Japanese and Korean Terminologies Reviewed from a Linguistic Perspective

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Introduction

China, Korea and Japan have a common orthography, namely, the Chinese characters. The Chinese characters are very important to the orthographical systems of the Korean and Japanese languages, having influenced the coinage and borrowing of words in both countries.

This paper starts with an overview of the orthography, vocabulary and terminology of our respective languages, and then discusses how the conditions informing their terminologies have been changing during the last few decades.

1 Chinese Characters

Needless to say, Chinese characters were created in China. While an alphabet consists of letters with a phonetic representation system, called "phonograms," Chinese characters are often called "ideographs." When characters express a direct meaning, even those unfamiliar with the language (who cannot read the characters in the language in which they are written) may be able to grasp something of the meaning from the order in which the characters appear. Chinese characters are generally considered, from a linguistic viewpoint, as being not so much ideographical characters, but rather characters that represent concepts, that is, " logograms".

The characters created in China have been used in the orthographies of Korea, Japan and Vietnam. In Vietnam, however, they use Roman characters today. In North Korea, too, they have discontinued the use of Chinese characters and came to use nothing but phonograms, called "Hangul" (the Korean alphabet). In South Korea, they use Chinese characters even today, but much less than the Japanese people. In Japan, we use two systems of phonograms, called "*hiragana*" and "*katakana,*" as well as Chinese characters.

If we look at these countries by the degree of their current use of Chinese characters, they may be ranked as follows:

1. Mainland China and Taiwan
   – only Chinese characters used in principle
2. Japan
   – Chinese characters used partly
3. South Korea
   – Chinese characters used on a very limited basis
4. North Korea and Vietnam
   – Chinese characters not used

Here are some examples:

	Chinese	Korean	Japanese
億 [1 hundred million]	yi	eog	oku
学生 [student]	xuesheng	hagsaeng	gakusei

(Note: The pronunciation orthography is chosen for convenience.)

When the same Chinese character is used in each of Chinese, Korean and Japanese, its pronunciation may be similar, but can be totally different. The characters have very similar or almost identical meanings in each language.

Though people in South Korea and North Korea use the same language, slight differences have emerged on account of the divergent language policies of the two governments. The language used nowadays in South Korea shall be called "Korean" hereinafter.

2 Structure of the Japanese Vocabulary and its Orthography

Classifying the Japanese vocabulary in terms of its etymology, we will have "WAGO" (pure Japanese words), "KANGO," Sino-Japanese words, "GAIRAIGO," foreign words, and "KONSHUGO," hybrid words.

"WAGO," pure Japanese words, are words of Japanese origin.

There are two types of "KANGO," the Sino-Japanese words: those in which Chinese loanwords are pronounced in a Japanese way and words formed in Japan using Chinese morphemes. The second type is called "WASEI-KANGO", or Sino-Japanese words created in Japan.

"GAIRAIGO" means loanwords in English and other foreign languages that we pronounce in a Japanese way.

Japanese is written with "*hiragana*" (ひらがな) and "*katakana*" (カタカナ), both phonograms, and logogrammatic Chinese characters, "*kanji*" (漢字).

"GAIRAIGO" is written with "*katakana,*" by custom.

"KANGO" can be written with "*hiragana,*" but is normally written with Chinese characters.

The orthography of "WAGO" is extremely complicated. It is not referred to here because it has little to do with our main subject.

3 Structure of the Korean Vocabulary and Its Orthography

Classify the Korean vocabulary in the same way, we find "GOYU'EO," pure Korean words, "HANJA'EO," Sino-Korean words, "OERAE'EO," foreign words, and "HONGJONG'EO," hybrid words.

"GOYU'O," pure Korean words, are words of Korean origin.

There are three types of "HANJA'EO," Sino-Korean words: Chinese loanwords pronounced in a Korean way, words formed in Korea using Chinese morphemes, and "WASEI-KANGO" made in Japan and pronounced in a Korean way.

"OERAE'EO," foreign words, are loanwords from English and other foreign languages pronounced in a Korean way.

Korean is written with phonogramic "Hangul" and logogrammatic Chinese characters, "*hanja*" (漢字).

"OERAE'EO" and "GOYU'EO" are written with "Hangul."

"HANJA'EO" can be written with Chinese characters, but now are written with "Hangul" in many cases.

4 Analogies between Japanese and Korean Vocabulary Structures

The structures of the Japanese and Korean vocabularies are analogous in that they have a three-layered structure of words derived from their respective mother tongues, words formed using Chinese morphemes, and loanwords from Western languages.

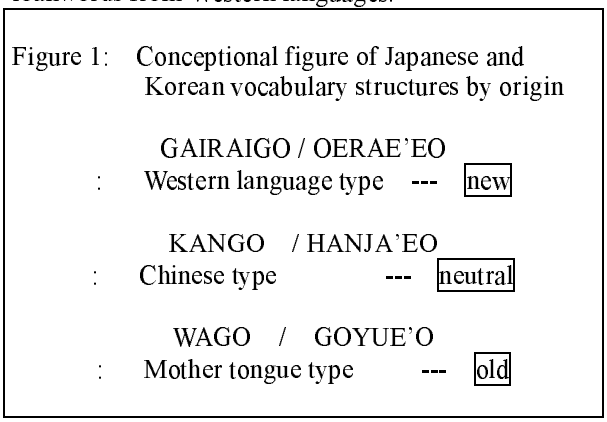


Figure 1: Conceptional figure of Japanese and Korean vocabulary structures by origin

(Note: "New and old" in the figure represents only the general tendency.)

5 Historical Backgrounds of Japanese and Korean Words

Korea and Japan have been greatly influenced by Chinese civilization from the earliest times. Many words created in China were introduced into the Korean and Japanese languages. They have come to make up a significant proportion of the vocabularies of both languages.

Late in the 19th century, Japan actively imported Western culture, science and ideas. Simultaneously, the Japanese people coined new words one after another using Chinese morphemes, namely, the "KANJI" (Chinese characters) words that have come to be called "WASEI-KANGO". Later, when Japan ruled over the

Korean Peninsula, "WASEI-KANGO" also came to be used in Korean.

Following the independence of South Korea, language purification was regarded as an increasingly crucial issue in that country and a campaign against the use of Japanese loanwords was launched nationwide. However, most "WASEI-KANGO" has continued to be used there. Some new "WASEI-KANGO" has also been introduced into Korean since the end of World War II.

6 Japanese and Korean Terminologies

I have previously compared current terms in Japanese and Korean (T.SHIODA1994, 1999). Current terms include both words in daily use and technical terms. In this study, the popular glossaries that people use to find the meanings of current terms are compared. All words contained therein belong to the category of terminology. In the following discussion, for convenience, the current terms considered here are technical terms.

The reference books are as follows:

Japan: *"Gendai Yoogono Kiso Chishiki"*
(Basic knowledge of contemporay terms)
Jiyuu Kokuminsha, 1993

Korea: *"Hyeondae Jisig Jeongbo Sajeon"*
(The Encyclopedia of Modern Knowledge)
Jung'ang Ilbosa, 1992

Terms entered in the two glossaries were selected on the condition that each entry was accompanied by an English translation, regarding those with the same translation as common entries. No entries in the form of Japanese and Korean phrases were included. Entries with more than one synonym, of different etymologies, (such as "WAGO" and "KANGO"), were counted separately for each.

As a result, 1,399 entries were chosen with an English translation for each. In the case of some entries, however, the entry was accompanied by more than one term in Japanese and Korean, so the total number of Japanese terms came to 1,570 and that of Korean terms to 1,484.

Japanese entries were classified into "WAGO," "KANGO" and "GAIRAIGO," and the Korean entries into "GOYU'EO," "HANJA'EO" and "OERAE'EO," producing the following results:

At a glance, we can tell that the distribution of Japanese and Korean etymological types is very similar. (Figure 2)

Figure 2: Etymological types of Japanese and Korean terms

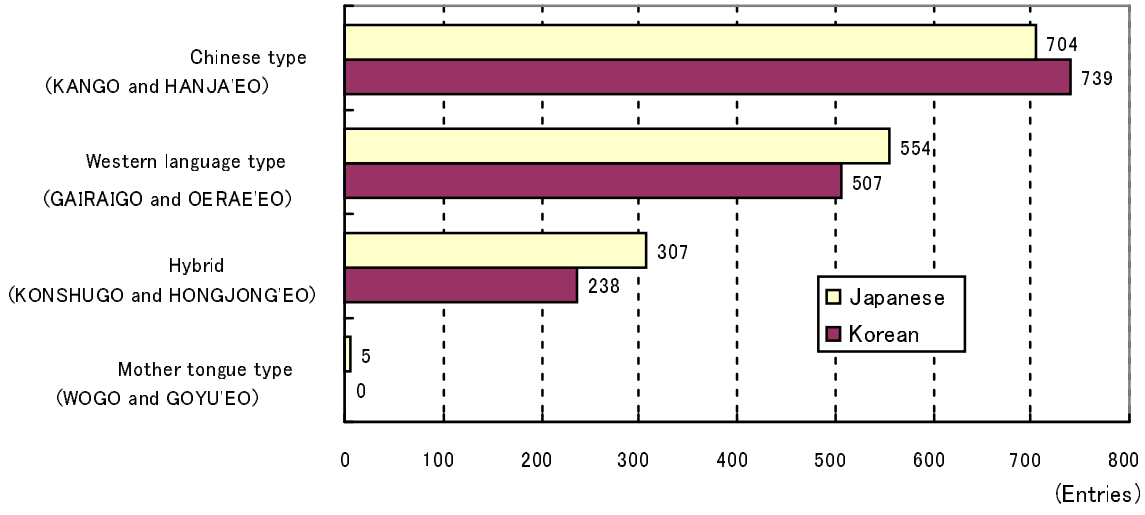
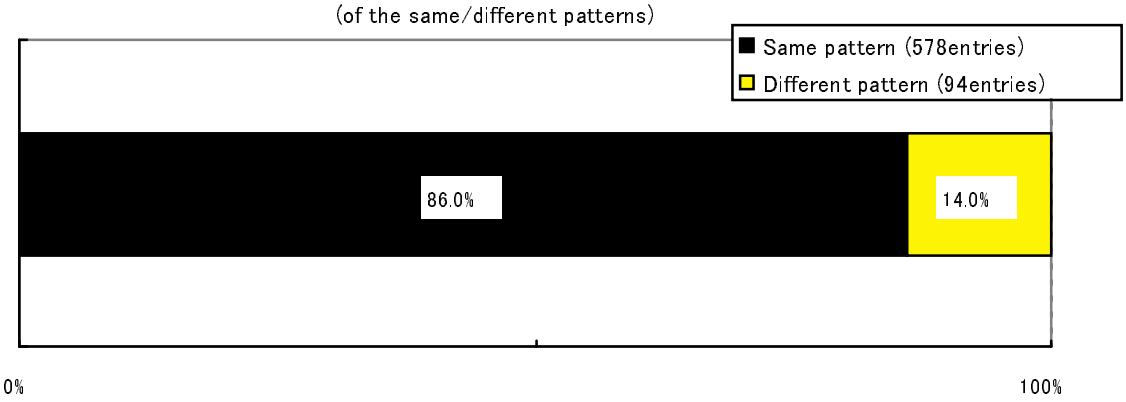


Figure 3: Chinese-type Japanese and Korean terms
(of the same/different patterns)



Let us have a close look at the Chinese type ("KANGO" and "HANJA'EO") in particular.

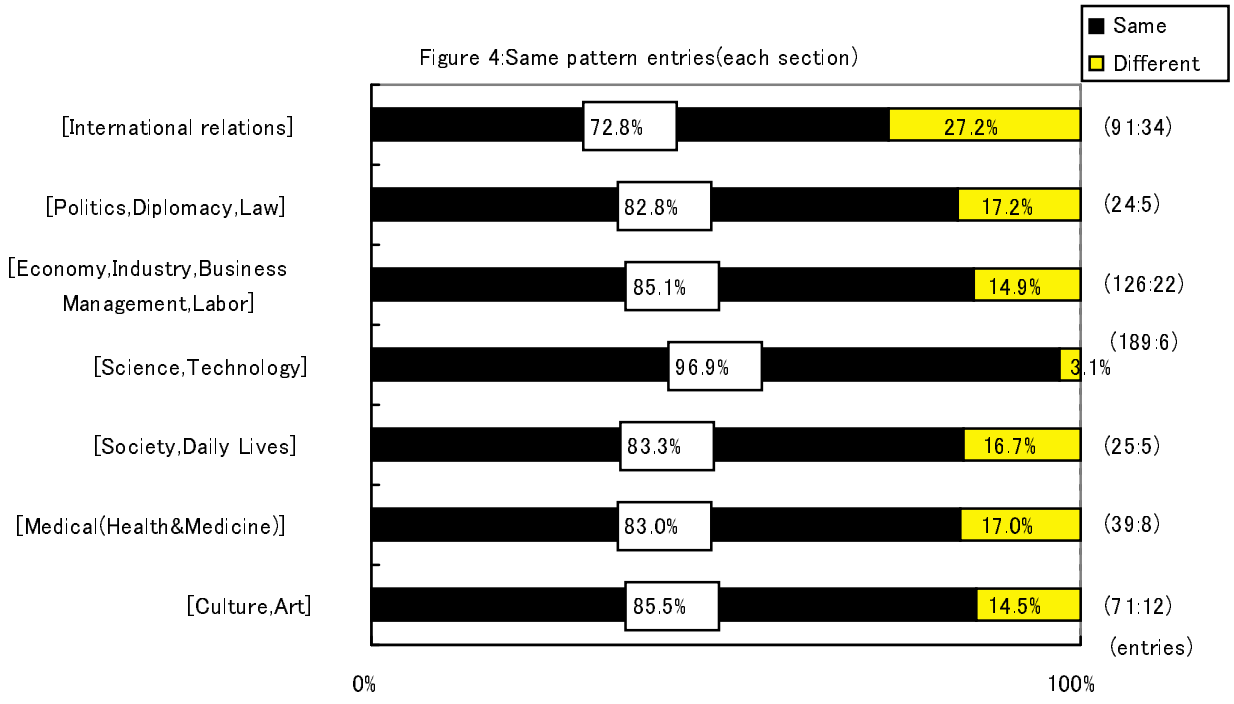
The above-mentioned reference materials contained 672 Chinese type entries ("KANGO" and "HANJA'EO") in both Japanese and Korean (Note: The data in Figure 2 includes entries expressed as "KANGO" in Japanese only, or as "HANJA'EO" in Korean only, making the total number of entries over 672 for each language). Every term was checked to establish whether it, as written with Chinese characters, was the same in both Japanese and Korean, with the following results: (Figure 3)

We can see that the Chinese-type ("KANGO" and "HANJA'EO") Japanese and Korean terms resembled each other closely.

Now, let us classify the terms by section, using the 1993 edition of "Gendai Yoogono Kiso Chishiki."

Evidently, the ratio of same pattern entries is particularly high in the Science and Technology section. This is because many terms from Japan's advanced science and technology have been introduced into Korean.(Figure 4)

Figure 4:Same pattern entries(each section)



7 Future Trends

A large number of “WASEI-KANGO” words have been introduced into the Korean language in the past. In recent years, however, an increasing number of Korean terms have been coined using Chinese morphemes. We see this trend in computer terms, for example, as follows:

E-mail

Japanese: *iimeeru* (“GAIRAIGO,” a foreign word), *densi-meeru* (“KONSHUGO,” a hybrid word)
Korean: *imeil* (“OERAE’EO,” a foreign word), *jeonja-meil* (“HONGJONG’EO,” a hybrid word), *jeonja-upyeon* (“HANJA’EO,” a Sino-Korean word)

Password

Japanese: *pasuwaad* (“GAIRAIGO,” a foreign word)
Korean: *paeseuwodeu* (“OERAE’EO,” a foreign word), *bimil-beonho* (“HANJA’EO, a Sino-Korean word)

*Illegal copy**

Japanese: *ihoo-kopii* ("KONSHUGO," a hybrid word)
Korean: *wibeob-bogsa* ("HANJA'EO," a Sino-Korean word)

*Thesaurus**

Japanese: *shisoorasu* ("GAIRAIGO," a foreign word)
Korean: *baeg'gwa-sajeon* ("HANJA'EO," a Sino-Korean word)

*Synchronous DRAM**

Japanese: *shinkuronasu-DRAM* ("GAIRAIGO," a foreign word)
Korean: *dong'gi-DRAM* ("HONGJONG'EO," a hybrid word)

*Virtual LAN**

Japanese: *baacharu-LAN* ("GAIRAIGO," a foreign word)
Korean: *gasang-LAN* ("HONGJONG'EO," a hybrid word)

*Voice mail**

Japanese: *boisu-meeru* ("GAIRAIGO," a foreign word)
Korean: eumseong-meil ("HONGJONG'EO," a hybrid word)

(Note: Entries with "*" are selected from the web site "Internet Terminology in 4 Languages" [http://www.yesnet.ne.jp/dictionaries/terminology/index.html].)

To express a new computer term, the Japanese often use a "GAIRAIGO" word in Japanese, while Koreans tend to use “HANJA’EO,” a Sino-Korean word.

Vocabularies for technical terms probably include more “GAIRAIGO” foreign words in Japanese. On the other hand, the Korean language is likely to have more “HANJA’EO,” Sino-Korean words, including “OERAE’EO,” foreign words. It would, therefore, appear that the proportion of Japanese and Korean terms that use the same combinations of Chinese characters will fall.

References

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