

The Use of Korean Ideophones in Newspaper Headlines

JIYEON PARK*

Jilin International Studies University

1 Introduction

This study is a time-series study that investigates how ideophones (also known as sound symbolic words or expressives) have been used in the headlines of Modern Korean newspapers in perspective of semantic and syntactic features.

It has been suggested that the Modern Korean ideophones are frequently used in newspaper headlines (Kim & Park 2001; Jo & Kang 2013). So far, however, there has been little discussion about what functions ideophones serve and what factors motivate the frequent use of ideophones in newspaper headlines.

This study, therefore, seeks to investigate the use of Korean ideophones in newspaper headlines with two research questions: What function do ideo-

Japanese/Korean Linguistics 29.

Edited by Kaoru Horie, Kimi Akita, Yusuke Kubota, David Y. Oshima, and Akira Utsugi.

Copyright © 2022, CSLI Publications.

* I would like to express my great appreciation to the audience for their valuable and constructive comments during the 29th JK conference. I am particularly grateful for the three anonymous reviewers' constructive and useful suggestions on this research.

phones have in the headline? When did ideophones become frequently used in the headlines, and what factors have affected their frequency?

The current paper argues that (i) Korean ideophones have the double function (Iarovici & Amel 1989) in semantic and pragmatic functions; (ii) the frequency of ideophones has increased rapidly from around the 1960s to 1980s to the 2000s; (iii) since the late 20th century, commercial competition has intensified, increasing the tabloidization of Korean newspapers affecting the frequent use of ideophones; and (iv) the semantic and syntactic properties of ideophones fit into the “appropriate headline,” which attributes to the frequency of ideophones.

The remaining part of the paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 gives a brief overview of the previous studies on ideophones in modern newspaper headlines. Section 3 explains the methodology and offers information on data. Section 4 reports the frequency, meanings, and syntactic constructions of ideophones in headlines from 1920 to 2000. Section 5 discusses the socio-cultural and language-internal factors that are assumed to affect the frequency, semantic and syntactic features of ideophones on newspaper headlines. Section 6 summarizes the paper.

2 Previous Studies

Thus far, previous studies have indicated that Korean ideophones are frequently used in newspaper headlines (Kim & Park 2001; Jo & Kang 2013). Based on corpus data, Jo & Kang (2013) investigated the frequency of adverbs in headlines and bodies of the news articles published from 2001 to 2009. They found that there were 65 ideophones out of the top 100 words used in the headlines but none were found in the bodies. In addition, they analyzed the collocations between ideophones and other words and visualized them with the lexical network using statistical methods.

Kim & Park (2001) investigated the morphological, syntactic, and semantic features of ideophones in both online and paper formats of newspaper headlines. So far, however, there has been little discussion about what functions ideophones have in newspaper headlines and what factors motivate the frequent use of ideophones. Moreover, previous works are limited to short-term studies focusing on Contemporary Korean. The current paper traces the historical changes in how ideophones’ semantic and syntactic features have changed and how ideophones have worked in newspaper headlines.

3 Methods

Data was collected using *Naver News Library*, a digitalized newspaper database (from 1920 to 1999). The database contains five companies' newspapers. I used *Dong-A Ilbo* 'Dong-A daily news' (published since April 01, 1920), *Chosun Ilbo* 'Chosun daily news' (published since March 05, 1920), and *Kyunghyang Shinmun* 'Kyunghyang newspaper' (published since October 06, 1946) for this study, which are major newspapers in Korea. In addition, each company's website was used to search the print formats of the newspapers published from January 01, 2000, to December 31, 2000. I counted the number of ideophones normalized across the decade division to seek diachronic changes.

Fifty ideophones based on data from Jo & Kang (2013), Kim & Park (2001), and the ideophones' list in Park (2015) were analyzed. In the data, 47 words are disyllabic (e.g., *kkwul.kkek* 'gulp'), which is the form most frequently used in newspapers (Kim & Park 2001), and four words are re-duplicated disyllabics (e.g., *eng.kum eng.kum* 'crawl crawl').

Criteria for examining the data are as follow: (i) whether the ideophone expresses metaphorical meanings or its original meanings (i.e., a sound, a movement, inner feelings, etc.); (ii) what kind of construction the ideophone appears in the headlines (i.e., utterance-edge, adverb-verb, or predicative, Akita 2021; Dingemanse & Akita 2017). An example sentence for each criterion is illustrated below.

The original meaning:

- (1) *Tonghay* *cicin* *sewul-se-to* *huntul*
the.East.Sea earthquake Seoul-LOC-too IDPH
yangyang *aph.pata* 4.2 *kyumo*
Yangyang.County offshore.waters 4.2.magnitude
"The earthquake in the East Sea *shook* Seoul as well. A magnitude 4.2 earthquake occurred in the offshore waters of Yangyang County."
(1996. 1. 25. *Kyunghyang Shinmun* 'Kyunghyang newspaper')

The metaphorical meaning:

- (2) *Mwulka anceng* *taychayk* *huntul*
price stabilization countermeasure IDPH
"The countermeasure of the price stabilization is being *shaken up*."
(2000. 2. 17. *Dong-A Ilbo* 'Dong A daily news')

The utterance-edge construction:

- (3) *Kyengki.sangsung.sey* *1-wel cwuchwum*
 economy.upward.movement January IDPH
Sopi.simli-to *wumccil*
 consumer.confidence-too IDPH
 “The upward economy movement *falters* in January, and consumer confidence *flinches* as well.”
 (2000. 2. 17. Dong-A Ilbo ‘Dong A daily news’)

The adverb-verb construction:

- (4) *Sokto keli sikan chekchek kyeyesan-ha-nun coking.hwa*
 speed distance time easily calculate-do-ATTR jogging.shoes
 “Jogging shoes that *easily* calculate speed, distance, and time.”
 (1985. 8. 1. Kyunghyang Shinmun ‘Kyunghyang newspaper’)

The predicative construction:

- (5) *Hwicheng-keli-nun cipang kyengcey*
 IDPH-suffix-ATTR local economy
 “The *faltering* local economy.”
 (2000. 11. 18. Chosun Ilbo ‘Chosun daily news’)

4 Results

4.1 The Frequency of Ideophones in Headlines

I have obtained 11,595 ideophones in my data. As shown in Figure 1, the results show a clear increasing tendency of the frequency of ideophones from the 1960s.

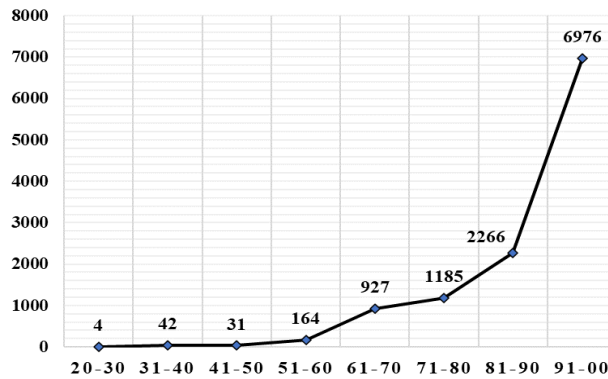


Figure 1. The frequency of ideophones in headlines

Interestingly, the data in the above Figure 1 is that from the 1980s to the 2000s, the frequency of ideophones increased significantly.

In the following sections, I will indicate ideophones' meanings and syntactic construction in headlines, respectively.

4.2 The Meanings of Ideophones in Headlines

As shown in Figure 2, semantically, the ideophones that express metaphorical meanings are more numerous than those representing their basic meanings, such as sounds, manner, and inner feelings. Specifically, the metaphorical meanings occupy the majority from the 1940s to the 2000s.

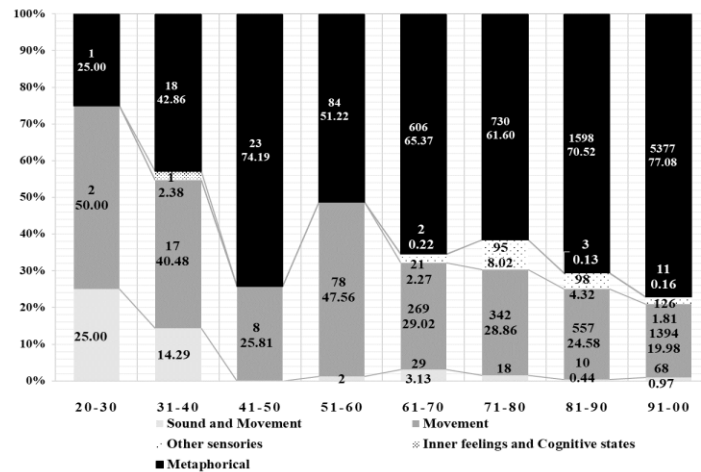


Figure 2. The meanings of ideophones in headlines

As can be seen from Figure 2, the frequent use of the metaphorical meanings of ideophones suggests that the metaphorical meanings of ideophones in headlines have conventionalized considerably.

4.3 The Syntactic Construction of Ideophones in Headlines

Table 3 presents the number of ideophones of the utterance-edge construction in a phrase from the 1950s to the 2000s. They are overwhelmingly more numerous than those used as adverb-verb and predicative constructions.

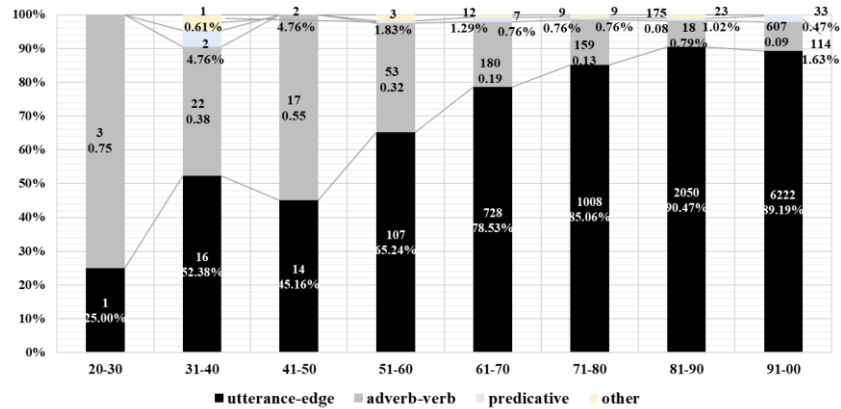


Figure 3. The syntactic construction of ideophones in headlines

The utterance-edge construction is divided into the utterance initial- and the utterance-final construction. Data I found mostly leaned to the utterance-final ones and without main verbs as in (6).

- (6) *Sopi.simli* 'kkwumthul.'
 consumer.confidence IDPH
 “Consumer confidence *suddenly shows* [signs of rising].”
 (1999. 1. 12. *Kyunghyang Shinmun* ‘Kyunghyang newspaper’)

What makes possible the construction like (6), the ideophone standing alone without a main verb, is the high “semantic specificity” between ideophones and main verbs (Akita 2013a, 2013b; Park 2018). Ideophones with high semantic specificity have a limited number of a few particular verbs that frequently cooccur. In other words, these ideophones exhibit a strong collocational relationship with their main verbs. Thus, if the main verbs are removed from the sentences, the readers can easily restore the main verbs.

In the next section, we will discuss the socio-cultural factors that influence the frequent use of ideophones in headlines (5.1) and the communica-

tive functions that ideophones serve in headlines based on the model by Iarovici & Amel (1989, Section 5.2).

5 Discussion

5.1 Socio-Cultural Factors: Tabloidization and Localization

As reported in Figure 1, the frequency of ideophones in headlines has increased over time. Interestingly, the frequency rose steeply from around 1990 to 2000. It is assumed that one of the reasons for the observed rapid rise of the frequency of ideophones could be mainly attributed to the tabloidization of Korean newspapers from the 1930s.

A recent study by Lee (2020) concluded that Modern Korean newspapers have become tabloidized and designed to attract readers rather than informing, employing the essential elements of tabloidization such as metaphor, adverbs, quotations, and questions. This strong tendency of tabloidization is ascribed to historical and commercial factors.

Newspapers in the 1920s, *Dong-A Ilbo* ‘Dong-A daily news’ and *Chosun Ilbo* ‘Chosun daily news’ were more informative and factual when they were first published as modern newspapers¹. However, since the 1930s, the presses progressively have become tabloidized and dealt with the subjects that attracted the reader’s attention rather than political and social issues to pass strict censorship by the government (Choi & Chae 2008). The pace of tabloidization has accelerated from the late 20th century, because commercial competition has intensified with the appearance of a variety of press companies on paper and online platforms (Kim 2019).

It can thus be suggested that as the tabloidization of Modern Korean newspapers has progressed constantly, the use of ideophones has increased as one of the effective ways to attract readers’ attention using their semantic and syntactic properties such as metaphor and the utterance-final construction.

Another significant factor of rapid increases in the frequency of ideophones is the localization of newspapers from the 1990s. For example, in the headlines in *Dong-A Ilbo* in the 1920s, most of the headlines were written in Chinese characters and a few in Japanese. *Hangul*—the Korean alphabet—was only used for some articles and loanwords. However, the newspaper headlines published from the 1990s have primarily been printed

¹ Choi & Chae (2008: 213) divided the newspapers’ headlines into subjective and objective ones. The objective headlines are a concise presentation of the contents by summarizing the facts, and the subjective headlines have intervened the intention or emotion of the editor or newspaper’s companies. Choi & Chae (2008) found that objective headlines occupied 96.61% (4/118) in the 1920s in *Dong-A Ilbo*.

in *Hangul*. In the headlines of *Chosun Ilbo*, the use of Chinese characters was 61.6% in 1980, which decreased to 5.9% in 2000 as the use of Chinese characters was limited to proper names or a few words that could be semantically ambiguous (Lee 2000: 53-54).

5.2 The Semantic and Pragmatic Functions of Ideophones

In this section, I will discuss how ideophones work in newspaper headlines from their semantic and syntactic features.

Thus far, previous studies have suggested that headlines serve a double function (Andrew 2007; Bell 1991; Dor 2003; Iarovici & Amel 1989). Iarovici & Amel (1989: 442-443) revealed that headlines carry out semantic and pragmatic functions. They proposed that the semantic function is “[to enable] the reader to grasp the meaning of the text,” and the pragmatic function is to “alert the reader to the nature or content of the text.” In other words, affording brief news summaries based on 5W1H (Who, When, Where, What, Why, and How) is the primary role of the semantic function. On the other hand, the pragmatic function refers to headlines involving eclectic devices to make the news fascinating, which entice readers’ attention to the newspapers by employing linguistic devices such as metaphors (Molek-Kozakowska 2013).

Based on the above double function model, this paper argues that ideophones in headlines play a crucial role in providing facts and attracting readers. In view of the semantic function, ideophones convey the “How” of the event.

- (7) *Kholleyla chwingkyek pata **thengtheng** hoyscip **sseleng***
 cholera shock beach IDPH sushi.restaurant IDPH
 “The beach was *empty* (due to) the cholera shock, and the sushi restaurant *is void* (of customers).”

As shown in (7), ideophones *thengtheng* and *sseleng* describe “how” the situation of the beach and the restaurant are. In other words, ideophones give information about the essential content of the text by delineating the events, which makes it easily understandable for the readers.

As for the pragmatic function, ideophones in headlines serve as an agent for attracting readers by using their semantic and syntactic features, such as metaphorical meanings and the utterance-final construction. As can be seen from Figure 2, ideophones are more likely to express metaphorical meanings rather than sounds, manners, and states in the headlines. In addition, as Figure 3 shows, ideophones are frequently situated at the edge of a phrase, and they act as holophrastic ideophones accompanied by a pause and high intonations.

Moreover, ideophones are frequently placed inside curly double quote marks (e.g., *Kilum-kaps “tulssek” “The oil price rose a lot”*). In Korean newspapers, curly double quote marks are implied to emphasize the contents (Lee 2000). These typographic marks have an immediate visual impact on arousing the interest of potential readers.

These findings of the current paper suggest that ideophones are a favored means to convey information and excite readers in Korean newspapers.

6 Conclusion

This paper identified the communicative functions of Korean ideophones in the newspaper headlines from the 1920s to the 2000s. The current study’s findings suggest that Korean ideophones fit into “appropriate headlines” (Iarovici & Amel 1989) with a maximal contextual amount of semantic and pragmatic effects for a minimal amount of processing effort in the headlines. Furthermore, this study strengthens the earlier findings of the conventionalization of Korean ideophones (Park 2019).

A question raised by this paper is whether the frequent use of ideophones in newspaper headlines can be found in other languages as well, such as Japanese. I hope that the findings of this research will highlight the importance of expanding the research scope on the usage of ideophones.

References

- Akita, K. 2013a. Nihongo-onomatope-ni okeru keisyoo-kankei [Inheritance in Japanese mimetics]. *NINJAL Workshop: Collaborative Research Project on the Japanese Lexicon*. Keio University.
- Akita, K. 2013b. Kyooki-tokusei-karamiru onomatope-no hureemu-imiron [The frame semantics of mimetics in terms of their collocational characteristics]. In Kazuko Shinohara and Ryoko Uno (eds.), *Sound Symbolism and Mimetics: Rethinking the Relationship between Sound and Meaning in Language*. 101-115. Tokyo: Hituzi Syobo.
- Akita, K. 2021. Nihongo-onomatope-to gengo-ruikeiron [Notes on the ideophonic protolanguage hypothesis]. In Haruo Kubozono, Hisashi Noda, Prashant Pardeshi, and Yo Matsumoto (eds.), *Linguistic Typology from the Perspectives of Japanese Linguistics and Linguistic Theories*. 49-73. Tokyo: Kaitakusha.
- Andrew, B. C. 2007. Media generated shortcuts: Do newspaper headlines present another roadblock for low information rationality? *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* 12(2):24-43.
- Bell, A. 1991. *The Language of News Media*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Choi, C. S. & Chae, B. 2008. Hankwuk kuntay sinmwun kisa ceymok-uy hyengseung-kwa palcen: Toklipsinmwun, tayhanmayilsinpo, tongailpo-lul cwungsim-ulo

- [The formation and development of article titles in the beginning period of Korean newspapers: Focused on the independent, the Korea Daily News and the Dong-A Ilbo]. *Korean Journal of Communication Information* 43:209-246.
- Dingemanse, M. & Akita, K. 2017. An inverse relation between expressiveness and grammatical integration: On the morphosyntactic typology of ideophones, with special reference to Japanese. *Journal of Linguistics* 53:501-532.
- Dor, D. 2003. On newspaper headlines as relevance optimizers. *Journal of Pragmatics* 35(5):695-721.
- Iarovici, E. & Amel, R. 1989. The strategy of the headline. *Semiotica* 77(4):441-459.
- Jo, H. M. & Kang, B. M. 2013. Sangcinge-uy sayong-kwa uymi: Sinmwun kisa ceymok khophesu-ey kichoha-n yenkwu [The use and meaning of symbolic words: A study based on the corpus of newspaper headlines]. *Korean Semantics* 40:191-218.
- Kim, H. B. & Park, D. G. 2001. Sinmwun kisa ceymok-ey ssuin sangcinge-uy pwunsek [An analysis of sound symbolic words used in newspapers headlines]. *Paytalmal* 29:53-70.
- Kim, S. H. 2019. South Korea. In *Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2019*. Oxford Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. Oxford: University of Oxford.
- Lee, E. K. 2000. Hanil Sinmwun Phyoceye-uy Sitaycek Yenkwu [A Study of the Headlines in Korean and Japanese Newspapers Published in the Year 1960, 1980 and 2000]. Master thesis, Chung-Ang University.
- Lee, N. Y. 2020. Headlines for summarizing news or attracting readers' attention? Comparing news headlines in South Korean newspapers with the New York Times. *Journalism*. DOI: 10.1077/1464884920929202
- Molek-Kozakowska, K. 2013. Towards a pragma-linguistic framework for the study of sensationalism in news headlines. *Discourse Communication* 7(2):173-197.
- Park, D. G. 2015. 2015. Hankwuke uysenge-wa uythaye-uy umwun pikyo [A phonological comparison between onomatopoeic and imitative words of Korean]. *Hanmal Yenkwu* 37:177-203.
- Park, J. Y. 2018. Semantic specificity and syntactic realization of Japanese and Korean ideophones. *Japanese/Korean Linguistics* 25:1-13. Stanford, CA: CSLI Publications.
- Park, J. Y. 2019. Onomatopoe-no Gengoteki Toogoosei-ni kansuru Nikkan Taisyoo Kenkyuu [A Contrastive Study of the Linguistic Integration of Ideophones in Korean and Japanese]. Doctoral dissertation, Nagoya University.

Corpora

- Chosun Ilbo <[http://srchdb 1 chosun com/pdf/i_service/index.jsp](http://srchdb1.chosun.com/pdf/i_service/index.jsp)> 21 December 2021.
- Dong-A Ilbo <<https://www.donga.com/news/pdf>> 21 December 2021.
- Kyunghyang Shinmun <<https://www.khan.co.kr/>> 21 December 2021.
- Naver News Library <<https://newslibrary.naver.com/>> 21 December 2021.