

“Naked” or “Dressed Up”? A Contrastive Analysis of Response Cries Between Korean and Japanese*

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1 Introduction

A speaker will produce utterances even when alone, without anyone to talk to. Of those utterances there are a type of expressions like *Wow!* and *God!*, which Goffman (1978) calls “response cries”. They are a speaker’s immediate reaction to what is occurring to or around him/her. Response cries are also referred to as “internal(-state) expressive sentences” (Iwasaki 2006, 2014) or are regarded as a type of *sokujibun* (Iwasaki and Ono 2007).

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According to Goffman (1978), “[a] response cry doesn’t seem to be a statement in the linguistic sense (even a heavily elided one)” (p. 800); that is, it is not a statement “in the linguistic and propositional sense” (p. 805). However, our previous research (Izutsu et al. 2022) demonstrates that Japanese speakers often use the linguistic forms of statements, which describe either a speaker’s emotion/sensation or evaluation of a perceived situation like *ita(i)* ‘painful’, *omo(i)* ‘heavy’, or *yaba(i)* ‘awful’.

The present study explores linguistic forms used for response cries by comparing two typologically similar languages: Korean and Japanese. Internal-state expressions of the two languages are investigated by Iwasaki (2006), who mainly discusses similarities in the structure of the expressions in terms of neurological processes involved in their production. He at the same time notes that the use of adjectives is less common for reflex expressions in Korean (e.g. *??A! apa/apeo!* ‘Ouch!’, *?A! nunbusyeo!* ‘Oh, too bright!’), observing that “pain, olfactory, tactile, and emotional experiences” are more likely “to be expressed pre-linguistically” (e.g. *A!*, *Aya!*) (pp. 334-335).¹ Our research investigates whether there are any other substantial differences in the representation of internal states between Korean and Japanese, focusing on Goffman’s eight types of response cries (the transition display, the spill cry, the threat startle, revulsion sounds, the strain grunt, the pain cry, floor cues, and audible glee).²

2 Data and Methodology

A questionnaire survey was administered to uncover what kinds of expressions Korean and Japanese speakers will produce under the eight circumstances of Goffman’s response cries.³ The basic description presented was: “Suppose that in the situations described below you are by yourself with no one around to hear you. In each case, what would you utter or say aloud when the following things happen? If you believe you would probably NEVER utter a thing, just write ‘nothing’.” The following questions were then asked:

- (i) Alone, eating lunch, you accidentally spill your coffee. At that moment, what would you utter? [The Spill Cry]
- (ii) Shutting the door, you accidentally catch your finger. At that moment, what would you utter? [The Pain Cry]

¹ The Korean romanization in this paper is essentially based on Ministry of Education Transliteration of Hangeul 1959. Examples cited from Iwasaki (2006) were changed accordingly.

² Goffman (1978) proposes nine types of response cries, of which “sexual moan” was excluded in this research.

³ Though the questionnaire design was described in English below, we used a questionnaire translated into the native language of each group of participants (i.e. Korean and Japanese).

- (iii) On trying to lift a large box, you realize it is really heavy. At that moment, what would you utter? [The Strain Grunt]
- (iv) While cooking, instead of adding salt, you add sugar by mistake. Upon realizing your mistake, what would you utter? [Floor Cues]
- (v) You reach the top story of a very high, open stairwell like the one in the photo. At the instant that you look down, what would you utter? (a photo provided) [The Threat Startle]
- (vi) You go to grab a couple of lemons from the refrigerator. And like the rotten ones in the photo, you find them covered in green mold. Right then, what would you utter? (a photo provided) [Revulsion Sounds]
- (vii) Upon opening the fridge, you discover a delicious-looking cake like the one in the photo below. Right then, what would you utter? (a photo provided) [Audible Glee]
- (viii) Just like the woman in the photo, from a seaside café you exit beachside into the bright sunlight. At that moment, what would you utter? (a photo provided) [The Transition Display]

The online survey (Google Form) was conducted with 50 native speakers of Korean (32 females, 18 males) and 54 speakers of Japanese (24 females, 30 males). The participants were all university students aged 18-26 years.

3 A Taxonomy of Response Cries

The classification used in this study was basically in line with that proposed in Izutsu et al. (2022). Following Ameka (1992), we classified response cries into primary and secondary interjections. Primary interjections are “little words or non-words” (p. 105) like *a* and *oo*, and secondary interjections are “words which have an independent semantic value” (p. 111). In our classification, secondary interjections were further divided into depictive (descriptive) and non-depictive (non-descriptive) interjections. Depictive interjections describe the speaker’s physical sensation or perceptual experiences like *nunbusyeo* ‘dazzling’ and *itai* ‘painful’, and non-depictive interjections include swear words like *ssibal* ‘f**k’ and vocatives like *eomma* ‘OMG (mom)’.⁴ Secondary interjections were also subdivided into simple-word and multiple-word expressions, the latter of which consist of more than one word.⁵ The taxonomy of response cries is summarized in Table 1:

⁴ The words “(non-)descriptive” were employed in Izutsu et al. (2022), but since Iwasaki (2006, 2014) uses “descriptive” in a different sense, this study adopts the terms “(non-)depictive”.

⁵ Our definition of word follows Suzuki (1972) and Okuda (1974) (see Izutsu et al. 2022: 200-201 for details).

| Primary interjection | Secondary interjection | | |
|---|---|---|--------------------------|
| | Non-depictive | Depictive | |
| <i>ag</i> , <i>aigo</i> ‘oh’, <i>heol</i> ‘huh’; <i>a</i> ‘oh’, <i>watt</i> ‘wow’, <i>oo</i> ‘oh’ | <i>eomma</i> ‘OMG (mom)’, <i>heg</i> ‘heck’, <i>swes</i> ‘sh*t’ | <i>manghaessda</i> ‘ruined’, <i>museoweo</i> ‘scared’; <i>omo(i)</i> ‘heavy’, <i>yaba(i)</i> ‘awful’ | Simple-word expression |
| | <i>a ssibal</i> , <i>a ssi</i> ‘ah f**k’, <i>o swes</i> ‘oh sh*t’ | <i>a apa</i> ‘oh painful’; <i>a</i> , <i>kobosita</i> ‘oh, (I) spilt (coffee)’ | Multiple-word expression |

Table 1. A taxonomy of response cries

4 Results

4.1 The Overall Distribution of Response Cries

The overall results of our analysis are given in Figures 1 and 2, where simple- and multiple word expressions are not distinguished:⁶

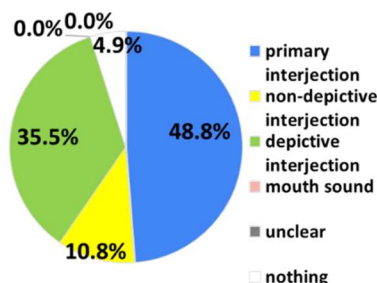


Figure 1. Response cries by Korean speakers

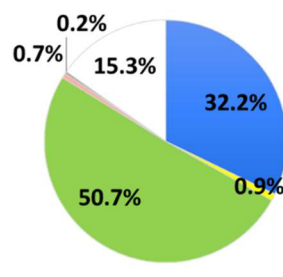


Figure 2. Response cries by Japanese speakers

Figure 1 reveals, contra Goffman’s claim, that Korean speakers also produce depictive interjections, which accounted for 35.5%, although the proportion was smaller than their Japanese counterparts (50.7%). In other words, Koreans likewise use the linguistic forms of statements in the propositional sense, which describe a speaker’s feeling/sensation or perception of the situation at hand. The results of the two groups were contrastive with those of American English speakers in our previous research (Izutsu et al. 2022), where their reported use of depictive (descriptive) interjections only accounted for 17.1%.

⁶ A response cry consisting of two different types of interjection was classified into the type that is richer in meaning; e.g. *A apa* was classified as a depictive rather than primary interjection.

Iwasaki (2006: 335) illustrates that some depictive utterances are less acceptable in Korean as indicated with the question marks in the following examples: *??A! apa/apeo!* ‘Ouch!’, *?A! nunbusyeo!* ‘Oh, too bright!’. In our study, however, five out of the 50 Korean participants employed the depictive forms *apa(ra)/apeune* ‘painful’ for question (ii) and 13 participants provided responses including *nunbusyeo* ‘dazzling’ for question (viii). For the latter, there were also four responses including *ddeugeo(weo)* ‘hot’.

There is a difference between the two groups of speakers in the type of response cries that occurred most frequently: Korean speakers most preferred primary interjections (48.8%) like *A* and *Aigo*, while Japanese speakers were most likely to use depictive interjections in their response cries (50.7%).

The types of response cries preferred by the two groups also differ across the eight situations. Figure 3 shows that the largest difference is found in (ii) Pain Cry, where most Japanese favored depictive interjections (83.3%) like *Ita(i)* and *Itta* ‘painful’, while Koreans tended to use primary interjections (72%) like *A* and *Ag*. Similar, though smaller, differences are observed in (iii) Strain Grunt and (viii) Transition Display. These results support Iwasaki’s observation that reflex experiences including pain, tactile, and visual ones are more likely “to be expressed pre-linguistically” in Korean (pp. 334-335).

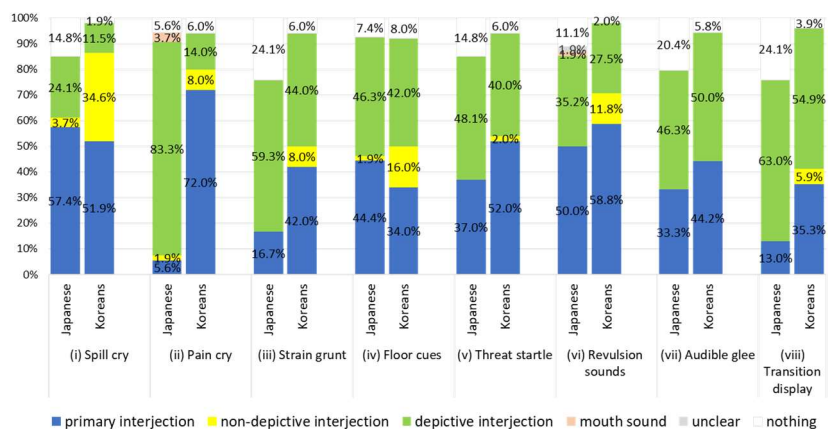


Figure 3. Response cries by Japanese and Korean speakers (by situation)

For the complexity of utterances, Japanese preferred simple wording like *Nagatt* ‘long’ and *Tak(k)a* ‘high’, while multiple wording (expressions with more than one word) was more favored by Koreans like *A, waelke gireo* ‘A why so long’ and *Wa nopda* ‘Wow high’ as seen in Figure 4:

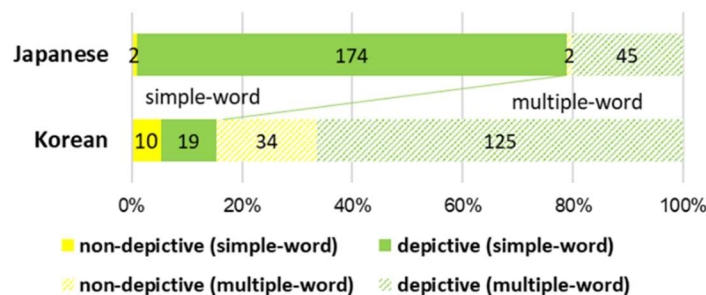


Figure 4. Simple-/multiple-wording of response cries

4.2 The Use of Swear Words

Another noteworthy difference is the use of swear words. As Table 2 shows, Korean speakers sometimes produce swear words, either those of Korean origin (e.g. *ssibal* and its shortened form *ssi* ‘f**k’) or borrowings from English (e.g. *heg* ‘heck’, *swes* ‘sh*t’). However, such words are less common in Japanese: there was only one example found in our Japanese data.

| | Swear words (freq.) | % of total |
|----------|---------------------|------------|
| Korean | 30 | 7.4% |
| Japanese | 1 | 0.2% |

Table 2. The frequency of swear words

The higher frequency of swear words in Korean response cries (7.4% of the total) points to some similarities to English response cries, where the use of swear words is far more prevalent (25% of the total in our American English data, cf. Izutsu et al. 2022). The widespread use of swear words leads to the avoidance of full forms, facilitating replacement with less blasphemous forms (Korean *ssi*; English *f**k*, *sh**t/shoot*). On the other hand, such replacement is less common in Japanese, where *kuso* ‘crap’ is one such word but not shortened as **ku*.⁷ It is also interesting that non-deictive interjections including swear words were most frequent in (i) Spill Cry, followed by (iv) Floor Cues in both Korean and English. These situations involve “the speaker’s inadvertent error” (Izutsu et al. 2002: 208), hence likely to be used to curse the event that occurs unexpectedly. Still, in such situations, Japanese prefer primary and deictive interjections as in Figure 3. Such similarities between Korean and English may ease the barrier to borrow English swear words into Korean.

⁷ Youngmin Oh (p.c.) explains that Koreans sometimes feel frustrated when they want to express strong emotion (rage, astonishment, bewilderment, etc.) in Japanese because it does not have sufficient linguistic means that correspond to Korean swear words.

4.3 Utterance-ending Forms

The utterance-ending forms of response cries also reveal important differences between Korean and Japanese, as represented in Table 3.

| Korean | | | Japanese | | |
|--|-----|-------|--|-----|-------|
| <i>-(seu)bnida/(neu)(n)da</i> | 41 | 26.6% | conclusive forms or their variants | 193 | 87.7% |
| <i>-(seu)bnigga/n(eung)a/ (eu)lgga</i> | 3 | 1.9% | <i>-na</i> | 1 | 0.5% |
| <i>-(eu)lggayo</i> | 1 | 0.6% | <i>-ka</i> | 1 | 0.5% |
| <i>-a/eo/yeo/ya</i> | 58 | 37.7% | <i>-kke</i> | 1 | 0.5% |
| <i>-(a/eo/yeo/e)yo</i> | 1 | 0.6% | <i>-wa</i> | 2 | 0.9% |
| <i>-(a/eo/yeo/e)ra</i> | 1 | 0.6% | <i>-yo</i> | 1 | 0.5% |
| <i>-(a/eo/yeo/e)seo</i> | 1 | 0.6% | <i>-kana</i> | 1 | 0.5% |
| <i>-ne</i> | 10 | 6.5% | <i>-kayo</i> | 1 | 0.5% |
| <i>-ji</i> | 5 | 3.2% | <i>-zyan/yan</i> | 5 | 2.3% |
| <i>-guna</i> | 1 | 0.6% | <i>-kedo</i> | 1 | 0.5% |
| <i>-(eu)nya</i> | 1 | 0.6% | adnominal-utterance ending | 1 | 0.5% |
| <i>-(eu)ryeona</i> | 1 | 0.6% | adverbial-utterance ending | 1 | 0.5% |
| <i>-(eu)lgeol</i> | 1 | 0.6% | nominal-utterance ending | 13 | 5.9% |
| <i>-(neu)ngeol</i> | 1 | 0.6% | | | |
| <i>-(neu)ngeoya</i> | 1 | 0.6% | | | |
| <i>-(n)(eu)nde</i> | 8 | 5.2% | | | |
| <i>-(eu)nigga(n)</i> | 1 | 0.6% | | | |
| adnominal-utterance ending | 3 | 1.9% | | | |
| adverbial-utterance ending | 4 | 2.6% | | | |
| nominal-utterance ending | 11 | 7.1% | | | |
| Total no. of utterances (excl. vocatives & swear words) | 154 | 100% | Total no. of utterances (excl. vocatives & swear words) | 222 | 100% |

Table 3. Utterance-ending forms of response cries

Maynard (1993) observes that when “a speaker expresses surprise, abrupt remembrance or sudden emotional surge” (p. 156), Japanese speakers employ “naked abrupt forms”, i.e. the conclusive forms of verbs and adjectives with no final particles and other interactional devices: for example, *Sugoi* ‘Awesome’ and *Matigaeta* ‘(I) made a mistake’. Naked abrupt style tends to be used in such circumstances because speakers utter them “at the instant the thought enter[s] into consciousness” (p. 157). As seen in Table 3, our results of Japanese response cries strongly supported Maynard’s observation: 87.7% of the Japanese examples were coded in naked abrupt style. In our analysis, naked abrupt forms include variant forms of adjectives, some of which are called as “clipped adjective” (Iwasaki 2014) or “*i*-drop construction” (Konno 2022) like *ita* < *itai* ‘painful’ and *omo* < *omoi* ‘heavy’. Adjectives (*i*-adjectives) may also be changed into other variants by undergoing the gemination of a consonant like *itta*, the coalescence of the diphthong /ai/ like *ite(e)*, or other phonological changes. Interestingly, such variant forms accounted for 91.4% of the *i*-adjectives in our data, which may of course be related to the age group of the Japanese cohort (18 to 26 years old) but also to the nature of response cries as immediate reactions to unexpected happenings.

On the other hand, the Korean examples of response cries were equipped (or “embellished”) with a variety of utterance-ending forms. It may be difficult to identify the exact counterparts of naked abrupt forms in Korean. However, even if we take into account two types of ending forms (-*(seu)bnida/(neu)(n)da* and *-a/eo/yeo/ya*), which can be viewed as representing some kind of conclusive ending, they only amounted to 64.3%.⁸ In other words, the remaining approximately 35% of the Korean utterances were ended with other forms such as final particles (*jonggyeoleomi*), connective particles (*yeongyeoleomi*), and (ad)nominal/adverbial-utterance endings, examples of which are given in (1)-(3), respectively.

- | | |
|--|----------------------|
| (1) a. <i>O igeo meogeodo dwe-na</i> ‘Oh can (I) eat this.’ | [(vii) Audible glee] |
| b. <i>Aya apa-ra.</i> ‘Oh painful.’ | [(ii) Pain cry] |
| c. <i>A manghaess-ne</i> ‘Ah, (it is) ruined.’ | [(iv) Floor cues] |
| d. <i>Heog eoddeogha-ji?</i> ‘Huh what should (I) do?’ | [(iv) Floor cues] |

⁸ If utterances with the politeness morpheme *-(seu)bni-* are not counted as Korean equivalents of naked abrupt forms, the proportion will become even smaller than 64.3%.

- e. *Ddeoreoji-myeon keun il nagess-guna.* [(v) Threat startle]
 ‘If (I) fall down, (I’ll be) in a big trouble.’
- f. *Eoddeohge chiu-nya ..* [(vi) Revulsion sounds]
 ‘How can (I) put it away?’
- g. *Dareu-n geos-do olmgyeo gasseu-llyeona* [(vi) Revulsion sounds]
 ‘Is (it) going to spread to others?’
- h. *A beori-lgeol* [(vi) Revulsion sounds]
 ‘Ah (I should have) thrown (it) away.’
- i. *Mugeou-ngeol* [(iii) Strain grunt]
 ‘Heavy.’
- j. *Igeo meogeo-do dwe-neun geoya?* [(iv) Floor cues]
 ‘Is it OK if (I) eat this?’
- (2) a. *Eohu, neomu mugeou-nde* [(iii) Strain grunt]
 ‘Oh, too heavy.’
- b. *Gwaenchanha na-n da-n geo johaha-niggan!* [(iv) Floor cues]
 ‘No problem, I like sweet food, so!’
- (3) a. *Michi-n* [(vi) Revulsion sounds]
 ‘Crazy.’
- b. *Wen keikeu?* [(vii) Audible glee]
 ‘What cake?’
- c. *As jamman ..* [(iv) Floor cues]
 ‘Oh, just a moment ..’

Similar non-naked forms were found in the Japanese data: for example, *Are itu katta-kke?* ‘Well, when did (I) buy (this)?’ *Tabete ii-kana* ‘Can (I) eat (this)?’ *Yatta-wa, kore* ‘(I) goofed this up.’ However, the variation of sentence-ending forms was less pronounced as compared with Korean. These results suggest that although both Korean and Japanese are well-known for having a variety of sentence-final particles, Korean sentence-ending forms are more expressive for the representation of a speaker’s internal state in non-communicative situations. In other words, while Japanese speakers prefer naked-abrupt forms in utterances without overt addressee-orientation, Koreans were more likely to dress up (or embellish) their response cries with a variety of sentence-final forms.

5 Conclusion

This study investigated linguistic forms used for response cries by comparing two typologically similar languages: Korean and Japanese. It was demonstrated that unlike Goffman’s claim, Korean as well as Japanese response

cries can be “a statement in the linguistic sense” (Goffman 1978: 800); they are often expressed in the form of depictive interjections. The results also revealed that the two languages differ in the following respects: (i) primary interjections were most frequent in Korean, but depictive interjections in Japanese (Figures 1 and 2), (ii) simple-predicate wording was more preferred in Japanese (Figure 4), (iii) swear words were more common in Korean (Table 2), and (iv) naked abrupt forms were predominant for Japanese response cries, while more dressed-up forms (i.e. a richer variety of sentence-ending forms) were often used in Korean (Table 3).

Finally, though not fully discussed in this paper, it is interesting to note that swear words and vocatives like *omma* ‘mom’ are frequently employed as interjections in Korean but not in Japanese. The absence of such words in the Japanese response cries partly corroborates the contention of some Japanese researchers (e.g. Hasegawa 2010) that solitude speech including response cries may not always be dialogic, which is contrary to the popular assumption held by Western scholars (e.g. Bakhtin 1929/1984, Vigotsky 1934/1986). On the other hand, the frequent occurrences of such swear words in the Korean response cries suggest that Korean speakers may be different from Japanese speakers in their speech conception of non-communicative situations. This issue of dialogicity awaits to be investigated in future research.

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