# The Effect of Native Cultures of Japanese and Korean Learners of English on Reading Comprehension

Yong-ju Ahn, Na-kyung Kwon and Hyung-ji Chang

Faculties of Global and Leisure Tourism, Sun Moon University

yjan@sunmoon.ac.kr, Vickyzzang99@sunmoon.ac.kr, maria07@sunmoon.ac.kr

## Abstract

The present study is aimed to confirm how native culture of language learners is transferred to English reading strategy in terms of comparison study of Japanese and Korean readers of English. In the study, 32 students (JS=16, KS=16) were recruited and encouraged to take a test of phonographic and orthographic processing in English word identification. The test consists of two parts; reading aloud task and reading comprehension questions. In the results, KSs outperformed in reading aloud task, while JSs performed comparably in a reading comprehension test with KSs. Although the further investigation is required, the present study proposes that the visual and meaning-based strategy of JSs in reading is allowed them to have the comparable reading competence with KSs, who prefer to use a sound-based strategy in English reading.

## Keywords

Word identification, reading strategy, reading comprehension

## Introduction

There are some studies to support the evidence of transfer and facilitation of reading strategies if the L1 and L2 writing systems are similar. Muljani, Koda, and Moates (1998) studied English word recognition in Indonesian and Chinese students of English and suggested that there was some positive transfer from the Indonesian L1 reading processor to the English L2 because both the L1 and L2 have the same alphabetic system. However, there was no positive transfer from Chinese L1 to English L2 because those writing systems are so different. Indonesian L1 students use a sound-based strategy when they read the text, while Chinese L1 students use the visual and meaning-based strategy because of Chinese logographic system. In case of Japanese L1, writing system has a part of Chinese culture and they use *Kanji*, the logographic writing. According to Smith (1996), around 25% of the 2,000 *Kanji* in use have photo-logical clues to their pronunciation in Chinese. As like Chinese readers of English, it is believed that Japanese readers of English use visual and meaning-based strategy when they face unpronounceable words in reading. According to King (1996), Korean, *Hangul*, has the simplicity of its graphic elements, which promotes learnability, and the syllabic organization, which enhances efficiency in processing. Korean reading system encourages readers to follow an alphabetic processing. According to Chikamatsu (1996), there are different strategies involved in reading different orthographies and these strategies transfer to L2 word recognition. The present study is aimed to conduct the comparison study of Japanese and Korean readers of English and confirm the transfer of using reading strategies from native cultures to English L2 reading. For the study, the research questions are formed as follows.

1) How do Japanese and Korean readers of English perform on word identification task?
2) How do Japanese and Korean readers of English perform in reading comprehension test?

## 1      Word Identification Task

For the research question 1, the word identification task was designed with two parts, the reading aloud task and word recognition task. Participants were encouraged to read the given 2 English texts with 80 to 100 words and the time for reading processing and numbers of recognized words were estimated. In the result, Korean readers of English showed the significantly faster reading speed (M=57. 21, M=55.75) than Japanese readers of English (M=84.92, M=75.68). The following Table 1 describes the results.

Table 1: Reading aloud task

| Items | | Mean | N | Std.D | t | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Text 1 | J1 | 84.92 | 14 | 28.84 | | |
| | K1 | 57.21 | 14 | 11.45 | .360 | .005 |
| Text 2 | J2 | 75.68 | 16 | 22.22 | | |
| | K2 | 55.75 | 16 | 14.49 | 3.459 | .004 |

In addition, numbers of new words were reported by participants. Korean readers of English reported they found 1.53 new words per text, while Japanese readers of English found 1.83 new words per text. There's no significant difference between Japanese and Korean readers of English.

## 2 Reading Comprehension

For the research question 2, participants were asked to complete 10-item of reading comprehension test, including main and detailed questions from 2 English texts. As shown in Table 2, there's no significant difference between Japanese and Korean readers of English.

Table 2: Results of reading comprehension test

| Items | | Mean | N | Std.D | t | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Text 1 | RJ1 | 7.50 | 16 | 1.78 | -1.767 | .098 |
| | RK1 | 8.68 | 16 | 1.53 | | |
| Text 2 | RJ2 | 7.37 | 16 | 1.62 | -1.431 | .173 |
| | RK2 | 8.25 | 16 | 1.57 | | |

## 3 Conclusion

Firstly, the study found that Japanese readers of English spend more time to read English texts than Korean readers. It implies that Japanese learners are struggling with word recognition in English reading, when they encounter the unpronounceable words. Secondly, participants were asked to take the reading comprehension test and there's no significant difference between Japanese and Korean readers of English. According to Abu-Rabia (1997), there's evidence of transfer and facilitation if the L1 and L2 writing systems are similar. Thus Japanese readers prefer to use a visual meaning-based strategy, which holds participants to conduct the visual processing in reading since the writing systems of Japanese L1 and English L2 are different. However, for Korean readers of English use a sound-based strategy in English reading since Korean L1 is similar to English L2 reading process.

## References

Abu-Rabia, S. (1997). Verbal and working memory skills of bilingual Hebrew-English speaking children. *International Journal of psycholinguistics, 1*, 25-40.

Birch, B. (2008). *English L2 reading*. New York, Lawrence Erlbaum Association, Inc.

Chikamatsu, N. (1996). *The effects of L1 orthography on L2 word recognition.* Studies in Second Language Acquisition, 18, 403-432.

King, R. (1996). Korean writing. In P. Daniels & W. Bright (Eds.), *The World's writing systems* (pp. 218-227). New York, Oxford University Press.

Muljani, D., Koda, K., & Moates, D. (1998). The development of word recognition in a second language. *Applied Psycholinguistics, 19*, 99-113.

Smith, J. (1996). Japanese writing. In P. Daniels & W. Bright (Eds.), *The world's writing systems* (pp.209-217). New York: Oxford University Press.