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Conflicting Languages, Echoing Languages:
The Differences in South Korean and Japanese Language Usage as Demonstrated by the 2019 South Korean-Japanese Conflict, and their Implications

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Abstract

The 2019 South Korean-Japanese trade row made clear that the gap in historical perceptions between Japan and its former colony also had an important linguistic side. South Korea and Japan operate with two mutually incompatible sets of historical terms, especially regarding the most sensitive historical issues. Moreover, both governments have been making conscious efforts in language policing, attempting to control the ways in which their respective media refer to anything supposed to be potentially controversial between the two states. Furthermore, the war between the two language-policing regimes across the Straits of Korea has a civil war aspect as well: right-wing historical revisionists in South Korea have been actively appropriating the terminology of their Japanese colleagues while consolidating their opposition to the preferred terminology of the current South Korean government. They have also been exporting to Japan some of the terms they have coined. The present article deals with all the interrelated aspects of the South Korean-Japanese language war. It attempts to explore the ways in which state-level language management regimes have been operating and the interactions between language policies and media language conventions. At the same time, it proposes solutions for overcoming limitations of state language policing and linguistic nationalism.

Keywords: terminology, terminology dispute, language policing, media, South Korea, Japan, trade conflict, South Korean-Japanese historical conflict

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2019 South Korean-Japanese Conflict Represented Linguistically

The South Korean-Japanese 2019 trade row started on July 1, 2019, when the Japanese Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry announced its restrictions on exports to South Korea of materials used for semiconductor and display production. This dispute meant a full, long-term escalation of the pre-existing conflicts that had accumulated between the two countries. The intensity of their mutual conflict had been increasing, with such events as the October 2018 decision by the South Korean Supreme Court on compensating the victims of war-time imperial Japanese forced labor conscription and the expropriation of Nippon Steel (former Nippon Steel Corporation) assets in South Korea, the December 2018 radar lock-on dispute, and the April 2019 South Korean prohibition on the importation of maritime products from the Fukushima area being the major landmarks in this acceleration. An exacerbation of the conflict was decisively triggered by the aforementioned court victory of South Korean forced labor conscription victims. After this, the diplomatic, economic, and military disagreements between the two countries became at last fully visible, as Japan and South Korea entered a full-blown diplomatic war. The media—domestic and foreign—hurriedly reported on the South Korean-Japanese relationship hitting rock bottom, their lowest level since the 1965 normalization of diplomatic relations. However, one significant special trait of the 2019 South Korean-Japanese trade conflict was its explicit linguistic side. Language became an important weapon in the diplomatic war, whereas the media space played the role of its main battlefield.

In fact, the history of South Korean-Japanese relations already contains numerous instances of mutual language conflict, with diverging terms reflecting variant approaches to issues. The differences are especially evident in the case of historical terminology. For example, the South Korean term for the 1592–1598 Hideyoshi invasions of Joseon Korea is Imjin Waeran. The term is rooted in the Confucian imaginary geography of the East Asian world, and literally signifies "chaos" (*ran*), a disturbance to the normal inter-state order created by the peripheral

"Japanese barbarians" (*wae*) in the year imjin (1592). This term makes clear Koreans' hierarchically superior position vis-à-vis Japanese within the framework of the traditional East Asian order. However, the accepted term in Japanese is the War of Bunroku-Keicho—a self-centered term that does not foreground the fact of an invasion committed by Japan.[1] The South Korean and Japanese terms possess different contextual meanings in their respective worlds. Along similar lines, South Korea formerly referred to the 1910–1945 period of Japanese colonial rule as *ilje sidae* (Japanese imperial period), though the official Korean term has recently been changed to *ilje gangjeomgi* (period of forced Japanese occupation). This latter term is meant to accentuate both the illegality and forcibly imposed nature of Japanese colonialism in Korea (the Hangeul word processor, widely used in South Korea, actually converts ilje sidae to ilje gangjeomgi automatically as one types). In Japan, however, this period is usually referred to as the "era of Japanese rule" (*Nihon tōchi jidai*), which does not directly address the issue of colonialization's illegality. Yet another example of a similar kind is the usage of the word *shūsen* (literally 'end of the war') in Japan in reference to the last stage of the Pacific War, known to Koreans either as *haebang* (liberation) or *gwangbok* (literally, 'restoration of the light'). The different systems of historical terminology exert profound influence on the formation of the worldviews regarded as *natural truth* by the majorities in both Japan and South Korea. The 2019 South Korean-Japanese conflict was, inter alia, expressed linguistically through a mutual clash of the different systems of meaning accentuated by the terminological divergences on both sides of the South Korea-Japan divide.

In the colonial period, the Korean language was greatly influenced by Japanese in diverse ways. The two languages are close enough linguistically as to be easily influenced by each other; in addition,

1. Interestingly, North Korea's term for this war is "Imjin Patriotic War" (Imjin joguk jeonjaeng) North Korean historiography defines Imjin Waeran as a "feudal" term. Instead, North Koreans coined a modern term of their own, "patriotic war" being obviously inspired by the Soviet Union's official name for the Soviet-German War of 1941–1945 (part of World War II), "the Great Patriotic War."

modernity-related Japanese-coined translations of Western terms were imported into Korean in large numbers, which naturally brought a significant number of Japanese loanwords into the Korean language. Moreover, as Korea was fully colonized by Japan in 1910, Japanese language assumed a dominant position, while Korean was reduced to an auxiliary instrument in the hand of the Japanese colonial administration (Mitsui 2010). In such circumstances, the changes in the structure of Korean language induced by the influence of Japanese reached qualitatively deeper levels than the mere importation of loanwords. This influence continued even after Korea's liberation in 1945. To counter it, a campaign of *language purification*, designed to replace Japanese loanwords with their Korean equivalents, was launched immediately after liberation (E. Lee 1974). South Korean academia has been focusing on questioning and assessing the methods and meanings of *linguistic liberation* from Japanese (H. Kim 2005). In such a context, the present research, dealing with a Korean-Japanese linguistic conflict, represents an attempt to re-examine the interrelationship between the two languages following Korean's *linguistic liberation*.

Language has never been a neutral vehicle of communication. It is always part of social relationships, often conflictual, and its usages are often influenced by conflicting interests. As communication research has repeatedly demonstrated, the *official* linguistic practices of governments or media are always inherently ideologically laden: the agenda of writers is often palpable, even in the ways in which the sentences are constructed in newspaper articles, emphasizing the centrality, benevolent intentions, or responsibility of certain actors (for example, of a government in its conflict with striking workers, on this see Kress and Hodge [1979, 15–37]). Moreover, most states tend to have their language policies and to implement them by establishing approved language standards, ensuring uniformity, balancing *native-ness* against the inevitable influx of *foreign-ness*, and sanctioning linguistic *deviations* (Shohamy 2006, 59–76, 110–135). Neither Japan nor South Korea are exceptions to this. Indeed, both possessed well-developed state apparatuses for language standardization and language policing well before the beginning of

the current dispute, and these apparatuses, expectedly, have their ideological and political agendas (Gottlieb 2011, 1–33; Song 2012). Acquiring the Japanese or South Korean version of Korean by birth, or selecting it for expressing oneself, implies an acceptance of the two countries' conflictual relationship already reflected in the respective state-approved constructions of the standard versions of the two languages, or inexplicably implicating oneself into them. The only way out is a constant effort to distance oneself from the conflict and relativize it as much as possible. As a part of such efforts, the present paper will attempt to analyze examples of the South Korean-Japanese language collisions that surfaced in the media in the wake of the 2019 South Korean-Japanese trade dispute. Furthermore, it will attempt to clarify the implications of these collisions, emphasizing at the same time the necessity of the linguistic efforts towards mutual understanding between the two countries involved.

The Managed Language

One of the most significant linguistic aspects of the South Korean-Japanese trade dispute after July 2019 is the meticulous ways in which the governments concerned administrate the language used in the dispute. Ironically, the first instance of such state-language management of the language was exactly the word "management" (*kanri* in Japanese). It was by signing and promulgating the "Daikan Minkoku muke yushutsu kanri no un'yō no minaoshi ni tsuite" (Revised Rules on the Administration of the Export Management vis-à-vis Republic of Korea) that Japan's Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry initiated restrictions on the export of semi-conductor production materials to South Korea. In response, the South Korean government demanded a clear explanation for the reasons behind the restrictions, while announcing its intention to dispute the restrictions by appealing to the World Trade Organization (WTO). Following this, then Japanese minister of Economy, Trade, and Industry, Hiroshige Seko, analyzed the wording used by the Japanese media in their

reporting on the events, and found that such dailies as *Asahi*, *Mainichi*, *Nihon Keizai* and the public broadcaster NHK referred to the measures as "export restrictions" (*kisei*), whereas the daily Yomiuri spoke about "export management" (*kanri*), and the daily Sankei used the expression, "tightening (*genkakuka*) of exports." Consequently, he criticized NHK's wording, asking the public broadcaster to refer to the measures as "management" rather than "restrictions," and to "use the exact expression currently utilized in the world of the experts." Indeed, following this, NHK switched to using the term "export management."[2] This move did not go unnoticed in South Korea. South Korea's public broadcaster, KBS, reported that "Minister Seko's move is seen as intended to prevent in advance the media criticism expected in the process of excluding South Korea from the 'white list' of the states to which the export restrictions do not apply and having the case being taken to the WTO."[3] As we can see from this example, the language was viewed as a sensitive enough issue as to be managed in order to improve one's position in the South Korean-Japanese trade row.

Such *language management* by the Japanese government became even more visible after the victory of the lawsuit by Korean victims of wartime forced labor at the South Korean Supreme Court in October 2019. Immediately after the verdict by the South Korean Supreme Court, the Japanese government seemingly decided that the use of terminology should make it clear that not all former wartime laborers were forcibly recruited. Thus, it announced its decision to change the reference to "formerly conscripted civilian workers" (*kyū minkanjin chōyōkō*) to "former workers from the Korean Peninsula" (*kyū Chōsen hantō shusshin*

2. "Sekō keisan-shō `NHK wa 'yushutsu kanri' o tsukaubeki,' 'Yushutsu kisei' hōdō ni teigen → sonogo no kiji wa dō natta?" (Japan's Economy, Trade, and Industry Minister Seko Suggested, NHK Should Use the Expression 'Export Management' with Respect to Its Report Using 'Export Control' → What Happened to Subsequent Reports?), *J-CAST News*, July 25, 2019, https://www.j-cast.com/2019/07/25363557.html?p=all.
3. "Il eollon tongje, 'gyuje' anin 'gwalli.' Gisa bakkun NHK" (Japan's Justification for Its Media Control, 'It's Not Control but Management.' NHK Changed Its Report), *KBS News*, July 26, 2019.

rōdōsha) and use exclusively the latter wording in all official governmental materials thereafter.[4] As I will elaborate upon later, such use of language is understood to be aimed at diverting attention from the forcible nature of wartime labor recruitment.[5] Indeed, in the *Gaikō seisho 2019* (Diplomatic Bluebook 2019) published by Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs in April 2019, the wartime forcible conscription issue is addressed as the "problem of former workers from the Korean Peninsula."

One more issue related to the *Diplomatic Bluebook 2019* concerned its statement on the issue of the Japanese Imperial Army's *comfort* women to the following effect: "The expression 'sex slave' (*seidorei*) does not conform to the facts and thus should not be used. It was confirmed with the South Korea side as well in the December 2015 South Korean-Japanese Agreement. This expression was not used at all in the text of this Agreement" (Gaimushō 2019, 29). To that, South Korea's Foreign Ministry responded in the following dismissive way: "The South Korean government has never agreed to such a wording, and simply pointed out that its official term of address is 'Japanese military comfort women victims.'" After that, it continued to use the disputed wording, ending with one more recent row with Japan.[6] In fact, already as early as 2014 an expert on the United Nations Human Rights Committee advised that, instead of evasive expressions like "comfort women," the victims should be referred to as "forced sex slaves."[7] The Japanese government, however, was in steady disagreement with this recommendation. In February 2017, Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs decided to address the sculptures

4. "Seifu 'chōyōkō' wa 'kyū Chōsen hantō shusshin rōdōsha' ni" (Government Adopted the Phrase 'Former Workers from the Korean Peninsula' in Place of 'Conscripted Laborers'), *NHK News*, November 11, 2018.
5. "'Yet Hanbando chulsin nodongja' ragoyo?" (Calling them, 'Former Workers from the Korean Peninsula'?), *Hankyoreh*, November 15, 2018.
6. "'Wianbu seongnoye anya, Hanguk-do hwagin' ... Ilbon oegyo cheongseo waegok" ('Comfort Women Were Not Sex Slaves,' the Japanese Diplomatic Bluebook Falsely Argued), *KBS News*, November 11, 2019.
7. United Nations Human Rights, Office of the High Commissioner, "Human Rights Committee considers report of Japan," July 16, 2014, https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=14878.

of the victims of sexual slavery (so-called 'girl statues,' or *sonyeosang* in Korean) exclusively as "comfort women statues."[8] After that, such appellations as "girl statue" completely disappeared from the pages of *Asahi* and other Japanese dailies. The reference to the South Korean-Japanese Agreement on the "comfort women" issue, suddenly announced on December 28, 2015 (hereafter, December 28 Agreement) and to the South Korea government's supposed acquiescence to the preferred Japanese wording for the victims, resurfaced in the *Diplomatic Bluebook 2019* in the context of the South Korean-Japanese trade row of that year.

While it did not necessarily constitute *management*, there are also some examples of the South Korean government inducing the media to use the terminology of its choosing. In response to the August 22, 2019 Japanese governmental decision to exclude South Korea, on the grounds of supposed security issues, from the so-called white list of countries to which simplified export clearance procedures applied, the South Korean government decided on August 22, 2019 not to prolong GSOMIA (Japan-South Korea General Security of Military Information Agreement). While the Japanese government stated that this decision "is evaluated as bringing serious changes to the security cooperation environment between the two countries," the South Korean government grounded its decision in its belief that "prolongation of an agreement concluded with the aim of exchanging sensitive military information was judged not to be beneficial to our state interests." Furthermore, the Blue House (South Korean presidential office) clarified that its decision amounted to "termination" (*jongnyo*) of the agreement, pursuant to agreement's clause on its termination (GSOMIA, article 21, clause 3) rather than its "abrogation" (*pagi*): "abrogation," according to Blue House officials, could imply that Koreans violated the terms of the agreement, and that, as they saw it, was not the case.[9] This clarification was a response to the division

8. "Shōjo zō koshō 'ianhu zō' ni tōitsu e gaimushō ga hōshin" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Plans to Rename 'Girl Statues' as 'Comfort Woman Statues'), *Mainichi shimbun*, February 2, 2017.
9. "'GSOMIA pagi, anbo uryeo eomna' jilmun-e, Cheong gwangyeja 'Anbo jasin'" (To the Quesion 'May the Termination of GSOMIA Jeopardize National Security?' the Blue House Replies, 'Confident in National Security'), *Chosun Ilbo*, August 22, 2019.

among South Korean media, some of which reported GSOMIA to have been "terminated," while others preferred the expression, "abrogated." After the initial confusion passed, such conservative dailies as *Chosun Ilbo*, *JoongAng Ilbo*, and *Dong-A Ilbo* continued to refer to the "abrogation" of the agreement, whereas the more progressive dailies *Hankyoreh* and *Kyunghyang sinmun* chose to continuously use the word "termination."

As far as the issue of state-level language management is concerned, the Blue House's critical response (July 17, 2019) to the translated versions of the *Chosun Ilbo* articles at that daily's Japanese-language site represents an unusual example of the interventionist approach. On July 4, 2018, the *Chosun Ilbo* published an article under the title: "Ilbon-ui Hanguk tuja—40%, Hanguk gieop-gwa jeopchokdo kkeoryeo" (Japan's Investment into South Korea Dive 40 Per Cent, [Japanese] Avoid Contact with South Korean Businesses). However, the translated title in the paper's Japanese-language version read differently: "How Can Koreans dare to Expect Investment from Japan [Now]?" (Kankoku wa dono tsura sagete Nihon karano tōshi o kitai suru noka?). Along similar lines, the title of a July 15, 2019, editorial, "Gukche bosang, donghak undong, ilsegi jeoneuro doragandeuthan Cheongwadae" (The Repayment of National Debt Campaign, Donghak Movement ... Looks as if Blue House Went Back a Century in Time) was translated into Japanese as, "Kaiketsu saku wo teiji sezu, kokumin no hannichi kanjō ni hi o tsukeru Kankoku no daitōryō" (Blue House Does Not Suggest any Solutions, Incites [Korean] People's Anti-Japanese Sentiments). The Blue House criticized the inconsistencies between the originals and their translations, rhetorically asking the daily to answer, "What will serve Republic of Korea and its people best?"[10] The criticism implied the discontent of the South Korean presidential administration over what they saw as the *Chosun Ilbo*'s attempt to *spin* the Japanese translations in a way that would attract more interest and sympathy from its Japanese readers. Open criticism by the South

10. "Hyeonan gwallyeon Ko Min-Jung daebyeonin beuriping" (Ko Min-Jung, the Spokesperson to the President of the Republic of Korea Made a Briefing on Pending Issues), *Republic of Korea Policy Briefing*, July 17, 2019.

Korean government over issues of *custom-tailored* Japanese translations demonstrates to us how important the state administering of language became in the course of the South Korean-Japanese trade dispute.

Conflicts Stemming from Differences between Korean and Japanese Vocabulary

Another notable feature of the 2019 conflicts was that in the course of their conflicts the two countries took advantage of different usages of the same words. A famous example is the use of *owabi* おわび by the Japanese government as a vernacular (purely Japanese) word for expressing its apology for the past. This word, whose significance varies from "feeling sorry" to "having deepest regret" depending upon the intentions of the speaker, has settled as a term expressing apology since it was used for the first time when South Korean president Roh Tae-woo visited Japan in 1990 for a summit with then Japanese prime minister Toshiki Kaifu (Endō 2000, 57). However, the word has been widely viewed as an *incomplete apology*, consistently creating controversy over its real implication.

The Korean government has also variably interpreted it as an expression of *sorry* or *apology*, depending on the diplomatic circumstances. In the meantime, Shimbun Akahata しんぶん赤旗, the daily organ of Japanese Communist Party, used the expression *shazai* 謝罪, whereas the Japanese government and most of the Japanese media have insisted on owabi in an apparent political attempt to avoid the legal responsibilities implied by shazai. Indeed, when the anti-Japanese product campaign flared up in July 2019, a South Korean student organization based in Gyeonggi-do province adopted a resolution demanding *shazai*, as opposed to *owabi*, in its protest of Japanese restrictions on exports to Korea.[11]

A similar controversy erupted in 2010, the centennial anniversary

11. "Ilbon gyeongje bobok-e jeonguk jachi danchejang-deul Ilbon bangmun jungdan gyeorui" (Heads of South Korean Local Governments Resolve to Stop Visiting Japan in response to Its Economic Retaliation), *Hankyoreh*, July 23, 2019.

of the Japanese annexation of Korea, when Japan returned to Korea approximately one thousand Korean books that had been taken by the Japanese during the Japanese colonial era. The Japanese government successfully insisted that *hikiwatashi* 引き渡し (meaning 'handing over something') be used in the agreement text, instead of *henkan* 返還 (meaning 'returning something to its owner'). This was to forestall the possibility of Japan acknowledging that the seizure of Korean cultural assets had been illegal. The Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs was also criticized for its intentional mistranslation of *hikiwatashi* as "return."[12]

These cases have something to do with the characteristics of Korean and Japanese words, in which Sino-Korean or Sino-Japanese words are combined with vernacular lexemes. The vernacular words of both languages carry a wide range of meanings, while Chinese-derived words denote specific and concrete meanings (G. Kim 1989). In connection with this linguistic characteristic, it is observed that Japanese tend to gloss over past history by using vernacular words with multiple meanings, while Koreans want to articulate historical responsibility by using more precise Sino-Korean terms.

Another case of intentionally using linguistic differences to abet conflict surfaced amidst the 2019 Japan-South Korea trade dispute. A famous example was the controversy over the four-character idiom *jeokbanhajang* 賊反荷杖 (literally, 'the thief turns on [the master] with a club')—meaning "a perpetrator positions him or herself as a victim"—and its translation. It arose after South Korea's president Moon Jae-in said in an emergency State Council meeting on August 2, "We will not tolerate Japan loudly claiming victimhood when in fact it is the perpetrator," in response to Japan's removal of South Korea from its white list. Since there is no Japanese equivalent to the idiom jeokbanhajang, most Japanese news media literally translated it as *nusutto takedakeshii* 盗人たけだけしい ('the brazen audacity of a thief'), thus infuriating the Japanese public. Moreover, Japanese Deputy Foreign Minister Masahisa

12 "Oegyobu, Il chongni damhwa 'immatdaero beonyeok'" (MOFA Arbitrarily Translated the Japanese Prime Minister's Statement), *Chosun Ilbo*, August 12, 2010.

Sato 佐藤雅久 denounced President Moon's comments on a TV program, saying, "It is extremely rude to use such vulgar words." South Korea's Presidential Office and Ministry of Foreign Affairs responded to Japan's reaction with harsh criticism, saying that "it is hardly believable that a high-level diplomatic official would produce a comment so devoid of politeness and common sense." While the mutual political recriminations were going on between Seoul and Tokyo, the *Mainichi shimbun*, one of a few news outlets that interpreted *jeokbanhajang* as *hirakinaoru* 開き直る (meaning 'being blatant'), instead of directly translating it, pointed out that the "Japanese press is to blame for the controversy." The *Mainichi* went on to quote a veteran interpreter of Korean as claiming, "The four-character idiom must be a strong criticism against Japan, but it means nothing more than 'you are to blame.' Besides, this saying is not a vulgar expression since four-character Sino-Korean idioms are usually used by cultured persons." As Mainichi pointed out, "This dispute is not a mere matter of translation but reflects the distrust between the two countries that has been so deepened as to make it impossible to even conduct a summit meeting."[13]

From this case, it can be argued that there is an established practice of opting for words that further fan the conflict in South Korea-Japan relations. In fact, the free online translation service of Google paraphrases *jeokbanhajang* as *inaori* 居直り (similar to *hirakinaoru* in terms of nuance), while Papago—a multilingual machine translation cloud service provided by Naver Corporation of Korea— opted for a literal translation as *nusutto takedakeshi* 盗人たけだけしい. In 2011, at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Google CEO Eric Schmidt said, "Automatic interpretation that is soon to be released will be able to prevent a third world war. A real revolution in human history is now on the way" (S. Kim 2013, 57), but the 2019 Korea-Japan conflict over language is a good example of how his expectations were too hasty.

13. Horiyama Akiko, "Mun daitōryō wa 'Nusutto takedakeshii' to ittanoka, puro tsūyaku to yomitoita" 文大統領は「盗っ人たけだけしい」と言ったのか：プロ通訳と読み解いた (President Moon's Remark 'The Brazen Audacity of a Thief,' Interpreted by a Veteran Interpreter), *Mainichi shimbun*, August 7, 2019.

A similar case can be found in Korea. As anti-Japanese sentiment worsened in Korea after the Korea-Japan agreement on the issue of "comfort women" victims was concluded on December 28, 2015, South Korean and Japanese civic groups called for Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to issue a letter of apology to "comfort women" survivors. However, Abe flatly refused the request, saying "I am not in any way considering (*mōtō kangaete imasen* 毛頭考えていません) sending a letter of apology to comfort women" (Shūgiin 2016, 16). This was literally translated by Korean news media as "I'm not giving it a hair's breadth of consideration." The Korean media translated *mōtō* 毛頭 literally as "not a hair's breadth," ignoring the fact that it actually means "not in the least" in Japanese. This expression particularly antagonized Korean public opinion, and during an annual audit by the Korean National Assembly's Foreign Affairs and Unification Committee, both the ruling and opposition camps criticized Abe for making "an utterly inappropriate remark without any sign of dignity."[14] This is another case in which a literal (rather than paraphrased) translation that ignored the semantic nuances of the original aggravated the diplomatic conflict.

Another case involved ways of referring to the South Korean president in speech. The October 25, 2018 episode of KBS 1TV's current affairs program *Sisa jikgyeok* (Current Events Direct Hit) featured an open discussion in which two Korean and two Japanese correspondents discussed how much more strained South Korea-Japan relations had grown since the Supreme Court ruling on forced labor during Japanese colonial rule. After the episode's airing, public criticism of it mounted, with some viewers decrying it as "pro-Japanese" or "traitorous." The most controversial point was the answer that Ruriko Kubota 久保田るり子 of *Sankei shimbun* gave to the moderator's question. When Kubota was asked who was to blame for strained Korea-Japan relations, she replied, "In short, it is the historical views of Mr. Moon Jae-in." Besides Kubota's

14. "Gukgam hyeonjang 'wianbu habui' jipjung georon, Abe teolkkeut bareon-do munjesi" (Japan-ROK Agreement on the Comfort Women Issue Was Intensely Discussed at the Annual Audit: Taking Issue with Abe's Remark 'Not a Hair's Breadth'), *Yonhap News*, October 5, 2016.

critical remarks about Korea, her addressing of President Moon Jae-in as "Mr. Moon Jae-in" (Mun Jae-in *ssi*) ignited Korean viewers' indignation. In response to the public criticism, the production team issued an explanatory statement, in which they explained, "In Japan, mister is used as a formal honorific term. Even when referring to Prime Minister Abe, all the debate participants used both appellations of 'mister' and 'prime minister' interchangeably. I want you to understand that the Sankei reporter did not address President Moon Jae-in with a derogatory appellation."[15] Unlike in Korea, it is usual in Japan for *shi*氏 or *san*さん to be used to mean "Mr.," without specifying the person's job title or professional position. In Korea, however, it is usual to call someone by his or her job title (Park et al. 2018, 330). Given this, it is not very plausible that a Japanese correspondent who had lived in Seoul for as long as five years and was fluent in Korean was unfamiliar with Korean appellation conventions. Therefore, the production team's explanations failed to convince a significant segment of Korean viewers, who suspected that Kubota had intentionally used "Mr." in addressing the Korean president despite her knowledge of its connotation in Korean.

Different Experiences, Different Histories, and Different Languages

Another appellation issue emerged in 2019. While the conflict between the two countries was by then protracted, South Korean Prime Minister Lee Nak-yon was scheduled to visit Japan on October 22 to attend the enthronement ceremony for Emperor Naruhito 德仁. The visit drew keen attention as a possible breakthrough in the two countries' diplomatic stalemate. However, a furor erupted over the issue of how to refer to the Japanese emperor during a parliamentary inspection session by Korea's Foreign Affairs and Unification Committee on October 21. Replying

15. "Sisa jikgyeok jejakjin-ui ipjang imnida" (An Announcement by the Production Team of *Sisa Jikgyeok*), KBS *Sisa Jikgyeok*, https://program.kbs.co.kr/1tv/culture/direct/pc/board.html?smenu=264b73&bbs_loc=T2019-0280-04-876659,list,none,1,0 (October 28, 2019).

to the questions of lawmakers as to how the Japanese emperor should be addressed, Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha said, "Based on the principle that Korea and Japan should use the appellations that respective countries have chosen for their leaders, as agreed upon at the time of President Kim Dae-jung's visit to Japan in October 1998, the government settled for the appellation *cheonhwang* 天皇 ('emperor'; *tenno* in Japanese). As Foreign Minister Kang said, the principle stems from the "Japan-South Korea Joint Declaration: A New Japan-Korea Partnership towards the 21st Century" (known as the Kim Dae-jung-Obuchi Joint Declaration). This was adopted in 1998 by then-South Korean President Kim Dae-jung and then-Japanese Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi 小淵惠三 at the time of the former's visit to Japan in 1998.

The Korean press originally tended to use the term *cheonhwang* to refer to the Japanese monarch but had begun to use *ilwang* 日王 ('king of Japan') instead about the time of Hirohito's (Emperor Showa) death in 1989.[16] The chief reason for this was that Korean governmental control over press coverage of Japan in connection with its diplomatic policies was eased following democratization of the nation in the late 1980s. Another reason was the worsening of relations between the two countries due to the right-wing turn in Japanese society, the emergence of which coincided with the death of Emperor Hirohito, can be attributed to the Japanese government's denial of Hirohito's responsibility for the war (Park 2013, 69).[17] Nevertheless, President Kim Dae-jung chose to use cheonhwang as the official appellation for the Japanese monarch at the

16. "Hirohito jomun bandae seongmyeongman-euro andwae" (A Statement Opposing a Condolence Delegation to the Funeral of Hirohito Is Not Sufficient), *Hankyoreh*, February 17, 1989.

17. One Foreign Ministry official in charge of Japanese affairs explained that the Korean media began to use the appellation "king of Japan" instead of "Japanese emperor" in 1989, when diplomatic relations with Japan worsened due to the latter's fingerprinting policy for Korean-Japanese in 1998, and this explanation has been widely accepted ('Ilwang-eun cheonhwang,' *Dong-A Ilbo*, May 14, 1998). However, this explanation is off the mark, given the fact that fingerprinting had been a controversial issue throughout the 1980s, and there is no evidence of any particular escalation in the issue around 1989.

time of his visit to Japan.[18] The government explained at that time that "it is desirable to call the Japanese emperor as the Japanese do, and it is a diplomatic norm to use the diplomatic partner's own appellation."[19] This was met by mounting public criticism, which asserted that the word *cheonhwang* symbolized Japan's 35-year-long colonial rule over Korea and therefore could not be accepted.[20] This is why some Korean media maintained the term *ilwang*. This issue has somewhat different implications from that involving the allegedly derogatory appellation "Mr. Moon," in that it reflects the Korean people's anger about and criticism of Japan's illegal colonial rule over Korea. At the heart of the 2019 language clash between the two countries is a wide gap over the perception of past history produced by asymmetric relations between the colonizer that enforced colonial domination and waged a war of aggression and the colonized who came under colonial rule and were mobilized for that war of aggression.

This wide gap resulted in a sharp clash between the two countries over the court ruling on the forced labor of Korean workers during Japan's colonial rule. The clash, in its turn, culminated in a controversy over how to refer to Korean victims of forced labor. As mentioned earlier, Japanese

18. "Jeongbu 'cheonhwang' hoching jeonhwan baegyeong" (Background to the Government's Decision to Discard the Appellation 'Emperor'), *Hankyoreh*, September 12, 1998; "Ilwang-gwa cheonhwang" (King of Japan and Japanese Emperor), *Dong-A Ilbo*, September 12, 1998; "Jeongbu, ilwang hoching gyeoksang? doesaranan 'cheonhwang'" (Government, Back to the Appellation 'Emperor'?—Revived 'Emperor'), *Kyunghyang sinmun*, September 12, 1998. According to an opinion poll, for instance, those who said they preferred the term "king of Japan" accounted for 62.8 percent, while those who agreed with the the term "Japanese emperor" as a diplomatic norm accounted for merely 19.7 percent ('Cheonhwang-eun sidae chagojeok hoching, 62.8%' [62.8% Responded, 'Emperor Is an Anachronistic Appellation']), *Dong-A Ilbo*, September 15, 1998.
19. "Jeongbu, ilwang hoching gyeoksang? doesaranan 'cheonhwang'" (Government, Back to the Appellation 'Emperor'? — Revived 'Emperor'), *Kyunghyang sinmun*, September 12, 1998.
20. "An Byeong-uk gatollikdae sahakgwa gyosu hanIl gwangye gwallyeon Cheongwadae-e 'jeongchaekjean' haenneunde … 'gwageosa jeongni sigeuphaedo sinjunghi'" (Prof. An Byeong-uk of CUK Proposed a Japan Policy to the Blue House, Calling for 'Prudence Despite the Urgency of Settling History Issues'), *Kyunghyang sinmun*, September 16, 1998; "'Cheonhwang' jegukjuui hoching, ilwang-i jeonghwakhan pyohyeon" ('Emperor' is an Imperialist Word; 'King of Japan' is the Right Term), *Hankyoreh*, September 16, 1998.

Prime Minister Abe said after the ruling that Japan would refer to them as *kyu Chōsen hantō shusshin rōdōsha* 旧朝鮮半島出身労働者 (former workers from the Korean Peninsula) instead of *chōyōkō* 徴用工 (conscripted workers), based on the insistence that they had been "recruited" before the conscription order was issued in Korea in 1944. Following this, the Japanese government proclaimed that it would officialize the former term to make clear that not all of the Korean workers were conscripted. According to the Japanese government, the workers in question were recruited in various ways, including employment brokerage by private corporations or public officials, before the conscription order took effect.[21] The Japanese government intended to discard the term "forced mobilization" by replacing the expression "forced laborers" with "former workers from the Korean Peninsula." However, the Japanese news media still generally use the expression *chōyōkō* (conscripted workers) or moto *chōyōkō* 元徴用工 (former conscripted workers). Their use of this term implies that Japan's mobilization of Korean workers was lawful since *chōyō* 徴用 (labor conscription) was based on the Japanese laws such as the National Mobilization Law (*Kokka sōdōinhō* 国家総動員法) and the National Service Conscription Ordinance (*Kokumin choyorei* 国民徴用令). Concurrently, the Japanese mainstream holds the view that all compensation issues for Korea wartime victims were settled with the conclusion of the 1965 Korea-Japan Treaty.

On the other hand, the Korean government maintains, on the basis of accumulated research on Japanese labor conscription, that the Korean workers mobilized through private or public recruitment or job brokerage were given no better treatment than those conscripted by the Japanese Government-General of Korea (Tonomura 2012) and that there was no difference between the two in terms of the forcible nature of the labor. In 2018, the South Korean Supreme Court ruled on the compensation for wartime forced labor of Korean workers on the basis of the understanding that the forced labor was not subject to the effects of the 1965 treaty

21. "Seifu 'chōyōkō' wa 'kyū Chōsen hantō shusshin rōdōsha' ni" (Government, from 'Forced Laborers' to 'Former Workers from the Korean Peninsula'), *NHK News*, November 11, 2018.

because the workers in question were illegally mobilized for forced labor during the colonial occupation. The term that the Supreme Court used at the ruling was *gangje dongwon* (forcible mobilization).[22] Accordingly, the Korean workers who were mobilized during Japan's colonial occupation are called in Korea "victims of forcible mobilization or conscription." The issue whether to refer to them as "conscripted workers," "former workers from the Korean Peninsula," or "victims of forcible mobilization and conscription" stems from the clash between the colonizer's stance, which justifies the wartime mobilization of labor, and the colonized people's stance, which argues for its illegality and involuntary character.

The issue was taken up by Korea's National Assembly as soon as the two countries were embroiled in a trade dispute. As some lawmakers of the conservative Liberty Korea Party (Jayu Hangukdang) used the term "conscripted workers," the ruling camp took issue with it, claiming that it reflected their "pro-Japanese perspective." A leading broadcasting network referred to the clash as a "language war over history."[23] Thereafter, any lawmaker, whether from the ruling or opposition party, who carelessly used this term was criticized, while the importance of the careful considerations for "the significance and the potential ripple effects that a word may have in diplomacy" was emphasized.[24]

The most representative case of the language conflict caused by the gap in historical views between the former colonizer and its ex-colony was the conflict over how to define the wartime ordeal of "comfort women" victims. The Korean and Japanese civic groups denounced the term "comfort women," on the grounds that the terminology was coined only to play up the allegedly voluntary nature of the victims' service, hiding the forcible recruitment and violence behind it. Consequently,, the expression "sex slave" began to be used first by news media from

22. Kim Chang-rok, "Daebeobwon gangje dongwon pangyeol jeomgeom" (A Review of the Supreme Court's Ruling on Japan's Forcible Mobilization of Korean Workers), *OhmyNews*, August 2–30, 2019.
23. *MBC News Desk*, July 10, 2019.
24. "Bangil uiwon-deul-ui nat tteugeoun 'jingyonggong' pyohyeon" (Lawmakers who Visited Japan Shamelessly Used the Term 'Forced Laborers'), *Hankook Ilbo*, August 9, 2019.

1990.[25] Then the term went global after the Associated Press settled for it on the basis of the judgement that the term "comfort woman," a direct translation of the Japanese *ianfu*, fails to adequately describe the wartime realities. Since the Coomaraswamy Report, which defines the so-called "comfort women" as "sex slaves," was submitted to the UN Human Rights Commission in 1996, the latter took hold as the accepted terminology used by the UN and global community (Kurahashi 2014, 76–99). However, the Japanese government has been consistently insisting that "comfort women" were not sex slaves, thus prolonging the controversy.

This issue emerged again amid the 2019 trade dispute between Korea and Japan. Japan's *Diplomatic Bluebook 2019* published in April 2019 was belatedly found to have a passage describing the Korean government as supposedly having agreed not to use the term "sex slaves" at the time of concluding the Korea-Japan Agreement on December 28, 2015. Faced with the controversy, South Korea's Ministry of Foreign Affairs clarified that it had raised objection to it through diplomatic channels before the Bluebook was issued. A report of the taskforce to review the Korea-Japan Agreement of December 28, 2015 on the issue of "comfort women" victims also stated, "The Japanese side also wanted the Korean side not to use the term 'sexual slavery.' The Korean side objected on the grounds that the term 'sexual slavery' is internationally accepted. However, it ended up reaffirming that the 'issue of the comfort women victims of the Japanese military' was the only official term used." Given this, it is highly likely that the controversial part of the Japanese Foreign Ministry's *Diplomatic Bluebook 2019* is misleading. Another point deserving notice in the taskforce report is the statement, "These non-disclosed remarks did not contain the promise that the Korean government would . . . refrain from using the term, 'sexual slavery.' However, they left room for the Japanese side to intervene in those issues" (Task Force on the Review of the Korea-Japan Agreement on the Issue of 'Comfort Women' 2017, 23–24). As the Japanese human rights lawyer Etsuro Totsuka 戸塚悦郎, who was the first

25. "Ilje-ga halkwin yeoseong sunansa jeungeon" (Testimonies to Women's Suffering under Imperial Japan), *Maeil Business Newspaper*, April 19, 1990.

to propose to the United Nations the use of the term "sex slaves" instead of "comfort women" back in 1992 (Totsuka 2006, 124), pointed out, there was a possibility that the passage in the *Bluebook* might be wrongly interpreted as the Korean government giving up on the term "sex slaves."[26] However, it might also be argued that the Korean government failed to properly represent the voices of the victims by taking an ambiguous position on the internationally approved term supposed to restore victims' human rights. Therefore, it can be said that the 2019 language clash between Korea and Japan revealed the Korean government's negligence of its duties to hold Japan to account for its state violence against the victims of colonialism and to make efforts to restore their rights and dignity.

Resonance, or *Civil War* between Two Languages

Amid the conflict between Korea and Japan in 2019, an unprecedented number of cases demonstrating the resonance between Korean and Japanese languages were observed, as if pushing back against the currents of conflict. The clearest case is the popular success of *Banil jongjokjuui: Daehan Minguk wigi-ui geunwon* (Anti-Japan Tribalism: The Root of the Korean Crisis) edited by so-called New Right scholars led by Prof. Lee Young-hoon (Seoul National University). The book was published shortly after the start of the Japan-South Korea trade dispute in 2019. With regard to Japan's compulsory recruitment of Koreans during World War II, the book insists that such assertions as "forced recruitment," "forced labor," and "forced conscription" of Koreans are all fictional. Concurrently it claims that the so-called "comfort women" were not sexual slaves, supporting the Japanese government's assertions, and from the linguistic point of view, also revealing the linguistic intimacy between Korean and Japanese historical revisionism.

26. "10 eok en naego 'seongnoye' anida yaksok badasseumyeon wianbu habui muhyo" (The Comfort Women Agreement Should Be Nullified If It Agreed Not to Use the Term 'Sex Slaves' in Return for 1 Billion Yen), *Yonhap News*, November 12, 2019.

In short, the authors define the victims of "forced mobilization" as youth who voluntarily went to Japan with *romantic* dreams of success and personal enrichment. They claim that there was no racial discrimination against Koreans in the workplace. Also, they insist that the victims of Japan's wartime sexual slavery, called *won wianbu* ('former comfort women,' a direct translation from the Japanese *moto ianfu* 元慰安婦), were voluntary sex workers with political consciousness. As "comfort women of the empire," they were given the sacred responsibility of comforting the Japanese soldiers and were protected by the Japanese government from the danger of sexually transmitted diseases (Lee 2019a). Moreover, the authors lament the "shamanistic mentality" of Koreans and castigate them as habitual liars. They also claim that Korean people are demonizing Japan with malicious fabrications, something they define as *banil jongjokjuui* ('anti-Japanese tribalism').

The book became a bestseller just two months after publication in Korea, with sales of more than 100,000 copies. Two months later, on November 14, 2019, its Japanese translation was published under the slightly revised title, *Hannichi shuzokushugi: nikkan kiki no kongen* 反日種族主義: 日韓危機の根源 (Anti-Japan Tribalism: The Root of the Japan-South Korea Crisis). At his press conference held at the Japan National Press Club on November 21, 2019, Lee Young-hoon said that 250,000 copies had been printed in only a week.[27] This remarkable networking between Japanese and Korean historical revisionists has been referred to as the "*Anti-Japanese Tribalism* phenomenon." The authors have been maximizing the influence of their work, combining their best-selling book in print with cutting-edge technology of new media platforms like YouTube (Kang 2019). Videos produced with Japanese subtitles and released on YouTube by the Rhee Syngman School—the director of which is Lee Young-hoon—are watched by many Japanese

27. The book had sold approximately 400,000 copies as of January 26, 2020, according to Bungei Shunjū, publisher of its Japanese version ('Nihongohan wa 40 man-bu, *Hannichi shuzokushugi* wa naze besutoserā ni natta ka' 日本語版は40万部『反日種族主義』はなぜベストセラーになったか [Why *Hannichi shuzokushugi* Became a Bestseller], *Bungei Shunjū digital*, accessed March 2, 2020, https://bungeishunju.com/n/ndaf89d7cf73f).

users, who actively communicate with Korean users by leaving comments in Japanese on the videos.

Lee Young-hoon defines the phenomenon as an "alliance between Korean and Japanese free citizens" (*hanil jayu simin yeondae*). In the preface to the Japanese version of the book, Lee explains the reason for publishing the book at such a sensitive time: "I gladly agreed to the publication of the Japanese translation because I thought it would be desirable to form and strengthen the alliance between the two countries' free citizens. ... The alliance between Korean and Japanese free citizens will play its part as a bulwark for spreading liberal democracy to North Korea and China" (Lee 2019b, 4). According to the authors of the book, the alliance—which is reminiscent of the Japan-ROK-US trilateral cooperation that props up South Korea and Japan as a bulwark against communism in East Asia—is threatened by "anti-Japanese tribalism" in South Korea, and the most extreme case of it is South Korea's response to the comfort women issue.

What should be noted here, however, is that the language of the book, which seeks to strengthen the solidarity between the "free citizens" of Korea and Japan, mostly leans on imported Japanese terminology. In fact, the import of Japanese-style historical terminology by Korean historians, whether conservatives or liberals, has continued since the colonial period. However, it is only in recent times that Korean historical revisionists, led by Lee Young-hoon, have been actively attempting to import Japanese historical terms. A representative one would be *jahak sagwan* 自虐史観 (a *masochistic* or self-defeating view of history), borrowed from the Japanese *jigyaku shikan* (Ha 2007; Kang 2019). Regarding the stance urging Japan to show remorse and take responsibility for its colonial rule and wartime aggression, a group of Japanese revisionist historians has been labelling this as a *masochistic* (i.e. self-critical) view of history (*jigyaku shikan*). These historians rather assert that, on the contrary, Japan modernized Korea through its colonial rule and there was neither forced recruitment nor sexual slavery. Their assertions crossed the Straits of Korea, along with their preferred terms, to be accepted by Japanese revisionists' Korean counterparts. These Korean historical revisionists say that it is no less

than a *masochistic* view of history to take a negative stand vis-à-vis South Korea's past. According to them, in this past Rhee Syngman made South Korea a member of the Free World by defining it as an anti-communist nation, and that Park Chung-hee succeeded in *modernizing* his country. Furthermore, they argue for Japan's role in the modernization of Korea. However, it should also be noted that, while the networking between Korean and Japanese historical revisionists is based on their shared negation of the supposedly *masochistic* view of history, it can also serve as a force that unleashes a linguistic *civil war* in Korea between revisionists and their antagonists, both using mutually divergent sets of terms.

At the same time, another notable linguistic feature of the "anti-Japanese tribalism phenomenon" is that Korean historical revisionists have succeeded in exporting the Korean term *banil jongjokjuui* (anti-Japanese tribalism) to Japan in reverse. It was made possible by the anti-Korean (*kenkan* 嫌韓) sentiment in Japan, which spreads wider as Korea-Japan relations worsen, and by the rapid growth of the businesses that take advantage of the sentiment. This makes it possible to say that the term "anti-Japanese tribalism," which refers to supposed *ethnic exclusiveness* and *uncivilized collectivism* of Koreans, ironically contributes to sustaining and linguistically diversifying the Japanese anti-Korean sentiment that stems from the disdain and fear of the Other—that is, Korea.

For the Sake of a Different Language Space

The root causes of language conflicts between Korea and Japan not only include both countries' self-centered and closed national language paradigms, but also the unresolved issue of Japan's liability for its illicit colonial rule. The conflicts are also a reflection of reality: the victims' voices appealing for relief against inhumane and illegal acts committed during the colonial rule over Korea have erupted since the 1990s but have not been properly rooted in our language life. In the meantime, the victims and the vulnerable all over the world have been championing human rights causes and have helped to advance the norms of the

international community to the extent of clearly stipulating states' responsibilities for individual human rights.

To resolve conflicts between Korea and Japan—two countries with different identities—efforts should be made to find a universal language beyond the closed domain of each's respective nation-centered language. In this light, the two nations should go through the process of re-organizing the historical contexts of the intricate and conflicting meanings relating to the colonial past, and recounting and integrating their complex and subtle implications. Only when the integrated, agreed-upon meanings are shared across borders will there be a public language space where the human rights of victims and of the weak are guaranteed.

Among these, noteworthy are attempts by Korean and Japanese journalists working in media-related industries, which constitute the main battleground of conflict where the divergent perceptions of the two countries' governments and societies are expressed in language. On September 28, 2019, when the Korea-Japan conflict was at the height of its intensity, South Korea's National Union of Media Workers (NUMW) and Japan's Congress of Mass Media Information and Cultural Workers' Union (Nihon masukomi bunka jōhō rōso kaigi 日本マスコミ文化情報労組会議) adopted and announced a joint declaration titled "Hanil yangguk eollon nodongja gongdong seoneon" (Joint Declaration of Korean and Japanese Media Workers), in which they resolved, "Let's strive for a society where peace and human rights are respected across the borders with objective, fact-based reporting." The journalists claimed, "The political confrontation between South Korea and Japan, which began with historical issues, has halted exchanges in various fields, further alienating the two countries," and stressed, "There should be no trampling of precious human rights, peace, and friendly relations between citizens of the two countries, due to the influence of exclusive rhetoric and narrow nationalism." And they also declared that they would "defend the essence of journalism that is the pursuit of truth, aim for a society in which peace and human rights are respected, and

would not take part in reporting that fans exclusive nationalism."[28] This solidarity between the media workers of the two countries in bringing about fact-based mutual understanding can serve as a good precedent for overcoming language conflicts. After all, it is based on the reflection of the potential of exclusive language that neglects facts to violate human rights and destroy peace.

28. "Hanil eollon nojo gongdong seoneon, 'Pyeonhyeophan minjokjuui neomeo jinsil bodo yeondae'" (Joint Statement by South Korean and Japanese Unions of Media Workers, 'Solidarity for Reporting Truths beyond Narrow Nationalism'), *Yonhap News*, September 27, 2019.

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