

# Functions of Japanese *Ne* and its Korean Equivalents

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The purpose of this study is to investigate the differences and similarities between Japanese and Korean, with special attention to the Japanese particle *ne* and its Korean equivalents. In conversational Japanese, *ne* is one of the most frequently used linguistic items, about which there have been a great number of studies. The fundamental function of *ne* is to invite interaction of the interlocutor, which is a function thought to be observed cross-linguistically in many languages. Given that this function is an integral part of face-to-face conversations, the goal of the current study is to find how this function is realised in Korean. In doing so, the nature of *ne*, itself, will also be described in clearer terms.

The current study examines the Korean equivalents of *ne* with respect to five functions: requests for confirmation, requests for agreement, indications of agreement, softening, and interjections. The analysis reveals that, as for Japanese and Korean, despite the generally well-recognised fact that the two languages share a number of similarities, especially in grammar, it is not the case with the Japanese particle *ne* and its Korean equivalents. Instead of a one-to-one absolute equivalent, various grammatical items are used in Korean to serve the same functions of Japanese *ne*.

本稿では、日本語の日常会話で最も頻繁に用いられる終助詞の一つである「ね」の機能を情報共有の観点から以下の

ように五つに分類し、それぞれの機能に対応する韓国語の相当語句を探し出し、日韓両語における終助詞「ね」の機能の相違点を明示することを目的にする。

- ア) 確認要求
- イ) 同意要求
- ウ) 同意表明
- エ) 表現の緩和
- オ) 間投用法

日韓両語の文法は類似点が多いと一般的に考えられており、特に、両言語の格助詞については一対一の対応関係が認められている。実際に、日本語の「は」は韓国語の「(n)un」、「を」は「(l)ul」というように、一対一の対応関係を見せているが、本稿では、日本語の終助詞「ね」については、そのような一対一の対応関係が認められず、韓国語では日本語の「ね」の機能を代替する表現として、様々な助詞や文末表現が使われるということを指摘する。

**N***e* is one of the most frequently used linguistic items in Japanese conversation. The fundamental function of *ne* is to express 'shared information' through which the listener gets involved in the utterance (Ohso 1986; Masuoka 1991; Masuoka & Takubo 1992; Kamio 1994, 1995 & 1998). This function of *ne* which invites the interaction of the interlocutor, is thought to be observed cross-linguistically in many languages. However, it is important to note that this function is realised differently in different languages.

Given that this function of *ne* is an integral part of face-to-face conversations, and also that the devices used

to serve this function vary from language to language, the ultimate goal of this study is to discover how it is realised in Korean.

## Data and methods

For this study, 822 Japanese expressions containing *ne* were collected from modern Japanese conversations within 15 novels and short stories. The Korean translations of these novels/stories were then used to examine the Korean equivalents of *ne*.

The study adopts the Hepburn system for romanization of Japanese with one modification: long vowels are expressed by a succession of two short vowels *aa*, *ii*, *uu*, *ee*, and *oo*, instead of its original scripts (i.e. short vowels with superscript diacritics). For the romanization of Korean, the study adopts the Yale system without any modification.

This study examines the Korean equivalents of *ne* with respect to the following five functions:

- (a) Request for confirmation
- (b) Request for agreement
- (c) Indication of agreement
- (d) Softening, and
- (e) Interjections.

These functions of *ne* are categorised within the framework of *Shared Information Theory*.

## Results

The following sections provide definitions of each function and also summarise the results of the contrastive analysis, based upon the five functions of *ne*, mentioned above.

### *Request for confirmation*

To obtain reassurance from the listener about the knowledge or doubts the speaker has.

Table 1: *The realisation of ne in Korean as request for confirmation*

	Realisation in Korean	Frequency (%)
<i>Ne</i> as Request for confirmation (n=64)	- <i>ci</i>	34.4
	- <i>ka</i>	17.2
	- <i>e/a</i>	14.1
	- <i>na</i>	10.9
	- <i>kwun</i>	9.4
	- <i>kka</i>	6.2
	- <i>o</i>	4.7
	∅	3.1

In the data, a variety of Korean suffixes are found to be equivalents of *ne* as shown in the table. Among these, let us observe one of the cases where no specific expression in Korean was found as a counterpart of *ne*.

### Example 1:

- a. *kontakutorenzu nee.*  
 contact lens ne (Data 4a: 57)  
 'you mean, the contact lens?'
- b. *khontheykthu leymcu lu yo...* (Data 4b: 49)  
 contact lens ACC POL

In (1b), the sentence ends with the particle *lul* which is an accusative marker and it is followed by *-yo*, the polite marker which simply indicates the politeness. Therefore, this expression can be seen as a noun-phrase ending and this also means that a predicate is omitted in this sentence. The syntactic restrictions on the use of interrogative suffixes in Korean which restrains them to be attached directly to a noun leads to the absence of Korean equivalents in this case.

### *Request for agreement*

When the speaker wishes to confirm that the listener shares the same information and judgement.

Table 2: *The realisation of ne in Korean as request for agreement*

	Realisation in Korean	Frequency (%)
<i>Ne</i> as Request for agreement (n=95)	-kwun	54.7
	-ci	21.1
	-e/a	14.6
	-nikka	3.2
	-kka	3.2
	-na	3.2

As the table 2 shows, the majority of suffixes used for this function are those for requesting confirmation except for a conjunctive particle, *nikka*. Consider Example 2:

- a. *ironna ningen ga shinda mono ne.*  
various human being NOM die(PAST) thing ne  
(Data 4a: 146)  
'Various people died, didn't they?'
- b. *manun salam i cwukessu nikka.*  
Many person NOM die(PAST) nikka  
(Data 4b:117)

*Nikka* in (2b) has been grammatically formed into a sentence-final particle and when *-nikka* appears in the sentence final position "it functions to strengthen the speaker's attitude (i.e. justification) by seeking

agreement from the interlocutors" (S. O. Sohn 1996: 229). This explains why *nikka* can be used in the case of 'request for agreement'.

### Indication of agreement

To indicate the speaker's agreement towards the information or judgement conveyed by the interlocutor in the preceding turn.

Table 3: *The realisation of ne in Korean as indication of agreement*

	Realisation in Korean	Frequency (%)
<i>Ne</i> as Indication of agreement (n=36)	-e/a	36.1
	-ci	30.6
	-kwun	27.8
	-ney	5.5

Let us examine an example of *ney* in Example 3:

Preceding context: It is a hot summer day and it has just been raining. B was frustrated that she got wet from an unexpected shower.

- a. A: *demo okagede suzushiku wa natta yo.*  
but thanks to cool TOP become(PAST) SFP  
'But it was good that it rained. It's become cooler'

B: *soo ne.*  
 so ne (Data 4a: 126)  
 ‘Yes, that’s true.’

b. A: *kuleh ci man kutekey siwenhay cyessnun kel.*  
 so(NMI) but because of cool AUX(PAST) SFP

B: *kule ney yo.*  
 so ney POL (Data 4b:102)

The meaning of *-ney* is “to express the speaker’s realisation when something is different to what he/she thought or expected” (Lee 1987:99). The expression with *ney* in (3b) implies that B agrees with A, realising there is another aspect than what she had previously thought about the subject. B was frustrated about the rain and only thought negatively of it as she was adversely affected. However, after listening to what A said, she realises that there is also a good side of having the rain as the weather became a little cooler. The characteristic of *-ney* mentioned earlier accounts for the use of *-ney* by B to indicate her agreement.

### Softening

Softening is divided into two:

- a. Listener-oriented softening
- b. Speaker-oriented softening.

### Listener-oriented softening

When the speaker is making some comments about something directly related to the listener which therefore, falls into the listener’s territory, such as requests, commenting on the listener’s behaviour/ characteristics or possessions.

Table 4: *The realisation of ne in Korean as listener-oriented softening*

	Realisation in Korean	Frequency (%)
Ne as Listener-oriented softening (n=108)	-kwun	44.5
	-e/a	25.9
	-nuntey	8.4
	-ney	7.4
	-kka	5.6
	Tag question, -ney	4.6
	-key	0.9
	-p-si-o	0.9
	-na	0.9
	-o	0.9

Let us observe one of the examples of the Korean equivalents ‘*-nuntey.*’

Example 4:

- a. *soreni yoso e tomaru no nanka yoku nai ne.*  
 besides another place to stay at NMI such as well NEG ne  
 (Data 1a: 61)  
 ‘(I don’t think) it’s good to stay at another place though’
- b. *kulayto oypakul hanta nun kes un cohci an ulthey ntey.*  
 but stying out do TOP NMI TOP good NEG(FUT)ntey  
 (Data 1b: 56)

According to Park (1999: 191), the *-nuntey* clause “can frame interactionally delicate actions such as request, disagreements and denials and allow the speaker to avoid explicitly stating their intentions” and therefore, the speaker can avoid saying the bottom-line and achieve ‘being indirect’. Park (1999) also observes that *-nuntey* used in requests signals or invites the interlocutor to make an inference about the action and to respond appropriately. In (4b), there is a disagreement about the interlocutor’s behaviour; such as staying out at another place. By using *-nuntey*, the speaker avoids conveying the action in a direct way and invites the interlocutor to make an inference about the action it implies and to decide what action to take, in this case, not to stay at another place.

*Speaker-oriented softening*

Cases where the speaker wishes to make his/her

utterance less direct, feeling that the expression may impart negative impact to the listener, for instance, non-preferred response, justification, speaker’s own opinion, and judgement etc.

Table 5: *The realisation of ne in Korean as speaker-oriented softening*

	Realisation in Korean	Frequency (%)
Ne as Speaker-oriented softening (n=241)	-e/a	46.1
	∅	18.7
	-ci	12.9
	-p-ni-ta	9.9
	-nuntey, -nunkel	9.9
	-o	1.7
	-sey	0.8

What I want to discuss here is some of the cases where no Korean equivalents were found. Interestingly enough, with these cases, it seems that even *ne* in Japanese is used to reinforce a softening of the utterance with certain expressions such as *kedo* and *ga* which also have the function of softening as noted by Itani (1992). Observe the examples (5) and (6) focusing on *ciman* in (5b) and (6b), which in this case may be regarded as a Korean counterpart of *kedo* and *ga*.

Example 5:

- a. *suki ni nare soona kigashita no honno issbun*  
 like become(POT) seems feel(PAST) SFP just a moment  
*da kedo ne.*  
 COP kedo ne (Data 4a: 139)  
 ‘I thought I could fall in love (with him).  
 It was only for a moment though’
- b. *coga cilkes kathun nukkim i tulesse yo.*  
 like become as if feeling NOM feel(PAST)e POL  
*acwu ccalpun hanswunkan iess ciman yo.*  
 very short a moment be(PAST)ciman POL  
 (Data 4b: 112)

Example 6:

- a. *konna koto iitaku nai n da ga ne...*  
 such as this thing want to say NEG COP ga ne...  
 (Data 3a: 164)  
 ‘I don’t want to say this but...’
- b. *ilen mal un hakosiphci anh ciman...*  
 such as this word TOP do want NEG ciman...  
 (Data 3b: 271)

In Example 5, the speaker is expressing her feeling that although she thought she could fall in love with the man, she thought of him in that way only for a moment. In Example 6, the speaker is about to say something that the interlocutor does not wish to hear. As mentioned earlier, the use of Japanese *ne* in these cases reinforces softening of the utterances with the expression *kedo* and

*ga*. *Ciman* in Korean also functions in a similar way as *kedo* and *ga*, which softens the tone of utterances.

*Interjections*

‘Interjections’ is divided into the following three functions; (a) drawing attention, (b) obtaining time for retrospection, and (c) exclamation. ‘Drawing attention’ is again, divided into two as vocatives and interpolation.

*Drawing attention*

• *Vocatives*

Table 6: *The realisation of ne in Korean as vocatives*

Ne as Vocatives (n= 52)	Realisation in Korean	Percentage(%)
		<i>ipwa</i>
	<i>Ce</i>	5.8
	∅	57.7

Example (7b) represents the use of *ipwa*.

Example 7:

- a. *nee, chotto mattekure.*  
 nec for a moment wait(AUX) (Data 4a: 25)  
 ‘Hey, wait a sec.’
- b. *ipwa camkkan man kitalyepowa.*  
 ipwa for a moment only wait(AUX) (Data 4b: 23)

*Ipwa* is a combination of *i* and *pwa*, with their literal meanings, ‘this’ and ‘to see, look’, respectively. *Ipwa* in Korean is used when ‘calling people’ (Martin 1992: 142) or when trying to draw attention from the interlocutor. It has similar usage to ‘hey’ or ‘look’ at the beginning of speech in English.

#### • Interpolation

The cases where *ne* is interpolated after a phrase or word to draw attention from the interlocutor, were realised as shown in the table.

Table 7: *The realisation of ne in Korean as interpolation*

	Realisation in Korean	Percentage (%)
Ne as interjections- Interpolation (n=119)	∅	82.4
	-e/a	9.2
	-ci	4.2
	-o	2.5
	-p-ni-ta	1.7

As the table indicates, the realisation of ∅ has a strikingly high frequency where *ne* is used to draw attention from the interlocutor. Consider Example 8:

- a. *hakkiri itte ne, minna machigatteru no sa.*  
clearly speak ne everyone being mistaken NMI SFP  
(Data 4a: 26)  
‘Clearly speaking, everyone is in the wrong.’
- b. *solcikhi mal ha myen, motwutulchalmos bako issnun ke la kwu.*  
truly word say if everyone fault do being NMI COP SFP  
(Data 4b: 25)

With the phrase which preceded *ne* in (8a), *hakkiri itte*, the speaker has already established a ground that he is about to express his opinion. The fact that what he really wants to say has not been said yet and is about to be, the speaker is trying to draw the listener’s attention even more by inserting *ne* after *hakkiri itte* in (8a).

In (8b), no such grammatical item has been found. However, it may be thought that there is a ‘marked pause’ (Lim 1997) after the phrase *solcikhi mal ha myen* which corresponds to *hakkiri itte* in (8a). The ‘marked pause’, according to Lim (1997:100), “draws attention from the interlocutor and also induces the interlocutor’s curiosity or interest about the information which will follow the pause”. This therefore contributes to the absence of any specific expressions in Korean.

• *Obtaining time for retrospection*

Seven point nine percent of the data for interjections fell into the usage of *ne* in order to obtain time for retrospection, with its Korean equivalents realised as ∅.

Table 8: *The realisation of ne in Korean as obtaining time for retrospection*

Ne as interjections- Obtaining time for retrospection (n=22)	Realisation in Korean	Percentage(%)
		∅

Observe Example 9:

- a. *soo ne, henna kibun yo.*  
well ne strange feeling SFP (Data 4a: 79)  
‘Well, it feels quite strange’
- b. *kulssey yo, isanghan kipwun iyey yo.*  
well POL strange feeling COP POL (Data 4b: 65)

In Example 9, the interlocutor asked the speaker in the preceding turn, how it feels to have a twin sister. In the example, the speaker has been asked a question where she needs a little time to retrospect before replying. Notice that *soo* is used in Japanese, which is often employed as a strategy to earn some time to think about the answer. In Korean, *kulssey* (*yo*) is a typical phrase used for such a strategy, as illustrated in (9b). While *ne* is further used after *soo* in Japanese, there is

no specific expression added to *kulssey* (*yo*) in Korean, which results the absence of an equivalent expression. However, as ‘marked pause’ is often used to obtain some time to retrospect as Lim (1997:113) claims, in these cases, the Korean equivalents of *ne* may also be thought as ‘marked pause’.

• *Exclamation*

Finally, when *ne* is used for exclamation, it was realised in Korean as the suffixes indicated in the table below.

Table 9: *The realisation of ne in Korean as exclamation*

Ne as Exclamation (n=85)	Realisation in Korean	Percentage(%)
		-kwun
	-nikka	22.4
	-ko	18.8
	-ney	12.9
	-ketun	4.7
	-la	2.4

Let us consider one of the examples of *-ko*.

Example 10:

- a. *iya, kimochi nante mono ja nai ne.*  
no feeling such as thing NEG ne  
(Data 4a: 115)  
‘No, it wasn’t just how I felt’

- b. *ani, kibwun kathun key ani essta kwu.*  
 no, feeling such as thing NEG PAST kwu  
 (Data 4b: 93)

*Ko* sometimes appears as *kwu*, which is an allophonic form of *-ko*. According to S.O. Sohn (1996: 227), the sentence-final *ko* marks “the speaker’s attitude, feelings, emotional involvement, or disposition towards the propositional content of the message or interlocutors in a speech context”.

The speaker in (10) is talking about how he felt when he saw an ancient tomb which was so enormous that it looked as if it were a mountain. He is trying to tell the interlocutor how he became sentimental towards its sublimity but is not quite sure how to describe it in words. The expressivity of *kwu* in this case, “is motivated by the speaker’s desire to enhance the speaker’s emotional involvement in the speech situation and to reinforce the message” (S. O. Sohn 1996: 226).

### Concluding remarks

As shown above, the analysis of this study has revealed that, despite the well-recognised fact that Korean and Japanese share a number of similarities, especially in grammar, it is not the case with the Japanese particle *ne* and its Korean equivalents. Instead of a one-to-one absolute equivalent, various grammatical items are used in Korean to serve the same functions of the Japanese *ne*.

Below, I provide the summary of Korean realisations of the functions of *ne*:

- a) Interrogative suffixes of various speech levels (*-kka, -na, -o, -ka*) and the tag question (*-ney?*)
- b) Imperative suffixes of various speech levels (*-key, -p-si-o*)
- c) Declarative suffixes (*-p-ni-ta, -sey*)
- d) Exclamatives (*-kwun, -la, -ney*) and other grammatical devices (*-ko, -nikka, -ketun*) which enhance the expressivity of the speaker
- e) Expressional phrases (*ipwa, ce*)
- f) Connectives (*-nuntey, -nunkel*)
- g) Infinitive suffix (*-e/a*)
- h) Committal suffix (*-ci*); (This term was first used by Lee, 1999)
- i) No grammatical items found (linguistic devices such as intonation and pause can be thought to serve the functions of *ne* in these cases in Korean)

Significant implications drawn from the findings are the following three points. First, as mentioned earlier, ‘sharing information’ between the speaker and the listener is deemed to be a cross-linguistic property, although linguistic devices adopted for the sharing information function may vary from language to language. This study shows that Japanese and Korean faithfully adhere to this aspect.

The second point is related to the way participants interact with each other. The fundamental function I have dealt with in this study is again 'shared information' between the speaker and listener. The study has revealed that in principle, the sentence style has an important role in the interaction. To be more specific, interrogative and imperative sentences directly involve such interaction with the listener. In addition to this, declarative, exclamative and even infinitive forms of the sentence may be used to attract interaction, especially when they contain the interrogative mood.

The third point that the current study has clearly shown is the uniqueness of *ne* in Japanese. As previously mentioned, Korean has a variety of equivalents to *ne*.

In other words, *ne* is a verbal device used specifically for the function of 'shared information', while this function is expressed by various forms in Korean which are also used for other grammatical meanings such as infinitive, interrogative, etc. In this regard, it would be reasonable to say that *ne* is indeed a unique grammatical device which expresses frequent interactive exchanges in Japanese conversations.

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