A Contrastive study on the Korean and Japanese spatial nouns denoting the interior and exterior: A corpus-based analysis of the collocation

This paper describes the multiple meanings in the semantic areas for modern Korean spatial nouns “an, sok, pakk, keth” and modern Japanese spatial nouns “uchi, naka, soto, omote”. Comparisons were drawn between spatial nouns related to the interior and exterior focusing on the lexical and syntactic changes derived from semantic transitions based on the result.

For this study, quantitative survey and analysis were conducted using large-scale corpus composed of language collection that were actually used in the linguistic fields. Rather than examining stand-alone words, their combined relationships were analyzed centering around collocations which are semantic structures in which meaning is realized in (“sok”) relation to other word(s). After which, the meaning of the vocabulary was described positively. Pursuant to the result, relationships in which a group of meaning is formed were established by re-formulating relationships of synonyms and antonyms and identifying the overlaps and confrontations in the semantic areas.

Furthermore, based on aspects of semantic transitions extracted in the process of delineating the multiple meanings, the two languages Korean and Japanese were compared by focusing on the conditions and degrees in which changes appeared in lexical and syntactic meaning stemming from semantic transitions.

In conclusion, underlying the overlaps and dislocations found in the corresponding relationship of spatial nouns denoting the interior and exterior in Korean and Japanese, there exists a disparity in the perception of how to express which realm in more detail in the inside space in. In addition, it was also noted that the direction and degree in which the lexical meaning becomes abstract are different.

The result of the study is as follows.

1. The meaning usage of Korean spatial nouns denoting the interior and exterior “an, sok, pakk, keth”
   1) Regarding the frequency of use in spatial nouns denoting the interior and exterior, spatial nouns representing the interior are used markedly more often than those referring to the exterior in the order of “sok>an>pakk>keth. Also, there is a vast difference in the frequency of the same vocabulary according to the case-marking postpositional particle.
   2) There were overlaps in meaning and formations of synonym pairs in cases where “an” and
“sok”, “pakk” and “keth” represented a particular space, but the overlaps decreased as the meaning became more abstract.

3) For “an” and “sok”, overlaps of meanings are found in semantic area representing a particular space and space in the physical body. Even when it co-occurs in a sentence with a common antecedent noun, there are differences in terms of the frequency. According to the characteristics of the following predicate or complement, one word is preferred over the other or only one particular word must be used.

4) Whereas “an” denotes a two-dimensional surface or three-dimensional solid space, “sok” expresses a three-dimensional solid space. The difference in the semantic area of “an” and “sok” co-occurring in three-dimensional space could be explained as to be a matter of <visibility and invisibility>, and <openness, limit in scope, continuous state>. Furthermore, whereas “an” represents space in terms of <area-diffusion, existence>, “sok” denotes space in terms of <continuous state, psychology & emotion>.

5) The main distinction between “pakk” and “keth” is the existence of <boundary or barrier>. Whereas “pakk” is a space beyond a certain boundary, whether it be a two-dimensional or three-dimensional one, that can move and has no special limit in terms of area, “keth” is related to the outside and reverse side of a certain object without the existence of a boundary. Also, “pakk” is a <visual space> accompanied by <movement, occurance, happening of event>, in which there could both be three-dimensional and two-dimensional space. However, “keth” refers to a flat space of <existence, attachment, exposure>.

2. The meaning usage of Japanese spatial nouns denoting the interior and exterior “uchi, naka, soto, omote”

1) In the case of Japanese, the frequency of the spatial nouns appeared in the order of “naka” > “uchi” > “soto” > “omote”, and as in Korean the frequency differs significantly by case-marking postpositional particle.

2) It was noted that “uchi” co-occurs in the same sentence with an unsubstantive noun in more than 70% of the cases. While it represents <time, psychology, abstract space in emotion>, there weren’t cases in which it represented a detailed space. Accordingly, overlaps with the meaning of “naka” occur mainly in the abstract psychological space rather than a specific space.

3) In sentences where “uchi” and “naka” co-occur with the same antecedent noun, based on the analysis of the following predicate, for “uchi” a more emotional <personal abstract space, invisibility, closed> characteristics is prominent while there is a higher tendency to represent <conceptual abstract space> for “naka”.

4) Whereas “soto” could represent both the two-dimensional surface space and three-dimensional solid space with a barrier inbetween, in the case of two-dimensional flat space for “omote” there is no barrier. When “omote” represents a three-dimensional solid space, it is a part of “soto” and denotes the front or façade area of the space or structure that is used as the standard. In addition,
the semantic area of movement and passage overlaps in the two-dimensional surface, but, the semantic area does not overlap with “soto”. Whereas “soto” is <visual, auditory space>, “omote” is a <visual, auditory, detachable> space.

3. Comparison of the semantic area of the Korean and Japanese spatial nouns denoting the interior and exterior

1) Semantic area overlaps in specific space but the overlaps lessen as the meaning becomes more abstract for “an” and “sok”. However for “uchi” and “naka”, the semantic area does not overlap in the specific space but in the abstract and psychological area. Furthermore “an” and “sok” which denotes specific space in Korean could be encompassed by “naka” in Japanese. This shows that the language use in Korean expresses specific space in more detail. In contrast, in the case of Japanese, “uchi”, which denotes range, collection, scope of comparison, it is further subdivided into “jung, tae, jeon, tong-an”.

2) The Japanese “soto” and “omote” are both three-dimensional, visual and auditory spaces. However, “pakk” and “keth” in Korean are confrontational spaces between the three-dimension and two-dimension, the visual-auditory sense and visual-tactile sense. The Korean “pakk” and “keth” are lexically more rigid with higher usage frequency and represent in many cases negative semantic areas.

4. Comparison between lexicality and grammaticality of Korean and Japanese spatial nouns denoting the interior and exterior

As the semantic area of “an” expands to represent the abstract, scope and time, the lexical meaning of <specific space> disappears or becomes weak. At the same time, syntactically without the antecedent noun, “an” cannot represent a unique meaning and the case-marking postpositional particle becomes limited. In the case of “sok”, it is modified by the attributive form of the predicate. When it represents <situation or background> it refers to a space where an event happens and is restricted by the postpositional particle. In addition, in many cases it represents <negative>, <passive> meaning with the predicate in the same sentence.

Compared with “naka”, the semantic meaning of “uchi” has become more abstract becoming grammaticalized after progressing from a formal noun. Also, “uchi” mostly represents abstract, time and scope particularly psychological space and does not usually refers to a specific space. In the case of “naka”, grammaticalization has progressed further than Korean. The constructions of “naka+de, naka+o, naka+Ø” form a clause with the attributive form of the predicate possessing conjunctive function and represents the progress of an event and sense of realism.