



Text-based Comparison between Chinese and Korean English Textbooks for Middle School Students: Sentence Structure Distribution, Sentence Type Distribution, and Readability

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study is to compare the sentence structure distribution, sentence type distribution, and readability of the reading passages in middle school (Grades 7–9) English textbooks published in China and Korea. The two data sets consist of 55 reading passages from Chinese textbooks, and 24 reading passages from Korean textbooks. Quantitative analysis finds remarkable similarities between the two sets of texts. First, the distribution of sentence structures is similar. Second, simple sentences make up the largest proportion of sentence types and compound-complex sentences the smallest in both sets. Third, the textbooks in the two sets are almost identical in terms of their Coh-Metrix L2 readability values. It is hoped that the findings of this study will promote mutual understanding, learning, and cooperation between the involved parties in both countries, helping them to learn from each other and work together with the shared goal of improving their respective middle school English textbooks, and, ultimately, to nurture their globally competitive talents with morality, honesty, and love.

KEYWORDS

Korea, China, middle school English textbooks, reading texts, sentence structure, sentence type, readability

1. Introduction

In China, language policy-making has seen tremendous changes in the last half-century. Starting from 1978, with the implementation of the open-door policy and the drive for modernization and internationalization, there have been a number of official measures to promote foreign language education (Hu 2005, Lam 2005, Li et al. 1988). Moving into the twenty-first century, demands for English proficiency have been escalating, and efforts have been stepped up to expand English language education and improve its quality (Pan and Block 2011). Not surprisingly, against such a backdrop and driven by globalization, English language education is playing an increasingly vital role in Chinese modernization, as well as in promoting Chinese traditional culture to the outside world.

In Korea, of all foreign languages, English enjoys the most prominent status, as reflected in recurring proposals to establish English as the nation's second official language (Shim 2003). The English language is not spoken much by the general public, but it is nevertheless highly visible in the linguistic landscapes of Korea and prevalent in popular culture. Furthermore, in Korea there are also a number of English-medium newspapers, television networks, and radio stations. English proficiency is perceived to be an indispensable tool in helping individuals and the country as a whole gain competitiveness in today's globalized world. With so much attention concentrated on English, it is not surprising that English language teaching (ELT) is a key agenda in Korea's education policies at all levels.

In short, English education plays an important role both in China and in Korea, and thus English language textbooks, as an essential teaching material that guides teachers in teaching and students in learning, are also highly important. Middle school, in particular, is a critical period for students to establish a foundation and develop study skills that will help them succeed in high school, college, and the workforce. Therefore, it is logical that junior high school serves as the foundational stage of English learning and is a crucial period for the rapid improvement of students' language abilities (Shi and Wang 2018). Moreover, English textbooks, as essential teaching materials, serve as representations of cultural identities for students through their content and illustrations, reflecting the intrinsic link between language and culture (Saemee and Nomnian 2021). In this context, comparing English textbooks from different countries can play a vital role in fostering cross-cultural understanding and communication. Against this backdrop, this study examines English textbooks used for middle school students (Grades 7–9) in China and Korea to identify and analyze their similarities and differences. For the comparative analysis, this paper focuses on reading passages in English as a foreign language (EFL) textbooks widely used in Korean and Chinese middle schools. The following research questions are addressed:

- (1) Do Chinese and Korean EFL textbooks differ in the sentence structures in their reading passages?
- (2) Do Chinese and Korean EFL textbooks differ in the types of sentences in their reading passages?
- (3) Do Chinese and Korean EFL textbooks differ in the readability of their reading passages?

2. Literature Review

2.1 EFL Education in China and Korea

According to the “Compulsory English Education Curriculum Standards” promulgated by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China in 2022, English classroom instruction starts in the third grade of

primary school nationwide. Nonetheless, English instruction can also be provided progressively from Grade 1 to Grade 9 in some areas or schools when the circumstances allow, with Grades 1 and 2 primarily emphasizing speaking and listening skills. In general, during the academic years from Grade 1 to Grade 9, the total English class hours account for somewhere between 6% and 8% of all class hours required for all compulsory courses, as illustrated in Table 1. In addition, according to the Normal Senior School English Curriculum issued by the Chinese government in 2020, senior high school English courses are divided into compulsory, elective, and selective-compulsory kinds. The credit requirements for each kind of course are 6, 8, and 6 respectively. However, there is no definite requirement for class hours for each kind of course.

Table 1. English Education in China and Korea

Grade	Primary school		Middle school		High school	
	3–4	5–6	7–8	9	10–12	
Total English class hours in one year	China	63–84 hr	63–84 hr	72–96 hr	68–90 hr	Not specified
	Korea	136 hr	204 hr	340 hr		255 hr
One class duration	China	40 min	40 min	45 min	45 min	45 min
	Korea	40 min	40 min	45 min		50 min

Like China, Korea is also committed to the promotion of the English language. As of 2011, English language education starts from the third grade (Choi and Lee 2008). Presently, the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (MEST) requires 68 hours of instruction a year for third- and fourth-grade students and 102 hours for fifth- and sixth-grade students. Table 1 also displays the allocated class hours for English courses from primary school to high school according to the English curriculum guidelines promulgated by the Korean government in 2009 (Su and Zhu 2018, p. 82).

2.2 The Importance of Textbooks in EFL Education

EFL textbooks are designed to provide EFL students with essential knowledge, language skills, and information about English-speaking nations, as well as to prepare them for interactions with individuals from other countries and cultures. Textbooks are the main teaching materials in classes, playing a crucial role in language teaching and learning (Rahmawati 2018), especially for students who study English as a foreign language, for whom their textbooks are often the main channel for their use and practice of English (Dang and Seals 2018). English textbooks provide learning tasks, learning activities, learning sources, examples of language use, exercises, and tests (Parlindungan et al. 2018). They also have the potential to offer not only guidance for learning English but also a platform for introducing cultural diversity and integrated cross-disciplinary knowledge (Huang 2019). Moreover, textbooks can provide both the structure and the syllabus for a language program (Richards 2001). In addition, the use of a textbook in a program can guarantee that students in different classes will encounter similar content and hence, can be evaluated in the same way. In other words, textbooks provide the standards in instruction.

English textbooks also have a tremendous impact on teachers' teaching behaviors such as introducing new content, checking students' understanding and knowledge, and assigning activities or homework. Harmer (2007) states that the most important aspect of textbook use is for teachers to try to engage learners with the content they are going to be dealing with. Taking into account the many facets of language proficiency, numerous English textbooks are developed by incorporating accessible materials and resources intended to improve students' proficiency in particular language skills, such as reading and writing, as well as particular components of language,

such as vocabulary, grammar, and cultural information (Faramarzi et al. 2021). Despite the introduction of technology in classrooms, the textbook remains a cornerstone of most curricula. It constitutes the most essential aid, in some cases the only one, available to the teacher and the learner, even at the university level (Wissing et al. 2016).

For all these reasons, it is evident that English textbooks play a vital role in both the teaching and the learning of the language.

2.3 Reading Comprehension in EFL Textbooks

2.3.1 The importance of reading passages

Reading is a complex cognitive process that involves a multitude of subprocesses from describing signs to creating meaning (Jayadiningrat and Widiani 2021, Sangia 2014). The importance of reading as a language skill cannot be underestimated, and reading comprehension can be foundational for improving other specific skills. Specifically, first, improving reading comprehension improves communication skills by not only enriching vocabulary and conferring knowledge but also enhancing empathy—all of which are essential components of effective communication in both written and verbal forms (Gumber 2023). In brief, being able to understand and interpret information, whether written or spoken, increases the learner's ability to express ideas clearly and comprehend the messages conveyed by others. Second, reading comprehension can also improve writing skills. Reading a variety of texts exposes individuals to different writing styles and structures, a broad range of words and phrases, and well-constructed sentences (Pulimeno et al. 2020). All of this can help writers develop a sense of what works well in different contexts. In essence, reading comprehension serves as a foundational skill that provides the building blocks for effective writing. The more individuals read and engage with a variety of texts, the more they are likely to absorb elements of effective writing, leading to their continuous improvement in writing skills. Third, reading comprehension can build students' critical thinking ability in the sense that reading comprehension entails the ability to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information as well as other cognitive skills that are valuable in problem-solving and decision-making (Elmouhtarim 2018). Moreover, reading comprehension can elevate intercultural awareness, because reading literature, informative articles, and other types of texts from different cultures enhances cultural awareness and promotes a more profound understanding of diverse perspectives (Rodríguez and Puyal 2012).

The evident importance of reading comprehension leads to the centrality of teaching reading comprehension skills in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages). While there are many choices of learning media that can be used by teachers to impart reading comprehension skills to students, the textbook is probably the most widely used type of learning resource used by teachers in the teaching-learning process (Ayu and Indrawati 2019, Issitt 2004, Kusumawardhani et al. 2020, Mahayanti et al. 2017, Mizbani and Chalak 2017, Syamsi et al. 2013). While textbooks contain illustrations, diagrams, texts, activities, and exercises that are considered as resources generally used within the classroom to enhance the teaching and learning process, reading passages unquestionably comprise the most important vehicle for improving students' reading comprehension (Fen and Poh 2015, Tayyeh et al. 2021).

Because of their importance in shaping and supporting foreign language teaching and learning, the reading passages of textbooks are the focus of this study.

2.3.2 The importance of syntactic knowledge

Syntactic knowledge is connected to reading comprehension because understanding the syntax of sentences is necessary for text comprehension to take place (Gottardo et al. 2018). Syntax is the rule system that governs how words are combined into larger meaningful units, including phrases, clauses, and sentences (Kamhi and Catts 2012). Syntactic knowledge underlies a student's ability to comprehend or produce different grammatical structures within the context of a sentence (Catts et al. 2006, Cutting and Scarborough 2006). For example, a student may be required to listen to a sentence and then identify a picture that represents that sentence or to produce a new sentence with a similar structure. Syntactic processing is needed for the meaning construction that allows the student to complete such a task. Texts that are more syntactically complex are more difficult to read and understand (Frantz et al. 2015), and yet, the role of syntax in text complexity and comprehension is often overlooked (Scott 2009).

Many researchers point out that learners' vocabulary knowledge, prior knowledge, and grammatical knowledge all affect their reading comprehension (Koda 2007). Bowey and Patel (1988) conclude that, for younger students, syntactic knowledge is a significant predictor of reading comprehension; Shiotsu and Weir (2007) conducted a componential analysis in EFL and ESL contexts to find contributory factors of L2 reading. The results showed that the variance in L2 reading comprehension was best explained by syntactic knowledge, even in the subgroup analysis.

Other studies have focused on the effects of syntactic simplification on the L2 reading comprehension of learners. For example, Yano et al. (1994) found that students who read linguistically simplified texts scored significantly higher on L2 reading comprehension tests than students who read the original (i.e., not simplified) texts. This result indicates that comprehending texts with less complex grammatical structures tends to be easier than comprehending texts with more complex grammatical structures. Berman (1984) also gave a syntactically simplified text version (with vocabulary intact) and the original version to an experimental group and a control group, respectively, of Hebrew-speaking college English learners. The group that read the syntactically simplified version did consistently better than the other group in responding to all types of comprehension questions, again pointing to the grammatical effect on reading comprehension. A further interpretation of such results may be that an L2 reader who has sufficient syntactic knowledge would have no problem in comprehending the structures of original L2 texts.

In sum, the previous findings establish the importance of syntactic knowledge in reading comprehension. It is encouraging to note that empirical studies of the effects of syntactic simplification further corroborate the important role of syntactic knowledge in shaping readers' ability to read and understand texts.

As mentioned above, a student's ability to comprehend or produce different grammatical structures within the context of a sentence relies on syntactic knowledge (Catts et al. 2006, Cutting and Scarborough 2006). Grammatical structure itself involves sentence structures and sentence types. Hence, it stands to reason that a good awareness and understanding of both sentence structure and sentence type contributes to reading comprehension.

First, sentence structure concerns the organization and complexity of sentences. Each structure type, as shown in Table 2, adds a layer of complexity, allowing for varied expressions of meaning and relationships between sentence components. Sentence structure is crucial to reading comprehension because it serves as the framework through which ideas are conveyed. The sentence structures in a written text influence the clarity, meaning, and overall comprehension of the text. There are five basic sentence structures, listed in Table 2 in order of complexity.

Table 2. Sentence Structures

Sentence structure	Examples from the textbooks
Subject + Verb	(Chinese) According to him, however, one thing will never change.
	(Korean) My father disappeared like magic.
Subject + Verb + Object	(Chinese) We had such a happy childhood.
	(Korean) My mother joined her.
Subject + Verb + Complement	(Chinese) It was so exciting!
	(Korean) Many people are poor listeners.
Subject + Verb + Object + Complement	(Chinese) This has made traveling between villages, towns and cities much easier.
	(Korean) This makes the music very powerful and rich.
Subject + Verb + Indirect Object + Direct Object	(Chinese) Our hometown has given us so many great memories.
	(Korean) First, bees give us honey.

Table 3. Sentence Types

Sentence type	Description	Examples from the textbooks
Simple	Containing one independent clause	(Chinese) A computer game is in the school library.
		(Korean) I like sports clubs.
Compound	Containing two or more independent clauses joined by coordinating conjunctions	(Chinese) They have a quick dinner, and then it's time for homework.
		(Korean) It wasn't green and there was no lake.
Complex	Containing one independent clause and at least one dependent clause	(Chinese) We found that only fifteen percent of our students exercise every day.
		(Korean) Although there are many books and movies about Mars, no one has been there yet.
Compound-complex	Containing two or more independent clauses and at least one dependent clause	(Chinese) Maybe I could cut out a few of their activities, but I believe these activities are important for my children's future.
		(Korean) No such sentences in the Korean textbooks.

The five kinds of sentence structures influence how different sentences could be understood on different levels. In L2 reading research, Alderson (2000) points out “the importance of knowledge of particular syntactic structures, or the ability to process them, to some aspects of second-language reading” and suggests that “the ability to parse sentences into their correct syntactic structure appears to be an important element in understanding text” (p. 37). Berman (1984) and Yano et al.'s (1994) studies support this claim.

In summary, sentence structure is the foundation of written communication; it shapes how ideas are communicated, arranged, and comprehended. A strong basis for deriving meaning from a written text is provided by knowledge of sentence structure. Hence, mastery of sentence structure enhances reading comprehension.

Second, sentence type refers to different forms a sentence can take based on its purpose and grammatical structure. There are four basic sentence types, as shown in Table 3. Sentence types play a significant role in reading comprehension as they contribute to the overall rhythm and nuance of a text. Understanding and recognizing different sentence types enriches the reading experience and facilitates the extraction of meaning. Specifically, on the one hand, the judicious use of the four different sentence types—simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex—adds to a text an intriguing variety, which keeps the reader engaged, preventing monotony and contributing to a more interesting reading experience (Tran 2021). On the other hand, sentence types contribute to the cohesion and coherence of a text by guiding readers through the relationships between ideas. The flexible use

of different sentence types enhances the overall cohesion and coherence of the text, helping readers connect concepts and follow the author's line of reasoning. In addition, the ability to recognize different sentence types can aid readers in quickly assessing the content of a text through skimming or scanning. It helps them identify key information and the overall structure of the text, making it easier to locate relevant details.

EFL learners often face challenges in understanding complex sentences in reading comprehension. Complex sentences are sentences that consist of several clauses, and at times contain conjunctions such as *although*, *because*, *furthermore*, and *however* (Scott 2009). Other causes of difficulties in reading comprehension among EFL learners include coordinating conjunctions, prepositional phrases, participial phrases, and nominalizations, because they make the writing more complex (Nuttall 2000).

To sum up, understanding sentence types enhances reading comprehension by enabling readers to extract ideas through recognizing how a given text establishes cohesion and coherence. It allows readers to navigate and interpret a text more efficiently and effectively, contributing to a deeper and more profound understanding of the text material.

2.4 The Importance of Readability

2.4.1 The concept of readability

According to Brown (2012), readability is a concept that portrays the extent to which a text is easy or difficult to read. It can be used to calculate the accessibility of a text, indicating how efficiently it can reach the intended audience. Similarly, Bailin and Grafstein (2016) define readability as the difficulty level at which a specific reader can comprehend what is discussed in a written text. In brief, readability refers to the level of text that defines to what extent a text can be comprehended by the targeted reader.

Providing students with texts that are matched to their reading abilities has always been a challenge for teachers, educational curriculum developers, and other experts in education. A solution to this problem can be the use of a text readability tool called Coh-Metrix, which was developed in 2004 by two researchers, Arthur C. Graesser and Danielle McNamara (Otlhomile et al. 2018, p. 60). In essence, Coh-Metrix is a computational tool that “analyses texts on multiple measures of language and discourse that are aligned with multilevel theoretical frameworks of comprehension” (Graesser et al. 2011, pp. 223-234). McNamara et al. (2014) confirm that many studies by different researchers have validated Coh-Metrix as a reliable tool.

2.4.2 Factors and measurement

This study mainly investigates three factors that are related to readability. Two of them are commonly used: Flesch Reading Ease (Flesch 1948) and Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level (Kincaid et al. 1975), both of which focus on the number of words and sentences. The third factor examined in this study is Coh-Metrix L2 readability. According to Kiselnikov et al. (2020), Coh-Metrix L2 readability significantly differs from Flesch Reading Ease and Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level, which primarily deal with formal aspects of a text, like the average length of a word or average length of a sentence, without regard to the content of the text. Meanwhile, Coh-Metrix L2 readability offers a simple text complexity evaluation tool aiming to describe a text in accordance with its syntax, vocabulary, morphology, semantics, and so forth.

As to the measurement, the traditional method of assessing texts in terms of difficulty level consists of various readability formulas. More than 40 readability formulas have been developed over the years (Klare 1974-1975).

Flesch Reading Ease and Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level, are, as mentioned, two of the most common formulas.

The output of the Flesch Reading Ease formula is a number from 0 to 100, with a higher score indicating easier reading. The average document has a Flesch Reading Ease score between 6 and 70. The formula is as follows:

$READFRE = 206.835 - (1.015 \times ASL) - (84.6 \times ASW)$, where ASL (the average sentence length) refers to the number of words divided by the number of sentences, and ASW (the average number of syllables per word) the number of syllables divided by the number of words.

The Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level formula converts the Reading Ease score to a U.S. grade-school level. The higher the number, the harder it is to read the text. The grade levels range from 0 to 12. The formula is:

$$READFKGL = (0.39 \times ASL) + (11.8 \times ASW) - 15.59.$$

As for the Coh-Metrix L2 readability formula, it incorporates a deeper analysis of the cohesion between sentences into the formula. This formula is claimed to be able to produce more valid and objective results, which not only describe the superficial characteristics of a text but also deeper levels of discourse in the algorithm. The formula of Coh-Metrix L2 readability is as follows:

$L2 \text{ readability} = -45.032 + (52.230 \times \text{Content Word Overlap Value}) + (61.306 \times \text{Sentence Syntax Similarity Value}) + (22.205 \times \text{CELEX Frequency Value})$.

This study uses the Coh-Metrix version (<http://www.Coh-Metrix.com/>) updated on September 23, 2023.

3. Methodology

3.1 Materials: Textbooks

In this study, only the texts in the reading sections (i.e., the reading passages) of the Chinese and Korean middle school English textbooks are compared; these are textbooks used for Grade 7 through Grade 9. Five Chinese textbooks and three Korean ones are used for the comparison. There are several different types of middle school English textbooks commonly used in each country. Among them, the five selected Chinese textbooks were all published in 2013 or 2014 by the People's Education Press, the most authoritative textbook publisher in China, which is widely used in Chinese middle schools. The three selected Korean textbooks were all published in 2018 by Neungyule, one of the major textbook publishers in Korea. It is worth mentioning that, for China, two textbooks (one per semester) are used for Grade 7 and for Grade 8, and only one textbook for Grade 9, while, in Korea, each grade uses only one textbook.

3.2 Data Collection

The data are extracted from the Chinese and Korean English textbooks in the form of the reading passages. For the Chinese textbooks, each unit includes one reading passage and one dialogue. However, for the sake of this research, just the reading passage is used, resulting in a collection of 21 texts for Grade 7, 20 texts for Grade 8, and 14 texts for Grade 9, for a total of 55 texts. For the Korean textbooks, the reading passage in each unit is used in this research, yielding eight texts per grade for a total of 24 texts. Thus, we have far more texts from the Chinese than the Korean textbooks, but the Chinese texts are also, on average, substantially shorter than their Korean counterparts. Each sentence was input into a Microsoft Word table for the analyses. Note that sentences containing quotations are analyzed in two stages; they are considered as a whole, and the sentences enclosed by quotation

marks are considered separately. Moreover, single word sentences, such as “OK,” “Hello,” “Thanks,” “Yes,” and “No,” are excluded from the data sets.

3.3 Data Analysis

There are three parts to the data analysis.

The first part, addressing RQ1, identifies the sentence structures (i.e., SV, SVO, SVC, SVOC, or SVIDO) of every sentence in the reading passages to examine their distribution in the Chinese and Korean English textbooks. For this comparison, the total number of each kind of sentence structure is calculated for each grade. These numbers are then turned into percentages and compared by grade between the two sets of textbooks.

The second part of the analysis, addressing RQ2, identifies the sentence types (i.e., simple, complex, compound, or compound-complex) of each sentence in the reading passages to examine their distribution in the two data sets. Again, total numbers are counted for each grade, converted to percentages, and then compared across the two data sets.

To address RQ3, the third part of the analysis employs Coh-Metrix (<http://tool.Coh-Metrix.com/>, updated on September 23, 2023) to computationally analyze each text and to provide values for each of the three indices of Flesch Reading Ease, Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level, and Coh-Metrix L2 readability. For each index, the values are then averaged for the textbook(s) used in each grade; the averages are automatically computed and then compared.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Comparison in Terms of Sentence Structure

The first analysis found similar patterns in the English textbooks from China and Korea across all three grades. Figure 1 shows the results for the 7th grade. For China, SVC and SVO sentence structures make up the major portion of the texts, with each accounting for around 41%. The next most frequent structure is SV, which stands at around 16%. As to SVIDO and SVOC, they represent the smallest portions, at about 0.3% and 2% respectively. For Korea, SVO comes first, with a portion of around 45%, followed by SVC at roughly 33%, and SV, at roughly 20%. SVIDO and SVOC again account for very small portions of approximately 0.4% and 1%, respectively. In sum, in the reading passages of the EFL textbooks for all three middle school grades in both China and Korea, SVC and SVO are the dominant sentence structures, while SVIDO and SVOC are used minimally, and SV falls somewhere in the middle ground.

Figure 2 represents the findings for the 8th grade. As the figure indicates, for both countries, SVO is by far the most common structure, followed by SVC, SV, SVOC, and SVIDO, in that order, with the proportions decreasing at very similar rates across the two countries. Specifically, on the part of China, SVO leads with a proportion of around 48%, followed by substantial rates of SVC (32%) and SV (14%). We see a slight increase of SVIDO and SVOC compared with Grade 7, but they still constitute a tiny portion at roughly 1.4% and 3.8%, respectively. On the part of Korea, the distribution is similar: SVO (39%), SVC (34%), SV (21%), SVIDO (almost 2.5%), and SVOC (almost 3%).

As Figure 3 makes evident, the overall patterns remain the same and the similarities between the textbooks used in China and Korea grow even stronger for the 9th grade texts, with almost equal proportions for the four sentence structures, at around 42% (China) and 38% (Korea) for SVO, 36% (China and Korea) for SVC, 16% (China) and

22% (Korea) for SV, 5.5% (China) and 3.5% (Korea) for SVOC, and 1.3% (China) and 1% (Korea) for SVIDO. The greatest difference is observed for SV, which is slightly more in Korea than in China.

Figure 1. 7th Grade English Textbook

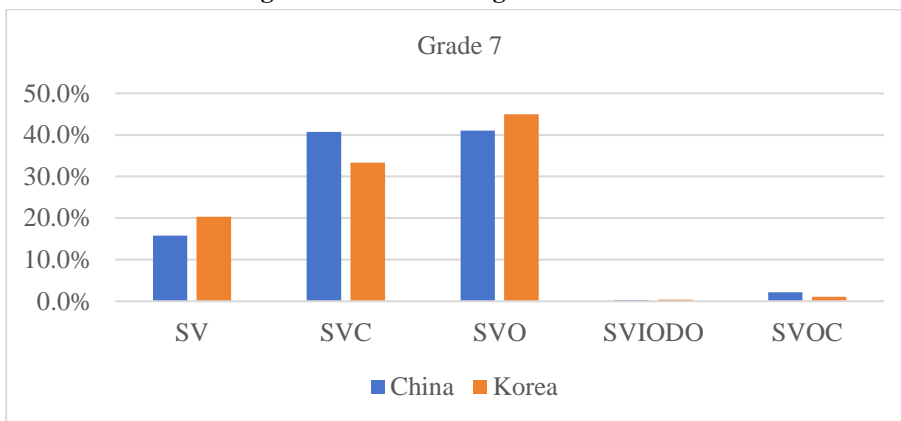


Figure 2. 8th Grade English Textbook

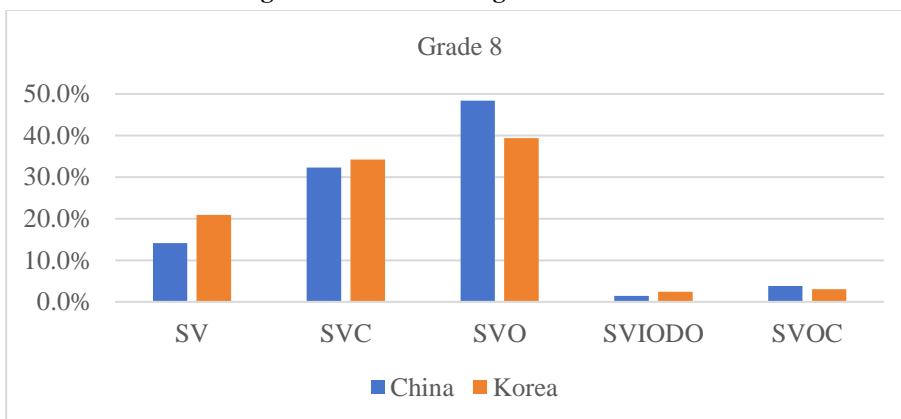
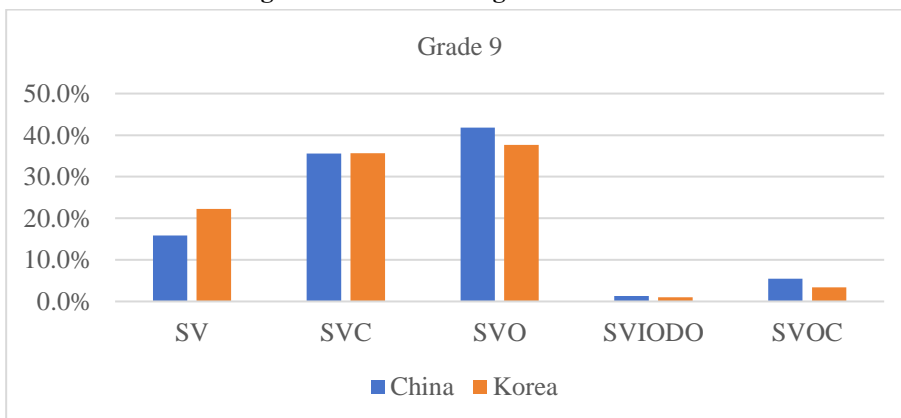


Figure 3. 9th Grade English Textbook



Taken together, these findings indicate, first, that the distribution patterns for sentence structure converge from Grade 7 to Grade 9, suggesting that the officially expected proficiency level of students in both countries by the time they finish middle school is quite similar. Furthermore, for both countries at all three grade levels, the rank order of the five sentence structures is always the same: SVO, SVC, SV, SVOC, SVIDO. The most commonly used sentence type by far is SVO, and the least commonly used one, again by far, is SVIDO.

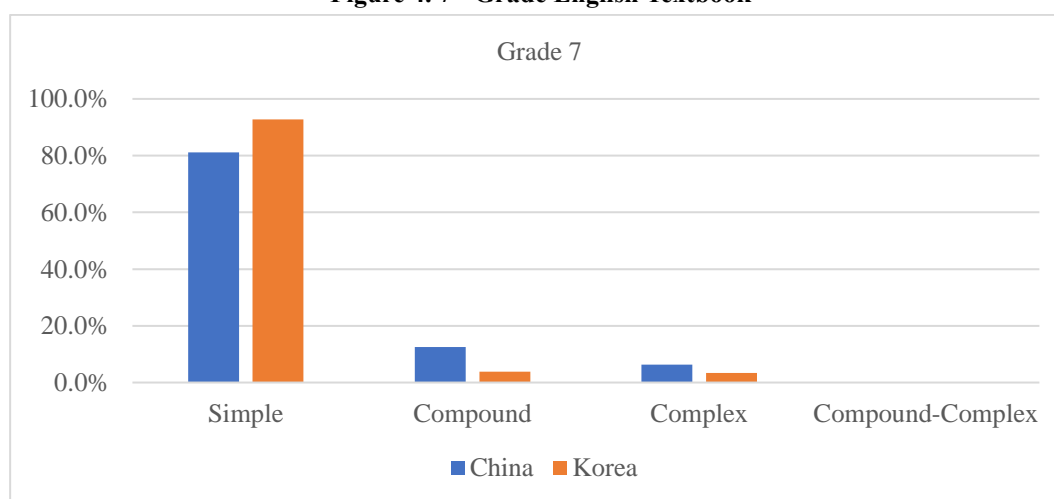
More specifically, SVO and SVC are both frequent and occur in similar proportions, while SVOC and SVIDO both take up surprising small proportions. This distribution imbalance could indirectly mirror the assumptions that, in reading comprehension, the sentence structures of SVO and SVC will cause the least difficulty for L2 learners while SVIDO and SVOC will be the most challenging for them. This idea, however, draws attention to the case of the SV structure, which would presumably be the simplest sentence structure for L2 learners as it involves the fewest syntactic elements. Yet the results show that SV consistently accounts for a comparatively small percentage among the five sentence structures, and that this situation, again, is markedly similar between China and Korea.

4.2 Comparison in Terms of Sentence Type

As far as sentence type distribution is concerned, the similarities again outweigh the differences between the Chinese and Korean middle school English textbooks.

Figure 4 provides a vivid illustration that the simple sentence type contributes most to the texts in the textbooks for both countries, with around 81% for China and around 93% for Korea, while each of the rest of the sentence types occurs in much lower proportions, accounting for less than 20% together. It may be that the simple sentence type comes easiest in reading comprehension for the students in Grade 7 while the other sentence types pose greater reading difficulties. Another similarity between the two data sets is the complete absence of the compound-complex sentence type, which may be due to the fact that the compound-complex sentence type is the most difficult to read.

Figure 4. 7th Grade English Textbook



Regarding Figure 5, for Grade 8, it shows similarly that for both countries, it is again the simple sentence type that plays a leading role, with nearly 62% for China and nearly 85% for Korea, greatly outnumbering each of the rest of the sentence types separately and together. However, in both countries, we observe a striking increase for

the complex sentence type, albeit with a large gap between them, as it occurs at slightly over 27% for China and not quite 9% for Korea, indicating that the Chinese textbook is more difficult to read than the Korean counterpart for students in Grade 8. Meanwhile, the compound-complex type makes its first appearance, but only in the Chinese texts, while the compound sentence type shows a similar portion, with around 8% for China and around 6% for Korea.

Figure 5. 8th Grade English Textbook

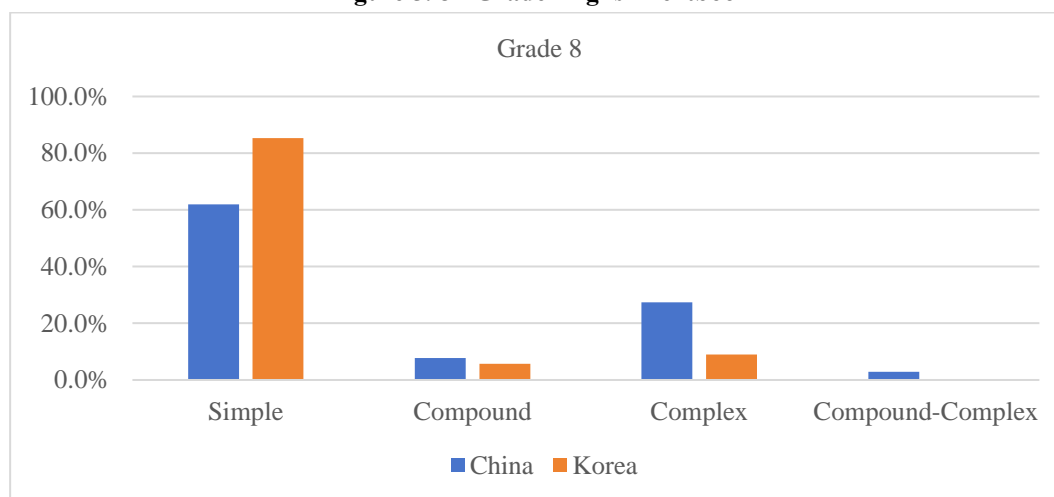


Figure 6. 9th Grade English Textbook

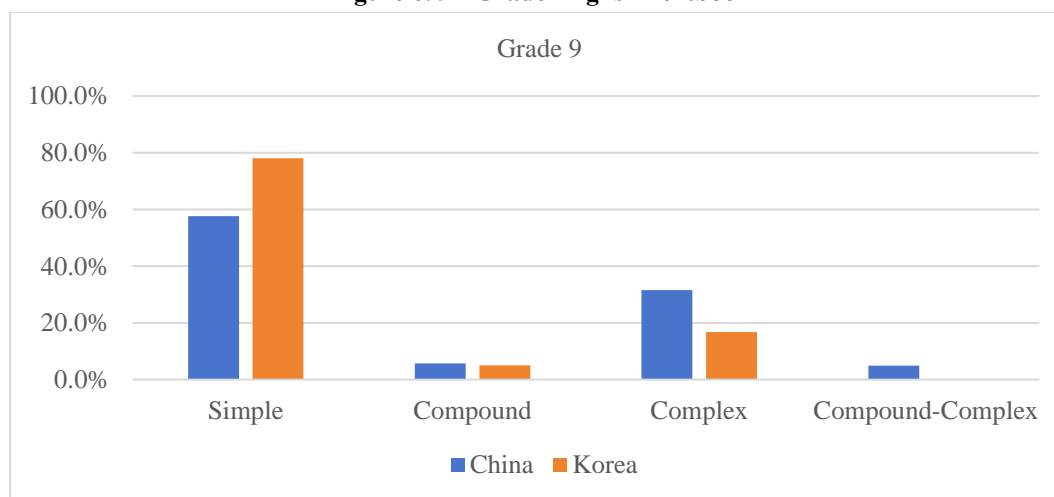


Figure 6 displays the findings for Grade 9, showing similar patterns. Specifically, although in Grade 9 the texts in the textbooks for China and Korea are presumed to be more difficult to read, the textbooks' reading passages for both countries still rely heavily on the simple sentence type: almost 60% for China and almost 80% for Korea. The rest of the sentence types still occupy a comparatively marginal position, except for the complex sentence type, which is noticeably greater in both countries for this grade: about 32% for China and about 17% for Korea, showing a narrowing of the gap for the complex sentence type of the previous two grades, a finding that may reflect the fact that both China and Korea are making conscious efforts to enhance the difficulty of the reading

texts in Grade 9. With respect to the compound sentence type, both countries continue to develop on almost the same track with approximately 6% for China and 5% for Korea. Once again, the compound-complex type occurs, although still rarely, in the Chinese texts but remains absent from the Korean texts.

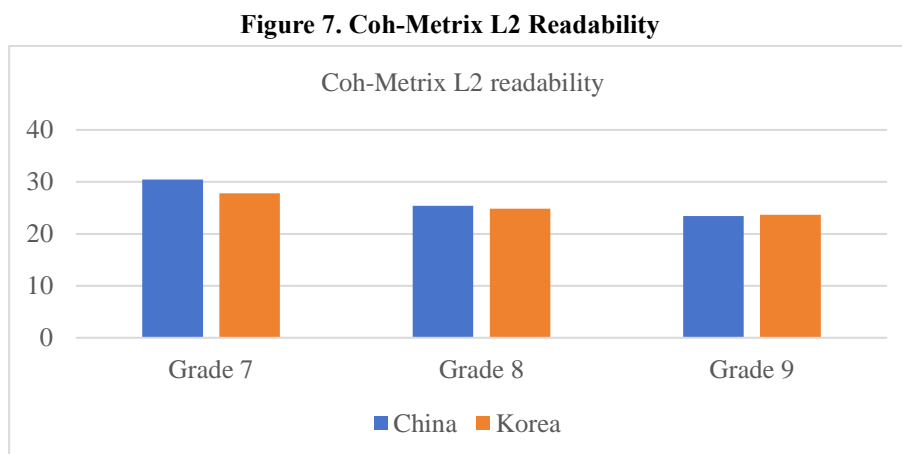
Considering all three grades together, at a macro level the textbooks for China and Korea still share a lot with each other in terms of the distribution of the four sentence types. First, as vividly illustrated in the above figures, for both countries, the simple sentence type accounts for the largest percentage across the three grades. Second, for both countries, the compound-complex sentence type barely occurs, only occupying a tiny percentage for the Grade 8 and Grade 9 texts for China. Third, the proportion of the compound sentence type is notably stable, at 5–8%, across Grade 8 and Grade 9 for both China and Korea. Lastly, the percentage of the complex sentence type shows the most change across the years: for China, it starts at around 6% in Grade 7, then jumps to about 27% in Grade 8 and lands at about 32% in Grade 9; for Korea, the trend is the same, although less dramatic, from around 3.5% in Grade 7 to around 17% in Grade 9.

To summarize, the Chinese and Korean middle school English textbooks have noteworthy similarities in terms of sentence type distribution. The simple sentence type holds a dominant position for all three grades of both countries; the compound-complex sentence type takes up the smallest percentage for all three grades of both countries; the complex sentence type sees a similar increase rate between Grade 7 and Grade 9 for both countries; and the compound sentence type keeps a fairly stable percentage for Grade 8 and Grade 9 for both countries.

4.3 Comparison in Terms of Readability

4.3.1 Coh-Metrix L2 readability

The Chinese and Korean middle school English textbooks manifest notable similarities in Coh-Metrix L2 readability values, as illustrated in Figure 7.



As can be seen from the above figure, on the whole, both the Chinese and Korean middle school English textbooks from Grade 7 to Grade 9 reveal a slight progressive decrease in terms of their respective values for Coh-Metrix L2 readability, which implies that the reading passages in both sets of textbooks become progressively more difficult to read from Grade 7 to Grade 9. Looking more closely at the figure shows some interesting details. For instance, there is a narrow gap or almost no gap between the two countries regardless of grade, although each

country shows a more notable disparity between Grade 7 and Grade 8 than between Grade 8 and Grade 9. It is also worth bearing in mind that, for both countries, while the value of Coh-Metrix L2 readability descends markedly from Grade 7 to Grade 8, which could, to some extent, reflect an acceptable and reasonable expectation for L2 learners to move from a “low level” to a “moderate level” in their reading comprehension skills, the same does not apply from Grade 8 to Grade 9. In other words, both China and Korea see an almost stable state from Grade 8 to Grade 9. The reasons behind this are worth further exploration.

4.3.2 Flesch Reading Ease and Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level

The results from the analysis of both Flesch Reading Ease and Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level further corroborate and reinforce the results on Coh-Metrix L2 readability. Table 4 provides an overview. The Flesch Reading Ease scores range from 78.283 to 91 for both the Chinese and Korean middle school English textbooks, while the value for Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level fluctuates between 2.384 and 5.715. Upon closer examination, the table reveals more nuanced similarities between the two countries. Specifically, in terms of Flesch Reading Ease, both China and Korea share the same downward trend: as the grade becomes more advanced, the corresponding score gradually decreases, thus demonstrating the increasing reading difficulty of the reading passages from Grade 7 to Grade 9. It is worth mentioning that the two countries have nearly identical values for these scales in Grade 7, but diverge slightly in Grade 8 and Grade 9. Concerning the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level, again, the two sets of reading passages show the same tendency, with the corresponding values increasing from Grade 7 to Grade 9, although the greatest disparity between the two countries is in Grade 8.

Table 4. Flesch Reading Ease and Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level

Grade Level	Country	Flesch Reading Ease	Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level
Grade 7	China	91	2.384
	Korea	90.849	2.475
Grade 8	China	79.367	5.253
	Korea	85.104	3.514
Grade 9	China	78.283	5.715
	Korea	82.439	4.111

In sum, the three measures all demonstrate that the reading passages in Chinese and Korean middle school textbooks share remarkable similarities, developing progressively from the easiest in Grade 7 to the most difficult in Grade 9.

5. Conclusion

This study’s findings suggest several conclusions. First, in terms of sentence structures, both the Chinese and Korean textbooks follow the same pattern in terms of how each sentence structure is proportionately distributed. In other words, the two sets of textbooks show the same hierarchy of sentence structures when ranked by proportion. Most importantly, whatever the grade and whatever the country, both SVO and SVC consistently play a dominant role in the texts of the textbooks, while both SVIODO and SVOC receive much less attention with a low level of coverage. Meanwhile, the proportion of SV stays remarkably stable in both countries.

Second, in terms of sentence types, the Chinese and Korean textbooks are again extraordinarily similar. Most notably, among the four sentence types, the simple sentence type accounts for the vast majority in all three grades in both countries, while the compound-complex sentence type is rarely covered, never reaching a proportion as high as 5% and usually absent altogether. What is more remarkable is that the complex sentence type sees a similar increase rate between Grade 7 and Grade 9 across the two countries, while the compound sentence type, with its minor but significant contribution, remains quite stable in proportion for Grade 8 and Grade 9 in both countries.

Third, we observe remarkable similarities between the two sets of textbooks in terms of readability as well, as measured by Coh-Metrix L2 readability, Flesch Reading Ease, and Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level. Most notably, for each grade, China and Korea are almost identical with each other in terms of the Coh-Metrix L2 readability value. Regarding the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level, both countries follow the same trend, with similar scores and consistent increases from Grade 7 to Grade 9. As for Flesch Reading Ease, again, both China and Korea follow the same downward trajectory: as the grade level increases, the corresponding score progressively falls, indicating the reading texts' growing difficulty from Grade 7 to Grade 9. Thus, it can be concluded that the reading passages in the textbooks for both Chinese and Korean students exhibit notable similarities, progressing gradually from the simplest in Grade 7 to the most complex in Grade 9.

In brief, this text-based comparison between the Chinese and Korean English textbooks leads us to conclude that there is a high degree of similarity between the reading texts found in the two sets of textbooks. These similarities further contribute to a broader understanding of how EFL education is approached globally beyond national and cultural boundaries. Besides, it's also critical to remember that there should be more conceivable differences to be explored between the Chinese and Korean English textbooks. Given the prevalent importance of English textbooks in EFL education, it would be potentially valuable to identify and analyze the differences between each other for future studies.

6. Implications

Several interesting implications can be drawn from this study.

On the one hand, the study's findings can pave the way for inspiring both Korean and Chinese students to think through the variety of similarities between the Korean and Chinese English textbooks so that they can be encouraged to develop an impartial attitude toward English learning, or, put differently, to consider how students from a different Asian country can follow the same pattern in learning English under the guidance of a textbook. In this sense, what is revealed in this study can instill in the students not only a sense of shared values embraced by both countries but also a high level of confidence in learning English well, ultimately supporting their long-term academic and non-academic development over the long run.

On the other hand, because the Chinese and Korean English textbooks run almost in parallel with each other in terms of sentence structure distribution, sentence type distribution, and readability in the reading passages throughout the three middle-school grades, it indeed makes sense to assume that the study can help to promote mutual understanding and learning between the two countries through the lens of shared values and cultures, consequently further contributing to mutual cooperation and exchange in English textbook design and development. Future research could explore the impact of textbook similarities on student motivation and attitudes toward learning English. A detailed examination of how recognizing these parallels influences students' motivation and attitudes would offer valuable insights. Additionally, investigating teachers' perceptions and the application of

these textbooks in classroom settings is crucial. Specifically, a follow-up study could analyze how teachers perceive and implement these materials, and how their teaching methods are shaped by the observed similarities and differences in the textbooks.

All in all, this study demonstrates the advantages of comparative analysis of textbooks employed in English as foreign language contexts within Asian countries. Most importantly, what is implied in this study can serve as a driving force for China and Korea to elevate their respective standards of English textbooks, ultimately helping to cultivate their own globally competitive talents with morality, honesty, and love.

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Examples in: English
Applicable Languages: English
Applicable Level: All