



Interactions Between Characters with and without Disabilities in Korean Contemporary Picture Books

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Abstract: Using content analysis, this study explored the interaction between characters with and without disabilities in Korean contemporary picture books. The characters with mental or physical disabilities were shown more positively interact with friends than in the past. The characters with physical disabilities were depicted as having more positive interactions with characters without disabilities in variety places than characters with mental disabilities. Clearly the above findings showed that the socio-cultural values of on minority such as individual with disabilities in South Korea.

Key Words: characters with mental and physical disabilities, Korean contemporary picture books, interaction.

The view of the general public has on minority such as disabilities have always changed with the times. Thus, commonly notions about disabilities vary not only depending on the era but also according a nation's political, economical, social and cultural conditions. Postmodernism, which first appeared in the 1960's and attaches great importance to the issues of difference and diversity, sparked a change in negative judgments on minority such as disabilities, women, races and those in low-income brackets (Derman-Sparks, 1989; Sook Yeon, 2002). Attitudes based on medical model which viewed disabilities as personal tragedies have changed into social model that society should take the responsibility for people with disabilities (Gill, 2001). Subsequently, recommended special educational practices changed from separation to inclusion. In order to put this change of thinking into educational practice, many countries quickly enacted laws relating to inclusive education in the 1970's.

In the case of Korea, this evolution in thinking started to occur in the 1990's. In 1994, through an amendment of Special Education Promotion Act, special educational practice changed from separation to inclusion. Furthermore, the Special Education Act for the Disabled (2007) supports the full inclusion of students with disabilities in classes for students without disabilities (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology of Korea, 2008). This represents a change in the socio-cultural value paradigm which is comprised of minority groups such as disabilities.

Since literature is an important medium by which the author shows his/her socio-cultural values and the current attitude of publics (Nodelman, 2001). Thus, even if it is not a quantitative measure, looking into and analyzing literature can be a way to understand macro-systems such as socio-cultural values (Sung Hee, 2002). Research on literature examining the Korean viewpoint on disabilities shows a gradual improvement in the public attitude. Research finding of Kwang Soon



and Seung Hee (2002) and Yong Ha, Hwang and Lee (2004) showed that classic novels and modern novels in Korea depicted characters with disabilities as ones who are to be discriminated against or driven out. Soo Ok Yoo (2008)'s research on folk tale picture books notes that interactions between characters with and without disabilities were equally positive and negative, however, incidents in which character without disabilities got angry and struck them were found frequently. But Nam Su, Park and Jeong Soon, Kweun (2005)'s research on storybooks for primary students reveals that students with disabilities are depicted quite positively. This is because literature is in many ways a mirror of society and reflects current attitudes which started to change after postmodernism in Korea.

Contemporary picture books give a description of contemporary life. The main purpose of this study has been to analyze the interaction among characters with disabilities depicted in contemporary picture books. In particular, the present study primarily sets out to investigate whether the characters with disabilities are under full inclusion as is specified in Special Education Act for the Disabled in Korea. This is the first time that this particular aspect of this has been examined in Korea.

This paper has two goals: 1) to look into the interactions between characters with and without disabilities in Korean contemporary picture books; and 2) to see if there are some differences in interactions between characters with and without disabilities in Korean contemporary picture books related to the types of disabilities.

Method

Participants

Participants were 24 contemporary picture books for preschoolers who included interactions between characters with and without disabilities. There were nine types of disabilities (Specific Learning Disabilities were excluded due to no publication) were divided into two categories: mental disabilities and physical disabilities

Table 1

Types Categories	Mental Disabilities					N	Physical Disabilities				N	Total
	MR	DD	ED	AT	CD		VI	HI	OI	HI		
N	3	1	1	3	3	10	5	2	6	1	14	24

MR: Mental Retardation **DD:** Developmental **ED:** Emotional Disturbed **AT:** autism **CD:** Communication Disorder **VI:** Visual Impairment **HI:** Hearing Impairment **OI:** Orthopedic Impairment **HI:** Health Impairment

Procedure



Analytic Tools: Using contents analysis, qualitative data on the interaction between characters with and without disabilities in the picture books were categorized into quantitative data through an objective process and gathered statistics in this study. Based on definition of full inclusion, I investigated whether people with disabilities are being discriminated against based on their type or degree of disability.

Standards for Analysis: In order to analyze characters with disabilities, Yoo (2007)'s tool was used, which has been already established by discussions with professors in early childhood education departments who teach children's literature, preschool teachers and early childhood special educators.

Process of Analysis: Five books were randomly selected and analyzed three times with three researchers, resulting in reliability 0.92. I established a context as a unit of analysis. As we read a passage, context as a unit is gleaned from the contents (Bae Keun, 1990). It then became possible to find the total of the frequency of the unit corresponding to the context.

Data Analysis: In order to answer the research question, analysis of data was fully carried out to find the value of frequency and percentage.

Results

1. Interaction objects and place of characters with disabilities

Table 2

Object Types	family	friend	teacher	villager	neighboring villager	imaginary object	N
mental	20(24.7)	44(54.3)	5(6.2)	8(9.9)	4(4.9)	0(0.0)	81(100.0)
physical	10(12.3)	45(55.6)	7(8.6)	10(12.3)	1(1.2)	9(11.1)	81(100.0)
N	30(18.6)	88(54.3)	12(7.4)	18(11.1)	5(3.1)	9(5.6)	162(100.0)
Place Types	their house	friend's house	school	village	neighboring village	imaginary place	N
mental	6(7.4)	2(2.5)	20(24.7)	45(55.6)	7(8.6)	1(1.2)	81(100.0)
physical	17(21.0)	7(8.6)	23(28.4)	25(30.9)	6(7.4)	3(3.7)	81(100.0)
N	23(14.2)	9(5.6)	43(26.5)	70(43.2)	13(8.0)	4(2.4)	162(100.0)

As we see in Table 2, characters with disabilities in Korean contemporary picture books most frequently interact with a friend in their village or school.

With types of disabilities, both characters with mental and physical disabilities most frequently interact with a friend and in their village or school.



2. Interactions between characters with and without disabilities

Table 3

Inte ractions	Positive Interaction					N	Negative Interaction				N	Total
	help	receive help	teach	accept or approve	encourage or consulate		despise or avoid	tease	cheat or steal	get angry or hit		
Types												
Mental	11 (13.6)	8 (9.9)	2 (2.5)	24 (29.6)	2 (2.5)	47 (58.1)	15 (18.5)	16 (19.8)	1 (1.2)	2 (2.5)	34 (41.9)	81 (100.0)
Physical	17 (20.9)	12 (14.8)	6 (7.4)	24 (29.6)	9 (11.1)	68 (84)	3 (3.7)	10 (12.3)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	13 (16.0)	81 (100)
Total	28 (17.3)	20 (12.3)	8 (4.9)	48 (29.6)	11 (6.8)	115 (71.0)	18 (11.1)	26 (16)	1 (0.6)	2 (1.2)	47 (29)	62 (100.0)

As shown in Table 3, these data showed that positive interactions between characters with and without disabilities are more than twice as frequent as negative interactions. The most frequent interaction was acceptance or approve. Acceptance or approve and helping someone in positive interactions were much in order, while teasing and ignorance and being avoided in negative interactions were much in order.

With the types of disabilities, characters with physical disabilities often interact positively more and characters with mental disabilities often interact negatively more. Further, for both type of disabilities, acceptance or approval were the most frequent in positive interaction, however characters with physical disabilities were shown helping much more and receiving help than the characters with mental disabilities. In negative interactions, characters with mental disabilities showed much more teasing and ignorance and being avoided compared to with physical disabilities.

3. Relationships between characters with and without disabilities

Table 4

Relation ships	Stable Relationships			N	Dynamic Relationships			N	Total
	positive	neutral	negative		Ne → Po	Ne → Po	Po → Ne		
Types									
Mental	10(37.0)	1 (3.7)	5 (18.5)	16(59.3)	7 (25.9)	3 (11.1)	1 (3.7)	11(40.7)	27(100.0)
Physical	25(46.3)	0 (0.0)	2(3.7)	27(50.0)	7(13.0)	10(18.5)	10(18.5)	27(50.0)	54(100.0)
N	35(43.2)	1(1.2)	7(8.6)	43(53.1)	14(17.3)	13(16.0)	11(13.6)	38(46.9)	81(100.0)



As we see in Table 4, there was more Stable Relationships than Dynamic Relationships between characters with and without disabilities. In Dynamic Relationships, changing from a negative or neutral to a positive relationship was more frequent than the opposite direction.

With types of disabilities, characters with mental disabilities show more Stable Relationships compared to those with physical disabilities. Characters with mental disabilities show a much higher degree of negative relationships than physical disabilities. In Dynamic Relationships, negative relationships in characters with mental disabilities were often changed into positive, while neutral or positive in physical disabilities into negative relationships.

Conclusion

1. Interactions between characters with and without disabilities

First, characters with disabilities in Korean contemporary picture books often interact with a friend in their village or school which is different from the characters with disabilities in Korean folk tale picture books who mostly interact with a neighbors in their own village (Yoo, 2007). Because special education is now being offered in classes for young children without disabilities rather than separately, increased frequency of interaction seen in the Korean contemporary picture book

The second, there were many more positive interactions such as acceptance or approval and help in Korean contemporary picture books. These interactions are quite different from getting angry or striking someone which were the most frequent actions in Korean folk tale picture books (Yoo, 2007) and also research of classic novels and modern novels depicted characters with disabilities who are to be discriminated against or driven out (Kim & Lee, 2002; Hwang & Lee, 2004).

The third finding is that characters with disabilities in Korean contemporary picture books often maintained positive relationships or transformed positive ones. This result is different from the results of Kim and Lee (2002), Hwang and Lee (2004)'s research which showed characters with disabilities depicted as being rash, lacking ability, or as objects of contempt.

2. Interactions between characters with and without disabilities related to mental and physical disabilities

First, characters with physical disabilities interacted more with friends than family in other places than those with mental disabilities.

Second, characters with physical disabilities interact much more positively than those with mental disabilities. However, unlike the characters with mental disabilities who only receive help passively, characters with physical disabilities worked in close cooperation with characters without



disabilities. The content of Korean picture books now satisfy the condition emphasized by Kramer (1999) and Williams et al. (2005) which was that characters with disabilities in literature should be depicted as interacting socially with others.

The third finding is that characters with physical disabilities usually maintained the stable relationship in most cases than those with mental disabilities. This result is similar to the results found in Praitier(1999)'s research in which characters with mental disabilities are depicted as victims of banter, bullying and mental cruelty more.

Discussion

First, Two Acts on special education in 1994, 2007 make public a friendlier atmosphere for individuals with disabilities in our society and this in turn has brought characters with better images to Korean contemporary picture books. In other words, the fact that interactions in folk tale picture books and contemporary picture books are different indicates the change of socio-cultural values in Korean society.

Second, characters with physical disabilities are depicted more positively as interacting a lot more with other and in many variety places as well as helping each other in Korean contemporary picture books. The expansion of facilities for individuals with disabilities and the spread of Assistive Technology devices have increased the mobility and abilities for communication of individuals with disabilities with public.

Third, although full inclusion in early childhood is becoming generalized, the present study is the first to investigate and yield supportive evidence for the social value on disabilities those Korean contemporary picture books reflects.

In addition, picture books from the U. S. and Europe which are translated into Korean often depict characters with disabilities more positively than Korean picture books. Perhaps this is due to the fact that the progress of special education took place in the US and Europe earlier than in Korea and this may have influenced people's attitudes toward disabilities. As the general public's understanding on disabilities varies with each nation's political, economical, social and cultural situations, further research with the method outlined is worthwhile, especially on picture books from different nations.

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