

A COMPARISON OF AMUSINGNESS FOR JAPANESE CHILDREN AND SENIOR CITIZENS OF *THE STORY OF LITTLE BLACK SAMBO* IN THE TRADITIONAL VERSION AND A NONRACIST VERSION

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Japanese versions of *The Story of Little Black Sambo (LBS)* were perceived to have racist characterizations and were withdrawn from the Japanese market in 1988. A revised version of *LBS* was prepared that contained no words or pictures related to racism and was compared with a version of *LBS* published by Iwanami Publishing Co. in terms of amusingness. Fifty-four kindergarteners, four to five years old, and 43 senior citizens, 78.9 years old on average, were read a picture book popular in Japan, followed by either the revised or the Iwanami version of *LBS* and then asked to judge which of the two stories was more amusing. The results showed equal levels of amusingness between the Iwanami and the revised versions of *LBS* in both age groups.

The first Japanese version of *The Story of Little Black Sambo (LBS)*, *Chibikuro Sambo*, was published in 1953 by Iwanami Publishing Co., a leading publisher in Japan. *Chibi* means “little” in colloquial usage and *kuro* means “black” in

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Japanese. The Iwanami version was not a translation of Bannerman's original but of the Macmillan Happy Hour Book, illustrated by Frank Dobias and published in 1927.

Although the Iwanami *LBS* was not a translation from the original, it was regarded as the orthodox *LBS* in Japan because it appeared first and was published by Iwanami Publishing, one of the most prestigious publishers in Japan. The fact that more than forty different versions appeared after the Iwanami *LBS* and yet the Iwanami version still sold overwhelmingly better than the other versions in Japan ironically helped to create the image of its being the orthodox one while all the others were seen as its imitators. It was also crucially important that Bannerman's original had not been published at that time in Japan.

In 1988, "The Association To Stop Racism Against Blacks" confronted the major publishers of Japanese versions of *LBS*. They sent letters to the publishers expressing their concerns about the book's perceived racial bias and requesting that publishers stop printing *LBS*. All the publishers, including Iwanami, responded promptly to the accusation by halting further printing and withdrawing *LBS* from the market by January 1989. In this way, all *LBS* books were withdrawn abruptly despite the fact that Japanese children had loved them for more than 30 years. It was estimated that more than a million copies of Japanese versions of *LBS* had been sold up to that time.

Most Japanese people, especially those who had loved *LBS* in their childhood, were unconvinced by the racism accusation and mourned the sudden disappearance of *LBS*. At that time, there should have been thorough debate among scholars, journalists and others on the abolition of discrimination and the banning of publication versus freedom of the press. However, regrettably, there was little or no such debate. One year later, Komichi Shobo, a small publisher in Tokyo, edited and published a book in which the sudden disappearance of *LBS* in Japan was fully reviewed (Komichi Shobo, 1990). According to Togo (1990), included in the Komichi Shobo book, the version of *LBS* published in Japan had the following three racist characteristics: (1) *LBS* used the name Sambo that had been used pejoratively in Western culture, (2) *LBS* depicted black people stereotypically, and (3) the story of *LBS* described black people as primitive. Russell (1991) also reviewed the disappearance of *LBS* from the viewpoint of a Black living in Japan.

Empirical data have been lacking concerning whether or not *LBS* was actually related to racial discrimination in Japan. One of few exceptions was the experiment conducted by Ohkubo (1976), in which she presented six different versions of *LBS* available in Japan to children of ages two to twelve and to adult participants and asked them to judge which one was the best and what part was most amusing in the books. The results showed that children and adults evaluated the *LBS* books similarly. The most amusing parts of *LBS*, such as "when tigers

melted into butter”, were listed predominantly across the participants. Ohkubo interpreted these results as evidence that *LBS* was not related to racial discrimination. However, her empirical data were weak and not conclusive.

There were many *LBS* lovers who wanted to revive the amusing story. Mori (1991) proposed that all the controversial aspects of *LBS* could be remedied by simply replacing the protagonist. Mori’s revised version was entitled *Chibikuro Sampo*, which sounded almost identical to the Iwanami *LBS* title, *Chibikuro Sambo*. In Mori’s version, the protagonist was a black Labrador puppy instead of a black boy, and his name was Chibikuro (Little Black). The word *Chibikuro* was widely used as a pet name for black dogs or cats in Japan. It was a play on words to use in the title of the revised version the word *sampo*, which means “taking a walk” or “going out for a walk” in Japanese. The new title successfully showed its relationship to the familiar old version without using the questionable word, “Sambo.” It also correctly portrayed the plot of the book, that is, a little black dog going out for a walk. In the revised version, the names of the parents of Sambo, “Mumbo” and “Jumbo”, were also changed to “Mamakuro” (Mother Black) and “Papakuro” (Father Black), respectively. Although they are not traditional Japanese words, Mama and Papa are now widely used in Japan, especially by young children, as names for their parents.

The revised nonracist version of *LBS*, *Chibikuro Sampo*, was a good candidate to be published in place of the *LBS* version condemned for having racist characteristics. However, the revision might have destroyed the book’s essential amusing characteristics. Therefore, it was desirable to empirically assess its amusingness to examine whether or not the revised version remained as amusing as the original. If Japanese children found the revised nonracist version equally as amusing as the Iwanami version, it would indirectly prove that *LBS* entertained Japanese children by its story, not by its supposed racist characterization.

According to Mori (1994), there was the possibility that elderly Japanese people who had been children during the era of Japanese Imperialism, might find a contemptuous amusement/funniness in *LBS*. Mori quoted a letter from an elderly Japanese man who found this to be so. Therefore, it was also worth assessing whether or not Japanese old people would find the Iwanami *LBS* more amusing than the revised nonracist version.

EXPERIMENT 1

METHOD

Indirect comparisons It seemed possible to compare the amusingness of the two versions by simply letting participants read both and then asking them to select the more amusing one. However, the direct comparison might have confused child participants as young as four years old, especially in a comparison of

similar materials such as two versions of basically the same story. It was also probable that child participants might be affected by the presentation order. Therefore, it was not considered wise to use a direct comparison in the present experiment.

Two items (A and B) can be compared indirectly by comparing each with a third item (C). If A is larger than C, whereas B is smaller than C, then it can be logically concluded that A is larger than B without directly comparing A and B. In a similar way, if the revised version is assessed as more amusing than a third book, while the Iwanami *LBS* is assessed as far more amusing than the same third one, it can be estimated that the Iwanami *LBS* is more amusing than the revised version.

The third book to be compared with the two versions should be almost equivalent in terms of amusingness, because the indirect comparison would be most efficient within a middle range of comparison. For this reason, *Guri-to-Gura*, a popular Japanese picture book written by Rieko Nakagawa and illustrated by Yuriko Ohmura, was chosen as the third book to be compared in the present experiment. *Guri-to-Gura* is a story of two mice, named Guri and Gura, finding a large egg in a forest and baking a big cake with the egg.

Participants Two classes of four-year-old kindergarteners, with 27 children each (13 boys and 14 girls in each class), were randomly assigned to the following two conditions: Iwanami Condition, in which children were read the Iwanami *LBS* and *Guri-to-Gura*, and Sampo Condition, in which children were read the revised version, *Chibikuro Sampo*, and *Guri-to-Gura*.

Presentation Materials: Kamishibai Style The three picture books were converted into Japanese traditional kamishibai forms. Kamishibai, literally meaning “paper play” in Japanese, has long been a popular entertainment form for children under elementary school age. Kamishibai is similar to a slide show only the pictures are shown to the audience on hard paperboards and the text is printed on the backside for the narrator to read aloud. In the present experiment, the original pictures in the books were enlarged and trimmed into an ordinary kamishibai size (271 mm in height and 372 mm in width) so that a class of children could watch them together. Illustrations for *Chibikuro Sampo* were made by replacing the protagonist and his parents with black dogs. Both the Iwanami *LBS* and *Chibikuro Sampo* stories consisted of 18 storyboards of pictures and *Guri-to-Gura* consisted of 15 boards. (See Figure 1)

Procedure The two groups of children were read *Guri-to-Gura* and either the Iwanami *LBS* or *Chibikuro Sampo* in that order by their class teacher as an ordinary class activity. It took about six minutes to read *Guri-to-Gura* and about ten minutes to read either the Iwanami *LBS* or *Chibikuro Sampo*. After hearing both stories, the children were asked: (1) which was more amusing, and (2) what part was most amusing. The children were interviewed individually in separate



Figure 1: Pictures presented to the participants. They were drawn in full color although shown here in gray.

Upper panel: a scene from the Iwanami *LBS*.

Middle panel: a scene from *Chibikuro Sampo*.

Lower panel: a scene from *Guri-to-Gura*.

rooms by female interviewers so that their answers were not affected by those of the other children.

TABLE 1
CHILDREN'S ASSESSMENT OF WHICH BOOK WAS MORE AMUSING

Book Title	Experimental Group	
	<i>LBS vs. Guri-to-Gura</i>	<i>Chibikuro Sampo vs. Guri-to-Gura</i>
<i>LBS</i>	13	
<i>Chibikuro Sampo</i>		15
<i>Guri-to-Gura</i>	14	12
Total No. of Children	27	27

TABLE 2
CHILDREN'S ASSESSMENT OF MOST AMUSING PARTS IN *LBS* AND *SAMPO*

Referred Parts	Experimental Group		Total
	<i>LBS</i>	<i>Sampo</i>	
Fighting episode among tigers	4	3	7
Tigers melting into butter	2	3	5
Dialogue between tigers and protagonist	2	1	3
Eating pancakes	4	2	6
The entirety	0	3	3
No answer	1	3	4
Total No. of Children	13	15	28

RESULTS

1. Which book was more amusing for children?

The number of children who chose either of the two versions of *LBS* or *Guri-to-Gura* is shown in Table 1. More children (15/27) in the *Sampo* Condition chose *Chibikuro Sampo* over *Guri-to-Gura* than *LBS* over *Guri-to-Gura* in the Iwanami Condition (13/27) children. The difference was not statistically significant ($\chi^2(1) = .297, ns$). The results showed that the two versions were equally amusing to the four-year-old participants.

2. What part was most amusing for children?

The most amusing parts mentioned by the children who found either the Iwanami *LBS* or *Chibikuro Sampo* more amusing than *Guri-to-Gura* are listed in Table 2. There were no remarkable differences between the Iwanami *LBS* and *Chibikuro Sampo*. The results were also similar to those of Ohkubo (1976). It should be noted that no children referred to the characteristics of the protagonist, such as "black boy" or "black puppy", being an element of their amusement.

Therefore, it was concluded that the replacement of the protagonist did not affect the book's capacity to amuse. *Chibikuro Sampo* amused Japanese children to a similar degree and in a similar way to the Iwanami *LBS*.

EXPERIMENT 2

METHOD

Participants Forty-three senior citizens (5 males and 38 females, 78.9 years old on average) at a senior citizens' home in Nagano, Japan, participated in the experiment. According to their usual activity groupings, 3 males and 15 females were assigned to the Iwanami Condition, and 2 males and 23 females to the Sampo Condition.

Presentation Materials The same three sets of storyboards were used in Experiment 1.

Procedure The two groups of senior citizens were read *Guri-to-Gura* and either the Iwanami *LBS* or *Chibikuro Sampo* in that order by the experimenter (a female undergraduate student) as an extracurricular activity. It took about six minutes to read *Guri-to-Gura* and about ten minutes to read either the Iwanami *LBS* or *Chibikuro Sampo*. After the reading of both stories, participants were interviewed individually and asked to answer these two questions: (1) which was more amusing, and (2) what part was most amusing.

RESULTS

1. Which book was more amusing for senior citizens?

The preferences of the senior citizens between the two versions of *LBS* and *Guri-to-Gura* are shown in Table 3. A slightly larger proportion of senior citizens chose the Iwanami *LBS* over *Guri-to-Gura* (15/18 or 83.3%) than chose *Chibikuro Sampo* over *Guri-to-Gura* (16/25 or 64.0%). However, the result was not statistically significant ($\chi^2(1)=1.94, ns$).

2. What part was most amusing?

The most amusing parts selected by the senior citizens who found either the Iwanami *LBS* or *Chibikuro Sampo* more amusing than *Guri-to-Gura* are listed in Table 4. There were no remarkable differences between the Iwanami *LBS* and *Chibikuro Sampo*. The referred points were similar among the senior citizens in Experiment 2, but different from those of the young children in Experiment 1. A quarter of the children (7/28) selected the tigers fighting as the most amusing part, while no senior citizens selected it. On the other hand, about a third of senior citizens (11/31) selected the protagonist's taking the clothes back from the tigers as the most amusing part whereas no child did so. Only the senior citizens referred to the sounds of names as amusing. Despite these differences, it was noteworthy that the selected points were quite similar between the two versions

and that the characteristics of the protagonist, such as a black boy or a black puppy, were not referred to as a component of the amusingness of the book.

TABLE 3
SENIOR CITIZENS' ASSESSMENT OF WHICH BOOK WAS MORE AMUSING

Book Title	Experimental Group	
	<i>LBS vs. Guri-to-Gura</i>	<i>Chibikuro Sampo vs. Guri-to-Gura</i>
<i>LBS</i>	15	
<i>Chibikuro Sampo</i>		16
<i>Guri-to-Gura</i>	3	9
Total No. of Participants	18	25

TABLE 4
SENIOR CITIZENS' ASSESSMENT OF MOST AMUSING PARTS IN *LBS* AND *SAMPO*

Referred Parts	Experimental Group		Total
	<i>LBS</i>	<i>Sampo</i>	
Tigers melting into butter	5	8	13
Taking clothes back from tigers	5	6	11
Dialogue between tigers and protagonist	1	1	2
Sounds of names	2	1	3
Being robbed of his clothes by tigers	1	0	1
Eating pancakes	1	0	1
Total No. of Participants	15	16	31

In conclusion, the results were basically the same in the two experiments in terms of the absence of discriminatory characteristics; irrespective of their ages, participants regarded the two versions as fundamentally equivalent. Again, it was confirmed that the replacement of the protagonist did not affect the amusingness of the book. The results provided no evidence of the possibility that elderly Japanese people would find a contemptuous amusement/funniness in *LBS*.

Mori (2003) has recently provided more evidence demonstrating the innocence of *LBS* in Japan. Mori carried out an experiment in which three age groups of participants, 147 in total, were given implicit association tests to measure the strength of their negative emotional associations to certain target words. The results revealed that the experience of reading *LBS* did not change the intensity of negative emotional association with either the word "Sambo" or the words "black people" in junior high school students.

DISCUSSION

ACCEPTING THE NULL HYPOTHESIS

The results seemed to prove statistically the equivalence of the two versions. However, it is not true. There exists a methodological difficulty in proving the equality of two groups of data. Ordinary statistical tests are valid only for proving differences among the obtained data. The logic behind statistical tests is that if no differences are assumed (= the null hypothesis) and if the probability of achieving a difference in the observed data under the null hypothesis is smaller than a predetermined value (i.e., the probability of Type I error; $\alpha = .05$), the null hypothesis should be denied, therefore, differences exist. Consequently, the purpose of statistical tests is to detect significant differences, but not to prove equality.

It seems possible to use ordinary statistical tests to prove the null hypothesis. For example, if the difference between two sample means is not statistically significant, it seems to have proved that there is no difference. However, the correct conclusion from “not-achieving-statistical-significance” is just a failure to reject the null hypothesis. Such failure does not warrant a conclusion that the null hypothesis is proved. Accordingly, the null hypothesis in the present study that the revised version was equivalent to the Iwanami version in terms of amusingness was not proved just by negating the presence of significant differences between the two versions.

A statistical method called “power analysis” introduced by Cohen (1969/1977/1988) can overcome the difficulty. If the power of a statistical test is strong enough, its failure to reject the null hypothesis can mean the correctness of the null hypothesis with a risk of Type II error (β) occurring in the complement probability of the power. For example, if the power of a given statistical test is as strong as .95, being able to deny the equality between two means 95% of the time, equality can be concluded in case of its failure with a risk level of $\beta = (1 - .95) = .05$.

In order to accept the null hypothesis with the equivalent level of significance as a rejection of the null hypothesis, β should be set at .05 or smaller, or the power should be .95 or larger. The value for the significance criterion (α) was set at a conventional level, that is $\alpha = .05$, and the degree of freedom (u) of a chi-square test for the present experimental design was $(2-1) \times (2-1) = 1$, that is, $u = 1$. The sample sizes were $N = 54$ in Experiment 1 and $N = 43$ in Experiment 2. According to Cohen (1988), under these circumstances, the effect size to be detected (w) was .50 in Experiment 1 and larger than .50 in Experiment 2. As indicated by Cohen, $w = .50$ means that the effect size is large. Therefore, it can be concluded that there was not a *large* difference between the two versions. In other words, there remained the possibility of the presence of a moderate or

smaller difference. In order to prove further the absence of a smaller difference than $w = .50$, it would be necessary to increase the statistical power by increasing the number of participants, N .

Revising was judged unsuccessful only if the revised version largely degraded the amusingness of the original version. Therefore, the conclusion that there was no large difference between the two versions would suffice for the purposes of the present study. Moreover, if the data from the two experiments are combined and put into a chi-square test, the effect size to be detected becomes smaller, such as $w = .38$, while holding the probability of the Type II error at the same level, $b = .05$. Since the combined data also failed to indicate the significance ($\chi^2(1)=0.06, ns$), it can be concluded that the two versions were not different even by a moderate magnitude.

PUBLICATION OF CHIBIKURO SAMPO AND REVIVAL OF *LBS* IN JAPAN

New illustrations were drawn for *Chibikuro Sampo* and published by Marimo Mori, pen name of the present author, from Kitaoji Shobo Publishing, Kyoto, in 1997. *Chibikuro Sampo* was listed in Barton's Centennial Catalogue of *LBS* (Barton, 1998). During the preparation of the publication of *Chibikuro Sampo*, two other similar attempts were made to produce nonracist versions of *LBS* in the United States in 1996. Fred Marcellino drew new illustrations for his nonracist version of *LBS* with a new name, "Babaji", for the protagonist. Marcellino's book, *The Story of Little Babaji*, published by Harper Collins Publishers, was a minimum revision of the original. Marcellino (1996) tried to make the setting of the story India and chose the name 'Babaji' as a typical Indian name. Although his attempt appeared successful to American readers who know little about India, Sircar (1999), an Indian researcher in children's literature, criticized his attempt as rather awkward, or even disingenuous. Meanwhile, Julius Lester and Jerry Pinkney published *Sam and the Tigers*, from Dial Books for Young Readers, New York, by changing the boy's name from Sambo to Sam and by rewriting the story in an imaginary world rather than an Indian jungle. Both books were translated and published the following year in Japan. Consequently, three different nonracist versions of *LBS* appeared in the Japanese market in 1997.

The publication of these revised versions of *LBS* led to a controversy in Japan. It should be noted that the controversy was brought out in the open for the Japanese people by the decision of the author/rewriter and the publisher of *Chibikuro Sampo*, whereas the controversy was hidden at the time of the disappearance of *LBS* in 1988. The Association To Stop Racism Against Blacks sent a legal contents-certified letter to Kitaoji Shobo, the publisher of *Chibikuro Sampo*, attacking them for the book's publication. The publisher replied to them through a return contents-certified letter claiming that the revised version was racism-free. They exchanged contents-certified mail with each

other several times and the publisher disclosed all correspondence on the web page of Mori, the author of the book, and of this paper, located at: <http://zenkoji.shinshu-u.ac.jp/mori/sampo/arita-kitaooji.html>. Mori also took part in an Internet debate on the publication of *Chibikuro Sampo* organized by Professor Ichikawa of the University of Tokyo. The debate lasted more than a month and involved several psychologists at Japanese universities, including a representative of the publisher of *Chibikuro Sampo*. The debate was later edited and published by Ichikawa (1998). In these debates, critics of the publication of *Chibikuro Sampo* were unsuccessful in terms of identifying inappropriate points in the publication.

After such intensive controversy, Masahiko Nadamoto of Kyoto Sangyo University published a translation of Bannerman's original with Komichi Shobo Publishing in 1999, the centennial year of the original publication of *LBS* in London. The Association To Stop Racism Against Blacks, who had by now been identified as a couple with a ten-year-old-son, remained silent despite the fact that Nadamoto's *LBS* was essentially the same as the former versions of *LBS* that they had attacked and put out of print. The Association was accused of inconsistency and suspected of having a hidden agenda behind their apparent search for justice. Allegations were made at the time that major publishers of Japan, including Iwanami Publishing Co., had hidden the real reasons for their decision to stop publishing *LBS* in 1988. It seemed unnatural that all the publishers uniformly made the same decision promptly after having been accused by The Association. It was suspected that the decision by publishers to stop producing *LBS* was not because of its "racist characterization" but because the publishers' versions of *LBS* were "pirated," and they wished to avoid having their piracy publicly known. This suspicion has subsequently been strengthened because relatively small publishers, such as Kitaooji Shobo and Komichi Shobo, have been able to defend their publishing against the same type of accusation. It has been seventeen years¹ since the decision of the major publishers in Japan to stop publishing their versions of *LBS* in 1988 after having made a large profit without paying royalties. However, they have not yet fulfilled their legal responsibilities.

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¹ The Iwanami version of *LBS* was reissued in April 2005 by Zuiunsha Publishing, Tokyo.

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