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## **What Happens when the Tomato Ripens? Manufacturing Sense through Metaphorical Suspension in the Picturebook *Kechappu-Man***

### **Abstract**

Coseriu delineates three ways by which incongruence may be suspended in discourse (Coseriu 2001[1976], 2007[1988]): metaphorical, metalinguistic, and extravagant suspension. This paper focuses on metaphorical suspension, investigating how it contributes to creating sense in the Japanese picturebook *Kechappu-Man* (Ketchup-Man) by Noritake Suzuki. The story's surreal characters and story beats ooze incongruence when set against a backdrop of what otherwise seems reality. Younger, more socially-inexperienced readers can enjoy the story's bizarre nature at face value, while older readers will likely see beyond the surface-level extravagance and discover more nuanced metaphors at play within the narrative. *Kechappu-Man* includes various "building blocks" meant to guide readers towards this more metaphorical interpretation of the story's characters and events. This picturebook's multiple metaphorical suspensions ultimately interact to turn this story's nonsense into congruency, culminating in a melancholic if not fatalistic view of life in modern society. Moreover, exactly how these "building blocks" function to create the metaphorical sense in *Kechappu-Man* can be more clearly understood via comparison with the Korean translation, as the latter seems more inclined toward extravagant suspension due to a relative lack of linguistic devices aimed at inviting deeper metaphorical interpretation.

### **Keywords**

metaphorical suspension, extravagant suspension, sense, Japanese, translation.

### **Rezumat**

Coseriu schițează trei moduri în care incongruența poate fi suspendată în discurs (Coseriu 2001[1976], 2007[1988]): suspendarea metaforică, metalingvistică și extravagantă. Articolul de față se focalizează asupra suspendării metaforice, investigând modul în care aceasta contribuie la crearea sensului în cartea ilustrată japoneză *Kechappu-Man* (Ketchup-Man) de

Noritake Suzuki. Personajele suprarrealiste și ritmul povestirii apar în cel mai înalt grad incongruente în virtutea contrastului cu un fundal care altfel pare a reflecta realitatea. Cititorii mai tineri, cu mai puțină experiență socială, pot aprecia natura bizară a poveștii la un nivel de suprafață, imediat accesibil, în timp ce cititorii mai în vârstă vor privi probabil dincolo de extravaganța de suprafață și vor descoperi metafore mai nuanțate în interiorul narațiunii. *Kechappu-Man* include diverse „cărămizi de construcție” a sensului – elemente constitutive menite să ghideze cititorii către interpretarea metaforică a personajelor și evenimentelor din poveste. Multiple suspendări metaforice din text interacționează și se integrează, transformând în cele din urmă nonsensul în congruență, pentru a culmina într-o viziune melancolică, sau chiar fatalistă, asupra vieții în societatea modernă. Mai mult, modalitatea concretă în care aceste elemente constitutive funcționează pentru a crea sensul metaforic în *Kechappu-Man* poate fi mai clar pusă în evidență printr-o comparație cu traducerea coreeană, deoarece aceasta din urmă pare să favorizeze suspendarea extravagantă, din cauza disponibilității mai restrânse decât în japoneză a unor procedee lingvistice capabile să declanșeze o interpretare mai profundă, în registru metaforic.

### Cuvinte cheie

suspendare metaforică, suspendare extravagantă, sens, japoneză, traducere

### 1. Introduction

The utterance “Look at that tomato go!” will more likely than not elicit reactions of confusion and incredulity: tomatoes are not known to trot around with the same ease as limbed fauna. In other words, this statement contradicts our empirical knowledge about the world at large.

This abnormality can, however, be deemed as acceptable in certain situations, even though the bizarre nature of the sentiment itself likely remains intact. Imagine, for example, that a man sees a bus zoom by, and plastered on the side of said bus is a large advertisement featuring a tomato, and so he shouts “Look at that tomato go!” to his nearby friend. In this case, “that tomato” does not refer to the tomatoes of home gardens and supermarket shelves, but rather designates the speedy vehicle with the tomato tattoo.

Such an example suggests that even though a sentence may convey content seemingly at odds with our empirical knowledge, this does not necessarily render the sentence nonsensical or incomprehensible. Put in terms of Coseriu’s Integral Linguistic framework, the incongruence is suspended through appropriateness (Coseriu 2001[1976], 2007[1980], 2007[1988]). Congruence/incongruence is a judgement based on whether or not a speech act satisfies general

expectations concerning how the mind processes the accepted workings of reality: while divorced from context the tomato example would surely be judged as incongruent, the congruency of the idea “Look at that car go!” assists in its garnering acceptability. Additionally, incongruent language can be fully accepted, or suspended, assuming recognition of one’s intention to purposefully produce incongruency (Coseriu 2007[1988]: 125-126): with the utterance “Look at that tomato go!,” the man perhaps aims to share his surprise regarding a peculiarly enormous, attention-grabbing tomato covering the bus; using “tomato” and not “bus” to refer to the vehicle here proves quite appropriate in conveying such surprise and, furthermore, inviting others to share in the reaction.

The suspension of incongruence in discourse happens by various means. Coseriu (2001[1976], 2007[1988]) delineates three ways: metaphorical, metalinguistic, and extravagant suspension. These types of suspension prove vital in helping to interpret the meaning of poetry, report the language of third parties, understand wordplay, etc. (Coseriu 2001[1976], 2007[1988]; see also Coseriu 2007[1980]). However, when it comes to comprehending the sense of a literary work, metaphorical suspension proves to be of particular importance. Coseriu mentions the relationship between metaphorical suspension and the sense of discourse:

les signifiés linguistiques «contradictaires» (et leurs *designata*) ne sont à la rigueur que des signifiants symboliques pour un contenu d’ordre supérieur qui est le **sens** du discours (ou «texte») considéré: c’est, précisément, ce qu’on appelle l’emploi «métaphorique» du langage, propre aussi bien à la poésie qu’à certains types de plaisanteries et de jeux de mots.

(the «contradiction» of the linguistically signified (and its *designata*) is, strictly speaking, but a symbolic signifier for higher-order content which is the **sense** of the discourse (or «text») considered: this is precisely what is called the «metaphorical» use of language, which is as characteristic of poetry as it is of certain types of jokes and wordplay.)

(Coseriu 2001[1976]: 157, trans. ours)

This short passage suggests that the understanding of metaphorical suspension ties into grasping the sense of literary works where incongruency is a characteristic element. In fact, Ikarashi and Maher (2024), while not directly delving into metaphorical suspension itself, nonetheless demonstrate how this phenomenon plays out within the Japanese picturebook *Shin-kun to Henteko Raion* (Shin and the Curious Lion) by Cho Shinta (Shogakukan, 1995).

*Shin-kun to Henteko Raion* is classified into the genre of nonsense picturebooks. It consists of several short episodes in which the protagonist, a boy named Shin, meets a rather curious lion. In each episode, the lion undergoes inconceivable metamorphoses, changing into

a flower, the moon, an elephant, etc. Though clearly nonsensical by everyday standards, these incongruent happenings can, however, achieve congruency assuming that the lion is regarded as something along the lines of a metaphorical ‘canvas’ (see Murase (2010)), on which one is free to paint as they please. The metaphorical suspension of the lion’s incongruent transformations, working together with other “building blocks” (Coseriu 2007[1980]), ultimately leads to the sense of this picturebook as <a lion as canvas for creative activities><sup>1</sup> (Ikarashi and Maher 2024: 20).

This study aims to provide yet a further example of how metaphorical suspension plays a crucial role in creating sense within a literary work, focusing here on *Kechappu-Man* (Ketchup-Man) by Noritake Suzuki (Bronze Publishing, 2015). This Japanese picturebook has a rather short and simple story, which thus allows for a relatively easier analysis of the mechanisms behind its sense creation. In *Shin-kun to Henteko Raion*, only one recurring case of metaphorical suspension (i.e. the lion symbolizing a canvas of infinite possibilities) is relevant to the sense of the work, whereas in *Kechappu-Man*, several examples of metaphorical suspension take place. The suspensions on display in this story, which at first glance may appear to many a simple work of child-oriented fiction, interact with each other to turn this surreal, incongruent narrative into one of congruency, manufacturing a story sense with more layers for interpretation than one might likely expect.

The first version was published in 2008 (Bungeisha Visual Art). However, the version of *Kechappu-Man* analyzed in this paper is the fully-revised version, first published in 2015. The plot of the revised version follows essentially the same story structure as that of the initial version, yet the text in the new version varies greatly in both style and orthography (with the pictures also having slightly changed). The original text, nonetheless, does at times assist in better illuminating the author’s intentions, and thus, reference to and comparison with the original shall be made, mainly within the footnotes, to clarify points of argument from time to time when necessary. In addition, this second, fully-revised version has been translated into Korean. Investigating similarities and differences between the translation and the original Japanese can further help shed light on how the nuances of linguistic expression contribute to sense creation; therefore, fragments of the Korean text are compared with the original Japanese in the latter part of this discussion.

Following a general overview of *Kechappu-Man*’s plot and characters in the upcoming section, theoretical foundations necessary for analyzing the incongruence of the narrative will

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<sup>1</sup> <> designate the sense of a story.

be introduced. Findings show that two types of suspension lie at the heart of this picturebook and indeed prove to be closely associated with how sense is created within the story. Several incongruent characters appear in *Kechappu-Man*, and though absurd events occur, analysis ultimately uncovers metaphorically congruent interpretations to explain how the story's suspensions in fact intertwine to bring about a sense which invokes the feelings of melancholy and fatalism common to many coming-of-age in modern society. This paper concludes with a comparison of the original Japanese text with that of the Korean translation, discussing linguistic expressions of note in regards to their effect on sense creation.

## 2. An Overview of *Kechappu-Man*

*Kechappu-Man* is regarded as a nonsense picturebook. The protagonist, a literal bottle of ketchup but with human limbs, lives a seemingly normal life amongst humans in modern society.<sup>2</sup> He seeks his calling in life, eventually happening upon a French fry shop (what appears to be a typically-designed fast-food restaurant with only French fries on the menu), which one would assume a workplace ideal for ketchup, if not a literal bottle of ketchup at that. Ketchup-Man pitches the idea of adding ketchup to the menu, but the shop manager is not interested. Instead, because the shop is short on staff, the manager hires Ketchup-Man on as a mere part-time employee. Day after day, contrary to his initial hopes, Ketchup-Man simply works the fryer until closing, having no chance to make use of his unique attributes (i.e. being a literal bottle of ketchup who can produce literal ketchup) in the workplace.

In due time a second uncanny character arrives on the scene, this time a professor with a tomato for a head (*Tomeito Hakase*, or Dr. Tomato) who becomes a regular at the shop. Dr. Tomato begins his repeated story appearances as the first customer to ask to taste-test Ketchup-Man's ketchup, but his strangely pleased reaction does not make Ketchup-Man happy despite this initial ketchup sale. Following this meeting, day-after-day, Dr. Tomato visits the shop demanding more and more ketchup before ultimately grabbing Ketchup-Man and directly drinking the ketchup from his bottle body. With each eerie encounter, Dr. Tomato's head grows all the larger from imbibing the ketchup, culminating in the tomato head's eventual explosion, which serves as an important event leading into the climax of the narrative.

The explosion causes all the ketchup which has accumulated in Dr. Tomato's head to flood the town, drenching local citizens in the red deluge. These locals (as well as a cat and

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<sup>2</sup> The illustration of Ketchup-Man (and other characters) can be seen on the publisher's website: <https://www.bronze.co.jp/books/post-116/> (available as of May 21, 2025)

even a dead fish) all decide to give the ketchup a taste and quickly realize just how delicious it is. As a result, they flock to the French fry restaurant to order ketchup and ketchup alone; the stock soon sells out.

Although ketchup becomes quite popular, Ketchup-Man's life does not change dramatically; he continues toiling at work, frying up French fries, as he had been doing prior to Dr. Tomato's arrival. In the closing scene, we get a view of Ketchup-Man from the back, trudging home under a lovely evening sky following another busy day at work.

### 3. Theoretical Foundation for Analysis

The "universe of discourse" (Coseriu 1973) within *Ketchup-Man* is structured differently from our empirical world, naturally leading to a judgement of the story as weird. However, readers will likely not reject it outrightly as nonsensical, but rather, will accept the extraordinary events and enjoy how it diverts from reality. Furthermore, as previously mentioned, thoughtful readers will likely search for a metaphorical interpretation that makes the story congruent at a deeper level, and it is here that metaphorical suspension takes place. Before delving into a thorough investigation of the suspension on display within this picturebook, however, the notion of suspension itself requires some further clarifying.

#### 3.1. Knowledge (Competence) and Judgements

Coseriu assumes that "[e]l lenguaje es una actividad humana *universal* que se realiza *individualmente*, pero siempre según técnicas *históricamente* determinadas («lenguas») (language is a *universal* human activity that is carried out *individually*, but always according to *historically* determined techniques («languages».) (Coseriu 1981: 269, trans. ours). In other words, linguistic activity can be broken into three levels: the universal, historical, and individual levels. This distinction is consistent with our linguistic experience (Coseriu 1981, 1985). For example, the universal level, or "speaking in general," involves when one hears conversation nearby, but does not grasp the content of said conversation, nor whom is being addressed by who, etc.; however, it is understood that human language is being used in some manner or other. The historical level, or "concrete particular language," is at play when it is determined that another is speaking a particular language, such as English or Mandarin Chinese. Finally, the individual level, or "discourse," refers to understanding the purpose or function behind language use; say, someone is giving an order by uttering such-and-such an authoritative expression.

Certain types of knowledge further underlie the linguistic activity that corresponds to each respective level; these three tiers of knowledge are autonomous from one another. The most self-explanatory knowledge variety would be the one at the historical level. This is “saber hablar de acuerdo con la tradición lingüística de una comunidad” (to know how to speak according to the linguistic tradition of a community) (Cosieru 1998: 13). In other words, the activity of speaking Standard American English at the historical level assumes knowledge of mutually-understandable, standard variants of English grammar and pronunciation, or what Cosieru calls “idiomatic knowledge.” The knowledge relevant to the universal level, termed “elocutional knowledge,” “comprises everything that applies in principle to all languages independently of their respective linguistic structuring, that is, a number of principles of thought and the general knowledge of the world” (Cosieru 1985: xxix). Consider the statement, “I boiled the piano.” (Cosieru 1985: xxx). While grammatically impeccable given the rules of English, i.e. idiomatic knowledge, this unnatural sentence would normally cause confusion, as most functioning humans do not boil their musical instruments; thus, the sentence contradicts our empirical knowledge. Such an example demonstrates how elocutional knowledge and idiomatic knowledge stand independently from each other. Lastly, knowledge corresponding to the individual level of language use, “expressive knowledge,” is “a knowledge about how certain discourses should be constructed in certain situations” (Cosieru 1985: xxix). For example, adults understand the need to make speech less grammatically complex and lexically simpler when talking to small children; regardless of how grammatically-sound or logically-coherent the language may be, if the speech is too complicated it will likely fail for the purpose of communicating efficiently and meaningfully with a younger audience.

This triad of linguistic knowledge assists in the adequate interpretation and judgement of linguistic utterances, which is, as briefly mentioned in Section 1, closely related to suspension (Cosieru 1985, 2007 [1988]). Often when hearing the aforementioned line “I boiled the piano,” one will judge this a deviation from shared knowledge about the empirical world, i.e. elocutional knowledge. In other words, the sentence is judged as “incongruent.” Conversely, “I boiled potatoes,” proves quite normal when relying on this same elocutional knowledge, and is thus “congruent.” All utterances can be assessed from the idiomatic perspective as well. While “I boiled potatoes” is a “correct” expression with respect to the Standard English grammar, that same set of grammatical norms argues that “He boil potatoes every morning” is “incorrect” as the verb lacks the third person singular -s necessary for conventional subject-verb agreement. Similarly at the individual level, expressions consisting of simpler structures and simpler vocabulary will be judged as “appropriate” when intended for an audience of children. However,

sentences with complicated structures and higher-level vocabulary, even if judged “congruent” and “correct” with respect to the prior-discussed varieties of knowledge, will likely result in an “inappropriate” judgement. These notions of knowledge and judgements can be summarized as follows:

	Knowledge (Competence)	Judgements
Universal Level	elocutional knowledge	congruent/incongruent
Historical Level	idiomatic knowledge	correct/incorrect
Individual Level	expressive knowledge	appropriate/inappropriate

The three-level distinction of knowledge (competence) and judgements

### 3.2. Suspension (Aufhebung, or Sublation)

As with the tomato example discussed in Section 1, negative judgements can nonetheless be accepted, or suspended, given the proper circumstances. What is more, incongruence, as well as incorrectness, “are not only tolerated but indeed recognized as necessary” (Coseriu 2007[1988]: 179, trans. ours).<sup>3</sup> Take this brief example from Ikarashi (2023):

Cicada work in tall building.

Data entry clerk. Seventeen year.

No sick day. No mistake.

Tok Tok Tok!

(Shaun Tan, *Cicada*, Spread 2<sup>4</sup>)

The above is an excerpt from the picturebook *Cicada* by Shaun Tan. The eponymous protagonist, Cicada, works at a company existing within in human society and is often bullied by its colleagues. The story progresses with Cicada as narrator, and it does not take long to recognize that Cicada’s English deviates significantly from standard grammatical norms; hence, a clear judgement of incorrectness. In addition, some of Cicada’s expressions prove less than adequately informative, thus a result of incongruence, too. To point, Cicada’s narration often takes the form of sentence fragments like “Data entry clerk.” “Seventeen year.” While such language chunks are understandable enough, they fail to completely and clearly convey the entirety of the narrator’s intended message, as elocutional norms demand. The onus thus falls to the reader to recover missing minutiae like “*I am a data entry clerk.*” “*I have worked here*

<sup>3</sup> “[...] nicht nur toleriert, sondern gerade als das notwendige anerkannt” (Coseriu 2007[1988]: 179)

<sup>4</sup> In picturebooks, a double-page spread often constitutes a single unit. Thus, this paper uses *Spread* to refer to both the left and right pages as a whole (even if the left and right pages depict different scenes respectively). The first double-page spread of the story is counted as Spread 1, followed by Spread 2, Spread 3, etc.

for seventeen years.” Judged in this sense, Cicada’s sentence fragments are unsuccessful in thoroughly communicating information.

However, most readers surely will not reject this narration simply because it includes such errors. Rather, they are more than likely to accept the incongruence and the incorrectness (and inappropriateness as well) as intended by the author. In fact, “this manner of speaking will undoubtedly convey the image of a communicatively undeveloped, foreign-if-not-altogether-alien being” (Ikarashi and Maher 2022: 51-52); roughly speaking, the incorrect English (a structured, and not random, incorrectness) indicates that Cicada is an alien being who cannot follow English linguistic traditions, whereas the less informative, thus incongruent expressions signal Cicada’s inability to communicate effectively (Ikarashi 2023).

Coseriu (2007[1988]: 179) mentions that “[d]ie Aufhebung findet natürlich nur dann statt, wenn der Verstoß gegen die Korrektheit oder die Kongruenz intentionell, d.h. beabsichtigt oder gewollt ist” ([t]he suspension naturally takes place only if the violation of correctness or congruence is intentional, i.e., intended or deliberate). In the above example, readers will normally comprehend the author’s intentional violation of elocutional and idiomatic conventions, realizing that such violations serve towards better characterization of the protagonist. Without the incongruence and incorrectness in the text, Cicada would come across as a rather different character, thus demonstrating that these violations are a necessary story-building element.

### 3.3. Linguistic Content

Lastly, there is the matter of linguistic content. Coseriu assumes three types of content, each of which corresponds, again, to the three levels: “designation” (or reference), “signification” (language-specific meaning) and “sense” (see Coseriu 1985: xxx)—sense being of particular importance to the current discussion.

Designation, at the universal level, “is the relation to extra-linguistic objects or to the extra-linguistic reality itself, be it a state of affairs or the corresponding content of thought” (Coseriu 1985: xxx). Signification, at the historical level, “is the linguistically-given content in a particular language, the particular form of the possibilities of designation in a given language” (Coseriu 1985: xxx). In other words, “the significations of a language must be considered as mental ‘models’ or ‘moulds,’ sets of conditions for the classification of the entities in the external world’,” and with regard to designation, “a particular referent is ‘introduced’ into one of these models or moulds” (Coseriu 2000: 30). When, for instance, one refers to a particular ‘tomato’ sitting atop a chef’s cutting board by using the word *tomato*, “[l]a designación puede

corresponder a un significado de lengua (que representa su posibilidad)” ([t]he designation may correspond to a signification of [particular] language (which represents its possibility)) (Coseriu 1981: 283, trans. ours); in this case, a normal use of the signification mould *tomato*. On the other hand, the designation “puede también no corresponder al respectivo significado y ser «metafórica»” (may not correspond to the respective signification and also be «metaphorical») (*ibid.* trans. ours). Thus, with the utterance “Look at that tomato go!” within the context outlined in Section 1, the designation (i.e. a bus) does not correspond to the signification of *tomato*, but the referent is metaphorically (in a wider sense) inserted into the mould of *tomato* given the eye-catching tomato in the bus-side advertisement.

In contrast, sense, at the individual level, is “the particular linguistic content which is expressed by means of designation and meaning [=signification] and which goes beyond designation and meaning [=signification] in a particular discourse, such as a speaker’s attitude, intention, or assumption” (Coseriu (1985: xxx)). Returning again to the tomato example, “Look at that tomato go!” has its own signification and context-specific designation (i.e. a moving bus adorned with an enormous tomato-theme ad) and the signification and designation, in turn, work together as a “textual sign (Textzeichen)” (Coesriu 2007[1980]: 65) to express a certain sense: here, the speaker’s desire to share with his friend a mutual surprise concerning the unusually large, attention-grabbing tomato picture plastered on the side of a passing bus.

It is important to recognize, however, that this relation between textual signs (signification + designation) and sense explained by Coseriu is but a simplified view (Tămăianu-Morita 2014); sense is not merely a byproduct of merging signification with designation. In fact, Coseriu mentions that one must consider “welches die ‘Bausteine’ komplexer Sinneinheiten sind und wie sich diese Bausteine zu höheren Sinneinheiten zusammenfügen lassen” (what the ‘building blocks’ of the complex unity of sense are and how these building blocks can be put together to form a higher unity of sense) (Coseriu 2007[1980]: 165, trans. ours). In order to arrive at the sense intended by the speaker of the bus-tomato sentence, suspension, one of the building blocks alluded to above, must be taken into consideration. Similarly, it is the case with analyzing the picturebook *Kechappu-Man*; such building blocks, metaphorical suspension among them, must first be identified and their connections subsequently disentangled in order to achieve an adequate understanding of the story’s sense.

## 4. Suspension and Sense in *Kechappu-Man*

### 4.1. Beyond Extravagant Suspension

Readers of *Kechappu-Man*, especially younger children, can simply enjoy the absurdity and incongruity of the story. Such a reading experience involves unbiased acceptance of the narrative's incongruence as such; simply savoring the surreal story world. The type of suspension at play in such a case is known as extravagant suspension:

Die *extravagante* Aufhebung schließlich ist die Aufhebung, die bei der intentionellen Behauptung eben des Absurden und Inkongruenten auftritt. Man kann nämlich auch mit der Sprache spielen, man kann auch Wortspiele erzeugen; das Absurde ist denkbar und kann deshalb auch ausgedrückt werden. Bei der extravaganten Aufhebung bleibt die Inkongruenz bestehen; sie wird aber toleriert, weil sie als intentionell erkannt wird.

(*Extravagant* suspension, finally, is the suspension that occurs in the intentional assertion of precisely the absurd and incongruent. Thus, one can also play around with language and create puns and the like; the absurd is conceivable and can therefore also be expressed. With extravagant suspension, the incongruence remains; however, it is tolerated because it is recognized as intentional.)

(Coseriu 2007[1988]: 125, trans. ours)

This tale's extraordinary characters (Ketchup-Man and Dr. Tomato) and unexpected events (e.g. Dr. Tomato's explosion) thus undergo extravagant suspension when readers enjoy the book simply as a work within the genre of nonsensical storytelling.

However, socially mature readers likely eclipse this base level of suspension. Although the text in the book is written using only Japanese *hiragana* and *katakana* characters (eschewing Chinese *kanji* characters), which is normally a clear indication that a book is geared toward young children,<sup>5</sup> some book reviews have regarded *Kechappu-Man* as intended for adults.<sup>6</sup> The reasoning, discussed in more detail hereafter, stems from the interpretation that the story reflects an uncomfortable reality of society (to point, Japanese society) which more mature readers have experienced, are presently experiencing, see looming large on the horizon. This interpretation is one born of metaphorical suspension. Of course, readers of this ilk are not incapable of enjoying the more surreal yet superficial charms of the story; in fact, a more mature reading

<sup>5</sup> The first edition, on the other hand, includes Chinese *kanji* characters, which would prevent small children from decoding the entire text by themselves. It may be that by removing the Chinese *kanji* characters from the revised version, the author perhaps wanted to make it clear that he intends this as a story for children (or all ages).

<sup>6</sup> For example: <https://ddnavi.com/news/268848/a/> (available as of January 6, 2025, but no longer accessible) and <https://ddnavi.com/article/d316434/a/> (available as of April 23, 2025)

allows plenty of room for metaphorical as well as extravagant suspensions to occur in tandem. So how, then, will the story's sense come about, assuming readers arrive at a more metaphorical interpretation of Ketchup-Man, Dr. Tomato, etc.? While various understandings of the narrative's deeper sense might surely be argued, the mature interpretation (i.e. sense) this analysis finds quite convincing is as follows: *Kechappu-Man* is a book about <a melancholic if not fatalistic view behind coming-of-age in modern society>. <sup>7</sup> Numerous linguistic and visual clues, or building blocks, speak evidence to such an interpretation. Several examples, such as the characterization of the French fry shop's manager, the meaningful use of empty space each page, and more make up this totality of evidence; however, the discussion at hand shall focus exclusively on three matters which are above all of a nonsensical nature: the titular Ketchup-Man, the eerily eccentric Dr. Tomato, and the climactic explosion of Dr. Tomato's head. Below is a summary-in-advance of the metaphorical interpretations to be discussed in the coming pages:

- Ketchup-Man: an idealistic youth who comes to realize some less-than-comforting lessons about life as an adult in modern society
- Dr. Tomato: the first to recognize Ketchup-Man's abilities, his initial curiosity grows into a mania that brings Ketchup-Man little beyond confusion and exhaustion
- Explosion: explosive popularity (where greater social recognition brings unforeseen consequences) and emotional outburst (youthful ideals colliding with reality)

"Ketchup-Man's abilities" as noted above can be taken as symbolic of young employee's abilities within various real-world contexts. Henceforth discussion of such "abilities" or uniqueness apply as much to Ketchup-Man as to, say, a designer. In his interview celebrating the publishing of *Kechappu-Man*, the author speaks of Ketchup-Man as a reflection of himself, who worked as a graphic designer at an advertising company before becoming a writer:

Back when I was a designer, I was plagued by worries like what if my work doesn't stay in my name? What if everything I've created just up and disappears? Who exactly is ordering these jobs I'm doing?...on and on, until I started to wonder "What am I?"

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<sup>7</sup> One book review offers a similar interpretation: "the gloomy and hopeless world [of *Ketchup-Man*] evokes the absurdity of Kafka's novels" (<https://ddnavi.com/article/d316434/a/> (available as of April 23, 2025), English translation ours). Interestingly, however, the reviewer arrives at this notion based on a metaphorical interpretation of Ketchup-Man alone. When it comes to acceptance of the uncanny Dr. Tomato, extravagant suspension seems to prevail over deeper metaphorical suspension.

Is this really my dream job? The latter half of twenties was ripe with misgivings.<sup>8</sup>

(Interview posted on the publisher's blog on November 25, 2015, English translation ours)

Of course, most readers are likely unfamiliar with the author's job history, but this background information lends credence to the congruence of the aforementioned expanded metaphorical interpretation.

## 4.2. Degrees of Suspension

When contrasting varieties of suspension, it could be said that the metaphorical works on an echelon beyond the extravagant. In *Kechappu-Man*, most if not all readers can recognize and savor the surreal aspects of the narrative (i.e. extravagant suspension), while only those individuals with an adequate enough understanding of society at large will grasp the more complicated metaphors at play. Given that picturebooks tend toward more extraordinary settings and storylines, there exists a certain expectation in readers as pertains to encountering the unusual, and thus one might label extravagant suspension as a primary suspension within the genre. Metaphorical suspension would thus be secondary, as observed in analyzing the nuances of *Kechappu-Man*, where aiding readers to this higher tier of interpretation requires the author to sprinkle indications of deeper meaning (building blocks) throughout the book. *Kechappu-Man* is indeed ripe with such suggestions, for if it were not, the story would merely come off as a more or less extravagant spectacle (which comparatively speaking is the case when it comes to the Korean translation (see Section 6)).

Attempting to parse the layers of *Kechappu-Man*'s multifaceted suspension from a less versatile perspective of metaphor would lead to difficulties in analyzing the story's overall sense. With Grice (1989), for example, metaphor can occur by violating the Maxim of Quality; "You are the cream in my coffee" (Grice 1989: 34) would normally be judged as invalid, although the Cooperative Principle would subsequently encourage seeking an associated interpretation where one's feature(s) in some way, shape or form resemble(s) cream. Indeed, a wide range of everyday metaphors can be understood in such a manner; however, *Kechappu-Man*'s metaphorical intentions will go undetected if scrutinized via simple lateral moves in search of linguistic association (even with the Cooperative Principle operative). When addressing works like *Kechappu-Man*, one must recognize that violation of the Maxim of

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<sup>8</sup> This interview was conducted by the book's publisher. The excerpt is from the following URL: <https://staffroom.hatenablog.com/entry/20151125/1448434691> (available as of April 23, 2025)

Quality (or incongruence, as specified in this paper) is not an infraction done for the purpose of creating a degree of allegorical separation between signifier and referent, but rather an expected and accepted act tied to the narrative's greater sense. This or that passage of the text is not so much intended to be interpreted as metaphor in isolation; rather, metaphorical interpretation occurs at a higher level that is reached with the aid of special devices nudging readers beyond mere acceptance of what is said (a topic examined in more detail in the forthcoming section).<sup>9</sup>

## 5. Sense Manufactured via Interwoven Suspensions

### 5.1. Ketchup-Man

Arguably the most obvious as well as significant metaphorical suspension contributing to the narrative's sense involves the protagonist, Ketchup-Man. As noted in Section 2, the main character seeks his calling in life, and sees hope in a local French fry shop. An unbiased outsider would easily agree that this is an ideal place of employment for a literal bottle of anthropomorphic ketchup, as ketchup is the quintessential condiment when it comes to French fries. Dousing the fire of this initial ambition, however, the manager cares little about Ketchup-Man's unique qualifications and hires him as any other run-of-the-mill worker. Day after day, Ketchup-Man just fries up potatoes late into night, unable to make the most of his unique attributes in his work.

This story, as suggested in book reviews like those mentioned footnote 6,<sup>10</sup> has led many adults to view Ketchup-Man as a metaphorical representation of a young employee who, though initially hopeful that life has a special place for their abilities and uniqueness, gradually accepts that this will not come true. In other words, an idealistic youth comes to realize some less-than-comforting lessons about life as an adult in modern society

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<sup>9</sup> A similar, yet crucially distinct, example demonstrating the relationship between metaphorical and extravagant suspension comes from a Japanese capsule toy called "Baggu-doggu" (Bag-dog) by Takaratomy-Arts. Upon hearing this product's name, one might assume a more straightforward metaphorical interpretation, imagining, say, a dog with some quality that relates to bags; perhaps a dog that is small enough to fit into a handbag. However, this toy's name is not a metaphor of this sort; instead, the figure is literally a dog with a bag for a body (more specifically, it is a bag with a dog's head, legs and tail). The imaginative incongruency of such a creation is one born from extravagant suspension, and because of this, any initial assumptions of metaphorical suspension from hearing the toy's name are upended after seeing what the product looks like. The unexpected cancellation of metaphorical suspension via extravagant suspension seems a selling point of several such toys. Our thanks to the anonymous reviewer who pointed out the possibility of such cancellations within the interpretation of metaphor.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, the following excerpt from a book review:

"Landing the job that you want"—much easier said than done, as any adult well knows. [...] And so does the protagonist of *Ketchup-Man*: a typical youth struggling with the gap between his ideals and reality. (<https://ddnavi.com/news/268848/a/> (available as of January 6, 2025, but no longer accessible, English translation ours))

## 5.2. Dr. Tomato

If Ketchup-Man works as a representation of a young employee struggling with the gap between ideals and reality, then just how does Dr. Tomato fit into the greater picture of Ketchup-Man's suffering? What does the gradual swelling of his head from eating, then straight drinking, the title-character's ketchup mean? Why, in the first place, is Dr. Tomato a literal tomato and not, say, an orange, or a potato, or another human like the manager? And what about the title of "Dr." rather than "President" or simply "Mr."?

Put simply, Dr. Tomato is a metaphorical representation for how social recognition of one's uniqueness or ability, something many would view as a positive, can quite quickly deteriorate into something relentless, exhausting and undesired. There are several contextual clues within the book hinting at such an interpretation.

### 5.2.1. Social Recognition, Unanticipated Emotions

As explained above, the manager of the French fry shop sees no use for Ketchup-Man's ketchup. His manager is oddly fair as he does not discriminate against the bizarre-looking creature who is soliciting work, treating him like any other human; a nod to the fact that others do not see him as unique despite being, again, a literal bottle of walking ketchup. One day, however, the strange customer that is Dr. Tomato visits the shop and suddenly demands some ketchup by arrogantly shouting "Are-o kure" (that-acc(usative) give) 'Give me that' (Spread 6).<sup>11</sup> Metaphorically, this can be interpreted as the very first moment a young employee stands out as special in some way, garnering recognition from another.

However, the manner in which Dr. Tomato consumes his serving of ketchup is not what Ketchup-Man, nor most readers, would categorize as appropriate or flattering. The picture of this scene (on the right page on Spread 7) shows Dr. Tomato giving no thought to eating any French fries; rather, he is exclusively licking dollops of ketchup from his finger. Thus, Ketchup-Man, despite his ketchup being sold for the first time, nonetheless feels uneasy with the result ("Henna kibunde" (strange mood.in) '[he] feels strange' (Spread 7)). Similarly with Dr. Tomato's subsequent visit, Ketchup-Man finds no sense of fulfillment in being a mere object at this bossy customer's beck and call ("Henna okyaku-no iinaride Kechappu-Man-ni yorokobi-wa nashi" (strange customer-gen(itive) at-the-mercy-of Ketchup-Man-dat(ive) joy-top(ic) not) 'At the mercy of this strange customer, Ketchup-Man felt no joy' (Spread 9)). Most notably

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<sup>11</sup> This English translation, as well as all forthcoming translations of *Kechappu-Man* excerpts, are ours.

with his first appearance, but lingering throughout the narrative as well, Dr. Tomato represents an ominous portrait of becoming a working member of society: be careful what you wish for, lest it come true. Youthful desire to find one's calling, a place in society best suited to one's abilities, is not an impossible dream; however, when that dream becomes reality, it may come with some unexpected and unpleasant surprises as to how the dream-now-reality will play out from there.

Interestingly, this metaphorical interpretation seems perhaps linked with the name of this character. The compound name *Tomeito-Hakase* (tomato-Dr.) can be read as speaking both to the character's appearance as well as personal characteristics. First, the name describes how the character looks: a humanoid with a tomato for a head who wears a white lab coat of sorts. In addition to this appearance-related reading, another interpretation speaks to Dr. Tomato's characterization. In Japanese, *X-hakase* (X-Dr.) can mean a person with profound knowledge about X (and having obtained a post-graduate-level degree, like *gengogaku-hakase* (linguistics-Dr.) who would have Ph.D. in linguistics). Thus, the name *Tomeito-Hakase* can convey that the character has expert knowledge about tomatoes.

This latter interpretation particularly reflects Dr. Tomato's metaphorical importance in relation to the protagonist. Dr. Tomato knows much about tomatoes, and assumedly tomato-adjacent products, which predisposes him to discover Ketchup-Man's usefulness (i.e. serving up delicious ketchup). Ordinary people in the story's world, such as the shop manager, care little about this, as they are seemingly unfamiliar with any such potential (nor would Dr. 'Orange,' for example, have discovered Ketchup-Man's talents). Furthermore, Dr. Tomato's high-prestige social standing jibes well with his arrogant attitude and way of speaking toward the manager, reflecting an intellectual superiority over lowly others.

The name *tomeito* (four morae [to-me-i-to]) deserves mention as well. This is a non-standard, unfamiliar assimilation into Japanese of the English word tomato, for which *tomato* (three morae [to-ma-to]) is the accepted form registered in the lexicon. For Japanese speakers, *tomeito* sounds like an imitation of the American-English pronunciation for the word. Thus, *tomeito* "evokes" (Coseriu 2007[1980]) a foreign language with a foreign culture. This evocative interpretation, again, serves a double function, and its incorrectness can be suspended. First, the foreignness of *tomeito* helps bolster the aura of outsider, or alien, to the already uncanny Dr. Tomato (i.e. the appearance-related function). Secondly, it implies that Dr. Tomato's supposed knowledge about ketchup might not exactly correspond to what is inside Ketchup-Man. Tomato ketchup's main ingredient is, of course, tomatoes, but the customer's name tells us he is a *tomeito* expert, as opposed to a *tomato* expert, indicating a subtle yet crucial

gap in understanding. To point, Ketchup-Man's reaction suggests that he had assumed, as a reader's common sense would dictate, ketchup's purpose within a French fry shop is to serve as a dip, but Dr. Tomato is only ever seen consuming ketchup on its own, sans the French fries. Opting for the incorrect form in *tomeito* seems deliberate in helping to explain Dr. Tomato's unusual behavior, and further contribute to the metaphorical interpretation of a young employee's potential being recognized, though not necessarily in the way they had envisioned.

### 5.2.2. Relentless Consumption

Following his initial appearance, Dr. Tomato becomes a regular at the fry shop. Curiously enough, each time he imbibes ketchup, his head becomes bigger, ripening gradually.<sup>12</sup> His manner of consuming ketchup also undergoes disturbing changes. When he first tries the ketchup, the picture (on the right page of spread 7) depicts a gentler demeanor, with Dr. Tomato licking ketchup from off his finger. However, in the next picture with Dr. Tomato eating ketchup, he has firm hold of the cup filled with ketchup, while ketchup drips in drool-like fashion from his mouth, spilling onto the counter in front of him (on the left page of Spread 8). Finally, Dr. Tomato reaches full debauchery, going so far as to directly drink the ketchup from out of Ketchup-Man's body (Spread 10). His behavior demonstrates a drastic change from curiosity to obsession to addiction.

Naturally this kind of unrestrained consumption is not what Ketchup-Man initially desired when first he stepped foot into the French fry shop, pushing for ketchup on the menu. In fact, Ketchup-Man does one time attempt to resist Dr. Tomato's order ("Gutto koraete mune-o hari" (Onomatopoeia (strong concentration) keep-back chest-acc puff-out) '[Ketchup-Man] toughened up and puffed out his chest' (Spread 9)),<sup>13</sup> but the resistance is to no avail, and Dr. Tomato forcefully grabs him to begin drinking. Dr. Tomato's ketchup addiction is, in a manner of speaking, a sign of success for Ketchup-Man, but it is a relentless, burdensome success to be sure.

Here, another example of incorrectness helps contribute to building towards this metaphorical interpretation. Over the course of Dr. Tomato's ripening, the sound of his head

<sup>12</sup> The original version explicitly describes this with "Makka-ni umasoni urete kita" (all-red-dat delicious-looking ripen come) "[The tomato head] had ripened, red all over and delicious-looking" (Spread 7), while in the new edition, this description is absent. Thus, the metaphorical interpretation related to ripening (see below) has become more implicit in the updated version.

<sup>13</sup> The original version more clearly expresses this resistance immediately before this citation: "Moshi sugu kechappu dashitanara onaji yaritori kurikaeshi" (if soon kechup serve.if same interaction repetition) 'If [he] quickly served up ketchup again, this cycle would only continue to repeat itself' (Spread 8).

swelling is described with variations of the onomatopoeic expression, *zumuri* (Spread 8). Japanese is a language rich in onomatopoeic expressions, to the point that even onomatopoeia dictionaries are published. However, despite readers easily understanding *zumuri* to be an expression conveying the process of something growing larger, it nonetheless will sound unusual to native Japanese speakers. To point, *zumuri* cannot be found in prominent onomatopoeia dictionaries like Yamaguchi (ed.) (2015) or Ono (ed.) (2007), which contain approximately 2,000 entries and 4,500 entries respectively. Which all goes to say, this expression is an incorrect one.

This incorrectness is, however, suspended, most especially in the immediate lines leading up to Dr. Tomato's head exploding. While directly guzzling the ketchup from out of Ketchup-Man's body, Dr. Tomato's head continues to grow larger and larger, a growth described by the repeated usage of *zumuri*, or variations on the theme of *zumuri*, in rhythmic combinations:

zun-zun-zumuri

zun-zumuri

zun-zun-zun-zun

muri-muri-muri-muri

(Spread 10, the underline and the double underline ours)

The underlined and double-underlined parts prove of particular importance. These combinations break free from the confines of the originally-implied onomatopoeic meaning of *zumuri*. In these final two lines, *zumuri* is ultimately separated into two parts: *zun* and *muri*. First, notice that when the first half of this word, *zum*, appears independently, the sound undergoes a slight change into *zun*. This probably stems from the nature of the Japanese sound system. In Japanese, almost all consonants are paired with vowels. Thus, *zum* would not be permitted in Japanese as the nasal /m/ is followed by no vowel. However, there is a lone exception to this rule, that being that the nasal consonant /n/ can appear word-final without a vowel.<sup>14</sup> So it makes perfect sense for the *m* in *zum* to be replaced by the accepted nasal sound *n* when *zum* becomes independent from *zumuri*.

As a result of this phonological shift, the underlined repetition of *zun* also undergoes a semantic shift as well. The repetition *zun-zun* is a well-established onomatopoeia phrase which (especially in the above citation) describes "acting without hesitation or mercy" (Yamaguchi (ed.) 2015: 272). Thus, *zun-zun-zun-zun* not only carries a holdover meaning linked to its initial

<sup>14</sup> The manner of articulation of word-final /n/ is, strictly speaking, different from /n/ when paried with a vowel, though. See Vance (1987) for details.

semantic relationship with *zumuri*, but it can additionally reinforce the feeling that Ketchup-Man is being drained of ketchup (what makes him capable and unique; his essence, his life blood) ever more merciless; the growing anxiety behind this obsessive consumption of ketchup feels like it's speeding up, approaching the event horizon.

The double underlined portion of the excerpt above also allows for reinterpretation. *Muri*, on its own, is no longer just a newly independent half of an onomatopoeic expression, but it can also evoke the homophone 無理, which means, in this context, "can no longer endure something." Thus, the repetition of *muri* not only describes how the tomato head is growing bigger and bigger, but it also leads readers to imagine Ketchup-Man's anguished cry that he can no longer endure this unwanted exploitation of himself, that the relentlessness of Dr. Tomato's obsession has led Ketchup-Man to a breaking point.

The adjacent pairing of *zun-zun-zun-zun* and *muri-muri-muri-muri*, both born from the incorrect onomatopoeic expression *zumuri*, could well reflect the relationship between Dr. Tomato (relentless consumption) and Ketchup-Man (a young employee suffering from success). Moreover, the extended repetition of these expressions contributes to highlighting just how tense the scene has become on the eve of Dr. Tomato's explosion.

### 5.2.3. From Limited to Widespread Recognition

Incidentally, what does Dr. Tomato's ballooning cranium imply? Prior to the day of the imminent explosion, his tomato head becomes so big that he gets stuck in the shop's automatic doors when attempting to leave, with his head so enlarged that it reaches the ceiling (Spread 9); overall, the size of his head is large enough that it could house several of the onlooking adults. In line with the analysis up to this point, this growth would appear a metaphor for an increasing appreciation for what Ketchup-Man can offer as a working member of society. Though this popularity within the narrative remains limited to a single manic admirer for the time being, the reactions of the manager and other customers confer that this limited recognition is not going unnoticed, and additionally, that it is on the verge of transitioning towards explosive popularity via the forthcoming tomato head explosion.

Furthermore, Dr. Tomato's head does not merely increase in size. When he first appears at the shop, his head looks slightly green. However, as it becomes bigger, it turns red and ripens (see footnote 12). When something ripens, it is ready to be eaten; thus metaphorically, the time is ripe for Ketchup-Man's capabilities to be shared among society at large.

#### 5.2.4. Interim Summary

At first sight, Dr. Tomato is difficult to comprehend in any congruent way. However, readers can discover both linguistic and visual clues which point towards certain metaphorical implications. Points of interest regarding Dr. Tomato's deeper meaning have thus included:

- a young employee's unique capabilities are recognized for the first time, though not without unforeseen, and upon notice undesired, consequences (Section 5.2.1)
- social success comes with overbearing admiration (Section 5.2.2)
- a gradually-growing appreciation of the employee's talents shows signs of spreading like wildfire throughout society at large (Section 5.2.3)

In summary, Dr. Tomato can be regarded as a metaphorical representation of the darker side of finding one's calling in life; even initial, limited social recognition can start eroding the idealism of a young individual new to life as a working member of society, and growing success might quickly become a relentless struggle with unpleasant emotions and outcomes.

### 5.3. Tomato Explosion

When Dr. Tomato's head expands to its limit, it bursts (Spread 11), signalling the climax of the story. This scene suggests at least two metaphorical interpretations: explosive popularity (where greater social recognition brings unforeseen consequences) and emotional outburst (youthful ideals colliding with reality).

#### 5.3.1. Explosive Popularity

After Dr. Tomato's head explodes, the huge amount of ketchup that had been accumulating inside of it gushes into the town (Spread 12), and local people and animals alike are caught in the deluge (Spread 13). Seemingly at once deciding to sample a taste of the ketchup flood, everyone realizes just how good the ketchup tastes. As a result, they flock enmasse to the French fry shop and the ketchup on offer quickly sells out (Spread 14).

Despite Ketchup-Man garnering widespread popularity, just like before, the customers' manner of ketchup consumption runs counter to what Ketchup-Man and readers would consider the societal norm. The illustration on Spread 14 shows the townsfolk having formed a long line that snakes out beyond the entrance of the shop, where everyone is enjoying ketchup in the

same manner as Dr. Tomato did so; namely, only the ketchup itself is eaten.<sup>15</sup> Seen metaphorically, the young employee's uniqueness has garnered explosive popularity, although the manner of appreciation is at odds with early hopes and expectations.

### 5.3.2. Emotional Outburst

Although his ketchup is being enjoyed as such, Ketchup-Man no longer resists as he once tried to against Dr. Tomato; he serves customers who line up at the shop as a worker should (Spread 14). This suggests that Ketchup-Man has come to terms with his reality, one in which he is merely a worker toiling for pay, no longer overly-concerned with pursuing his ideals and understanding that what was once a dream can soon become the source of physical and mental exhaustion. This fact is symbolized by the bandages and plasters adorning his body (Spread 14): as his ideals give way to reality, he becomes a mature, or one might say tamed, member of modern society.

Ketchup-Man's acceptance of life as a worker in modern society comes well-encapsulated in the final scene. Here, a view from behind of Ketchup-Man trudging home in under an evening sky is bittersweetly depicted with the following narration:

*Tsukarete kaeru yuugure-no michi*  
 exhausted go back evening-gen street  
*Atama-no kyappu-o naderu kaze-ga*  
 head-gen cap-acc caress wind-nom(inative)  
*fuini boo-ttoiu oto-o tateruto*  
 suddenly onomatopoeia (whistle)-like sound-acc emit.when  
*Kechappu-Man-wa hisashiburini waratta*  
 Ketchup-Man-top for the first time in ages laugh.past  
 (Exhaustedly headed home on the street that evening  
 The wind caressed the cap on Ketchup-Man's head  
 Which suddenly emitted a buzzing-like sound  
 And he laughed for the first time in ages)

(Spread 15)

“Boo ttoiu oto” is meant to evoke the buzzing-like sound an empty bottle makes when blown into at the right angle. Imagining this sound should lead readers to the conclusion that Ketchup-Man's body makes such a sound because he has essentially been drained, with much of his

<sup>15</sup> The first edition does not depict anyone eating ketchup. One might then assume that, in the latest version, the author has tried to make it clear that the town on the whole, like Dr. Tomato, does not consume, i.e. appreciate, the ketchup in a way in which Ketchup-Man would have initially wanted.

inner ketchup selling well to customers who savored it without French fries (as depicted in the previous spread). Ketchup-Man has ultimately accepted the reality of such unwanted consumption of his ketchup, continuing to toil at work day in and day out. Thus, he cannot help but laugh (which might best be imagined as him chuckling with a semi-forced snort from the nose while cracking a wry smile, not dissimilar to the variety of laughter many employ when reacting to more emotionally-heavy feelings) at finding himself trapped in such an unideal situation.<sup>16</sup>

This fatalistic, take-it-on-the-chin attitude is strengthened by the phonological rhythm employed (and at times purposely disregarded) in this text. In Japanese, various rhythmic combinations consisting of five morae and seven morae have been foundational in the creation of traditional texts, such as *haiku* poetry (a five morae-seven morae-five morae pattern, which is generally called *shichi-go chou* (seven-five tone)). This formula is so commonplace in Japanese culture that even elementary school children have little difficulty creating haiku (or haiku-like) texts.

Linguistically, five morae and seven morae can be further captured within eight morae frames. Kawamoto (1996) points out that five morae and seven morae are often accompanied by three-morae pauses and one-mora pauses respectively, both thus totaling eight morae (he regards two morae as equating to one beat, so the eight-morae rhythm can be thought of as a four-beat rhythm). In fact, picturebook texts sometimes adopt a four morae-four morae combination, creating an equivalently pleasing morae rhythm (Sasamoto 2001). It is common to construct picturebook narratives with rhythms that employ morae phrases of five, seven, and eight morae; however, unlike haiku, the order of these phrases is not set in stone, allowing for greater flexibility and variety when writing.

*Kechappu-Man*'s text, although with some slight deviations, is essentially structured with such rhythmic patterning. For example, take the opening two lines of the story, seen below with

<sup>16</sup> The original version more clearly describes Ketchup-Man's situation, offering clues beyond just the more nuanced mention of his laugh in the new version. The following two lines conclude the story of the original version:

*Kosei-ga ikaseru basho sagashi*

individuality-nom make the most of place look for

*Sonnano nayamu himamo nashi*

like that worry about time.as well not

(To find a place where he can make the most of his talents

No, there is no time to worry about something like that)

indicators marking the rhythm in which Japanese speakers would most likely read this excerpt aloud (“//,” “[ ]” and numbers indicate rhythmic pauses, morae chunks and the number of morae in each chunk, respectively).

*Kare-no namae-wa Kechappu-Man*  
 he-gen name-top Ketchup-Man  
*Oseba detekuru makkana kechappu*  
 push.if come out bright red ketchup  
 [Kare-no namae-wa]7 // [Kechappu-Man]6  
 [Oseba detekuru]7 // [makkana kechappu]8  
 (His name is Ketchup-Man  
 Squeeze him and bright red ketchup comes out)

(Spread 1)

This text can be phonologically divided into four parts, of which three consist of seven or eight morae. “Kechappu-Man” in the latter half of the first line accounts for six morae, which might seem a deviation from expected rhythmic patterning. However, a sentence-final phrase with six morae sounds well-integrated into the rhythmic structure (at least in this picturebook), probably because, intuitively speaking, a pause corresponding to two morae in length, which serves as a kind of period in writing, would likely be included to round out the eight-morae unit.

Returning to the concluding scene of the story (Spread 15), the text’s rhythm starts out as expected, but a slight deviation shows up in the second line:

[Tsukarete kaeru]7 // [yuugure-no michi]7  
 [Atama-no kyappu-o]8 // [naderu kaze-ga]6

The latter part of the second line is six morae, similar to the prior example. Yet “naderu kaze-ga,” concludes with the particle *-ga*, which indicates that “naderu kaze” is a subject. Thus, the line ends in the middle of a sentence. Finishing these six morae with a subject-marking particle in the latter part of the line makes for a more unnatural cadence with respect to rhythmic expectations. More crucial deviations, however, occur in the next two lines, which bring the narrative to a close. In the third line, one would surely fail in trying to insert adequate pauses in the expected fashion when reading aloud: [fuini]3 // [boo ttoiu]6 // [oto-o tateruto]7 does not work, [fuini boo ttoiu]9 // [oto-o tateruto]7 also sounds clunky, etc. Neither can the rhythm be pleasingly parsed in the ultimate line: [Kechappu-Man-wa]7 // [hisashiburini]6 // [waratta]4 does not cut it, nor does [Kechappu-Man-wa]7 // [hisashiburini waratta]10.

The rhythmic collapse in this final scene gives the ending a slower, more somber tone. The reason for this lies in the fact that the well-established four-beat rhythm, via which the book begins and from there smoothly progresses up until the last spread, keeps the story flowing at a steady pace. However, at the closing of this tale, rhythmic convention is ultimately upset, and readers find it a struggle to harmoniously hit the same *morae* beats that had come so naturally throughout most of the story. Losing touch with the phonological pattern of progression just as the story concludes is sure to trigger sensations of confusion, doubt, and the like. Such a mood meshes well with Ketchup-Man's ultimate melancholic, fatalistic attitude, and thus contributes to heightening its impression on the reader.<sup>17</sup>

### 5.3.3. From Tomeito to Tomato

When Dr. Tomato's head finally explodes, the narration uses *tomato*, the normal Japanese-version of the word, and not the incorrect *tomeito*, to describe the scene: "Toutou tomato-ga haretsushite" 'At last the tomato exploded' (Spread 11, underline ours). This word choice ties in with what the explosion symbolizes (explosive popularity and emotional outburst). What spews forth from the explosion is Ketchup-Man's own ketchup (his essence, his talent), and similarly the strained emotions he has harbored reach a boiling point, too. In other words, this violent moment of transformation is not one foreign to Ketchup-Man, but directly relates to his own talents, emotions and essence. Thus, the ordinary word *tomato*, which has been contrasted with the foreign word *tomeito*, is opted for to express the explosion belonging to Ketchup-Man on a deeper, emotional level.

## 5.4. Summary

This section has focused on the story's outstanding nonsensical characters and events, i.e. Ketchup-Man, Dr. Tomato and Dr. Tomato's explosion, working to understand their metaphorical interpretations:

Ketchup-Man: an idealistic youth who comes to realize some less-than-comforting lessons about life as an adult in modern society

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<sup>17</sup> As mentioned in Footnote 16, the first edition concludes the story by clearly describing Ketchup-Man's inner thoughts. Phonologically, the original version also keeps its standard rhythm intact through end of the story. The newer version, on the other hand, is more nuanced in how it implies Ketchup-Man's mood; therefore, the rhythmic collapse was perhaps opted for in order to aid in hinting toward the expected interpretation regarding Ketchup-Man's feelings. See Section 6 for more on the role of rhythm in the narrative.

- Dr. Tomato: the first to recognize Ketchup-Man's abilities, his initial curiosity grows into a mania that brings Ketchup-Man little beyond confusion and exhaustion
- Explosion: explosive popularity (where greater social recognition brings unforeseen consequences) and emotional outburst (youthful ideals colliding with reality)

These metaphorical suspensions interact with one another throughout the story, serving as major building blocks of the narrative's sense. To give a congruent interpretation of the story based on these suspensions: Ketchup-Man is a representation of a young ambitious employee who seeks his calling in life but ultimately must temper expectations to fall in line with modern society. Dr. Tomato represents that first social recognition of young talent and uniqueness, but this recognition gives way to widespread obsession; an unexpected, undesired manner of recognition at odds with youthful desires. Unable to make the most of one's true potential, as the young employee sees it, success cannot be enjoyed but must, instead, be endured. Thus, growing popularity, which objectively would be the goal of ambition, only brings growing dissatisfaction. When the time is ripe, Ketchup-Man becomes much sought after by many for what he can offer (explosive popularity); unfortunately, though, his dream coming true is at best a disturbing reality, as the town directly ingests his ketchup in a style at odds with what one might have hoped. Ketchup-Man's ideals have clashed with reality, and reality first assaults Ketchup-Man with Dr. Tomato's addiction (leading to emotional outburst), before finally winning acceptance of what it means to be an adult integrated into modern society. Ultimately, this metaphorically congruent story conveys the sense of this picturebook as <a melancholic if not fatalistic view behind coming-of-age in modern society>.

## 6. Comparison with the Korean Translation

### 6.1. Translation: Metaphorical vs. Extravagant

As discussed in Section 4, two types of suspension co-exist in *Kechappu-Man*: metaphorical suspension and extravagant suspension. Extravagant suspension is surely a part of all readers' experience with this book, given the nonsensical characters and plot points in the story. On the other hand, metaphorical suspension does not necessarily occur, depending on the maturity level of the reader. Small kids will likely lack the social experience necessary to see Ketchup-Man as the representation of a young employee new to adult working society. Furthermore, although a thoroughly metaphorical interpretation of the entire story, as this paper has outlined, is indeed possible, adult readers who metaphorically interpret Ketchup-Man as something more than a goofy walking bottle of ketchup may fail to see beyond the mere superficial extravagance

of Dr. Tomato's looks and behavior. Thus, whether metaphorical suspension or extravagant suspension stands out more in comparison when reading can and will vary from reader to reader. This makes for a cumbersome balancing act when it comes to translation. In translating this particular book, a translator has several options regarding how to attempt conveying these two varieties of suspension throughout the progress of the story. In this respect, the Korean translation proves an interesting example.

Analysis of the Korean text appears to reveal that more so than trying to guide readers towards a metaphorical interpretation, the word choices and linguistic stylings opted for rather serve to highlight the extravagance of this nonsense story. This does not mean to imply that it would be impossible or exceedingly unlikely for Korean readers to interpret the story in a manner similar to this present study, however the sense of <a melancholic if not fatalistic view behind coming-of-age in modern society> seems less at the heart of the narrative in the Korean version than it does in the Japanese original. Comparing these two versions should make it clearer how some of the building blocks in the Japanese text contribute to its sense creation (cf. Tămâianu-Morita 2014).

## 6.2. Narrator's Tone

Perhaps the most outstanding difference involves the narrator's tone in relating the story. As noted in Section 5.3.2, the Japanese text progresses via a specific, traditional rhythm. In the Korean translation, on the other hand, there seems no particular phonological rhythm at play.

*Geu-e ireum-eun Kecheommaen.*

he-gen name-top Ketchup-Man

*Momtong-eul nureu myeon saeppalgan*

body-acc push if red.adnominal

*kecheop-i twieonawayo.*

ketchup-nom squirt out.polite

(His name is Ketchup-Man. If (you) push (his) body, red ketchup squirts out.)

(Spread 1)

Take notice in the Korean text of the sentence-final form of verbs. In the above citation, the verb *twieonawayo* (base form: *twieonaoda*) takes a polite form. According to a native informant<sup>18</sup> consulted for this study, conjugating verbs as such serves to create a gap between the story content and the narrator's tone. Polite verb forms appear throughout the picturebook

<sup>18</sup> Our sincere thanks to Mrs. Youngju Park for her assistance with the analysis of the Korean translation.

narration, conveying a gentler tone of voice. Despite the interplay of uncanny characters like Ketchup-Man and Dr. Tomato in a world illustrated to look more-or-less realistic (which some have, anecdotally, described as characteristic of the uncanny valley), this surreal story is nonetheless narrated in the tenor of a fairy tale. Such a gap would seem to highlight the strangeness of the story, thus tilted more toward emphasizing extravagant suspension.

This comparison allows for greater insight into the functionality behind the phonological rhythm used throughout the majority of the original text. In Japanese, the narrator's tone commonly "overlaps" with feelings correlating to the protagonist's perspective (in other words, the linguistic stylization of the narration tends to mirror the character's thoughts) (see Hashimoto (2014) for details); as a result, such narration enables readers to see into, and moreover empathize with, a character's point of view (see also Ikarashi (2025) who uses the notion of "overlapping" to analyze a Japanese novel within Coseriu's Integral Linguistic framework). However, the four-beat rhythm adopted in *Kechappu-Man* prevents such overlapping narration, because characters do not normally develop their thoughts within the strict confines of five, seven and eight-morae phrases. Non-overlapping narration will thus, in turn, hinder readers from vicariously tagging along with Ketchup-Man on his exploits; therefore, in line with what the book's author has mentioned in an interview, Ketchup-Man's situation is observed objectively.<sup>19</sup> The four-beat rhythm does nothing to take away from enjoying the story's nonsensical elements, but because it inhibits total immersion within the narrative world, readers are able to take a step back from the story and contemplate the deeper meaning behind said nonsense. In other words, such a rhythmic scheme can, to a greater or lesser extent, contribute to an increased awareness of and appreciation for metaphorical suspension.

### 6.3. Onomatopoeia

The onomatopoeic expressions in the Japanese text also differ significantly in both form and function in the Korean translation. As discussed in Section 5.2.2, the onomatopoeia representing the expansion of Dr. Tomato's head, *zumuri*, qualifies as incorrect in that it is not an official part of the Japanese lexicon. However, this incorrectness is necessary (ergo suspended) in the scene immediately before Dr. Tomato's head explodes. In the text, the repetitions *zun-zun* and *muri-muri* contribute to creating sense: *zun-zun-zun-zun* ratchets up the anxiety concerning Dr. Tomato's relentlessly escalating obsession for more ketchup, (or more metaphorically, the young employee's capabilities) whereas the repetition of *muri* not only

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<sup>19</sup> <https://staffroom.hatenablog.com/entry/20151125/1448434691> (available as of May 12, 2025)

describes how the tomato head is approaching a dangerously unsustainable size, but also reads as an echo of Ketchup-Man's anguished cry that he can no longer endure this unwanted exploitation of his talents.

In comparison, the onomatopoeia in the Korean translation is *ppulluk*, which is a common, thus correct, expression denoting "a part of something expands." The invented, though semantically sound, Japanese onomatopoeia *zumuri* expresses an image more akin to something swelling up evenly in its entirety, and thus, the Korean counterpart conveys a slightly different nuance. That said, the Korean onomatopoeia does similarly function to strengthen the tension leading up to the extraordinary explosion in the scene preceding Dr. Tomato's head bursting:

*ppulluk - ppulluk*  
*ppuulluk-ppuulluk*  
*ppuru-ppuru-ppuru-ppuru*  
*ppuu-ppuu-ppuu-ppuu*

(Spread 10)

However, unlike the original Japanese, the last two lines of this passage do not offer any secondary meaning. Instead, the translator simply plays around with the base expression by shortening and stretching its front half. This repetition of *ppulluk* does offer readers a varied, perhaps more grotesque image, though. As the expression denotes a part, rather than the whole, of something expanding, one might imagine a series of lumpy protrusions jutting out one after another as Dr. Tomato's head grows in size to resemble less of a sphere and more of a lumpy mess (more eldritch horror than blown-up balloon).

Moreover, this Korean expression has a likelihood of sounding cute to Korean ears, which would create a gap between the pleasant phonological resonance and the grotesque image explained above, together with the subsequent illustration of the bright red mess post-explosion. A gap of such magnitude would surely highlight the strangeness of the story, putting more emphasis on extravagant suspension over metaphorical suspension.

#### 6.4. The Nuance in Ketchup-Man's "Smiling" Sendoff

The differences discussed thus far suggest that the Korean text was constructed more so with an eye toward extravagant suspension over metaphorical suspension, and the conclusion of the narrative would seem to maintain this tilt. At the end of the story, Ketchup-Man laughs, or smiles, or laughs and smiles (the ambiguity of the Japanese verb *warau* allows for any of these interpretations). What is clear, however, is that this laugh or smile is not one of mirth or hilarity,

but rather it can be regarded, from both visual and linguistic clues, as expressing a more somber, melancholic feeling. In contrast to this, the Korean translation seems to convey quite a different interpretation:

*Oneul-do jichin chae jip-euro doraganeun*  
 today-again tired remain home-dat go back.adnominal  
*hae jil nyeok-e gilgeori.*  
 sun goes down time-gen street  
*Meolli ttukkeong-eul eorumanjideon baram-i*  
 head cap-acc caress.adnominal wind-nom  
*aju jamkkan hwiik haneun sori-reul naesseoyo.*  
 very for a while onomatopoeia (whistle) do.adnominal sound-acc make.past.polite  
*Kecheommaen-eun oraenmane useotdamnida.*  
 Ketchup-Man-top for the first time in a long time laugh.past.polite  
 (On the street in the evening, [he] again goes back home tired today. The wind which caressed the cap on his head made a very brief whistling sound. And so Ketchup-Man smiled/laughed for the first time in a long time.)

(Spread 15)

Once again, polite verbal forms play a crucial role in creating a particular sense. As previously noted, polite conjugations convey a gentler tone of voice. Thus, *useotdamnida* (base form: *utda*), the verb with which the story ends, lends a more positive nuance to Ketchup-Man's smile/laugh. A native-speaking Korean informant interpreted the conclusion as follows: His smile/laugh can be seen as peaceful. The gentle wind makes him smile, giving him peace of mind. Thus, Ketchup-Man does not brood on his lot in life; rather, he feels exhausted yet pleased that others recognize his value. What is more, this particular verb form makes the narrator's tone sound more intimate, as though with this closing sentence the narrator more directly addresses the reader, signaling that yes, indeed, this is the end of the tale.

From the perspective of the linguistic choices made, therefore, the Korean text seems less set on aiming to eliciting the original version's sense of <a melancholic if not fatalistic view of coming-of-age in modern society>, especially given the more tranquil note it ends on.

## 7. Concluding Thoughts

N. Suzuki's *Kechappu-Man* initially appears a purely nonsensical picturebook: a literal bottle of ketchup, adorned with arms and legs, lives a seemingly normal existence within human society; an uncanny tomato-headed customer wearing a laboratory coat becomes a regular at the French fry shop where Ketchup-Man works; the enigmatic explosion of said customer's

head sparks a citywide ketchup sensation. Readers can enjoy these nonsensical, thus incongruent, characters and events as superficial curiosities, in which case extravagant suspension takes place, allowing one to accept the surreal story world as it is. However, one can also interpret these unrealistic elements metaphorically, assisted both by linguistic and visual clues, with the titular protagonist representative of an ambitious youth new to working society, and the tomato-headed customer symbolic of relentless, exhausting consumption of the youth's capabilities, leading to his head's climactic explosion: a portrait of youthful ideals and modern realities colliding. Whether or not such metaphorical interpretations are reached depends greatly on several factors, including the reader's level of social maturity, working experience, and/or approach to reading. However, a deeper-level metaphorical interpretation of the narrative allows the various metaphorical suspensions therein to interact with one another, not only making the story a highly congruent tale, but further creating a certain story sense of <a melancholic if not fatalistic view of coming-of-age in modern society> which otherwise fails to appear with a singularly superficial extravagant interpretation. *Kechappu-Man* is a picturebook which not only offers commentary on modern society, but further serves as a great example of how metaphorical suspension can work hand in hand with supporting narrative building blocks to accomplish the artful conveyance of an author's ideas at multiple levels of interpretation.

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