

Topic/Focus Phenomena in Korean and Syntax-Processing/Phonology Interface

In this paper, we argue that concepts of topic/focus are not tied to specific syntactic positions, morphological markers or prosody but are best explained as interface properties of Syntax-Phonology, Syntax-Processing. We will discuss topic/focus phenomena in terms of these interfaces and show that various topic/focus effects are the consequences of left-to-right, incremental structure-building.

Cross-linguistically, it is often observed that given expressions precede new, with a variant of this being that topics generally precede foci (Hajicova, et al 1998). We argue that this tendency, with background topic characteristically occurring at the left periphery, is not due to the fact that topic and focus are related to certain specific syntactic positions. Rather it is due to a relevance-based constraint (Sperber and Wilson 1995) that context-dependent items be placed to minimise search in context for their construal, this being literally secured by initial placement, a choice that ensures optimal access for both speaker and hearer to previously given structure as the point of departure for the current structure-building task, rather than presuming structure is built from scratch each time (Ferreira and Yoshita (2003)).

Nevertheless, as Vermeulen (2007) argued, morphologically topic-marked NPs don't necessarily play the role of a major topic, since the *-wa* NP in (1a) is not a topic NP but a discourse-anaphoric item. Though we do not think topic and discourse-anaphoricity are necessarily to be distinguished, we agree that topic-marked NPs may serve distinct discourse roles. In particular, we argue that in a multiple topic-marked NP construction, the left-most NP serves as the basis for on-going structure building, a pattern which carries over to double nominative marking. In both cases, the second such NP is interpreted relative to the construal of the first in an incremental and recursive way. In a multiple topic-marked or nominative construction, it is very rare in consequence to find the cases when the second or the third topic-marked or nominative NP denotes aboutness of the whole sentence (See (2)-(3)). We will call the left-most topic/nominative NP as the major topic or major subject à la Yoon (in press). Based on Dynamic Syntax framework (Cann et al 2005), we will show how multiple topic-marked or nominative constructions as (2)-(3) can be incrementally built, updating the semantic content of major topic/subject from left-to-right. In the case of double topic-marking the first will set the context (a *linked structure* in DS terms) relative to which the following topic-marked expression provides a context shift (a second *linked structure*), hence its contrastive nature. In double nominative-marking the effect is that of clarificatory apposition, with the second expression constituting an extension of the first leading to a single subject of which the second expression constitutes a modification of the first.

With respect to the supposed Korean preverbal positioning of focus expressions with attendant contrastive stress (Choe 1995), we note that though such correspondence of position and prosodic prominence may be proto-typical, no such one-to-one correspondence between focus effect and specific syntactic position can be sustained, given the common initial placement of WH-marked expressions (4). We argue that this is a consequence of the same relevance-based constraint. For an immediate consequence is that expressions which constitute new information will be placed without pressure for early placement, hence with a preference for right-placement. Given that Korean is a rigid verb-final language, such late NP positioning will be the immediate pre-verbal position, and to be optimal for any expression that is presenting new (i.e. focussed) information will benefit from prosodic salience to incrementally buttress the distinction of such expressions from those which involve reference to what has already been introduced (cf (4)-(5)). In sum, it is interaction

between prosody, linear ordering and constraints on the optimisation of processing which determine topic/focus effects. We hope to accompany these arguments with reports of empirical tests involving completion and judgement tasks probing the incremental nature of production of multiple topic and nominative constructions.

Examples

- (1) Sono inu-ga dare-o kande-simatta no?
That dog-NOM who-ACC bit-closed Q
'Who did the dog bite?'
a. JOHN_i -o Sono-inu-wa kinoo kooen-de *i* kande-simatta
'The dog bit John in the park yesterday.'
- (2) Jina-nun ton-un issta
Jina-TOP money-TOP exist
'As for Jina, she has money.'
'??? As for money, Jina has it.'
- (3) a. Yene-ka Scotland-san-i choyko-ita.
Salmon-NOM Scotland-from-NOM best-BE
'Scottish Salmon is the best.'
b. ???Scotland-san-i yene-ka choyko-ita.
Scotland-from-NOM Salmon-NOM best-BE
Possible reading: As for all things from Scotland, Salmon is the best.'
- (4) A: Nwuka sakwa-lul mekesse?
Who apple-ACC ate?
'Who ate apple?'
B: Jina-ka sakwa-lul mekesse.
Jina-NOM apple-ACC ate
'Jina ate an apple.'
- (5) A: Jina-ka mwuess-ul mekesse?
Jina-NOM what-ACC ate?
'What did Jina eat?'
B: Jina-ka SAKWA-lul mekesse.
Jina-NOM apple-ACC ate
'It is an apple which Jina ate.'

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