**Prosody and semantics of the focus particles always and only in Korean: Theoretical implications from a perception experiment**

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**Synopsis:** This study sheds light on the relationship between prosodic features and semantic functions of Korean focus particles (FPs) hangsang ‘always’ and ocik ‘only’, based on a perception experiment. Nambu and Lee (to appear) found different phonetic realizations for hangsang and ocik in a production experiment, which reflect their semantic distinction (Beaver and Clark 2003, 2008). Following those results, we conducted a perception experiment to examine how much listeners are conscious of those prosodic cues. The results provide evidence that listeners are sensitive to the prosodic patterns of hangsang and ocik with respect to a correlation between prosody and semantics.

**Background:** Previous studies have argued whether the way focus sensitive expressions associate with focused elements should be explained by pragmatics or semantics (e.g., Rooth 1992, 1996, von Fintel 1994, Lambrecht 1994, Roberts 1996). Beaver and Clark (2008) propose a hybrid theory of semantics and pragmatics, called the Quasi/Free/Conventional theory, and claim that associations of always and only with focus are formed differently and have distinct restrictions such as reduced pronouns (1). In their theory, the function of always is categorized as free association, constructing an association with contextually salient sets of events or situations. However, only has the function of conventional association, which constructs an association with a lexically-encoded dependent focus. This implies that prosodic salience of a focused element must be requisite for only to create an association while it is not necessary for always. Nambu and Lee (to appear) pursued this reasoning and conducted a production experiment. The results support Beaver and Clark’s theory, showing that the focused element with ocik is the most prominent in contrast to hangsang (Figure 1).

**Analysis:** To examine whether listeners are conscious of the prosodic features of hangsang and ocik with respect to their semantic distinction, we conducted a rating experiment using a 5-point scale (e.g., 1: very unnatural, 5: very natural). The stimuli consist of pitch contours manually manipulated in Praat (Boersma and Weenink 1999/2010). Figure 2 shows the three different contours for the stimuli with hangsang, labeled as HangsangH for hangsang with a high pitch, FocusH for the focused element, and DoubleH when both the FP and the focused element have high pitches. Following the production experiment by Nambu and Lee (to appear), the manipulated pitch contours were provided in the three different contexts: (i) FPs given without context (2a), (ii) FPs preceded by a prompt question (2b), and (iii) FPs given with a discourse context to elicit the focus effect (2c). In total, 144 sound files (48 sentences * 3 contexts) served as stimuli to 7 native speakers of Korean. The results of ocik (Figure 3b) show that the values of FocusH are the highest (mean: 3.429), followed by OcikH (mean: 2.935) and DoubleH (mean: 2.798) in all of the contexts. The effect of the different contours for ocik is highly significant (F2, 12)=10.868, p<.0001). In addition, the results of a two-way repeated ANOVA do not show a significant interaction effect between the contours and the contexts for ocik (F4, 24]=0.699, p=0.593). This indicates that the listeners prefer the same prosodic pattern for ocik, which has prosodic prominence on a focused element regardless of context. The results of hangsang (Figure 3a), on the other hand, differ in the three contexts (F2, 12]=7.601, p<.01). HangsangH is the highest when without a context (mean: 4.054). DoubleH is the highest with a prompt question (mean: 3.696). When it is within discourse context, DoubleH is the highest (mean: 3.161) but the difference is not significant enough (F2, 12]=0.9003, p=0.411). Thus, the results of hangsang vary depending on the contexts, differently from ocik. In the case of edge-prominence languages (e.g., Korean, Bengali, French), DoubleH is a possible prosodic unit, given that every word can form its Accentual Phrase (Schafer and Jun 2002). There exist two plausible scenarios to explain the different results between hangsang and ocik. One is that the present study supports Beaver and Clark’s (2008) claim, following the results of a production experiment (Nambu and Lee, to appear). ‘Always’ does not need to have the most salient prosody on a focused element to create an association, but ‘only’ needs a prosodic cue to create a conventional association with a focused element. Another scenario is that our examples for hangsang were not interpreted as we expected, but the listeners were inclined to interpret it as an ‘intensifier’; since the predicate, coha hapnita ‘like’, already entails a habitual/stative meaning, the function of hangsang in the sentence is to emphasize that meaning. In that perspective, it is reasonable that the listeners prefer hangsang with stress, in addition to prosodic prominence on a focused element. This scenario is also still consistent with the production results (Figure 1). To settle this issue, it is necessary to conduct another experiment with a different predicate type, such as eat, to exclude the possible interpretation of hangsang as an ‘intensifier’.
(1) Reduced Pronoun in English (Beaver and Clark 2003)

Context: You had many discussions with Sandy, but what I want to know is the extent to which you talked about Fred. Of all the times you talked with Sandy, how often was Fred the person you talked about?

Answer: ‘I always/only discussed him with Sandy.’

(2) a. FPs given without context

Nanun hangsang/ocik mantwulul cohahapnita. ‘I always/only like dumplings.’

b. FPs preceded by a prompt question


c. FPs given with a discourse context


‘There is something I have liked since I was young. When it rained, when it was a holiday, or when I was sick, my elder sister used to make food for me. For this reason, I don’t like other foods. I always/only like dumplings.’

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Selected References