

Licensing conditions for embedded topic in Korean: An experimental approach

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Introduction: This paper investigates the restricted distribution of embedded (non-contrastive) topic in Korean, and the licensing conditions for embedded topics. In order to explore these issues, this paper develops two acceptability judgment tasks that provide experimental evidence that a topic phrase needs both a matrix scope interpretation via LF movement (Han 1998; Portner and Yabushita 1998), and its syntactic position in the left periphery of an embedded clause, which is related to speaker deixis (Haegeman 2006; Tomioka 2012).

Background: Even though topic-marked phrases are allowed in a clausal complement (1), they seem to be very restricted in subordinate clauses, such as relative clauses, noun complement clauses or other adjunct clauses (2). Previous approaches that deal with the restriction of embedded topic in Korean fall into two categories: the “Lack-of-position” analysis (Whitman 1989, Haegeman 2006, among others) and “LF movement” analysis (Han 1998, Portner & Yabushita 1998). The “Lack-of-position” approach argues that a topic phrase cannot occur in certain embedded clauses because they lack the syntactic position for topic that is related to mood markers. The “LF movement” approach claims that a (non-contrastive) topic phrase must be interpreted in the matrix clause. In other words, if a topic is generated and overtly remains in the embedded clause, it has to undergo LF movement to the highest CP layer to be interpreted.

Predictions: The “Lack-of-position” analysis focuses on the role of mood markers. It predicts that any embedded clause that contains a mood marker will allow a topic because the mood marker introduces the syntactic position required for embedded topic. It is unclear, though, if the relation between mood and embedded topic is direct (Topic in Spec of MoodP, Whitman 1989) or indirect (“Speaker Deixis” Phrase, Haegeman 2006). On the other hand, the “LF movement” analysis predicts that an embedded topic cannot occur inside an island regardless of the existence of a mood marker in an embedded clause. These predictions were tested in two written acceptability rating studies.

Experiments: Experiment 1 was designed to examine the effect of mood particle on embedded topic inside an island. It tests the claimed need for a syntactic position introduced by mood. We used 20 sets of the noun complement clauses as in (3) with two factors: a case marker (NOM vs. TOP) and a mood particle (WITH MOOD vs. WITHOUT MOOD). Experiment 2 attempted to test the effect of type of embedded clause, island or non-island, by comparing a clausal complement and a noun complement clause, with a mood particle in each, as in (4). We manipulated the case marker of the embedded subject to examine whether the effects tested were found only with the topic marker. Every target sentence was preceded by a context sentence to induce a non-contrastive reading. 28 native Korean speakers rated the target sentences on a seven-point scale in each experiment.

Results: The mean ratings for Experiment 1 & 2 are presented in (5a-b). In Experiment 1, the interaction of CASE \times MOOD was significant by participants only ($F_1(1,27) = 5.33$, $p < .05$, $F_2(1,19) = 1.61$, $p = .21$), partially confirming the prediction of the “Lack-of-position” analysis that a topic phrase inside a noun complement clause with a mood particle would be more acceptable than without a mood particle. In Experiment 2, the CASE \times EMBEDDED CLAUSE TYPE interaction was significant both in the participants and items analysis ($F_1(1,27) = 7.92$, $p < .01$, $F_2(1,19) = 8.07$, $p < .05$), attributable to the fact that the positive effect of non-island embedded clause type was shown only with the topic marker. The results confirmed the prediction of the “LF movement” analysis that a topic phrase in an island embedded clause would be less acceptable because a topic phrase needs to undergo LF movement out of island.

Discussion: The results have shown each account is not sufficient to fully predict the licensing conditions on embedded topic. Supported by the experimental data, we propose a hybrid approach to the licensing conditions for embedded topic. That is, an embedded topic needs to undergo covert movement to the matrix clause to be interpreted as sentential topic in TopP with a matrix scope. We argue that this is due to the lack of TopP in embedded clauses. In addition to this, an embedded topic also needs a certain syntactic position in an embedded clause, the “Speaker Deixis” Phrase, as a landing site for covert topicalization, which can be indicated by a mood marker or other speaker anchoring-related elements.

Thus, we claim that mood markers function as a processing cue rather than a grammatical condition by itself (cf. Whitman 1989).

- (1) Chelswu-ka [Yenghuy-ka/**nun** yeyppu-**ta**-ko] sayngkakha-n-ta.
C.-NOM Y.-NOM/TOP pretty-DECL-C think-PRES-DECL
'Chelswu thinks that Yenghuy is pretty.'
- (2) a. *John-i [[Mary-**nun** coaha-nun] salam-ul] man-ass-ta. *Relative Clause*
J.-NOM M.-TOP like-REL person-ACC meet-PAST-DECL
'John met a person who Mary likes.'
- b. *John-i [Sue-nun apha-ss-ki ttaymwuney] cenhwa ha-yess-ta. *Because-clause*
J.-NOM S.-TOP sick-PAST because call-PAST-DECL
'John called because Sue was sick.'
- (Han 1998)

(3) Sample Item, Experiment 1

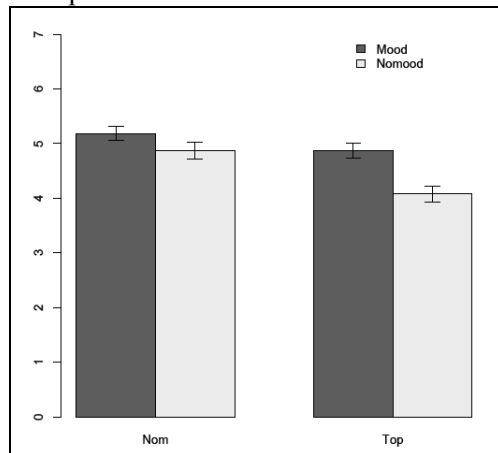
- a. Pippi-ka [[Tommy-**ka**/**nun** Nilsson-ul silhehan-**ta**-nun] sasil]-ul palkhyessta.
P-NOM T-NOM/TOP N-ACC hate-DECL-NM fact-ACC disclosed
'Pippi disclosed the fact that Tommy hates Nilsson.'
- b. Pippi-ka [[Tommy-**ka**/**nun** Nilsson-ul silheha-nun] sasil]-ul palkhyessta.
P-NOM T-NOM/TOP N-ACC hate-NM fact-ACC disclosed
'Pippi disclosed the fact that Tommy hates Nilsson.'

(4) Sample Item, Experiment 2

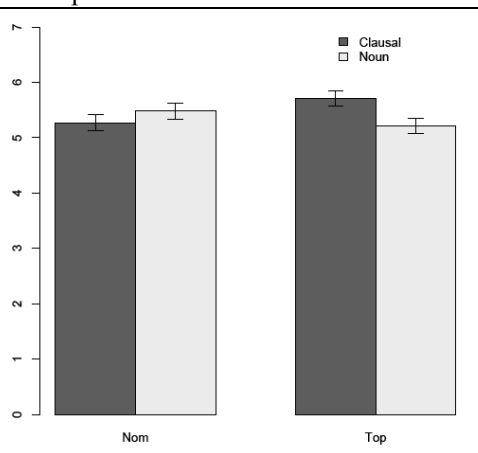
- a. Pippi-ka [Sue-**ka**/**nun** ecey phathi-ey ka-ss-ta-**ko**] tul-ess-ta
P-NOM S-NOM/TOP yesterday party-to go-Past-DECL-C hear-PAST-DECL
'Pippi heard that Sue went to the party yesterday.'
- b. Pippi-ka [Sue-**ka**/**nun** ecey phathi-ey kass-ta-**nun** **sasil**-ul] tul-ess-ta
P-NOM S-NOM TOP yesterday party-to go-Past-DECL-NM fact-Acc hear-PAST-DECL
'Pippi heard the fact that Sue went to the party yesterday.'

(5) Judgment tasks results: Mean acceptability ratings, Experiment 1 & 2

a. Experiment 1



b. Experiment 2



Selected references

Haegeman, L. 2006. Conditionals, factives and the left periphery. *Lingua* 116, 1651-1669. **Han**, Chung-hye. 1998. Asymmetry in the Interpretation of '-(n)un' in Korean. In Noriko Akat-suka et al., editors, *Japanese/Korean Linguistics* 7, pages 1-15. Stanford, CA: CSLI Publications. **Portner**, Paul & Katsuhiko **Yabushita**. 1998. The semantics and pragmatics of Topic phrases, *Linguistics and Philosophy* 21, 117-157. **Tomioka**, Satoshi. 2012. Embedded Wa-phrases, Predication, and Judgment Theory. Ms. University of Delaware. **Whitman**, J., 1989. Topic, modality, and IP structure. In: Kuno, S., et al. (Eds.), *Proceedings of the Third Harvard Workshop on Korean Linguistics*. Hanshun, Seoul.