

Case marking on Korean nominal adverbials correlates with Subject Position

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Overview

- Korean non-argument NPs can appear with a structural Case marker. Today's focus is nominal adverbials.
- In transitive/unergative sentences, the adverbial must be accusative.
In passive/unaccusative sentences, the adverbial can be either nominative or accusative.
- I demonstrate that the choice of nominative vs. accusative in passive/unaccusative constructions correlates with whether the subject has remained within VoiceP or moved higher, presumably to TP.

1 Background

Korean is a nominative-accusative case-marking language.

- Nominative Case marker: *-i* after consonants, *-ka* after vowels
- Accusative Case marker: *-ul* after consonants, *-lul* after vowels

- (1) Mina-ka chayk-**ul** ilk-ess-ta.
Mina-NOM book-ACC read-PST-DECL
'Mina read a book.'

However, there are other things that can be case-marked. I focus on nominal adverbials (section 1.1)

1.1 Nominal adverbial

Durational adverbials (nominal adverbials expressing the duration of an event) can appear with either a postposition (2a) or an accusative case marker (2b).

- (2) a. Mina-ka han sikan tongan chayk-**ul** ilk-ess-ta.
Mina-NOM one hour for book-ACC read-PST-DECL
'Mina read a book for one hour.'
- b. Mina-ka han sikan-**ul** chayk-**ul** ilk-ess-ta.
Mina-NOM one hour-ACC book-ACC read-PST-DECL

Multiplicative adverbials (numeral plus classifier *pen* 'times') can optionally be marked accusative.

- (3) *Multiplicative Adverbial*
- a. Mina-ka sey pen kyengchal-**ul** pwull-ess-ta.
Mina-NOM three times police-ACC call-PST-DECL
'Mina called the police three times.'
- b. Mina-ka sey pen-**ul** kyengchal-**ul** pwull-ess-ta.
Mina-NOM three times-ACC police-ACC call-PST-DECL

1.2 Inalienable possession

Korean has what are called *multiple nominative* and *multiple accusative* constructions: Yoon (2007, 2015) These constructions have a specific semantic profile: One of two possibilities below.

- Lower NP is an inalienable possessee of the higher NP. (“Possessor-type”)
 - Higher NP is a topic or superordinate concept, and the lower NP is a subordinate concept (“Topic-type”)
- (4) *Multiple nominative constructions (relevant NPs boldfaced)*
- a. **Mina-ka khi-ka** khu-Ø-ta.
Mina-NOM height-NOM large-PRES-DECL
‘Mina is tall.’ (Lit. ‘Mina’s height is large.’)
 - b. **kwail-i sakwa-ka** masiss-Ø-ta.
fruit-NOM apple-NOM tasty-PRES-DECL
‘As for fruits, apples are tasty.’
- (5) *Multiple accusative constructions (relevant NPs boldfaced)*
- a. Mina-ka **Inho-lul elkwul-ul** po-ass-ta.
Mina-NOM Inho-ACC face-ACC see-PST-DECL
‘Mina saw Inho’s face.’
 - b. Mina-ka **chayk-ul Hamlet-ul** ilk-ess-ta.
Mina-NOM book-ACC hamlet-ACC read-PST-DECL
‘As for books, Mina read *Hamlet*.’

1.3 Ditransitive constructions

The goal argument of ditransitive constructions are typically dative, but they can be accusative as well.

- (6) Mina-ka Inho-{eykey/lul} ton-ul cwu-ess-ta.
Mina-NOM Inho-{DAT/ACC} money-ACC give-PST-DECL
‘Mina gave Inho money.’

2 Multiple Case options for adverbials in passive/unaccusative constructions

2.1 Case alternation under passivization as a diagnostic for structural Case

In addition to Korean, Case-marked adverbials also appear in German (McFadden 2021), Finnish (Kiparsky 1998, Maling 2009), Russian (Pereltsvaig 2000).

For German, Baker (2015) and McFadden (2021) both agree that accusative marking on adverbials as inherent Case. This is because they do not undergo Case alternation in impersonal passives.

- (7) *German* (McFadden 2021)
- | | |
|---|---|
| a. <i>Active</i>
Der Metallurge spielte den ganzen Tag.
the metallurgist played the whole day.ACC
‘The metallurgist played the whole day.’ | b. <i>Passive</i>
Den ganzen Tag wurde gespielt.
the whole day.ACC was played
roughly ‘They/one played the whole day.’ |
|---|---|

However, not all case-marking on adverbials reflect inherent Case. Finnish accusative-marked adverbials *do* in fact undergo Case alternation.

(8) *Finnish* (Maling 2009)

a. *Active*

(Minää) viivyin matkalla viiko-n.
I.NOM stay.1sS trip-ADESS week-ACC
'I stayed on the trip one week.'

b. *Passive*

Siellä viivyt-tiin kokonainen viiko.
there.ADESS stayed-PST.PASS whole week.NOM
'We/they/one stayed there a whole week.'

2.2 Applying the test to Korean

Korean has *two* Case possibilities in passive/unaccusative constructions. The subject is nominative-marked, but the adverbial can either be nominative or accusative.¹

(9) *Passivization with adverbial* *twu pen* 'two times'

a. *Active*

Yorisa-ka naymbi-lul twu pen-ul talku-ess-ta.
cook-NOM pot-ACC two time-ACC heat-PST-DECL
'The cook heated the pot twice.'

b. *Passive*

Naymbi-ka twu pen-{i/ul} talku-eci-ess-ta.
pot-NOM two time-NOM/ACC heat-PASS-PST-DECL
'The pot was heated twice.'

(10) *Passivization with adverbial* *han sikan* 'one hour'

a. *Active*

Salam-tul-i saysori-lul han sikan-ul tul-ess-ta.
person-PL-NOM birdsong-ACC one hour-ACC hear-PST-DECL
'People heard birdsong for an hour.'

b. *Passive*

Saysori-ka han sikan-{i/ul} tul-li-ess-ta.
birdsong-NOM one hour-NOM/ACC hear-PASS-PST-DECL
'Birdsong was heard for an hour.'

The same holds true for unaccusative verbs such as *nemeci* 'fall down' and *nok* 'melt'.

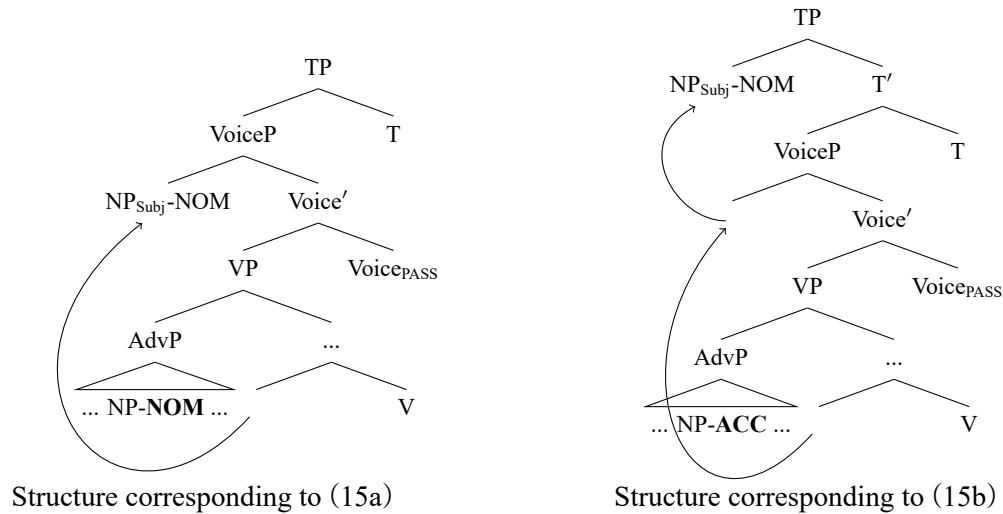
(11) a. Ai-ka sey pen-{i/ul} nemeci-ess-ta.
child-NOM three time-NOM/ACC fall.down-PST-DECL
'The child fell down three times.'

b. Namkuk-i elum-i sip nyen-{i/ul} nok-ass-ta.
Antarctica-NOM ice-NOM ten year-NOM/ACC melt-PST-DECL
'The ice melted in Antarctica for 10 years.'

¹Speaker intuitions vary regarding Case preference: the nominative is generally preferred, but for some verbs like *boil* some speakers prefer the accusative. What's for certain is that **none of the speakers consulted systematically rule out either Case**.

(12) a. Mina-ka sam pwun-ul/*i ttuy-ess-ta.
Mina-NOM three minute-ACC/*NOM run-PST-DECL
'Mina ran for three minutes.'

b. Mina-ka twu pen-ul/*i haphwumha-yess-ta.
Mina-NOM two time-ACC/*NOM yawn-PST-DECL
'Mina yawned twice.'



Note: Korean passive subjects appear to the left of any internal arguments and/or adjuncts. I'm not aware of an analysis for this other than "EPP". Here I just assume that the passive subject always scrambles to Spec, VoiceP.

5 Evidence in support of the positional restriction

5.1 Predicate fronting

In Japanese and Korean nominalized predicates can be fronted like the following.² (For Korean data I present adversative context in parentheses to enforce verum focus and get the right parse).

(16) *Japanese*

[susi-o tabe]-sae John-ga ____ sita.
 sushi-ACC eat-even John-NOM did
 'Even eat sushi, John did.' (Hoji et al. 1989)

(17) *Korean*

[Sakwa-lul mek-ki]-nun Mina-ka ____ mek-ess-ciman, (mas-i eps-ess-ta.)
 apple-ACC eat-NMZ-TOP Mina-NOM eat-PST-but taste-NOM not.exist-PST-DECL
 'As for eating an apple, Mina did do that. (But the apple didn't taste good).

The size of the moved predicate cannot be larger than VoiceP. No tense/aspect available inside:

- (18) a. *[Sakwa-lul mek-ess-ki]-nun Mina-ka mek-ess-ciman...
 apple-ACC eat-PST-NMZ-TOPIC Mina-NOM eat-PST-DECL
 b. *[Sakwa-lul mek-ko.iss-ki]-nun Mina-ka mek-ko.iss-ciman...
 apple-ACC eat-PROG-NMZ-TOPIC Mina-NOM eat-PST-DECL

I adopt previous accounts on these structures (Hoji 1987, and Bae 2022 more recently on Korean):

- (a) Subject moves out of VoiceP to Spec, TP
- (b) Remnant VoiceP undergoes topicalization to clause edge

When a passive predicate with an adverbial is fronted, the adverbial is expected to be accusative.

²Korean fronting has a topicalization effect, while the Japanese translation suggests some focus effect. I do not comment on this difference.

- (19) a. Ai-ka twu pen-ul/i nemeci-ess-ta.
 child-NOM two time-ACC/NOM fall-PST-DECL
 'A child fell down twice.'
- b. [twu pen-**ul** nemeci-ki]-nun ai-ka nemeci-ess-ciman, (kumpang ilenassta.)
 two time-ACC fall-NMZ-TOPIC child-NOM fall-PST-but soon stood.up
 'Falling down twice, the child did do that. (But the child soon stood back up.)'
- c. *[twu pen-**i** nemeci-ki]-nun ai-ka nemeci-ess-ciman, (kumpang ilenassta.)
 two time-NOM fall-NMZ-TOPIC child-NOM fall-PST-but soon stood.up

5.2 Specificity of the subject

With multiplicative adverbials, we can distinguish specific versus non-specific readings of the subject.

The passive subject of (20a) is interpreted as non-specific; it can mean that two different thieves were each arrested once. The passive subject of (20b) is interpreted as specific.

(20) (Lee 2017, her (11))

- a. Totwuk-i twu pen-**i** cap-hi-ess-ta.
 thief-NOM two time-NOM arrest-PASS-PST-DECL
 'It happened twice that a thief was arrested.'
- b. Totwuk-i twu pen-**ul** cap-hi-ess-ta.
 thief-NOM two time-ACC arrest-PASS-PST-DECL
 'A thief (specific) was arrested twice.'

Enter the *Mapping Hypothesis* (Diesing 1992): Indefinite NPs interpreted as specific (referential) vs. non-specific (existential) occupy different syntactic positions.

Under Heim's (1982) analysis of indefinites,

- NPs remaining in the nuclear scope are subject to Existential Closure. (Diesing maps the nuclear scope to VP.)
- NPs that have been raised to the restrictive clause escape Existential Closure and receive a non-existential, referential interpretation. (Diesing maps the restrictor clause to the IP area.)

If escaping out of Existential Closure entails movement out of VoiceP, then the pattern is as expected.

Crucially, when a transitive or unergative construction contains a nominal adverbial (which is always accusative), the subject is interpreted specific – despite the unlikelihood of the scenario.

- (21) a. Sonnim-i kwaca-lul yel pen-ul sa-ss-ta.
 customer-NOM snack-ACC ten time-ACC buy-PST-DECL
 'A (specific) customer bought snacks ten times.'
- b. Sungkayk-i yel pen-ul haphwumha-yess-ta.
 passenger-NOM ten time-ACC yawn-PST-DECL
 'A (specific) passenger yawned ten times.'

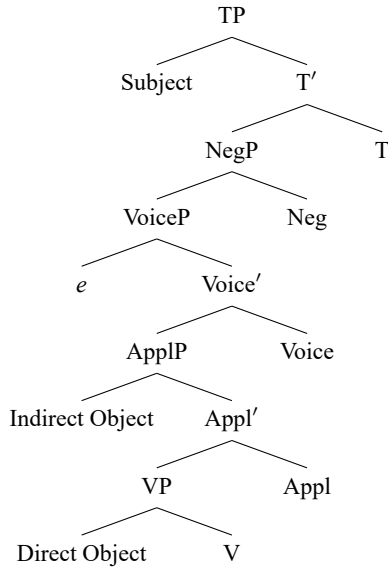
5.3 Intervention effects with Negative Concord Item (NCI) *amwu*³

Korean has an NCI of the format *amwu*-X-to where X can optionally be replaced by light nouns.

- (22) a. *amwu-tey-to*
AMWU-place-TO
'anywhere'
- b. *amwu-kes-to*
AMWU-thing-TO
'anything'
- c. *amwu-Ø-to*
AMWU-Ø-TO
'anyone'

The NCI and negation have to be in the immediate scope of each other (Sells and Kim 2006).⁴

⇒ When a scope-bearing element intervenes between the NCI and negation, we see intervention effects.



- (23) a. **Mina-ka motun ai-eykey amwu-kes-to cwu-ci.anh-ass-ta.*
Mina-NOM every child-DAT AMWU-thing-TO give-NEG-PST-DECL
Intended: 'Mina didn't give every child anything.'
- b. *Mina-ka amwu-hanthey-to motun kes-ul cwu-ci.anh-ass-ta.*
Mina-NOM AMWU-DAT-TO every thing-ACC give-NEG-PST-DECL
'Mina didn't give anyone everything.'

If the Indirect Object is a scope-bearing element and the Direct Object is an NCI, we expect intervention effects as in (23a).

If the Indirect Object is an NCI and the Direct Object is a scope-bearing element, we don't expect intervention effects as in (23b)

Now let us look at examples with accusative-marked adverbials.

(24) is the baseline active sentence, with scope-bearing object *motun kulim* 'every painting' and accusative-marked adverbial *sam nyen* 'three years'.

- (24) *Pakmwulkwon-i motun kulim-ul sam nyen-ul naykel-ess-ta.*
museum-NOM every painting-ACC three year-ACC display-PST-DECL
'The museum displayed every painting for three years.'

(25) shows two passivized versions of (24). The adverbial can either be nominative- or accusative-marked.

³I thank Filipe Hisao Kobayashi for insight and discussion on this section.

⁴Korean NCIs can outscope negation – they can syntactically c-command short form negation, which is said to be prefixed to V.

- (i) *Amwu-to cip-ey an o-ass-ta.*
anyone home-LOC NEG come-PST-DECL
'Nobody came home.'

But the intervention effect still holds: a scope-bearing element like *always* cannot intervene between the NCI and negation.

- (ii) **Amwu-to hangsang cip-ey an o-ass-ta.*
anyone always home-LOC NEG come-PST-DECL
Intended: 'Nobody always came home.'

(Adopted from Sells and Kim 2006)

- (25) a. Motun kulim-i sam nyen-i naykel-li-ess-ta.
 every painting-NOM three year-NOM display-PASS-PST-DECL
 ‘Every painting was displayed for three years.’
 b. Motun kulim-i sam nyen-ul naykel-li-ess-ta.
 every painting-NOM three year-ACC display-PASS-PST-DECL

Now we introduce the NCI *amwu-tey-to* ‘anywhere’ to baseline (24). The sentence is a mouthful, but grammatical with the surface scope reading Neg > every > three.

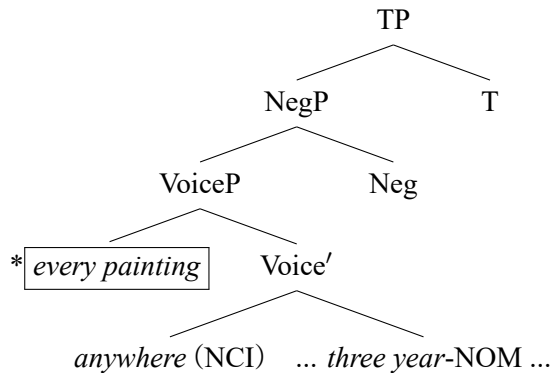
- (26) Pakmwulkwan-i amwu-tey-to motun kulim-ul sam nyen-ul naykel-ci.anh-ass-ta.
 museum-NOM anywhere every painting-ACC three year-ACC display-NEG-PST-DECL
 ‘There is no place such that the museum displayed every painting for three years.’

Crucially, there’s a difference in acceptance between passive (27a) and (27b).

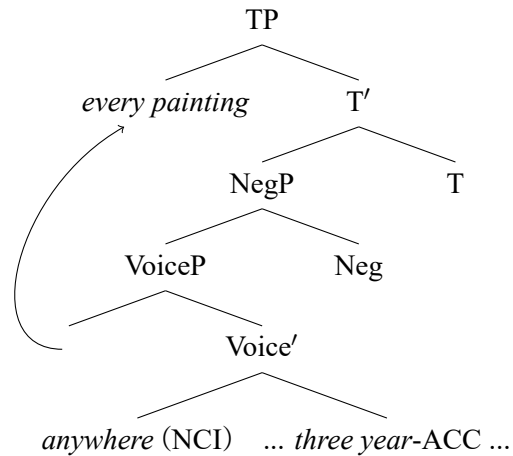
While the degree of contrast varied among speakers, four out of five speakers prefer (27a) over (27b).

- (27) a. %Motun kulim-i amwu-tey-to sam nyen-i naykel-li-ci.anh-ass-ta.
 every painting-NOM anywhere three year-NOM display-PASS-NEG-PST-DECL
 b. Motun kulim-i amwu-tey-to sam nyen-ul naykel-li-ci.anh-ass-ta.
 every painting-NOM anywhere three year-ACC display-PASS-NEG-PST-DECL
 ‘Every painting is such that they weren’t displayed anywhere for three years.’

Structure of (27a) – Intervention occurs



Structure of (27b) – No intervention



6 Summary

- Korean shows both nominative and accusative Case options for nominal adverbials in passive sentences.
- I proposed a Dependent Case assignment mechanism where only a c-commanding NP at Spec, TP counts as a competitor for dependent accusative Case assignment. Crucially, a subject NP remaining within VoiceP cannot trigger accusative Case to NPs it c-commands.
- I discussed arguments from VoiceP fronting, specificity of the subject, and NCI intervention in support of my proposal.
- The arguments presented strongly suggest that the subject *moves out of VoiceP* when there are accusative things downstairs. Whether *the landing site is Spec, TP* is an independent matter. Previous studies that I build on assume that the subject raises to Spec, TP, which is reasonable. But since I’m proposing a positional restriction on case licensing, more direct evidence of the landing site would be enlightening.

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