

## **On the semantics-driven disambiguation in the processing of Korean comparative constructions**

This study investigates the role of the lexical-semantic features of incoming words for the disambiguation of locally ambiguous comparative constructions in Korean, illustrated in the following:

Tasha-TOP Mary-POSTPOSITION(="than") Sue-OBJ like

- (1) [Tasha-TOP Mary-OBJ(Theme) like]-than Sue-OBJ more like  
“Tasha likes Sue more than Tasha likes Mary.”
- (2) Tasha-TOP [Mary-NOM(Experiencer) Sue-OBJ like]-than Sue-OBJ more like  
“Tasha likes Sue more than Mary likes Sue.”

Given Minimal Attachment, (1) is expected to be selected at the OBJ position. However, the strength of semantic association between the compared words might play a critical role in the disambiguation process. In the example like (3), it could be hypothesized that the interpretation like (2) would be preferred against Minimal Attachment due to the strong semantic relationship between ‘a chef’ and ‘cooking’.

- (3) Tasha-TOP chef-than cooking-OBJ well do

To test this hypothesis, we constructed 60 experiment sentences (20 per condition) which were manipulated in terms of semantic association between the words to be compared: (a) no association (b) weak association (c) strong association; 34 Korean native speakers were required to supplement the sentence final verb which was missing.

Our results indicate the proportional increase of the sentence completion like (2) as the strength of semantic association between the words to be compared increases: (a) vs. (b):  $t(33) = 15.50, p < .001$ ; (b) vs. (c):  $t(33) = -8.70, p < .001$ .

These results demonstrate that the lexical-semantic features of incoming words strongly contribute to disambiguate the locally ambiguous comparative construction of Korean.