

Differences Between Korean Null Arguments and Korean Overt Pronouns

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ABSTRACT

The ultimate goal of this paper is to provide five pieces of evidence that Korean null pronouns are not semantically and syntactically equivalent to Korean overt pronouns. First, when Korean overt pronouns and Korean null pronouns have the only NP as their antecedent, the truth condition becomes different. Second, when Korean overt pronouns and Korean null pronouns take the even NP as their antecedent, the truth condition becomes different. Third, the Korean overt pronoun *ku* 'he' is associated with its antecedent by coreference, whereas Korean null pronouns are associated with their antecedent by binding. Fourth, Korean overt pronouns yield a strict reading, whereas Korean null arguments induce the strict/sloppy ambiguity. This in turn suggests that Korean null pronouns yield looser interpretations than Korean overt pronouns. Additionally, it is worth noting that Korean overt pronouns induce a definite reading, whereas Korean null pronouns yield indefinite and definite readings. Fifth, Korean overt pronouns and Korean null pronouns are not alike in that the former is sensitive to phi-features (gender, number, and person), whereas the latter is not. This paper argues that Korean null pronouns are not syntactically the equivalent of Korean overt pronouns.

Keywords: null pronoun, overt pronoun, null argument, binding, coreference, sloppy identity, definite reading

INTRODUCTION

The main goal of this paper is to provide evidence that Korean null pronouns are not semantically and syntactically equivalent to Korean overt pronouns. The organization of this paper is as follows. In section 2.1, we show that when Korean overt pronouns and Korean null pronouns have the only NP as their antecedent, the truth condition becomes different. In section 2.2, we argue that when Korean overt pronouns and Korean null pronouns take the even NP as their antecedent, the truth condition becomes different. In section 2.3, we further argue that the Korean overt pronoun *ku* 'he' is associated with its antecedent by coreference, whereas Korean null pronouns are associated with their antecedent by binding. In section 2.4, we maintain that Korean overt pronouns yield a strict reading, whereas Korean null arguments induce the strict/sloppy ambiguity. This in turn suggests that Korean null pronouns yield looser interpretations than Korean overt pronouns. Additionally, we show that Korean overt pronouns induce a definite reading, whereas Korean null pronouns yield indefinite and definite readings. In section 2.5, we argue that Korean overt pronouns and Korean null pronouns are not alike in that the former is sensitive to phi-features (gender, number, and person), whereas the latter is not. We demonstrate that Korean null arguments are not syntactically equivalent to Korean overt pronouns.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN KOREAN OVERT PRONOUNS AND KOREAN NULL ARGUMENTS

The Only NP and the Truth Condition

The main goal of this section is to verify that in some environments, Korean overt pronouns and Korean null pronouns are synonymously used, but the former is not equivalent to the latter. In this section, we provide evidence that Korean null pronouns are not semantically equivalent to Korean overt pronouns. We show that when Korean overt pronouns and Korean null pronouns have the only NP as their antecedent, the truth condition becomes different.

Now let us consider (1) and (2):

(1) John_i-mani ku_i-ka ikilkessila-ko sayngkakhanta.
only he-NOM will win-COMP think
(Only John thinks that he will win.)

(2) John_i-mani e_i ikilkessila-ko sayngkakhanta.
only will win-COMP think
(Only John thinks that he will win.)

When Korean overt pronouns and Korean null pronouns have the only NP as their antecedent, the truth condition becomes different. In some environments, Korean overt pronouns and Korean null pronouns are interchangeable, but the following state of affairs suggests the opposite:

(3) =0
John — John
Jim — Jim
Bill — Bill
Tom — Tom

In (3), John is not the only person who thinks that he will win. In (3), Jim, Bill, and Tom think that they themselves will win. This is not compatible with (1). In (3), John is not the only one who thinks that he will win, which renders (1) false.

Now let us consider the following state of affairs:

(4) =0
John — John
Mary — John
Bill — John
Tom — John

We understand (1) as false since in (4), John is not the only person who thinks that he will win. That is to say, Mary, Bill, and Tom think that John will win, which is not compatible with (1).

Now let us observe (5):

(5) =1
John — John
Mary — Mary
Bill — Bill
Tom — Tom

In (5), John is the only person who thinks that he will win. Mary, Bill, and Tom do not think that they themselves will win. In addition, they do not think that John or someone else will win. Thus, (5) is compatible with (1), which renders (1) true.

Now let us observe (2) and (6):

(6) =0

John — John
 Mary — Mary
 Bill — Bill
 Tom — Tom

In (6), John is not the only person who is likely to win. That is to say, Mary, Bill, and Tom think that they themselves will win. We take (2) as indicating that John is the only person who is likely to win. This is not compatible with the state of affairs in (6), which renders (2) false.

Now observe the following state of affairs:

(7) =0

John — John
 Mary — Mary
 Bill — Bill
 Tom — Tom

In (7), John is not the only person who is likely to win. That is to say, Mary thinks that Bill will win and Bill thinks that Mary will win, which is not compatible with (2). The meaning of (2) is 'John is the only person who is likely to win'.

Now let us consider the following state of affairs:

(8) =1

John — John
 Mary — Mary
 Bill — Bill
 Tom — Tom

The state of affairs in (8) is in accordance with the meaning of (2). More specifically, in (8), John is the only person who is likely to win. John thinks that he will win and Mary, Bill, and Tom think that John will win. Thus, the state of affairs in (8) renders (2) true. This in turn suggests that Korean null pronouns are not semantically equivalent to Korean overt pronouns and that Korean null pronouns are null arguments different from overt pronouns.

The Even NP and the Truth Condition

In this section, we show that when Korean overt pronouns and Korean null pronouns take the even NP as their antecedent, the truth condition becomes different. Let us consider the following examples:

(9) John cocha ku-ka ttokttokhata-ko sayngkakhanta.

even he-NOM intelligent-COMP think

(Even John thinks that he is intelligent.)

(10) John cocha e ttokttokhata-ko sayngkakhanta.
even intelligent-COMP think
(Even John thinks that he is intelligent.)

Now let us observe the following state of affairs:

(11) =1
John — John
Mary — Mary
Bill — Bill
Tom — Tom

The state of affairs in (11) renders (9) true since Mary, Bill, and Tom think that John is intelligent and even John thinks that he himself is intelligent. The meaning of (9) is 'everyone thinks that John is intelligent and John is the last person who thinks that he is intelligent'.

However, let us consider the state of affairs in (12):

(12) =0
John — John
Mary — Mary
Bill — Bill
Tom — Tom

The meaning of (12) is 'for every x, x thinks that x is intelligent'. However, (9) indicates that everyone thinks that John is intelligent and John is the last person who thinks that he himself is intelligent. Thus, this is not compatible with the state of affairs in (12).

Now let us consider (10) and the state of affairs in (13):

(13) =1
John — John
Mary — Mary
Bill — Bill
Tom — Tom

The meaning of (10) is 'for every x, x thinks that x is intelligent and John is the last person who thinks that he is intelligent'. Thus, the state of affairs in (13) renders (10) true.

Now consider the state of affairs in (14):

(14) =0
John — John
Mary — Mary
Bill — Bill
Tom — Tom

The state of affairs in (14) indicates that everyone thinks that John is intelligent. However, (10) clearly indicates that for every x, x thinks that x is intelligent and John is the last person who thinks that he is intelligent. This is not compatible with the state of affairs in (14). Thus, (14)

renders (10) false. This in turn suggests that Korean null pronouns are not equivalent to Korean overt pronouns.

Binding and Coreference

In what follows, we wish to argue that the Korean overt pronoun *ku* 'he' is associated with its antecedent by coreference, whereas Korean null subjects are associated with their antecedent by binding. Reinhart (1983, 1993) argues that Binding Theory regulates the distribution of bound anaphora, not coreference and that coindexed anaphora allows binding. Let us begin making a difference between binding and coreference. Let us observe (15):

(15) Tom-cocha ku-casin-ul piphanhayssta.

even he-self-ACC criticized

(Even Tom criticized himself.)

(a) Most men criticized themselves (binding)

(For most men *x*, *x* criticized *x* and Tom is the last person who criticized himself.

(b) Most men criticized Tom (coreference)

(For most men *x*, *x* criticized Tom, and Tom is the last person who criticized himself.

As illustrated in (15), the Korean reflexive *ku-casin* 'se-self' is associated with its antecedent either by binding or by coreference. More specifically, the Korean reflexive *ku-casin* 'he-self' induces a bound variable reading, whereas it can be associated with its antecedent through coreference. The following sentences also provide a clear distinction between coreference and binding in the non-local context with Korean overt pronouns and Korean null pronouns:

(16) Tom_i-cocha ku_i-ka ku_i-uy tongsayng-ul piphanhayssta-ko

even he-NOM he-GEN brother-ACC criticized

malhayssta said

(Even Tom said that he criticized his brother.)

Most men said that they criticized Tom's brother (coreference)

(For most men *x*, *x* said that *x* criticized Tom's brother and Tom is the last person who criticized his brother.)

(17) Tom_i-cocha e_i ku_i-uy tongsayng-ul piphanhayssta-ko

even he-GEN brother-ACC criticized

malhayssta said

(Even Tom said that he criticized his brother.)

Most men said that they criticized their brother (binding)

(For most men *x*, *x* said that *x* criticized *x*'s brother and Tom is the last person who criticized his brother.)

As indicated in (16) and (17), the Korean overt pronoun *ku* 'he' is associated with its antecedent by coreference. On the other hand, the Korean null subject is associated with its antecedent by binding. This in turn suggests that in some environments, Korean overt pronouns and Korean null pronouns are synonymously used, but the former is not equivalent to the latter.

The same applies to QP/WH-antecedents. The assumption that Korean overt pronouns and Korean null pronouns are non-locally bound is widely accepted in the literature:

(18) Tom_i-i ku_i-ka ttokttokhata-ko sayngkakhanta.

NOM he-NOM intelligent-COMP think

(Tom thinks that he is intelligent.)

(19) Tom_i-i e_i ttokttokhata-ko sayngkakhanta.

NOM intelligent-COMP think

(Tom thinks that he is intelligent.)

When a DP occurs as the antecedent, there is no difference in naturalness between Korean overt pronouns and Korean null pronouns. However, when a QP appears as the antecedent, the difference in naturalness between Korean overt pronouns and Korean null pronouns is sharper:

(20) *Nwukwuna_i ku_i-ka ttokttokhata-ko sayngkakhanta.

everyone he-NOM intelligent-COMP think

(Everyone thinks that he is intelligent.)

(21) Nwukwuna_i e_i ttokttokhata-ko sayngkakhanta.

everyone intelligent-COMP think

(Everyone thinks that he is intelligent.)

The ungrammaticality of (20) indicates that binding is not available for the Korean overt pronoun *ku* 'he', whereas binding is available for the Korean null subject. More specifically, the Korean null subject gives rise to a bound variable reading, whereas the Korean overt pronoun *ku* 'he' does not. An important question that naturally arises is "why is (18) grammatical?" We wish to argue that in (18), the Korean overt pronoun *ku* 'he' is associated with its antecedent not through binding but through coreference. Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that Korean overt pronouns are associated with their antecedent by coreference, whereas Korean null pronouns are associated with their antecedent by binding. This in turn suggests that Korean null pronouns are not pro but null arguments different from Korean overt pronouns.

Sloppy Identity and a Definite Reading

The so-called sloppy identity has been discussed in Keenan (1971), Sag (1976), Williams (1977), Partee (1978), Reinhart (1983), Heim and Kratzer (1997), Buring (2005), Mckillen (2016), and others. In (22), the second conjunct is two ways ambiguous between (a) and (b):

(22) Tom admired his teacher and so did Mary.

(a) On the strict reading

Tom admired Tom's teacher and Mary admired Tom's teacher.

Tom (λx (x admired his (=Tom's) teacher))

Mary (λx (x admired his (=Tom's) teacher))

(b) On the sloppy reading

Tom admired Tom's teacher and Mary admired Mary's teacher.

Tom (λx (x admired x's teacher))

Mary (λx (x admired x's teacher))

As alluded to in (22), the second conjunct induces sloppy and strict readings under VP ellipsis. In order to verify that Korean null pronouns are not semantically equivalent to Korean overt

pronouns, we are now in a position to consider Korean null pronouns and Korean overt pronouns under sloppy identity.

(23) a. Tom-un palamkwa hamkkey salacita-lul ilkessta.

TOP wind with gone-ACC read

(Tom read gone with the wind.)

b. Bill-to ku-kess-ul ilkessta.

too it-ACC read

(Bill read it, too.)

c. Mary-to e ilkessta.

too read

(Mary read it, too.)

(23b) means that Bill read the same book (gone with the wind) Tom read (a strict reading). Likewise, (23c) means that Mary read the same book (gone with the wind) Tom and Bill read (a strict reading). This seems to suggest that Korean overt pronouns and Korean null pronouns are synonymously used. However, (24) provides further confirmation that Korean null pronouns are not semantically equivalent to Korean overt pronouns:

(24) a. Tom-un twukwen-uy chayk-ul ilkessta.

TOP two-GEN book-ACC read

(Tom read two books.)

b. Bill-to ku-kess-tul-ul ilkessta.

too them-ACC read

(Bill read them, too.)

(25) a. Tom-un twukwen-uy chayk-ul ilkessta.

TOP two-GEN book-ACC read

(Tom read two books.)

b. Mary-to e ilkessta.

too read

(Mary read them, too.)

(24b) means that Bill read two books Tom read (a strict reading). On the other hand, (25b) means that Mary read two books Tom read (a strict reading). In addition, (25b) means that Mary read two books Tom did not read (a sloppy reading). In a word, (25b) induces the strict/sloppy ambiguity. This in turn suggests that Korean null pronouns yield looser interpretations than Korean overt pronouns. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that Korean null pronouns are not semantically equivalent to Korean overt pronouns.

The fact that Korean overt pronouns induce a definite reading, whereas Korean null pronouns yield indefinite and definite readings lends its support to the assumption that Korean null pronouns are not semantically equivalent to Korean overt pronouns:

(26) a. Tom-un caymiissnun yenghwa-lul hanpyen

TOP interesting movie-ACC a

poassta.

saw

(Tom saw an interesting movie.)

b. Bill-to ku-kess-ul poassta.

too it-ACC saw
(Bill saw an interesting movie, too.)

(27) a. Tom-un caymiissnun yenghwa-lul hanpyen
TOP interesting movie-ACC a
poassta.
saw
(Tom saw an interesting movie.)
b. Bill-to e poassta.
too saw
(Bill saw an interesting movie, too.)

In (26), the Korean overt pronoun *ku-kess* 'it' is interpreted to mean that Bill saw an interesting movie and that Tom and Bill saw the same movie. This is something corresponding to the English definite pronoun *it*. On the other hand, the null argument *e* indicates that Bill saw an interesting movie that Tom did not see. In this case, the referent of the null argument *e* is something corresponding to the English indefinite pronoun *one*. In addition, the null argument *e* indicates that Bill saw the same movie that Tom saw. Thus, the referent of the null argument *e* is something to the English definite pronoun *it*. To sum up, Korean overt pronouns yield a definite reading, whereas Korean null pronouns give rise to indefinite and definite readings.

Likewise, the following sentences clearly show that Korean overt pronouns yield a definite reading, whereas Korean null pronouns give rise to indefinite and definite readings:

(28) a. Tom-un sekwen-uy chayk-ulilkessta.
TOP three-copies-GEN book-ACC read
(Tom read three books.)
b. Bill-to ku-kess-tul-ul ilkessta.
too them-ACC read
(Bill read them, too.)

(29) a. Tom-un sekwen-uy chayk-ulilkessta.
TOP three copies-GEN book-ACC read
(Tom read three books.)
b. Bill-to e ilkessta.
too read
(Bill read them, too.)

In (28), the overt pronoun *ku-kess-tul* 'they' indicates that Tom and Bill read the same three books. This is something corresponding to the English definite pronoun *it*. In (29), on the other hand, the null argument *e* indicates that Bill read three books that Tom did not read. This is something corresponding to the English indefinite pronoun *one*. In addition, it is interpreted as 'Tom and Bill read the same three books', which is something corresponding to the English definite pronoun *it*. We thus conclude that Korean overt pronouns yield a definite reading, whereas Korean null pronouns give rise to indefinite and definite readings. Simply put, Korean null pronouns yield looser interpretations than Korean overt pronouns. This in turn implies that Korean null pronouns are not semantically equivalent to Korean overt pronouns.

Phi-features and Agreement

Korean overt pronouns and Korean null pronouns are not alike in that the former is sensitive to phi-features (gender, number, and person), whereas the latter is not. We demonstrate that Korean null pronouns are syntactically equivalent to Korean overt arguments. Let us consider the following sentences:

(30) Nwu-ka ikilkessila-ko ne-nun sayngkakhani?
Who-NOM will win-COMP you-TOP think
(Who do you think will win?)

(31) a. Ku [points to Tom]-ka ikilkeya.
he-NOM will win
(Tom will win.)
b. e [points to Tom] ikilkeya.
will win
(Tom will win.)

As shown in (31a) and (31b), the speaker employs the pointing effect in order to denote a particular entity or entities. The Korean overt pronoun *ku* 'he' can refer to *Tom*. Likewise, the null argument *e* can also refer to *Tom*, which depends on the speaker's intention. This seems to suggest that Korean overt pronouns and Korean null arguments are synonymously used. However, the following sentences indicate that Korean null arguments are not syntactically equivalent to Korean overt arguments:

(32) Nwu-ka ikilkessila-ko ne-nun sayngkakhani?
Who-NOM will win-COMP you-TOP think
(Who do you think will win?)

(33) a. *Ku [points to Tom and Bill]-ka ikilkeya.
he-NOM will win
(Tom and Bill will win.)
b. e [points to Tom and Bill] ikilkeya.
will win
(Tom and Bill will win.)

As indicated in (33a), the Korean overt pronoun *ku* 'he' cannot refer to *Tom* and *Bill* since it is a singular dependent term. On the other hand, the null argument *e* can refer to *Tom* and *Bill*. The pointing effect does not work for (33a), which in turn indicates that the overt pronoun *ku* 'he' is sensitive to the number feature. On the other hand, the pointing effect works for (33b), which in turn implies that the null argument *e* is not sensitive to the number feature. In a word, Korean null arguments are not exactly the syntactic equivalent of Korean overt pronouns. The same applies to the gender feature:

(34) a. *Tom-i ku-nye [points to Jim]-lul pipphanhaysse.
NOM she-ACC criticized
(Tom criticized Jim.)
b. Tom-i e [points to Jim] pipphanhaysse.
NOM criticized
(Tom criticized Jim.)

As alluded to in (34a), the Korean overt pronoun *ku-nye* 'she' cannot refer to *Jim*. The ungrammaticality of (34a) is attributed to the fact that *ku-nye* 'she' does not agree in gender with *Jim*. That is, Korean overt pronouns are sensitive to the gender feature. However, we attribute the grammaticality of (34b) to the fact that Korean null arguments are not sensitive to the gender feature. This in turn suggests that Korean null arguments have more functional load than Korean overt pronouns.

Finally, let us consider the following sentences:

(35) a. *Tom-i ku [points to us]-lul pipphanhaysse.

NOM he-ACC criticized

(Tom criticized us.)

b. Tom-i e [points to us] pipphanhaysse.

NOM criticized

(Tom criticized us.)

We attribute the ungrammaticality of (35a) to person disagreement between *ku* 'he' and us, which indicates that Korean overt pronouns are sensitive to the person feature. On the other hand, the null argument *e* can refer to us, which suggests that Korean null arguments are not sensitive to the person feature. From all of this, it is clear that Korean overt pronouns are sensitive to phi-features, whereas Korean null arguments are not. We thus conclude that Korean null arguments have more functional load than Korean overt pronouns.

CONCLUSION

The main purpose of this paper is to provide evidence that Korean null pronouns are not semantically and syntactically equivalent to Korean overt pronouns. In section 2.1, we have shown that when Korean overt pronouns and Korean null pronouns have the only NP as their antecedent, the truth condition becomes different. In section 2.2, we have argued that when Korean overt pronouns and Korean null pronouns take the even NP as their antecedent, the truth condition becomes different. In section 2.3, we have maintained that the Korean overt pronoun *ku* 'he' is associated with its antecedent by coreference, whereas Korean null pronouns are associated with their antecedent by binding. Reinhart (1983, 1993) argues that Binding Theory regulates the distribution of bound anaphora, not coreference and that coindexed anaphora allows binding. In section 2.4, we have contended that Korean overt pronouns yield a strict reading, whereas Korean null arguments induces the strict/sloppy ambiguity. This in turn suggests that Korean null pronouns yield looser interpretations than Korean overt pronouns. In addition, we have shown that Korean overt pronouns induce a definite reading, whereas Korean null pronouns yield indefinite and definite readings. In section 2.5, we have argued that Korean overt pronouns and Korean null pronouns are not alike in that the former is sensitive to phi-features (gender, number, and person), whereas the latter is not. We have demonstrated that Korean null arguments are not syntactically equivalent to Korean overt pronouns.

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