

Formal/Syntax

NPI Licensing and Intervention Effects in Korean

In this paper I present novel evidence for a kind of Intervention Effect (cf. Beck & Kim 1997, Tanaka 1997) in Korean, where the licensing of Negative Polarity Items can be disrupted by certain modal operators. I propose an analysis based on a feature percolation approach to NPI licensing, and show that my proposal makes a number of correct predictions regarding the distribution of NPIs and modals.

As shown in (1a,b), the Korean modal form ‘-(u)l *swu iss-*’ is ambiguous between an epistemic (possibility) reading and a root (ability) reading. Interestingly, when the subject DP is replaced by NPIs such as *amwuto* ‘anyone’ or NP-*ppakey* ‘NP-except’, the root ability reading disappears as shown in (2).

I provide data to argue for the hierarchy of functional projections in (3) for Korean (cf. Cinque 1999), and I assume that the subject and the object are raised to Spec/TP and Spec/vP respectively. I propose two hypotheses regarding NPI licensing in Korean.

A) *Feature Percolation and Intervention Effects*

The Neg feature of the Neg head can percolate up to higher phrases unless there is an intervening operator.

B) *NPI licensing*

An NPI is licensed if immediately dominated by a node carrying the Neg feature.

This analysis accounts for the lack of the root modal reading in (2). In (4a), the Neg feature of the short form negation can only percolate up to vP under hypothesis (A), since the modal blocks further percolation. Therefore the NPI in spec/TP is not immediately dominated by a node carrying the Neg feature and it cannot be licensed. As a result, the structure in (4a) is ruled out and (2) cannot have a root modal reading. On the other hand, in (4b), the epistemic modal is higher than TP, and therefore the Neg feature is able to percolate up to TP. The NPI is therefore licensed with the epistemic modal reading.

This analysis makes a number of predictions. First, in both (4a) and (4b), the object positions are under the c-command domain of vP and TP. Thus, it is predicted that when the object DP in (1b) is replaced by an NPI, both the root and epistemic readings should be available. And this prediction is borne out, as shown in (5).

Second, it is predicted that any negative sentence with obligation modality and a subject NPI will be ruled out, since the obligation modal dominates both short form negation and long form negation, while being dominated by TP, whose specifier position is filled with the subject NPI (see (3)). This prediction is also borne out. In (6), to license the subject NPI in spec/TP, the Neg feature must percolate up to TP. However, an intervening Mod_{obligation}P blocks the feature percolation. Thus, the NPI cannot be licensed and this results in ungrammaticality.

Finally, it is predicted that negative sentences with epistemic necessity modality and subject NPIs will be grammatical, since the Mod_{necessity}P is higher than TP. Again, this prediction turns out to be correct. As shown in (7), the Neg feature percolates up to TP. Thus, the NPI is licensed and the structure is grammatical.

