

Inalienable Possession Relation in Processing Korean Double Accusative Constructions

This research investigates how Korean speakers process potentially ambiguous constructions that contain a sequence of two accusative noun phrases. In head-final languages, where case marking is an important source of information concerning sentence structure, an accusative-marked noun phrase is analyzed as an object of its clause and the second in a sequence of two accusative-marked noun phrases is typically taken to be the object of a new clause (Miyamoto 2002). However, Korean also has Double Accusative Constructions that includes two accusative noun phrases which enter into an inalienable relation (e.g., '*Jinhi-ka(Nom) Mina-lul(Acc) meli-lul(Acc) ttaylyessta* 'Jinhi hit **Mina's head**').

Thus, a sequence of two accusative noun phrases is temporarily ambiguous, especially when they allow an inalienable possession relation: they can be taken to be co-arguments of a monoclausal double accusative construction as exemplified above, or arguments of a biclausal construction where the second noun phrase is the object of an embedded clause (e.g., '*Jinhi-ka(Nom) Mina-lul(Acc) meli-lul(Acc) ttaylin namcaeykey ponayssta* 'Jinhi sent **Mina** to the man who hit (her) **head**').

This study investigates how Korean speakers resolve the local ambiguity by addressing two research questions: (1) whether they initially give a biclausal interpretation based on only the grammatical information associated with case markers, or whether they initially favor a monoclausal interpretation based on the possible existence of a double accusative construction, and (2) how the different types of semantic relations manifested by a sequence of two noun phrases affect the initial interpretation of the sentences.

Fifty-four Korean speakers participated in a self-paced reading task in which they were asked to read biclausal constructions containing a sequence of two accusative noun phrases which involve three types of semantic relations: no plausible semantic relation (Unrelated Condition), a potential relation of inalienable possession (Inalienable Condition) or a potential relation of alienable possession (Alienable Condition), as illustrated in (1-3).

The results showed a significant effect of inalienable possession in that the Inalienable Condition showed different reading patterns than other conditions. At the second accusative noun phrase, the adverb phrase, and the head noun of relative clause, the Inalienable Condition showed shorter reading time than the other conditions, which suggests that the second accusative noun phrase was initially interpreted as an argument of a monoclausal double accusative construction (the creation of a new clause is known to increase processing time). But the Inalienable Condition showed greater increase in reading times than the other conditions at the head noun, where the second accusative noun phrase has to be reanalyzed as the object of the embedded clause.

A Korean corpus indicates that only the inalienable possession relation is more frequently involved in double accusative constructions than in biclausal constructions. The reading time patterns and the corpus study offer evidence that Korean speakers process sentences incrementally by rapidly integrating various sources of information such as the grammatical information associated with case marking, the nature of semantic relations between two accusative noun phrases, and the frequency of each type of semantic relation.

Examples

(1) *Unrelated Condition*

Mina-ka **Jinhi-lul hayngin-ul** iywuepsi ttaylyess-ten kkangphay-eykey ponayssta
 Mina-Nom Jinhi-Acc passerby-Acc without reason hit-Rel gangster-Dat sent
 ‘Mina sent Jinhi to the gangster who hit a passerby without reason.’

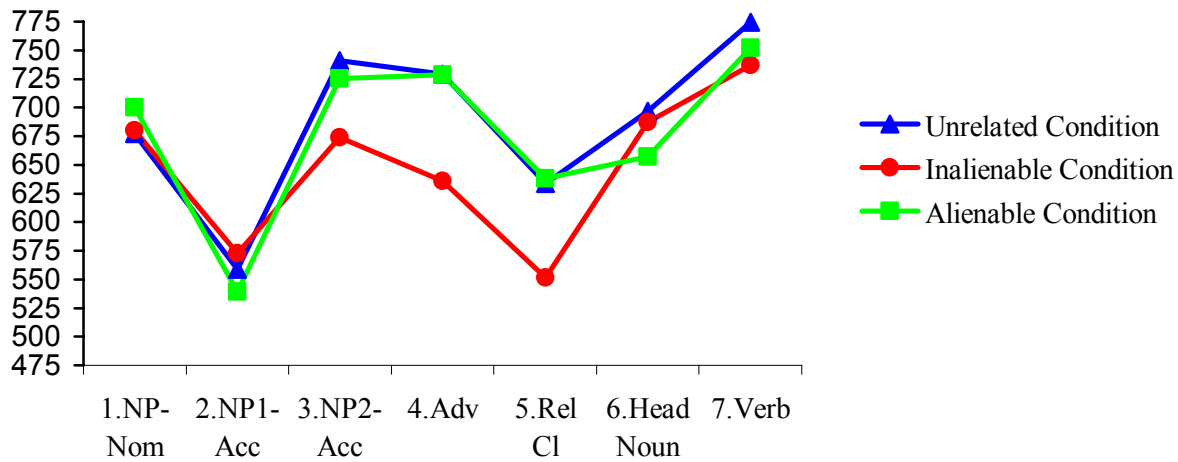
(2) *Inalienable Condition*

Mina-ka **Jinhi-lul meli-lul** iywuepsi ttaylyess-ten kkangphay-eykey ponayssta
 Mina-Nom Jinhi-Acc head-Acc without reason hit-Rel gangster-Dat sent
 ‘Mina sent Jinhi to the gangster who hit (her) head without reason.’

(3) *Alienable Condition*

Mina-ka **Jinhi-lul tongsayng-ul** iywuepsi ttaylyess-ten kkangphay-eykey ponayssta
 Mina-Nom Jinhi-Acc brother-Acc without reason hit-Rel gangster-Dat sent
 ‘Mina sent Jinhi to the gangster who hit (her) brother without reason.’

Figure 1. Reading times for each region in embedded clauses with **two accusative NPs**



References

Miyamoto, E. T. 2002. Case marker as clause boundary inducers in Japanese. *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research* 31:307–47.