

## Discourse-functional Correlates of Argument Structure in Korean Acquisition

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A fundamental assumption of discourse-functional theory is that in order to understand grammar, we must understand the functions it serves in discourse. In this paper I will present a discourse-functional approach to the acquisition of Korean argument structure, showing that semantic and discourse-pragmatic functions are correlated with three major features of argument structure: argument realization (surface form), argument role (S: subject of intransitive verb, A: subject of transitive verb, O: direct object of transitive verb), and argument marking (nominative, accusative, topic).

The data come from 13 transcribed sessions of Korean discourse in which two girls, initially aged 1;8 and 1;10, were recorded every two weeks for a year in interaction with their mothers. The S, A, and O arguments of verbs were coded for their formal, semantic, and discourse-pragmatic properties in all of the children's speech and in samples of the mothers' speech.

Argument realization. The forms used to encode arguments (Noun, Deictic Pronoun, Personal Pronoun, Ellipsis) have strong semantic and discourse-pragmatic correlates. Statistical analysis using multinomial logistic regression confirms that each of seven factors exerts a significant, independent influence on the form of arguments in the mothers' speech: Contrast, Referentiality, Prior Mention, Person, Animacy, Presence/Absence, and Argument Role. All seven factors become significant predictors of argument form for the children by 2;6 and 2;8 years of age, respectively.

Argument role. S, A, and O argument roles have distinctive distributions of formal and functional properties. The A role features ellipsis and personal pronouns encoding mainly human, referential, first/second person referents. In the O role, nouns and deictic pronouns encode third person, usually inanimate referents; O referents are sometimes non-referential or new. The S role shows greater variety in animacy and person than A and O. Like A arguments, referents in the S role are almost always referential, like O arguments, they are sometimes new.

Argument marking. The distribution of topic, nominative and accusative morphemes reflects the skewed distribution of formal and functional properties across argument roles. Topic markers are found primarily on deictic pronouns in the S role, due to their high frequency in contrastive labeling sequences. Accusative marking is rare, occurring on inanimate nouns in the O role. Nominative marking is complex: the *-ka* allomorph is used primarily on proper names, kin terms, and personal pronouns in the A role, while the *-i* allomorph is found sometimes on nouns in the S role and often on deictic pronouns in the S role in the form *-key* (from *-kes* 'thing' + *-i*).

These findings provide evidence for the discourse-functional position that we cannot understand the grammar of argument structure and its acquisition in Korean without taking semantic and discourse-pragmatic function into account. The children are not only acquiring the same forms as their caregivers; they use them for the same functions, with the same frequencies, and in the same skewed distributions. The results point to the conclusion that mental representations of grammar arise from experience with grammar as it is used in discourse, and that grammatical form is represented along with its discourse-functional correlates.