Searching the Frog vocally in Korean:
Typological and language-specific issues on expressing motion events in Korean narratives
Category: Cognitive semantics, Discourse

This paper investigates typological patterns and language specific issues in the expression of motion events in Korean as compared to English. Specifically, it examines locus of path information in Korean when expressing motion events, and tests whether locus of path information affects the selection and packaging of motion components.

My claim is that Korean should be understood as an independent type that is neither Verb-framed nor Satellite-framed, the classification system proposed by Talmy (1985, 2000). The results reveal that Korean is less constrained by its Verb-framed properties, even though Korean speakers tend to encode Path information more with verbs than Others than verbs. My analysis refers to language-specific features of Korean such as the use of Serial Verb Constructions, the frequent compounding of deictic verbs in spontaneous motions, and the frequent use of adverbs of manner and mimetics.

Motion events & language typology: A motion event is defined as "a situation containing movement of an entity of maintenance of an entity at stationary location" (Talmy, 1985; p.60), encode semantic components such as motion itself, manner (e.g. 'fly'), cause of motion (e.g. 'roll'), and cange of posture (e.g. sit). According to Talmy (1985, 2000), languages can be classified either as verb-framed or satellite-framed with regards to whether the path component is encoded inside or outside the verb. Within this framework, several studies proposed that there are typological constraints which affect how languages select and package motion components. Slobin (2004), for example, argued that verb-framed languages show less attention to a manner of a motion event, and Hickman and Hendriks (2010) proposed that satellite-framed languages have a higher utterance density (UD) (i.e the overall number of motion components encoded in a motion event, see (1), than verb-framed languages. They support their claim by comparing the UD of French (verb-framed) and English (satellite-framed).

(1) Utterance Density
　　Sonyeni thongnamwu-lul kie-　　　olla-　nem-ess-eyo.
　　boy　　log-OBJ　　　crawl-　ascend-climbed over
　　　　　　　　　　　　　　[manner]+[path]+[Path]= UD3
　' *lit*. A boy climbed over a log.'

Korean is classified as a "Verb-framed" language by Talmy (2000) and Slobin (1994). However, the typology of Korean is still much debated (Choi 1994, Lim 2000), and typological language constrains on Korean motion events have not received much attention. Therefore, this paper tests the locus of the Path information in Korean motion events, and test whether Korean is a language which is constrained by its languages typology in the above context.
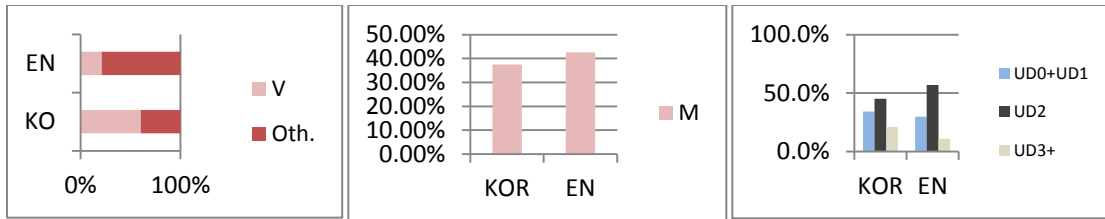
Experiment: To compare the lexicalization pattern of English and Korean motion events, English data from CHILDES, an open corpus by Macwhinney (2000), were analyzed. This data is a product of "the frog story project", a project gained dozens of cross-linguistic data under the guidance of Dan Slobin and Ruth Bermanin. The experiment under the project was to ask subjects to tell a narrative in their native languages with a picture book, "Frog where are you?" Mayer (1969). Since there are no open source or published paper with regards to "the frog project", Korean data were collected within the methodology of the project. Both English and Korean data were analyzed by the coding scheme developed by Hickman & Hendriks (2006).

Results: The results show that when Path information was encoded in Korean, it is likely to be encoded inside the verb rather than others with significant difference. Note that there is still the chance of Path information to be encoded in Manner was 40%(2). However, the attention of manner information of the two languages did not significantly differ (p<0.05)(3). In addition, English did not necessarily show higher utterance density then Korean as in (4).

(2)　　　　　　　　　　　　(3)　　　　　　　　　　　　(4)

EN
KO
0% 100%
■ V
■ Oth.

50.00%
40.00%
30.00%
20.00%
10.00%
0.00%
KOR EN
■ M

100.0%
50.0%
0.0%
KOR EN
■ UD0+UD1
■ UD2
□ UD3+

To put it another way, while UD2 was higher in English than in Korean, UD3 was vice versa. Therefore, even though Korean encoded Path information more in verbs than in others, the results reveal that Korean is less constrained by its typology, 'Verb-framed'.

The results reveal that Korean does not support the language typological constraints of the verb-framed languages proposed by other studies. I explain this as follows. Defining the typology of Korean is not simple due to the fact that Korean has its language specific features, and different combinations of these features result in different selection and packaging of manner components. Firstly, the use of Serial Verb Constructions (SVC), a construction that clusters more than one verb morpheme, enables Path information to be encoded in the verb. Secondly, the highly frequent use of deictic motion verbs (DEI), a subset of Path in most spontaneous Korean verbs higher the chance of Path information to be incorporated inside the verb. On the other hand, Path information's have a chance to be encoded in others devices. Firstly, there was frequent usage of positional marker, which denoted Path. Secondly, Spatial nouns(SN) followed by a postpositional marker(PP) denoted path as well. Since there are relatively many variables that can higher or lower the locus of past to be a verb, defining the typological status is not simple. With regards to attention of manner, Korean speakers can address manner information with the help of SVCs, mimetics(MIM) and manner adverbs(MA) as in (5).

(5) Sonyeni kil-ul   helleypelltteck ppalli ttwie-   kenne- kassta,
    boy   road-OBJ [MIM 'pant'][MA fast] [SVCrun-   across- [Dei went]
                       [Manner]+[Manner]+[Manner]+[Path]
   ' A boy ran across the road fastly in a hectic manner,'
(6) Sonyen.i namwuwilul ollakassta.
boy tree-[SNup][PP'to'] [SVCascend-go]
 [Path][Path] [Path]

The pattern of UDs in two languages can be also explained by different combination of language specific factors. To begin with, Korean speakers make frequent use of SVCs, manner adverbs and mimetics and this contributed the overall semantic density to be higher. On the other hand, English Verb+preposition construction is efficient for additional semantic information other than Path to be eoncoded in the verb. However, Korean has a relatively lower frequency in UD2 than English, even though SVCs easily combine more than one verb and deictic verbs are mostly present on spontaneous verbs. This implicates that more studies are in need to reveal not only the relation between language specificity and language typology, but also the relations between the language specificities. For future research, it would be worth investigating the similarities and differences of language specific features, regardless of their typologies.

Selected references

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