Two classes of adjectives in Korean: Pure vs. Inchoative States

“Category: Morphology/Lexical Semantics”

The goal of this paper is to establish there are two classes of adjectival statives predicates in Korean: so called inchoative states (INS) (e.g. hwana ‘angry’, nulk ‘old’) (cf. Chung 1999, 2005) which allow, as I will show, both atelic/telic construals vs. pure states (PS) (e.g. sulphu ‘sad’, aphu ‘sick’) which are atelic. I argue that inchoative adjectival predicates are concealed verbs derived via zero affixation of an inchoative marker (BECOME) from a gradable adjectival root (Adj°)). This proposal will explain why INS have variable telicity unlike PS.

(1) a. Pure state predicates = [Adj° SAD] ‘sulphu’
   b. Inchoative state predicates = [V° [Adj° ANGRY] [V° Ø–BECOME]] ‘hwana’

Two diagnostics ((2)) tell us that PS and INS do not share the same aspectual properties.

   M-NOM now-TOP sad-go-PROG-DECL sad-INCHO-PRES-DECL
   “Mina is getting sad now.” [PS]
   M-NOM now-TOP tired-go-PROG-DECL tired-INCHO-PRES-DECL
   “Mina is getting sad now.” [INS]

In (2), the PS sulphu ‘sad’ co-occurs with the inchoative marker, but not with the progressive. In contrast, the INS cichi ‘tired’ cannot co-occur with the inchoative marker, but can combine with the progressive (cf. Chung 2005). The examples in (2) illustrate that PS are typical adjectival states just like English states, while INS are actually non-stative despite the fact that they seem to correspond to English stative predicates. I argue that PS are adjectives and include permanent/temporary (e.g. intelligent vs. sad), as well as gradable/non-gradable (e.g. tall vs. round) states ((1a)), whereas INS are deadjectival change-of-state verbs derived from gradable adjectives ((1b)). The incompatibility with the overt inchoative marker –e ci ‘become’ in (2b) suggests that unlike PS, INS are inherently inchoative. Since the inchoative meaning (a zero morpheme) is lexicalized, INS cannot co-occur with the overt inchoative marker, due to morphological blocking effect.

According to Han (1996), Chung (1999) and Sohn (1999), only verbal predicates in Korean take the overt present marker -nun (or its allomorph -n) as shown in (4).

   M-TOP eat-PRES-DECL
   “Minho is eating.”
   b. Minho-nun namja-Ø-i-ta.
   M-TOP man-PRES-COP-DECL
   “Minho is a man.”

As illustrated in (5), INS take the overt present marker, whereas PS take the null morpheme.

(5) a. Minho-nun (cemcem) cichi-n-ta.
   M-TOP gradually tired-PRES-DECL
   “Minho is (gradually) getting tired.” [INS]
   b. Minho-nun sulphu-Ø-ta.
   M-TOP tired-PRES-DECL
   “Minho is sad.” [PS]

The examples in (5) provide an argument for the claim that INS are verbal predicates, unlike PS which are adjectives.

Assuming that gradable PS and INS are both derived from a gradable root element adj° denoting the whole property scale of degrees (building on Kearns (2007), Kennedy & Levin (2008), Hay et. al (1999)), I propose that (i) PS are positive adjectives denoting a region on the property scale which is determined by contextual factors; (ii) INS are deadjectival change-of-state verbs which are interpreted in terms of movement along a property scale. (cf. Levin & Rappaport (1991), Jackendoff (1966))

PS and INS show a different behavior with respect to telicity, too. As well-known, the use of for-adverbials/in-adverbials distinguishes telic predicates from atelic predicates: in-adverbials
modify telic predicates, and *for*-adverbials modify atelic predicates. PS can only be modified by *for*-adverbials, as expected since they are typical stative predicates as shown in (6).

    J-TOP one-week-for/in sad-PERF-DECL
    “Juno was sad for one week/*in one week.” [PS]

However, INS show variable telicity, in that they allow modification by both *for*-adverbials and *in*-adverbials as illustrated in (7).

(7) Namu-ka il-euwil-tongan/maney cala-ss-ta.
    tree-NOM one-week-for/in grown-PERF-DECL
    “The tree became grown for one week/in one week.” [INS]

The same pattern of variable aspectual behavior with respect to standard diagnostics for telicity has also been observed for deadjectival degree achievements as shown in (8) (Dowty (1979), Abusch (1986), Hay et al. (1999), Kennedy & Levin (2008)).

(8) a. The soup cooled in 10 minutes. [telic]
    b. The soup cooled for 10 minutes. [atelic] (Dowty (1979))

To account for variable telicity of INS, I argue that they alternate between two semantic representations: ‘become ADJ-er’ and ‘become ADJ’. When they are interpreted in the ‘become ADJ-er’ sense, they describe a process of change-of-states iterated and thus, they yield an atelic reading. When they are interpreted in the ‘become ADJ’ sense, they describe a transition between two states (∼ADJ, ADJ) like achievements, and thus, they give rise to a telic reading.

On Hay et al. (1999), Kennedy & Levin (2008)’s account, a telic construal arises if the predicate denotes a maximal value of a property on a scale (‘maximal telos’). Well-known diagnostic is the modification by proportional adverbs such as ‘completely/totally’ oriented towards a maximal value of a property: if a deadjectival verb can be modified by ‘completely’, then the predicate entails a maximal value. However, INS allowing a telic reading cannot be modified by ‘completely’ having the endpoint-oriented use. The example in (9) shows that they lack the maximal value on the scale.

(9) ??Juno-nun wanceonhi (ta) nulk-ess-ta.
    J-TOP completely all old-PERF-DECL
    “Juno became completely old.”

The analysis according to which the telos of deadjectival verbs is provided by a maximal scale value fails to account for the telos of INS. Following Kearns’ analysis, I argue that the ‘become ADJ’ sense is interpreted with reference to the inception of a change of state providing the telos of the deadjectival verb.

The atelic reading induced by the addition of punctual adverbials in (10) illustrates that INS have an inception of the state ADJ° in inherent meaning.

    J-TOP his-NOM die-PERF-ACC-when crazy-PERF-DECL
    “Juno became crazy when his wife died.” / *“When his wife died, Juno was (already) crazy.”

The example (11) where a perfective INS is felicitously conjoined with an imperfective clause shows the absence of an inherent culmination.

    J-TOP ten-minutes-in angry-PERF-DECL and still angry-be-DECL
    “Juno got angry in ten minutes, and he’s still angry.”

In sum, there are two classes of states in Korean: (i) PS which are adjectival predicates corresponding to English stative predicates; (ii) INS which are zero derived deadjectival change-of-state verbs. INS showing variable telicity alternate between two semantic representations. On their atelic sense (‘become ADJ-er’), they describe a process of change-of-states iterated. On their telic sense (‘become ADJ’), they describe a transition without an inherent culmination (lacking a maximal value). The inception of the state denoted by ADJ° provides the telos for the derived verb.