

'i/ka' marks focus

Category: Formal Syntax

Background There are two types of particles that appear with NPs in Korean and Japanese. One is a Case particle which expresses the Case of an NP, the other is a Semantic particle which adds discourse /information structural meaning to an NP. Traditionally, Korean *i/ka* and Japanese *ka* has been analyzed as a Nominative Case particle, a morphological realization of the abstract Nominative Case adding no new meaning to the interpretation of the NP. However, recently Japanese *ka* has been analyzed as a Semantic particle (Miyajima 2008). In this paper, I claim that Korean *i/ka* is also a Semantic particle, which marks its host as either, i) the focus of the sentence, or ii) a member of a focused constituent.

Analysis - i/ka is a focus marker Many previous researchers have already claimed that all or most of *i/ka* that appears in a non-canonical position functions as a focus marker (Yoon 1987, Schütz 1996). Canonically, a single NP will surface with a single Case particle, and a Case particle will surface only once in a simple sentence (1a). But *i/ka* may at times appear with another Case particle (1b), or appear twice in a simple sentence (1c). This non-canonical behavior of *i/ka* as a Case marker, along with the fact that NP marked by such *i/ka* is interpreted as the focus of the sentence was the major supporting data for the analysis of *i/ka* as a focus marker. However, this analysis had to accept the dual identity of *i/ka*, since *i/ka* may, at times, appear with a non-focused element, such as *John-i* in (1a). Out-of-the-blue statements (1a), or answers to a general question (3), are generally claimed to have focus on the entire sentence, with no focus on any of the individual components of the sentence. Thus, *i/ka* in (1a), (2a) or (2b) are clearly not marking their host as the focus of the sentence.

But what is true is that all the *i/ka* marked elements are a member of a focused constituent. And all members of the focused constituent cannot be marked by any particle other than *i/ka* (2d) (or *ul/lul* which I assume is also a focus marker). From this I claim that *i/ka* (and *ul/lul*) appearing in such cases marks the focus on the higher constituent of the marked host. The assumption is that all focus must be morphologically expressed in Korean. However, due to the morphological restriction on the focus marker, not all focused constituents can be marked by *i/ka*. For most Koreans, *i/ka* is only compatible with NPs and a very restricted set of adverbs. It cannot attach to sentences or VPs. When a focus marker cannot attach to the actual focused constituent, a focus marker will mark each subcomponent of the focused constituents that are compatible with the focus marker. Therefore, in (1a), (2a) and (2b), the NP subcomponents of the focused constituent appears with *i/ka* (or *ul/lul*), since the focus marker cannot mark the sentence directly (2c).

However, there is an apparent exception to the generalization that *i/ka* always marks the focus. In (3b), *i/ka*-marked NP is neither focus of the sentence nor a member of a focused constituent. My explanation is that (3b) is a result of direct repetition: the speaker is simply repeating what (s)he has heard. This analysis can be supported by the fact that (4b) is infelicitous, when the question is without *i/ka*.

Analysis - i/ka is not a Case marker If the above analysis is on the right track, *i/ka* is not a Case marker. By Case marker, I am referring to a morphological realization of the abstract Case; invisible to syntax or semantics. Taking the conservative approach on Case theory, Case is a purely syntactic element with no semantic properties (Chomsky 1995). Then, if *i/ka* is merely a morphological realization of the abstract Case with no semantic properties of its own, *i/ka* marking should not provide any additional semantic value. However, I have shown above that *i/ka*-marked elements are understood as the focus, meaning that *i/ka* is not merely a Case marker. The fact that *i/ka* can appear in a non-Case position (2e) also supports my analysis of *i/ka* as a focus marker. *Totaychey* is one of the few adverbs that allow *i/ka* marking, thus in (2e) it is marked by the focus marker *i/ka*, as it is a member of a focused constituent.

Researchers analyzing *i/ka* as a Case marker has constantly used the fact that *i/ka* and *ul/lul*, even in its non-canonical use, is not interchangeable (1), as the basis of their analysis (Choi 2005). Their claim is that there is no reason why the two particles cannot be interchangeable, unless the distribution of *i/ka* and *ul/lul* are restricted by syntactic structure; namely, *i/ka* appearing only with the Nominative NP and *ul/lul* appearing only with the Accusative NP. However, the fact that the distribution of *i/ka* and *ul/lul* is sensitive to syntax does not necessarily mean that the two particles must be linked with two separate structural Case positions.

I claim that *i/ka* is not a Case marker but a focus marker that appears with elements above the *vP*. This claim can be supported by the distribution of *i/ka* and *ul/lul* appearing with adverbs. Adverbs are not a Case position in Korean. Therefore, *i/ka* and *ul/lul* appearing with adverbs are not associated with Nominative or Accusative Case. However, the particles are still incompatible (2e). This is expected if *i/ka* is a focus marker appearing only above the *vP*, as *totaychey* in (2e) is an adverb appearing above the IP (Park 2002). Then the prediction is that adverbs appearing at or below the *vP* will not allow *i/ka* marking. The prediction is born out as adverbs appearing at or below *vP*, such as *ppali* in (5), do not allow *i/ka* marking.

Conclusion In this paper, I have shown that *i/ka* is always functioning as marker of focus and that, although *i/ka* is not always associated with Nominative Case position, it is always appearing with elements above the *vP*. In sum, *i/ka* is a focus marker appearing above the *vP*.

- (1) a. John-**i/*ul** Tom-**ul/*i** ttelyessta
 John(NOM)-*i/ul* Tom(ACC)-*ul/i* hit
 'John hit Tom'
- b. Na-**eykey-ka/*lul** paym-i mwusepta
 I-DAT-*ka/lul* snake-i fearful
 'I am afraid of snakes' (J.Yoon 1996:110)
- c. John-**i/*ul** paci-*ka* ccalpta
 John-*i/ul* pants-*ka* short
 'John's pants are short'
- (2) Context : 'What's up?'
 a. John-**i** pemin-i-ess-e
 John-*i* culprit-is-PAST-DECL
 'John was the culprit'
- b. ku salam-**i** pemin-i-ess-e
 that person-*i* culprit-is-PAST-DECL
 'he was the culprit'
- c. *[John pemin-i-ess-e]-*i*
 John culprit-is-PAST-DECL-FOC
 'John was the culprit'
- d. #ku salam-**un** pemin-i-ess-e
 that person-*un* culprit-is-PAST-DECL
 'he is the culprit'
- e. totaychey-**ka/*lul** mal-**i** an toy-ca-na
 at all-*ka//lul* word-*i* NEG become
 'It does not make sense at all'
- (3) Q: John-**i** yepcip-ey iss-ni?
 John-*i* next house-at is-Q
 'Is John in the next house'
- a. John-**un** yepcip-ey iss-ta
 John-*un* next house-at is-DECL
 'As for John, he is in the next house'
- b. ?John-**i** yepcip-ey iss-ta
 John-*i* next house-at is-DECL
 'As for John, he is in the next house'
- (4) Q: John yepcip-ey iss-ni?
 John next house-at is-Q
 'Is John in the next house'
- a. John-**un** yepcip-ey iss-ta
 b. #John-**i** yepcip-ey iss-ta
- (5) John-**i** banana-lul ppali-**lul/*ka** mek-ess-e
 John(NOM)-*i* banana(ACC)-*lul* fast-*lul/ka* eat-PAST-DECL
 'John ate a banana fast'

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