Embedded topicalization in Korean factive clauses and islands: Experimental approach

It has been known that topicalization is unavailable in complement clauses of factive predicates – or henceforth factive clauses (Kiparsky & Kiparsky 1971, Hooper & Thompson 1973). There are mainly two theoretical approaches to this issue. According to the operator approach, there is an event operator at the edge of the factive clause. It occupies [Spec, CP] which topicalization should be targeting (Watanabe 1993), or ungrammatically undergoes featural intervention by the topic (Haegeman and Õrgdö 2010). The clause-size approach assumes the split-CP framework of Rizzi (1997) and argues that factive clauses are structurally smaller than their non-factive counterparts. In Haegeman (2006), they project only up to FinP, while non-factive clauses project up to ForceP. Since TopicP, the functional head that licenses topic, is higher than FinP, this means that factive clauses cannot license topicalization.

However, matters are more complicated for Korean. The language possesses two different forms of factive clauses. The two only differ in the presence/absence of functional particles, as in (1). Both sentences are factive: they require a truth presupposition in order to be felicitously uttered. However, (1a) projects more functional elements at the clause edge than (1b): the tense marker n and the sentence-final particle (SFP) ta (boldfaced). Since Korean SFPs encode sentential force, it is arguably a projection of ForceP. Without explicit evidence of ForceP, (1b) can be said following Haegeman that it projects only up to FinP. Critically, the operator approach would expect topicalization to significantly worsen the grammaticality of (1a) and (1b). The clause-size approach, on the other hand, would expect (1b) to be much worse with topicalization than (1a) since (1b) possesses the appropriate structure for licensing topic.

An acceptability judgment experiment (Experiment 1) was designed to evaluate the predictions of the two approaches against collective judgment data from multiple Korean speakers. It was a 2×2 factorial design: TOPIC (Nominative ka vs. Topic nun-marked subject) × SFP (With vs. Without SFP). 61 native speakers of Korean participated and judged 8 experimental stimuli and 24 filler items. Experimental stimuli were presented by a latin square design. A sample 2×2 set of stimuli is presented in (2a-b). They were presented in Q-A pairs: the question provides context that suppresses the unintended contrastive reading, which is also marked by nun. The raw score data are presented in table (3). To interpret the results, a linear mixed effects model was constructed with “item nested in token set” and “subject” as random effects. There was a significant main effect of TOPIC (p < 0.01) and a significant interaction of SFP:TOPIC (p < 0.05). (See interaction plot in (4).) The main effect of TOPIC provides support for the operator approach while the interaction provides support for the clause-size approach. The results call for a reconciliation of the two approaches, at least for factive clauses in Korean.

A follow-up experiment (Experiment 2) was designed to verify whether the clause-size approach can be extended to island constructions in Korean. It has been reported that topicalization is unavailable inside topic constructions (Authier 1992, Maki et al 1999). However, in Korean, some islands seem to project a larger structure including SFPs while others seem to lack such a projection. More specifically, wh-islands and complex NP islands include an SFP while adjunct (because) islands and relative clause islands do not. If the clause-size approach is empirically supported as the results from the main experiment suggest, topic would be much more easily licensed in the larger islands than the smaller ones. A similar 2×2 factorial design with identical factors (SFP, TOPIC) was carried out with 70 participants. A linear mixed effects model was again constructed, and the results were as expected: a significant interaction of SFP:TOPIC (p < 0.001) without main effects. (Raw scores and interaction plot in (5) and (6))

In a larger context, this study argues for a hybrid approach in explaining embedded topicalization and also suggests that applying the cartography approach of Rizzi (1997) may contribute to providing a descriptively accurate account of syntactico-pragmatic phenomena in Korean.
(1) a. Korean factive clause with SFP
   Hani-NOM Minho-TOP Chinese-ACC do.well-PRES-SFP-ADN C-ACC be.surprised

b. Korean factive clause without SFP
   Hani-NOM Minho-TOP Chinese-ACC do.well-ADN C-ACC be.surprised

   “Hani was surprised that Minho is fluent in Chinese.”

(2) a. Nominative *ka* vs. Topic *nun* marking on subject, with SFP
   Q: Ney-ka onul Minho-ey tayhayse mwues-ul nollawehaysse?
      you-NOM today Minho-LOC about what-ACC be.surprised
   “What (thing) about Minho surprised you today?”

      I-NOM today Minho-NOM/TOP Chinese-ACC do.well-PRES-SFP-ADN C-ACC be.surprised
   “I was surprised that Minho is fluent in Chinese.”

   b. Nominative *ka* vs. Topic *nun* marking on subject, without SFP
   Q: Ney-ka onul Minho-ey tayhayse mwues-ul nollawehaysse?
      you-NOM today Minho-LOC about what-ACC be.surprised
   “What (thing) about Minho surprised you today?”

      I-NOM today Minho-NOM/TOP Chinese-ACC do.well-ADN C-ACC be.surprised
   “I was surprised that Minho is fluent in Chinese.”

(3) Experiment 1 (factive) raw scores

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(5) Experiment 2 (islands) raw scores

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SELECTED REFERENCES


