Effects of morphological and prosodic focus cues on topic maintenance in Korean
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How do morphology and prosody work together to manage a discourse topic?

Morphological and Prosodic Focus Cues in Korean

C-HON-NOM Y-HON-DAT book-ACC hand-PAST-DECL
‘Mr. Chelswu handed a book to Mr. Yengswu.’

(2) Chelswu-ssi-nun Yengswu-ssi-eykey chayk-ul kenney-ess-ta.
C-HON-TC Y-HON-DAT book-ACC hand-PAST-DECL
‘Mr. Chelswu handed a book to Mr. Yengswu.’

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Sohn (1999): “(-nun) provides the co-occurring noun phrase with either a topic meaning, usually when the noun phrase is unstressed and occurs in the sentence-initial position, or a contrast meaning, especially when the noun phrase is stressed or appears in a non-initial position.”

NB: (1) with contrastive focus prosody and (3) without contrastive focus prosody are unnatural in Korean.

Motivation for this Study

- Kim, Gürtler & Schafer (2013) tested the effect of focus/topic marking on topic maintenance, using sentence types (1)-(3) in a written story continuation task. They found:
  - No difference between (1) and (2) in topic choice in the continuation (see also Ueno & Kehler, 2010, for Japanese)
  - (3) increased maintenance of the current topic (vs. (1) & (2)).
  
  → This goes against the idea that focus increases salience and therefore subsequent reference (Birch & Garnsey, 1995).

- This supports the idea that focuses highlight a reference set with alternatives (Rooth, 1992), which allows maintenance of the current (source/subject) topic.

What remains unresolved:

To what extent is this effect due to (a) the presence of the morphological marker -nun on the goal, or (b) the presence of implicit prosody on the -nun-marked goal?

Need for spoken stimuli with manipulation of prosody: this study.

Method

Participants: 32 students at Seattle National University
Task: Participants listened to a context sentence (1–4), then wrote a continuation.
Materials: 4 conditions (see 1–4 below) ; 70 items (42 experimental; 28 fillers)

- Broad focus prosody (Cond1)
  C-HON-NOM Y-HON-DAT book-ACC hand-PAST-DECL
  ‘Mr. Chelswu handed a book to Mr. Yengswu.’

- Focus on source/subject: morphology only (Cond2)
  (2) Chelswu-ssi-nun Yengswu-ssi-eykey chayk-ul kenney-ess-ta.
  C-HON-TC Y-HON-DAT book-ACC hand-PAST-DECL
  ‘Mr. Chelswu handed a book to Mr. Yengswu.’

- Focus on source/subject: morphology & prosody (Cond3)
  (3) CHESLWSI-NUN YENGWSIU-ESS-EYKEY-NUN chayk-ul kenney-ess-ta.
  C-HON-NOM Y-HON-DAT-TC book-ACC hand-PAST-DECL
  ‘Mr. Chelswu handed a book to Mr. Yengswu.’

- Focus on goal/non-subject: morphology & prosody (Cond4)
  C-HON-NOM Y-HON-DAT-TC book-ACC hand-PAST-DECL
  ‘Mr. Chelswu handed a book to Mr. YENGWSIU.’

Prosodic analyses

Fig1. Duration (in ms) of critical regions. Pause after contrastive -nun.

Fig2. Prosodic analyses, F0 range. Greater F0 range with contrastive -nun.

Questions and Predictions

- Cond2 vs Cond1: How does morphology alone on the source/subject affect topic selection in the continuation?
  - Previous (written) work showed no effect (Kim et al., 2013; Ueno & Kehler, 2010).

- Cond3 vs Cond2 (and 1): How do morphology and prosody together on the source/subject affect topic selection in the continuation?
  - If increased salience promotes increased selection for topic, more source selections for topic
  - If focus highlights a reference set with alternatives, more continuations with contrastive (parallel) coherence relation
  - More continuations with contrastive (parallel) coherence relation

- Cond2 vs Cond1 (and 2): How do morphology and prosody together on the goal/non-subject affect topic selection in the continuation?
  - If increased salience promotes increased selection for topic, more source selections for topic
  - If focus highlights a reference set with alternatives, more continuations with contrastive (parallel) coherence relation
  - More selections from source reference set (alternative or original goal) for topic

Results

Fig3. Referential patterns: Sentential subject of continuation

Fig4. Coherence relations vary by condition

- Replication of written study: Broad focus -ka and -nun result in similar referential patterns. (Written -nun in sentence-initial position is interpreted with implicit broad focus prosody.)

- Contrastive prosody on -nun results in distinct referential patterns:
  
  - Contrastive prosody on the source increases source and alt-source selections for the topic.
  
  - Contrastive prosody (on -nun) on the goal also increases source selections for the topic: Goal focus enhances topic maintenance, together with a selection from the goal reference set as the focus.

Appendix: Examples of Contrastive Continuations

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- Found only in Cond1 - Alt-Source subject continuation (7%)
  C-HON-NOM Y-HON-DAT book-ACC hand-PAST-DECL
  Notice: The third person singular pronoun “nun” is used in place of the personal form “-ka”.
  Conclusion: (1) “Mr. Chelswu handed a book to Mr. Tongyeong.”

- Found only in Cond2 - Alt-Goal subject (28%), Alt-Goal subject (7%) continuations
  Content: Tongyeong-ESS-EYKEY-NUN YENGWSIU-ESS-KEYK YENGWSIU-ESS-KEYK
  Notice: The third person singular pronoun “nun” is used in place of the personal form “-ka”.
  Conclusion: (1) “Mr. Chelswu handed a book to Mr. tongyeong.”

- Found only in Cond4 - Alt-Goal dative (28%), Alt-Goal subject (7%) continuations
  C-HON-NOM Y-HON-DAT-TC book-ACC hand-PAST-DECL
  Notice: The third person singular pronoun “nun” is used in place of the personal form “-ka”.
  Conclusion: (1) “Mr. Chelswu handed a book to Mr. tongyeong.”

Conclusion

- Contrastive prosody plus contrastive morphology together produce contrastive focus, which in turn affects discourse coherence and topic management.

- Contrastive morphology alone does not.

References


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