

Empty categories in Korean: Using processing data to decide among theoretical analyses

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Languages differ as to whether relative clauses (RCs) follow or precede their heads, and as to whether or not they exhibit head-final word order, as illustrated in (1) and (2) for English and Korean, respectively.

- (1) The reporter [_{RC} who the detective has always trusted ___] interviewed the witness
(2) [_{RC} hyengsa-ka ___ enceyna sinloyha-n] kica-ka cungin-ul inthepyuhayssta
 detective-NOM always trust-ADN reporter-NOM witness-ACC interviewed

Researchers have analyzed head-final prenominal relative clauses in languages like Korean as involving English-like operator-movement, null pronominals, or gapless adposition to the main clause. Since theoretical arguments in this domain can become quite arcane, relying as they do on varying judgments of often marginal structures, the impression is created that we may have arrived at something of an impasse as to how to decide among these alternatives.

In this talk, I present new experimental data that help to decide among these theoretical alternatives. In particular, our experimental results provide evidence for the operator-movement analysis of Korean relative clauses (and against null pronominal and gapless analyses), as well as for the fundamental distinction between *pro* and trace. These results show clearly that the processing of empty categories in Korean RCs differs in its time course from the processing of null pronominals in minimal pair adjunct clauses. Taken in conjunction with primary linguistic data showing movement effects in Korean RCs, this leads to the conclusion that Korean relative clauses contain trace. While English and Korean RCs are both derived via movement, they use different variants of the same basic processing strategy for identifying the antecedent of the gap inside the relative clause—this difference is thus related to the different linear order.

The same methodology further shows its value in its application to understanding control structures in Korean. The processing data from Korean adjunct clauses in conjunction with additional primary linguistic data help to differentiate between obligatory and non-obligatory control structures, which will also be discussed.

The results presented in this talk thus provide new evidence for the existence of both *pro* and trace in Korean. Moreover, the processing of both *pro* and trace in Korean appears to adhere to the well-known Accessibility Hierarchy, in that subject gaps are favored over object gaps. While the Accessibility Hierarchy represents a robust cross-linguistic descriptive generalization, its explanation is still far from obvious. I conclude by addressing several possible motivations for the hierarchy.