Song-Nim Kwon & Anne Zribi-Hertz

UMR SFL, Universite Paris-8/CNRS

Differential Function Marking, Case, and information structure:

a case study from Korean

Abstract

The central goal of this article is to propose a systematic description of Differental Function Marking (DM) in Korean, a language in which both subject and object markers may fail to be spelt out. Taking Aissen's 2003 theory of DM as a starting point, we show that although its predictions seem mostly consistent with the statistical results of corpus-based research on Korean (and Japanese), this model doesn't accurately account for the Korean data. We argue that subject and object bareness (the lack of a functional particle) regularly correlates with interpretive effects which should be captured in terms of information structure (focus structure). Adapting Erteschik-Shir's 1997, 2007 framework to represent f(ocus)-structure, we argue that bare subjects and objects, in Korean, fail to be visible at this level. Consequently, they may be construed neither as active topics, nor as foci, thus must either be left out of f-structure, or incorporated within larger f-structure constituents, in order to be interpreted. As regards bare objects, we show that they are never construed as topics or foci, and always exhibit a form of semantic incorporation, while LEUL-marked objects always stand as f-structure constituents construed as focused at some level. As regards bare subjects, we show that unlike NEUN-marked topical subjects and GA-marked subjects, they can be construed neither as active topics, nor as foci, and always occur in Tense-deficient clauses construed as thetic and anchored to Speech Time. We argue that our own assumptions correctly predict the results of corpus studies, and we suggest that as regards nominal arguments, *f-structure visibility* might ultimately stand as the crucial interpretive correlate of *functional* positions in syntax.