Frame Setters in Verbal Unagi-sentences in Japanese and Korean
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This study reports a difference in acceptability of a certain type of verbal unagi-sentence (e.g. (3a–b)) in Japanese and Korean, which was found through an empirical survey conducted to test the acceptability of various unagi-sentences in Japanese and Korean. To account for this, it is proposed that a lone topic marker can only mark temporal and locative frame setters in Japanese, while the topic marker can additionally mark experiencer frame setters in Korean. Furthermore, to distinguish between aboutness topic and frame setter, a test comprised of exchanging the topic marker for the nominative case particle is proposed; only aboutness topics can be nominativized.

Unagi-sentences (e.g. (1)) have been a hotly debated topic for over half a century (e.g. Okutsu 1978; Kitahara 1989; Obana 2001; Yang 1996; Nam 2004). While they have so far been perceived as relating to the copula, similar context dependent utterances with apparent violation of selectional restrictions can be seen with verbal predicates as well (= (2a)).

The reason why (2a) is acceptable in both languages, while (3a–b) is only acceptable in Korean, is due to a difference in the nature of the topic-marked constituents. The topic marked constituent in (2a) is an aboutness topic, which passes the nominativization test (= (2b)), i.e. the comment in (2a) describes an attribute of the topic. The topic marked constituents in Korean (3a–b), on the other hand, are not aboutness topics, since they do not pass the nominativization test (= (4)). Instead, they are frame setters (Chafe 1976; Jacobs 2001; Krifka 2008), which set the frame in which the proposition is interpreted. More specifically, they are experiencer frame setters since their frames are represented by something that is experienced by someone. In (3a), the proposition ‘it is not raining’ is delimited by the frame na nun, which represents the location experienced by the topic marked entity. In (3b), the proposition ‘he is handsome’ is delimited by the frame represented by the opinion/experience of the frame setter na nun. These experiencer frame setters are therefore interpreted adverbially, as indicated by underlines in the translations. Since frame setters inherently presuppose alternative frames in which the proposition does not hold (Krifka 2008), (3a) contains the implicature that it is not raining somewhere else, and (3b) that in someone else’s opinion, he is not handsome. (3) shows that experiencer frame setters cannot be marked using the topic marker alone in Japanese.

Topic-marked temporal and locative frame setters, on the other hand, are possible in both languages (e.g. (5a)). Here, the same constraint of nominativization is found (= (5b)), since frame setters are not aboutness topics. The inability of frame setters to be nominativized does not stem from their inability to be focused; they can be focused using prosodic marking (= (6)). Instead, it is their inability to be subjects that prevents them from taking a nominative case marker. As frame setters are not subjects, the subjects of (3) and (5a) are merely realized as zero pronouns, and can appear explicitly in surface structure (= (7) & (8)).
a. J: boku wa unagi da
   I TOP eel COP
K: na nun cang.e ta
   I TOP eel COP
   ‘As for me, eel.’ ‘(lit.) I am an eel.’

b. J: konnyaku wa futora-nai
   konjac TOP get.fat-NEG
K: kon.yak un an ccinta
   konjac TOP NEG get.fat
   ‘Konjac doesn’t make you fat.’ ‘(lit.) Konjac doesn’t get fat.’

b. J: konnyaku ga futora-nai
   konjac NOM get.fat-NEG
K: kon.yak i an ccinta
   konjac NOM NEG get.fat
   ‘Konjac doesn’t make you fat.’

(3)

a. ‘It’s raining where I am.’
   J: # watashi wa futte i-nai
   I TOP rain be-NEG
K: na nun an o-nuntey
   I TOP NEG rain-MOD
   ‘It’s not raining where I am.’

b. ‘He isn’t very handsome, is he?’
   J: # watashi wa kakkoii yo
   I TOP handsome MOD
K: na nun cal sayngkyess-nuntey
   I TOP NEG have.appearance-MOD
   ‘He is handsome in my opinion.’

(4)

K: # nay ka cal sayngkyess-nuntey
   I NOM well have.appearance-MOD
   ‘I think he is handsome’

(5)

a. J: kinoo wa soojishi-ta
   yesterday TOP clean-PST
K: ecey nun chengsohay ss.e
   yesterday TOP clean-PST
   ‘I cleaned yesterday.’

b. J: # kinoo ga soojishi-ta
   yesterday NOM clean-PST
K: #ecey ka chengsohay ss.e
   yesterday NOM clean-PST
   ‘I cleaned yesterday.’

(6)

‘When did you clean?’
J: KINOO soojishi-ta
   yesterday clean-PST
K: ECEY chengsohay ss.e
   yesterday clean-PST
   ‘I cleaned YESTERDAY.’

(7)

K: na nun pi ka an o-nuntey
   I TOP rain NOM NEG rain-MOD
   ‘It’s not raining where I am.’

(8)

J: kinoo wa watashi ga soojishi-ta
   yesterday TOP I NOM clean-PST
   ‘I cleaned yesterday.’