Projection of contrastivity in Korean

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Generally, Korean contrastive marker 'un/nun' is said to appear to the right of the contrasted constituent, as in (1a) or (2a). In (1a), what is contrasted is the word panana. Thus, a natural follow-up question to (1a) is (1b); a question about some alternative of panana. In (2a), 'un/nun' is adjacent to both the V head and the VP. Thus, either the entire VP, or the V head could be interpreted as the contrasted element; a natural follow-up question to (2a) could be either, (2b) with an alternative VP, or (2c) with an alternative V head.

However, contrastive marker 'un/nun' may also appear within a contrasted constituent, as in (3a). In (3a), what is contrasted is not just pants but the washing of the pants; the alternative to ‘John washing the laundry’ is not washing of some other garment, but is ‘sweeping of the floor’. In other words, (3a) can be given the same interpretation as (3b), a sentence with contrasted VPs.

I argue that (3a) is possible because contrastiveness may project up like markers of information focus. In other words, contrastiveness of a higher constituent can be expressed by marking the sub-constituent of the contrasted constituent.

In English, prosodic focus on a sub-constituent can be interpreted as to express information focus on a larger constituent containing the focus marked constituent (Katz and Selkirk 2011). Thus, (4a) is an appropriate answer to (4b). Such a phenomenon has been termed focus projection, or projection of focus. According to Kiss (1998), (focus) projection is available only to functions that are not structurally dependent, such as English information focus, as in (4b). (4c) is not an appropriate answer to (4a), as identificational focus, a focus function that is dependent on a structural position, cannot project.

If we are to extend the analysis to contrastiveness, projection of contrastiveness may be available in Korean as contrastiveness is not dependent on a specific structural position. Such a notion is not novel. Many scholars, mostly based on the surface distribution of contrastive elements, have argued that contrastive interpretation is not associated with a specific structural position in Korean.

That contrastiveness is not dependent on a structural position, has been already suggested for English contrastive elements on independent grounds (Büring 2003). Thus projection of contrastive should be possible in English as well, if the analysis is on the right track. And the expectation is met. Contrastive prosody (or B-accent) may appear on sub-constituents to express contrast on its higher constituent in English, as in (5b) (within a DP) or (6) (within a VP).

To summarize, we have observed that projection of contrastivity is allowed in Korean, as well as in English, languages in which the interpretation of contrastiveness is not dependent on a specific structural position. Contrastive marker wa in Japanese has been observed to project as well, as in (7). Assuming that possibility of projection may be used as a diagnostics for structural dependency, at least contrastiveness in Korean, Japanese, and English is a function that is not assigned structurally.
    John-NOM banana-CONT eat-PAST-DECL
    ‘As for bananas, John ate them.’

b. John-i sakwa-nun mek-ess-ni?
    John-NOM apple-CONT eat-PAST-Q?
    ‘What about apples, did John eat them?’

(2) a. John-i ppally-lul toli-ki-nun ha-yss-ta.
    John-NOM laundry-ACC spin-ki-CONT do-PAST-DECL
    ‘As for washing the laundry, John did it.’

b. John-i batak-un ssul-ess-ni?
    John-NOM floor-CONT sweep-PAST-Q?
    ‘As for sweeping the floor, did John do that?’

c. John-i ppallay-lul nel-ki-nun ha-yss-ni?
    John-NOM laundry-ACC hang-ki-CONT do-PAST-DECL
    ‘As for hanging the laundry, did John do that?’

(3) a. John-i ppallay-nun toly-ess-ciman,
    John-NOM laundry-CONT spin-PAST-though
    patak-un ssul-ci ahn-ass-ta.
    floor-CONT sweep-ci NEG-PAST-DECL.
    ‘Though John washed the laundry, he did not sweep the floor.’

b. John-i [ppallay-lul toli-ki]-nun ha-yss-ciman,
    John-NOM laundry-ACC spin-ki-CONT do-PAST-though
    [patak-ul ssul-ci]-nun ahn-ass-ta.
    floor-ACC sweep-ci-CONT NEG-PAST-DECL.
    ‘Though John washed the laundry, he did not sweep the floor.’

(4) a. What did John do?

b. John [FOC ate BEANS].

c. #It is beans that John ate.

(5) a. Where will the guests at Ivan and Theona’s wedding be seated? (Büring 2003).

b. [CONT FRIENDS and RELATIVES of the couple] will sit at the table.

(6) a. John [MARINATED the pork], but he didn’t [CONT STUFF the chicken].

b. They [WATERED the flowers], but they did not [TRIM the bushes].

(7) [CONT AME-WA hut-ta] kedo [CONT GAKKO-NI-WA it-ta]
    rain-CONT fell-PST but school-to-CONT go-PST
    ‘Rain fell but I went to school.’ (Kuno, 1973)

Selected References

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