



THE GRAMMATICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF KOREAN OBJECT
PSYCHOLOGICAL ADJECTIVE CONSTRUCTIONS — A RECONSIDERATION
OF THE DUAL-SUBJECT ANALYSIS —

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Abstract: *This paper examines the grammatical properties of Korean sentence constructions containing object psychological adjectives and argues that such constructions should not be analyzed as so-called dual-subject sentences. It is shown that the second noun phrase in these constructions does not function as a secondary subject but rather as a complement selected by the predicate. Accordingly, the particle -*o/ga* attached to this noun phrase should be interpreted not as a nominative case marker but as a complement marker whose function is determined by the argument structure of psychological adjectives. This analysis provides a more principled account of argument structure in Korean and reveals the limitations of subject-based analyses relying solely on surface case marking.*

Keywords: *object psychological adjectives, dual-subject construction, experiencer, stimulus, complement, case marking.*

1. Introduction

Korean psychological adjective constructions frequently display a surface pattern in which two noun phrases precede the predicate. On the basis of this surface configuration, such constructions have often been analyzed as instances of dual-subject constructions. A representative example is given in (1).

(1)

나는 고향이 그립다.

na-neun gohyang-i geuripda

‘I miss my hometown.’

(lit. ‘Hometown is missed by me.’)

The presence of two noun phrases marked by -neun and -i has been taken as evidence for the existence of two grammatical subjects. However, this paper argues that such an analysis fails to adequately capture the semantic and syntactic roles of the two noun phrases involved. By reexamining object psychological adjective

constructions, this study proposes an alternative analysis based on argument structure rather than surface case marking.



2. Semantic Properties of Object Psychological Adjectives

2.1 Psychological adjectives and object psychological adjectives

Psychological adjectives in Korean denote internal mental or emotional states such as joy, fear, anxiety, worry, and satisfaction. Unlike action predicates, they describe psychological conditions rather than externally observable events.

From a semantic perspective, psychological adjectives can be divided into subject psychological adjectives and object psychological adjectives. Subject psychological adjectives describe states that arise internally from the experiencer and do not require an explicit external cause. Object psychological adjectives, by contrast, denote psychological states triggered by an external entity, event, or situation.

2.2 Experiencer and stimulus

Object psychological adjective constructions involve two core semantic roles: the experiencer, who undergoes the psychological state, and the stimulus, which gives rise to that state. Crucially, object psychological adjectives semantically require the presence of a stimulus. When the stimulus is not overtly expressed, the sentence often becomes semantically incomplete or pragmatically infelicitous. This semantic requirement motivates the distinctive syntactic behavior of these constructions.

3. Syntactic Structure of Object Psychological Adjective Constructions

3.1 Basic sentence pattern

The prototypical syntactic pattern of Korean object psychological adjective constructions can be represented as follows:

NP1-은/는 (eun/neun) + NP2-이/가 (i/ga) + A

In this structure, NP1 denotes the experiencer, NP2 denotes the stimulus, and A represents an object psychological adjective.

(2)

나는 그 소식이 기쁘다.

na-neun geu sosik-i gippeuda

‘I am glad about the news.’

(lit. ‘The news is pleasing to me.’)

(3)

철수는 시험 결과가 걱정되다.

(Cheolsu-neun siheom gyeolgwa-ga geokjeongdoeda)

‘Cheolsu is worried about the exam results.’

(lit. ‘The exam results are worrying to Cheolsu.’)

3.2 NP1-은/는 (eun/neun): the experiencer

NP1 typically refers to a human or animate entity capable of experiencing psychological states and is commonly marked by the topic marker -eun/neun. Although NP1 exhibits certain subject-like properties, it does not bear agentive roles. Rather, it functions as the locus at which the psychological state is manifested.

(4)

나-는 고양이-가 무섭다.

na-neun goyangi-ga museopda



‘I am afraid of cats.’

(lit. ‘Cats are frightening to me.’)

In (4), na-neun does not denote an agent performing an action but an experiencer undergoing a psychological state induced by the stimulus.

3.3 NP2-*o|/ga*: the stimulus as a complement

The second noun phrase, NP2-*i/ga*, has often been analyzed as a secondary subject due to its nominative marking. However, such an analysis fails to capture its grammatical behavior.

Semantically, NP2 denotes the stimulus that triggers the psychological state. Syntactically, it is obligatorily selected by the predicate and cannot be omitted without resulting in semantic degradation.

(5)

나는 그 책이 좋다. (na-neun geu chaek-i jota)

‘I like that book.’

(lit. ‘That book is good to me.’)

(6)

?나는 좋다. (na-neun jota)

(Intended: ‘I like [something].’)

The unacceptability of (6) demonstrates that NP2 is not optional but required to

complete the meaning of the predicate. Furthermore, NP2 lacks core subject properties such as agentivity, discourse topicality, honorific agreement control, and topic continuity across

clauses. These facts indicate that NP2 does not function as a grammatical subject.

Accordingly, the particle – *o|/ga* attached to NP2 should be analyzed as a

complement marker, rather than as a canonical nominative case marker.

3.4 A case study: 나는 고향이 그립다.

(Naneun gohyang-i geuripda)

The sentence in (1), repeated below, has frequently been cited as evidence for a dual-subject analysis.

(7)

나는 고향이 그립다.

na-neun gohyang-i geuripda

‘I miss my hometown.’

In this sentence, na-neun functions as the experiencer, while gohyang-i denotes the stimulus required by the adjective geuripda ‘to miss’. Omitting NP2 results in semantic incompleteness, and NP2 fails to exhibit syntactic privileges associated with subjecthood. This construction therefore involves an experiencer argument and a stimulus complement, rather than two independent subjects.

As explained above, in the prototypical Korean object-centered psychological adjective construction “NP1-eun/neun NP2-i/ga A,” the grammatical and semantic functions of each element are as follows.



나 na	는 neun	고향 gohyang	이 i	그립다 geuripda
↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
NP1	eun/neun	NP2	i/ga	A
experiencer	topic marker	stimulus	complement marker	experiential result (object psychological adjective) predicate
subject		complement		

3.5 Interim summary

The analysis presented above leads to the following conclusions:

NP1-eun/neun functions as the experiencer and exhibits limited subject-like properties.

NP2-i/ga denotes the stimulus and is obligatorily selected by the predicate.

The particle -i/ga attached to NP2 functions as a complement marker rather than

a subject marker.

These properties indicate that object psychological adjective constructions in Korean instantiate a non-canonical argument structure that cannot be adequately captured by a dual-subject analysis.

4. Implications for the Analysis of Dual-Subject Constructions

The findings of this study demonstrate that the presence of multiple nominative-marked noun phrases does not necessarily entail the existence of multiple grammatical subjects. In object psychological adjective constructions, nominative marking must be interpreted

in relation to predicate type and semantic role assignment. These constructions therefore call for a reexamination of subjecthood diagnostics in Korean syntax.

5. Conclusion

This paper has argued that Korean object psychological adjective constructions should not be analyzed as dual-subject sentences. Despite their superficial resemblance to such structures, these constructions involve an asymmetric argument structure consisting of an experiencer and a stimulus.

The analysis has shown that NP1-eun/neun functions as the experiencer, while NP2-i/ga serves as an obligatory complement selected by the psychological adjective. Although morphologically identical to the nominative case marker, -i/ga in this construction functions as a complement marker whose role is determined by the predicate's semantic requirements. This study thus contributes to a more precise understanding of Korean argument structure and highlights the limitations of analyses based solely on surface case marking.



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