

The Meronymic Construction

This work puts forth the hypothesis that a previously unrecognized construction should be envisaged. In the literature on Korean, sentences such as (1) and (2) have almost invariably been defined as cases of inalienable possession (see Maling and Kim 1992). Traditionally, under this label converge three different types of relation: (a) part-whole (e.g. *child:hand*), (b) spatial (*door:middle*), and (c) kinship (*John:mother*). The ungrammatical sentence in (3), in which the two accusative marked NPs are related by kinship, shows that this label is inappropriate for the Korean clause type exemplified with (1) and (2) (ordinary ownership is also out). Mirto 1998 labels this clause type as meronymic, a well-known term (see Cruse 1986) whose meaning (after the Greek *méros* 'part') includes types (a) and (b), but leaves (c) out.

The distinction the meronymic construction draws between (c) and the other relations reflects an actual difference between two kinds of relational nouns: when we talk about '*the child's hand*' or '*the middle of the door*', the two nouns in each NP (meronym and holonym) refer to a single entity, whereas in a NP like '*John's mother*' the two nouns necessarily refer to two distinct entities. Sentence (3) is out because the meronymic construction instantiates this difference.

The Korean meronymic construction is constrained as in (I)-(III). To my knowledge, this complex pattern is unique.

- (I) transitive verbs such as *cap* 'hold' and *ttwulh* 'make a hole' are allowed, others like *sa* 'buy' are not, as (4) shows;
- (II) as for intransitives, unergatives bring about ill-formed sentences, unlike unaccusatives, as (5) and (6) show;
- (III) syntactic tests like passivization, relativization and topicalization reveal an asymmetry between the holonym and the meronym. With regard to such tests, the former is syntactically active, the latter is inert (the sentence in (7) shows the asymmetry with regard to *á*-passivization (see O'Grady 1991: 47)).

In Mirto 1998 I argue that the meronymic construction is also found in Amharic, a Semitic language of Ethiopia, in Lakhota, a Siouan language of North America, and in two clause types of Mandarin Chinese (the *ba* construction and the so-called double nominative). Korean, Amharic and Lakhota all share SOV word order. The two constructions of Mandarin also show SOV word order. Constructions that appear to be meronymic are also found in Guaraní (Velazquez Castillo 1996) and in Northern Pomo (O' Connor 1996). These constructions too have SOV word order. All these languages are genetically unrelated and geographically distant. This bundle of similarities calls for a typology based explanation.

For these patterns, I propose an analysis in which the meronym is a noun predicate, while the holonym is an enlarged-argument, a noun that apparently denotes the whole, but actually refers to a part.

- (1) Nay-ka ai-lul son-ul cap-ass-ta. (Maling and Kim 1992: 49)
 I-NOM child-ACC hand-ACC hold-PAST-IND
 'I held the child by the hand.'
- (2) Ai-tul-i mun-ul kawuntey-lul ttwulh-ess-ta. (Kim 1990: 262)
 child-PL-NOM door-ACC middle-ACC make.hole-PAST-IND
 'The children punctured the door in the middle.'
- (3) * Nay-ka John-ul emeni-lul ttayli-ess-ta.
 I-NOM John-ACC mother-ACC hit-PAST-IND
 'I hit John's mother.'
- (4) * John-i sikyey-lul cwul-ul sa-ss-ta.
 John-NOM watch-ACC chain-ACC buy-PAST-IND
 'John bought the chain of the watch.'
- (5) John-i pal-i pina-ess-ta.
 John-nom arm-nom bleed-past-ind
 'John's arm bled.'
- (6) * John-i nwun-i wus-ko iss-ess-ta.
 John-NOM eye-NOM smile-PROCbe-PAST-IND
 'John's eyes are smiling.'
- (7) a. Kangto-ka Yumi-lul phal-ul pulettuli-ess-ta.
 burglar-NOM Yumi-ACC arm-ACC break-PAST-IND
 'The burglar broke Yumi's arm.'
- b. Yumi-ka phal-i pulettuli-e-ci-ess-ta.
 Yumi-NOM arm-NOM break-INF-PASS-PAST-IND
 'Yumi's arm was broken.'
- c. * Phal-i Yumi-ka pulettuli-e-ci-ess-ta.
 arm-NOM Yumi-NOM break-INF-PASS-PAST-IND
 'Yumi's arm was broken.'

References

- Cruse, D. A. (1986). *Lexical Semantics*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Kim, Y.-J. (1990). *The Syntax and Semantics of Korean Case: The Interaction between Lexical and Syntactic Levels of Representation*. Dissertation, Harvard University.
- Maling, J. and S.-W. Kim (1992). 'Case assignment in the inalienable possession construction in Korean'. *Journal of East Asian Linguistics* 1: 37-68
- Mirto, I. M. (1998). *The Syntax of the Meronymic Construction*. Pisa, ETS.
- O' Connor, M. C. (1996). 'The situated interpretation of Possessor-Raising', in: *Grammatical Constructions: Their Form and Meaning*, Shibatani M. and S. A. Thompson (eds.). Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- O' Grady, W. (1991). *Categoriae and Case. The Sentence Structure of Korean*. Amsterdam Studies in the Theory and History of Linguistic Science. Amsterdam, John Benjamins.
- Velazquez Castillo, M. (1996). *The Grammar of Possession: Inalienability, Incorporation and Possessor Ascension in Guaraní*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia, John Benjamins.