Mass-count distinction and nominal grounding in Korean and Japanese

Problem & Proposal: This paper explores the atomization and grounding in the nominal domain in Korean and Japanese. After demonstrating that these languages show mass-count distinction, I argue that classifiers are not atomizers (contra Chierchia 1999, Borer 2005). I moreover cliam that, in addition to atomicity, nouns are grounded (Langacker 1988), but the grounding occur in a different way between Korean and Japanese.

Atomicity: It has been widely claimed that nouns are underlyingly non-atomic in classifier languages (Greenburg 1973, a.o.), and that classifiers function as an atomizer in classifier languages whereas the plural marker does in non-classifier languages, e.g., -*s* in English (Chierchia 1998 and subsequent works and Borer 2005). However, it has also been widely argued that bare nouns in Korean and Japanese (both of which are well-studied classifier languages) have mass-count distinction (Kang 1994, Lee 1989, a.o.). For instance, Kang (1994) points out that a pluralizer -*tul* in Korean cannot be attached to typical mass nouns (e.g., water). A plural marker in Japanese -*tati*, which corresponds to -*tul* in Korean, is also subject to the same restriction (although -*tati* is more restricted than -*tul*, such that -*tati* is largely incompatible with non-human individuals). In Japanese, on the other hand, Sudo (2015) convincingly shows empirical evidence of the mass-count distinction in Japanese. Thus, I claim, contra Chierchia and Borer, that bare nouns in Japanese and Korean can be atomic. (I assume that atomization happens in the lower domain of a nominal (e.g., *n* or lexical).

Classifiers: The proposal here is also supported by behaviours of classifiers; in some cases (though not widely observed), classifiers are dropped as shown in (1) (Lee 2000).

(1)a. *han saram* (1 person) **b.** *tu cip* (2 house) **c.** *pyol set* (star 3) (KOR)

As Sudo points out, the same holds in Japanese as in (2) (although it seems more restricted in Japanese than in Korean).

(2)a. *san choo (ko) no hoshi* (3 trillion (CL) of star) **b.** *san senshu* (3 player) (JP)

I argue following Bale & Coon (2014) that classifiers in Korean and Japanese are required by a number (but not always obligatory) rather than obligatorily required for a noun to be atomic (as commonly assumed in the recent literature, e.g., Borer 2005).

Grounding: The differences between Korean and Japanese are not limited to the degree of the optionalities discussed above, however. As shown in (3), nouns with or without quantifiers (numeral + classifier) necessarily have a definite interpretation in telic circumstances in Korean.

(3) *Mary -nun sakwa* (*-se kae*) *-rul (ta) mek-e peri/chiu -ess -ta.*
-TOP apple -3 Cl -ACC exhaustively eat up-Past -Dec
'Mary ate up **the** (three) apple(s).'

The examples in (3) cannot be followed by a sentence that expresses indefiniteness of the individuals (Lee 2000); e.g., **Mary* ***ate up*** apple*, but I have no idea which one it was* (* in Korean). Similarly, the examples in (4) show that singular demonstratives brings a singular interpretation to a bare noun (Kang 1994).

(4)a. *i / ce / ku sakwa* **b.** *i / ce / ku sakwa-tul* **c.** *i-tul/ce-tul/ku-tul sakwa*
this/that/the apple this/that/the apple-PL this-PL/that-PL/the-PL apple
'this/that/the apple' 'these/those/the apples' 'these/those/the apples'

While bare nouns denote either a singular or plural individual(s), NPs with a demonstrative should denote a singular individual (4a). The examples in (4b, c) show that the singularizing in is not due to the demonstrative. Meanwhile, Japanese correspondences to (3, 4) are still ambiguous in terms of definiteness or specificity. I argue that these differences of Korean and Japanese are grounding (applying from Langacker 1988): Korean nouns are grounded by D elements (e.g., telic predicates, or demonstratives) whereas those in Japanese are grounded contextually.