

No Nom/Acc Case Markers in Korean: Just Allomorphs of a Delimiter

It is generally assumed that *-i/ka* is the nominative case marker and *-ul/lul* is the accusative case marker in Korean. This seems to be very clear in consideration of the following:

- (1) *minho-ka swuci-lul salang ha-ø-nta.*
Minho-Nom Susie-Acc love do-Pres-Decl ‘Minho loves Susie.’

There are controversies over the morpho-syntactic status of the markers, whether they are inflectional affixes, clitics or phrasal affixes (H-K Kuh 1998, B Yoo 1989, Y No 1991, H-R Chae 1991/2000, Cho & Sells 1995, J Yoon 1995, H-R Chae & Y No 1998, etc.).

We face, however, a far more difficult problem to solve when we consider sentences of the following:

- (2) *i chayk-i cal phalli-ci-ka/lul anh-ass-ta.*
this book-Nom well be sold-Comp-KA/LUL do not-Past-Decl
‘This book did not sell well.’

The markers glossed as KA/LUL are formally the same as those case markers in (1). However, they are in positions where the case markers cannot occur. The questions then are: i) if the two groups of markers are different, how can we define each of them?, ii) if they are the same, how can we define their distributional differences? If they are different, we need to identify the *-ul/lul* in such “borderline” cases as *osolkil-ul ket-* ‘to walk along a path.’ If they are the same, we need to explain why *-i/ka* is attached to the subject and *-ul/lul* to the object (cf. (1)). No previous approaches seem to have succeeded in either of these tasks.

We will show that *-i/ka* and *-ul/lul* are all allomorphs of a delimiter, under the assumption that the subject/object are defined on the basis of word order and such pragmatic factors as animacy of the arguments involved. I Kim (2014) argues that the basic function of *-i/ka* is “unique specification.” We will see that that of *-ul/lul* is the same, contrary to the general assumptions. Most of all, sentences like (2) do not have identifiable meaning differences. A further evidence for their allomorphic differences comes from their distributions: except in such rare cases as (2), the two groups of variants are in complementary distributions. We will argue that the morpheme concerned has four allomorphs. Firstly, they are divided into two groups depending on a morpho-syntactic factor whether they are realized on the subject position or on the other positions (including the object position). Secondly, each group of allomorphs is further divided into two allomorphs depending on a phonological factor. Under our approach, we can provide a unified account of *-i/ka* and *-ul/lul*, capturing the fact that the former occurs with the subject and the latter with the object.

There seem to be some counter-examples to our analysis. Firstly, the *-i/ka*-marked NP which comes before *ani-* ‘not to be’ or *doy-* ‘to become’ is not the subject. However, the marker here is different from those at issue because it appears as the marker of a (non-subject) complement, which is designated as *-i/ka* by the head verb. Secondly, an *-i/ka*-marked NP can appear before the auxiliary verb *-ko siph-* ‘to want to’ (e.g. *pay-ka mek-ko siph-ta* ‘... want to eat a pear’). However, as this unusual marker is controlled by the auxiliary verb, as is shown in H-R Chae (2015a), it is also different from the delimiter we are dealing with. Lastly, the most difficult data to account for would be those in (2). They are problematic for us because *-i/ka* occurs in a non-subject position. At the moment we just want to point out that this phenomenon occurs in a very limited range. The only place where *-i/ka* is allowed in non-subject positions is in between the complement marker *-ci* and the negative auxiliary *anh-* ‘do not.’ In addition, only intransitive non-volitional verbs are allowed before *-ci* (*pap-i mekhi-ci-ka anh-nunta* ‘the rice is not eaten’ vs. **pap-ul mek-ci-ka anh-nunta* ‘do not eat rice,’ *mwul-i hulu-ci-ka anh-nunta* ‘the water does not flow’ vs. **ay-ka nol-ci-ka ahn-nunta* ‘the child does not play’). The fact that these “unaccusative verbs” have their logical objects as their surface subjects might trigger an agreement between the real subject and the *-ci*-marked VP.

Selected References

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