

A constructionist approach to Korean locative postposition–verb construction

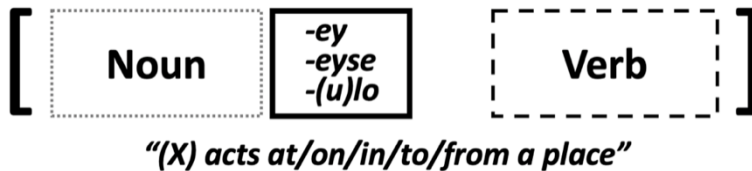
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A constructionist approach assumes that language comprises units of conventionalized form–meaning/function pairings at varying levels of abstraction, dubbed constructions (Ellis, 2002; Goldberg, 1995). These units exist in a speaker’s hyperdimensional space as a form of clusters (Goldberg, 2019) with diverse links between (sub-)constructions representing their internal networks (Goldberg, 1995).

Based on these ideas, the current study aims to reveal the properties of Locative Postposition–Verb Construction (LPVC) in Korean, an agglutinative and SOV language with overt case-marking via particles. This construction corresponds to one type of English intransitive construction and is a basic clause-level construction type in Korean. LPVC consists of three major components: a fixed slot for postposition allowing only one of the three particular options (-ey, -eyse, -(u)lo); a moderately restricted slot for verb such that its selection is contingent upon the semantics of the postposition and the intended event; a rather open slot for noun unless its meaning is incompatible with the frame semantics—a location-related event: existence, action/deed, destination, arrival, contact, and source (Nam, 1993). The grammatical subject can occur between the postposition-marked noun and verb and be omitted, as Korean permits scrambling/omission of sentential components.



The postposition serves as a pivot of LPVC such that each postposition introduces its frame semantics and restricts verb-in-construction use. While previous studies have mostly focused on the semantics and use of these postpositions in an isolated manner, little research touches upon how LPVC (and its sub-constructions) is explained by way of its major components and the relations between these components in an interactive manner.

By employing a large-scale corpus (the semantic-role-tagged corpus by National Institute of Korean Language, 2020), this study scrutinizes the internal network regarding LPVC, with a focus on the three representative (i.e., most frequently used) verbs identified in Jung (2020). We visualize the network per verb by (i) posing three sub-constructions of LPVC (N-ey V; N-eyse V; N-(u)lo V), (ii) specifying the thematic roles of N and subject, and (iii) connecting each node.

Figures 1 to 3 present the constructional network of LPVC for the three verbs. We find three notable aspects regarding the network. First, it is verb-specific in that each verb demonstrates distinct relations between the components. While the three sub-constructions involving *ka-* ‘to go’ show multiple thematic-role nodes on nouns (and on subjects if present), the sub-constructions involving the other two verbs are rather simple in this respect. Second, within each verb, the sub-constructions share the same properties to *some* degree. For the verb *sa/-* ‘to live’, for example, N-ey V and N-eyse V manifest an overlap regarding a thematic role of nominals. This overlap may be the source of the alternating nature (and possibly acquisitional challenges) of these sub-constructions. Third, the strength of association between these sub-constructions and the noun’s thematic roles per verb seems to be asymmetric in terms of usage frequency (investigation ongoing). Together, these findings illuminate (and are expected to reveal) the interactive nature of LPVC in terms of frame semantics, verb, postposition, and thematic roles of noun.

Keywords: Constructionist approach, Locative Postposition–Verb Construction, Korean

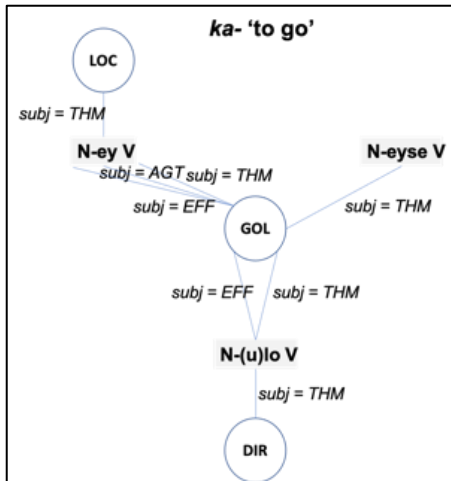


Figure 1. Constructional network: *ka-* 'to go'. The abbreviation in a circle (e.g. GOL) = thematic role of noun.

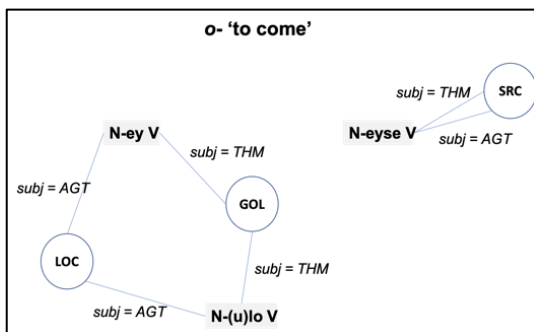


Figure 2. Constructional network: *o-* 'to come'. The abbreviation in a circle (e.g. GOL) = thematic role of noun.

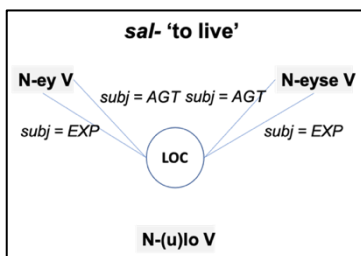


Figure 3. Constructional network: *sa/-* 'to live'. The abbreviation in a circle (e.g. LOC) = thematic role of noun.

Abbreviations. AGT = agent; DIR = direction; EFF = effect; EXP = experiencer; GOL = goal; LOC = location; N = noun; subj = subject; THM = theme; V = verb

References

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