

NPI licensing and the role of phonological phrasing in Korean

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Richards (2016) proposes that agreeing elements in syntax should be in the same phonological domain (forming “probe-goal Contiguity” in Richards’ term). I argue that interpretational ambiguity displayed in Negative Sensitive Items (NSI) in Korean offer an argument in favor of this proposal.

NSIs in Korean consist of an indefinite and a focus marker *-to*, which can broadly be categorized into two groups hinging on the type of the indefinite: 1) *amwu* +(N)+*to*, 2) *wh*+(...)+*to*. Though they seem to deliver similar interpretations, they have important differences. First, the former is subject to the clause-mate condition (Sells 2006), while the latter is subject to the *c*-command relation requirement.

- (1) a. **Mary-nun* [_{CP} *Tom-i amwu chak-to ilkesstako*] *sayngkakha.ji anh-nun-ta*.
M-Top T-Nom ANY book-Foc read think not-Pres-Decl
‘(intended reading) Mary does not think Tom read any book.’
- b. [_{CP} *amwu chak-to_i Mary-nun* [_{CP} *Tom-i t_i ilkesstako*] *sayngkakha.ji anh-nun-ta*]
ANY book-Foc M-Top T-Nom read think not-Pres-Decl
‘Mary does not think Tom read any book.’
- c. *Mary-nun* [_{CP} *Tom-i mwusun chak-to ilkesstako*] *sayngkakha.ji anh-nun-ta*.
M-Top T-Nom WHAT book-Foc read think Neg-Pres-Decl
‘Mary does not think Tom read any book’

Second, grammatical instances of [amwu(N)to ... NEG] are unambiguous, –they deny existence– while instances of [wh(N)to ... NEG] are ambiguous; they can be understood to deny existence, but they can also take a “specific ... also/even” reading. This is shown below.

- (2) a. *John-un etten chak-to kenturi-ji. anh-ass-e*.
J-Top WHICH book-Foc touch-Neg-Past-Decl.
(A) ‘John did not touch any book.’ → John-un || **etten chak-to** (||)
kenturi-ji. **anh-ass-e**
(B) ‘For a specific book x, John also did not touch x’. → John-un || **etten chak-to** ||
kenturi-ji. **anh-ass-e**
- b. *John-un etten chak-ul kenturiji-to anh-ass-e*.
J-TOP WHICH book-Acc touch-Foc Neg-Past-Decl.
(A) ‘John did not touch any book.’ → John-un || **etten chak-ul kenturiji-to anh-ass-e**
(B) ‘For a specific book x, John did not even touch x’. → John-un || **etten chak-ul** ||
kenturiji-**to anh-ass-e**

In this paper, I first argue that *amwu*-NSIs are negative concord items, and *wh*-NSIs are negative polarity items (NPI), based on diagnostic tests to distinguish between concord items and polarity items by Vallduví(1994) and Giannakidou (2000). Moreover, adopting Contiguity theory (Richards 2016), which has it that a probe and its matching goal must be dominated by a single prosodic phrase ϕ , I propose that the different prosodic structures in (2) are reflections of different syntactic derivations led by distinct features involved in each reading.

A copy of *wh*+(...)+*to* must be *c*-commanded by a negation; otherwise, the string receives a free choice reading. Moreover, a copy of a *wh*-indefinite must be *c*-commanded by *-to*; otherwise, it is interpreted existentially. Given that a probe undergoes Agree with a goal within its *c*-command domain (Chomsky 2015), the *c*-command requirement for NSI licensing can be attributed to Agree between a *wh*-indefinite and the focus particle and a negation. Based on this, under the NSI reading, I argue, the *wh*-indefinite of an NSI has [*u*Foc] feature and the string *wh*+(...)+*to* has [*u*Neg] feature to value, which are valued by the focus particle *-to* and the negation *anh* respectively. On the other hand, the specific reading of the string *wh*+(...)+*to* does not require the *c*-command relation, indicating that such features are absent, let alone Agree.

Richards (2016) argues that probe-goal Contiguity is formed by “Grouping” in languages like Korean in which the directionality of a head and a phonologically active edge are different.

(3) Grouping

Take a pair of prosodic nodes α , β and create a ϕ which dominates them both.

Provided that a maximal projection is translated into a ϕ (Selkirk 2011), the phonological structures of (B)s of (2) are the direct reflections of syntactic structures. Under the NSI reading, on the other hand, which involves Agree between a *wh*-indefinite and the focus particle and negation, agreeing elements should form a single ϕ to form Contiguity via Grouping. This is what we see in (A) of (2-b). The remaining question is why (2-a) has an optional boundary after the NSI. Unlike (2-b), *-to* is directly attached to the *wh*-indefinite phrase, which makes the NSI reading more salient than the specific reading and weakens the role of phonological phrasing. This analysis supports that a syntactic structure and its derivation directly influence its phonological structure.

Reference: *Giannakidou, A. (2000). Negative... concord?. *Natural Language & Linguistic Theory*, 18(3), 457-523. *Richards, N. (2016). *Contiguity theory (Vol. 73)*. MIT Press. *Selkirk, E. (2011). The syntax-phonology interface. *The handbook of phonological theory*, 2, 435-483. *Sells, P. (2006). Interactions of negative polarity items in Korean. *Harvard Studies in Korean Linguistics*, 11, 724-737. *Vallduví, E. (1994). *Polarity items, n-words, and minimizers in Catalan and Spanish*. HCRC Publications, University of Edinburgh.