

Korean and Japanese Light Verb Construction and Its Implications on Typological Variations^{*}

Youngju Choi

(University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign)

Choi, Youngju. 2008. **Korean and Japanese Light Verb Construction and Its Implications on Typological Variations**. *The Linguistic Association of Korea Journal*, 16(2), 143-164. The purposes of the paper are; first, to show that verbal nouns in light verb constructions are nominal instead of being nominal plus verbal and, second, to show that the light verb constructions reflect typological variations between English-type isolating languages and Korean/Japanese-type dependent marking languages (Nichols 1986). English-type languages are predicate centered, meaning that predicates select arguments. On the contrary, Korean and Japanese are argument centered. They allow arguments to combine in a cluster and to select their predicate. Then, the special properties of light verb constructions are not from the dual category but from the dual character of verbal nouns they are not only selected by preceding arguments but also select another verbal nouns or a light verb.

Key Words: light verb constructions, verbal nouns, macro-parametric differences, predicate requirement

1. Introduction

^{*} I would like to thank three anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments. Also I am thankful to James Yoon and Hee Rack Chae for the seminar class 'Korean/Japanese syntax and semantics' at UIUC in 2003. Their active discussion on the light verb constructions helps me construct the macro-parametric idea, to capture their interesting properties. All the errors are my own responsibility.

Like verbs, Korean/Japanese verbal nouns (VNs) can assign verbal case to arguments just like verbs. Like nouns, they are case-marked and require a light verb to form a clause. Due to the mixed properties of VNs, many previous researches have assumed that VNs have a mixed category and that they transfer their argument structure to the light verb (Grimshaw and Mester 1988, Choi and Wechsler 2001, Kim, Yang, and Choi 2004, among many others). However, the mixed category and/or argument transfer assumption cannot explain the case where VNs are stacked. As shown in (1), more than one VN (*swuip-ul* and *kumci-lul*) can occur in a clause. The assumption that the argument structure of VNs is transferred to the light verb does not work for the stacked VNs. The argument structure of the first VN cannot be transferred to the light verb. If special properties of light verb constructions are treated as superficial rather than as deep seated macro parametric difference between languages, the stacked VNs cannot be explained.

- (1) cengpwu-ka yangtampay-lul **swuip-ul**
 government-Nom foreign.cigarette-Acc import-Acc
 kumci-lul hay-ss-ta
 blocking-Acc do-Pst-Dcl
 ‘Government blocked the import of foreign cigarette’

(Chae 1996:102 (5))

Unlike other researchers, Manning (1993), following Sells (1991, 1995) assumes that argument selection is not decided by a predicate but by affixes which are added to nominals in Japanese/(Korean). He also assumes that VNs have an underspecified category. The two assumptions can explain the stacked VNs. However they predict that the VNs are verbs when they are in aspectual noun constructions in Korean, as pointed out in Yoon and Park (2007). In (2), the aspectual noun *cwung* is used with the

VN *swuip*. If the VN *swuip* is as a verb, the sentence would be wrongly ruled out. The aspectual noun *cwung* is not compatible with a verb.

- (2) cengpwu-ka yangtampay-lul **swuip-cwung**
 government-Nom foreign.cigarette-Acc import-Asp.Noun
 ‘in the middle of government’s import of foreign cigarettes’

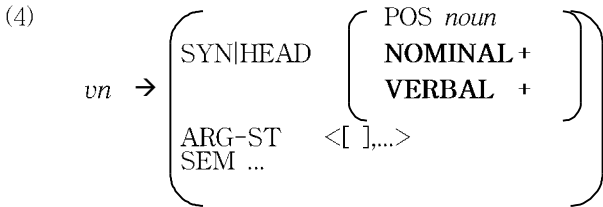
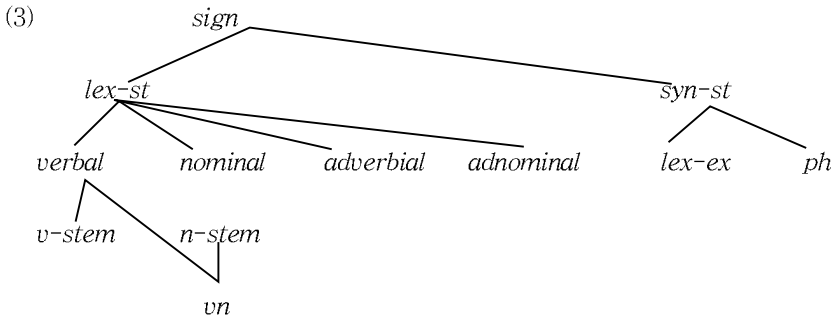
In the paper, I adopt Manning’s insight on argument selection but along the line with Yoon and Park (2007), I claim that the VNs are nominal instead of being nominal plus verbal. The special properties of light verb constructions do not come from the mixed or underspecified category but from the dual character of the VNs. In syntactic selection, they are predicates selected by arguments and, when case-marked, they are also arguments selecting other VNs or a light verb. As well as other paradoxical syntactic behavior of light verb constructions, the VN stacking construction ((1)) and the aspectual VN construction ((2)) will naturally follow from the assumption that there is a macro-parametric variation on syntactic selection between English-type isolating languages and Korean/Japanese-type dependent marking languages (For detailed discussion of the macro-parameter, named ‘dependent marking parameter’, see Choi 2007 and Choi and Yoon 2006, 2007).

The organization of the paper is as follows. Section 2 reviews previous researches, showing how they fail in explaining basic properties of light verb constructions. Section 3 introduces a new analysis which treats the VNs as predicative nominals. Section 4 shows how the new analysis explains tricky phenomena of light verb constructions. Section 5 concludes the paper.

2. Previous Approaches

2.1. Mixed Category and Argument Transfer

Due to the dual behaviors of VNs, it has long been treated as having a dual or an underspecified category. For example, Kim, Yang, and Choi (2004: KYC) treat VNs as inheriting both of the constraints of n-stem and v-stem, resulting in the information specified in (4).



This explains why VNs have argument structures while having nominal forms morphologically, having case markers and requiring predicates (light verbs). They have argument structures since v-stems are supposed to have argument structures. They are nominal since they also inherit the constraint of n-stem.

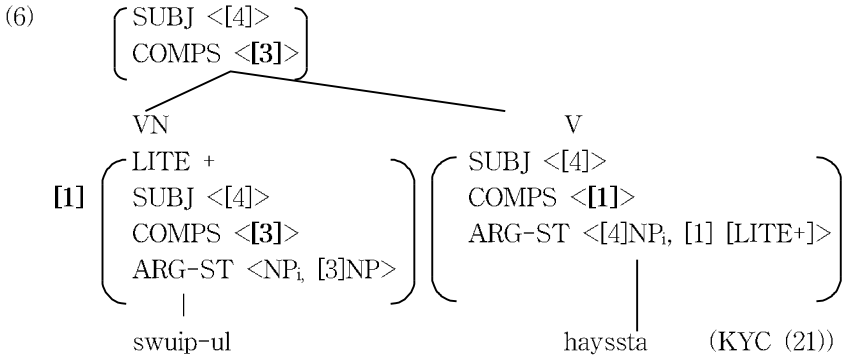
For combination of VNs and a light verb, KYC (2004) provides the Head-Lite Rule which guarantees that the light verb *ha* takes the VN as its

complement and the argument structure of the VN is percolated to the mother node, as specified in COMPS [A]. The idea is very similar to Grimshaw and Mester’s argument transfer except that argument structure of the VN is transferred to the light verb directly instead of being transferred to the mother node.

(5) Head Lite Rule:

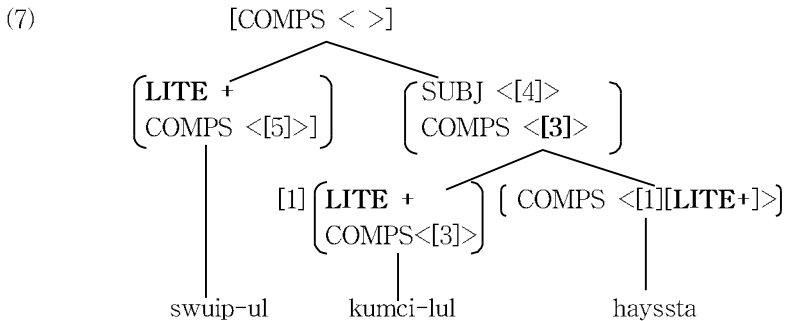
$$\left[\begin{array}{l} hd\text{-}lite\text{-}ph \\ COMPS [A] \end{array} \right] [1] \left[\begin{array}{l} LITE + \\ COMPS [A] \end{array} \right]_{nelist}, \left[\begin{array}{l} H COMPS <[1]> \\ (KYC (23)) \end{array} \right]$$

The lexical specification of the light verb and the Head-Lite Rule can explain the case where one VN occurs, as shown in (6). The light verb *hayssta* takes the VN *swuip-ul* as its complement, as specified in COMPS <[1]>. The mother node inherits the COMPS value [3] of the VN, as specified in the Head-Lite Rule.



However, the Head-Lite Rule cannot explain the case where two or more VNs are stacked. The rule can constrain the combination of the light verb, *hayssta* with the VN, *kumci-lul*, but it cannot constrain the

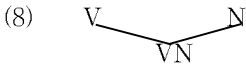
combination of the verbal complex, *kumci-lul hayssta* and the first VN, *swuip-ul*, as shown in (7). The first VN and the verbal complex also need to be constrained by the Head-Lite Rule because the argument structure of the VN *swuip-ul* has to be transferred to the mother node so that the whole phrase, *swuip-ul kumci-lul hayssta*, can take appropriate complements.



The Head-Lite Rule specifies that a head element combines with a complement that bears the head feature LITE. The head element requires its complement to have the feature LITE. When *kumci-lul* is combined with *hayssta*, the feature LITE matches and the Head-Lite Rule allows the combination. However, when *swuip-ul* is combined with the head-lite phrase *kumci-lul hayssta*, the COMPS value of the phrase is percolated from the VN *kumci-lul*. As a result, there is no LITE feature specification for the COMPS value in the head-lite phrase. Then, the combination of *swuip-ul* and *kumci-lul hayssta* is constrained by the Head-Complement rule instead of by the Head-Lite Rule. It means that the mother node cannot inherit the COMPS value of the VN, as shown in [COMPS < >]. Then, the phrase (7) is not allowed to combine any other complement, ruling out the stacked VN construction (1).

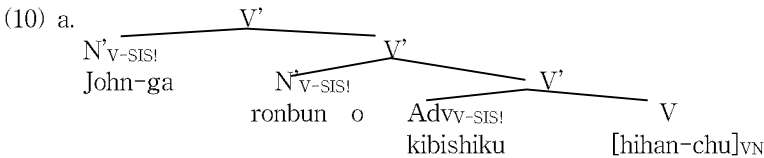
2.2. Underspecified Category and Sister Selection

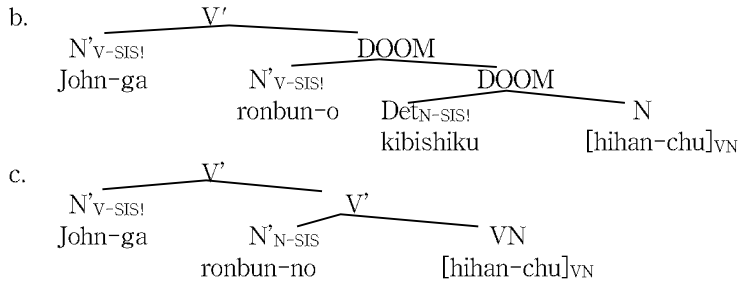
The important insight of Manning (1993) is that the syntactic combinatoric information is decided by the affixes that are added to nominals (Sells 1995, Cho and Sells 1995). For example, when a nominal has a genitive marker, the following element must be nominal, and, when it has a nominative or an accusative marker, the following element must be verbal. Thus, the nominative marked nominal *John-ga* and the accusative marked *ronbun-o* have a marking of V-SIS which means that it has to have a verbal sister. The information is further distinguished by the exclamation marker. N-SIS! which means that it can only take a nominal sister. N-SIS means that the requirement is not that strict, allowing both a nominal and an underspecified category VN.



- (9) a. John-ga ronbun-o kibishiku hihan-chu
 J-Nom thesis-Acc severely criticism-during
 ‘During John’s severe criticism of the thesis, ...’
 b. *John-ga ronbun-o sono hihan-chu
 J-Nom thesis-Acc this criticism-during
 c. John-ga ronbun-no hihan-chu
 J-Nom thesis-Acc criticism-during

The selectional restriction of (9a) through (9c) is represented in (10a) through (10c).



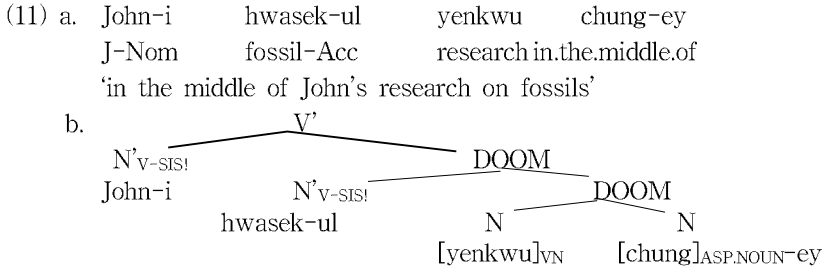


The example (9b) is ruled out because the phrase *kibishiku hihan-chu* does not have an appropriate verbal category. The accusative marked nominal *ronbun-o* requires strictly a verbal element as its argument, as marked by V-SIS!. The determiner *kibishiku* imposes a strict requirement on its sister, as marked by N-SIS!. Due to the strictness, the VN has to be recognized as a noun instead of an underspecified one. As a result, the entire combination is percolated as a noun, resulting in a conflict with the requirement of the preceding accusative marked nominal.

The example (9c) is acceptable because the genitive marker does not impose the strict requirement on its sister. The category of the VN *hihan-chu* can be percolated as underspecified and the whole combination can be any V or N category, depending on the preceding selectional information. In (9c), the phrase *ronbun-no hihan-chu* is recognized as a verb since the nominative marked nominal *John-ga* strictly requires a verbal sister.

Manning (1993) successfully explains the grammaticality difference in (9) using the categorical underspecificity of VNs and using the selectional restriction that affixes impose on their sisters. However, when his explanation is applied to Korean data, a problem arises, as Yoon and Park (2003) point out. The aspectual noun *cwung* 'in the middle of' in Korean, as an independent noun, forms a complex noun when combined with a preceding noun. Then, the requirement of the preceding nominal cannot be

satisfied. Having an accusative marker, *hwasek-ul* selects a verbal sister (V-SIS!). The noun complex *yenkwu chung* does not satisfy the requirement of its sister. As a result, the grammatical sentence (11a) will be wrongly ruled out, as shown in (11b).



3. Verbal Nouns and Typological Variation

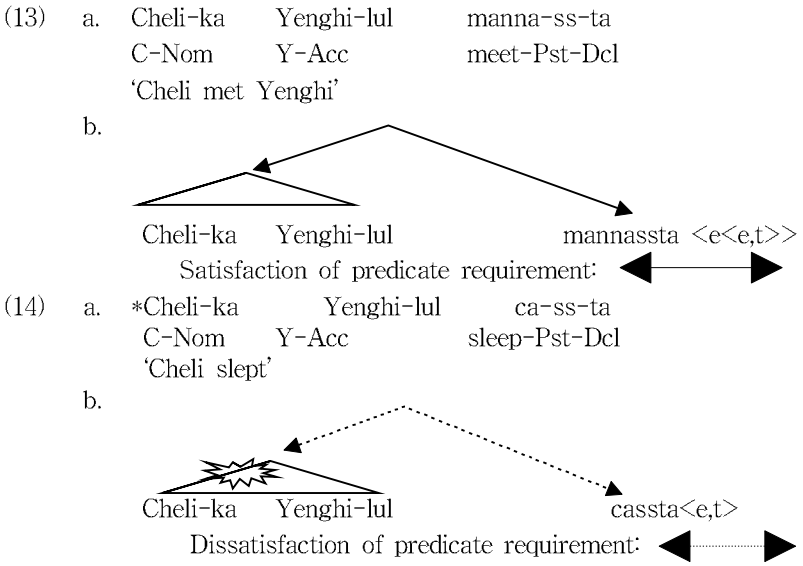
3.1. Proposal

Following Choi (2007) and Choi and Yoon (2006, 2007), I claim that, in dependent marking languages like Korean and Japanese, arguments combine in a cluster to select predicates.

- (12) Dependent Marking Parameter:
 Arguments combine in a cluster first and select their predicate with the help of dependent markers in dependent marking languages. (Choi 2007:24(2))

Using the lexical information of dependent markers, dependent-marked arguments become functors looking for a compatible predicate. A nominative-marked argument looks for an intransitive, transitive, or ditransitive predicate. An accusative-marked nominal looks for a transitive or ditransitive predicate. A dative-marked nominal looks for a ditransitive

predicate. When a nominative-marked argument combines with an accusative-marked argument, the argument chunk looks for a transitive or ditransitive predicate. When a nominative-marked, an accusative-marked, and a dative-marked argument combine, the entire chunk looks for a ditransitive predicate. Whenever an argument or an argument chunk has an appropriate predicate, they satisfies the predicate requirement the case markers imposes on them. The argument combination in (13) has its own predicate, which satisfiesthe predicate requirement. On the contrary, the argument chunk in (14) does not have a compatible predicate. The nominative plus accusative argument chunk is not compatible with the intransitivepredicate, *cassta*.



When a VN has a case marker, it requires a light verb or another VN. Derivation of the basic light verb construction will reveal how the system

works. For example, in (15), *cengpwu-ka* and *yangtampay-lul* combines and they requires a transitive or a ditransitive predicate, as in (15c) and the requirement is satisfied by the VN *swuip*, as in (15d).

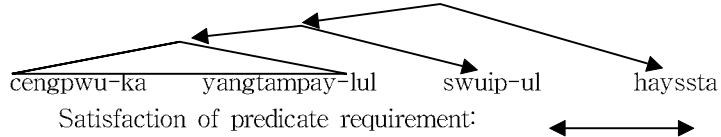
- (15) a. *cengpwu-ka yangtampay-lul swuip*
 government-Nom foreign.cigarette-Acc import
 ‘Government’s importing of foreign cigarettes’
- b. [*cengpwu-ka*
 P-requirement <e,t> or <e,<e,t>> or <e,<e,<e,t>>>
- c. [*cengpwu-ka yangtampay-lul*
 P-requirement <e,<e,t>> or <e,<e,<e,t>>>
- d. [*cengpwu-ka yangtampay-lul swuip*<<e,<e,t>>pred>
 Satisfaction of P-requirement

When the VN has an accusative marker, as in (16c), it requires a transitive or a ditransitive predicate. The requirement is satisfied by the light verb *ha-*, as in (16d).

- (16) a. *cengpwu-ka yangtampay-lul swuip-lul hay-ess-ta*
 government-Nom foreign.cigarette-Acc import-Acc do-Pst-Dcl
 ‘government imported foreign cigarettes’
- b. [*cengpwu-ka yangtampay-lul swuip*<pred>
 Satisfaction of P-requirement
- c. [*cengpwu-ka yangtampay-lul swuip* <pred>-lul
 P-requirement
- d. [*cengpwu-ka yangtampay-lul swuip*<pred>-lul
hay<<e,<e,t>>pred>-ss-ta Satisfaction of P-requirement

As shown in (17), all case-marked arguments (or argument chunks) have their appropriate predicates.

(17)



3.2. Stacked Verbal Noun Constructions and Aspectual Noun Constructions

Within the proposed system, stacked VN constructions are no longer problematic. In the systems of KYC (2004) and Choi and Wechsler (2001), the second occurrence of VN is not acceptable since the Head-Lite Rule is supposed to constrain only the combination of a VN and the light verb. The light verb alone has the information that it selects a complement with [LITE+] feature. The information is not available for the mother node because the mother node inherits the COMPS value of a VN. Then, in the next step, the combination of an extra VN is not constrained by the Head-Lite Rule which ensures the percolation of the COMPS value of the VN to the mother node.

However, in the proposed system, the light verb *ha-* is not responsible for selection of VNs. Instead of selecting its argument, it is selected by the VNs. Case-marked VNs require another VN or a light verb to satisfy their predicate requirement. In (18a), the first accusative-marked VN *swuip-ul* is allowed since it has its own predicate *kumci*. The second accusative-marked VN *kumci-lul* is allowed since it has its own predicate *ha(y)-*. Any number of VNs is allowed as long as VNs are followed either by another VN or by the light verb. In (18b), the first VN *swuip-ul* is followed by another VN *kumci-lul*, the second VN *kumci-lul* is followed by another VN *kyehoyk-ul*, and finally, the third VN *kyehoyk-ul* is followed by the light verb.

- (18) a. cengpwu-ka yangtampay-lul **swuip-ul**
 government-Nom foreign.cigarette-Acc import-Acc
kumci-lul hay-ss-ta
 blocking-Acc do-Pst-Dcl
 ‘Government blocked the import of foreign cigarette’
- b. cengpwu-ka yangtampay-lul **swuip-ul**
 government-Nom foreign.cigarette-Acc import-Acc
kumci-lul kyeheyk-ul hay-ss-ta
 blocking-Acc plan-Acc do-Pst-Dcl
 ‘Government planned to block the import of foreign cigarette’

VNs in the aspectual noun constructions in Korean do not suffer from the wrong category problem in the proposed system. VNs are predicative nominals. Since they are categorized as nouns, they can combine with the aspectual noun *cwung* ‘middle’, forming a complex noun phrase.

- (19) Cheli-ka konchwung-ul **kwanchal** (VN) **cwung** (Asp N)
 C-Nom insect-Acc observation middle
 ‘in the middle of Cheli’s observation of insects’

The VN *kwanchal* serves as a predicate of the nominative plus accusative argument chunk, without turning into a verb. When the aspectual noun *cwung* is added to the phrase, the VN and the aspectual noun combines and forms a noun.

What is required from the nominative/accustive-marked VN is not a verbal sister but a predicate whether nominal or verbal. Even though morphologically and syntactically nominal, VNs are predicative. Based on the observation of newspaper headlines, Yoon and Park (2007) conclude that predicates in K/J need not be verbal, unlike English. As shown in the

contrast in (20) and (21), the verbal predicate in English can be replaced by VN in Korean.

- (20) a. Samsung-cenca-to sayngsancik-un **kwuinnan**
 S-electronics-even production.jobs-Top manpower.difficulty
 ‘Even Samseung Electronics is experiencing manpower difficulties in the production branch’
- b. Mwu-n-kyuhyen-sinpwu Ro-taythonglyeng-ey **toksel**
 M-priest R-president-Dat harsh.words
 ‘Father Mwu-n hurled invectives against President Ro’
 (*Chosun Ilbo*, internet edition, 7/30/03)
- (21) a. Bush **acknowledges** ‘real threat’ of terrorism
 b. President **urges** compromise on medicare prescription plan
 (*The New York Times*, internet edition, 7/30/03)
 (Yoon and Park 2007)

4. More Properties of Light Verb Constructions

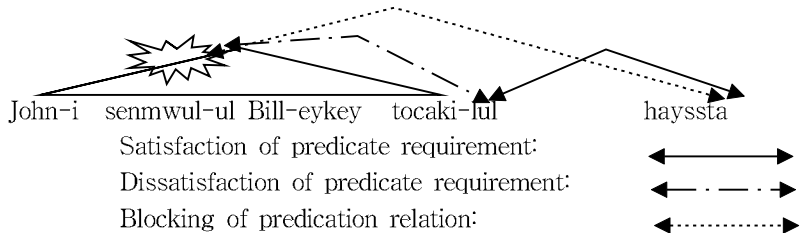
It is well-known that when the VNs are the only Acc-marked nominal in a clause, it can occur in a dislocated position in scrambling, relativization, topicalization, and so on, as in (22).

- (22) a. John-i Bill-eykey **senmwul**-ul hay-ss-ta
 J-Nom B-Dat present-Acc do-Pst-Dcl
 ‘John gave a present to Bill’
- b. John-i **senmwul**-ul Bill-eykey hay-ss-ta (scrambling)
- c. John-i Bill-eykey ha-n **senmwul** (relativization)
- d. John-i Bill-eykey han kes-un **senmwul**-i-ta (clefting)
- e. John-i Bill-eykey **ku-kes**-ul hay-ss-ta (pronominalization)
- f. John-i Bill-eykey **mwues**-ul hay-ss-ni? (wh-question)
 (KYC 2004: p82)

is used as a heavy verb with a meaning of ‘give’. In other syntactic variations ((22b) through (22f)), the VNs act exactly like other case marked nominals¹. In (23a), there is an extra case-marked argument. The extra one is a VN. The predicate requirement of the nominative+dative+accusative chunk is satisfied by the VN *senmwul*. The predicate requirement of the accusative marked VN is satisfied by the light verb *ha-*. Then, why are other syntactic variations ruled out, as in (23b) through (23f)?

In scrambling of (23c), the first three nominals, including the VN, combine first and look for their predicate but the common noun *tocaki* cannot serve as a predicate. The argument chunk is ruled out without having an appropriate predicate.

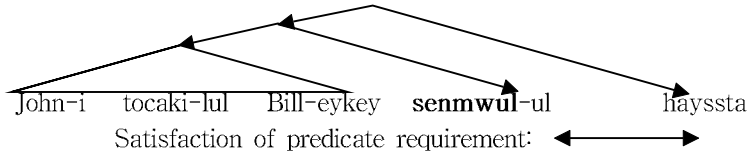
(25)



Comparison with the unscrambled version will show how the system explains the contrast. In (26), all the case marked arguments or argument chunks have their own predicates. Predicate requirements imposed by the argument chunk *John-i tocaki-lul Bill-eykey* and by the argument *senmwul-ul* are satisfied by the VN and the light verb, respectively.

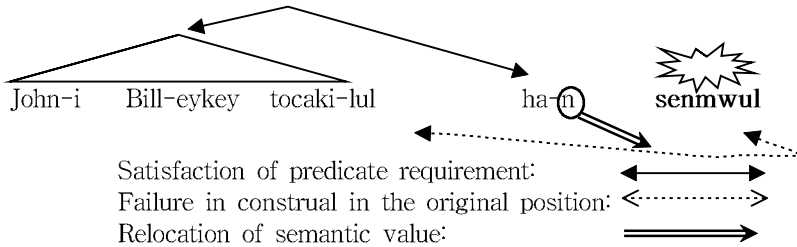
¹ In the relativized version ((22c)), the relative marker, as a dependent marker, relates the relativized element, *senmwul* to the missing argument in the preceding clause. Similarly, in clefting ((22d)), the copular marker *i-* equates the missing argument in the preceding clause which is followed by *kes* to the focused element, *senmwul*. See Choi (2007) for more discussion of clefting, and relativization.

(26)



Relative clauses are supposed to have a missing argument, but, in (23c), there is no missing argument. The three nominative+dative+accusative chunk has an appropriate predicate, a heavy verb *ha-2*. The relativized element *senmwul* cannot find an appropriate place to be construed in the preceding clause.

(27)

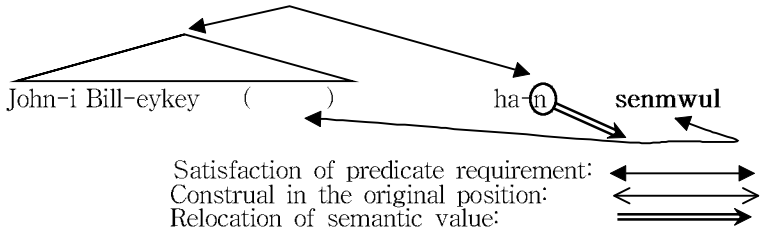


When VNs do not have their internal arguments, they can be relativized, as in (22c). It is because the relative clause does have an argument position unfilled in which the VNs are interpreted, as in (28).

² The verb *ha-* can be used either as a heavy verb or as a light verb. When it does not have a VN, it is construed as a heavy verb. In a ditransitive sentence, it is interpreted as ‘giving’ among many meanings. In (B), the verb *ha-* means ‘present’.

- A: John-i Mary-eykey tocaki-lul senmwulhay-ss-e?
 J-Nom M-Dat china-Acc present-Pst-Q
 ‘Did John presented Mary a china?’
- B: ani, John-i Mary-eykey tocaki-lul han-key-anila kkoch-ul hay-ss-e.
 no, J-Nom M-Dat china-Acc do-Comp-but, flower-Acc do-Pst-Dcl
 ‘No, John did not present Mary a china but flowers’.

(28)

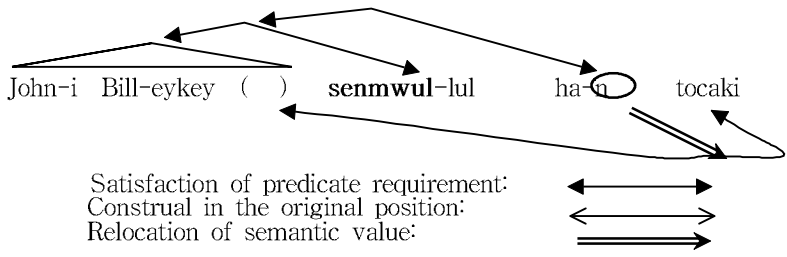


Common nouns can be relativized in the light verb constructions, as in (29).

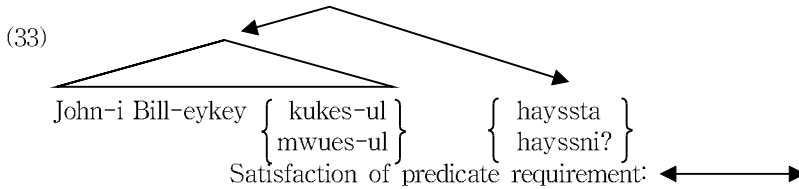
- (29) John-i Bill-eykey **senmwul**-ul ha-n tocaki
 J-Nom B-Dat present-Acc do-Rel china
 'a china that John presented Bill'

There are two possible derivations. The first option is that the first three nominals combine and has the predicate *ha*. In that case, the relativized item *tocaki* does not have an appropriate place to be interpreted. Thus, just like (27), it will be ruled out. The second option is shown in (30). The VN does not combine with the preceding nominals but it serves as a predicate of them. Then the relativized item will find a place to be construed in the preceding clause. The difference between the relativized common noun and relativized VN is that, while there is only one derivational option for the latter, there are two derivational options for the former due to the flexibility of VNs - they can be a predicate or an argument.

(30)



kukes and the wh-word *mwuescan* join to the argument combination since they are the only accusative marked nominals in the sentence. The argument combination, then, selects the verb *ha-*, as shown in (33).



5. Conclusion

The paper has discussed the special properties of Korean/Japanese light verb constructions with a macro-parametric perspective (Baker 1996, 2001). An optimal parameter explains the clustering properties of languages which are typologically distinguished from other languages. Not only light verb constructions but also many other properties of dependent marking languages, including scrambling, head-finality, radical pro-drop, argument chunk (surprising) coordination follow from the macro-parameter that I have proposed here. In combination of arguments, the order between them does not matter, as long as they find an appropriate predicate (scrambling). Since predicates do not select arguments, presence of arguments is not mandatory (radical pro-drop). Arguments combine first and expect a predicate to follow (head-finality). Finally, multiple argument coordination, multiple argument clefting, and multiple fragments are not surprising any more in Korean and Japanese because arguments are supposed to combine in these languages.

References

Baker, M. C. (2001). *The atoms of language: the mind's hidden rules of*

- grammar*. Basic Books.
- _____ (1996). *The polysynthesis parameter*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Chae, Hee-Rahk. (1996) Light verb constructions and structural ambiguity. *Language, Information and Computation (PACLIC 11)*, 99-107.
- Choi, I. and S. Wechsler. (2001). Mixed categories and argument transfer in the Korean light verb construction. *On-line proceedings of HPSG 2001*, 103-120.
- Choi, Y. (2007). *Dependent marking parameter: coordination, clefting, fragments, and scrambling in Korean and Japanese*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Urbana-Champaign, IL.
- Choi, Y. and J. Yoon. (2007). Fragments with and without articulated constituents. Paper presented at the 38th meeting of the North East Linguistic Society (NELS 38), University of Ottawa, Canada, 26-28 October.
- _____ (2006). Argument Cluster Coordination and Constituency Test (Non)-Conflicts. Paper presented at the 37th meeting of the North East Linguistic Society (NELS 37), University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Illinois, 13-15 October.
- Grimshaw J. and A. Mester. (1988). Light verbs and theta-marking. *Linguistic inquiry* 19, 205-232.
- Kim, J.-B., J. Yang, and I. Choi. (2004). Capturing and parsing the mixed properties of light verb constructions in a typed feature structure grammar. Paper presented at *PACLIC 18*, Waseda University, Tokyo. 8-10 December.
- Manning, C. D. (1993). Analyzing the verbal noun: internal and external constraints. *Japanese/Korean Linguistics* 3, 236-253.
- Sells, P. (1995). The category and case marking properties of verbal nouns in Korean. *Harvard studies in Korean linguistics* IX, 517-531.

_____ (1991). Properties of verbal nouns and category status in Japanese.
Unpublished manuscript.

Yoon, J. and C. Park. (2007). Process nominals and morphological complexity. *Japanese/Korean linguistics* 13.

Youngju Choi
Linguistics Department
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
906A Crescent Dr.,
Champaign, IL., U.S.A.
Phone: (217)352-6282
Email: ychoi1@uiuc.edu

Received: 28 March, 2008

Revised: 22 May, 2008

Accepted: 1 June, 2008