

The Acquisition of English Anaphors by Korean Secondary School Students

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Cho, Woo-young; Lee, Eun-kyeong & Lee, Hye-young, 2011. **The Acquisition of English Anaphors by Korean Secondary School Students.** *The Linguistic Association of Korea Journal*. 19(2). 131-151. This study aims to investigate Korean learners' acquisition pattern of English reflexives and pronouns. Sixty middle school students, aged from 14 to 16, participated in this experimental study. According to our study, Korean English learners understood the distribution and interpretation of reflexives and pronouns, Principle A and B and preferred a nearer and a more prominent NP in the same clause as its antecedent, even for a sentence that requires a distant NP, as in L1. We explained it with syntactic principles of "locality" and "prominence". Also, Korean learners of English as L2 show that Principle A and B emerge from a relatively early point in syntactic development, and that Principle B is not acquired later than Principle A, as English native speakers do. Consequently, as Korean students recognized syntactic principles, the comprehension of reflexives and pronouns depends on pragmatic considerations. In other words, the interpretation of reflexives and pronouns should be explained in terms of semantics or pragmatics.

Key Words: locality, prominence, Principle A, Principle B, a referring NP, a quantified NP

1. Introduction

A distinction is usually made between two classes of pronouns; reflexives and pronouns. These two types of pronouns are interpreted in different

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ways. The reflexive *himself* in (1a) for example, must take the NP *Peter* as its antecedent, while pronoun *him* in (1b) refers to either *John* or some third person.

- (1) a. John thinks that Peter likes himself.
 b. John thinks that Peter likes him.

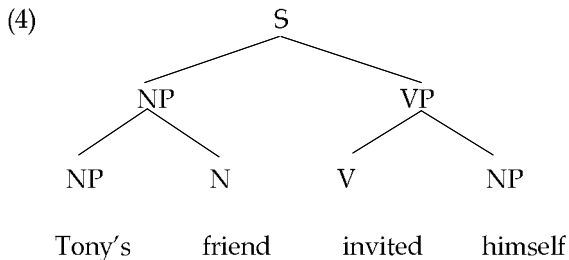
Another contrast is presented in (2), where reflexive *himself* in (2a) can refer to *Tony's friend*, but pronoun *him* in (2b) can be interpreted as either *Tony* or someone else.

- (2) a. Tony's friend invited himself.
 b. Tony's friend invited him.

In the framework of Principles and Parameters theory (cf. Chomsky, 1981), reflexives are assumed to comply with the following constraint, as in (3).

- (3) Principle A:
 A reflexive pronoun must have a more prominent antecedent.
 in its minimal domain.

It is argued that 'minimal domain' is the smallest S containing a reflexive. In (1a) *Peter* is the only NP in the embedded S that contains a reflexive. In (2a), it is also presented that the 'more prominent antecedent', *Tony's friend*, is taken to be an NP that is higher in the tree structure, as follows;



We will refer to Principle A that requires an antecedent in the same clause as the Locality Requirement and a more prominent antecedent as the Prominence Requirement.

As mentioned earlier, pronouns tend to have interpretations that contrast with those associated with reflexive. as in (5), proposed by Chomsky (1981).

(5) Principle B:

A pronominal must not have a more prominent antecedent in its minimal domain.

It is shown that in the minimal domain to be the smallest S containing the pronoun, pronoun *him* cannot refer to *Tony*, in (1b). Pronoun *him* in (2b) can be coreferential with *Tony* in the subject NP, but not with *Tony's friend* a more prominent NP in the same clause.

As O'Grady (1985) says, the development of pronoun-relation is one of the most complicated and intricate phenomena in a language acquisition process. In this paper, we will focus especially on the developmental process of the acquisition of the Korean English learners. In his pioneering work on the development of pronoun-antecedent relations in child language, Jackubowicz (1984) examined the English speaking children's knowledge of Principle A and B. In Jackubowicz's study (1984), the 31 children who participated in the experiment were between the age of 3 and 10. His result shows that the comprehension of reflexives and pronouns by English speaking children is formed in the early period of the syntactic development.

In this paper, we will concentrate on the following four sentence types;

(6) John said that Peter washed *himself*.

(7) John said that Peter washed *him*. (Jackubowicz 1984)

(8) Cinderella's sister points to *herself*.

(9) Cinderella's sister points to *her*. (Wexler and Chien 1985)

In (6), reflexive *himself* must take the NP *Peter* as its antecedent, while in (7) pronoun *him* refers to *John* or some third person. However, in (9) reflexive *herself* must take the NP *Peter* as its antecedent, while in (7) pronoun *him*

refers to *John* or some third person. However, in (8) reflexive *herself* can refer to *Cinderella's sister*, but in (9) pronoun *her* can be interpreted as either *Cinderella* or someone else.

In this study, we will study and compare the pattern of the acquisition of reflexives and pronouns between English native speakers and Korean English learners and find out why Korean learners of English show such patterns. Considering the studies (Jackubowicz 1984, Wexler and Chien 1985, Solan 1987, P. Bloom et al. 1994, Finer and Broselow 1986,, Cho se-kyong 1992), in case of acquisition of both L1 and L2, it has been claimed there are patterns in the acquisition and development of reflexives and pronouns. However, the study of the acquisition pattern of reflexives and pronouns as L2 has been done only by a few researchers. Accordingly, this study aims to study the acquisition pattern of native Korean speakers, especially middle school students. The findings from this analysis can allow us to support or refuse the existing arguments. Section 2 is the theoretical aspects of reflexives and pronouns, and their distribution and interpretation. In section 3, the previous studies of the acquisition and development of reflexives and pronouns will be briefly reviewed. Then, two hypotheses will be presented in section 4. Section 5 is the results and interpretation of this study. Section 6 is the conclusion of this paper.

2. Linguistic Theory of Reflexives and Pronouns

We will see the distribution and interpretation of reflexives and pronouns. The module of grammar that regulates NP interpretation is referred to as the binding theory.

Let us consider following examples;

- (10) a. Poirot admires *him*.
 b. Bertie hurt *himself*. (Haegeman 1994)

The examples above present the interpretation of NPs is constrained by grammatical principles. In sentence (10a) the pronoun *him* cannot be

coreferential with the subject NP *Poirot*. However, in (10b) the reflexive *himself* must be dependent on the subject NP *Bertie*. The binding theory contains grammatical principles that regulate the distribution and interpretation of reflexives and pronouns. Principle A is the principle that reflexives are bound by an NP in the local domain. Principle B constrains the interpretation of pronouns. Pronouns should not be linked to an NP in the binding domain. Thus while in (10a) the pronoun *him* must not be bound by the NP *Poirot*, in (10b) the reflexives *himself* must be bound by the subject NP *Bertie*.

2.1. Reflexives

With the following examples, Haegeman(1994) argues that a reflexive must be bound by the antecedent inside the same local domain of the clause.

- (11) a. Poirot_i invited himself_i.
 b. Poirot_i has hurt himself_i.
 c. *Poirot_i thinks that Miss Marple hurt himself_i.
 d. *Poirot_i's sister invited himself_i (Haegeman 1994)

In both (11a) and (11b) the reflexive, *himself* and the antecedent, *Poirot* are bound by clause-mate antecedents. However, in (11c) the reflexive, *himself* cannot be successfully bound by the antecedent, *Poirot* as they are too far away from each other.

With the principle (12) below we can explain the ungrammaticality of (11d).

- (12) Principle of reflexive interpretation
 A reflexive must be bound by a clause-mate antecedent.

2.2. Pronouns

It is obvious that the interpretation of pronouns differs from that of reflexives. Let us replace a reflexive by a pronoun in each example.

- (13) a. Poirot invited *him*_i/*_i.
 b. Poirot_i has hurt *him*_i/*_i.
 c. Poirot_i thinks that Miss Marple hurt *him*_i.
 d. Poirot_i's sister invited *him*_i. (Haegeman 1984)

The pronoun *him* in (13a,b) must not be coreferent with the subject NP *Poirot* while the reflexive *himself* in (13a,b) must be coindexed with *Poirot*.

As shown in (14), it is obvious that the constraint on the interpretation of pronouns differs from that of reflexives. Let us formulate the constraint as follows;

- (14) Interpretation of pronouns
 A pronoun must be free in its governing category;
 (i) the governing category is the minimal domain containing
 the pronoun, its governor and an accessible
 subject/SUBJECT;
 (ii) free is not bound

As we can see through the examples above, reflexives and pronouns should be in complementary distribution and they are different from each other in interpretation.

3. Previous Studies

The acquisition of reflexives and pronouns of English native speakers has been widely studied, but the acquisition of pronouns as a second language has been studied only by a few researchers. Studies have focused on the children's interpretation of reflexives and pronouns, and pronoun-antecedent relations.

Previous researchers have noted that distinction between reflexives and pronouns is learned in the early stage of syntactic development, and that general principles govern the acquisition of reflexives and pronouns.

A pioneering work on pronoun-antecedent relation in child language was carried out by Jackubowicz (1984). He examined the question of whether

children comprehended basic principles between reflexives and pronouns. Jackubowicz (1984) reported on the experiment designed to determine whether children comprehended that reflexives were subject to the Locality Requirement¹⁾, and whether they differed from pronouns with respect to the Prominence Requirement²⁾. In his study, all three groups of children had a very high score of above 90% on the sentences with reflexives, which indicates an understanding of Principle A. However, they scored more than 50% on the sentences with pronouns.

Similar results were reported in the studies of Read and Hare (1999), Ostu (1981), Chien and Wexler (1985), Solan (1987), and Kaufman (1994).

Differently from Jackubowicz, Chien and Wexler (1990) employed test sentences containing quantified NPs as antecedents in the same clause for reflexives or pronouns to assess children's knowledge of Principle A and B. Since Reinhart (1983)³⁾ argues that referring NPs can participate either in binding relation or coreference relation, and all the experiments in previous studies used test sentences which contain referring NPs.

Chien and Wexler (1990) designed his experiment as follows;

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- 1) The Locality Requirement refers to the mechanisms that sentence processing prefer to match pronouns with an antecedent that is in the same minimal clause (Solan 1983:119).
 - 2) The Prominence Requirement refers to the mechanisms responsible for sentence processing hold a relation between pronouns and an antecedent highest in topicality and easiest to empathize with (Givón 1984:138, Kuno 1987:159).
 - 3) Grodzinsky and Reinhart (1993) argue that a pronoun and an NP have the same reference via a grammatical and pragmatic mechanism. The grammatical mechanism is (binding relation) that matches a pronoun with a more prominent('c-commanding') antecedent of either a referring NP or a quantified NP. The pragmatic mechanism is coreference which requires a referring NP as an antecedent.

Table 1. Study of Chien and Wexler (1990)

THE STUDY: Chien and Wexler 1990

SUBJECTS: 177 children aged 2;6-7;10, and 20 adults. Child subjects were divided into 4 groups: I: 48 subjects under age 4; II: 45 subjects aged 4-5; III: 44 subjects aged 5-6; IV: 40 subjects aged 6-7; an adult control group

RELEVANT SENTENCE TYPES: (6 tokens of each type)

Pronominal with referring NP as potential antecedent:
Mama Bear is touching her.

Pronominal with quantified NP as potential antecedent:
Every bear is touching her.

TASK: Children were presented with a picture and a short story before being asked a question that tested their knowledge of Principle B. (Control sentences were used to ensure that the children understood quantified NPs.)

In the study of Chien and Wexler (1990), English native children did very well on a sentence, in which a referring NP or a quantified NP serves as its antecedent for a reflexive. However, English native children's responses on a sentence involving a referring NP and a pronoun, were poorer, scoring around 40-60% among the three younger groups, compared to above 80% among the two older groups. In other words, they treated a pronoun as a reflexive, namely, coreferential with the subject NP in the same clause, as in the studies of pronoun interpretation reviewed earlier. Crucially, English native children had a high success rate of above 80% on a sentence containing a quantified NP as an antecedent for a pronoun, which indicates an understanding of Principle B. With the results above, Chien and Wexler (1990) reported that Principle A and B do emerge, in fact, at the same time. Also, Grimshaw and Rosen (1990) agree that Principle B is not acquired later than Principle A.

Specifically, P. Bloom et al. (1994) focused on 3 children's use of the first person singular *me* and *myself* in six speech samples over a three-year period. P. Bloom et al. present the following results of their study;

Table 2. Subjects in Bloom et al.'s Study

Child	Age Range	Total Number of Utterances Examined
Abe	2;4-4;11	20,950
Adam	2;3-5;2	46,803
Sarah	2;3-5;1	39,426

Table 3. Children's Use of *me* and *myself* in Direct Object Position

Sample Context	<i>me</i>	<i>myself</i>
John hurt __: [correct form = <i>me</i>]	2830[99.7%]	8 [0.3%]
I hurt __: [correct form = <i>myself</i>]	4 [5.6%]	67 [94.4%]

With the results in table 2 and children's individual responses, they argue that children get to understand the essence of the distinction between reflexives and pronouns from a very early age, even at the age of 3. Recent researchers also suggest that acquisition device identifies the basic principles of pronoun interpretation at a relatively early point in the course of syntactic development.

On the other hand, of various studies of English reflexives as L2, Finer and Broselow (1986) report on a pilot study on the L2 acquisition of English reflexives⁴⁾ by adult Koreans (White 1989b). They used a method of 'picture identification', which showed pictures to Korean English learners as L2 and made them point to correct pictures. Responses to the finite embedded clauses strongly favoured a local antecedent of the reflexives, in contrast to the nonfinite embedded clauses, where nonlocal responses were also quite frequent.

Cho Se-kyung (1992) tested 104 Korean students of high schools, universities, and undergraduate schools, and used 4 methods of preference test, reading test, and sentence-picture matching test. Similarly, Korean English learners preferred local antecedents in finite clauses while they chose nonlocal antecedents in

4) Thomas (1993) also argues that 'the Minimal Distance Principle' which simply binds reflexives to the nearest plausible NP is made use of in the acquisition of L2 English reflexives. The control group, Japanese group and Spanish group, they were all found not to use 'the Minimal Distance Principle'.

nonfinite ones. Thus they treated English reflexives differently in finite and nonfinite clauses. However, neither English nor Korean distinguishes anaphoric relations between finite and nonfinite clauses with regard to reflexives.

O'Grady William, Yoshiko, Suzuki-Wei, Sook Whan Cho (1986) studied the interpretation and acquisition of reflexives and pronouns. Their results show the same pattern as those of English native children, and they argued that general principles may be applied for the acquisition process.

4. Hypotheses

The previous studies of reflexives and pronouns note that English native children recognize the distribution and interpretation of reflexives and pronouns, and prefer a nearer NP and a more prominent NP in the same clause in pronoun-antecedent relations. Also, Principle A and B do emerge from a relatively early period, even at the age of 3, and two principles are acquired in fact at the same time. Even though Korean middle school students have been taught English from elementary school, they are generally in the first stage of English education given that they have learned English focused on phonics from primary school. In this section, whether Korean English learners show the similar pattern of the acquisition of reflexives and pronouns will be investigated. Furthermore, the pattern of acquisition of reflexives and pronouns between English native children and Korean learners of English as L2 will be compared. For the purpose of this study, we propose the following two hypotheses;

Hypothesis 1: Korean English learners will understand the distribution of reflexives and pronouns and prefer a nearer NP and a more prominent NP as an antecedent in the same clause, as English native speakers do.

Hypothesis 2: Korean English learners will show the emergence of principle A and B early in the developmental course of a second language acquisition, and Principle B is not acquired later than Principle A, as in L1.

5. The Methodology of the Study

5.1. The Rationale for This Experiment

In this paper we focused on Korean students' knowledge of English reflexives and pronouns as a second language acquisition process.

Study 1 was designed to test students' knowledge of distribution and interpretation of English reflexives and pronouns, Principle A and B. Study 2 was conducted to test whether Korean students show the simultaneous emergence of Principle A and B, as English native children do.

5.2. Methods

5.2.1. Subjects

In this experimental study, to test students' knowledge of Principle A and B, we tested 3 groups of Korean students, ranging from 1st grade students to 3rd grade students of a middle school, aged from 14 to 16 -- 1st grade students(A), 2nd grade students(B), 3rd grade students(C). A total of sixty students consisting of twenty students in each group participated in study 1 and the same students were also tested in study 2. All the students attend H middle school in Wanju.

5.2.2. Materials and Tasks

For the study 1 of Korean students' knowledge of distribution and interpretation of English reflexives and pronouns, six types of sentences were selected and grouped as follows;

- (15) John said that Peter washed himself.
- (16) John said that Peter washed him.
- (17) Cinderella's sister points to herself.
- (18) Cinderella's sister points to her.
- (19) John hurt me.
- (20) I hurt myself.

After giving the test questionnaires with multiple choices, teachers explained the basic meaning of words, and the students were asked to choose the correct

antecedent for each sentence.

In sentence (15), we tested students' knowledge of Principle A with respect to the Locality Requirement, and in (17), we tested students' knowledge of Principle A with the Prominence Requirement. Furthermore, in sentence (16) and (18), we tested students' knowledge of pronouns, namely, Principle B. Finally, through sentence (19) and (20), we tested students' syntactic grammaticality of reflexives and pronouns since first singular pronouns explicitly show the contrast between reflexives and pronouns clearly.

For the study 2, we employed the control sentences containing the quantified NPs to experiment students' knowledge of Principle A and B, as in the study of Chien and Wexler (1990).

(21) Mama Bear is washing *herself*.

(22) Mama Bear is washing *her*.

(23) Every Bear is washing *herself*.

(24) Every Bear is washing *her*.

Study 2 controlled a factor of an antecedent, a true referring NP or a quantified NP in order to test the influence of the types of antecedents for pronoun interpretation, and the students were also given test sentences with two choices and asked to check the correct antecedent for the sentences.

In sentence (21), we tested Korean students' comprehension of binding relation containing a referring NP and a reflexive and in (23), we tested students with sentences involving a quantified NP and a reflexive. In sentence (18), we tested students' understanding of binding relation with a referring NP and a pronoun, and in sentence (24), we tested students with sentences containing a quantified NP and a pronoun, which indicates an understanding of Principle B since a quantified NP is only involved in binding relation, unlike a referring NP involving either in the binding relation or the coreference relation.

6. Results and Interpretation

6.1. Study 1 and Hypothesis 1

Many Korean middle school students selected a nearer NP and a more prominent NP as its antecedent in the same clause for a reflexive, as follows;

Table 4. Number of students who correctly answered for reflexives

Sentence Type	A	B	C
(15)	20	19	20
(17)	19	19	20

$$\chi^2=0.017 \quad p=0.991 \quad df=2$$

As we can see in the above results, all three groups of Korean students scored very high on the sentences with reflexives, which indicates an understanding of Principle A.

However, in sentence (16), Korean students incorrectly associated pronouns with the subject NP, and with the more prominent NP in the same clause in sentence (18), as seen below;

Table 5. Number of students who correctly answered for pronouns

Sentence Type	A	B	C
(16)	6	7	10
(18)	16	13	14

$$\chi^2=1.048 \quad p=0.592 \quad df=2$$

In sentence (15) and (17), we can see that reflexives are interpreted as *Peter* in (15) with a high rate of success and *Cinderella's sister* in (17). Yet, in case of sentence (16), Korean English learners prefer a nearer NP, *Peter*, as a result of syntactic principle "locality", and in sentence (18), pronouns are incorrectly associated with a more prominent NP, *Cinderella's sister*, thus violating Principle B. In other words, Korean students also tend to interpret pronouns as reflexives and fulfill as to the Locality and Prominence

in sentence (16), they had a relatively lower percentage of correct answers on the sentences with the third person singular pronouns than those of English native children.

In conclusion, the Hypothesis 1 of this study has been proven that Korean learners of English as L2 basically distinguish the distribution of reflexives and pronouns, and prefer a nearer NP and a more prominent NP as an antecedent in the same clause even for pronouns, as English native children do.

6.2. Study 2 and Hypothesis 2

Many Korean middle school students show the clear understanding of binding relation containing a referring NP and a reflexive, and a quantified NP and a reflexive.

Results are as follows;

Table 7. Number of students who correctly answered for reflexives

Sentence Type	A	B	C
(21)	20	20	20
(23)	20	20	20

$$X^2=0 \quad p=1 \quad df=2$$

Korean students did very well on the sentences containing reflexives in sentence (21) and (23). That is to say, they correctly matched the reflexive *herself* with the subject *Mama Bear* in sentence (21) or *Every bear* in sentence (23).

Table 8. Number of students who correctly answered for pronouns

Sentence Type	A	B	C
(22)	13	18	17
(24)	20	20	19

$$X^2=0.576 \quad p=0.750 \quad df=2$$

Interestingly, some students misinterpreted pronoun *her* in sentence (22) as reflexive *herself*, as in sentence (24), thus violating Principle B. In other words, they incorrectly linked the pronoun *her* to the subject *Mama Bear* in sentence (22), as Chien and Wexler (1990) claim that in sentences with referring NPs, the pronoun-antecedent relation is ruled out by the grammatical principles governing binding relations, and by the pragmatic principles regulating coreference relations. In contrast, they correctly interpreted pronoun *her* in sentence (24), in which an antecedent is a quantified NP since quantified NPs can only participate in the binding relation. Even though the scores were generally higher than those in Chien and Wexler's experiment, Table 8 shows the similar results from Chien and Wexler (1990).

In short, the Hypothesis 2 of this study has been positively proven given that Korean middle school students show the early and concurrent emergence of Principle A and B in the course of syntactic development as second language learners, as in L1.

7. Conclusion

This study presents that Korean English learners know the distribution and interpretation of reflexives and pronouns, Principle A and B, the general principles governing the acquisition of pronouns. Korean students' generalized choice of a nearer and a more prominent antecedent involves structural principles of "locality" and "prominence", as in L1. And it is also assumed that Korean learners of English as L2 show that Principle B is acquired in fact at the same time with Principle A, which implies that Principle A and B are learned relatively early and almost simultaneously in the syntactic development course of a second language acquisition process, as in L1 learners.

A crucial claim of this study is that Principle A and B regulate the binding relation not the coreference relation since the coreference relation is subject to a pragmatic principle. In order to assess the emergence of Principle A and B, it is necessary to employ test sentences with quantified NPs, which can be only involved in binding relation, since all the previous studies used test sentences

with referring NPs, which can be involved in either binding relations or coreference relations.

Accordingly, the results of this study strongly suggest that if both English native speakers and Korean English learners comprehend grammatical constraints on binding in pronoun-antecedent relations, then, first, general principles from L1 learners can be applied in the acquisition of second language, and second, problems in comprehension experiments reviewed earlier presumably lies with pragmatic constraints on coreference. In other words, the interpretation of reflexives and pronouns should be not only accounted for in syntactic terms, but explained in light of semantics or pragmatics.

As recent researches shows, if the acquisition of pronoun-antecedents is one of the complicated phenomena in language acquisition process, and the acquisition device identifies the basic principles between reflexives and pronouns at a relatively early point in syntactic development even though other factors such as processing preferences and pragmatic considerations interact with their actual language use, then continuous efforts to identify these factors to pronoun-antecedent relation may lead to a clear understanding of properties and interpretation of reflexives and pronouns.

Consequently, we can suggest that teaching method applied in findings of this study should be tried in the acquisition process of L2 and teaching materials based on the acquisition pattern of principle A and B will affect acquisition process of Korean English learners as L2.

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Appendix

The Test sentences for Interpretation of Reflexives and Pronouns

* Study 1.

1. *John said that Peter washed himself.*에서 *himself*가 가리키는 것은?
(1) John (2) Peter (3) someone else (3) John or someone else

2. *John said that Peter washed him.* 에서 him이 가리키는 것은?
(1) John (2) Peter (3) someone else (4) John or someone else
3. *Cinderella's sister points to herself.* 에서 herself가 가리키는 것은?
(1) Cinderella (2) Cinderella's sister (3) Cinderella or someone else
4. *Cinderella's sister points her.* 에서 her가 가리키는 것은?
(1) Cinderella (2) Cinderella's sister (3) Cinderella or someone else
5. *John hurt _____.* 에서 빈 칸에 알맞은 답은? (1) me (2) myself
6. *I hurt _____.* 에서 빈 칸에 알맞은 답은? (1) me (2) myself

* Study 2

1. *Mama Bear is washing herself.* 에서 herself가 가리키는 것은?
(1) Mama Bear (2) Mama Bear or some third one
2. *Mama Bear is washing her.* 에서 her가 가리키는 것은?
(1) Mama Bear (2) Mama Bear or some third one
3. *Every Bear is washing herself.* 에서 herself가 가리키는 것은?
(1) Every Bear (2) Every Bear or some third one
4. *Every Bear is washing her.* 에서 her가 가리키는 것은?
(1) Every Bear (2) Every Bear or some third one

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