

# Extra-linguistic knowledge and Pragmatics in the Interpretation of Korean Relative Clauses\*

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Yeon, Jaehoon (2021), “Extra-linguistic Knowledge and Pragmatics in the Interpretation of Korean Relative Clauses,” *Language and Information Society* 44. This paper explores how morpho-syntactic and semantic constraints interact with extra-linguistic and pragmatic factors in the interpretation of Korean relative clauses. Relative clauses in Korean are qualitatively different from those in European languages. This paper demonstrates that the interpretation of Korean relative clauses depends on context and pragmatic factors. In prior research, particularly in formal syntax, pragmatic factors have been neglected in considering relative clauses. Extra-linguistic knowledge and pragmatic factors play important roles in acceptability judgements and plausibility conditions for the interpretation of relative clauses in Korean. We also propose that Korean relative clauses show similarities to topic constructions in Korean. The plausibility condition in relative clauses can be compared to the aboutness condition in topic constructions. Lastly, we have shown that various pragmatic information interacts with and contributes to appropriate interpretation of

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Korean relative clauses.

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## 1. Introduction<sup>1)</sup>

One of the issues in typological studies on relative clauses is the Noun Phrase Accessibility Hierarchy (NPAH). Keenan and Comrie (1977) propose the Accessibility Hierarchy (AH) as follows:

Subject (SU) > Direct Object (DO) > Indirect Object (IO) > Oblique Object (OBL) > Genitive (GEN) > Object of Comparison (OCOMP)

In Korean, relative clauses (RCs) generally follow Keenan and Comrie's Hierarchy, but it shows complex constraints in case of oblique objects. As in the following examples, Korean relative clauses can be formed on the first four slots in the hierarchy (Yeon 2003: 38):

- (1) a. Subject: [Mary-eykey tayhak-eyse yenge-lul kaluchi-n] John  
Dat college-Loc English-Acc teach-Rel  
"John who taught Mary English at college"
- b. Direct Object: [John-i Mary-eykey tayhak-eyse kaluchi-n] yenge

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1) The following abbreviations are used in this paper: Abl: Ablative, Acc: Accusative particle, Dat: Dative, Dec: Declarative ending, Gen: Genitive, Imp: Imperative, Loc: Locative, Mod: Modifier, Neg: Negative, Nom: Nominative, Past: Past Tense, Pro: Reflexive Pronoun, Q: Question, Rel: Relative marker, Top: Topic.

- Nom     Dat     college-Loc   teach-Rel   English  
 “The English which John taught Mary at college”
- c. Indirect Object: [John-i   tayhak-eyse   yenge-lul   kaluchi-n]   Mary  
                           Nom   college-Loc   English-Acc   teach-Rel  
 “Mary, to whom John taught English at college”
- d. Oblique Object: [John-i   Mary-eykey   yenge-lul   kaluchi-n]   tayhak  
                           Nom             Dat     English-Acc   teach-Rel   college  
 “The college at which John taught Mary English”

As for the fifth slot in the hierarchy, Keenan and Comrie’s data show that this position can only be relativized in Korean when a pronoun is retained, as in the following example (Keenan and Comrie 1977: 74):

- (2) **casin-/ponin-uy**   kay-ka   chongmyenha-n   ku   salam  
           **Pro**-Gen    dog-Nom   intelligent-Rel   that   person  
 “That person whose dog is intelligent”

However, in some relative clauses, if the pronoun is retained, it becomes odd as in the following example (cf. Tagashira 1972:219, Song 1991:200).

- (3) a. [(*\*caki-uy*)   caynung-i   ttwiena-n]   kiho  
           Self-Gen   talent-Nom   outstanding-Rel   Keeho  
           ‘Keeho, whose talent is outstanding’
- b. [(*\*caki-uy*)   meli-ka   khu-n]   Yongsu  
           Self-Gen   head-Nom   big-Rel   Yongsu  
           ‘Yongsu, whose head is big’

In (3), if the pronoun *caki* ‘self’ is retained, the resulting relative clause

sounds odd. Furthermore, if the context allowed appropriate interpretation, the relative clause may not contain the pronominal counterpart of the head noun as in the following example:

- (4) [(*caki*-uy) ap*eci*-ka sacang-in] Yeongswu-nun ton-i manh-ta.  
 self-Gen father-Nom company boss-Rel Yongsu-Top money-Nom a  
 lot-Dec  
 ‘Yongsu, whose father is a company boss, is rich.’

In (4), the pronominal form *caki* ‘self’ is optional depending on the context. If the context tells you that the fact that Yongsu’s father is a company boss is well known, the relative clause does not have to retain the so-called presumptive pronoun. Here we can see first instance in which extra-linguistic knowledge and pragmatics kick in for the appropriate interpretation of Korean relative clauses.

The final slot on the hierarchy, the object of comparison, cannot be relativized in Korean (Yeon 2003: 39):

- (5) John-i Mary-pota khuta → \* [John-i khu-n] Mary  
 Nom than taller Nom taller-Rel  
 “John is taller than Mary.” “\*Mary who John is taller than”

Korean relative clause formation generally follows AH, but there are constraints that cannot be explicated solely based on syntactic and semantic restrictions.

## 2. Pragmatic constraints on the interpretation of Korean relative clauses

Although the relative clause formation in Korean generally follows Accessibility Hierarchy, it shows complex constraints in case of oblique objects. First, not all oblique NPs can be relativized. For example, the comitative NP cannot be relativized as in the following example (Lee 2017a: 82).

- (6) a. \*John-i        san-ey        ka-n        Mary  
          Nom    mountain-to    go-Rel  
          “Mary, with whom John went to the mountain”
- b. John-i        Mary-hago    san-ey        ka-ass-ta.  
          Nom                with mountain-Loc    go-Past-Dec  
          “John went to the mountain with Mary.”

In (6), the comitative NP Mary cannot be relativized. On the contrary, the comitative NP in (7) can be relativized (Song 1991: 198).

- (7) a. John-i        kyelhonha-n    Mary  
          Nom    marry-Rel  
          “Mary whom John married”
- b. John-i    Mary-hago    kyelhonha-ess-ta.  
          Nom                with    marry-Past-Dec  
          “John got married with Mary.”

Why is it that some comitative NP can be relativized and while some cannot? It seems that pragmatic knowledge plays an important role here. In

case of (7), extra-linguistic knowledge assumes that marriage normally requires a partner, and therefore the head noun can be easily interpreted as a comitative relation of the relative clause. On the other hand, in (6) there is no such pragmatic knowledge is available (Song 1991: 215).

Considering that the comitative NP in (7) is a complement, but the one in (6) is an adjunct, it could be claimed that an oblique NP can be relativized when it is a complement. However, this claim is not supported by (8) where a complement cannot be relativized (Lee 2017a: 82–83).

- (8) a. \*John-i Mary-lul sam-un myenuli<sup>2)</sup>  
 Nom Acc take-Rel daughter-in-law  
 ‘\*A daughter-in-law that John took Mary as’
- b. John-i Mary-lul myenuli-lo sam-ass-ta.  
 Nom Acc daughter-in-law take-Past-Dec  
 ‘John took Mary as a daughter-in-law.’

The oblique NP *myenuli-lo* ‘as a daughter-in-law’ in (8b) is a complement NP that is required by the verb *sam-* ‘take’ in the corresponding sentence. It seems therefore not easy to specify constraints clearly when the relativization is allowed for an oblique NP.

To explain when an oblique NP can be relativized, M. Kim (2010) argues that adjunct can be relativized only when they refer to time, place, or an instrument. Consider the following examples (Kim 2010: 139):

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2) An anonymous reviewer claimed that a head noun of relative clauses presupposes referentiality. (S)he claims that the reason why (8a) is ungrammatical is because the head noun *myenuli* ‘daughter-in-law’ is non-referential. While it is an interesting claim, I cannot wholly agree with him/her because not all the head noun of relative clauses should be referential.

- (9) a. Mary-ka ttena-n kunal ohwu  
 Nom leave-Rel that day afternoon  
 “Afternoon on that day when May left”
- b. John-i wuntong-ul ha-n wuntongcang  
 Nom exercise-Acc do-Rel playground  
 “The playground in which John did exercise”
- c. apeci-ka mwul-ul masi-n khep  
 father-Nom water-Acc drink-Rel cup  
 “The cup with which (my) father drank water”

Kim (2010:154-155) explains that an adjunct of time, place, or instrument can be relativized because pragmatic knowledge helps to retrieve the grammatical role of the head noun. Although it is the case in most cases that locative NPs (place) can be relativized, not all place NPs can be relativized. Consider the following example, in which the place noun is marked with ablative case.

- (10) a. \* [John-i o-n] mikwuk  
 Nom come-Rel America  
 ‘America, from which John came.’
- b. John-i mikwuk-eyse o-ass-ta.  
 Nom America-Abl come-Past-Dec  
 ‘John came from America.’

It shows that not all place nouns can be relativized in Korean. As for instruments, Kim (2010) suggests that the examples in (11a) and (11b) support his argument that pragmatic knowledge helps to retrieve an instrument role of the head noun (Lee 2017a: 86).

- (11) a. *nay-ka meystwayci-lul sanyangha-n chong*  
 Nom boar-Acc hunt-Rel gun  
 “The gun with which I hunt the boar”
- b. *ʔnay-ka meystwayci-lul sanyangha-n kay*  
 I-Nom boar-Acc hunt-Rel dog  
 “The dog with which I hunt the boar”

However, the degree of acceptability differs depending on the head noun in (11).

Why is it the case that some oblique NPs can be relativized while other oblique NPs cannot? The postposition deleted along with the relativized NP in the relative clause in (11) is the instrumental marker, *-(u)lo* ‘with, by means of’. What is it that helps retrieve the instrument relation in the construal of (11)? It is pragmatics (or extra-linguistic knowledge) against which the ‘missing’ relation between the actor’s action and the NP in question is construed (Song 1991:213). Based on extra-linguistic knowledge, the most likely relation between the act of someone’s hunting a boar and a gun is that of instrument. This is indeed the way how extra-linguistic knowledge and pragmatics play such an important role in the recovery of the missing relation for the appropriate construal of relative clauses. Kim (2010:155) also argues that it is pragmatic knowledge that makes (11a) acceptable but (11b) questionable. Pragmatic knowledge ensures that a gun is an instrument of hunting. The head noun in (11b), however, can be interpreted as an agent, which makes it difficult to retrieve the grammatical role of the head noun as an instrument.

In Korean, pragmatics and extra-linguistic knowledge thus play an important role in RC formation and the way in which a relative clause is



interpreted. Korean relative clauses can be formed even when the head noun plays no grammatical role in the relative clause if pragmatic knowledge helps to interpret the relative clause (Song 2001:231–232, Yeon 2012).

- (12) kwika-ka                      nuceci-nun      kyoosaynghwal  
       going home-Nom    be late-Rel    suburban life  
       “Suburban life such that (people) go home late”

An understanding of suburban life, where people might take more time to get home from a downtown workplace, makes the construal of the relative clause in (12) possible.

We can also provide examples below to show how pragmatic knowledge affects the acceptability of relative clauses; (13a) is acceptable while (13b) is not (Yeon 2012:443–445).

- (13) a. hwacangsil-ey      ka-l swu eps-nun      yensokkuk  
       toilet-Loc              go-cannot-Rel      soap drama  
       “A soap drama such that (people) cannot go to a toilet (while they are watching it)”  
       b. <sup>??</sup>hwacangsil-ey      ka-l swu eps-nun      yenphil  
       toilet-Loc              go-cannot-Rel      pencil  
       <sup>??</sup>“A pencil such that (people) cannot go to a toilet”

When a soap drama is very interesting people keep watching it even when they want to go to a toilet so as not to miss a scene. Therefore (13a) can be appropriately interpreted as a legitimate noun-modifying clause. On the contrary, (13b) is not interpretable unless a very special situation is set for it, since it is generally difficult to think of a situation where people

cannot go to a toilet because of a pencil. Korean relative clauses have been regarded as something special because extra-linguistic knowledge and pragmatics are critical to form and interpret relative clauses (Song 1991, 2001, Mun 2012, Yeon 2012). The peculiarities of Korean relative clauses can only be explained based on extra-linguistic knowledge and pragmatic factors. These peculiar Korean relative clauses have been studied as gapless relative clauses by some scholars (Cha 2005, Lee and Lee 2012, and Yeom (2015, 2017) among others). There have been attempts to explicate peculiarities of Korean gapless relative clauses in formal terms, but they have not been successful, which we will briefly review in the following section.

### 3. Attempts for a Formal Interpretation of Gapless Relative Clauses in Korean

Korean has the so-called gapless relative clauses (GRCs), which have been focus of attention recently (Cha 2005, Lee & Lee (2012), Yeom (2015, 2017)). GRCs do not have a syntactic gap in the relative clause, and therefore it is hard to explain the syntactic and semantic relation between the head noun and the adnominal clause. Consider the following examples.

- (14) [sayngsen -i tha-nun] naymsay  
 fish-Nom burn-Rel smell  
 ‘the smell of fish-burning’ (Cha 2005:15)
- (15) [thayphwung-i cinaka-n] huncek  
 typhoon-Nom pass-Rel trace  
 ‘the trace left after a typhoon hit’ (Cha 2005:15)

- (16) [apeci-ka so-lul phal-n] ton  
 father-Nom ox-Acc sell-Rel money  
 ‘the money obtained by father’s selling an ox’

(Lee and Lee 2012:204)

Cha (2015) claims that the GRC has a unique semantic property that a cause and effect relation holds between the adnominal clause and the head noun. In similar vein, Lee and Lee (2012: 204) agreed that “there exists a semantic cause-effect relation holding between the GRC and its modifying head noun: the content of the adnominal GRC constitutes cause and the denotation of its head noun effect.” They claim that for the coherent interpretation in GRCs like (16), the required cause-effect relation should be fully realized by the addition or coercion of a verb like *pel-* ‘earn’ as in (16’).

- (16’) [apeci-ka [[so-lul phal-a] [pel-n]] ton  
 father-Nom ox-Acc sell earn-Rel money  
 ‘the money that father earned by selling an ox’

(Lee and Lee 2012:205)

They then claim that in (16) a limited set of verbs can appear in place of *pel-* ‘earn’ including verbs like *malyenba-* ‘prepare’, *mantul-* ‘make’, *pat-* ‘receive; all these verbs share the basic meaning of ‘obtaining (money as a result of selling an ox in a given context)’. They further extend their analysis to the following seemingly controversial contrast. (Lee and Lee 2012:209)

- (17) a. [apeci-ka so-lul pal-a kaph-un] ton

- Father-Nom ox-Acc sell pay.back-Rel money  
 ‘the money that father paid back by selling an ox.’
- b. \* [apeci-ka so-lul phal-a kkwu-/ilh-un] ton  
 father-Nom ox-Acc sell borrow-/lose-Rel money  
 ‘the money that father borrowed/lost by selling an ox’

Their argument is that in (17a) the cause-effect relation indirectly holds between the causing event *so-lul phala* ‘selling an ox’ and the following additional verb *kaph-* ‘pay back’ by the mediation of the verb *pel-* ‘earn’ as in (17’) (Lee and Lee 2012:209).

- (17’) [apeci-ka [[so-lul phal-a] [pel-e] [kaph-]]-un] ton  
 Father-Nom ox-Acc sell earn pay.back-Rel money  
 ‘The money that father paid back by selling an ox and thereby earned’

According to Lee and Lee (2012:206), in (17b), however, “the verbs *kkwu-* ‘borrow’, *ilh-* ‘lose’ do not constitute a natural effect of the causing event, *so-lul phala* ‘selling an ox’ so there arises a conflict in the information structure”. Therefore, they claim that these verbs cannot be licensed here. However, this is not true, and these verbs can be interpreted well if appropriate contexts are given. For example, in case of *kkwu-* ‘borrow’ in (17b), suppose that the money father wanted to borrow was too much, and the lender wanted some kind of deposit or warranty goods. Therefore, father sold his ox to the lender for warranty or to make up for the shortfall, then (17b) can be appropriately interpreted as a gapless relative clause. In case of *ilh-* ‘lose’ in (17b), we can suppose the following situation. Father sold the ox very cheaply compared to normal market prices, and consequently he lost money in real terms. In that case, the

sentence can be interpreted properly as for intended meaning. We can see therefore Korean GRCs cannot be interpreted solely based on cause-effect relations or any well-defined semantic terms. Rather pragmatics and context play crucial roles in the interpretation of GRCs.

Another problem is that as Yeom (2017) pointed out, neither Cha (2005) nor Lee and Lee (2012) deals with more tricky cases of GRCs such as (18) below:

- (18) meli-ka      cohaci-nun      chayk  
 brain-Nom get.better-Rel book  
 ‘a book such that a person who reads it gets smarter’  
 (Yeom 2017:297)

To interpret this GRC, we need to rely on pragmatic and extra-linguistic knowledge which cannot be easily formalized in syntactico-semantic terms. In an effort to formalize the meaning of GRCs, Yeom (2017) adopts Generative Lexicon Theory proposed by Pustejovsky (1995, 2005) and tries to formalize what mechanisms can distinguish acceptable GRCs from unacceptable ones. Yeom (2017:313) argued that “to get smarter, the possessor needs to read the book and the event of reading is involved in the Telic qualia in the meaning specification of *chayk* ‘book’”. He then claims that reading a book can be related to a situation that the reader gets smarter. The following is his formal representation:

- (19) (Yeom 2017:313)  
 $\llbracket \text{meli-ka cohaci-nun} \rrbracket = \lambda w \lambda s \exists x \exists y [s \sqsubseteq w \ \& \ \text{brain}_w(y,x) \ \& \ \text{become.smart}_w(s,x)]$

$$\begin{aligned} \llbracket \text{chayk} \rrbracket &= \lambda w \lambda x [\text{book}_w(x)] \\ \llbracket \text{meli-ka cohaci-nun chayk} \rrbracket &= \lambda w \lambda z \exists s \exists e \exists e' \exists x \exists y [s \sqsubseteq w \ \& \\ &\quad \text{brain}_w(y,x) \ \& \ \text{become.smart}_w(s,x) \ \& \ \text{book}_w(z) \ \& \ \text{READ}_w(e,x,z)] \end{aligned}$$

Apart from the technicality of formalization, establishing cause and effect relations and formalization of the interpretation are already quite complex and tricky. The further problems are that there are many more complicated examples that involve more complex processes of interpretation. Consider the following example (Yeom 2017:314)

- (20) son-ul an ssi-eto-toy-nun kansik  
 hand-Acc not wash-may-Rel snack  
 ‘snacks such that a person who eats them with a hand does not have to wash the hand’ (sic) (intended meaning: Here is a snack that you don’t have to wash your hands in order to eat.)

In this case, we need to connect snacks and situations in which we do not need to wash our hands. To deal with such cases in Generative Lexicon Theory, they need to consider more meaning components in the meaning specifications of the head noun. This would be very complicated, and we don’t know how to formulate this interpretation in formal semantic terms. As Yeom (2017:315) admits, it cannot be dealt with the secondary quale formally. Yeom (2017:315) failed to give the general interpretation pattern for this case, and conceded that this issue is “beyond the scope” of his paper. In order to properly interpret GRCs, we need to fill up some missing links between the situation described by the adnominal clause and the head noun. Although some missing links can be explained by the mechanisms provided by formal semantic devices, it is not possible to

provide a coherent and successful interpretation for all the GRCs. As can be seen, Korean relative clauses including GRCs cannot successfully be interpreted, let alone formalized in semantic mechanisms, without considering pragmatic factors and extra-linguistic knowledge.

#### 4. Peculiarities of Korean relative clauses

What should be particularly noted in understanding Korean relative clauses is that the relative clauses in Korean is significantly affected by not only syntactico-semantic information but also pragmatic and contextual information. In Korean, even if they are well-formed morpho-syntactically, they may not be properly interpreted if the pragmatic situations are not fully framed. Furthermore even if they have the same structure, they can be interpreted differently depending on the head noun (see section 5). In this respect, the typology of relative clauses can be categorized as a language in which syntactic hierarchy plays an important role and a language in which pragmatics plays a crucial role in formation of relative clauses.<sup>3)</sup> The following sentence, for example, shows the characteristics of the Korean relative clauses that are different from those of the European languages.

- (21) pismul-i changmun-ul twutuli-nun soli  
rain-Nom window-Acc hit-Rel sound  
'The sound of rain tapping the window'

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3) It may be pointed out that distinguishing relative clauses from attributive clauses separately in a language such as Korean is a biased viewpoint influenced by European languages.

Here, the head noun *solli* ‘sound’ shows the characteristics of Korean head nouns that do not have a coreferential NP in their relative clauses, like the gapless relative clauses of European languages. There are many gapless relative clauses in Korean, which should be interpreted as attributive clauses as follows:

- (22) a. kwika-ka            nuceci-nun    kyoosaynghwal  
           going home-Nom be late-Rel    suburban life  
           “Suburban life such that (people) go home late”
- b. son    ssi-ul    philyo-ka    eps-nun    umsik-ulo    mek-upsita.  
       hand wash-Rel need-Nom    not-Rel    food-Inst    eat-let’s  
       ‘Let’s eat food that we don’t have to wash our hands in order to eat.’
- c. opaithuhaci    anh-nun    swul-lo    ha-psita.  
           vomit        Neg-Rel    alcohol-Inst    do-let’s  
           ‘Let’s drink alcohol that does not make us vomit.’

(22b) and (22c) can be treated as constituent omissions as follows:<sup>4)</sup>

- (23) b. [(mek-ki cen-ey/mek-ki wuyhayse) son ssi-ul  
           eat-Noml prior-Loc/eat-Noml for hand wash-Rel  
           philyo-ka    eps-nun] umsik  
           need-Nom not-Rel    food  
           ‘food that you don’t have to wash your hands (before you eat/in  
           order to eat)’
- c. [(masi-ko nase) opaithuha-ci anhnun] swul

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4) A similar example can be found in English ((Matsumoto (1989: 233), Song (1991: 213)); e.g. Here is a snack that you don’t have to wash your hands (cf. Here is a snack that you don’t have to wash your hands in order to eat.)



drink-after                  vomit-Neg-Rel alcohol  
 ‘alcohol that does not make you vomit after (you) drink’

However, not all GRCs can be treated as omissions. Furthermore, Korean relative clauses are not always derived from free-standing sentences. Consider the relative clause in (22c) again.

- (22c') obaithuhaci anh-nun swul  
 vomit Neg-Rel alcohol  
 (a) Alcohol that doesn't vomit.  
 (b) Alcohol that does not make you vomit.

Although the clause seems to literally mean (a), our knowledge of the world tells us that, as alcohol cannot vomit itself but can certainly make you vomit, the correct interpretation of the sentence is (b). The clause contains no causative element akin to the “make” in the English translation. As Korean has a productive system of analytical causation, this clearly shows that the relative clause is not derived directly from the corresponding free-standing sentence (24a), which is nonsensical. To express the idea of alcohol not making you vomit in a simple sentence, the causative auxiliary verb *-key ha-* is required as in (24b):

- (24) a. <sup>2</sup>i swul-un opaithuhaci anh-nun-ta.  
 this alcohol-Top vomit Neg-Pres-Dec  
 “<sup>2</sup>This alcohol doesn't vomit.”  
 b. i swul-un opaithuha-key ha-ci anh-nun-ta,  
 this alcohol-Top vomit-Caus Neg-Pres-Dec  
 “This alcohol does not make (you) vomit.”

Although the two-sentence combination may go some way to explaining relativization in English transformational grammar, it is clearly insufficient in describing Korean relative clauses.

In addition, there are a lot of relative clauses in Korean, in which a pragmatically appropriate element is chosen as a head noun while an obligatory argument in the sub-categorized structure of the verb is not selected as a head noun, as in the following example. These sentences cannot be explained by the definition of relative clauses as in European languages. In other words, the pragmatic factor is more important than the argument structure.<sup>5)</sup> For example, suppose that you utter a sentence (25) to a friend who is wanting to buy an expensive smart phone (cf. Matsumoto 1990:121).

- (25) sa-l            ton-i            iss-eyo?  
 buy-Rel money-Nom have-Q  
 “Do you have money to buy (it/one)?  
 (Lit: Do you have money (with which) (you can) buy (it/one)?”

In (25), the obligatory argument of the verb *sa-* ‘buy’ is absent, but the intended meaning is easily achieved in the given context. This can be contrasted with (25’) in which the subcategorized argument *mulken* ‘things’ is present:

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5) In Korean, relative clauses that violates the so-called “Island Constraint” are also possible (H. Shin 1994).

(e.g.) [[ e e pintayttek-ul mek-un] sinsa-ka may-lul mac-un] yolicip  
 pancake-Acc eat-Rel gentleman-Nom stick-Acc hit-Rel restaurant  
 ‘The restaurant in which the gentleman was hit who ate pancake (there)’

- (25') sa-l mulken-i iss-ni?  
 buy-Rel thing-Nom have-Q  
 'Do you have things to buy?'

There are many constructions in Korean that cannot be explained solely on the subcategorization of the predicate. Consider the following examples (cf. Matsumoto 1990):

- (26) a. Mek-un kulus-un kkaykkusi ssis-ela  
 eat-Rel bowl-Top neatly wash-Imp  
 "Please wash the bowls (with which) you have eaten."  
 b. ecey mek-un siktang-un acwu pissa-ta  
 yesterday eat-Rel restaurant-Top very expensive-Dec  
 'The restaurant where we ate yesterday is very expensive.'

In both (26a) and (26b), the object arguments of the verb *mek* 'eat' are absent, but the intended meaning is easily achieved in the given context. Since Korean does not require all subcategorized arguments to be present in a sentence, the head-noun in the relative clause can be interpreted based on interlocutor's pragmatic knowledge. The acceptability of relative clauses under a certain interpretation depends not only on consideration of the syntactic structures but also on various pragmatic factors such as the context, background knowledge and conversational principles.

As shown in the examples above, we can see that there are special pragmatic and extra-linguistic constraints involved in the interpretation of the relative clauses with the non-argument head nouns. This also applies to the interpretation of the gapless relative clauses. Considering the characteristics of Korean relative clauses, we will look more closely at how

the pragmatic and contextual factors interact to play essential roles in interpreting Korean relative clauses.

## 5. Importance of Context and Pragmatic Knowledge in the Interpretation of Korean Relative Clauses

The acceptability and interpretation of Korean relative clauses heavily rely on semantic, pragmatic, and extra-linguistic factors. Establishing appropriate context is especially vital in Korean. Korean does not require all complements of a predicate to be realized in a sentence and therefore allows relative clauses with multiple possible meanings. The following is an example of some possible interpretations between the head noun and relative clauses. (Matsumoto 1990:115, 1996, Yeon 2012):

- (27) [[chayk-ul sa-n] haksayng]  
book-Acc bought-Rel student  
(a) the student (who) bought a book  
(b) the student (from whom) (someone) bought a book  
(c) the student (for whom) (someone) bought a book

The translation in (27a), in which the subject of the predicate is the target of relativization, may seem the most likely interpretation. However, when the relative clause is embedded in a sentence such as (28), the interpretation would almost certainly be as in (b):

- (28) Chayk-ul sa-n haksayng-hantheyse sacen-to sa-ss-ta.

- book-Acc buy-Rel student-from dictionary-too buy-Past-Dec.  
 (a) <sup>1</sup>(I) also bought a dictionary from the student who bought the book.  
 (b) (I) also bought a dictionary from the student from whom (I)  
 bought a book.

Similarly, in a context in which someone has been buying various gifts for students, (27) could also be used to convey the interpretation given in (27c). Given the right context, the so-called ungrammatical Korean relative clauses that have been rejected by some scholars can be fully acceptable. Na (1986: 139) argued that the following sentence was ungrammatical because the direct object position in the relative clause is not filled.

- (29) \* [Ann-i kkakka cwu-n] salam  
 Nom peel give-Rel person  
 ‘the person (for whom) Ann peeled (something)’

However, it can be fully acceptable given the right context. For example, as Song (1991: 217) rightly pointed out, if we suppose that people are engaged in “a game of peeling for their friends as many apples as possible in a given time”, we can share extra-linguistic knowledge that apples are being peeled in the game. Given the circumstances, the sentence (29) can be interpreted appropriately. Na (1986:140) further takes the following sentence as almost unacceptable because semantically entailed position, which is beneficiary (i.e. for X), is unfilled.

- (30) <sup>22</sup> [Mary-ka sakwa-lul kkakka cwu-n] khal  
 Nom apple-Acc peel give-Rel knife  
 ‘the knife (with) which Mary peeled an apple (for X)’

Again, it can be fully acceptable given the right context. Consider the following sentence (Song 1991: 217).

- (31) [cinanpen Mary-ka sakwa-lul kkakka cwu-n] khal-ul  
 last time Nom apple-Acc peel give-Rel knife-Acc  
 etita twu-ess-ni?  
 where place-Past-Q  
 ‘Where did you put the knife with which Mary peeled apples (for you) last time?’

In (31), the context tells you that the beneficiary is the hearer and that Mary peeled apples for the hearer last time. Here again, given the right context, grammatically marginal relative clauses can be fully interpreted based on pragmatic knowledge.

The following example shows a case in which the grammatical role of the head noun is not determined by the obligatory argument of the verb. Suppose you ask the following question to a friend who wants to buy expensive jewelry, which is repeated from above with a slight modification.

- (32) sa-l ton-to eps-umyense mwel kulehkhe po-ni?  
 buy-Rel money-even have.not-while what like.that see-Q  
 ‘What are you looking at like that while you have no money to buy (it) (with)?’

In the example, the verb *sa-* ‘buy’ as a transitive verb requires a direct object as a core argument, but in this case, *ton* ‘money’ is not an object but an adjunct with an instrumental role. Thus, it is important to consider the context and pragmatic information when interpreting the Korean

relative clauses, since the grammatical role of the head noun cannot be determined by only the subcategorization information of the verb. In other words, the determination of the grammatical role on the target of the relativization does not crucially depend on the subcategorization of the predicate in the relative clause. The following example shows that these pragmatic information sometimes extend to extra-linguistic knowledge as follows:

- (33) Kim *sensayng-i*    *sa-n*        *paykhwacem-i*    *eti-eyo?*  
 Kim-teacher-Nom buy-Rel    dept.store-Nom    where-is  
 (a) Where is the department store (which) Mr Kim bought?  
 (b) Where is the department store (in which) Mr Kim bought (it)?

There are two interpretations of this sentence. The choice between (33a) and (33b) largely depends on the interlocutors' knowledge about Mr. Kim and about the place. If the interlocutors assume that Mr. Kim cannot afford to buy the department store, the preferred interpretation would be (33b), whereas if he was a millionaire or a property developer, (33a) can be a possible interpretation. A comparison of the following examples makes it clearer to understand these characteristics.

- (33') *Samseng-i*        *sa-n*        *paykhwacem-i*    *eti-eyo?*  
 Samsung-Nom buy-Rel    dept.store-Nom    where-is  
 'Where is the department store (which) Samsung bought?'  
 (33'') *ku pokpwin-i*        *sa-n*        *ttang-i*        *eti-eyo?*  
 The property developer buy-Rel real estate-Nom where-Dec  
 'Where is the real estate (which) the property developer bought?'

Since both *samseng* ‘Samsung’ and *pokpwuin* ‘property developer’ in the above two examples have an ability to purchase department stores or the real estate, the interpretation as in (33a)-type is more natural than (33b)-type. This shows that different interpretations are potentially available in Korean depending on the possible pragmatic relationship between the head noun and the relative clause.

The pragmatic relationship between the head noun and the relative clause must be plausibly related. This ‘plausibility’ can be loosely defined as the condition<sup>6)</sup> that the participants of the dialogue can establish through the knowledge of the world and background information. For example, (34a) is a plausible scenario and can thus be interpreted properly, but (34b) is not plausible and cannot be interpreted unless a very special scenario is set up.

- (34) a. hwacangsil-ey ka-l swu eps-nun yensokkuk  
           toilet-to go-cannot-Rel soap drama  
           “A soap drama such that (people) cannot go to a toilet (while they are watching it)”
- b. <sup>??</sup>hwacangsil-ey ka-l swu eps-nun yenphil  
           toilet-to go-cannot-Rel pencil  
           <sup>??</sup>“A pencil such that (people) cannot go to a toilet”

It is important to note that in order to successfully interpret relative clauses, extra-linguistic knowledge plays an important role, i.e. information

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6) The ‘plausibility’ condition can be comparable to ‘aboutness’ condition in topic constructions (Kuno 1973). Korean relative constructions exhibit parallelism with topic constructions as discussed below.



given in the context or information about the participants in the sentence shared among the participants.

Relative clauses are closely related to topic constructions (Kuno 1973, Yang 1975, Lee 1975, M. Kim 2010, J. Lee 2017a, b). In addition to formal features that are common in between relative clauses and topic constructions, they share a functional/pragmatic feature as well. Consider the following example:

- (35) a. *enehak-un chwicik-i elyep-ta*  
linguistics-Top finding a job-Nom difficult-Dec  
'As for linguistics, finding a job is difficult.'
- b. *chwicik-i elyep-un enehak*  
finding a job-Nom difficult-Rel linguistics  
'Linguistics that is hard to find a job'

In (35a) *enehak* 'linguistics' is the topic, and it is followed by the comment that is an observation/description about the topic. The 'aboutness' is the requirement that allows topic constructions. This aboutness condition can be comparable to 'plausibility' condition in relative clauses, which is a requirement that allows an appropriate interpretation of Korean relative clauses, especially the so-called 'gapless' relative clauses. Relative clauses can be compared to a comment, and the head-noun can be compared to the topic.

Kim (2010) and Lee (2017a) also argue that there are similarities between relativization and topicalization. In Korean, what can be topicalized can be relativized as well. Consider the following examples:



- (38) a. khi-ka      khu-nun    wuyu  
           height-Nom grow-Rel    milk  
           “Milk that makes you grow fast”  
       b. i wuyu-nun    khi-ka      khu-n-ta.  
           this milk-Top height-Nom grow-Pres-Dec  
           “As for this milk, it makes you grow fast (if you drink it).”
- (39) a. tali-ka    kile    poi-nun    paci  
           leg-Nom long    look-Rel    trousers  
           ‘Trousers that make your leg look longer’  
       b. i paci-nun            tali-ka    kile    poi-n-ta.  
           this trousers-Top leg-Nom    look long-Pres-Dec  
           “As for this trousers, they make your legs look longer (if you wear it).”
- (40) a. meli-ka    cohaci-nun    umsik  
           brain-Nom get.better-Rel food  
           ‘Food that make you clever’  
       b. i umsik-un    meli-ka    cohaci-n-ta.  
           this food-Top brain-Nom get.better-Pres-Dec  
           “As for this food, it makes you clever (if you eat them).”
- (41) a. elkwul-i    yeppeci-nun    seymyenpep  
           face-Nom get-pretty-Rel    face-washing methods  
           ‘Face-cleansing methods that make you look prettier’  
       b. i seymyenpep-un            elkwul-i    yeppeci-n-ta.  
           This face-cleansing methods face-Nom get.pretty-Pres-Dec  
           “As for this face-cleansing method, it makes you look prettier (if  
           you use it).”

These examples are difficult to be translated into English because the head noun is not an argument of the preceding adnominal clause. The correlation shows that relative clauses are closely related to topic

constructions in Korean. Consider some more examples, which exhibit correlations between gapless relative clauses and topic constructions.

- (42) a. *sopangswu-ka chwultonghay-ya ha-l pwul*  
 firefighters-Nom dispatch-must-Rel fire  
 ‘Fire that firefighters needed to be dispatched (to extinguish it)’  
 b. *i pwul-un sopangswu-ka chwultonghay-ya ha-nta.*  
 this fire-Top firefighters-Nom dispatch-must-Dec  
 ‘As for this fire, firefighters need to be dispatched (to extinguish it).’
- (43) a. *swulikong-ul pwulu-eya ha-l kocang*  
 repairman-Acc call-must-Rel fault  
 ‘Fault that a repairman needs to be called (to fix it)’  
 b. *i kocang-un swulikong-ul pwulu-eya ha-nta.*  
 This fault-Top repairman-Acc call-must-Dec  
 ‘As for this fault, repairman needs to be called (to fix it).’

Having considered a large number of Korean relative clauses that can be topicalized, we tentatively assume that there is a close relationship between ‘aboutness’ condition in topic construction and ‘plausibility’ condition in relative clauses. It should be noted, however, that there are some topic constructions that cannot be relativized. Consider the following examples:

- (44) a. *sayngsen-un mineylal-i phwungpwuha-ta.*  
 fish-Top mineral-Nom rich-Dec  
 ‘As for fish, there are various minerals in them.’  
 b. *mineylal-i pwungpwuha-n sayngsen*  
 mineral-Nom rich-Rel fish  
 ‘Fish that contains various minerals’

- (45) a. sayngsen-un taykwu-ka masiss-ta.  
           fish-Top    cod-Nom   delicious-Dec  
           ‘As for fish, cod is delicious.’
- b. \*taykwu-ka masiss-nun sayngsen  
           cod-Nom   delicious-Rel   fish  
           ‘Fish that cod is delicious’

In (44), what is given in the comment phrase applies to the whole denotation of the topic NP. The topic NP in (45), however, exhibits a different characteristic from one in (44). The fact that cod is delicious is not a characteristic that can be shared among all the entities under the domain of fish. In this case, the topic cannot become a head noun of relative clauses. When the information described in the comment cannot be applied to the whole entity of the topic, the topic NP cannot be relativized into a relative clause (Lee 2017b:209).<sup>7)</sup>

## 6. Pragmatic factors working in the interpretation of Korean relative clauses

In this section, we will examine what kind of pragmatic information interact for appropriate interpretations of Korean relative clauses.

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7) See Lee (2017b) for further discussion on (in)compatibility between relative clauses and topic constructions.

## 6.1. Correlations between head-nouns and verbs

Firstly, we can consider the correlations between the head-nouns and the verbs in relative clauses.

- (46) a. [ [X-ka mek-un] Y ]  
Nom eat-Rel  
'Y (which) X ate' (Y: food or something edible)
- b. [ [X-lul sa-n] Y ]  
Acc buy-Rel  
'Y (who) bought X' (Y: purchaser)
- c. [ [X-ka Y-lul manna-n] Z ]  
Nom Acc meet-Rel  
'Z (at/in which) X met Y' (Z: place or time)

In the case of normal circumstances in which special pragmatic factors do not intervene, the head-nouns are mostly likely to be obligatory arguments of the verbs in the relative clauses. In general, 'eat' requires a food, and 'buy' requires a buyer or a list of articles as a head-noun as in (47).

- (47) a. Yongsu-ka mek-un umsik  
Nom eat-Rel food  
'Food that Youngsu ate'
- b. chayk-ul sa-n salam  
book-Acc buy-Rel person  
'the person who bought the book'

However, if a special noun is used as a head-noun, it may affect the interpretation of relative clauses. For example, if a semantically awkward noun is used as a head-noun as in (48), it may be required to assign a special interpretation to match it.

- (48) a. Yongsu-ka mek-un kulus-ul ssis-ess-ta.  
 Nom eat-Rel bowl-Acc wash-Past-Dec  
 ‘Yongsu washed the bowl in/with which he ate (food).’
- b. nay-ka chayk-ul sa-n cakka-ka sang-ul  
 I-Nom book-Acc buy-Rel author-Nom award-Acc  
 pat-ass-ta.  
 receive-Past-Dec  
 ‘The author whose book I bought received an award.’

The above sentences are cases in which the head-noun requires a special semantic and pragmatic relationship with the verb in relative clauses, and therefore it affects the interpretation of the relative clause. Under the circumstances, the head-noun is not interpreted as an obligatory argument of the verb but tends to be interpreted as a non-argument that receives an appropriate pragmatic interpretation. In the case of (48a), the interpretation of ‘to eat (food) in/with a bowl’ is much more natural pragmatically than an interpretation, ‘to eat a bowl’. (48b) is also a grammatically awkward sentence, but it can be interpreted nicely as shown in the example given a pragmatic context.

In prior research, particularly in formal syntax, the pragmatic factors have been neglected in the research on relative clauses. Considering that the pragmatic factors play important roles in the interpretation of Korean relative clauses, it should be recognized that Korean relative clauses can

receive various interpretations. The fact that the head noun is normally interpreted as an obligatory argument of the verb in a relative clause does not always apply to Korean. If it is more natural for a particular head-noun to be interpreted as a non-argument of the verb in the relative clause, a pragmatically plausible interpretation can be preferred to a syntactically motivated interpretation in Korean.

## 6.2. Tense of relative clauses

The tense of relative clauses in Korean is indicated by the adnominal ending of the verb in the relative clause. The interpretation of a head-noun can be varied depending on the tense of relative clauses. Consider the following examples:

- (49) a. [tambay-lul sa-n]                      *canton*  
           cigarette-Acc buy-Rel(Past) change  
           ‘The change that left over after buying cigarettes’<sup>8)</sup>
- b. [tambay-lul sa-nun/l]                    *canton*  
           cigarette-Acc buy-Rel(Pres/Fut) change  
           ‘The change that will be/is used to buy cigarettes’

Depending on the tense of the verb, the head-noun *canton* ‘change’ can indicate different referents, i.e. the change after the purchase and the change that is/will be used for the purchase.

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8) An anonymous reviewer pointed out that ‘the change’ in this example could also be interpreted as ‘the change that was used to buy cigarettes’.



### 6.3. Interpretation depending on adjunct elements

The grammaticality of the relative clause can be changed depending on whether or not an additional adjunct is added or not. In this case, the added element helps to identify grammatical roles of the head-noun. Consider the following examples:

- (50) a. \*Yumi-ka mek-un salam  
          Nom eat-Rel person  
          ‘\*The person who Yumi ate’  
      b. Yumi-ka hamkkey mek-un salam  
          Nom together eat-Rel person  
          ‘The person with whom Yumi ate’

(50a) cannot be accepted as a natural sentence<sup>9)</sup>, but it becomes much more natural when an adverb *hamkkey* ‘together’ is added as in (50b). Adverbs such as *kathi* ‘together’ or *hamkkey* ‘together’ play a role in identifying the grammatical role of the comitative particle, which is omitted in the formation of relative clauses. The same applies to the following examples:

- (51) a. \*Yongsu-ka san-ey ka-n Suni  
          Nom mountain-Loc go-Rel  
          ‘\*Suni who Yongsu went to the mountain’  
      b. Yongsu-ka kathi/hamkkey san-ey ka-n Suni

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9) An anonymous reviewer pointed out that if Yumi was a cannibal (or in a situation where she was bound to eat a person), this example could be acceptable. I agree with the reviewer but we consider only the pragmatic context at the level of common sense.

Nom together mountain-Loc go-Rel  
 ‘Suni with whom Yongsu went to the mountain’

The comitative NP in (51a) cannot become a head-noun as already pointed out in (6) above, but if an adverb *kathi* or *hamkkey* ‘together’ is inserted, (51b) can be acceptable.

#### 6.4. Interpretation based on context

The interpretation of the same relative clause can vary depending on the contextual meaning of the main clause. Consider the following examples:

- (52) a. na-nun chengchecang-ul ponay-n chinkwu-tul-hanthey  
 I-Top wedding.invitation-Acc send-Rel friend-PL-Dat  
 chwukuykum-ul ponay-ess-ta.  
 gift money-Acc send-Past-Dec  
 ‘I sent gift money to friends who sent me a wedding invitation.’
- b. na-nun chengchecang-ul ponay-n chinkwu-tul-hanthey  
 I-Top wedding.invitation-Acc send-Rel friend-PL-Dat  
 hwakinmeyil-to hamkkey ponay-ess-ta.  
 confirmation mail-too together send-Past-Dec  
 ‘I sent confirmation mails as well to friends to whom I sent a  
 wedding invitation.’

(52) is an example in which the interpretation of relative clauses can be varied according to the contextual meaning of the following main clause. On the other hand, it is also possible that the interpretation of the relative clause can be changed according to the contextual meaning of the

preceding sentence. Consider the following example.

- (53) manna-kilo ha-n      yeca-nun    cip-ulo    ka-peli-ess-ta.  
meet-arrange.to-Rel   woman-Top   home-Loc   go-Aux-Past-Dec  
'The woman (with whom) (I) have arranged to meet has gone home.

When (53) stands alone, the preferred interpretation would be 'the woman (with whom) I (speaker) have arranged to meet'. However, interpretation may be changed if the following context is given:

- (54) namca-wa yeca-ka      manna-kilo ha-ess-ciman,    sikan-i  
man-and woman-Nom   meet-arrange.to-Past-but,      time-Nom  
cina-to                    sangtaypang-un    nathanaci-anh-ass-ta.  
pass-even though counterpart-Top   show.up-Neg-Past-Dec  
Manna-kilo ha-n    yeca-nun    cip-ulo    ka-peli-ess-ta.  
meet-arrange.to-Rel   girl-Top   home-Loc   go-Aux-Past-Dec  
'The man and woman arranged to meet, but the man did not show  
up as time passed.  
The woman (who) arranged to meet (him) has gone home.'

In this case, the woman is the agent of the meeting and she is the subject who meets the man. The reason for this diverse interpretation is that Korean does not need to specify all the arguments in a sentence, unlike English. We therefore do not have to interpret the head nouns of the relative clauses as obligatory arguments of the verb. Furthermore, in Korean, adjuncts that are not arguments in sentences can become head nouns of relative clauses, therefore various interpretations are possible. This implies that Korean relative clauses are not fully explained based on

syntactic information alone and requires pragmatic information, including higher level of extra-linguistic knowledge.

## 7. Conclusion

Prior studies on relative clauses have focused primarily on the morphology and syntactic nature of the sentence. However, as we have seen so far, various pragmatic factors and extra-linguistic knowledge play important roles in the formation and interpretation of Korean relative clauses. Therefore, further research is needed on these peculiarities.

Comrie (1998, 2002) proposed that relative clauses in East Asian languages should be treated as attributive clauses rather than European-type relative clauses, based on the observation that relativizability is constrained not by grammatical relations but by semantic and pragmatic factors in these languages. With special reference to Japanese, Matsumoto (1990, 1997) offered an explanation based on semantic and pragmatic - rather than syntactic - conditions to determine the availability of noun-modifying clauses in Japanese. Based on her work, Comrie (1996, 1998, 2002) proposed a new typology that distinguishes Japanese and other Asian languages with similar properties from European-type languages. He proposed that noun-modifying clauses in many Asian languages (e.g. Chinese, Japanese and Korean) are qualitatively different from those in European languages because these Asian languages do not have relative clauses with a gap but, rather, have attributive clauses, which involve simply attaching modifying clauses to the head noun.

In this respect, Fox and Thompson's (1990a, 1990b) claim provides a

very interesting implication. They have argued that strict syntactic argument constraints are required in N-Rel type languages while semantic-pragmatic interpretations are required in Rel-N type languages. The reason for the differences can be attributed to the difference in information processing between the N-Rel type and the Rel-N type language. In the N-Rel type language, the head noun comes before the relative clause, so it is followed by the explanation of the head noun. Thus, the speaker of the N-Rel type language is required to provide the listener with information about the head noun for the information processing. The information include grammatical information such as case, gender, and number of the head noun, which is provided through relative pronouns. The listener's expectation for syntactic information can be met through this process (Rumelhart 1977). On the other hand, in the Rel-N type language, the information about the head noun is presented properly in a preceding relative clause, and the listener interprets the most appropriate candidate from the given context as the appropriate head noun. At the same time, the listener can appropriately deduce the syntactic relationship between the preceding verb in relative clauses and the following head noun based on this pragmatic information rather than syntactic information, so that there is room for various pragmatic information to intervene.

This paper thus demonstrates that interpretation of Korean relative clauses depends on context and pragmatic factors. Pragmatic factors and extra-linguistic knowledge play important roles in acceptability judgments and therefore those factors should be considered in the interpretation of Korean relative clauses. This paper has convincingly proven the significant role played by pragmatic factors in the interpretation of relative clauses in Korean.

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