Focus in Japanese and Korean syntax
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1. Introduction

Information structure is a branch of pragmatic discourse analysis that deals with ideas of how sentences are structured in order to convey a certain kind of information. These structures typically depend upon considerations in the sentences' syntax, phonology, and semantics. As such, information is packaged using these structural considerations in order to provide interpretational indications for New, Given, and Focused material[1]. Where New indicates information that is, at utterance time, new to the discourse; Given indicates information that has been noted to be previously mentioned, and is being referred to; Focus, which is the primary focus of this paper, tends to be some bit of information that is highlighted—or marked—as being important to the issue at hand. Of course, within the literature these concepts themselves are still being contested and argued against, with even such barebones descriptions as I've described falling under discussion.

Due to the large quantities of discussion regarding the various facets of Information Structure, this paper will singularly examine the syntactic configurations of Focus as evidenced in Japanese and Korean, two East Asian languages belonging to separate language families. Syntax, as I understand it and reason for choosing this topic, is fundamental in forming sentences in natural human languages; without which all other aspects of transmitting and interpreting meaning has no foundation upon which to stand.

[1] For the purposes of this paper, these concepts will be typographically indicated by capitalization as a way to distinguish them from general usage.

With this in mind, the goal of this paper is to understand the roles in which syntax plays in determining Focus through a comparative-analytical lens, by way of Japanese and Korean examples, in order to understand the cross-linguistic applicational value of certain Focus syntactic structures.

2. The Syntax of Focus in Japanese and Korean

Focused constituents, in both Japanese and Korean, are generally thought to draw attention to important new information within a discourse context. Importantly, the literature demarcates Focus interpretation as falling within two camps: contrastive Focus and non-contrastive Focus. Non-contrastive Focus is understood as the general "highlighting" effect of Focusing constituent, whereas contrastive Focus emphasizes that the Focused constituent is the option, out of some set of alternatives, which fulfills the truth conditions of the overall proposition. Non-contrastive focus can be understood, in this sense, as an entity that is not immediately interpreted to have come out from a set of alternatives (Neeleman & Vermeulen, 2013).

(1)   A: Who did Max see yesterday?
        B: He saw Rosa yesterday.

(from Vermeulen, 2013b, p. 81)

With this example, Vermeulen argues that *Rosa* is the Focused constituent, as it corresponds to the *wh*-part of person A's question—as the informationally new answer to the question in (1A) when all of the other parts in (1B) are repeated from (1A)—and that (1) is a non-contrastive Focused constituent as there is no indication of an implied contrasting set of alternative people (Vermeulen, 2013b). It is my understanding that there

is no consensus in the literature, but for the purposes of this paper, I will take this view of contrastive and non-contrastive Focus constituents.

In her study of Japanese and Korean Information Structure, Vermeulen (2013b) asserts that the distinction between Contrast and Focus (and as well, Topic) must be made, primarily, on the basis of the languages' syntactic configurations. The following subsections will quantify the kinds of syntactic structures available to speakers of Japanese and Korean when packaging Focus information.

2.1. Cleft and pseudocleft constructions

The syntactic structures of Japanese and Korean, as head-final languages with case marking particles, allows for some variability in how word order is constructed. As a result, the ordering of constituents can determine the information structure presented in a sentence (Jun, 2015; Vermeulen, 2013b). Cleft and pseudocleft sentences are designed to move constituents out of their canonical position, into a position indicating that constituent is should bear Focus. In English, we see this construction as "It is X that Y" type of sentence where the Focus constituent should fall in the "X" position. Cleft constructions are common cross-linguistically, and as such, it comes to no surprise that both Japanese and Korean should be able to employ these syntactic structures:

(2)   *thokki-lul*   *mu-n*   *kes-un*   *[cala-ita]$_F$*   (K)
        rabbit-ACC   bite-ADNZ   thing-TOP   turtle-be
        'It is the turtle that bit the rabbit'

(from, Jun, 2015, p. 182)

(3)   a. *Mari-ga*   *tabeta-no-wa* *[ringo-Ø*   *mittu-da]$_F$*   (J)
            Mari-NOM   ate-NML-TOP   apple-ø   three.CL-COP
            'It is (those) three apples that Mari ate'

<p style="text-align:right">(from, Tomioka, forthcoming, p. 3)</p>

(2) and (3a) indicate that the constituent interpreted as the Focus is moved to the right periphery of the phrase, creating a similar interpretation of the "It is X that Y" structure that we find so familiar in English Focus syntax. Tomioka (forthcoming) raises discussion on the close similarities of the Japanese pseudocleft construction and another syntactic construction termed as scrambling.

2.2. Scrambling

In much of the literature on the Focus syntax of Japanese and Korean, the notion of scrambling repeatedly comes into discussion. In the case of Information Structure, scrambling can be understood as a constituent moving from its original in-situ position to other, non-canonical positions within the sentence (Jackson, 2008; Vermeulen, 2013a, 2013b). Vermeulen (2013b) asserts that this scrambling is indicative of the effects of Contrast on the Focus constituents, and that "contrast licenses scrambling" (Vermeulen, 2013, p. 89). The idea is that the contrastive interpretation of Focus constituents allows for this scrambling. Presumably, as a result, non-contrastive Focus constituents cannot scramble, and would be regarded as infelicitous in a discourse context. The following examples clearly illustrate the positions available to scrambled constituents:

(4)   *John-wa*   *Sue-ni CD-o*   *ageta*   (J)
            John-WA   Sue-to CD-ACC gave
            'John gave a CD to Sue'

(5)   a. *Ie,* *John-wa*   *Sue-ni*   *[ano hon-o]$_F$*   *ageta*

b. *Ie,   John-wa   [ano hon-o$_i$]$_F$ Sue-ni   t$_i$ ageta*
c. *Ie,   [ano hon-o]$_F$ John-wa   Sue-ni   t$_i$ ageta*
   no   that book-ACC   John-WA   Sue-to   gave
   'No, John gave that book to Sue'

(6)   *John-i   Sue-eykey   CD-ul   cwuess-e*   (K)
       John-NOM   Sue-to   CD-ACC gave-DECL
       'John gave a CD to Sue'

(7)   a. *Ani,   John-i   Sue-eykey   [ku chayk-ul]$_F$ cwuess-e*
       b. *Ani,   John-i   [ku chayk-ul$_i$]$_F$ Sue-eykey   t$_i$ cwuess-e*
       c. *Ani,   [ku chayk-ul$_i$]$_F$ John-i   Sue-eykey   t$_i$ cwuess-e*
          no   that book-ACC   John-NOM   Sue-to   gave-DECL
          'No, John gave that book to Sue'

What these examples illustrate are the varied positions that Focus constituents can take under scrambling. The importance of scrambling word order becomes clear at the interface between syntax and prosody; the default stress position in Japanese falls on the immediately pre-verbal item, therefore, scrambling can manipulate constituents out of this position in order to allow the Focus constituent to assume that position. When the Focus constituent is scrambled, it gains an emphatic stress to indicate its Focus (Vermeulen, 2013a). Scrambling, unlike cleft constructions, provides constituents a freer range of movement, and is also not contained to movement of Focus constituents.

Turning back to the point raised prior, the relationship between this concept of scrambling and the pseudocleft construction in Japanese is discussed in Tomioka's (forthcoming) research. Consider again (3a), and compare it to (3b):

(3)   a. *Mari-ga   tabeta-no-wa   [ringo-∅   mittu-da]$_F$*   (J)
          Mari-NOM   ate-NML-TOP   apple-∅   three.CL-COP
          'It is (those) three apples that Mari ate'

       b. *Mari-ga   tabeta-no-wa   [ringo-o   mittu-da]$_F$*
          Mari-NOM   ate-NML-TOP   apple-ACC   three.CL-COP

'It is (those) three apples that Mari ate'

The difference between the two constructions is merely the inclusion of the accusative case marker in (3b). It is the inclusion of the case marker that changes the syntactic structure of the phrase from a pseudocleft-like construction, to a scrambled phrase (Tomioka, forthcoming). Understandably, the "free" word order of Japanese is allowed in that case-marking particles are present to help facilitate understanding. In order to keep linguistic consistency, I can see how constituent movement with the inclusion of a case marker should fall under the umbrella for scrambling. As of writing this paper, I have not seen a similar example in Korea, if it is possible.

Japanese is not the only one of the two with discussions on scrambling. Korean, as well, has some ambiguity with respect to scrambled constructions:

(8)   a. *Swuni-ka*   *Minho-lul*   *cohaha-y*   (K)
           Swuni-NOM   Minho-ACC   like-DC
           'Swuni likes Minho'

           b. Minho-lul   Swuni-ka   cohaha-y
           Minho-ACC   Swuni-NOM   like-DC
           i. 'As for Minho, Swuni likes him'
           ii. 'It is Minho that Swuni likes'

Here, the issue is that in Korean, the problem with simple syntactic scrambling is that there are two interpretations that can be drawn from the scrambled construction (8b): (8b-i) can have a topic interpretation, where the scrambled constituent is considered to be the topic of the sentence; (8b-ii) carries the contrastive focus interpretation as I've listed in

examples prior. The disambiguation is then made at the pragmatic level of the discourse context (Jackson, 2008).

The issues that arise with scrambling, Tomioka (forthcoming) presents the argument that these are not indicative of Focus-induced movement, as other non-Focus constituents can scramble as well. He says this of Japanese, and other research must be performed in order for me to extend this argument to Korean scrambling as well. My own question on the topic is, how does movement available to non-Focus constituents preclude identification of that movement as a kind of Focus movement? However, Tomioka does consider the long distance scrambling construction as a step in the direction of Focus movement.

2.3. Long distance scrambling

Sentences in both Japanese and Korean are able to undergo long distance scrambling—scrambling a constituent out of an embedded clause to a position in the matrix clause. It has been noted in prior research that embedded subjects are not able to be scrambled, and that long distance scrambling carries with it the obligatory interpretation of contrastive focus (Vermeulen, 2013a, 2013b):

(6) *Bill-wa [CP John-ga   Sue-ni CD-o   ageta   to]   omotteiru*   (J)
     Bill-WA   John-NOM   Sue-to CD-ACC gave   COMP   thinking
     'Bill thinks that John gave Sue a CD'

(7) *Ie,   [ano hon-o$_i$]$_F$ Bill-wa [CP John-ga   Sue-ni t$_i$ ageta to]   omotteru*
     no   that book-ACC   Bill-WA   John-NOM   Sue-to   gave   COMP   thinking
     'No, Bill thinks that John gave a book to Sue'

(8) *Swuni-ka   [CP Yenghi-ka   ku kwutwu-lul sasse-ta-ko]   sayngkakha-n-ta*   (K)
     Swuni-NOM   Yenghi-NOM that shoes-ACC bought-DECL-COMP   think-DECL

'Swuni thinks that Yenghi bought these shoes'

(9) *Ani,* *[ku moca-lul$_i$]$_F$ Swuni-ka [$_{CP}$ Yenghi-ka t$_i$ sasse-ta-ko]*
     no,   that hat-ACC   Swuni-NOM   Yenghi-NOM   bought-DECL-COMP
     sayngkakhan-ta
     thought-DECL
     'No, Swuni thinks that Yenghi bought that hat'

<p align="right">(from, with some modification Vermeulen, 2013b, pp. 89-91)</p>

Conceptually, Focus constituents that are scrambled out of the embedded clause are then accommodated by speakers as having an obligatory contrastive interpretation indicative of more of the kind of movement by Focus constructions Tomioka (forthcoming) discussed.

3. Discussion

In sum, Japanese and Korean are subject to similar kinds of Focus syntactic constructions; although those constructions—scrambling, as a main one—are not always subject to a Focus interpretation, or used for the express purpose to indicate a Focus constituent. However, long range scrambling, as seen above, does seem to be used only when communicating an explicit contrastive focus interpretation.

That being said, the Focus syntax of Japanese and Korean do not stray too far from each other. It is not necessarily the case that the two languages employ different syntactic constructions, as I've summarized above, they employ similar structures of cleft and pseudocleft constructions, and word order scrambling. While Japanese and Korean have similar properties within their respective syntactic parameters, it is certain that these concepts of word order scrambling can be applied to other languages, so long as they support freer uses of word order than languages like English might. Speaking to linguistic

variability, the main point of divergence between Korean and Japanese vis-à-vis Focus syntax, was considering the syntax in relation to other aspects of Information Structure. The important aspects of syntax and Focus were that the syntax and Focus interpretations were always subject to manipulation by other Information Structural functions—especially Topic, and the intersection of a contrastive interpretation between Focus and Topic. Perhaps if the scope of this paper were broader, some of these underlying issues may have taken a larger role here.

4. Conclusion

Information structure encompasses many disciplines within linguistics, and parsing a small subsection of it from the rest makes the topic more difficult to talk about, as it turns out . Comprising of the synthesis of discourse analysis, semantics, phonology, and syntax, used in symbiosis to understand a number of topics interwoven together. Understanding Focus syntax is difficult to do without being privy to the ideas of Topic, New, and Givenness, and all of their points of convergence.

By looking at some of the available literature on the syntax of Focus in Japanese and Korean, the clearest implication I arrive at is that there is still a great deal opportunity for researchers to parse through the data and come to a better understanding of the relationship between Focus and syntax, as well as the whole area of Information Structure more broadly.

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