

# Some Properties of Short-form Negators in Korean

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Cho, Sae-Youn. 1999. Some Properties of Short-form Negators in Korean. *Linguistic Research* 17, 214-224. There has been much controversy on the status of the Short-form Negators in Korean linguistic society. The previous analyses under the transformational grammar framework tend to consider the Short-form Negator to be an adverb while some analyses under the nontransformational grammar framework regard it as a prefix. In this paper, it is claimed that the Short-form Negator is not a prefix but an adverb, on the basis of various evidence. Furthermore, it is claimed that it is more appropriate to provide a semantic or pragmatic account to explain properties of the Short-form Negators. (Honam University)

## 1. Introduction

It is well known that negators in Korean can be classified into two types depending on their position with respect to the verb in a sentence: the so-called Short-form Negator (SN) and Long-form Negator (LN). As shown in (1-2), a verb can follow the SN morpheme *an* whereas a verb precedes the LN morpheme *anh*.

- (1) Sensayngnim-i    chayk-ul    *an*    poassta.  
teacher-N            book-A    SN    see-Past-D  
'The teacher did not see the book.'
- (2) Sensayngnim-i    chayk-ul    po-ci            *anh*-assta.  
teacher-N            book-A    see-Comp    LN-Past-D  
'The teacher did not see the book.'

Following Ahn (1991) and S.-Y. Kim (1993), Kim (1996) has supported the argument that the SN *an* is a prefix to account for various properties of the SN in (1) under the lexicalist approach. In addition, Kim has claimed that some lexical idiosyncratic cases such as

\**an iss-ta* vs. *an kyeysi-ta* are regular lexical blocking cases where the existence of irregular lexical forms prevents the regular ones from being used.

In this paper<sup>1</sup>, I, rather, claim that the SN is not a prefix but an adverb. Furthermore, I suggest that it is more appropriate to provide a semantic and/or pragmatic account to explain properties of the SN morpheme, which has been rejected by Kim (1996).

To support my claim above, I will show, in section 2, that the SN morpheme *an* might be an adverb, after critically reviewing the argument for treating the morpheme as a prefix. In section 3, I will also show that the lexical idiosyncratic cases as to *an* are related not to regular lexical blocking cases but to semantic and/or pragmatic issues, by demonstrating that some data involving such idiosyncratic cases cannot be accounted for under the morphological approach.

## 2. The Status of the Short-form Negator

Recently, there has been much controversy on the status of the SN morpheme *an* in Korean linguistic society. While GBians like Ahn (1991) and Lee (1993) tried to explain the properties of the negation constructions by positing a NegP, nontransformationalists including Sells (1995) and Kim (1996) have proposed various analyses of the SN construction on the basis of either the feature-based or the morphological approach. Though I agree with Kim (1996) that the existence of the NegP is dubious, I do not agree with his arguments for taking the SN *an* to be a prefix.

To argue that the negator *an* is not an adverb but a prefix, Kim, first of all, rejects the argument for treating *an* as an adverb on the basis of the following reasons. Under the Adverb analysis, the SN *an* and some adverbs such as *cal* 'well' exhibit the similar distributional behavior as in (3-4). In other words, the sentences in (3-4) show that the negator *an* and the adverb *cal* must be restricted to the preverbal position. Thus, the SN *an* can be regarded as an adverb.

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Han-Gyu Lee, Jong-Bok Kim, Jong-Joo Choi and Myung-Hee Chae for their comments and questions.

- (3) (\*cal) John-i (\*cal) sakwa-lul (cal) mek-nun-ta.  
 John-N apples-A (well) eat-Pres-D  
 'John eats apples well.'
- (4) (\*an) John-i (\*an) sakwa-lul (an) mek-nun-ta.  
 John-N apples-A (SN) eat-Pres-D  
 'John does not eat apples.'

However, Kim (1996) argues that the similarity in their syntactic distribution does not guarantee that the negator is an adverb. To make his argument persuasive, he provides some data showing the grammatical difference between *cal* and *an* which lies in their linear ordering, as illustrated in (5-6).

- (5) cal an ka-ss-ta.  
 well SN go-Past-D
- (6) \*an cal ka-ss-ta.  
 SN well go-Past-D

The examples in (5-6) show that though *cal* and *an* must be located right in front of the verb, the SN *an* follows the adverb *cal*. From this observation, he believes that instead of postulating some Linear Precedence (LP) rules, the negator *an* is prefixed to the main verb, forming a morphological word as shown in (7).

- (7) word[ SN + Main Verb ]  
 prefix

Though this morphological approach appears to well explain why the SN *an* follows the adverb *cal*, at least three problems must be accounted for to be an adequate theory.

First, it is a well-known fact that verbal prefixes are rare in Korean. If the SN is assumed to be a prefix based on the fact that it is easier to account for the LP difference in (5) and (6), then we may have two Korean verbal prefixes, namely the SN *an* and the emphatic expression morpheme (EM) *chye*. Similar to the ordering difference between *an* and *cal*, there is a similar ordering difference between *an*

and *chey*, as illustrated in (8-9).

- |     |               |             |                    |
|-----|---------------|-------------|--------------------|
| (8) | <i>an</i>     | <i>chey</i> | <i>mek-nun-ta.</i> |
|     | SN            | EM          | eat-Pres-D         |
| (9) | * <i>chey</i> | <i>an</i>   | <i>mek-nun-ta.</i> |
|     | EM            | SN          | eat-Pres-D         |

To preserve the claim that *an* is a prefix, the EM *chey* might be assumed to be prefixed to the verb first in order to account for why *an* precedes *chey*. This assumption requiring the ordering constraint between the prefixes, however, is unnatural, in considering that Korean verbal prefixes are rare.

Second, it appears that on the basis of the ordering difference between *cal* and *an*, the argument for treating the SN as a prefix is too weak. As shown in (10), the SN *an* precedes the EM *chey*.

- |         |                  |             |                    |
|---------|------------------|-------------|--------------------|
| (10) a. | <i>an</i>        | <i>chey</i> | <i>mek-nun-ta.</i> |
|         | SN               | EM          | eat-Pres-D         |
|         | b. * <i>chey</i> | <i>an</i>   | <i>mek-nun-ta.</i> |
|         | EM               | SN          | eat-Pres-D         |

Under Kim's logic above, the easiest way to define the ordering difference between the SN and the EM might be that the SN *an* is an adverb and *chey* is a prefix. This result, of course, is contradictory to his claim that the SN is a prefix. Hence, the supporting evidence based on the ordering difference cannot be the argument for taking the SN to be a prefix. Rather, in considering that like other languages, some adverbs such as *hangpokhakey* 'happily' precede other adverbs such as *cal* as in (11), it might be natural that the SN as an adverb follows other adverbs. Namely, positing some LP constraints among adverbs seems to be independently motivated.

- |         |                     |                     |                    |
|---------|---------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| (11) a. | <i>hangpokhakey</i> | <i>cal</i>          | <i>sal-ass-ta.</i> |
|         | happily             | well                | live-Past-D        |
|         | b. *? <i>cal</i>    | <i>hangpokhakey</i> | <i>sal-ass-ta.</i> |
|         | well                | happily             | live-Past-D        |

Third, there seems to be some evidence supporting the argument for taking the SN to be an adverb. It is common that the degree modifiers like *maywu* 'very' immediately precede certain adverbs like *cal* 'well' as in (12a). If the degree modifier occurs alone like (12b), the sentence is generally ungrammatical.

- (12) a. *maywu cal mek-nun-ta.*  
           very well eat-Pres-D  
       b. \**maywu mek-nun-ta.*  
           very eat-Pres-D

Similarly, the degree modifiers such as *kyelkho* 'never' and *celtay* 'absolutely' must occur with the SN (or the LN) as in (13a). Unless the degree modifier occurs with the SN, the sentence is construed to be ungrammatical as in (13b).

- (13) a. *celtay an mek-nun-ta.*  
           absolutely SN eat-Pres-D  
       b. \**celtay mek-nun-ta.*  
           absolutely eat-Pres-D

What the examples in (12-13) show is that the degree modifier *maywu* modifies the adverb *cal* while *celtay* modifies the SN *an*. The morphological view Kim (1996) advocated may treat the adverb *celtay* to modify only the verb containing a negative element, so as to differentiate (13a) from (13b). Though such an account works for (13), it still does not answer why (12b) is impossible. This analysis, again, needs an additional device to answer this question. In short, this approach loses an important generalization. On the other hand, if the SN *an* is regarded as an adverb, the fact that a certain degree modifier modifies some adverbs just follows without additional and unnecessary statements. Hence, this evidence points to the fact that like *cal*, the SN *an* is an adverb.

### 3. Lexical Idiosyncrasies of the SN

Kim (1996) believes that the existence of lexical idiosyncrasies supports the morphological view. In other words, the morphological view provides a simpler explanation for the fact that verbs like *iss-* 'exist' and *al-* 'know' do not tend to occur with the SN as in (14-15).

- (14) \*an      *iss-ta*.  
          SN      exist-D
- (15) \*an      *al-ta*.  
          SN      know-D

Under the morphological view, the examples in (16), where inherent negative cases *eps-* 'not.exist' and *molu-* 'not.know' and their positive counterparts *iss-* 'exist' and *al-* 'know' cannot occur with the SN, are assumed to be regular blocking cases in which the existence of irregular forms prevents both of them being used.

- (16) a. \*an      *eps-ta*.  
          SN      not.exist-D
- b. \*an      *molu-ta*.  
          SN      not.know-D

Furthermore, he has rejected the semantic or pragmatic solution on the following reasons. Though two verbs *iss-ta* and *kyey-si-ta* convey the same meaning 'exist', as in (17), *kyey-si-ta* can co-occur with the SN but *iss-ta* cannot. Because of this, he, hence, has suggested that the semantic account would fail in predicting the idiosyncratic cases.

- (17) a. \*an      *iss-ta*.  
          SN      exist-D
- b. an      *kyey-si-ta*.  
          SN      exist-Hon-D

Though Kim's argument seems to be plausible, there might be empirical and theoretical problems to this issue. Theoretically, it might not be that easy for all lexical main verbs to encode the information as

to which verb can co-occur with the SN and which cannot. In short, the cost is too high. Even if the information can be encoded in the lexicon under the unification-based approach, it would be difficult for the unification of the Negative value of *al-* and *li-* to succeed in the case of *al-li-ta* 'know-Cause-D', as illustrated in (18).

- (18) an al-li-ss-ta.  
 SN know-Cause-Past-D
- word{an [al- li- ss-ta]}  
 [+neg] \*[-neg] [+neg]

There are also some empirical problems. First of all, Kim (1996) firmly believes that the string *an kyey-si-* is possible but *an iss-* is not. However, it is empirically not the case. As in (19), the same string *an iss-* can be perfectly acceptable in this sentence.

- (19) John-i yocum cip-ey *an iss-ko* kiswuksa-ey iss-e.  
 John-N nowadays house-at SN exist-Comp dormitory-at exist-D  
 'Nowadays, John does not stay at home but at the dormitory.'

Likewise, the string *an al-* in (20), again, seems to be perfect against what Kim believes.

- (20) a. Ne ikes(-ul) al-ko siph-e *an al-ko* siph-e?  
 you this-A know-Comp want-C SN know-Comp want-C  
 'I wonder whether you want to know this or not.'
- b. Ne ikes(-ul) *an al-a* po-ass-e?  
 you this-A SN know-Comp try-Past-C  
 'Don't you check this out?'

What the examples in (19-20) show is that Kim (1996)'s account of the lexical idiosyncrasies of the SN is on the wrong track mainly because his theory is not empirically motivated.

To avoid such difficulties under the morphological view, one might argue that the reason why *an al-ko* in (20) is well-formed is due to

the existence of the AUX (auxiliary verb) *siph-e* or *po-ass-e*. However, this is not a good solution, since the AUX *po-ass-* can co-occur with the SN *an* as illustrated in (21).

- (21) Na-nun noymwul-ul meke-to *an po-ass-ko* (=AUX)  
 I-Top bribery-A take-DL SN try-Past-Comp  
 cwue-to *an po-ass-ta*(=AUX).  
 give-DL SN try-Past-D  
 'I have never tried to give bribe to anyone and receive bribe from anyone.'

Specifically, the morphological view and any feature-based theory having a co-occurrence restriction like  $*[+AUX]$  &  $[+neg]$  cannot be right. Thus, the lexical idiosyncrasies of the SN are not lexical blocking cases.

#### 4. A Proposal: Semantic or Pragmatic Account

So far, I have shown that the arguments for taking the SN to be a prefix cannot be tenable, unless concrete evidence is provided. Rather than that, I have claimed that the Adverb analysis represented as in (22) is more preferable than the morphological view.

- (22) *word[an]*      *word[iss-ta]*  
 adjunct              verb

Though the idea that the lexical idiosyncrasies of the SN are not lexical blocking cases is claimed to be wrong, the question on how to account for the oddness of sentences like (23) would be answered.

- (23)# Na-nun ikes-ul an al-ko      siph-e.  
 I-Top this-A SN know-Comp want-D  
 'I don't want to know this.'

To answer this question, I propose that whether or not the SN can co-occur with the following verb or adjective heavily depends upon the



context when the sentence is pronounced. In addition, it is common that the SN *an* plays an important role in expressing the speakers' willingness while the SN1 *mos* exhibits the ability of the subject in a sentence. Keeping this in mind, let's consider (23). Some sensory verbs such as *al-* 'know' and *cikakha-* 'perceive' cannot be the objects for speakers' willingness so that they are not easy to use with the SN in a normal context.

There might be some evidence pointing to the fact that the co-occurrence of the SN morphemes with verbs is caused by semantic or pragmatic issues. Under my analysis, the sentences headed by the verb *naylin-ta* in (24) can be correctly viewed as acceptable under the condition that it is raining at the airport. In (24a), the SN *an* can occur with the verb since the subject of the verb can denote the pilot of the airplane via the reference transfer. (Cf. P&S (1994)) By contrast, (25b) containing the SN1 *mos* seems to be a little bit odd since raining is not the matter of abilities.

- (24) a. *pihayngki-ka an naylin-ta.*  
       plane-N SN land-D  
       b. *pihayngki-ka mos naylin-ta.*  
       plane-N SN1 land-D  
       'The airplane does not land.'
- (25) a. *pi-ka an naylin-ta.*  
       rain-N SN pour-D  
       b. *#pi-ka mos naylin-ta.*  
       rain-N SN1 pour-D  
       'It doesn't rain.'

The morphological or the syntactic approach may not be able to account for the difference in acceptability between (24) and (25) because the head of (24) and (25) is the same. Thus, the issue on whether or not a verb can co-occur with the SN or the SN1 would be a semantic or pragmatic issue.

## 5. Conclusion

There have been lots of debates as to the status of the SN and the lexical idiosyncrasies in relation to SN morphemes. Contrary to various works supporting the claim that the SN is a prefix, I have argued here that the SN is an adverb, by demonstrating that it syntactically behaves as an adverb. Furthermore, I have claimed that the cases of the lexical idiosyncrasies of the SN are not lexical blocking cases but semantic or pragmatic issues. The reason why the morphological approach is on the wrong track is due to the lack of related data research.

Empirically unmotivated theories are trivial. It is my conviction that though a theory itself can be important, the careful examination of the related empirical data is more indispensable.

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접수일자: 1999. 10. 20.

게재일자: 1999. 11. 2.