

On the Time Away Construction: A Corpus-Based Approach*

Mija Kim
(Kyung Hee University)

Kim, Mija. 2010. On the Time Away Construction: A Corpus-Based Approach. *Linguistic Research* 27(1), 121-136. In English, there are constructions in which the complements of lexical verbs are not predictable in the sentence. There are remaining issues on whether it should be treated as being idiomatic. One of these constructions is time away construction. This paper examines grammatical properties of the time-away construction on the basis of the corpus search, proposes to extend this construction, showing their similar behaviors in syntactic and semantic aspects and sees how this construction should be analysed in the framework of HPSG. (Kyung Hee University)

Key Words time-away construction, optional complement, difficulties, construction, HPSG

1. Introduction

Since generative grammar, many researchers have tried to focus on the role of lexical verbs which determine their complements in a sentence. It is said that these approaches have resulted in putting excessive load on to the lexical heads and facing difficulty in explaining constructions whose complements cannot be predicted by the lexical head. As an instance of the latter case, we can take the time-away construction in English.

As shown in (1), the bold-faced verbs are followed by the noun phrases and the expression, *away*, in sequence. It is hard to predict these two elements by the verbs respectively.

- (1) a. Joe **talked** the night away.
- b. Harry determined to **walk** the day away.
- c. Dinah allowed the young woman to **idle** her days away in the

* For helpful comments on previous draft of this paper, I am grateful to anonymous reviewers for the journal.

Hampstead house.

d. We **sat, read** and **talked** the morning away.

e. I can't **nap** today away.

It is noticeable in (1) that the noun phrases are involved with the expressions denoting the temporal duration and that only the word '*away*' is allowed in these sentences. The combination of these highly restricted elements yields a peculiar semantic interpretation: an agent spends the time while action designated by a verb.

Linguists has neglected the study of this construction so far and the only attempt has made by Jackendoff (1997). Jackendoff (1997) proposes that this kind of sentences should be regarded as their own constructional constructions, not an idiomatic construction.

In this paper, I first investigate, based on the corpus search¹⁾, grammatical properties of this construction and then try to offer the constructional analysis for it in the theoretical framework of HPSG.

2. Grammatical Properties

2.1 Basic Syntactic Behaviors

As was stated earlier, this construction exhibits a syntactic structure such as the sentences which include idiomatic phrases. This paper tries to sketch out four aspects of the grammatical properties in the time-away construction. First, let us start with the issue on constituency of this construction. The examples in (2) show that two elements following the verb are obligatorily required in this construction and that a fixed phrase '*away*' is sanctioned to be positioned as the last element of this construction. Nevertheless, the two elements are observed not to be licensed by the lexical verb.

(2) a. She danced the night away.

b. *She danced the night.

c. *She danced away. (in the constructional meaning)

1) As was mentioned above, the first researcher was Jackendoff (1997). This study aims to more closely study this construction on the basis of the corpus data and to clarify the grammatical properties of this construction.

- d. *She danced. (in the constructional meaning)
- e. *She danced the night off/ out/ over/ up/ with.

Secondly, let us review the uses of verbs. The property of verbs which can happen in this structure, is characterized by the following examples (Jackendoff 1997):

- (3) a. I could while his vacation away on the beach.
- b. They drank their whole day away.
- c. They walked the afternoon away.
- d. *Fred devoured the night away.
- e. *Ann perused the morning away.

Jackendoff (1997) points out that the verb '*while*' is typically used in this construction but not shown in other constructions. As in (3b~c) both transitive and intransitive verbs can be used in this construction, yet the verbs whose complements should be obligatorily realized within the sentence are not allowed in this construction like (3d~e).

In the case of transitive verbs this construction shows an interesting property in that their optional complements can be recovered by the prepositional phrase, i.e. '*with*-phrase,' as follows (Jackendoff 1997):

- (4) a. Fred drank the night away with a bottle of Jack Daniels.
- b. Ann read the morning away with a pile of old mysteries.
- c. *They walked the afternoon away toward Chicago.

We can make an interim conclusion from these behaviors that the verbs in this construction should have the character by which their typical complements do not realize in the position followed by the verb.

The third is on the noun phrase. The noun phrase in the object position shows quite a different syntactic property from other time expressions in the sense that although time expressions with various determiners (including quantifiers) are allowed in this position, they are different from time adverbials as follows (Jackendoff 1997). That is, the noun phrase in this construction displays that it serves as the complement of the verb, unlike that of the sentences

in (5c-d):

- (5) a. Stan drank the (entire) afternoon of his fiftieth birthday away.
- b. Frank walked the afternoon away along the wharf.
- c. Fred hasn't slept this year
- d. Kate is leaving Monday.

The striking difference between (4) and (5) can be found in passives, as seen in (6). Under the proper context, the time-away construction can undergo passive regardless of what kind of a verb it is (e.g., intransitive type verb), whereas the sentences with free time adverbials cannot undergo it.

- (6) a. The evening had been nearly slept away, when I suddenly awoke
with a start.
- b. *This year hasn't been slept by Kate.

Another difference between them is observed in the position of adverbs. The time-away construction exhibits the similar behavior with other verb-particle construction when the adverbs are inserted in this construction as in (7) and (8). As in (7) and (9) below, the insertion of adverbs in the position between main verbs and their objects is not allowed in the time-away construction, while the sentences with free time adverbials are freely allowed (Jackendoff 1997):

- (7) a. *Sue danced happily the night away.
- b. *Sue danced happily away the night.
- c. Sue danced the night happily away.
- d. Sue danced the night away happily.
- (8) a. *Sue threw quickly the paper away.
- b. Sue threw the paper quickly away.
- c. Sue threw the paper away quickly.
- (9) a. Sue danced happily all night.
- b. Sue danced all night happily.

From these behaviors, we can tentatively conclude that the time expressions in an object position also play a similar role with objects of other transitive

constructions, even though the object complements are not predicted by the lexical verb.

Finally, let us look at the fixed phrase '*away*'. It can be said that the fixed phrase, '*away*' behaves as an ordinary particle because it can be inverted to the object NP as in (10). This particle can take a modifier only if it is positioned at the final of the sentence as shown in the example (11b). In this case, the modified particle phrase does not be inverted as in (11c). The modifier corresponds to adverbs such as *entirely*, *half*, *partly*, etc.. Because the particle '*away*' is the only fixed expression available for this construction, other kinds of particles cannot be allowed in the construction.

- (10) a. Harry determined to walk the day away.
b. Harry determined to walk away the day.
- (11) a. Harry slept the whole afternoon away.
b. Harry slept the whole afternoon entirely away.
c. *Harry slept entirely away the whole afternoon.

2.2 Semantic interpretation

The meaning of this constructional pattern can be understood as "the individual expressed by the subject, spends or uses the time (up) through the action of the verb". The meaning of examples (12) is paraphrased as (13) respectively (Jackendoff 1997):

- (12) a. Sam slept the afternoon away
b. Sam gambled the evening away.
- (13) a. Sam spent/wasted the afternoon sleeping.
b. Sam frittered the evening away gambling.

Focused on these paraphrastic meanings, we can see that at least the individual in the subject position has to be an agent who carries out the action designated by the verb. As in (14) and (15), nonagent subjects cannot be realized in this position.

- (14) a. The light flashed for two hours.
b. *The light flashed two hours away.

- (15) a. Celia sat for two hours.
 b. *Celia sat two hours away.

2.3 Previous Approach

On the peculiar properties of the time-away construction which we have noticed so far, Jackendoff (1997)²⁾ asserts that this construction should be regarded as forming its own construction. Even more, he emphasizes that this time-away construction is also different from the sentences in (16). That is, the noun phrases have to be a free time expression.

- (16) a. Bill gambled his life away.
 b. Diet those pounds away.

He explains that even though they might syntactically look like a time-away construction, they are a kind of resultative construction in the sense that the sentences in (6) have a cause interpretation. That is, his basic criterion to distinguish a time-away construction from the resultative sentences is whether there is a cause interpretation or not, indicating that through the activity designated by the verb, the subject causes the designated time of the object to go away.

According to his premise, the example (17a), which is typical of the time-away construction, can not be paraphrased to the meaning in (17b).

- (17) a. Bill slept the afternoon away.
 b. ??Bill caused the afternoon to go away by sleeping.

He adds that (16a) is ambiguous while (16b) is a true resultative sentence with similar syntactic pattern to the time-away construction. The sentence (16a) can be paraphrased to (18a), whereas the sentence (16b) can be paraphrased to (18b). He explains that the latter sentence (16b) is hard to have such a strange meaning as in (18c).

2) As was mentioned at the beginning of this paper, no studies have ever tried to investigate this construction. The only research was made by Jackendoff (1997). As a previous approach, this paper introduces his view on this construction.

- (18) a. Bill has spent his whole life gambling.
 b. Make those pounds go away by dieting.
 c. ??Spend those pounds by dieting.

As stated so far, his assumption leads to the conclusion that only the sentences with the expressions of time in the object position would be a time-away construction. The question then arises as to whether these two kinds of sentences should necessarily be divided into different constructional types. This approach is likely quite restrictive in that they have to be treated as other constructional type on account of the difference in meaning, though they share this peculiar syntactic pattern each other. In fact, this time-away construction reveals quite a peculiar syntactic pattern.

3. Away Constructions

3.1 Syntactic Distributions: Corpus Findings

As we have examined so far, the time-away construction shows peculiar constructional properties which do not share with other constructions. This paper then makes an attempt to confirm whether the time-away construction is bound to have a highly restricted property by which the noun phrase always corresponds to time expressions, as proposed above.

At present, it may be useful to look more closely at the syntactic distribution and semantic interpretation of sentences which exhibit the similar syntactic pattern to 'verb + noun phrase + *away*' (the away constructions, henceforth). For the present purpose, this paper mainly uses BNC (British National Corpus) with other supplementary dictionaries as the corpus search.

Let us start with what kinds of constructions can be found in this syntactic pattern first. The subjects of the search was approximately 282 possibilities of sentence patterns, under which the verb obligatorily takes the particle *away*. Based on these corpus examples, this paper identified and sorted them into the types as in (19). That is, the following sentences as in (19) could exhaustively be available to the syntactic structure like '[NP [V NP *away*]]³⁾': this structure has to necessarily consist of the noun phrase and a fixed item, *away*.

3) Due to the property of a particle, this structure can be changed into '[NP [V + *Away* + NP]]'

- (19) a. Would you clear away the dishes?
 b. Jane rolled the ball away.
 c. Fred drank the night away.
 d. She slept her troubles away.

3.2 The syntactic and semantic properties of the away constructions

As listed above, this paper, at least, has identified four different types of sentences, which at least meet the condition of syntactic structures superficially. Let us more closely examine their differences in syntactic and semantic aspects one by one.

The first type (20) is an instance of transitive type in which the verb takes a noun phrase as the complement in the object position. In this type, the verb superficially consists of two lexical items: the verb forms a phrasal verb with a particle *away*. This type denotes the semantic interpretation of typical transitive relation, in which the agent causes the theme to do something.

- (20) a. Would you clear away the dishes?
 b. She cut away the loose thread.

The examples (21) of the second type below show that the verb takes a noun phrase as the complement and then a fixed phrase *away* at the end of the sentence. This pattern displays the similar syntactic structure with the resultative one. The sentences designate the meaning of the subject's moving away by means of the action of the verb. For instance, the sentence (21a) can be paraphrased as 'Jane caused the ball to move away by rolling': that is, as a result of Jane's rolling, the ball moved away.

- (21) a. Jane rolled the ball away.
 b. He kicked the gun away.
 c. She brushed the crumbs away from the table.
 d. She boiled the water away.

The third type (22) is typical of the time-away construction, which Jackendoff (1997) named. The big difference of this type from other three types is that the complement in a object position has to be a time expression.

- (22) a. Fred drank the night away.
 b. She slept her whole vacation away.

The last type which this paper found through the corpus search reveals the same syntactic pattern with the third one. The only difference is that the object complement do not denote the meaning of time.

- (23) a. She slept her troubles away.
 b. I baked my blues away.
 c. Bulan was about to laugh any such fears away.
 d. Can I chew my ADHD away?
 e. Joe tried to cry his blues away.
 f. Bill drank his fortune away. / Bill drank his care away.

It is not necessary for the purpose of this paper to enter into a detailed discussion of (20) and (21) among these four types. As was previously mentioned, this paper now tries to extend the observation of the time-away construction as in (22) into the type (23).

3.3 Resultative vs time-away construction

On the forth type (23) on which this paper tries to focus, Jackendoff (1997) came to the conclusion that this type of sentences is not of the time-away construction, but of a resultative construction on the ground for their cause meaning.

As examined above, the cause meaning is, in fact, derived from the structural property of the away constructions. As in (21), when the away constructions take the particle *away* at the end of the sentence, they signify the causative meaning⁴). That is, it is more reasonable to judge that the cause meaning is traced to the syntactic structure like: [NP [V NP *away*]].

This paper now provides two adequate reasons for regarding this type of sentences as part of the time-away construction as follows: on the ground for the properties of its argument and its meaning interpretation.

4) In the case of (20), when the particle *away* occurs in the position followed by the verb, that meaning disappears. That is, the sentence (20a) can be paraphrased to 'Would you remove away the dishes?'

3.3.1 The argument of the construction

The type (23) shares the common property with the time-away construction (22) in two aspects, the properties of which are distinct from the types as in (20) and (21): the predictability and the recoverability of their complements in the object position.

First, the most striking property of the time-away construction is that the object complement is not predicted by the lexical verb, which is the reason for regarding as a constructional construction. The same behavior is found in (23). For instance, in the sentence (23a) the lexical verb '*slept*' does not subcategorize for the complement '*hetionoules*'. That is, this complement does not be predicted by the lexical verb.

For the time being, let us review the case of true resultative construction as in (24). In the example (24), the argument 'his plate' can be semantically or pragmatically predicted by the verb 'ate'. That is, the argument of an object position that corresponds to the semantic role of patient can pragmatically be guessed at least by the event situation, in which John ate the food and as a result of his eating the food, the plate - not the food or others, etc.,- became clean. On the other hand, the verbs of the example (23) cannot subcategorize for the object argument semantically or even pragmatically.

(24) Joe ate his plate clean.

Therefore, based on the syntactic behavior of subcategorization, the examples (23) can be sorted as the similar pattern with the time-away construction.

Second, in addition to the predictability of the complement, the time-away construction displays the recoverability of the optional construction. That is, the deleted complement of a verb can be recovered with the prepositional phrase at the end of the sentence.

The verb which happens in the time-away construction can be an intransitive verb or a transitive verb type. In the case of transitive verbs, the truly semantic object should be omitted. The deleted object can be recoverable as '*with*' prepositional phrase in the time-away construction as in (25). This syntactic behavior is also found in the examples (23) as in (26).

- (25) Fred drank the night away with a bottle of vodka.
- (26) a. I baked my blues away with banana cakes.
b. Sally tried to drink her weight away with green teas.

Taking the property of having recoverable complement into consideration, the example (23) and the time-away construction can be said to be the same type of construction.

3.3.2 The interpretation

On the semantic interpretation⁵⁾ of the time-away construction, Jackendoff (1997) asserts that the argument followed by the verb should denote the temporal duration and that the verb express the manner⁶⁾ interpretation as in (27). In addition he explains that the example (28a) shows ambiguity. That is, the sentence (28) can be interpreted in two ways (28b) or (28c). It also means that the time-away construction has ambiguity in semantic interpretation.

- (27) a. Sam slept the afternoon away.
b. Sam spent the afternoon (while) sleeping.
c. *Sam spent the afternoon by sleeping.
- (28) a. Bill gambled his whole life away.
b. Bill has spent his whole life (while) gambling.
c. Bill caused his whole life to go away by gambling.

Likewise, the sentences of the type (29) can be paraphrased into (30) and (31). It means that these sentences display the means interpretation as in (30) or sometimes show some ambiguity: means or manner one as in (31). The only difference between these sentences and the time-away construction is that the object followed by the verb denotes the difficulties in terms of the expressions such as '*her problems, her troubles, cancer, blues, fear, my ADHD*', etc, instead of the time expressions of the time-away construction.

5) In the previous section, this paper has pointed out that this is too restrictive on the grounds of their syntactic behaviors.

6) The manner interpretation refers to the accompaniment interpretation here.

- (29) a. Kelly laughed her problems away.
 b. She slept her troubles away.
 c. Joe tried to drink cancer away.
- (30) a. Kelly got rid of her problems by laughing.
 b. She got rid of her troubles by sleeping.
 c. Joe tried to get rid of cancer away by drinking.
- (31) a. While Kelly spent her time laughing, her problems seemed to disappear.
 b. While she spent her time sleeping, her troubles seemed to disappear.

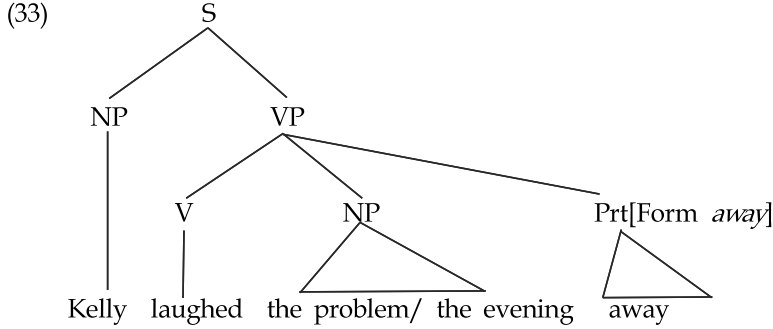
As shown above, the time-away construction shows the similarity in meaning interpretation. It is more interesting that the same verb can simultaneously be occurred in the two sentence types as in (29) above and (32) below.

- (32) a. We laughed the evening away.
 b. She slept her whole vacation away.
 c. Joe drank the night away.

For the reasons from the syntactic behaviors and semantic interpretation, it is appropriate to suppose that the time-away construction should extend the range of meaning into the time and the difficulties.

4. Analysis

As we have noted, the time-away construction displays peculiar constructional properties. This section tries to analyze the peculiar properties of the extended time-away construction with a version of HPSG (Sag 2007). This construction would have the following syntactic structure of (33) because of the constructional properties which have been examined through the previous sections. That is, the verb '*laughed*' takes three elements as the arguments: <NP, NP, Prt[Form *away*]>, though the lexicon of a verb '*laugh*' does not show this syntactic behavior. The last element has invariably to be a particle with a form of '*away*'



In addition to this syntactic structure, we can express the extended time-away construction as a type of the constructional restriction reflected the syntactic and semantic properties of the construction as represented in the following.

(34) *Away-cxt* \Rightarrow

$$\left[\begin{array}{l} \text{SYN} \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{CAT } \textit{verb} : [1] \\ \text{ARG-ST} \langle [2]\text{NP}, [3]\text{NP}, [4]\text{[FORM } \textit{away}] \rangle \end{array} \right] \\ \text{SEM} \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{INDEX } s \\ \text{FRAMES} \left\langle \left[\begin{array}{l} \textit{pass-fr} \\ \text{THEME } [3] \\ \text{BV } s \end{array} \right], \left[\begin{array}{l} \textit{time/difficulty-fr} \\ \text{INST } [3] \\ \text{SIT } s \end{array} \right], \left[\begin{array}{l} \textit{m-fr} \\ \text{MEANS/} \\ \text{MANNER } [1] \\ \text{SIT } s \end{array} \right], \left[\begin{array}{l} \textit{motion-fr} \\ \text{MOTION } [1] \textit{verb-relation} \\ \text{SIT } s \end{array} \right] \right\rangle \end{array} \right] \end{array} \right]$$

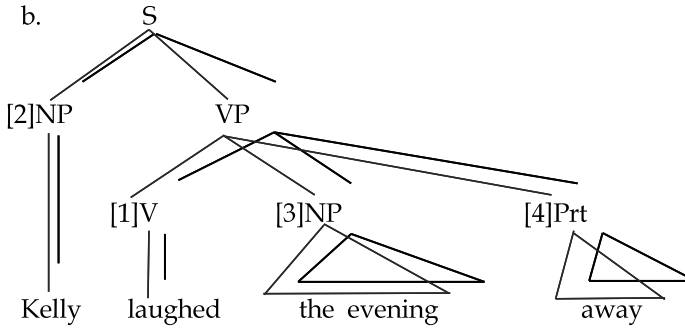
This is a type of construction in which the verb takes three elements as the complements and among them the last element should take a fixed form of *away*. The remarkable difference of this syntactic restriction from that of other typical VPs requiring three complements is that the lexical head verb in this VP takes the three elements regardless of the meaning of the verb (more precisely, the semantic properties of the verb).

Besides this syntactic restriction, the type (34) represents the construction type in which the second element [3] of the argument structure has to denote the meaning of an instance of difficulty or time in the semantic frame and this element [3] realized semantically as a theme role in the sentence becomes to pass away by or during the motion of the lexical head. Under this situation, the motion of the lexical verb signifies the manner or means of the agent. Especially

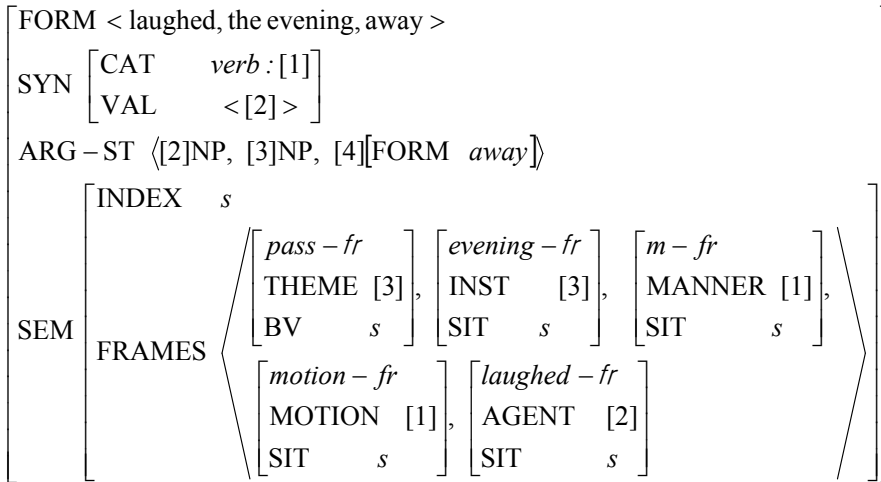
the example (34) shows the manner of the agent.

Likewise, the example (35a) can be expressed as the typed feature structure of (35c).

(35) a. Kelly laughed the evening away.



c.



The typed feature structure (35c) is a type of construction in which the lexical verb takes three arguments as its value in the argument structure and also it is assigned five semantic role types as the values of the semantic frames.

5. Conclusion

This paper has investigated the syntactic and semantic properties of the time-away construction and has examined the validity of this pattern from a constructional approach. In addition, this paper has made an attempt to extend the time-away construction of Jackendoff (1997) to the away construction, showing their similar behaviors in syntactic and semantic aspects. We could make sure that the expression with the meaning of difficulties goes together with the time-away construction in syntactic behaviors. Based on this, this paper provided the constructional type for this construction, which reflects the constraints of this construction under the frame of HPSG.

References

- Goldberg, A. 1995. *Constructions: A Construction Grammar Approach to Argument Structure*. The University of Chicago Press.
- Goldberg, A. and R. Jackendoff. 2004. The English resultative as a family of constructions. *Language* 80: 532-568.
- Israel, M. 1996. The *Way* Constructions Grow. In A. Goldberg (ed.) *Conceptual Structure Discourse and Language*, CSLI Publications, Stanford, CA.
- Jackendoff, Ray. 1990. *Semantic structures*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Jackendoff, Ray. 1997. Twistin' the Night Away. *Language*, Vol.73, No.3. pp.534-559. LSA.
- Levin, Beth. 1993. *English verb classes and alternations*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Levin, Beth & Malka Rappaport Hovav. 1995. *Unaccusativity*: At the syntax-lexical semantics interface. Cambridge, MA: MIT press.
- Marantz, Alec. 1992. The *way* construction and the semantics of direct arguments in English: A reply to Jackendoff. *Syntax and semantics*, vol.26. NewYork: Academic Press.
- Rappaport Hovav, Malka Rappaport and Beth Levin. 2001. An Event Structure Account of English Resultatives. *Language* 77 4: 766-797.
- Sag, Ivan. 2007. Sign-Based Construction Grammar, manuscript, Stanford University.
- Tenny, Carol. 1995. How motion verbs are special: The interaction of semantic and pragmatic information in aspectual verb meanings, in *Pragmatics and Cognition* 3: 31-73. The British National Corpus. <<http://www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk/>>.

Mija Kim

Kyung Hee University

1 Hoegi-dong Dongdaemun-gu, Seoul, 130-701 Korea

Tel. (010) 3287-8690

E-mail: 3mjkim@khu.ac.kr

Received: 2010. 02. 14

Revised: 2010. 04. 07

Accepted: 2010. 04. 16