

Semantic taxonomy and verbal coordination in Korean

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Lee, Juwon. 2024. Semantic taxonomy and verbal coordination in Korean. *Linguistic Research* 41(3): 571-587. This paper presents and discusses a distinct type of verbal coordination in Korean, where the final verb is semantically incompatible with the shared object, violating its selectional restrictions. Despite this semantic mismatch, such coordinations remain acceptable, indicating a need for a more nuanced explanation. To address these cases, the paper proposes a semantic taxonomy-based analysis. It argues that when the final verb in a verbal coordination is semantically incompatible with the object, a direct hyponym of the object is instead associated with the verb. This approach highlights the limitations of previous analyses and underscores the importance of semantic relationships in verbal coordination. The paper extends this account to disjunctions in verbal coordination, demonstrating its broader applicability. Ultimately, this study shows that understanding Korean verbal coordination requires careful consideration of both syntactic structures and underlying semantic relationships, thereby contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of coordination phenomena in natural language. (Jeonju University)

Keywords verbal coordination, semantic taxonomy, hyponym, conjunction, disjunction

1. Introduction

This paper presents and discusses a distinct type of verbal coordination in Korean (see discussions on Korean coordinations in Cho and Morgan 1988; Yoon 1996; Chung 2001, 2004; H. Lee 2005; Kim 2006; Kim and Yang 2006, 2011; Park 2006, 2007; Cho 2008; Lee and Oh 2011, among others). Example (1) provides a typical example of Korean verbal coordination.

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572 Juwon Lee

(1) Minse-ka ku chayk-ul [sa-ko ilk-ess-ta].
 Minse-Nom the book-Acc buy-and read-Pst-Dec 'Minse bought and read the book.'

In (1), the morphological coordinator -ko 'and' is attached to the first verb sa- 'buy,' while the second verb *ilk*- 'read' carries both tense and declarative markers. Both verbs are transitive, facilitating a natural coordination. The nominative subject *Minse-ka* 'Minse-Nom' and the accusative object *ku chayk-ul* 'the book-Acc' are shared by both verbs in the coordination. This results in a grammatically conventional structure where the two NPs serve the same syntactic roles across the conjuncts. However, unlike (1), the following examples illustrate atypical cases of verbal coordination in Korean, where the structures deviate from the usual pattern.

(2) a. Sia-ka	ku	umsik-ul [mek-ko masi-ess-ta].					
Sia-Nom	the	food-Acc eat-and drink-Pst-Dec					
(lit.) 'Sia	dranl	k and ate the food.'1					
b. Sia-ka	ku	pisangsiklyang-ul [mek-ko masi-ese]					
Sia-Nom	the	emergency.food-Acc eat-and drink-since					
salana-ss-	salana-ss-ta.						
survive-P	survive-Pst-Dec						
(lit.) 'Sine	(lit.) 'Since Sia drank and ate the emergency food, she survived.'						
c. Sia-ka	ku	kokup yoli-lul han sikan naynay					
Sia-Nom	the	fine cuisine-Acc one hour entire					
[mek-ko	[mek-ko masi-ess-ta].						
eat-and	eat-and drink-Pst-Dec						
(lit.) 'Sia	(lit.) 'Sia drank and ate the fine cuisine for an entire hour.'						

The sentences in (2) share the similar syntactic structure to (1). However, the second conjuncts involving *masi*- 'drink' are semantically incompatible with the objects. For instance, in Korean, expressions like *#ku umsik-ul masi-ess-ta* (lit.) 'drank the food' are not allowed because the verb *masi*- 'drink' requires a liquid object due to its

¹ English is a head-initial language, while Korean is a head-final language. In sentences with verbal coordinations, the relative distance between verbs and their objects are important. Hence, in English translations, the order of the verbs is reversed.

selectional restrictions, whereas *umsik* 'food' does not imply a liquid state. Despite this semantic incompatibility, sentence (2a) is perceived as acceptable, with similar acceptability observed in (2b) and (2c).

This raises the question of how these sentences derive their appropriate meanings. This paper proposes that the concept of semantic taxonomy is necessary to account for this type of verbal coordination. In particular, it is argued that if the final conjunct in verbal coordination is semantically incompatible with the object, a direct hyponym of the object is instead associated with that conjunct. For instance, in (2a), a direct hyponym (e.g., *ku umlyo-lul* 'the beverage-Acc') of the object *ku umsik-ul* 'the food-Acc' is semantically associated with the second verb *masi-ess-ta* 'drink-Pst-Dec' in the verbal coordination. Thus, the sentence is interpreted as meaning that Sia drank the beverage and ate the food.

The structure of this paper is as follows. Section 2 demonstrates the inadequacy of prior analyses in fully accounting for the verbal coordination under discussion. In Section 3, I argue that the notion of semantic taxonomy is necessary to properly account for this type of verbal coordination. In Section 4, the proposed account is extended to disjunctions in verbal coordination. Section 5 concludes the paper.

2. Previous analyses of coordination

This section demonstrates that prior approaches to coordination are insufficient to properly account for Korean verbal coordinations, such as those in (2) above and (3) below.

(3) a. Sia-ka paykhwacem-eyse yele caphwa-lul
Sia-Nom department.store-at various apparel-Acc
[chakyongha-ko ip-e] po-ass-ta.
wear-and wear-Con see-Pst-Dec
(lit.) 'Sia tried on and tried on various pieces of apparel at the department store.'

b. Sia-ka ku kos-eyse yele caphwa-lul
Sia-Nom the place-at various apparel-Acc
[chakyongha-ko sin-e] po-ass-ta.
wear-and wear-Con see-Pst-Dec
(lit.) 'Sia tried on and tried on various pieces of apparel at the place.'

In (3), the objects are semantically compatible only with the first verbs in the verbal coordinations. Notably, the verb *chakyongha-* 'wear' in (3) is a direct hypernym of both ip- 'wear (clothes)' and *sin-* 'wear (shoes)'.

2.1 Conjunction reduction

Chomsky (1957) proposed the following rule to generate coordinations:

(4) Conjunction Reduction rule:

If S1 and S2 are grammatical sentences, and S1 differs from S2 only in that X appears in S1 where Y appears in S2 (i.e., S1 = ...X... and S2 = ...Y...), and X and Y are constituents of the same type in S1 and S2, respectively, then S3 is a sentence, where S3 is the result of replacing X by X+and+Y in S1 (i.e., S3 = ...X+and+Y...). (Chomsky 1957: 36)

Using the Conjunction Reduction rule, an English verbal coordination can be generated, as shown below:

(5) S1: Tom bought the book.
S2: Tom read the book.
→ S3: Tom [bought and read] the book.

In (5), the two sentences – S1 and S2 – are grammatical and differ only in that *bought* appears in S1 and *read* appears in S2. Since the two verbs are constituents of the same type, S3 is generated by replacing *bought* in S1 by *bought and read*. However, this method does not apply to the Korean verbal coordinations. Consider the following examples:

(6)	a. Miso-ka	ku	umsik-ul	mek-ess-ta	•			
	Miso-Nom	the	food-Acc	eat-Pst-De	с			
	'Miso ate	'Miso ate the food.'						
	b. #Miso-ka	ku	umsik-ul	masi-ess-ta	ι.			
	Miso-Nom	the	food-Acc	drink-Pst-l	Dec			
	(lit.) 'Miso	dran	k the food.'					
	c. Miso-ka	ku	umsik-ul	[mek-ko	masi-ess-ta].			
	Miso-Nom	the	food-Acc	eat-and	drink-Pst-Dec			
	(lit.) 'Miso	dran	k and ate t	he food.'				

Sentence (6a) is grammatical, while sentence (6b) is not. Thus, the Conjunction Reduction rule cannot generate sentence (6c) from sentences (6a) and (6b). This illustrates a limitation of this rule when applied to Korean verbal coordinations.

2.2 Right node raising

The following coordination construction can be generated through right node raising (RNR) (see Ross 1967; Dougherty 1970; Hankamer 1971; Maling 1972; Bresnan 1974; Postal 1974; Abbott 1976; Hudson 1976; Sabbagh 2007, among others).

(7) Jack may be-and Tony certainly is-a werewolf. (Hudson 1976: 549)

In (7), the NP *a werewolf* is raised from the two conjuncts (*Jack may be a werewolf* and *Tony certainly is a werewolf*) to the end of the sentence. The raised NP is shared by both conjuncts. Similarly, one might assume that in the following sentence, the object *ku umsik-ul* 'the food-Acc' is moved from the two conjuncts *ku umsik-ul mek-ko* 'the food-Acc eat-and' and *#ku umsik-ul masi-ess-ta* 'the food-Acc drink-Pst-Dec.'

(8) Miso-ka ku umsik-ul [[____ mek-ko] Miso-Nom the food-Acc eat-and [____ masi-ess-ta]]. drink-Pst-Dec (lit.) 'Miso drank and ate the food.' However, the underlying structure is already unacceptable due to the semantic incompatibility in the second conjunct, *#ku umsik-ul masi-ess-ta* 'the food-Acc drink-Pst-Dec.' This suggests that the object *ku umsik-ul* 'the food-Acc' should not originate from the conjuncts. Consequently, the RNR cannot account for the semantic mismatch.

2.3 Deletion

According to deletion analysis (Wexler and Culicover 1980; Kayne 1994; Hartmann 2000; Merchant 2004, 2013, 2016), the object in the first conjunct can sometimes be deleted if the second conjunct contains the same expression. For example, in (9), the object *the book* in the first conjunct can be omitted since it is repeated in the second conjunct.

(9) He likes the book and she dislikes the book.

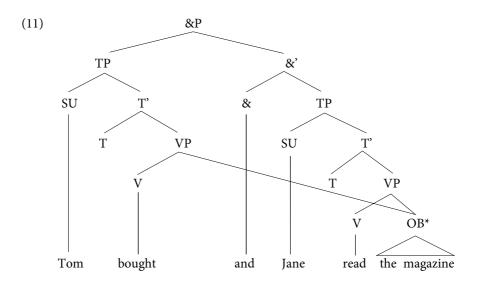
One might then assume that the object *ku umsik-ul* 'the food-Acc' could similarly be deleted in the following sentence, resulting in the observed verbal coordination:

(10) Miso-ka ku umsik-ul mek-ko ku umsik-ul Miso-Nom the food-Acc eat-and the food-Acc masi-ess-ta. drink-Pst-Dec (lit.) 'Miso drank and ate the food.'

However, once again, the underlying structure before deletion is unacceptable due to the semantic incompatibility in the second conjunct $#ku \ umsik-ul \ masi-ess-ta$ 'the food-Acc drink-Pst-Dec.' This suggests that deletion analysis cannot adequately explain the formation of such verbal coordinations. In other words, while deletion mechanisms may work when the two conjuncts are fully compatible and semantically aligned, as in (9), they fail in cases where the verbs impose conflicting selectional restrictions, as illustrated in (10).

2.4 Multiple dominance analysis

The multiple dominance analysis of coordination (McCawley 1982; Goodall 1987; Muadz 1991; Moltmann 1992; Wilder 1997, 1999) can provide the following structure for the sentence *Tom bought and Jane read the magazine*:



However, a multiple dominance analysis cannot account for the verbal coordination in Korean. For instance, in (12), the object *ku siklyang-ul* 'the food-Acc' cannot be directly associated with the second verb *masi-ess-ta* 'drink-Pst-Dec' due to semantic incompatibility.

(12) Miso-ka ku siklyang-ul mek-ko masi-ess-ta. Miso-Nom the food-Acc eat-and drink-Pst-Dec (lit.) 'Miso drank and ate the food.'

This suggests that the object should combine with the verbal coordination as a whole rather than with each verb individually. Summarizing, major previous approaches to coordination do not fully account for the Korean verbal coordinations.

3. An account of verbal coordination

This section introduces the use of semantic taxonomy to account for Korean verbal coordinations, building on the semantic taxonomy-based account of unlike nominal coordinations in J. Lee (2020, to appear).

3.1 Constraints on verbal coordination

This section first discusses grammatical properties of verbal coordination in Korean and suggests a semantic taxonomy-based account. First, as shown in (13), if the first verb in a verbal coordination is semantically incompatible with the object, the sentence is clearly unacceptable.

(13)	a.	#Manho-ka	ku umsik	ul [masi-ko	mek-ess-ta].
		Manho-Nom	the food-A	cc drink-and	eat-Pst-Dec
		(lit.) 'Manho	ate and dr	ank the food.'	
	b.	#Manho-ka	yele ca	phwa-lul [ip-ko	chakyonghay]
		Manho-Nom	various ap	parel-Acc wear-	and wear.Con
		po-ass-ta.			
		see-Pst-Dec			
		(lit.) 'Manho	tried on an	nd tried on vario	ous pieces of apparel.'

In (13a), the first conjunct *masi-ko* 'drink-and' is semantically incompatible with the object *ku umsik-ul* 'the food-Acc,' making the sentence awkward. Similarly, in (13b), the first conjunct *ip-ko* 'wear (clothes)-and' is semantically incompatible with the object *yele caphwa-lul* (lit.) 'various apparel-Acc,' rendering the sentence unacceptable. These examples show that in a verbal coordination, the verb closest to the object must be semantically compatible with it. This constraint is akin to the proximity effect or the Closest Conjunct Constraint (Benmamoun et al. 2009; Shiraïshi et al. 2019; An and Abeillé 2022; Abeillé et al. 2023, see also a similar proximity effect in Korean coordination in Kim and Park 2020; J. Lee 2020, to appear).

Second, if the meaning of the second verb diverges significantly from the first verb, the sentence becomes unacceptable, as in (14).

(14) a. #Manho-ka ku umsik-ul [mek-ko ilk-ess-ta].
 Manho-Nom the food-Acc eat-and read-Pst-Dec (lit.) 'Manho read and ate the food.'

b. #Manho-ka yele caphwa-lul [chakyongha-ko Manho-Nom various apparel-Acc wear-and ilk-ess-ta].
read-Pst-Dec (lit.) 'Manho read and wore various pieces of apparel.'

The sentences in (14) are unacceptable because the second verbs are semantically incompatible with the objects. However, it is notable that the second verb in (2) is also semantically incompatible with the object, yet the sentence is acceptable. This indicates that semantic incompatibility between the object and the second verb does not necessarily render a sentence ungrammatical. Why, then, are sentences like (14) unacceptable, while sentences like (2) are acceptable? A key observation here is that the meanings of the verbs in (2) are more closely related than those in (14). For example, the verb *mek*- 'eat' is a direct hypernym of *masi*- 'drink.'² Similarly, *chakyongha*- 'wear' is a direct hypernym of verbs like *ip*- 'wear (clothes)' and *sin*- 'wear (shoes).' However, there is no such semantic relationship between *mek* 'eat' and *ilk*- 'read,' nor between *chakyongha*- 'wear' and *ilk*- 'read.'

Third, when the second verb in a verbal coordination is semantically compatible with the object, as in (15), the object must be associated with that verb.

(15) Manho-ka chayk-tul-ul [sa-ko ilk-ess-ta].
 Manho-Nom book-Plu-Acc buy-and read-Pst-Dec (lit.) 'Manho bought and read books.'

In (15), the sentence means that Manho bought and read the books, but it does not imply that he bought and read a specific kind of books, such as fairy tales. While sentence (15) can be used to describe a situation where Manho bought and read fairy tale books, the sentence itself does not have the meaning that Manho bought

² The verb *mek* 'eat' can be used as a hypernym of *masi* 'drink,' but it also seems to be a co-hyponym of *masi* 'drink,' This is similar to the word *animal* in English, which can serve as both a hypernym of *human* and a co-hyponym with *human*. In this way, *animal* can also refer to beast.

and read fairy tale books. Based on these three properties, I suggest three constrains on Korean verbal coordination.

(16) Constraints on verbal coordinations in Korean:

- (i) The verb in a verbal coordination closest to its object must be semantically compatible with the object.
- (ii) If a distant verb is semantically compatible with its object, the object is semantically associated with the verb.
- (iii) If a distant verb is semantically incompatible with its object, a direct hyponym of the object is semantically associated with the verb.

These constraints highlights that a semantic taxonomy-based approach is essential for understanding and analyzing Korean verbal coordination. This approach not only accounts for the grammatical properties observed but also addresses the limitations of previous theories.

3.2 Predictions

Two predictions regarding verbal coordination are examined here. First, a lexical coordinator, *kuliko* 'and,' can appear between the two verbs in a verbal coordination, as shown in (17).

(17) a. Manho-ka ku umsik-ul [mek-ko kuliko Manho-Nom the food-Acc eat-and and masi-ess-ta]. drink-Pst-Dec (lit.) 'Manho drank and ate the food.' = 'Manho drank the beverage and ate the food.' b. Manho-ka vele caphwa-lul [chakyongha-ko kuliko Manho-Nom various apparel-Acc wear-and and ip-e] po-ass-ta. wear-Con see-Pst-Dec (lit.) 'Manho tried on and tried on various pieces of apparel.' = 'Manho tried on various clothes and tried on various pieces of apparel.' When *kuliko* 'and' appears in a verbal coordination, the three constrains in (16) still apply to the verbs in the coordination. For instance, in (17a), the first verb *mek-ko* 'eat-and' is semantically compatible with the object *ku umsik-ul* 'the food-Acc.' Since the object is semantically incompatible with the second verb *masi-ess-ta* 'drink-Pst-Dec,' a direct hyponym (e.g., *ku umlyo-lul* 'the beverage-Acc') of the object is instead associated with the second verb.

Second, an adverb can modify the verbs in a verbal coordination, as shown in following examples:

(18) a. Manho-ka ku umsik-ul [kuphakey mek-ko Manho-Nom the food-Acc urgently eat-and (kuliko) chenchenhi masi-ess-tal. and slowly drink-Pst-Dec (lit.) 'Manho slowly drank and urgently ate the food.' = 'Manho slowly drank the beverage and urgently ate the food.' b. Manho-ka vele caphwa-lul [yeyppukey Manho-Nom various apparel-Acc beautifully chakyongha-ko (kuliko) chenchenhi ip-e] wear-and and wear-Con slowly po-ass-ta. see-Pst-Dec (lit.) 'Manho slowly tried on and beautifully tried on various pieces of apparel.' = 'Manho slowly tried on various clothes and beautifully tried on various pieces of apparel.'

This is unsurprising, as it is typical for an adverb to modify a verb. This adverb modification supports that the coordination is indeed verbal rather than an idiomatic expression. If the combination *mek-ko masi-ess-ta* 'eat-and drink-Pst-Dec,' which may sound like a fixed expression, were an idiom, it would be less likely for an adverb to modify each conjunct. This suggests that each verb contributes individually to the overall meaning of the verbal coordination.

4. Extension to disjunctions

The data discussed above are all conjunctions. If the constraints in (16) are correct, they predict that disjunctions of a similar kind should also be acceptable. This prediction is examined in this section. In the examples below, the morphological disjunctive coordinator *-kena* 'or' is attached to the first verb, and the lexical disjunctive coordinator *ttonun* 'or' can also appear between the two verbs.

(19) a. Manho-ka ku umsik-ul [mek-kena (ttonun) Manho-Nom the food-Acc eat-or or masi-ess-tal. drink-Pst-Dec (lit.) 'Manho drank or ate the food.' = 'Manho drank the beverage or ate the food.' b. Manho-ka vele caphwa-lul [chakyongha-kena Manho-Nom various apparel-Acc wear-and (ttonun) ip-ess-ta]. wear-Pst-Dec or (lit.) 'Manho wore or wore various pieces of apparel.' = 'Manho wore various clothes or wore various pieces of apparel.'

In (19), only the first conjunct is semantically compatible with the object, and the examples are acceptable.

Second, as with conjunctive verbal coordinations, reversing the order of verbs renders the sentence acceptable, as illustrated in (20).

(20) a. #Manho-ka	ku umsik-ul	[masi-kena	(ttonun)
Manho-Nom	the food-Acc	drink-or	or
mek-ess-ta].			
eat-Pst-Dec			
(lit.) 'Manho	ate or drank	the food.'	
b. #Manho-ka	yele caphy	wa-lul [ip-k	ena (ttonun)
Manho-Nom	various appar	rel-Acc wear-	-or or
chakyonghay]	po-ass-ta.		
wear.Con	see-Pst-Dec		
(lit.) 'Manho	tried on or tri	ed on various	s pieces of apparel.'

In (20), only the second conjuncts are semantically compatible with the objects, resulting in unacceptable sentences.

Third, if the semantic difference between the verbs is beyond a hypernym-hyponym relation, the sentence is unacceptable, as shown in (21).

(21) a. #Manho-ka ku umsik-ul [mek-kena (ttonun) Manho-Nom the food-Acc eat-or or ilk-ess-ta]. read-Pst-Dec (lit.) 'Manho read or ate the food.' b. #Manho-ka yele caphwa-lul [chakyongha-kena Manho-Nom various apparel-Acc wear-or (ttonun) ilk-e] po-ass-ta. read-Con see-Pst-Dec or (lit.) 'Manho tried reading or tried on various pieces of apparel.'

In (21a), even a direct hyponym of the object is semantically incompatible with the second verb, as is also the case in (21b).

Fourth, when the verbs in a disjunctive verbal coordination are semantically compatible with the object, the object must be associated with the verbs, as shown in (22).

(22)	a.	Manho-ka	yele	umsik-ul	[mantul-kena		(tto	nun)
		Manho-Nom	various	food-Acc	make-or		or	
		mek-ess-ta].						
		eat-Pst-Dec						
		'Manho made	or ate various foods.'					
	b.	Manho-ka	yele	caphwa-l	ul	[ceycoha-ke	ena	(ttonun)
		Manho-Nom	various	apparel-A	Acc j	produce-or		or
		chakyonghay]	po-ass-ta.					
		wear.Con	see-Pst-	-Dec				
	'Manho tried producing or tried on various pieces of appa				of apparel.'			

In (22a), the sentence cannot mean that Manho made various foods or "ate" various beverages. In (22b), it cannot imply that Manho tried producing various pieces of

apparel or tried on various shoes.

Fifth, an adverbial expression can modify each verb in a disjunctive verbal coordination:

(23) a. Manho-ka [pwuekh-eyse mek-kena ku umsik-ul Manho-Nom the food-Acc kitchen-in eat-or (ttonun) matang-eyse masi-ess-tal. drink-Pst-Dec or vard-in (lit.) 'Manho drank the food in the yard or ate the food in the kitchen.' = 'Manho drank the beverage in the yard or ate the food in the kitchen.' b. Manho-ka vele caphwa-lul [thaluysil-eyse Manho-Nom various apparel-Acc fitting.room-in chakyongha-kena (ttonun) cha an-eyse ip-ess-ta]. wear-and inside-in wear-Pst-Dec or car (lit.) 'Manho wore various pieces of apparel inside the car or wore various pieces of apparel in the fitting room.' = 'Manho wore various clothes inside the car or wore various pieces of apparel in the fitting room.'

In short, disjunctive verbal coordination shares the same properties as conjunctive verbal coordination.

5. Conclusion

This paper has explored a distinct type of verbal coordination in Korean. The final verb in such a verbal coordination is semantically incompatible with its object. Despite this semantic incompatibility, such coordinations are still considered acceptable in Korean. To account for these verbal coordinations, this study proposes a semantic taxonomy-based analysis, suggesting that when the final verb is semantically incompatible with the object, a direct hyponym of the object is instead associated with the verb. This analysis emphasizes the critical role of semantic taxonomy, providing insight into how Korean resolves coordination at the semantic level. The findings also reveal the limitations of previous approaches, which do not fully capture

the complexities of Korean verbal coordination. This paper extends the proposed framework to disjunctions in verbal coordination, demonstrating its broader applicability. Ultimately, this research highlights the need for a more nuanced understanding of Korean verbal coordination, one that integrates syntactic structure with underlying semantic relationships.

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