Korean Multiple *Wh*-phrases and Intervention Effects

Intervention effects, often observed in languages such as Korean and German, refers to the phenomenon where *wh*-interrogatives become ungrammatical when there is a so-called *intervener* that sits between the *wh*-phrase and the interrogative complementizer C. Below are Korean examples showing the intervention effect caused by the intervener *only*, *man*.

(1) a. *Minsu-man nuku-lul po -ass -ni?
Minsu-only who-ACC see-PAST-Q

b. nuku-lul$_i$ Minsu-man t$_i$ po -ass -ni?
who-ACC Minsu-only see-PAST-Q

'Who did only Minsu see?'

Pointing out the shortcomings of the earlier syntactic approach (Beck & Kim (1997), Pesetsky (2000)) to the phenomenon, Beck (2006) argued that the issue is the semantic derivation of the structure. According to Beck (2006), the *wh*-phrase, *nuku,* in (1a) cannot get interpreted due to the intervening focus operator associated with *man*, which results in the ungrammaticality of the sentence. That is, the *wh*-phrase, which can only be evaluated by the question operator, is c-commanded by the focus operator as shown in (2a). (2b) shows Beck (2006)'s generalization about the structure that shows intervention effects.

(2) a. [$_{CP}$ Q$_2$ [$_{IP2}$ ~ C [$_{IP1}$ Minsu$_{F1}$-man$_C$ nuku-lûl$_2$ po-ass-ni]]]]

b. *[Q$_i$ [...[~C [...*wh*-phrase$_i$ ...]]]]
A *wh*-phrase may not have a ~ operator as its closest c-commanding potential binder.

However, Beck (2006)'s proposal cannot account for the data in (3), especially the moderate acceptability of (3b).

(3) a. *Minsu-man nuku-eykey mues-ul chu -ess -ni?
Minsu-only who -DAT what-ACC give-PAST-Q

b. ?mues-ul$_i$ Minsu-man nuku-eykey t$_i$ chu -ess -ni?
what-ACC Minsu-only who -DAT give-PAST-Q

c. mues-ûl$_j$ nuku-eykey$_i$ Minsu-man t$_i$ t$_j$ chu -ôss -ni?
what-ACC who -DAT Minsu-only give-PAST-Q

'What did only Minsu give to whom?'

Sentences that involve a syntactic structure like (3b) are predicted to be subject to intervention effects under Beck's account, since the lower *wh*-phrase, *nuku,* cannot get interpreted due to the intervening focus operator associated with *man* that precedes the *wh*-phrase. However, (3b) is judged to be better than (3a) by native speakers of Korean.

To account for this data, first of all, I will adopt the *wh*-cluster hypothesis by Grewendorf (2001) and the Q-Grammar by Hagstrom (1998) and Cable (2010). I propose that Korean multiple *wh*-interrogatives involve the covert *wh*-cluster formation; the lower *wh*-word moves and adjoins to the higher *wh*-word, and Q that originates from the lowest *wh*-word moves to the Spec CP position for the interrogative interpretation. Thus, in (3b), the lower *wh*-phrase, *nuku,* adjoins the higher *wh*-phrase, *mues,* at LF, and this saves the structure from being uninterpretable; the lower *wh*-phrase is no longer in the binding domain of the focus operator. This analysis still correctly predicts the ungrammaticality of (3a) as the *wh*-cluster formed covertly in (3a) is still under the binding domain of the focus operator, and thus fails to be evaluated by the question operator at all.

In conclusion, the analysis proposed not only supports Beck (2006)'s semantic account for intervention effects but also provides evidence that Korean multiple *wh*-questions undergo covert *wh*-clustering, which was initially proposed for Japanese in Grewendorf (2001).

References

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