

Towards a proper treatment of the plural marker ‘-tul’ in Korean

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1. Wiltschko (2008) suggests, on a par with its counterpart in Halkomelem Salish, that the plural marker ‘-tul’ in Korean (like Chinese ‘-men’ and Japanese ‘-tati’) is a modifier adjoined to a determiner. Kiaer (2010) argues against taking ‘-tul’ as a lexically-defined plural suffix and its attachment as a kind of number agreement, and suggests à la Potts and Kawahara’s (2004) and Kim and Sells’s (2007) analysis of Japanese/Korean honorification that ‘-tul’ introduces a dimension of meaning in the realm of expressive meaning. In this paper we argue, unlike Wiltschko (2008) and Kiaer (2010), that the ‘-tul’ attachment is part of run-of-the-mill grammatical marking, like its counterpart in English. One difference between Korean and English lies in the denotation of a syntactically singular count noun. Its denotation in Korean may include a pragmatically-induced plural domain as well as a singular domain.

2. In Korean, syntactically singular forms of common nouns or NPs without plural marking (henceforth, bare CNPs) are ambiguous between a singular reading and a KIND reading (cf. Link, 1983). For instance, *sakwa* ‘apple’ in (1a) has the former reading, and that in (1b) has the latter reading. These two construals of bare CNPs in Korean follow from the fact that this language lacks a syntactic category of determiner, like the indefinite determiner *a/an* in English. However, the bare CNP in (1c) is apparently construed as plural. The question that arises is whether this construal is semantically or pragmatically motivated. We argue that unlike the syntactically plural-marked CNP in (1d), the bare CNP in (1c) is pragmatically interpreted as plural:

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| <p>(1) a. cheli-ka sakwa-lul cip-ess-ta. Cheli-Nom apple-Acc pick up-Pst-Dcl ‘Cheli picked up <u>an apple</u>.’ b. cheli-ka sakwa-lul cohaha-nta. Cheli-Nom apple-Acc like-Dcl ‘Cheli likes <u>an apple</u>.’</p> | <p>c. cheli-ka sakwa-lul sa+o-ass-ta. Cheli-Nom apple-Acc buy+come-Pst-Dcl ‘Cheli bought <u>apples</u> (and brought them home).’ d. cheli-ka sakwa-tul-lul nayta phal-ass-ta. Cheli-Nom apple-PM-Acc take-out sell-Pst-Dcl ‘Cheli (took out and) sold <u>apples</u>.’</p> |
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Evidence for it, drawn from the Sejong Written Corpus (58 million words), comes from the critical difference between bare and plural-marked CNPs. The former, albeit pragmatically interpreted as plural, cannot license the so-called agreement-induced extrinsic plural marker (EPM) on clausal elements like an adverb, as in (2a), whereas the latter does so, as in (2b):

- (2) a. sakwa-ka ppalukey-(*tul) phally-ess-ta.
apple-Nom fast -EPM be sold-Pst-Dcl
‘Apples were sold out fast.’
b. sakwa-tul-i ppalukey-(tul) ppally-ess-ta.
apple-PM-Nom -EPM

Thus, the CNP in (1c) or (2a) is neither syntactically nor semantically plural. It is construed as denoting a kind in the same fashion as the CNP in (1a), but it is in turn subject to pragmatic accommodation by reflecting the structural context where it occurs. By contrast, the syntactically plural-marked CNP in (1d) is semantically construed as denoting a plural SUM of atomic individuals.

3. To capture the expressive meanings of the honorific morpheme in Japanese, Potts and Kawahara (2005) propose the following four criteria: (i) nondisplaceability; (ii) independence; (iii) immediacy; (iv) descriptive ineffability. Note that these criteria cannot be met by the Korean non-EPM plural marker ‘-tul’ at issue. Plurality content ascribed to ‘-tul’ cannot be projected up out of all the standard presupposition holes (i.e., *displaceability*). In addition, the plurality that ‘-tul’ denotes contributes not the use-conditional but the truth-conditional meaning of the clause where it occurs (i.e., *dependence*). Unlike performatives, ‘-tul’ does offer semantic content (i.e., not *immediacy*).

Finally, the meaning of ‘-tul’ is propositional (i.e., not *descriptive ineffability*). Based on this observation, we argue that the core meaning of the plural marker in Korean is not use-conditional but truth-conditional (cf. Gutzmann, 2013).

4. The plural marker in Korean cannot be attached on CNPs of generic use, as in (3):

- (3) kolay(***tul**)-un phoyutongmwul-i-ta
 whale-PM-Top mammal-Cop-Dcl
 ‘A whale is a mammal.’

This renders clear evidence that bare CNPs that have a KIND reading are distinguished from syntactically plural-marked ones that have a SUM reading.

Another context where the presence/absence of the plural marker is apparently obligatory is when it is followed by demonstratives, as in (4):

- (4) cheli-ka i/ku/ce chayk-(**tul**)-ul ilk-ess-ta.
 Cheli-ka this/that/that-over-there book(s)-PM-Acc read-Pst-Dcl
 ‘Cheli read {this/that/that-over-there book, these/those/those-over-there book}.’

In this context, the bare CNP is construed as singular, and the syntactically plural-marked CNP is, as plural. Since the preceding demonstrative combines with the following CNP, there is no room for pragmatic accommodation of the bare CNP after their semantic composition. The discussion of these cases, contrary to Wiltschko’s (2008) claim, convincingly puts the plural marker in Korean under the category of a syntactic inflectional head rather than a modifier.

In addition to being obligatorily excluded or included in the CNP, the plural marker in Korean tends to be optional, especially together with a classifier that is known to denote a particular quantity in the noun (phrase) classified. What merits attention is that the plural marker on the CNP is optional along with the numeral classifier that denotes a plurality, as follows. In Korean there are three ways of forming numeral classifier (NC) constructions.

- (5) a. chayk-(***tul**) sey kwen-(***tul**)-i Prenominal numeral classifier (PreNC)
 b. sey kwen-uy chayk-(**tul**)-i postnominal numeral classifier (PNC)
 c. chayk-(**tul**)-i sey kwen-i postnominal floating numeral classifier (PFNC)

We suggest that these three constructions are derived as in (6). The most important point postulated in the structure (6) is that the nominal that the classifier associates with is its complement, as Huang and Otani (2012) propose for NC constructions in Chinese. Since Korean is a language that does not have a determiner as a functional category, the nominal selected for by the classifier is a CNP. As seen in (1c) and (1d), in Korean a CNP with or without the plural marker can be interpreted as plural; hence, unless otherwise required/forbidden, the realization of the plural marker on the CNP as in (5) is optional; however, the plural marker cannot be realized on the classifier.

