

Instrumental Causation

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In line with Fillmore's (1968) Subject-Choice Hierarchy, which claims that

If there is an Agent, it becomes the subject; otherwise, if there is an Instrument, it becomes the subject; otherwise, the subject is the Objective (Fillmore 1968:33),

sentences like (1) are grammatical in English.

- (1) a. The key opened the door.
 b. The hammer broke the vase.
 c. The new oven baked the cake.
 d. The fire burned my book.

In each of the sentences in (1) there is no agent NP and the instrument NP is the subject.

The Korean counterparts of the sentences, however, are ungrammatical as we see in (2).

- (2) a. *yəlswe-ka mun-lil yəl-əss-ta
 key-NM door-AC open-PAST-DEC¹
 'The key opened the door.'
 b. *mangchi-ka hwapyəng-lil kkæ-əss-ta
 hammer-NM vase-AC break-PAST-DEC
 'The hammer broke the vase.'
 c. *sæ obin-i kwaca-lil ku-əss-ta
 new oven-NM cake-AC bake-PAST-DEC
 'The new oven baked the cake.'
 d. *pul-i næ chæk-lil tha-u-əss-ta
 fire-NM my book-AC burn-cause-PAST-DEC
 'The fire burned my book.'

We see here that verbs like *yəl* 'open,' *kkæ* 'break,' *ku* 'bake' and *tha-u* 'burn' in Korean do not allow an instrumental NP to be the subject even if there is no agent NP in the sentence. If the verbs in the sentences of (2), however, are replaced by phrasal causative forms as in (3), the sentences become more acceptable though they may not be fully grammatical.

- (3) a. ?? yəlswe-ka mun-lil yəl-li-ke ha-əss-ta
 key-NM door-AC open-PASS-COMP cause-PAST-DEC

¹ NM=Nominative Marker; AC=Accusative Marker; PAST=Past Tense Marker; DEC=Declarative Marker; PASS=Passive Marker; COMP=Complementizer

‘The key caused the door to be opened.’

- b. ?? mangchi-ka hwapyəng-lil kkæ-ci-ke ha-əss-ta
hammer-NM vase-AC break-PASS-COMP cause-PAST-DEC

‘The hammer caused the vase to be broken.’

- c. ?? sæ obin-i kwaca-lil kuə-ci-ke ha-əss-ta
new oven-NM cake-AC bake-PASS-COMP cause-PAST-DEC

‘The fire caused my book to burn.’

In fact, sentences like (3) become fully grammatical in case the instrumental subject NP can be assumed to be more directly or actively involved in the causation as we see in (4).

- (4) a. palam-i hwapyəng-lil kkæ-ci-ke ha-əss-ta
wind-NM vase-AC break-PASS-COMP cause-PAST-DEC

‘The wind caused the vase to be broken.’

- b. thæyang yəl-i kwaca-lil kuə-ci-ke ha-əss-ta
sun heat-NM cake-AC bake-PASS-COMP cause-PAST-DEC

‘The heat of the sun caused the cake to be baked.’

On the other hand, sentences like (5) are less acceptable than those of (4), unless figuratively interpreted, i.e., the instrumental subject NP is agentively personified.

- (5) a. ? palam-i hwapyəng-lil kkæ-əss-ta
wind-NM vase-AC break-PAST-DEC

‘The wind broke the vase.’

- b. ?? thæyang yəl-i kwaca-lil ku-əss-ta
sun heat-NM cake-AC bake-PAST-DEC

‘The heat of the sun baked the cake.’

We can accept fully grammatical sentences like (6), where the instrumental subject NP can be assumed to be indirectly involved in the causation.

- (6) a. ki-iy punno-ka hwapyəng-lil kkæ-ci-ke ha-əss-ta
he-'s anger-NM vase-AC break-PASS-COMP cause-PAST-DEC

‘His anger caused the vase to be broken.’

- b. ki-iy kito-ka kwaca-lil kuə-ci-ke ha-əss-ta
he-'s prayer-NM cake-AC bake-PASS-COMP cause-PAST-DEC

‘His prayer caused the cake to be baked.’

On the other hand, sentences like (7) are far less acceptable than those of (6) or (5), presumably because such instrumental NP's as *punno* ‘anger’ and *kito* ‘prayer’ are far less likely to be personified than instrumental NP's like *palam* ‘wind’ or *thæyang yəl* ‘the heat of the sun.’

- (7) a. ?? ki-iy punno-ka hwapyəng-lil kkæ-əss-ta
he-'s anger-NM vase-AC break-PAST-DEC

‘His anger broke the vase.’

- b. *ki-iy kito-ka kwaca-lil ku-æss-ta
 he-'s prayer-NM cake-AC bake-PAST-DEC

'His prayer baked the cake.'

How can our grammar characterize the acceptability of sentences like (6) and the unacceptability of sentences like (7)? One plausible approach is to claim that the lexical causative construction with a verb like *kkæ* 'break' and the phrasal causative construction with a verb like *kkæ-ci-ke-ha* 'cause to break' are underlyingly distinct and that such lexical causative verbs like *kkæ* 'break' allow only agents to be their subjects whereas phrasal causatives like *kkæ-ci-ke-ha* 'cause to break' allow non-agents to be their subjects. Sentences like (7) are unacceptable since they violate the selectional restriction that the lexical causatives like *kkæ* 'break' do not allow instrumental NP's to be their subjects. Sentences like (6) are derived as follows.

- (8) a. ki-iy punno-ka ki-ka hwapyæng-lil kkæ-ke ha-æss-ta (Base)
 he-'s anger-NM he-NM vase-AC break-COMP cause-PAST-DEC
- b. ki-iy punno-ka hwapyæng-i ki-eke kkæ-ci-ke
 he-'s anger-NM vase-NM he-by break-PASS-COMP
 ha-æss-ta (Passive)
 cause-PAST-DEC
- c. ki-iy punno-ka hwapyæng-i kkæ-ci-ke
 he-'s anger-NM vase-NH break-PAST-COMP
 ha-æss-ta (Equi NP Deletion)
 cause-PAST-DEC
- d. ki-iy punno-ka hwapyæng-lil kkæ-ci-ke ha-æss-ta (Raising)
 he-'s anger-NM vase-AC break-PASS-COMP cause-PAST-DEC

'His anger caused the vase to be broken.'

We can assume that the underlying structure for (6a) is something like (8a), in which the embedded clause does not violate the agent-subject constraint of the lexical causatives since the subject of the embedded clause is *kɨ* 'he', which is clearly an agent. (8b) can be assumed to be derived from (8a) by applying Passive to the embedded clause of the latter. (8c) can be assumed to be derived from (8b) by applying Equi NP Deletion to the latter. (8d), which is identical to (6a), can be assumed to be derived from (8c) by applying Raising to the latter to raise the embedded subject *hwapyæng* 'vase' into the upper clause object position. On the other hand, in the case of derivation of a sentence like (9d) below, a rule like Indefinite NP Deletion can be assumed to be applied instead of Equi NP Deletion, as we see below.

- (9) a. tæwi-ka nuku-ka mun-lil yæl-ke ha-æss-ta (Base)
 heat-NM someone-NM door-AC open-Comp cause-PAST-DEC
- b. tæwi-ka mun-i nuku-eke yæl-li-ke ha-æss-ta (Passive)
 heat-NM door-NM someone-by open-PASS-COMP cause-PAST-DEC

- c. *təwi-ka* *mun-i* *yəl-li-ke* *ha-əss-ta* (Indefinite NP Deletion)
 heat-NM door-NM open-PASS-COMP cause-PAST-DEC
- d. *təwi-ka* *mun-lil* *yəl-li-ke* *ha-əss-ta* (Raising)
 heat-NM door-AC open-PASS-COMP cause-PAST-DEC

‘The hot weather caused the door to be opened.’

(9d) comes to have another reading when the subject NP *təwi* ‘hot weather’ is understood as not indirectly but directly involved in the causation of opening the door. For instance, the wood of a door may become so dry and light due to the heat of the weather that the door opens of itself.

REFERENCE

- Fillmore, C. 1968. The case for case. Universals in Linguistic Theory, ed. by E. Bach and R. Harms. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

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