

# Null Arguments in a Korean EFL Student's Interlanguage: A Case Study

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This paper investigates how an intermediate Korean learner of English uses overt and null pronouns in writing short essays and also whether topic-prominent properties of the first language transfer to and affect the interlanguage. The results of this case study show that this learner was able to provide overt subjects and objects with relative ease, which is consistent with the previous study by Hwang (2005), but that he is somehow still under the influence of the L1 topic-prominent features. The unlearning of topic-prominence seems to be a lengthy process, during which L2 learners utilize some strategies based on surface form in order to avoid producing ungrammatical sentences.

**Key Words:** null subject, null object, null arguments, topic-prominence, L1 transfer

## I . INTRODUCTION

It is a well-known fact that so-called "discourse-oriented" languages such as Chinese, Japanese, and Korean allow subjects or objects to be null or phonetically unrepresented if their referents are predictable from the context. Learnability problems arise when speakers of such languages learn as a second or foreign language<sup>1</sup> "subject-oriented" languages like English, which require subjects and objects to be overtly expressed.

In the second language (L2) acquisition literature, it has been reported that when native speakers of Korean-type languages learn English as an L2, they tend to supply overt subjects from the start (Lakshmanan, 1991) but frequently fail to use overt objects (Park, 2004). Through a grammaticality judgment task of English sentences, Zobl (1994) and Yuan (1997) showed similar findings. According to Zobl (1994), the Chinese learners of English rejected incorrect null subject sentences in English 75% of the time, but their rejection rate of incorrect null object sentences was only 43.8%. Similarly, in Yuan's (1997) study, the Chinese adult learners of English were far better able to detect the ungrammaticality of null subjects than that of null objects. What is more, the

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<sup>1</sup> In this study, the term 'second language (L2)' and 'foreign language (FL)' are used interchangeably.

learners' high English proficiency did not necessarily help them to unlearn null objects. Even very proficient learners of English were not able to notice the ungrammaticality of null objects to the almost same extent as intermediate-level learners could not. Yuan proposed that this difficulty in rejecting null objects is related to the lack of informative evidence in English to unset the [+topic-drop] setting, which allows objects to be null. Thus, Yuan predicted that it may be difficult or impossible for Chinese learners of English to realize the ungrammaticality of null objects in English.

However, Hwang (2005) presents a quite different picture regarding Korean learners' unlearning of null subjects and null objects. In a grammaticality judgment task of 64 English sentences, the Korean learners of English who participated in the study had more difficulties rejecting null objects than null subjects, but their rejection of incorrect null objects significantly increased as their English proficiency improved. This result indicates that although there exists the asymmetry between null subject and null object unlearning, rejecting incorrect null objects and supplying overt pronouns in English sentences is not at all impossible, as opposed to Yuan's (1997) proposition. In other words, the Korean learners could actually reset the topic-drop parameter from [+topic-drop] to [-topic-drop].

Although the asymmetry between null subject and null object unlearning by Korean EFL learners was already observed and discussed in several previous studies (Hwang, 2005; Kim, 2007; Park, 2004), the studies were based on the results of grammaticality judgment tasks rather than look into spontaneous production data or were only concerned very beginning learners. Therefore, this study aims to investigate how an intermediate-level Korean learner of English uses overt and null pronouns while writing in English and also whether topic-prominent properties of the first language transfer to and affect the interlanguage.

## **II . LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **1. Null Subjects and the Pro-drop Parameter**

Many researchers have looked into the relationship between rich agreement and null subjects. Chomsky (1981) proposes that languages like Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese allow subjects to be null or phonetically unrepresented due to their rich agreement system but that languages like English and German don't because they lack rich verbal inflection. Also he postulates that this phenomenon is related to a single parameter of UG, namely the *pro*-drop parameter.

Null subjects, however, are also observed in East-Asian languages like Chinese, Japanese and Korean, which do not possess any morphological agreement. To account

for this fact, Jaeggli and Safir (1989) propose the Morphological Uniformity Principle (MUP), which states that "null subjects are permitted in all and only languages with morphologically uniform inflectional paradigms" (p. 29). According to MUP, East-Asian languages can allow null subjects because they have no inflectional affixation at all and are therefore morphologically uniform. On the other hand, English does not allow any null subject because it has a mixed morphological paradigm, in which some verbs have a 'stem + affix' form but others do not.

## 2. Null Objects and the Topic-drop Parameter

Normally, objects are not dropped in [+pro-drop] languages as well as in [-pro-drop] languages. On the other hand, objects are frequently dropped in Chinese, Japanese, and Korean when the information of their referents can be identified in the discourse.

In order to explain this phenomenon, Huang (1984) proposes that there exists a typological parameter distinguishing "discourse-oriented" languages like Chinese and Korean from "sentence-oriented" languages like English. One of the clustering properties of discourse-oriented languages is "topic-prominence", suggested by Li and Thompson (1976). In discourse-oriented languages, a topic occupies the sentence initial position and the rest of the sentence functions as a comment about the topic. Another property of discourse-oriented languages is a topic chain rule and a topic deletion rule. Topic NPs form a chain beyond the sentence boundary via a topic chain rule and then can be dropped via a topic deletion rule, as illustrated in (1),

(1) (*na-ke shu*)<sub>i</sub> *e<sub>i</sub> hua xiao, e<sub>i</sub> ye da, e<sub>i</sub> hen nankan*,

TOP TOP SUB TOP SUB SUB

That-CL tree e flowers small e leaves big e very ugly

*suoyi wo mei mai e<sub>i</sub>.*

SUB

so I not buy e

'The tree, (its) flowers are small, (its) leaves are big, (it) is very ugly,

so I did not buy (it).'

(Xiao, 1998, p. 10)

### 3. Null Subjects in L2 Acquisition

In L2 acquisition research, null subjects and the pro-drop parameter were extensively studied by many researchers. Hilles (1991) and Lakshmanan (1991) explored the relationship between null subjects and verb inflections in learner language and found no clear correlation between the emergence of pronominal subjects and the acquisition of verb inflections. However, Vainikka and Young-Scholten (1994) presented counter evidence. In their study, the Turkish and Korean adult learners learning German as an L2 acquired overt subjects and subject-verb agreement simultaneously like child L1 learners. This suggests that L1 transfer is rather limited in L2 acquisition.

Another interesting fact noted by Lakshmanan (1991) was that the Japanese 5-year-old learner did not use null subjects in English from the beginning although she rarely provided verbal inflections. Furthermore, she even used expletive *it* from the very first sample.

Similar findings were also observed by Zobl (1990, cited from Hawkins, 1995). From the 40,000 word English written corpus produced by 72 native speakers of Japanese, Zobl noted that the learners rarely produced ungrammatical null subjects throughout all proficiency levels. Also, the learners produced only a very small number of null expletives, compared with Phinney's (1987, cited from Hawkins, 1995) Spanish-speaking learners. Moreover, it was observed that the Japanese learners overproduced expletive *it* even when it was unacceptable in English.

Another important observation made about null subjects is that Chinese learners with low English proficiency more easily detect the ungrammaticality of null subjects in the clause-initial position than when they are preceded by some other constituent. Xiao (1998) conducted two grammaticality judgment tests and found that the low- to intermediate-level adult Chinese learners were very likely to accept sentences with null subjects if they were headed by some sentence-initial constituent. For example, all the six participants rejected sentences like (2a) and accepted sentences like (2b) and (3).

	No. of acceptances
(2) a. Is raining.	0 / 6
b. It is raining.	6 / 6
(3) a. Every day eat breakfast.	5 / 6
b. Beijing snows a lot.	6 / 6
c. Chicago happened a big fire.	6 / 6
d. Here cannot swim.	6 / 6

A similar pattern was found in embedded clauses as well. The participants had difficulty rejecting the null subjects in embedded clauses when the clauses were headed by some other constituent.

	No. of acceptances
(4) a. Feng Yi says failed the test.	1 / 6
b. The teacher says that tomorrow must come early.	6 / 6

Since the clause-initial elements here function as topics, the particular difficulty in rejecting clause-medial null subjects suggests that the learners are still under the L1 topic-prominent features.

#### 4. Null Objects in L2 Acquisition

In L2 acquisition research, it has been a common observation that Korean-type L1 speakers allow null objects more readily than null subjects in their L2 English. Zobl (1994) conducted a grammaticality judgment task of English sentences to Chinese learners and found that while incorrect null subject sentences were rejected 75% of the time, the rejection rate of incorrect null object sentences was only 43.8%. Yuan (1997) also conducted a grammaticality judgment task of 54 sentences to 159 Chinese adult learners of English and observed the same asymmetry between null subject and null object rejection. He proposed that the difficulty in rejecting null objects lies in the lack of informative evidence to unset the [+topic-drop] setting in Chinese learners' L2 English. Therefore, the Chinese speakers transfer their L1 [+topic-drop] properties into their L2 grammar. As for null subjects, on the other hand, there exists ample evidence in L2 input that indicates English has verbal inflections which do not license subject *pro*. So even learners with rather low English proficiency can reject null subjects with relative ease.

The asymmetry between null subject and null object was also observed for Korean learners of English. Park (2004) investigated spontaneous spoken data of six Korean children learning English as an L2 and found that the Korean children scarcely dropped subjects from the early stages and that the children dropped more objects than subjects. Hwang (2005) conducted a grammaticality judgment task to 60 Korean college students and found that the Korean learners, especially those with lower English proficiency, had particular difficulty detecting the ungrammaticality of null objects in English. She suggests that such difficulty can be attributable to L1 topic-prominent features transferred to L2 English.

### **III. METHOD**

#### **1. The Participant**

The participant of this study was a male second-year high school student. He had no experience living in an English-speaking country. He had been studying English in a private language institute as well as in school for more than six years, and the instruction he had received mainly focused on reading skills, vocabulary knowledge, and grammar. Although he has not taken any standardized test like TOEFL or TEPS, his school English test scores and the writing samples indicate that he has an intermediate level of English proficiency.

#### **2. Data Collection and Data Analysis**

Data were collected over a period of ten months. Every two to three weeks the participant wrote a short essay at home without any time limit, and total 23 essays were collected. The participant admitted he sometimes consulted a Korean-English dictionary while writing a composition. Each essay topic was randomly selected from 185 TOEFL writing session topics. The lengths of the essays varied from half a page to one page but all compositions had at least four paragraphs.

For every essay, the participant was given some correctional feedback coupled with short grammar instruction by the researcher. Feedback was directed not only toward grammatical use of language but it also covered overall discourse structure, content, word choice, and even punctuation. Instructional treatments were also made about language form, meaning, and use. However, neither feedback nor instruction directly targeted the correct use of overt pronouns. The time devoted to feedback and instruction did not exceed one hour for one essay.

All the essays collected were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. For the quantitative analysis, the number of null and overt subjects was counted in matrix and embedded clauses. The number of null and overt objects was also counted and classified according to verb types. For the qualitative analysis, every sentence in an essay was closely looked at and compared with one another.

## IV. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

### 1. Null Subject Use

The participant of the study used an extremely small number of null subjects (see TABLE 1). In 688 positions<sup>2</sup> where a subject NP can occur, he only used 5 null subjects and more importantly, all the null subjects he used were in dependent clauses. In other words, not a single sentence was initiated by a finite verb. From this, it is possible to conclude that this student has already learned that every finite verb in English must have an overt subject.

**TABLE 1**  
Numbers and Percentages of Null Subjects and Numbers of *there*-clauses

	NS/SI	%	NS/SD	%	NS/total subj.	%	<i>there</i> -clause <sup>3</sup>
sample1	0/10	0%	0/4	0%	0/14	0%	0
sample2	0/26	0%	1/20	5%	1/46	2%	1
sample3	0/25	0%	1/11	9%	1/36	3%	0
sample4	0/29	0%	1/11	9%	1/40	3%	1
sample5	0/25	0%	0/15	0%	0/40	0%	2
sample6	0/18	0%	0/9	0%	0/27	0%	3
sample7	0/24	0%	1/13	8%	1/37	3%	2
sample8	0/23	0%	0/5	0%	0/28	0%	0
sample9	0/15	0%	0/11	0%	0/26	0%	4
sample10	0/24	0%	0/16	0%	0/40	0%	1
sample11	0/26	0%	0/4	0%	0/30	0%	2
sample12	0/19	0%	0/15	0%	0/34	0%	2

<sup>2</sup> This number does not include the occasions of *there*-construction. The number of *there*-clauses in each essay sample is also provided in Table 1.

<sup>3</sup> All the 39 'there' constructions used by the learner contained an indefinite subject NP. Given the fact that the topics in a topic-chain are definite NPs, this illustrates that the learner has unlearned the "topic-comment sentential structure" resulting from the L1 and has adopted the subject-prominent features of English.

sample13	0/16	0%	0/9	0%	0/25	0%	1
sample14	0/14	0%	0/9	0%	0/23	0%	1
sample15	0/12	0%	0/5	0%	0/17	0%	3
sample16	0/16	0%	1/11	9%	1/27	4%	1
sample17	0/14	0%	0/9	0%	0/23	0%	4
sample18	0/19	0%	0/12	0%	0/31	0%	2
sample19	0/24	0%	0/7	0%	0/31	0%	2
sample20	0/16	0%	0/9	0%	0/25	0%	2
sample21	0/17	0%	0/7	0%	0/24	0%	2
sample22	0/21	0%	0/12	0%	0/33	0%	1
sample23	0/17	0%	0/14	0%	0/31	0%	2
<b>total</b>	<b>0/450</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>5/238</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>5/688</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>39</b>

\* NS=number of null subjects, SI=number of subjects in independent clause (i.e., matrix or main clause), SD=number of subjects in dependent clause (i.e., embedded, subordinate, or coordinated clause<sup>4</sup>)

Even in dependent clauses, the learner rarely omitted an overt subject: the percentage of null subjects in dependent clauses is 2%. Examples in (5) show that from the earliest samples the learner was able to supply an overt subject especially even when the subject in a subordinate clause is coreferential with that in a main clause, in which environment a null subject instead of an overt subject is likely to be used in the learner's first language, Korean.

(5) a. *Maybe we can wear school uniforms only when **we** are students except special events such as dancing party with school uniforms.* (sample 2)

<sup>4</sup> A dependent clause is a clause that cannot stand alone as a sentence and modifies the independent clause of a sentence or serves as a component of it. A dependent clause can be divided into three categories: embedded, subordinate, or coordinated clause. An embedded clause is a clause inside of another clause often initiated by a complementizer such as *that* and *if*. On the other hand, a subordinate clause begins with a subordinating conjunction (e.g., *when*, *as*, *before*, *after*) or a relative pronoun (e.g., *who*, *which*, *whose*) and modifies the main clause. Coordinated clauses are pairs of clauses linked by a coordinating conjunction such as *and*, *but*, *or*, and *so*. In this study, the second coordinated clause that appears after a coordinating conjunction is analyzed as a dependent clause if it is in the same sentence with the first coordinated clause.

(아마 우리는 교복을 입고 하는 댄스 파티와 같은 특별한 경우를 제외하고는 오직 우리가 학생일 때만 교복을 입을 수 있을 것이다.)

b. *When you might be feel bad if you are stressed by something, you had better playing sports to get rid of stress. (sample 3)*

(만약 당신이 어떤 것에 스트레스를 받아 기분이 안 좋을 때는 스트레스를 없애기 위해 운동을 하는 것이 낫다.)

The five null subjects the learner used in his writing can be classified into the following four categories. First, the learner used a null subject when he was not mentioning a single definite noun but referring to a vague situational proposition. In example (6), the learner starts a new discourse unit about the 'no school uniform' period of the 1980s (1980 년대의 교복자유화). The first sentence ("I heard story about ~") functions as a stage-setter for his new story, and the null subject in the subordinate clause actually refers to the whole story itself, which includes the next sentence as well as several other sentences after it. This kind of story-telling strategy is frequently used in Korean. Thus, this function of null subject is likely to have been transferred from his L1.

1) The subject of a dependent clause was dropped when its antecedent was unclear.

(6) *I heard story about wearing school uniforms **when<sup>5</sup>φ is occurred** in 1980s. In 1980s, high schools allowed once to wear what students want.*

(sample 2)

(나는 1980년대에 있었던 교복착용에 대한 이야기를 들었다. 1980년대에는 고등학교들이 한때 학생들이 원하는 것을 입는 것을 허락해 주었다<sup>6</sup>.)

Similarly, in example (7), the learner mentions one advantage of playing sports, which is to make people physically strong. Here, it seems that the null subject used in the coordinated clause refers to the overall situation that includes the previous clause ("This action stimulates the development of our knees.") rather than the subject "This action".

<sup>5</sup> An anonymous reviewer commented that 'when' in this sentence could be interpreted as an erroneous use of a relative pronoun (i.g., *which*), not as a subordinating conjunction. If so, there would be no missing subject in the sentence. However, if 'when' is a relative pronoun, it is not clear what can function as its antecedent.

<sup>6</sup> This Korean translation was provided by the researcher, not the writer, to show the writer's original intention in writing. The researcher had asked the writer what he intended to express for every unclear sentence.

(7) *For example, when playing basketball, we use our knees many times. This action stimulates the development of our knees, so  $\phi$  eventually can make us grow taller.* (sample 3)

(예를 들어, 농구를 할 때, 우리는 우리 무릎을 여러 차례 사용한다. 이 행동은 우리 무릎의 발달을 자극한다. 그래서 결국 우리를 키가 더 커지게 할 수 있다.)

Another type of null subject the learner misused belonged to a coordinated clause, for which the subject of the first clause functioned as a topic (see example 7). In English, an overt subject can be dropped in a coordinated clause only when the subject is coreferential with the subject of the first clause. For example, the second subject *he* can be omitted in the sentence “He bowed and (he) went away.” because it refers to the same person as the matrix subject. In example (8), however, the null subject after the conjunction ‘and’ cannot be coreferential with the main subject ‘pension’, but has to refer to ‘people’. Yet, still the surface form of the sentence looks all right since the “and + finite verb” form is frequently used in English and there is no clause with more than one subject as in “Pension, sightseeing(scenery) is beautiful. (펜션은 경치가 아름답다)” It is likely that this learner, consciously or unconsciously, realizes that English clauses require only one subject and one finite verb. Although the learner did not use any double nominative construction on the surface, the intended meaning of the coordinated clause “(pension)  $\phi$  (people) enjoy with nature ((펜션에서는) (사람들이) 자연을 즐길 수 있다)” requires the main subject “pension” to play a role of a null topic. In other words, although this example fits the surface structural norm of English, it actually utilizes a double nominative construction (i.e., topic + subject + verb) and contains a null topic and a null subject. This means that this learner’s interlanguage is under the influence of both topic-prominent and subject-prominent language.

2) The subject of a coordinated clause was dropped although it was not coreferential with the main subject.

(8) *For example, pension is one of the popular places people want to live in for years. Because pension can have beautiful sightseeing and  $\phi$  (people) enjoy with nature.* (sample 4)

(예를 들어, 펜션은 사람들이 몇 년 동안 살기를 원하는 인기 있는 장소 중의 하나이다. 왜냐하면 펜션은 경치가 아름답고 자연을 즐길 수 있기 때문이다.)

In example (9), the learner used the same strategy of using the verb 'have' in order to avoid a double nominative construction. That is, the learner did not use two subjects as in “many people in this area, body was unhealthy” because he knew English only requires one subject with one finite verb. Changing the common Korean word order “NP<sub>A</sub>, NP<sub>B</sub> is Adjective.” (e.g., Tom, eyes are blue.) into “NP<sub>A</sub> has Adjective NP<sub>B</sub>.” (e.g., Tom has blue eyes.) is usually a very successful strategy for Korean EFL learners. Unfortunately, however, the sentence (9) doesn't sound very natural. A native speaker of English would have written “many people in this area were unhealthy.”

(9) *So many people in this area had unhealthy body and many diseases such as pneumonia.* (sample 16)

(그래서 이 지역 많은 사람들이 몸이 건강하지 않았고, 폐렴과 같은 많은 병에 걸렸다.)

Example (10) shows a similar aspect. Here, the subject of the previous clause "thinking" actually functions as a null topic for the following clause "children's autonomy can be developed". If the subject "thinking" was not added as a topic to the meaning of the following clause, the whole sentence ("But this is not good for their children because children's autonomy can be developed.") would be uninterpretable or would not make any sense. This example indicates that this learner, despite the subject-oriented surface forms, is still under the influence of topic-prominence.

(10) *Most of parents have their way in almost everything when their children are young. But this is not good for their children because **thinking** is good for children's brain, and **children's autonomy can be developed.*** (sample 10)

(대부분의 부모들은 아이가 어릴 때 거의 모든 것에 있어서 마음대로 하려 한다. 하지만 이것은 그들 아이들에게 좋지 않다. 왜냐하면 (혼자) 생각하는 것은 아이들 두뇌에 좋고, 아이들의 자립심을 키워주기 때문이다.)

Example (11) shows the third type of null subject. Here, a null subject was used when successive sentences form a coherent discourse and meanwhile, a topic-chain is formed. Since the learner showed knowledge of 'connective + ~ing' form in all the other sentences as in (12), 'finished' may well be analyzed as nothing but a finite verb.

3) The subject of a subordinate clause was dropped when it was not coreferential with the main subject (the null subject is part of the topic-chain formed in the discourse).

(11) *In my experience, I had to show something in my English class. I thought day and night. So I decide to make a presentation in computer program. I made a program to show other students and I showed what I made. After  $\phi$  (I) finished showing, my class gave a big hand to me.*  
(sample 7)

(내 경험에, 나는 영어 수업에서 무언가를 보여줘야 했었다. 나는 밤낮으로 생각했다. 그래서 컴퓨터 프로그램으로 프레젠테이션을 하기로 결정했다. 나는 다른 학생들에게 보여줄 프로그램(파워포인트)을 만들었고 내가 만든 것을 보여주었다. 발표가 끝났을 때, 우리 반 학생들이 나에게 큰 박수를 쳐주었다.)

(12) a. *For example, when **playing** soccer, we usually wear sportswear such as training clothes.* (sample 1)

(예를 들어, 축구를 할 때, 우리는 보통 트레이닝복과 같은 스포츠의류를 입는다.)

b. *After **finishing** playing sports, we can feel our body refreshed.* (sample 3)

(운동을 하는 것을 끝낸 후에, 우리는 우리 몸이 상쾌해진 것을 느낄 수 있다.)

Finally, the learner used a null subject in only one out of many cases where the subject of a subordinate clause is coreferential with that of the main clause.

4) The subject of a subordinate clause was dropped when it was coreferential with the subject of the main clause.

(13) *For example, **when  $\phi$  (I) listened** to the radio, I often heard the traffic news.* (sample 16)

(예를 들어, 라디오를 들을 때, 나는 종종 교통뉴스를 들었다.)

In sum, the extremely small number of null subjects used in the learner's writings suggests that the learner is already well aware of the constraint that every finite verb in English requires one and only overt subject NP. In other words, the learner knows the Extended Projection Principle (EPP), which states that every sentence must have a subject. In several examples, however, even though only one overt subject was used, the

entire sentence was not nor grammatical. This is probably because the learner only tries to satisfy the surface structure of 'Subject + Verb + Object or Complement' but has not acquired the subject-predicate relation.

## 2. Null Object Use

When it comes to the use of null object, the result of the study is consistent with the findings of Hwang (2005). The participant of this study did not use null objects in most cases although the percentage of null object use is slightly higher than that of null subject use (see TABLE 2). However, the learner showed different degrees of difficulties depending on verb types.

**TABLE 2**  
Numbers and Percentages of Null Objects

	NO/V3	%	NO/V4	%	NO/V5	%	NO/total V	%
sample1	0/10	0%	0/0	–	0/5	0%	0/15	0%
sample2	0/43	0%	1/1	100%	3/3	100%	4/47	9%
sample3	0/29	0%	1/2	50%	0/3	0%	2/35	6%
sample4	0/21	0%	1/1	100%	0/3	0%	1/25	4%
sample5	0/37	0%	0/3	0%	0/0	–	0/40	0%
sample6	1/24	4%	0/0	–	0/1	0%	1/25	4%
sample7	3/31	10%	0/3	0%	0/1	0%	4/35	11%
sample8	0/21	0%	0/1	0%	0/5	0%	0/27	0%
sample9	0/22	0%	0/0	–	0/0	–	0/22	0%
sample10	1/26	4%	1/1	100%	0/5	0%	2/32	6%
sample11	0/23	0%	2/3	67%	0/1	0%	2/27	7%
sample12	1/24	4%	0/0	–	0/0	–	1/24	4%
sample13	3/14	21%	0/0	–	0/0	–	3/14	21%
sample14	0/18	0%	0/1	0%	0/1	0%	0/20	0%
sample15	0/18	0%	0/0	–	0/0	–	0/18	0%
sample16	0/13	0%	0/0	–	0/0	–	0/13	0%
sample17	1/25	4%	0/0	–	0/0	–	1/25	4%
sample18	2/24	8%	0/0	–	0/1	0%	2/25	8%
sample19	0/21	0%	0/1	0%	1/4	25%	1/26	4%

sample20	0/11	0%	1/1	100%	0/0	–	1/12	8%
sample21	1(?) / 29	3%	0/0	–	0/0	–	1/29	3%
sample22	0/12	0%	0/0	–	0/2	0%	0/14	0%
sample23	1/27	4%	0/1	0%	0/2	0%	2/30	7%
<b>total</b>	<b>14/523</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>7/19</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>4/37</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>28/580</b>	<b>5%</b>

\* **NO**=number of null objects, **V3**=number of verbs that require only one direct object, **V4**=number of verbs that require one indirect object and one direct object, **V5**=number of verbs that require an direct object and an object complement

First, the learner had the most difficulty providing an overt indirect object to a three-place predicate (or ditransitive verb) such as *tell*, *give*, and *ask* (in example 14).

(14) a. *I will tell  $\phi$  (you) my experience.* (sample 3)

(나의 경험을 이야기해 보겠다.)

b. *Finally parents should give  $\phi$  (their children) time for their children to think or choose something.* (sample 10)

(마지막으로 부모들은 그들 자녀가 생각하고 무언가를 선택할 시간을 주어야 한다.)

c. *For example, a student in my class once asked me math problems. I told  $\phi$  (him) how to solve this. After then, I asked  $\phi$  (him) another question about math. That student says how to answer the question.* (sample 11)

(예를 들어, 우리 반 한 학생이 전에 나에게 수학 문제를 물어 봤었다. 나는 이것을 푸는 방법을 말해 주었다. 그 후에, 나는 또 다른 수학 문제를 물어봤다. 그 학생은 그 문제 푸는 방법을 알려 주었다.)

Other times, however, the learner was able to supply a correct overt indirect object for the same verbs (example 15). Thus, it seems that although the learner is aware of the argument structure of ditransitive verbs, he treats the indirect object as an optional element.

(15) a. *Doing sports have many advantages of playing sports, **which** I will show you below.* (sample 3)

(운동을 하는 것은 많은 장점이 있는데, 그것들을 아래에 보여주겠다.)

b. *I will tell **you** my opinion about this below.* (sample 5)

(이것에 대한 내 의견을 아래에 말하겠다.)

Secondly, as for a two-place predicate or a typical transitive verb, the learner seldom dropped an object (example 16).

(16) a. *First, Think about wearing **school uniforms** when we wear **it**.*  
(sample 2)

(첫째로, 교복 착용에 대해 언제 우리가 그것을 입는지 생각해 보라.)

b. *If my father doesn't eat **beans** for me, I may not eat **beans**, either. Also, Confucius said, "If you do not want to do **something**, don't say another person to do **it**."* (sample 10)

(만약 우리 아버지가 나를 위해 콩을 먹지 않았다면, 나 또한 콩을 먹지 않을지 모른다. 공자 또한 말했다. "만약 네가 어떤 것을 하기 싫다면, 다른 사람에게 그것을 하라고 말하지 말라.")

In one case, the learner misanalyzed an intransitive verb as transitive and added an unnecessary reflexive pronoun (example 17).

(17) *First, exercising might be good for clearing the stress. If you exercise **yourself** sometimes, you will sweat it out and might feel **refreshing your mind**.* (sample 19)

(첫째로, 운동하는 것은 스트레스를 없애는 데 좋을지 모른다. 만약 당신이 가끔 운동을 한다면, 그것을(스트레스를) 땀으로 배출하여 기분을 상쾌하게 느낄지 모른다.)

The reasons why an EFL learner drops the object of a two-place predicate can be numerous and complex. First of all, the learner can be unaware of the subcategorization properties of English verbs. Since many verbs in English are used both as transitive and as intransitive, EFL learners have good reason to get confused. In example (18), the learner of the study failed to acknowledge the mandatory nature of the direct object and did not supply the reflexive pronoun 'ourselves'.

(18) a. *First, a great speech skill is important role in making friends. We can make friends because we talk them and **enjoyø** together.* (sample 6)

(첫째로, 훌륭한 말하는 능력은 친구를 사귀는 데 있어서 중요한 역할을 한다. 우리는 그들에게 말을 하고 함께 즐기기 때문에 친구를 사귄 수 있다.)

In other cases, EFL learners omit the direct object because they just transfer the subcategorization information of a particular verb from their L1, which may not be the

same in English. In example (19), the learner dropped the necessary object for verbs ‘influence (~에 영향을 미치다)’ and ‘disobey (~의 말에 복종하지 않다)’. It is interesting to note that the two verbs do not require a direct object when used in Korean.

(19) a. *So they (young adults) can affect and learn each other while they are in the school. Therefore young adults cannot help to influence  $\phi$  (each other) because they spend much time (together).* (sample 13)

(그래서 그들(청소년들)은 학교에 있는 동안 서로에게 영향을 끼치고 서로서로 배운다. 그러므로 청소년들은 (함께) 많은 시간을 보내기 때문에 영향을 주지 않을 수 없다.)

b. *So young adults may not be affected their adults because they often disobey  $\phi$  (them).* (sample 13)

(그래서 청소년들은 어른들에게 영향을 받지 않을지도 모른다. 그들이 종종 말을 듣지 않기 때문이다.)

In still other cases, English learners seem to have more difficulties noticing the lack of an overt object when the verb is followed by some adverbs or other constituents. In example (20), the participant of the study dropped the direct object when there exist some post-verbal elements.

(20) a. *I also asked my math teacher about that question. But, I couldn't understand  $\phi$  100%.* (sample 7)

(나는 또한 내 수학 선생님께 그 질문에 대해 여쭙보았다. 그러나 나는 100% 이해할 수 없었다.)

b. *Venice holds movie festival every year. So there are many famous stars and beautiful places to hold a festival. So I want to see  $\phi$  before my own eyes.* (sample 12)

(베니스는 매년 영화 축제를 연다. 그래서 많은 유명 스타들이 오고 축제를 여는 아름다운 장소들이 있다. 그래서 나는 내 눈 앞에서 보고 싶다.)

c. *Next day, I saw that question again and I solved it because I learned  $\phi$  for myself.* (sample 23)

(다음날 나는 그 문제를 다시 봤고 그것을 다시 풀었다. 내가 혼자서 공부했었기 때문이다.)

Lastly, as shown in example (21), the learner also failed to provide the direct object when the same NP was used in the sentence-initial adverbial phrase.

(21) *In this situation, you can treat  $\phi$  (this situation) well if you know what your children want.* (sample 10)

(이런 상황에서, 당신은 당신 자녀가 원하는 것을 안다면 잘 대처할 수 있다.)

As for the verbs requiring an object and an object complement, the participant of this study provided an overt object most of the time (example 22).

(22) a. *First, we wear clothes to active comfortable. So, In my opinion, different clothes just help **people** behave easily.* (sample 1)

(첫째로, 우리는 편하게 행동하기 위해서 옷을 입는다. 그래서 내 생각에 다양한 옷들은 단지 사람들이 쉽게 행동하도록 도와준다.)

b. *When we wear clothes which involve in any job, we just feel **ourselves** to be a person who has the job.* (sample 1)

(우리가 어떤 직업에 관련된 옷을 입을 때, 우리는 우리가 그 직업을 가진 사람이 된다고 느낀다.)

The learner, however, dropped the direct object with the less frequent verbs 'permit' and 'request' probably because he did not know the subcategorization rules for the verbs (example (23)-(24)). If the learner regarded the verbs as normal two-place predicates and *to*-infinitive as the only direct object, the null pronoun used in those sentences would be null subjects rather than null objects. In such case, the learner's interlanguage is likely to result from his incomplete mastery of control theory in English.

(23) *Recently, high school students are wearing school uniforms. Some people says high school **permit  $\phi$  (students) to decide** what to wear to school.* (sample 2)

(최근에, 고등학생들은 교복을 입고 있다. 어떤 사람들은 고등학교가 무엇을 학교에 입고 갈지 결정하도록 허락해야 한다고 말한다.)

(24) *In 1980s, high schools **allowed once  $\phi$  to wear** what students wear. After some days when students are wearing what they want, student's parents **requested  $\phi$  (schools or the government) to abolish  $\phi$  (students) wearing clothes** what they want.* (sample 2)

(1980 년대에, 고등학교들은 한 때 학생들이 입는 것을 (입고 싶은 것을) 입도록 허락했었다. 학생들이 원하는 것을 입는 날들이 며칠 지난 후에, 학부모들은 그들이 원하는 옷을 입는 것을 폐지할 것을 요청했다.)

On the other hand, as you can see in example (25), the learner dropped the object for the verb ‘make’ although he successfully provided an overt object for the same verb in many previous writing samples. This shows us that the learner’s use of null object cannot be attributed solely to the lack of correct argument structure knowledge of the verb.

(25) *Bathing makes  $\emptyset$  feel relax and calm; it is good for stressed mind.*

(sample 19)

(목욕은 편안하고 침착하게 느끼게 해준다. 그것은 스트레스 받은 마음에 좋다.)

## V. CONCLUSION

The results show that the intermediate level learner of English who participated in the study was able to provide overt subjects and objects with relative ease but that he is somehow still under the influence of his L1 topic-prominent features. It is likely that the unlearning of topic-prominence is a relatively lengthy process, during which L2 learners utilize some strategies based on surface form of the target language in order to avoid producing ungrammatical sentences.

The findings of the present study carry several pedagogical implications. First, students will benefit from being instructed on subcategorization properties of various verb types. Such instruction will help students provide overt objects in appropriate positions. Secondly, typological differences between English and Korean, namely subject-prominence and topic-prominence, can be taught to students either explicitly or implicitly to raise their consciousness. Lastly, grammar instruction on English reference system such as pronouns may help students unlearn null arguments because they will start to replace null arguments with overt pronouns. However, more importantly, such instruction should be delivered in a discourse level so that it can properly deal with cases of null topics and null arguments resulting from topic chains. Future research should be directed toward how instruction can facilitate the interlanguage transition from topic-prominence to subject-prominence and also from use of null arguments to proper pronominal use. In addition, for any generalization, larger numbers of Korean EFL students should be observed in terms of their use of null subject and null object.

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