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Japanese/Korean possessive verbal nouns as inherently intensional

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Inspired by Grimshaw (1990), who claims that English argument-taking derived nominals (DNs) should be analyzed as denoting a complex event with the same aspectual properties as their verbal counterparts, researchers like Jung (1997) and Miyamoto (1999) classify Japanese/Korean possessive verbal nouns (VNs) into the same group denoting a complex event. They do this mainly based on the fact that both types of nominals show the same distinctive pattern of the aspectual modifiers -- the culminating modifier ‘in’ is compatible with telics while the durational modifier ‘for’ is with atelics, as in (1):

(1) a. [NP Mina-uy hansikan-tongan-uy/*hansikan-nay-uy hwanca-uy kwanchal] (atelic VN) Mina-Gen one hour-for-Gen/one hour-in-Gen patient-Gen observation ‘Mina’s observation of the patient for an hour/*in an hour’

    b. [NP Mina-uy *hansikan-tongan-uy/hansikan-nay-uy tali-uy phakoy] (telic VN) Mina-Gen one hour-for-Gen/one hour-in-Gen bridge-Gen destruction ‘Mina’s destruction of the bridge *for an hour/in an hour’

    c. [NP Mina-uy *hansikan-tongan-uy/hansikan-nay-uy kichayek-ey-uy tochak] (telic VN) Mina-Gen one hour-for-Gen/one hour-in-Gen train station-at-Gen arrival ‘Mina’s arrival at the station *for an hour/in an hour’

There is, however, a distinction between English argument-taking DNs and Japanese/Korean possessive VNs: the former are compatible with extensional verbs like see, which take as complements entities (or events) that exist (or occur) in the actual world (cf. Higginbotham 1983), while the latter are not:

(2) a. *Nami-nun [cekkwun-uy tosi-uy phakoy]-lul poassta. (Korean) Nami-Top enemy-Gen city-Gen destruction-Acc saw ‘Nami saw the enemy’s destruction of the city.’

    b. *Nami-wa [teki-no toshi-no hakai]-o mita. (Japanese) Nami-Top enemy-Gen city-Gen destruction-Acc saw ‘Nami saw the enemy’s destruction of the city.’

Rather, it turns out that Japanese/Korean possessive VNs are compatible with intensional verbs that do not necessarily take actual-world entities (or events) as their complements. This is shown in (3), where the Japanese example is taken from Matsumoto (1996):

(3) a. Nami-nun [pro tali-uy phakoy]-lul uenhayssta/helakhayssta/sitohayssta.
Nami-Top bridge -Gen destruction-Acc wished/permitted/attempted
‘Nami wished/permitted/attempted to destroy a bridge.’ (Korean)
Nami-Top he-Dat police station-as far as appearance-Acc desires/ordered
‘Nami desires/ordered him to appear at the police station.’ (Japanese)

The data above suggest that Japanese/Korean possessive VNs are inherently intensional, but that English argument-taking DNs are extensional, which has been rarely recognized up to now, even by Jung (1997) and Miyamoto (1999).

This difference could be related to a parameter in word formation: English argument-taking DNs are derived from verb roots by adding a nominalizing suffix while Japanese/Korean possessive VNs are roots by themselves (cf. Grimshaw 1990, Takano 2003). Possibly, the perfective aspect of Latinate nominalizing suffixes (e.g., -ion) in English contributes to the semantics of extensionality (cf. Bonomi 1995, Snyder 1998). In contrast, one might suppose that the aspectual properties intrinsic to Japanese/Korean possessive VNs as roots – whether they characterize a process or a transition from one state to another (cf. Pustejovsky 1991) – remain undetermined with respect to perfectivity. This “undeterminedness” gives rise to a hypothetical future, eventually contributing to intensionality.

References