

When maximality derives kinds and contrastiveness: the case of Korean *-(n)un*

Background & Goals. In work on spoken Korean, two uses of so-called topic marker *-(n)un* have been attested: contrastive (1a) and non-contrastive (1b) use. Most recent work has focused on identifying the semantics of contrastiveness to which *-(n)un* gives rise (Lee 2003, Kim 2018a, Kim 2018b). This has two limitations: (i) they do not provide clear definition of the non-contrastive use; (ii) more importantly, they do not account for the fact that *-(n)un* is used in two seemingly very distinct ways. I show that empirically, non-contrastive *-(n)un* appears with generic sentences showing sensitivity to the type of NPs and predicates, and that theoretically, non-contrastive and contrastive *-(n)un* can be explained via a single unified function of *-(n)un*, namely marking maximality of the NP it attaches to.

- (1) a. *samusil pul-un achim-ey kye-cy-ess-e.*
office light-TOP morning-in light.up-become-PST-DECL
'THE OFFICE LIGHT turned on in the morning.' [contrastive *-(n)un*]
Note: Uppercase letters indicate prosodic prominence, which in English gives rise to contrastiveness in some contexts.
- b. *samusil pul-un achimmada kye-cy-e.*
office light-TOP every.morning light.up-become-DECL
'Office lights turn on every morning.' [non-contrastive *-(n)un*]

Observation (i). I show that the distribution of contrastive *-(n)un* is not independent from non-contrastive *-(n)un*. Specifically, *-(n)un* is always non-contrastive when it is required on an NP (2b vs. 1b), and is always contrastive when it is not (i.e. null marking is allowed) (2a vs. 1a).

- (2) a. *samusil pul achim-ey kye-cy-ess-e.*
office light morning-in light.up-become-PST-DECL
'The office light turned on in the morning.' [null marking allowed]
- b. **samusil pul achimmada kye-cy-e.*
office light every.morning light.up-become-DECL
Intended: 'Office lights turn on every morning.' [*-(n)un* required]

Observation (ii). It has been noted that non-contrastive *-(n)un* appear in generic sentences (Lee 1996). First, I show that the distribution of the two uses in fact is sensitive to NP types that *-(n)un* attaches to (i.e. kind vs. non-kind). Regardless of predicate types, kind NPs seem to require obligatory *-(n)un* marking (i.e. non-contrastive *-(n)un*) (3a-b) whereas non-kind NPs allow null marking in which an additional *-(n)un* gives rise to contrastiveness (3c-d). Since (3a-c) corresponds to generic sentences (Krifka et al. 1995), the distribution of *-(n)un* does not align with generic-episodic distinction, but firstly with the NP types that *-(n)un* appears with.

- (3) a. *koyangi*(-nun) phoyulyu-ya.* c. *sala chakha-y.*
cat-TOP mammal-DECL Sarah kind-DECL
'Cats are mammals.' [kind/individual] 'Sarah is kind.' [non-kind/individual]
- b. *konglyong*(-un) myelconha-yss-e.* d. *sala pap mek-ess-e.*
dinosaur-TOP extinct-PST-DECL Sarah rice eat-PST-DECL
'Dinosaurs are extinct.' [kind/stage] 'Sarah ate rice.' [non-kind/stage]

Note: In (c) and (d), *-(n)un* marking on the NP 'Sarah' gives rise to a contrastive reading, e.g. SARAH is kind.

I then show that as for kind NPs, dispositional sentences get null marking (4a) whereas habitual sentences get an obligatory *-(n)un* marking (4b). The data is supported by the test based on actuality entailment (Green 2000, Cable 2022): when the context describes some possibility without an empirical support, the sentence can only be formed

without *-(n)un* (4a); when the context describes an empirically supported real-world property, it requires *-(n)un* (4b).

- (4) a. Context: Assume that it is an established fact that printers only print four colors: black, cyan, magenta, and yellow. However, though hypothetical, current technology would allow printers to print other colors such as purple if there exists such a cartridge.

purinte(#-nun) borasaek ppop-a.

printer-TOP purple.color print-DECL

‘Printers print purple-colors.’

[dispositionals]

- b. Context: Assume that in this office, it is a known fact that office lights always turn on every morning.

samusil pul#(-un) achimmada kyeche-e.

office light-TOP every.morning light.up-DECL

‘Office lights turn on every morning.’

[habituals]

Generalization. The distribution of non-contrastive and contrastive *-(n)un* can be summarized as (5).

		kind	non-kind
individual-level	habitual	obligatory <i>-(n)un</i>	∅ marking
	dispositional	∅ marking	∅ marking
stage-level		obligatory <i>-(n)un</i>	∅ marking

- (5) Generalization:

Proposal. I propose that *-(n)un* serves a single function that derives both non-contrastive and contrastive use. In an expression *x-(n)un P*, *-(n)un* marks that the NP *x* is the maximal set of entities that holds true for the predicate *P*. This interacts with the fact that in Korean, bare nouns are interpreted ambiguously between kinds and non-kinds. I argue that bare nouns in Korean do not express kinds by itself, but in fact are ambiguous in terms of plurality (c.f. Korean bare nouns are used for both singular and plural entities, either definite or indefinite). Thus, kind interpretation in Korean arises by the interaction of the semantics of bare nouns and the function of *-(n)un*. When *x* denotes a set of (indefinite) plural entities, *-(n)un* indicates that that set is a maximal set that holds true for *P*, giving rise to a non-contrastive kind interpretation. When *x* denotes definite singular/plural entities, *-(n)un*’s indication of the maximality of *x* pragmatically gives rise to a contrastive reading since *x* already denotes a closed set of entities. This is supported by the case (6a) in which the sentence is ambiguous between a non-contrastive kind reading and a contrastive non-kind reading. This is further supported by the case with an overt use of demonstratives (6b); the sentence only allows the reading where the NP refers to a non-kind, and never to a kind. I add that *-(n)un* further requires that for the maximal set of entities *x*, their property *P* must be realized in the actual world, in order to account for the distinct pattern of *-(n)un* that distinguishes dispositionals and habituals.

- (6) a. *pap-un masiss-e.*

rice-TOP delicious-DECL

‘Rice is delicious’ or ‘THE RICE is delicious’

- b. i *pap-un masiss-e.*

this rice-TOP delicious-DECL

‘THIS RICE is delicious.’

Implications. In this paper, I first showed that the empirical patterns of non-contrastive and contrastive *-(n)un* support that the two uses are connected. I then proposed a single unified function for *-(n)un* that accounts for these two seemingly distinct uses of *-(n)un*, in each case deriving a kind interpretation and contrastiveness.

Selected References. Cable, Seth. 2022. Two paths to habituality: The semantics of habitual mode in Tlingit. Green, Lisa. 2000. Aspectual be-type constructions and coercion in African American English. Kim, Ilkyu. 2018a. Is contrastive implicature induced by Korean CT-marking *-(n)un* conventional or conversational? Kim, Jieun, 2018b. Deriving the contrastiveness of contrastive *-(n)un* in Korean. Krifka, Manfred, Francis Jeffry Pelletier, Gregory Carlson, Alice ter Meulen, Gennaro Chierchia, and Godehard Link. 1995. Genericity: An introduction. Lee, Chungmin. 1996. Generic sentences are topic constructions. Lee, Chungmin. 2003. Contrastive topic and/or contrastive focus.