Topics and Null arguments in Korean:
the syntax and discourse

So-Young Kim
University of Wisconsin-Madison

1   Introduction

Null arguments and topics have been studied as two distinct phenomena, which are separately attributed to the discourse-oriented parameter and topic-prominent typology, respectively.   As argued in Huang (1984), null arguments are allowed in languages like Korean, because they are discourse-recoverable, carrying old information.   On the other hand, topics occur in the sentence-initial position in Korean, based on Li and Thompson's (1976) typological taxonomy of topic-prominence.   In this article, I am going to report the following observations on topics and null arguments in Korean, which show that the two phenomena are in fact related. First, the relationship between topics and null arguments are based on predication, rather than construal, following Chomsky (1977), by which a topic saturates an open proposition which may or may not contain a null argument.   Second, topics and null arguments carry old information, which can be termed as *shifted topics* and *anaphoric topics,* in Herring's (1990) sense.   Their different syntactic manifestations, as a topic or a null argument, are determined based on the presence or absence of discourse prominence.   Third, the discourse concept of topics as carrying discourse prominence is syntactically manifested in the left-periphery, in Spec of TopP, the head of which is occupied by the [+topic] feature.   Fourth, the [+topic] feature is morphologically manifested by *-nun,* which makes a topic with the *–nun* marker scoped-out, from the rest of the sentence, resulting in a categorical judgment (Kuroda, 1972).

2   Null arguments

2.1   Pro-drop parameter

Since Taraldsen's (1978) generalization on the relationship between rich agreement and null subjects, the null subject phenomenon has been assumed to be related to the richness of agreement morphology, as in shown in Chomsky (1981: 241) who states that "when there is overt agreement, the subject deletion {is} recoverable."   Rizzi (1986) identifies the requirements of "licensing" and "identification" for *pro*-drop.

Rich agreement languages, like Italian and Spanish, "license" null subjects by the governing node INFL, and "identifies" its missing grammatical information, based on the rich agreement inflection carrying the φ-features of person, number and gender.

2.2   Discourse-oriented parameter

Huang (1984) notes that Chinese, which lacks agreement entirely, allows null arguments both in the subject and object position, whenever they pick up antecedents from discourse. Incorporating a typological distinction of 'sentence-oriented' and 'discourse-oriented' languages, he claims that discourse-oriented languages share clustering properties, which are not observed in sentence-oriented languages. First, following Li & Thompson (1976), discourse-oriented languages have topic prominence, in which a topic, the prominent element, occurs sentence initially, forming the topic-comment construction. Second, following Tsao (1977, cited in Huang, 1984: 549), discourse-oriented languages have a topic deletion and a topic chain rule, by which a topic is deleted and identified as its discourse antecedent. Third, an anaphor can pick up the antecedent from discourse, without being limited within a sentence boundary. According to Huang (1984: 557), the above clustering properties are derived from one independent parameter of [± discourse-oriented]. Huang (1984) further proposes that null pronouns are licensed by this parameter.

(1)   Binding of a topic to a null argument in Huang (1984);

[*Top e_i*], [Zhangsan shuo [Lisi bu renshi e_i]].
            Zhangsan say   Lisi not know *e*
        'Zhangsan said that Lisi didn't know [*e*].'

Huang's analysis: 'Him, Zhangsan said that Lisi didn't know.'
e_i = Him, Him $\neq$ Zhangsan, Him $\neq$ Lisi, Him = discourse topic
            (taken from Huang, 1984: 542)

In Huang's analysis (1), the null object is bound by the sentence initial [Top ϕ_i]. The status of the null object is defined as a *variable,* given that 'α is a *variable* if and only if it is locally A'-bound and in an A-position' (Chomsky, 1981: 330). According to Huang (1984), while a null object is a *variable,* a null subject can be either *variable* or *pro,* depending on where it occurs. When the null subject is c-commanded by the matrix antecedent, it can be a *pro.*[1] In other contexts, null subjects are *variables,* bound by the zero-topic. In the following section I will develop a modified theory of

---

[1] Null subject as a *pro*:   Zhangsan$_i$ xiwang [e_i keyi kanjian Lisi]
                                Zhangsan hope   can see   Lisi
                                'Zhangsan hopes that [*e*] can see Lisi.'
                                'Zhangsan hopes that [he] can see Lisi.'
                                (Chinese: Huang, 1984: 538)
Null subject as a *variable*:   *e*   lai-le.
                                    Come-LE
                                'Came.'
                                Meaning: 'He came.' (Chinese: Huang, 1984: 537)

Huang (1984) for Korean and Japanese, in which his discourse-oriented parameter is fully accepted, but the status of null arguments is analyzed as a *pro*.

2.2   Syntax of null arguments in Korean

Analyses of null arguments in discourse-oriented languages have not reached a consensus among researchers. While Kuroda (1965, cited in Zushi, 2003) suggest that null objects in Japanese show *variable* properties, as proposed in Huang (1984), other researchers claim that null arguments in Korean and Japanese are *pros* (Cole, 1987; Kang 1986; Moon, G. S.; Kim, S. H., 1993; Zushi 2003).[2] Proponents of the *pro* analysis provide data showing *pro* properties defined in Chomsky; 'α is a *pronominal* if and only if it is free or locally A-bound by β with an independent θ-role (Chomsky, 1982; 81).'

(2)   *pro* properties of null arguments in Korean

    a. *e*   cham   cal ttwuin-ta.
          really   fast run-DECL
      '[*e*] *really* runs fast.'
       '[he/she/it] really runs fast.'

    b. John$_i$-i   [Mary-ka e_i / ku$_i$ / caki$_i$-lul   ttaly-ess-ta]   ko   ha-ess-ta.
       John$_i$-NOM [Mary-NOM e_i / him$_i$ /self$_i$-ACC hit-PAST-DEC] COMP say-PAST-DECL
       'John said that Mary hit [him] /him/himself.'

In (2a), the null subject refers to someone physically present, which bears its own θ-role, behaving as "its overt counterpart that alternates with it' (Chomsky, 1982; 81). (2b) contains a null object which is in the variation with the overt resumptive pronouns, *ku$_i$* or *caki*, which bears its own theta role in the base position, suggesting it is base-generated. The null object in (2b) is A-bound by the matrix argument, suggesting it is a *pro,* but not a *variable.* Null arguments in Korean are *pros* which are base-generated, carrying their own theta-roles, and allowed due to the discourse-oriented parameter.

3   Topics

This section concerns the discourse of topics, which has been considered as confusing and elusive as the syntax of topics. Since "topics" are basically a discourse notion, it is prerequisite to understand the discourse of topics in order to understand the syntax of topics. In spite of the extensive use of the term *topic,* there has been "no accepted definition on it" (Reinhart, 1981: 53). As observed in Reinhart (1981: 61), *topic* has been identified mainly from two different criteria: *old information* and *aboutness*, where old information is "a property of the referents denoted by linguistic expressions" and aboutness refers to "a relation between an argument and a position." The term, *old information*, can be identified based on the speaker's belief on the

---

[2] Analyses based on Korean are assumed to apply to Japanese, due to their striking structural similarities.

shared background knowledge which the addressee is assumed to be conscious or aware of (Chafe, 1976).   Lyons (1969) elaborates old information as "contextual dispensability," which requires topics to be "*given* in the general situation" (p.335). Kuno (1972) defines topics as elements with "old, and predictable information," where "the theme ["topic" in the present paper] must be either anaphoric (i.e., previously mentioned) or generic" (p.270, parenthesis = original).   Gundel (1974) claims that a topic is "an element that is part of the presupposed (given or known) information conveyed in the sentence" (p.30).   Based on the information status, Gundel (1974) argues that topics do not need to occur sentence-initially.

The criterion *aboutness* is configuration-based, where a topic precedes its comment.[3]   This term dates back to Plato's concept of subject-predicate, according to Lyons (1969: 335).   Lyons (1969) suggests that one modern interpretation of Plato can be found in Sapir's (1921: 35) "something to talk about" and "something must be said about this subject of discourse once it is selected," referring to topic and comment, respectively.   Hockett (1958: 201, cited in Vallduvi, 1992: 31) provides a now generally held definition of *aboutness* in that "the speaker announces a topic, and then says something about it."

The two criteria allow pronominal subjects in English to be identified as topics, due to the anaphoricity carrying old information and the aboutness establishment between subject and predicate.   A close examination of English shows that topics can be further divided into two types, as follows:

(3)   a. Once there was <u>a wizard</u>.   <u>He</u> lived in Africa.
   b. Once there was <u>a wizard.</u>   He was very wise, rich, and was married to a
      beautiful witch.   They had two sons……….   <u>Now the wizard,</u> he lived in
      Africa.   (Givon, 1976: 153)

(3a) has a pronominal topic, <u>He</u>, whereas (3b) has a full NP topic, <u>the wizard</u>, which are respectively termed as *anaphoric pronominalization (AP)* and *topic-shift (TS)* by Givon (1976: 153).   According to Givon (1976), AP takes an antecedent which had been directly mentioned before, whereas TS occurs when there is an intervening gap between TS and its antecedent.   Halliday (1967) distinguishes the clause initial *theme* (=topic in this paper) into *marked* from *unmarked,* in that a *marked theme* carries the speaker's meaningful option of what (s)he is talking about now, at the point of departure of a clause.   For example, a sentence, *John saw the play,* has an *unmarked theme* of the subject, whereas a sentence, *The play John saw yesterday,* contains an unmarked *theme*, *the play,* representing "a foregrounding of the speaker's point of departure" (Halliday, 1967: 214).[4]   Herring (1990) distinguishes topics into *shifted* and *continuous topic*.   *Continuous topics* take their antecedents from the immediately

---

[3] Topic-comment can be a type of informational articulation, including theme-rhyme (Halliday, 1967), topic-focus (see Vallduvi, 1992, for the refenreces), focus-presupposition (Chomsky, 1972; Prince, 1981, 1986, and others).   According to Prince (1986, p.208), information articulation dates back to Chafe (1976), in that information in a discourse is not unstructured, but speakers form their proposition in accordance with their beliefs about the hearer, in terms of the hearers' possession and their expectation to know.
[4] According to Halliday (1967), *theme* must occur in the clause initial position.   For example, in an interrogative sentence, *did John see the play?,* the theme *did* announces the interrogative mood feature, which in turn demands the polar (yes/no) decision of the listener.

preceding discourse, and can be pronominalized or deleted, depending on the linguistic parameters. *Shifted topics* can be discontinuous from the immediate discourse, and expressed by full lexical NPs, often with a topicalizing expression, such as *as for X*.

(4)   Korean: A mother-child interaction:
        They are talking to mother about her tooth extraction.

        a) Child:
        kuntey,   na-ka, na-nun *e* twukay-na   ppop-ass-e.
        by the way, I-NOM I-TOP,   two-EMPHASIS MARKER   extract-PAST-DECL
        'By the way, I, I extracted two.'
        'By the way, I extracted two [of my teeth].'

        b) Mother:
        anya, *e* hana-pakke   an-ppop-ass-e.
        No,   one-only   not extract- PAST-DECL
        'No, extracted only one.'
        'No, [you] extracted only one.'

        c) Child:
        ikes-un   *e* *e*   an ppop-ass-e.
        this- TOP   not extract- PAST-DEC.
         'This, didn't extract.'
         'As for this, [I] didn't extract [it].'

The above Korean example (4) shows that Korean has the two types of topics, and they have different syntactic manifestations. Continuous topics or anaphoric topics are expressed as null, as in *ne* 'you,' and *na* 'I,' in (4a) and (4b), respectively. On the other hand, a shifted topic or intensified theme, as in (4c) is expressed as a topic marked NP in the sentence initial position. In (4c), the Topic-marked NP, *ikes* 'this (tooth),' contrasts with the child's other teeth, such as 'that tooth,' carrying *contrastiveness* and *prominence*. In other words, while unmarked themes or anaphoric pronouns are suppressed, marked theme and shifted topics are morphologically marked with the Topic marker *nun.*

4   Topic as left-periphery and morphological marking

The previous section discussed Korean's two types of topics, null arguments and topics, with the two being distinguished from each other based on the presence or absence of discourse-prominence. A topic carries discourse-prominence, while a null argument does not. In this section, I will show that topichood in Korean is a combination of the left-periphery configuration and the morphological –*nun* phrase. Evidence comes from data exhibiting that (i) not all –*nun* phrases carry topichood, such as *aboutness,* and (ii) not all left-peripheral phrases represent topichood, such as a *standing-out* property resulting in a *categorical j*udgment (see Kuroda, 1972).

In (5), only the sentence-initial *–nun* phrase, not the sentence-medial *-nun* phrase, can establish a topic-comment construction and its related properties, such as *aboutness*.

(5)   A mother-child interaction: W is J's baby sister

　　a) Mother:
　　J-nun　W-ka　　　hangsang ippe?
　　J-TOP　W-NOM　　always　is pretty?
　　'J, W is always pretty?'
　　'Do you always like W?'

　　b) Child:
　　na, nunkes-to ippuko,　usnunkes-to　ippuko,　ta　　　　ippe
　　I, crying also is pretty　laughing also is pretty,　everything is pretty
　　'I, crying is pretty, laughing is pretty, everything is pretty.'
　　'I like [her] crying, [her] laughing, and I like [her] everything.'

　　c) Mother:
　　emma-nun　　ununkes-un　　pokisil-e.
　　Mother- TOP　crying- FOC　　is ugly
　　'Mother, (her) crying is ugly.'
　　'I don't like [her] crying.'

(5c) contains two *–nun* marked phrases. The 1st *–nun* phrase, *emma* 'mother' is a topic as well as a focus, depending on the interpretation.   When the speaker wants to compare herself with her daughter, J, it carries focushood, such as contrastiveness. Without this contrastiveness, the *–nun* phrase shows topichood, meaning that the sentence is about *emma,* establishing *aboutness* between the topic and the rest of the sentence, i.e., the comment.   On the other hand, the 2nd *–nun* phrase, *ununkes* 'crying' is the focus, making a comparison between crying and laughing, in that she likes the baby's laughing, but not the crying.   The 2nd *–nun* marked NP cannot be a topic, because it cannot establish an *aboutness* relationship between the *topic* and the *comment.*[5]   This indicates that topichood involves the left-periphery configuration.

However, not every left-peripheral phrase exhibits topic properties like *categorical* judgment.   Before introducing examples, let us discuss the concept of *categorical* judgment.   *Categorical* judgment, along with *thetic* judgment, originates from the 19th century philosopher Brentano, and was elaborated on by his student Marty, (Kuroda, 1972).   *Categorical* judgment consists of two separate successive acts, in which one is an act of recognizing an entity and the other is an act of making a statement.   On the other hand, *thetic* judgment consists of a simple statement of an event or a state.   Thus, *categorical* and *thetic* judgments are also referred to as double and simple judgments, respectively.   Kuroda (1972) claims that this philosophical concept of *categorical* and *thetic* judgments accounts for the grammar structure of languages like Japanese.   *Categorical* statements are topic-centered,

---

[5] In other words, focushood observed in a topic should be a subproperty of the topic.   A topic can be a focus, but not vice versa.   Only a focus in the topic-position obtains topichood.

where the speaker recognizes an entity and then makes a statement about that entity, while *thetic* statements simply report an event, without any center of attention.[6] [7]

(6)   a) categorical judgment
    inu-wa   neko-o   oikakete iru   (Japanese)
    kae-nun   koyangi-lul   ccocko-iss-ta   (Korean)
    dog-TOP   cat- ACC   chase-PRES PROG-DECL
    'As for the dog, it is chasing a cat' or 'The dog is chasing a cat'

    b) thetic judgment
    inu-ga   neko-o   oikakete iru.   (Japanese)
    kae-ka   koyangi-lul   ccocko-iss-ta   (Korean)
    dog- NOM   cat- ACC   chase-PRES PROG-DECL
    'The/a dog is chasing a cat.'
    (Japanese examples; taken from Kuroda, 1972: 161)

In the Korean/Japanese data, (6a) has Topic-marked NPs, while (6b) has Nom-case marked NPs. Kuroda (1972) observes that the Topic-marked NPs in (6a) are what the speaker's interest is directed towards and he wants to make a statement about the event in relation to that entity. In (6a), the *-nun/-wa* marked phrase, the dog, is assigned the distinguished role of constituting the overall event. On the other hand, the Nom-case marked NP in (6b), the dog, and the cat are symmetrically distributed so that they constitute the overall event. In other words, in Japanese and Korean, a topic construction is a categorical statement, in which the topic NP is the primary constituent toward which the speaker's interest is directed.

(7)   A lunch table women's conversation about gender roles in their homes.
    a) ay-nun | eccaphi   nay-ka   *e* khiwunun kenikka.
      child(ren)- TOP | anyway   I- NOM   raise
      'children, I have to raise them anyway'
      'As for the children, I have to raise [them] myself anyway.'

    b) nay-ka   eccaphi   ay-nun/lul   khiwunun kenikka.
      I- NOM   anyway   child(ren)- FOC/ ACC   raise
      'I have to raise children anyway.'

(7a) is the original statement by the speaker, who initiated a sentence with a Topic marked NP, *ay-nun,* 'child(ren)- TOP.' (7a) has the same truth condition as (7b). (7b) has the Nominative-case marked NP, *nay-ka,* 'I- NOM.' These two sentence-initial phrases carry discourse-prominence because the speaker initiates his/her sentence with the phrase. The sentence-initial elements can also, in Vallduvi's words (1992:

---

[6] Thetic statements are simple statements about events or entities, also termed 'event-reporting' (Lambrecht, 1994: 137), 'presentational sentence' (Bolinger, cited in Lambrecht, 1994: 138), 'news sentences' (Schmerling, 1976, cited in Lambrecht, 1994: 138), and 'neutral descriptions' (Kuno, 1972).
[7] The two judgments are indicated in specific ways in grammar, in that categorical statements are marked by a particular morphological marker, a phrasal arrangement, or an intonation break (Raposo and Uriagereka, 1995: 185), whereas thetic statements form a single prosodic unit (Jäger, 1995, p.233).

47), be interpreted to perform the role of "linking up" between the "vehicular part" of the information and the oncoming information.[8] However, the Case-marked sentences lose categorical interpretation.[9] Only the –*nun* phrase in (7a) participates in the categorical statement, as observed in Kuroda (1972). (7a) has the interpretation that the speaker's interest is primarily directed toward *ay* '(her) children' as "the identity of the particular individual entity that he has in mind" (Kuroda, 1972: 166), while the rest of the sentence is about the topic. Raposo and Uriagereka (1995: 185, henceforth R & U) suggest that the above construction has "the semantic import of holding its subject [=topic, in the present study] in a standing manner – that is, irrespective of the event in which this subject participates." Adopting R & U (1995: 186), (7a) and (7b) have the same eventive structure, but (7a) has a "scoped out" topic, meaning that it is outside the scope of the event operator. Kuroda (1987, cited in Choi, S. J., 2000) studied the use of the Japanese topic marker, –*wa,* in a Japanese translation of Tolstoy, and claims that –*wa* phrases function to express either the point of view or the locus of consciousness. The given data show that this "scoped-out" or "topic-centered" property of topics is attributed only to the –*nun* phrase, but not to the case-marked topic, in the sentence initial phrase.

In sum, topics carry *old information, aboutness,* and *discourse-prominence.* In Korean, topics appear in the left-periphery of a sentence with the morphological marker, –*nun*. This results in categorical interpretation of the topic construction. Thus, topics in Korean are scoped-out from the rest of the sentence.

5. Topic and Null argument mapping in syntax and discourse

In the previous section, it was pointed out that topichood is the combination of the morphological –*nun* marking and the left-peripheral configuration. In order to account for a topic construction in Korean, Cho, J. H.'s (1997) tree structure is adopted.

---

[8] Vallduvi (1992) divides information into three primitives--topic (link), focus, and tail, as follows:

   S = { Focus, Ground}
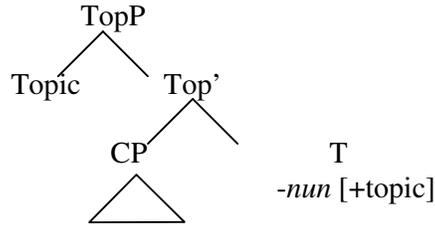   Ground = {Link, Tail} (Link = Topic)   (Vallduvi, 1992: 89)

According to Vallduvi, a sentence information structure consists of Focus and Ground, where Focus is the locus of new information. Ground, on the other hand, is defined negatively as the complement of the Focus, that is, background or presupposition, serving the role of anchoring the vehicular part. The Ground is divided into Topic (Link, in his terms) and Tail.

[9] The sentence initial position can be occupied by an Acc-case marked phrase, as follows:

ay-lul	eccaphi	nay-ka	*e*	khiwunun kenikka.
Child(ren)- ACC	anyway	I- NOM		raise

   'Children, I have to raise anyway.'
   'Children, I have to raise [them] anyway.'

Even though the sentence-initial phrase is discourse-prominent and serves a linking role, the sentence neither receives a topic-comment interpretation, nor a categorical interpretation. Depending on the interpretation, it may be argued that the sentence has the above topic properties, but the sentence with the Acc-phrase has a lesser degree of topichood than the –*nun* marked phrase.

(8)   The topic construction in Korean

```
                        TopP
                       /    \
                  Topic      Top'
                            /    \
                         CP        T
                        /__\    -nun [+topic]
```

                                      (Cho, 1997: 329)

According to this model, the [+topic] feature occupies the head of the Topic phrase. The *–nun* marker is the morphological realization of the [+topic] feature, which in turn undergoes affixation to a base-generated topic phrase in the Spec of the Topic Phrase. Similar variations have also been proposed by Choe (1995) and Moon (1989), who assume that the topic is base-generated in the Spec of the highest functional node and then enters into a spec-head relation, where the head carries a topic related feature.[10] Moon (1989: 88) argues, for instance, that the topic is licensed by a D(iscourse-morpheme) which is located in the highest functional node (that is, TopP in Cho's (1997) model), and "plays a role in making the connection between two sentences by transmitting the content of a discourse topic to a subsequent sentence in the same discourse domain." This model assumes that the Korean topic construction is analogous to English left-dislocation, following Chomsky (1977: 81).

(9)   As far as John is concerned, I will never believe the claims that have been
        made about **him.**   (bold letters-original, Chomsky, 1977: 80)

According to Chomsky (1977), *John* in (9) is coreferent with *him*, which violates the subjacency principle. The acceptability of this sentence suggests, however, that *John* and *him* are base-generated. This base-generation hypothesis is supported by the following sentences in Korean.

(10)   a) pihanki-nun   747-i   khu-ta.
           Airplaine- TOP   747- NOM   big-DECL.

---

[10] The issue of whether a topic is base-generated or moved has undergone long debate in the Korean/Japanese linguistics circle. Proponents of the movement analysis, such as Oh, C. K. (1971, cited in Ahn, S. H., 1990) claim that a topic is transformationally generated. In this analysis, a definite NP with a particle undergoes preposing, followed by the attachment of the *nun* particle, which is adjoined to S. As in the given example below, the topic constituent is generated in the canonical argument position and then undergoes movement to the sentence initial position, leaving a trace, as follows.

           ku chayk-un   Mary-ka   *t*   pil-lye-ka-ss-ta.
           That book-TOP   Mary-NOM   borrowed-and-took.
           'That book, Mary borrowed *t*.'

Some researchers divide topics into a movement-type and a base-generation type. With this division, argument topics, as in the above sentence, involve movement, whereas other gapless topics, with the exception of double subject constructions, are base-generated (Bak, S. Y. 1981; Ura, 1995).

'Airplane, 747 is big.'
'As for airplanes, 747s are big.' (Li and Thompson, 1976: 468)

b) i-chayk$_j$-un   [Tori-ka   [[e_i e_j sassten] saram$_i$]ul   mannassta.
   This book- TOP Tori- NOM   buy- PAST person- ACC meet- PAST-DEC
   'This book, Tori met the person who bought.'
   'As for this book, Tori met the person who bought [it]' (Moon, 1989; 67)

c) ku chayk$_j$-un   Mary-ka e_j / kukue$_j$-ul   pil-lye-ka-ss-ta.
   That book- TOP   Mary- NOM e/ it- ACC   borrow-and-take- PAST-DEC
   'That book, Mary borrowed e/it.'
   'As for that book, Mary borrowed [it]/it.'

(10a) suggests that a topic does not need to bind an argument in the comment.   (10b), if moved, would violate the subjacency principle.   As it is, however, the sentence is acceptable, suggesting that the topic is base-generated in the sentence initial position. (10c) shows that a topic refers to an overt resumptive pronoun that can carry its own θ-role.   This, in turn, alternates with a null argument, suggesting that a null argument is not a trace left behind after the movement of the topic in the sentence-initial position.

While (10b) and (10c) are the so-called argument topics or gapped topics, where the topic is coreferred with a null argument or a resumptive pronoun in the theta-position, (10a) is a gapless topic construction, where the topic is not part of the argument structure of the main predicate.   Then, a question is the grammatical status of a topic phrase.   According to Chomsky (1977:.81), a topic construction involves "rules of predication."   In (10b) and (10c), for instance, a topic is a coreferent with either a null argument or an overt resumptive pronoun.   According to Chomsky, the relationship between a topic and its null/resumptive pronoun is not construal, but rather predication.   (9) is repeated in (11).

(11)   As far as John is concerned, I will never believe the claims that have been
        made about **him.**   (bold letters-original, Chomsky, 1977, p.80)

In (11), *John* in the left-dislocation provides reference to *him,* which is not by c-commanding, but predication.   A topic saturates an open proposition, which contains a null/resumptive pronoun that needs its reference.   Chomsky (1977) assumes that this predication is based on "aboutness," which, rather than being a precise grammar concept, is a vague relationship between a topic and its predicative comment (see Kuno, 1972; Li and Thompson, 1976; Mathesius, 1915, cited in Vallduvi, 1992: 31; Reinhart 198; Strawson, 1964, for the concept of "aboutness").

(12)   Regarding your second proposal,| the board has found it feasible.
        (Reinhart, 1981: 63)

(13)   A mother-child interaction about a cavity in the child's teeth and about food
        which could cause cavities

Child: cereal-un‖   (*e* = ippal-i)   an-sseke
cereal-TOP ‖   (*e* = teeth-NOM)   not-rotten
'Cereal, don't get rotten.'
'As for cereal, my teeth don't get rotten.'/ 'Cereal doesn't rot your teeth'.

In (12), the topic does not have any coreferring argument in the predicate.   In (13), the topic is not coreferent with the null argument in the main predicate.   Thus, the topic may or may not be the same entity as the null argument.   Following Chomsky (1977), a topic and a null/resumptive pronoun are assumed base-generated in the Spec of TopP, and the theta-position, respectively.   These entities, the topic, the null argument, and the resumptive pronoun, carry old information, but their surface manifestation is determined by the interaction between the discourse and the syntax.

(14)   A lunch table conversation among women about their husbands' breakfast habits.

Chelsussi-nun   kunyang caki-ka   *e*   chayngkyese mekeyo
Chelsussi- TOP   just self- NOM   make-and-eat-DECL
'Chelsussi, he just makes and eats.'
'As for Chelsussi, he just makes and eats [breakfast] for himself**.**

(15)   A lunch table women's conversation about gender roles at their homes

Namcatul$_i$-un   *e$_i$*/caki$_i$-ka amuli   *e* towacwueto kuren sensu-ka   epnapoayo
men$_i$-TOP   *e$_i$*/self$_i$-NOM so much   help   such sense-NOM does not exist
'Men, no matter how much *e/*they help**,** such sense does not exist.'
'As for men, they have no sense at all, no matter how much they help us themselves.'

(14) and (15) each contain a topic, a resumptive pronoun, and a null argument.   In (14), the topic, *Chelsussi,* is corefernt with the resumptive pronoun, *caki,* 'self,' and the null argument refers to 'breakfast.'   In (15), the topic, *namcatul,* 'men,' is coreferential with the resumptive pronoun, *caki,* and the null argument refers to 'us,' which means 'women.'   In this paper, I argue that the distribution of the topic, the resumptive pronoun, and the null argument is regulated by both syntax and by discourse.   The topic is in the left-periphery that makes it the most prominent constituent, licensed by the [+topic] feature of the head of the highest functional TopP. The topic position in the Spec of TopP performs the role of linking-up between the previous discourse and the ongoing information.   Thus, it carries both the old information and the prominence of the speakers' marked option to initiate the clause. While topics are base-generated in the Spec of TopP, null arguments are base-generated in the theta-position.   The null arguments in (14) and (15), which are simply repetitive, are the least prominent constituents of the sentences, and are, therefore, favored to be null to avoid discourse-redundancy.[11]   The resumptive

---

[11] Following Kim, S. H. (1993) and Park, H. (2004), null arguments in Korean have a similar distribution as the pronouns of English, even though the distribution of null arguments in Korean and overt pronouns in English are not exactly the same (see Kim, S. W., 1999).   According to Kim, S. H.

pronouns in (14) and (15) can be replaced by null arguments, given that both the resumptive pronoun and the pronoun are used to express anaphoricity. The presence of a resumptive pronoun brings the semantic import of discourse-prominence, as shown in the Meaning of the sentences that contain the reflexives *for himself* in (14) and *themselves* in (15). In addition to the semantic import, the sentences with resumptive pronouns have the stronger interpretation of a categorical statement. The topics in (14) and (15) are analyzed as being coreferrent with the resumptive pronouns, which are the external arguments of the main predicates. When the resumptive pronouns are replaced by null arguments, the surface sequence of [Topic$_i$ [e_i [$_{VP}$]] may sound like the topic is the external argument itself, as argued in Suh, S. (1992).[12] On the other hand, the presence of the resumptive pronoun invokes an extra predication between the topic and the sentential predicate, by which the topic serves as a "scoped-out" constituent from the rest of the sentential predicate.

In sum, topic constructions in Korean involve a "rule of predication," where a topic saturates an open proposition, following Chomsky (1977). Again, adopting Chomsky (1977), a topic is assumed to be base-generated in the spec of the highest functional node, Topic Phrase, the head of which is occupied by the [+topic] feature with its morphological manifestation *–nun.* The relationship between the topic and the proposition is aboutness, and a topic may or may not corefer to a null argument(s) or a resumptive pronoun(s) in base-theta positions. The distribution of these three constituents is regulated by both syntax and discourse. The topic is the most prominent constituent in the Spec of TopP, occurring in the left-periphery with the *nun* marker attached. The left-periphery yields the topic properties of old information, linking-up, aboutness, and prominence. The combination of the left-periphery and the morphological marking invokes a categorical statement, by which a topic is scoped-out from the rest of the sentence. While a topic carries the most prominence, a null argument carries the least prominence, meaning that it should be used whenever possible to avoid discourse-redundancy. Null arguments can alternate with resumptive pronouns. The presence of the latter serves to bring semantic import with discourse-prominence. In addition, the presence of a resumptive pronoun makes a topic construction an extrapredication, by which a topic is more scoped-out from the sentential predicate.

(1993), the availability of null arguments depends on the DO parameter, which determines the recovery domain for anaphoric arguments. In DO languages, like Korean, the domain is discourse, in which null arguments can be bound to any discourse antecedent. In non-DO languages, the recovery domain is a sentence, in which the recovery must take place via rich inflections within a sentence boundary, as in languages like Spanish. On the other hand, English is a non-DO language, but its inflections are too impoverished to recover the missing information of the null arguments. Thus, it requires the presence of overt arguments. Similarly, Park, H. (2004) assumes that any languages can recover anaphors because the pragmatic module is active, but the choice of anaphoric device follows a language-specific discourse pattern; Korean uses zero forms, whereas English uses overt pronouns.

[12] According to Suh, S. (1992), this kind of topic construction has a topic in the spec of IP, just like a subject in English.

References

Ahn, Sung Ho. 1990. *Korean quantification and universal grammar.* Ph.D. dissertation, University of Connecticut.

Bak, Sung Yong. 1981. *Studies in Korean Syntax: Ellipsis, Topic, and Relative Constructions.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Hawaii, Honolulu, Hawaii.

Chafe, Wallas L. 1976. Givenness, contrastiveness, definiteness, subjects, topics, and point of view. In C. Li (ed), *Subject and topic* (25-55). NY: Academic Press.

Cho, Jai-Hyung. 1997. Remarks on Topic Constructions. In *Inmun Nonchong, 7,* pp.311-399.

Choe. Hyun Sook. (1995). Focus and topic movement in Korean and licensing. In Kiss, K. (Ed), *Discourse Configurational Languages,* pp. 269-334. Oxford University Press: Oxford.

Choi, Hye-Won. 1999. *Optimizing structure in context: scrambling and information structure.* Stanford, CA: CSLI

Chomsky, Noam. 1981. *Lectures and government and binding.* Dordrecht: Foris.

Chomsky, Noam. 1982. *Some concepts and consequences of the theory of government and binding.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Givon, Talmy. 1976. Topic, pronoun, and grammatical agreement. In Charles Li (ed), *Subject and Topic* (pp.459 – 185). NY: Academic Press, Inc.

Gundel, Jeannette. 1974. *The role of topic and comment in linguistic theory.* Bloomington: Indiana University Linguistics Club.

Halliday, M. A. I. 1968. Notes on transitivity and theme in English, Part 2. *Journal of Linguistics, 3.* 199-244

Herring Susan. 1990. Information structure as a consequence of word order type. *BLS,* 163-174.

Huang, James. 1984. On the distribution and reference of empty pronouns. *Linguistic Inquiry, 15,* 531-574.

Jäger, G. 1995. The stage/individual contrast revisited. In the *Proceedings of the 15th West Coast Conference on Formal Linguistics,* 225-240.

Kang, Young-Se. 1986. *Korean syntax and universal grammar,* Ph.D. Dissertation, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Kim, Sun-Hee. 1993. *Division of labor between grammar and pragmatics: the distribution and interpretation of anaphor.* Ph.D. Dissertation, Yale University.

Kim, Soowon. 1998. Sloppy/strict identity, empty objects, and NP ellipsis. *Journal of East Asian Linguistics, 8,* 255-284.

Kuno, Susumu. 1972. Functional sentence perspective. *Linguistic Inquiry, 3.* 269-320.

Kuroda, S. Y. 1972. The categorical and thetic judgment: Evidence from Japanese syntax. *Foundation of language, 9,* 153-185.

Lambrecht, K. 1994. *Information structure and sentence form.* Cambridge University Press.

Li, Charles & Sandra. Thompson. 1976. Subject and Topic: a new typology of language. In C. Li (ed.), *Subject and Topic* (pp. 459-489). New York: Academic Press.

Lyons, John. 1969. *Introduction to theoretical linguistics.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Moon, Gui-Sun. 1989. *The syntax of null arguments with special reference to Korean.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Texas.

Park, Hyesun. 2004. A minimalist approach to null subjects and objects in second language acquisition. *Second Language Research, 20, 1,* 1-32.

Prince, Ellen. F. 1981. Topicalization, focus-movement, and Yiddish-movement: A pragmatic differentiation. *BLS 7,* 249-264.

Reinhart, Tanya. 1981. Pragmatics and linguistics: An analysis of sentence topics. *Philosophica, 27,* 53-94.

Raposo, E. and Uriagereka, J. 1995.   Two types of small clauses (Toward a syntax of Theme/rheme relations).   In A. Cardinialetti and M. T. Guasti (eds.), *Syntax and Semantics: Small clauses* 28, 179 – 208. London, U.K.: Academic Press, Inc.

Rizzi, Luigi. 1986. Null objects in Italian and the theory of *pro. Linguistic Inquiry,*17, 501-537.

Sapir, Edward. 1921, *Language: An introduction to the study of speech.*   Harcourt: Brace and World.

Strawson, P. F. 1964. Identifying reference and truth-values. *Theoria,* 30, 96-118.

Suh, S. 1992. The distribution of topic- & nominative-marked phrases in Korean: The universality of IP structure. *MIT working papers in linguistics, 16,* 207-221.

Taraldsen. 1978. *On the NIC, Vacuous Application and the That-Trace Filter* Bloomington: Indiana University Linguistics Club.

Ura, H. 1995. *Multiple feature checking: A theory of grammatical function splitting.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, MIT.

Vallduvi, Enric. 1992. *The informational component.* New York: Garland Publishing Inc.

Yang, Dong-Whee 1983. The extended binding theory of anaphors. *Language Research, 19,* 169-192.

Zushi, Mihoko. 2003. Null arguments: the case of Japanese and Romance. *Lingua 113,* 559-604.

So-Young Kim
University of Wisconsin-Madison
Department of English

skim31@wisc.edu