

Heritage vs. Second Language Learners' Acquisition of Relative Clauses in Korean

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1 Background

The goal of the current study is to investigate the differences in acquisition of Korean externally-headed relative clauses (EHRCs) by both heritage (HL) and non-heritage (NHL) learners of Korean. HL are defined as having been exposed to Korean in the home environment from a young age, and NHL are defined as having first been exposed to Korean as adults, having already fully acquired their first language. The dominant language is English for both groups. Two types of EHRCs—subject and object—are considered.

(1) Korean subject EHRC

영화를	본	여자
yenghwa.lul	po.n	yeca
movie.ACC	see.PASTREL	woman
'woman who saw a movie'		

(2) Korean object EHRC

여자가	본	영화
yeca.ka	po.n	yenghwa
woman.NOM	see.PASTREL	movie
'movie that a woman saw'		

Although HL typically have higher proficiency than NHL (especially in phonology, see Montrul (2010)), results for any advantage in morpho-syntax is mixed. O'Grady *et. al.* (2001) found no overall advantage for HL, but Kim (2004) found that HL did not make errors interpreting the head of the RC—head errors (see (3) below)—while NHL did. A head error is when the first noun phrase in the relative clause's linear string of words is interpreted as the head of the EHRC even though in Korean the last NP in the linear string is the head of the EHRC. This mistake is made because of transfer from English; in English the first noun phrase in the linear string of a relative clause is the head of the relative clause (as in the erroneous interpretation of (3) below).

(3) Head error (O'Grady *et. al.* (2001), pp. 288)

남자가 좋아하는 여자

Correct interpretation:

[relative clause]	head
[namca-ka	__	cohaha-nun]	yeca
man-NOM	like-PRS	woman	
'the woman who the man likes'			

Erroneous interpretation:

head	[relative clause]
namca	[__	cohaha-nun yeca]
man		like-PRS	woman
'the man who likes the woman'			

Lee (2014) instead found a difference by dividing learners by accuracy level (low accuracy HL and NHL tended to have more head errors, while high accuracy HL and NHL did not make as many head errors). All three studies mentioned compared HL and NHL on a picture-selection comprehension task. The current study aims to build on previous research by investigating both comprehension and production for HL and NHL, which has not been investigated previously.

2 Current study

Participants included 11 HL and 15 NHL from comparable proficiency levels, as well as 5 native speakers as a control group. Participants completed a picture selection comprehension task (originally from O'Grady *et. al.* (2001)) and a written production task (modeled after Lee-Ellis

(2011)). Participants completed both tasks along with a brief language background survey in an online survey format (Google Forms). Both tasks included subject and object EHRCs. (4) below is an example of a question from the picture selection task. Participants heard a recording of a Korean EHRC (either subject or object) and chose the correct referent for the relative clause in a multiple-choice question format. (5) below is an example of a question from the written production task. Participants looked at a picture and typed in a relative clause that referred to the object in the picture denoted by a star.

(4) Picture selection comprehension task example

Participant hears a recording:
 “The man who is looking at the woman” (F)

Vocabulary
 남자 man 여자 woman 보다 see

Select one:
 A B C D E F Not sure

(5) Written production task example

Participant types the answer:
 “The horse who loves the snake”

별이 어디에 있어요?
 별은 _____ 위에 있어요.

Vocabulary:
 뱀 snake 말 horse 사랑하다 love

3 Research questions and results

- (1) Do heritage learners have an advantage over non-heritage learners in acquiring Korean EHRCs at the intermediate level? A 3x2x2 ANOVA failed to find a significant difference between the overall (production + comprehension) accuracy between HL and NHL groups.
- (2) Are there differences between the two groups in production vs. comprehension? The same analysis found that comprehension was more accurate than production across groups ($p=0.001$).
- (3) Are there differences between the two groups in subject vs. object EHRCs? No significant difference was found on accuracy of subject vs. object EHRCs ($p=0.45$).

4 Contribution

This study confirms results found by O’Grady *et. al.* (2001) that HL do not have an advantage compared to NHL in the comprehension of Korean EHRCs. This study however also included a production task and is therefore able to include no advantage in the production of Korean EHRCs, as well as no advantage overall (comprehension + production). Another contribution of this study is the introduction of the online survey methodology for similar studies. This methodology aims to increase the number of participants in such studies when combined with collaboration of researchers at separate institutions.

Selected references

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