

## L1 Influence on Korean EFL Learners' Acquisition of Ergative Verbs and Middle Verbs in English

This paper investigates L1 effects on Korean speakers' learning of ergative verbs and middle verbs in English which are used as both transitive verbs and intransitive verbs without transformation such as passivization. According to Keyser & Roeper (1984), the verbs "stop" and "read" in (1a) and (2a) are categorized as transitive verbs and the intransitive pair of them, (1b) and (2b) are categorized as an ergative verb and a middle verb, respectively.

- (1) a. I stopped the car.  
       b. The car stopped.
- (2) a. I read the book.  
       b. The book reads easily.

Even though ergative verbs and middle verbs are the same in terms of having transitive form, they are different syntactically and semantically. This is why they are categorized differently. According to Cho (1995) and Ko (1997), Korean has ergative verbs but not middle verbs. As you can see in example (3) and (4), Korean verb '읽다(read)' is only used as a transitive verb so '히(passive suffix)' is attached to the verb '읽다(read)' in intransitive sentence.

- (3) a. 나는 차를 멈췄다.  
       Na.nun Cha.lul Mem.chwess.ta  
       I-Top Car-Acc Stop-past-declarative.  
       'I stopped the car.'
- b. 차가 멈췄다.  
       Cha.ka. Mem.chwess.ta.  
       Car-Nom Stop-past-declarative.  
       '(The) car stopped'
- (4) a. 나는 책을 읽는다.  
       Na.nun. Chayk.ul Swip.key Ilk.nun.ta.  
       I-Top Book-Acc Read-present-declarative.  
       'I read a book.'
- b. 그 책은 쉽게 읽힌다.  
       Ku Chayk.un Swip.key Ilk.hin.ta.  
       The Book-top easily Read-passive suffix-declarative.  
       The book reads easily.

Based on this, this paper assumes that Korean EFL learners would have more difficulty learning English middle verbs than English ergative verbs. In particular, Korean counterpart

verbs which have the same meaning of English middle verbs come to be passivized when they are used as intransitive verbs. Then it is expected that Korean EFL learners will overly passivize English middle verbs in intransitive sentences. To examine these assumptions, this study analyzes Korean EFL learners' comprehension of English ergative verbs and middle verbs with a forced choice task and grammatical adequacy test.

22 Native speakers of Korean participated in this experiment. First, they did the forced choice task where they were given a questionnaire containing English sentences with two choices on the main verb: one being a middle verb or ergative verb, another being a passive form. They were asked to choose the grammatical one as shown in (5):

(5) The book (reads / is read) easily because of many pictures to help understanding.

The second task was the grammatical adequacy test where the participants were given another questionnaire containing English sentences with 4 different types of main verb: ergative verb, middle verb, passivized ergative verb, passivized middle verb. (6) is an example of middle verb sentence. For each sentence, the participants were asked to rate on the scale from 0 to 3; 0 being the least grammatically acceptable and 3 being the most grammatically acceptable.

(6) Without advertising, the clock sells well. (     )

The results show that Korean EFL learners tend to passivize the middle verbs more than the ergative verbs in intransitive sentences. Their L1 has influence on their comprehension on English ergative verbs and middle verbs, regardless of their English levels. In addition, another finding in the study is that Korean EFL learners' comprehension of each verb in the same category is different. Further research needs to be conducted to explain the reason why Korean EFL learners' learnability is different on the verbs of the same category.

## References

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