It has been observed that in various languages the domain of direct case assignment extends beyond the arguments of a predicate to include also certain non-subcategorized phrases such as duration and frequency adverbials. But to date no theory has been proposed to explain the extension of the case domain or the particular limits of this extension attested cross-linguistically. This paper offers such a theory, focusing primarily on Korean. Data from Korean, English, and other languages are adduced as evidence for a universally available option whereby the domain of direct case assignment is expanded to include a SITUATION DELIMITER, i.e., a (situation-quantifying) extensive measure expression. It is further shown that certain thematic roles qualify as situation delimiters because quantification is transferred to the clause from the nominal filling the role. The rule proposed for adverbial case is shown to correctly predict well-known semantic effects observed in transitivity alternations which involve situation-delimiting roles, such as the locative alternation.

0. Introduction

Studies of diverse languages have shown that the domain of direct case assignment extends beyond the arguments of a predicate to include also certain non-subcategorized adjuncts such as duration and frequency adverbials (see, inter alia, Maling (1989, 1993), Li (1990), and Ernst (1993)). For example, Korean duratives can receive accusative case:

(1) Tom-un twu sikan-tongan-ul tali-ess-ta
    Tom-Top two hour-period-Acc run-Pst-Dec
    Tom ran for two hours.

But to date no theory has been proposed to explain the extension of the case domain or the limits of this extension. Why just certain types of modifiers, including adverbials of duration and frequency but not, say, manner? In this paper we offer such a theory, with particular reference to Korean case. We present evidence from Korean and other languages.
for a universally available option whereby the domain of direct case assignment is expanded to include a SITUATION DELIMITER, i.e., an extensive measure function which temporally quantifies the event or state depicted by the clause.

A simple universal rule is proposed below to explain the adverbial case facts. This rule also covers semantic generalizations governing certain transitivity alternations, such as the locative alternation:

(2)a. Mary loaded the hay onto the truck.
   b. Mary loaded the truck with hay.

As we will show, direct case on the object correlates with its function as situation delimiter, i.e., the hay is a delimiter in (2a), while the truck is the delimiter in (2b).

Section 1 of this paper presents some key data showing the distribution of the accusative case particle on Korean adjuncts. In Section 2, we give a rough semantic characterization of the range of adjuncts permitting accusative case, in terms of the notion of situation delimiter. Next, we expand and complete our analysis of Korean direct case marking (Section 3). Section 4 specifies the semantics of situation delimiters as extensive measure functions and shows that certain thematic roles qualify as situation delimiters because quantification is transferred to an event from the nominal filling the role (inter alia, Krifka 1989). In Section 5 we support our universal case domain proposal with cross-linguistic data involving adverbials and certain lexical alternations such as the locative alternation.

1. ACCUSATIVE ADJUNCTS IN KOREAN

We begin by examining the distribution of the Korean accusative case particle -(l)ul. This particle appears on objects, where it shows the property characteristic of syntactic case, namely, that it is 'absorbed' in the passive, as shown in (3).


Minswu-Nom Swuni-Acc catch-Pst-Dec

Minswu caught Swuni.

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2 The initial l of the accusative -lul is elided when it immediately follows a consonant. The nominative marker is -ka after a vowel and -i after a consonant.