Wh-Constructions in Korean: A Lexical Account

Jee-Youn Shin

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ABSTRACT This paper investigates wh-constructions in Korean. Korean wh-constructions exhibit a set of properties that is different from those in Chinese and Japanese, which otherwise share many similarities with Korean. This paper attempts to provide a more comprehensive account of the set of properties of Korean wh-constructions, within the Minimalist Program (MP). I propose that Korean wh-words are variables which form binding relations with different operators in the lexicon, by adopting Tsai (1994, 1999). For interrogative wh-words, I argue that a nominal wh-word consists of a variable and a separate phonologically null operator which merges directly into Spec-CP, whereas a why-wh-word (i.e. the adverbial wh-word 'why') is composed of a variable and a null operator as a single unit (for Merge) in the lexicon. I also argue that a nominal wh-variable forms a non-interrogative expression in the lexicon by combining with a non-interrogative quantificational operator which merges either at the DP or PP level, or at the CP level. Incorporating the proposed analysis into the typology of wh-constructions by Tsai, I maintain that Korean employs both Chinese-type and Japanese-type operators.