

A Comparative Study on the Subject-to-Subject Raising Mechanisms between the Korean ‘-kes kaththa’ and English ‘seem’ Constructions

Jungbin Hong

(Pusan National University, Korea)

hongkacy@naver.com

This study investigates the syntactic status and pragmatic functions of the Korean ‘-kes kaththa’ construction by comparing it with the English ‘seem’ construction. Traditionally viewed as a simple modal marker or a grammatical collocation for conjecture, this paper argues that ‘kaththa’ functions as a raising verb structurally and functionally analogous to ‘seem’, validating the availability of subject-to-subject raising constructions in Korean. Although previous studies denied this mechanism, Choi (2016, 2017) empirically demonstrated its validity using negative polarity item (NPI) clausemate conditions and subject honorification.

Syntactically, ‘-kes kaththa’ resembles the ‘it seems that’ structure, but semantically and pragmatically, it parallels the ‘seem to’ structure. This pragmatic alignment occurs because contemporary Korean speakers frequently use ‘-kes kaththa’ to express subjective evaluations based on immediate sensory or internal experiences. By doing so, speakers mitigate assertiveness and achieve conversational modesty, utilizing the construction as a hedge even for highly certain information. This effect is driven by information packaging: raising the embedded subject frames the proposition as a subjective topic-comment sequence rather than an objective declaration of fact. Ultimately, this comparative approach bridges the gap between the formal syntax and discourse utilities of ‘-kes kaththa’.

Selected References

- 엄홍준·김용하. 2009. 주어 인상 구문과 예외적인 격 표시 구문에 대한 비교언어학적 고찰. 언어. 34. 583-602.
- Kiseong Park. 2015. English Raising Constructions and Their Korean Translations. 언어학 연구. 34. 57-75.
- Jihyeon Cha. 2016. Discourse Functions of -kes kaththa in Korean Conversation. 253-276.
- 최진선. 2016. 한국어의 주어 인상에 관한 실험적 연구. 언어연구. 32(1). 161-178.
- 최진선. 2017. 한국어의 주어 인상 구문 ‘-것 같다’: 존대 일치 현상에 관한 수용성 판단을 중심으로. 언어학. 25(2). 143-160.
- 박혜선. 2020. 영어 주어-주어 상승구문의 학술논문 코퍼스 기반 연구 : Seem과 Appear를 중심으로. Corpus Linguistics Research. 6(1). 65-82.
- 이창덕. 2022. ‘-은/는/을 것 같다’ 남용 개선을 위한 국어 양태 표현 체계 연구. 한국초등국어교육. 73(0), 207-232.