

‘Why’ before the subject, and ‘Where’ after the subject in Child Korean

Heejeong Ko, MIT (heejeong@mit.edu)

The Issue. The peculiar behavior of ‘why’ in *in-situ* languages has attracted a great deal of attention in the literature (Huang 1982, Nishigauchi 1990, Chung 1995, i.a.). In this paper, we argue that much of this peculiar behavior becomes clear once we look at ‘why’ in child language. While studies have previously examined *why* in child English (Stromswold 1990, Berk 2002), there has not been much work on the behavior of ‘why’ in child Korean (but see Clancy 1989 for a cognitive-based approach). Based on our case-study investigation, we show that child Korean makes systematic distinctions between ‘why’ and another *wh*-adjunct, ‘where’. We demonstrate that these distinctions are not accidental, but predicted by the theory of Beck and Kim (1997) and Ko (2003). Further, our study on child Korean provides empirical support for the claim that ‘why’, unlike other *wh*-phrases, is directly merged to its potential checking position above the subject (cf. Bromberger 1985, Lin 1992, Rizzi 1990, 1999, Ko 2003).

Syntactic background. Most *wh*-phrases in Korean cannot follow an NPI (1). This word order restriction is known as the **Intervention Effect** (IE) (2). Cho (1998) and Lee (2002), however, observed that *way* ‘why’ in Korean shows a rather peculiar distribution. As shown in (3a), *way* may follow an NPI, unlike other *wh*-phrases (1).

- (1) ***Amwuto etti-e ka-ci-an-ass-ni?**
 Anyone where-Loc go-CI-not-Past-Q
 ‘Where did no one go?’
- (2) *Intervention Effect (IE)*: In LF, a *wh*-phrase may not move across certain Scope-Bearing Intervener (e.g. NPI, not, only, even) to its licenser Q (Beck and Kim 1997).
 ex. *_[CP Q ← **amwuto** → ettie ka-ci-an-ass-ni]
- (3) a. **Amwuto way saimha-ci-an-ass-ni?**
 Anyone why resign-CI-not-Past-Q
 ‘Why did no one resign?’
 b. **Way amwuto saimha-ci-an-ass-ni?**

Ko (2003) argues that the peculiar behavior of *way* in (3a) is due to direct merge of *way* into [Spec,CP] in the overt syntax (cf. Bromberger 1985, Lin 1992, Rizzi 1990, Rizzi 1999). As shown in (4), *way* is merged into [Spec,CP], where it is licensed by Q. Therefore, *way* never moves at LF in (3), so the IE does not take place at all. The order in (3a) is a result of scrambling of the subject *amwuto* over *way*, as illustrated in (5) (see Sohn 1994 for the availability of subject scrambling in Korean).

- (4) [*way* ↔ Q *amwuto saimha-ci-an-ass-ni*]
 (5) [*amwuto*_i [CP *way* ↔ Q *t_i saimha-ci-an-ass-ni*]]

Consequences. This analysis has two interesting theoretical consequences: First, in the base order, *way* must always precede the subject since *way* is merged in [Spec,CP]; (3b) reflects the base order, and (3a) involves subject scrambling. Second, other *wh*-words are merged lower than the subject, so that the order ‘subject<where’ in (6a), unlike (3a), does not involve subject scrambling (6b) (NB: (6a) is irrelevant to the IE, since the subject *John* is not an NPI).

- (6) a. **John-i etti-e ka-ass-ni?** b. [Q [_{IP} *John-i etti-e ka-ass-ni*]]
 John-Nom where-Loc go-Past-Q
 ‘Where did John go?’

Predictions for Child Data. Scrambling is quite freely allowed in adult Korean. Thus, these theoretical consequences about the base order with *wh*-adjuncts cannot be tested with adult data.

It can, however, be directly tested with child data. It has been reported that young L1-Korean children produce very few sentences with scrambling during the early stage of language acquisition (2;00-3;00) (Cho 1981, Kim 1997; see also Slobin 1966 for Russian; Barbier 2000, Schaeffer 2000 for Dutch; Otsu 1994 for Japanese). Therefore, if Ko (2003) is correct, we predict two different word order patterns in child data: (i) way will generally precede the subject in child Korean, since the base order ‘why<subject’ is preserved. (ii) Other wh-words (e.g. etti ‘where’), in contrast, should be able to follow the subject in child Korean; ‘subject<where’ order does not involve scrambling (6b). This prediction about child Korean is summarized in (7).

(7)	Child WH	Wh < S _{NOM}	S _{NOM} < wh
a	Way ‘Why’	Dominant order	Rare order
b	Etti ‘Where’	Rare order	Dominant order

Acquisition Data. To test our predictions, we examined ‘why’ and ‘where’ questions in 53 files of spontaneous utterances of a Korean child, ranging in age from (2;00) to (2;11). The rate of scrambling in the child data was only 15% of all utterances, as expected from the previous literature. Subject omissions were quite frequent (omission with ‘why’ was 66% (304/450); omission with ‘where’ was 38% (209/547)). Crucially, however, as shown in (8), when a subject was present, way preceded the subject most of the time (75%). In sharp contrast, etti ‘where’ followed the subject in 100%. The difference in placement of way vs. etti is highly significant ($\chi^2=17.5$, $p<.001$). Thus, the child data in (8) support the hypothesis of Ko (2003) that way is base-merged higher than the subject, whereas etti is base-merged lower than the subject.

(8)	Child WH	Wh < S _{NOM}	S _{NOM} < wh
a	Way ‘Why’	12 (75%)	4 (25%)
b	Etti ‘Where’	0 (0%)	14 (100%)

Child Data ≠ Adult Input. We show that the ‘why<subject’ order in the child data is not a function of adult input. In the adult utterances from the same files, way follows the subject in most cases 66% (9a): the reverse pattern to the child data. The difference in placement of child vs. adult way was significant ($\chi^2=24.8$, $p<.001$). This indicates that ‘why<subject’ order in child Korean does not result from an imitation of adult input, but rather from a constraint against scrambling in child grammar. Note that ‘subject<where’ order, in contrast, is prevalent in child as well as adult Korean, supporting the view that this order does not involve subject scrambling.

(9)	Adult WH	Wh < S _{NOM}	S _{NOM} < wh
a	Why	32 (34%)	63 (66%)
b	Where	5 (5%)	91 (95%)

Conclusion. This paper shows that child Korean makes consistent distinctions between ‘why’ and ‘where’, which cannot be traceable from adult input. This distinction, more interestingly, is predicted by linguistic theory that ‘why’ should be base-merged higher than the subject, unlike other wh-phrases (Ko 2003). Importantly, this paper demonstrates that acquisition data are needed to test predictions which are not testable in adult language. The distribution of ‘why’ vs. ‘where’ in child Korean directly mirrors the base word order with these wh-phrases, whereas in adult Korean the base order is obscured by scrambling. Thus, investigation of child data provided crucial tests for verifying the existence of subject scrambling in adult wh-questions.

Selected References. Beck, S. & S-S. Kim (1997) On wh- and Operator Scope in Korean. *JEAL* 6(4); Berk, S (2002) Why ‘why’ is different, A paper presented at the 27th BUCLD; Kim, Y.-J. (1997) The acquisition of Korean. *The Crosslinguistic Study of Language Acquisition Vol 4*; Ko, H. (2003) Two Ways of Licensing ‘Why’ in Korean, A paper presented at the 77th LSA; Stromswold, K. (1990) Learnability and the Acquisition of Auxiliaries, Ph.D. dissertation. MIT.