PROSODY-SEMANTICS INTERFACE IN SEOUL KOREAN: CORPUS FOR A DISAMBIGUATION OF WH- INTERVENTION

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Abstract

In this paper, we construct a corpus that incorporates the recordings of Seoul Korean speech where the scripts are manually generated. The utterances contain wh- particles that make the sentences interrogative but sometimes perform as a quantifier. The phonetic property of the corpus concerns not only the sentence-final intonation that differentiates questions from statements, but also the overall prosodies which point out the topic and possibly yield a rhetoricalness. The scripts were generated considering the diversity in the predicate, evidentiality, sentence enders, and the particles regarding politeness. At least two prosodic contours are conveyed from a single script, and it makes the corpus suitable for a multimodal spoken language understanding in the viewpoint of computational linguistics.

Keywords: prosody-semantics, Seoul Korean, corpus, disambiguation, wh- particles

1. INTRODUCTION

In analyzing speech, phonetic properties of an utterance are deeply related to semantics. Korean is one of the languages where the sentence meaning highly relies on its prosody, as can be observed in sentence (1) where NOM denotes a nominative case and USE an underspecified sentence ender:

(1) 뭐가 먹고 싶어요 mwe-ka mek-ko siph-e
what-NOM eat-to want-USE

The sentence type of the utterance is decided upon the sentence-final intonation; an interrogative for a rising tone and a declarative for a falling one. In the viewpoint of speech act, mainly four intentions can be inferred from the given text, namely:

(1a) What do you want to eat? (wh-Q)
(1b) Do you want to eat something? (yes/no Q)
(1c) Do you really want to eat something? (rhetorical Q)
(1d) I want to eat something. (statement)

Following the L/M/H marking [10] where each denotes low/middle/high pitch and a single ‘=’ is used to denote the repetition of the previous syllabic pitch, (1a) is expressed by the syllabic intonation contour of LHL==H% or LHML==% (falling), (1b) by L==MLH%, (1c) by LML=HH%, and (1d) by LMLHL=%. To be specific, in (1a) the highest pitch is assigned to the particle ‘가 (ka)’ which is a post-position of mwe (what) phrase, and the main function of the utterance is to ask and addressee what to eat. In (1b) the high pitch is assigned to the particles ‘고 (ko)’ and ‘어 (e)’ which are respectively the head regarding eat and want, and here the speaker asks whether the addressee wants to eat something. In (1c), the high pitch is assigned to ‘싶어 (siph-e)’, making the utterance a rhetorical question, where the speaker expresses a negative feeling towards the addressee. In (1d), the high pitch is assigned only to ‘고 (ko)’, conveying that the speaker wants to eat something. This phenomenon fundamentally originates in the wh- intervention of ‘뭐 (mwe)’, which corresponds with what in English but also can be interpreted as something in particular circumstance, making mwe an in-situ to denote something edible.

Despite this variability in prosody-semantics that can emerge from a single utterance, conventional speech corpora usually do not incorporate all the speech act types as in (1a-d). This is the point where we came out with the necessity of a corpus that incorporates the single text to multi prosody/intention utterances. In this study, a corpus containing the recordings of manually generated Seoul Korean scripts is constructed. The sentences start with wh-particles and incorporate a wide variety of predicates and sentence enders. Based on the utterances, all possible prosodic contours are recorded, and the corresponding intention types are annotated with English translation. Note that the utterances were constructed in a simple structure with minimal contextual engagement. Since non-domain-specific words are utilized, the corpus fits with a variety of real-life language analysis that requires disambiguation.
2. RELATED WORK

Studies on the utterances incorporating in-situ wh-particles have been done widely in the areas of syntax [6, 2] and prosody-semantics interface [16, 1]. Especially for Korean and Japanese, which are typical wh-in-situ languages, the variability of the wh- particles was handled within the topic of LF intervention [15]. Also, in [8], it was proposed that a wh- particle in embedded self-addressed questions be interpreted as an existential quantifier.

In a slightly different view, in [5], the wh- particles associated with negative polarity items were investigated, suggesting the circumstances where the intervention is canceled. In [14], the usage of wh-particles as an interrogative and indefinite NP is investigated in a pragmatic view, accompanying the interpretation of gray-zone cases as rhetorical ones. Another thing to note is that it suggests that ‘왜 (way, why)’ interpretation of gray-zone cases as rhetorical ones.

3. CORPUS GENERATION

In generating the corpus script, namely five factors were considered: wh- particles that initiate an utterance, predicates that convey the content, reportive particles that give the utterance evidentiality, sentence enders that possess potential to represent various intentions, and politeness suffixes which come just after the sentence ender to assign honorific mood to the sentence.

3.1. wh- particles

Among the six wh- particles, namely ‘누구 (nwukwu, who)’, ‘뭐 (mwe, what)’, ‘어디 (eti, where)’, ‘언제 (encey, when)’, ‘어떻게 (ettehkey, how)’, and ‘왜 (way, why)’, only the first five were utilized in constructing the corpus. This is because way is rarely used as a quantifier, except for some cases in child language. Instead of way, we used ‘몇 (meych, the number of)’, which is widely used as a quantifier for counting. For the purpose of variation, in some cases, nominative (NOM) or accusative cases (ACC) were attached to the wh- particles.

3.2. Predicates

Predicates largely depend on the wh- particle they are aligned with. For instance, nwukwu (who) harmonizes with the verbs that are related to interaction, such as give and receive. In contrast, eti (where) matches with the verbs concerning location, such as come and go. In selecting the verbs, we referred to the set of 5,800 frequently used lexicons, released by the National Institute of Korean Language (https://www.korean.go.kr/). Depending on the verbs, appropriate particles were agglutinated and the phrases that contain object/complement were inserted. In some circumstances, polarity items such as ‘ 좀 (com, bit)’ or ‘한나 (hana, a piece)’ were augmented to modify or restrict the implicature.

3.3. Reportive particles

The reportive particles (RPT) provide utterances with evidential mood. Usually ‘-다 (ta)’ for declaratives and ‘-니 (ni)’ for interrogatives [11]. For these, the sentence type is fixed but the intention can vary regarding wh- intervention and rhetoricalness. The second type is the underspecified SEs whose feature is not fixed (e.g., ‘어 (e)’, ‘지 (ci)’). They have the potential to display various intention types depending on the prosody. Both types of SEs were utilized in the generation.

3.4. Sentence enders

The sentence enders (SEs) with various roles are components that influence the sentence type and intention of the utterance. There are mainly two types of SEs; the first type is SEs with a fixed role, e.g., ‘-다 (ta)’ for declaratives and ‘-니 (ni)’ for interrogatives [11]. For these, the sentence type is fixed but the intention can vary regarding wh- intervention and rhetoricalness. The second type is the underspecified SEs whose feature is not fixed (e.g., ‘어 (e)’, ‘지 (ci)’). They have the potential to display various intention types depending on the prosody. Both types of SEs were utilized in the generation.

3.5. Politeness suffix

The politeness suffix (POL), ‘요 (yo)’, can be agglutinated to SEs and in most cases does not affect the functional variability of the sentence, except for rhetoricalness. For some SEs such as ‘지 (ci)’ or ‘앞 지 (yaci)’, the augmented form is modified to ‘조 (cyo)’. On the other hand, the utterances with SEs to which the politeness suffix is not attachable, such as ‘나 (nya)’, were left without the politeness suffix. An example sentence incorporating the aforementioned concepts (3.1-5) is as follows:

(2) mwe com mek-ess-tay-yo (statement or y/n Q) what bit eat-PST-RPT-POL
4. TAGGING INTENTIONS

The substantial feature of this study lies in the annotation of the intentions along with the script and speech. The labels used for the annotation are statement, yes/no question, wh-question, rhetorical question, command, request, and rhetorical command, a modified version of the categorization recently suggested in [3].

- **Statement (S)** indicates an utterance that conveys information or the speaker’s thought.
- **Yes/no question (YN)** indicates a question where the answer set is limited to yes or no.
- **Wh-question (WH)** indicates a question where the answer set is open and variable.
- **Rhetorical question (RQ)** indicates a question whose answer set is in the speaker’s mind, usually being adopted to express the thought.
- **Command (C)** incorporates an order that corresponds to imperatives in English with a covert subject, hortative that indicates an order with a politeness particle (e.g., please), and modal that indicates a statement with particles which correspond with should or must.
- **Request (R)** indicates a command expressed in an interrogative form.
- **Rhetorical command (RC)** indicates a command where the to-do-list is not mandatory, usually used as an idiomatic expression.

We list some examples regarding several wh-particles, incorporating more than three intention (and prosody) types. The case for mwe (what) is explained in the previous section, and the case for et-tehkey (how) is omitted in this paper since the intention variability is small (two cases at most). 

Q denotes question and C denotes command. L, M, H and ‘=’ denote the relative pitches.

(3) 누가 보러 간대 nwu-ka po-le kan-tay
who-NOM see-to go-RPT
(3a) Who will go see it?
(LHL==H%; wh-Q)
(3b) Will sbd go see it?
(LML==H%; yes/no Q)
(3c) Does anyone say I’m gonna go see it?
(LMLMH%; rhetorical Q)
(3d) I heard sbd will go see it.
(L==HL=%; statement)

(4) 어디 가고 싶어 e-ti ka-ko siphe
where go-to want-USE
(4a) Where do you want to go?
(LHL==H%; wh-Q)
(4b) Do you want to go somewhere?
(L==MLH%; yes/no Q)

(5) 언제 다시 봐 (보-야) en-cey ta-si pwa (pw-a)
when again meet-USE
(5a) When will we meet again?
(LHL=H%; wh-Q)
(5b) Shall we meet again someday?
(LML=H%; yes/no Q)
(5c) Let’s meet again someday.
(LMLML%; rhetorical C)

(6) 몇 개 가져가 myech kay ka-cye-ka
how quantity bring-USE
(6a) How many shall I take?
(LHL=H%; wh-Q)
(6b) Shall I take some?
(LML=H%; yes/no Q)
(6c) Take some.
(LMLML%; command)

Figure 1: The F0 contour of the guiding voice for 6(a-c) by Praat.

(4c) I want to go somewhere.
(L==HL=%; statement)

(5) 언제 다시 봐 (보-야) en-cey ta-si pwa (pw-a)
when again meet-USE
(5a) When will we meet again?
(LHL=H%; wh-Q)
(5b) Shall we meet again someday?
(LML=H%; yes/no Q)
(5c) Let’s meet again someday.
(LMLML%; rhetorical C)

(6) 몇 개 가져가 myech kay ka-cye-ka
how quantity bring-USE
(6a) How many shall I take?
(LHL=H%; wh-Q)
(6b) Shall I take some?
(LML=H%; yes/no Q)
(6c) Take some.
(LMLML%; command)

To aid comprehension, the F0 contours of the guiding voice for 6(a-c) are presented in Figure 1. Note that the relative pitch sequence is displayed in the spectrogram. The sentence-final intonation of (6a,b) implies that they are questions, and the relative pitch of kay which follows myech distinguishes (6a) wh-Q from (6b) yes/no Q.
5. DISCUSSION

5.1. Corpus specification

In the corpus construction, the first version of the sentence list was generated by the methodology explained in Section 3, and only the sentences that received the consensus of first three authors (native speakers of Seoul Korean dialect) were taken into account. In total, the corpus contains 3,552 utterances that fall into the seven classes of intention. All the utterances were recorded by two native Koreans, a male and a female. The speech corpus containing a total of 7,104 (= 3,552 * 2) utterances are available on-line (https://www.github.com/warnikchow/prosem) as with the corpus.

The statistics on the corpus is presented in Table 1. Sorting by the \textit{wh}- particles that initiate the sentences, the most were the sentences starting with ‘누구 (nwugu, who)’, and the least were the ones starting with ‘어떻게 (ettehkey, how)’. Sorting by the intentions, S accounted for the most of the corpus data and RC did the least, following the tendency displayed in the recent Korean corpus [3]. Sorting by the possible intentions from a single utterance, the number of cases ranged from 2 to 4. The possible cases are partially listed in Table 1-c, tagged with the quantity. \textit{wh}- intervention occurs in most cases where interpreting the particles as \textit{wh}- is allowed, but not vice versa.

5.2. Analysis

For a more detailed analysis of the corpus, we performed a simple calculation that shows the correlation between the indices (Table 2). It is assumed that \textit{wh}- intervention largely occurs among \textit{how much}-sentences, considering the portion of \textit{wh}- questions within. Also, commands starting with \textit{how} are rare, due to the fact that a to-do-list [12] is usually recommended to convey a specific instruction. Concerning rhetoricalness, it is notable that \textit{how much} is scarce among the rhetorical sentences since in that case polarity items are accompanied, disambiguating the \textit{wh}- intervention. Consequently, the non-rhetorical directives (YN-WH and C-R) dominate \textit{how much} sentences. The portion of rhetorical directives scored the highest in \textit{when}- sentences for both RQ/C; we roughly assume that \textit{when}- questions have potential to be interpreted as ‘have sbd ever ...’ and \textit{when}- commands usually act idiomatically.

6. CONCLUSION

In this paper, we proposed a construction scheme for a corpus that incorporates single-text utterances with multi prosody/intention. In the process, five constituents, namely \textit{wh}- particles, predicates, evidentiality, sentence enders and politeness suffix were considered. We obtained 3,552 utterances from 1,292 sentences, with the major intention types of statement, yes/no question and \textit{wh}- question. A set of recordings by the native speakers (total 7,104 instances) is disclosed as a pilot research and can be supplemented for industrial purpose.

We suggest the corpus to be used for spoken language understanding systems which require disambiguation of the utterances that may induce \textit{wh}- intervention. Along with the multi-modal approaches as in [7], various statistics- or deep learning-based classification systems may be able to infer a proper intention for a given speech and transcript. Not only for the industry, but this study can also be utilized for the Korean language learners, especially for the acquisition of prosody.
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7. REFERENCES