Temporal and inferential interpretation of Korean direct evidential -te-
keywords: Korean direct evidential -te-, past, inferential evidentiality, tense marker

Korean -te- introduces the evidential ‘implication’ that the speaker has direct evidence about his/her assertion: (1a) carries the implication that the speaker saw it rained yesterday. However, -te- is not a mere direct evidential: first, (1a) shows, when used without overt tense, the sentence with -te- is interpreted as past; second, (1b/c) shows, with past -ess- or future -keyss-, -te- introduces inferential evidentiality.

(1) a. (the speaker saw that it was raining yesterday)
   Ecey pi-ka o-te-la.
   ‘Yesterday it rained’
   Implication: the speaker saw that it rained yesterday.

b. (today the speaker saw that the ground is wet)
   Ecey pi-ka o-ass-te-la.
   ‘Yesterday it rained’
   Implication: the speaker infers it rained yesterday based on what he/she saw.

c. (today the speaker saw that the weather is very cloudy)
   Nayil pi-ka o-keyss-te-la.
   ‘Tomorrow it will rain’
   Implication: the speaker infers it will rain tomorrow based on what he/she saw.

(1) shows: i) -te- is felicitous when the speaker has some direct evidence: -te- introduces direct evidentiality, or inferential evidentiality based on direct evidence (with overt tense); ii) the time when the speaker obtained the direct evidence is before the utterance time (hereafter t*).

Therefore we propose (2): -te- takes a proposition p, returning a character, with the presupposition that there is a salient time t before t*, and the speaker s in c has direct evidence compatible with p.

(2) For any utterance context c*, and any world of evaluation w,
   \[ [[-te-]]^{c*,w} = \lambda p. \lambda c: \exists t < t^* [t is salient in c & at t, s perceived dir. evi. compatible with p]. p \]
   (c is a triple including the world, the time, and the speaker of the utterance: <w, t, s>)

We analyze LF of (1a) as (3):

(3) \([-te- [t_{pro} [\lambda w. it rains in w]]]] \quad (t_{pro} is an anaphoric tense)\]

We assume, when there is no overt tense, an anaphoric tense, t_{pro}, is introduced (Partee 1984), and ‘bound’ by some antecedent. In (3), since there is no overt tense, t_{pro} should get its value from some context. However, -te- introduces context c with the presupposition that there is a salient time t in c before t*. Since -te- is the closest antecedent of t_{pro}, and in declaratives c in -te- is interpreted as the utterance context c*, t_{pro} is ‘anchored’ to t, and interpreted as past.

Next, the LF of (1b) is (4):
(4) \([-te- \text{[Past } \lambda w. \text{ it rains in } w]]\)

Since the speaker can use \(-te-\) to indicate his/her direct evidence as far as it is compatible with the assertion, the speaker’s assertion may based on inference from that direct evidence. Furthermore, since \(-te-\) indicates that direct evidence is only compatible with the assertion, using \(-te-\) with \(-\text{ess-}\) makes a weaker assertion (based on inference) than the assertion based on direct evidence. Therefore, \(-te-\) triggers the implicature that the speaker does not have stronger evidence (the direct perceptive one relative to the assertion). Thus, the speaker would not use \(-te-\) when (s)he has direct evidence w.r.t. the assertion, but use it only when his/her evidence is compatible with the assertion. Hence, inferential evidentiality.

Finally, the LF of (1c) is (5):

(5) \([-te- \text{-keyss- [\lambda w. it rains in } w]]\)

\(-\text{keyss-}\) indicates that the event denoted by the assertion does not occur yet and therefore the speaker cannot perceive it yet. Therefore the assertion is based on the speaker’s inference from his/her direct evidence, which was obtained before \(t^*\), and is compatible with it.

Since \(-te-\) is analyzed as a function from propositions to characters, we can explain why \(-te-\) cannot be embedded, unlike epistemic modals, as in (6), by assuming that attitude predicates take a proposition, but not a character, as their argument:

(6) a. ??John-un Mary-ka cip-ey iss-te-la-ko sayngkakhasst.
    John-Top Mary-Nom home-Loc be-te-Decl-Comp thought
    J.-Top M.-Nom home-Loc be-may-Decl-Comp thought

‘John thought Mary might be at home’

This paper also suggests that there may be some language where the evidential is neither an epistemic modal nor an illocutionary force operator (cf. Matthewson et al. 2007). Furthermore, by analyzing \(-te-\) as a context-binder, this paper gives a clue to account for why \(-te-\) cannot be used with the first-person subject unless the speaker was not aware of what he/she did, in terms of \(de se\) context created by quantifiers over contexts (Schlenker 2003).

    I-Nom John-Acc beat-te-Decl

‘I beat John’ (felicitous only when the speaker was too drunk, etc.)

Word count: 743

Selected references