**The Deterministic Prosody of Indeterminates**

*keywords: wh-indefinites, semantics-prosody interface, Korean*

**Introduction:** This paper investigates the role of prosody in deciding the meaning of the so-called *indeterminate words* (Kuroda 1965) in Korean that can be used as either interrogatives ‘who/what/...’ or indefinites ‘someone/something/...’. While the wide-spread impressionistic observation is that the *phonological prominence* such as high pitch of the indeterminate word signals an interrogative reading (Choe 1985, Kang 1988, Kim 2000), a production experiment shows that *dephrasing* after the indeterminate word is the most conspicuous prosodic feature of *wh*-questions (Jun & Oh 1996). This paper supports the latter by showing that the high pitch on the indeterminate is not a decisive factor in perceiving *wh*-questions unless dephrasing is followed; the mere prominence of indeterminate word rather helps disambiguate the scope configuration of an indefinite reading, giving a bias toward a wide scope interpretation.

**Experiment:** The test sentences contain an indeterminate phrase within a conditional clause as in (1), so that three different readings are available: a-i) narrow scope indefinite, a-ii) wide scope indefinite, and b) *wh*-interrogative.

(1) *nay-ka nwukwu-hako kyelhonha-myen yusan-ul pata*  
I-NOM IND-PERSON-with marry-if inheritance-ACC receive  
(lit. ‘If I marry [who/someone], I will receive an inheritance’)

a. indefinite  
i) if> ∃ (‘I will receive an inheritance if I marry anyone.’)  
ii) ∃ >if (‘There is *someone* such that I will receive an inheritance if I marry that person.’)

b. interrogative  
‘*Who* is the person such that I will receive an inheritance if I marry that person?’

Those sentences were recorded by a Seoul Korean speaker with a neutral tone with sentence-final falling, without focusing on any item in the sentence. Additional two sets of test sentences were obtained by manipulating the pitch contour of the first set using Praat (PSOLA): 2b) the highest pitch point in the sentence falls on the indeterminate phrase, and additionally 2c) all the words following the indeterminate word are dephrased until the end of the sentence.

(2) The schematic representation of the F0 contours of the test sentences

a) neutral  
[Diagram A]

b) F0 boost only  
[Diagram B]

c) F0 boost + dephrasing  
[Diagram C]

24 native Seoul Korean speakers took part in the perception test. For each test sentence, they read a written scenario that facilitates one of the three different readings as illustrated in (1), listened to the target sentence, and gave a score from 0 to 10 depending on how appropriate the sentence sounds in the given context.
Results & Discussion: The result shows that the high pitch on the indeterminate word alone does not make a decisive cue to the perception of a wh-question, whereas the following dephrasing causes a strong bias towards a wh-question reading. The importance of dephrasing in forming wh-questions in Korean can be explained by the general prosodic wh-scope marking strategy in many wh-in-situ languages that eliminates phonological phrase boundaries between the wh-word and the complementizer (Ishihara 2002, Richards 2010).

(3) The results (NS: narrow scope indefinite, WS: wide scope indefinite, WH: wh-interrogative)

The result also shows that the pitch boost on the indeterminate word increases a bias towards a wide scope interpretation for an indefinite reading. This is comparable with the long-standing observation that stress forces genuine indefinites such as some in English to take wide scope (Milsark 1974). Thus, contrary to the previous argument that indeterminate-based indefinites cannot take wide scope in general (Ha 2004, Bruening 2007), phonological prominence forces a wide scope/specific interpretation for “wh-indefinites” as well as genuine indefinites.

Word count: 560

References