ABSTRACT

A Study on the particles of Korean
—focused on ‘-ka’ and ‘-lul’—

Ko, Seok-Ju
Dept. of Korean Language and Literature
The Graduate School
Yonsei University

This study aims to make the grammatical properties of the particles of Korean clear, especially ‘-ka’ and ‘-lul’. In general, the particles of Korean have been divided into ‘case particles(or markers)’ which are described as the representation of the relationship of the noun with predicate, and ‘determiner(or semantic particles)’, which qualify the meaning of a noun. ‘-Ka’ and ‘-lul’ are especially described to be ‘structural case markers’ that have no meaning and just represent the grammatical relation of the noun. However, this explanation has many problems, so that it is not able to rationally explain the usage of the particle of Korean.

I review the basic notion of ‘case theory’, which was proposed by others, and the usage of a so called ‘case marker’, then propose that ‘case’ is not able to be established in Korean, based on the following facts.

Firstly, there is no form of noun which corresponds to ‘case form’ of noun in European language. Secondly, the particle of Korean is able to associate with the categories of a phrase or clause, while ‘case affix’ in European is only associated with the noun. Thirdly, the grammatical relation of a noun does not have one-to-one relationship with a particular particle in Korean. Fourthly, the notion of ‘case marker’ could not explain the difference of meanings due to the presence and the absence of the particle, and the limitation of the presence of the particle in a
particular context. Fifthly, it could not be explained that the particles are combined with other particles in Korean. Sixthly, ‘-ka’ and ‘-lul’ must not be associated with an indefinite pronoun. Seventhly, the particles of Korean, especially ‘-ka’ and ‘-lul’, have no unique function which is syntactic or semantic, or pragmatic, if Korean has ‘case marker’.

On the basis of the above observations and the distributional facts of the particle, I proved that ‘-ka’ and ‘-lul’ are not ‘case markers’ which represent the grammatical relation of a noun, but must be analysed as ‘modal particles’ reflecting the speaker’s inference on the meaning of a sentence and the hearer’s interpretation, and therefore belong to the determiner, which consists of ‘-num’ or ‘-to’ etc.

The meaning of ‘-ka’ is clarified to be ‘selectional listing’ based on the fact that ‘-ka’ is not associated with an indefinite pronoun. ‘Exhaustiveness’ proposed by others as the meaning of ‘-ka’ is a contextual meaning when a noun is given emphasis or focused in particular context.

‘Totality’, which is proposed as the meaning of ‘-lul’ in others’ literature, is proved to be the meaning due to ‘objectness’ of the meaning of ‘-lul’. And then, ‘objectness’ is embodied in to be ‘selectional listing of reaching point (of action)’.

It is proved that ‘-ka’ and ‘-lul’ are ‘modal particles’ with the meaning, through the constructions in which has the presence and the absence of the particle, or the correspondence or combination with other particles. They are investigated dividing into the construction related with the lexical meaning of a predicate or a noun, and the adjunct nominals.

Through the discussion, ‘-ka’ and ‘-lul’ are not ‘case markers’ decided by the syntactic machinery, but are realized in the surface structure of a sentence by semantic or pragmatic condition, and thus they are ‘modal particles’ which represent the speaker’s inference on the meaning of a sentence.

Key words: Korean, particle, case, case marker(particle), modal particle, selectional listing, selectional listing of reaching point (of action)