

Korean *what*-exclamatives and their implications

Okgi Kim (Kyung Hee University)
okgikim@khu.ac.kr

While *what*-exclamatives have been extensively studied in other languages, it has been traditionally believed that Korean may not employ *what*-exclamatives. The present study, however, challenges the traditional view by proposing to treat *mwe(-l) {ku/i}lehkey* ‘what so’ clauses like (1B), (1B’), and (1B’’) as variants of Korean *what*-exclamatives.

- (1) A: John-i Lamborghini-lul sa-ss-tay.
John-NOM Lamborghini-ACC buy-PST-DECL
‘(I heard that) John bought a Lamborghini.’
- B: wa, mwe(-l) kulehkey pissan cha-lul sa-ss-e!
wow what-ACC so expensive car-ACC buy-PST-DECL
‘Wow, what an expensive car he bought!’
- B’ wa, mwe(-l) kulehkey pissa!
wow what-ACC so expensive
‘Wow, how very expensive it is!’
- B’’ wa, mwe(-l) kulehkey pissakey sa-ss-e!
wow what-ACC so expensively buy-PST-DECL
‘Wow, how very expensive it is!’
- A: kulekey!
yeah
‘Yeah!’

Close investigation of Korean *what*-exclamatives provides an unusually rich set of linguistic diagnostics that we can use to investigate cross-linguistic variation in *what*-exclamatives. For example, there is an ongoing debate in the literature about whether *what*-exclamatives denote sets of propositions (Zanuttini & Portner 2003) or degree properties (Rett 2011, Castroviejo 2021) and whether they count as assertions (Trotzke & Giannakidou 2021) or expressives (Rett 2011, Castroviejo 2021). This study presents fresh insights into the aforementioned issues by arguing that Korean *what*-exclamatives denote maximal degrees derived via a maximality operator *{ku/i}lehkey* ‘so’ and that they have assertive speech acts toward which the speaker expresses their evaluative stance. This view allows us to account for regular as well as idiosyncratic properties of Korean *what*-exclamatives.

References

- Castroviejo, Elena. 2021. On *wh*-exclamatives and gradability: An argument from Romance. *Journal of Linguistics* 57: 41-82.
- Rett, Jessica. 2011. Exclamatives, degrees and speech acts. *Linguistics & Philosophy* 34(5): 411-442.
- Trotzke, Andreas & Anastasia Giannakidou. 2021. Exclamation, intensity, and the assertion of emotion. Manuscript. lingbuzz/006137.
- Zanuttini, Raffaella & Paul Portner. 2003. Exclamative clauses at the syntax–semantics interface. *Language* 79: 39-81.