Why Japanese and Korean Differ in the Behavior of Genitive Subject

1. Introduction: Japanese and Korean show a crucial difference in the behavior of genitive subject: while Japanese allows it, Korean does not, as shown in (1-2). (2) is from Sohn (1997).

(1) kinoo   John-ga/-no   katta hon (2) ecey   John-i/?*-uy   san   chayk
     yesterday John-Nom/-Gen bought book   yesterday John-Nom/-Gen bought book
     'the book John bought yesterday' (J)   'the book John bought yesterday' (K)

However, possessor nominals are marked genitive both in Japanese and Korean, as (3) shows.

(3) a. John-no hon   b. John-uy chayk
         John-Gen book 'John's book' (J)   John-Gen book 'John's book' (K)

Also, in some fixed expressions, genitive subject is allowed in Korean, if it is not preceded by anything, as shown in (4).

(4) na-uy salten kohayng
     I-Gen lived hometown 'the hometown where I lived' (Sohn (1997)) (K)

The research question is what factor is involved in the difference between the two languages.

2. Data: It has been pointed out that there is another difference between the two languages, that is, NP-Deletion, although the two phenomena (genitive subject licensing and NP-Deletion) have been investigated independently in the literature. (5-6) show that while NP-Deletion is possible in Japanese, it is not in Korean.

(5)   [Taroo-no taido]-wa   yoi   ga,   [Hanako-no ~~taido~~]-wa   yokunai.
          Taro-Gen attitude-Top good though   Hanako-Gen attitude-top not good
          'Though Taro's attitude is good, Hanako's isn't.' (Saito, Lin, and Murasugi 2008) (J)

(6) * [John-uy thayto]-nun coh-ciman,   [Mary-uy ~~thayto~~]-nun cohci ahnta.
          John-Gen attitude-Top good-though Mary-Gen attitude-Top good not
          'Though John's attitude is good, Mary's isn't.'   (An 2012)   (K)

However, An (2012) points out that NP-Deletion in (6) involves another factor: the sequence of case markers/particles is not allowed, as shown in (7). Therefore, (6) does not genuinely show the impossibility of NP-Deletion in Korean.

(7) a.   * Mary-ka/-lul/-uy/-nun   b.   Mary-ka/-lul/-uy   c.   Mary-nun
            Mary-Nom/-Acc/-Gen-Top   (An 2012)

Rather, examples in (8) show that it is actually impossible in Korean, where the genitive case marker is not followed by any other case marker.

(8) a.   Nuku-uy thayto-ga   cohci ansumni ka? b.   John-uy   [NP thayto/*e] imnida.
          who-Gen attitude-Nom good not.be Q   John-Gen   attitude be
          'Whose attitude is not good?'   'John's (attitude).'   (K)
          Note that Japanese allows NP-Deletion in the same environment, as shown in (9).

(9) a.   Dare-no taido-ga   yoku nai desu ka? b.   John-no   [NP taido/e] desu.
          who-Gen attitude-Nom good not be   Q   John-Gen   attitude be
          'Whose attitude is not good?'   'John's (attitude).'   (J)

3. Discussion: The above data suggest that NP-Deletion is unavailable in Korean. Furthermore, the following data as well as the above data show that genitive subject licensing is totally impossible under any of the approaches to it, that is, (i) Miyagawa's (1993)/Maki and Uchibori's (2008) D-licensing approach, (ii) Hiraiwa's (2001) C-licensing approach, and (iii) Miyagawa's (2012) *v*-licensing approach.

(10) John-wa [ame-ga/-no   yam-u]   made ofisu-ni ita.
      John-Top rain-Nom/-Gen stop-PRES until office-at was
      'John was at his office until it stopped raining.'   (J)

(11) John-un [bi-ga/*-uy   kunki-l]   *(ttay) kkaci samusil-ey issoeta.
      John-Top rain-Nom/-Gen stop-ADN   time until office-at   was
      'John was at his office until it stopped raining.'   (K)

In Japanese, the genitive subject in (1) is allowed due to the D/C-licensing approaches, and the one in (10) is allowed due to the C/*v*-licensing approaches. However, the corresponding Korean examples are all ungrammatical, which indicates that no approach to genitive subject licensing is available in Korean. We therefore claim that the unavailability of (i) NP-Deletion and (ii) genitive subject suggests that it is not directly due to the structural properties of the phenomena, but due to the morphological property of the genitive case marker, and that these two facts should receive a uniform account. To be specific, we propose that the genitive case marker is affix-like in Korean, while it is not in Japanese, as shown in (12).

(12) Korean genitive case marker contains an invisible affix that must attach to the head noun in overt syntax. Japanese genitive case marker does not contain such an affix.

   With this proposal, let us consider the relevant Korean data shown above. First, the examples in (13)-(14) receive a uniform account under the proposal.

(13) ?*[$_{IP}$ ecey   John-**uy**   san]   chayk   (14) * John-**uy** [$_{NP}$ *e*] imnida.
        yesterday John-Gen bought book   John-Gen   be
        'the book which John bought yesterday'   'John's.'   (K)

In (13), the invisible affix adjoins to N across another head V (or V+I), as shown in (15).

(15)   [$_{IP}$ ADV John-Gen…V]$_{IP}$ N
            └─────*────▲

In (14), the affix cannot adjoin to N in overt syntax, if N had already been elided, as shown in (16). Alternatively, if N were elided after the affix attaches to it in overt syntax, the affix cannot survive at the LF representation.

(16)   [$_{DP}$ John-Gen [$_{NP}$ ø] D]
            └──*─▲

On the other hand, in (3b) and (4), reproduced as (17)-(18), the affix can adjoin to N without crossing any intervening head, as shown in (19)-(20), under Sohn's (1997) assumption that the NP marked genitive is in DP SPEC in overt syntax in these examples.

(17)   John-uy book   (18)   na-uy salten kohayng
        John-Gen book   I-Gen lived hometown
        'John's book'   (K)   'the hometown where I lived'   (K)

(19)   [$_{DP}$ John-Gen [$_{NP}$ book] D]   (20)   [$_{DP}$ I-Gen [$_{AP/IP}$…] [$_{NP}$ hometown] D]
            └──────▲   └──────────────▲

   The above argument makes the prediction with respect to availability of (i) NP-Deletion and (ii) genitive subject that a language allows NP-Deletion if it allows genitive subject. This prediction is actually borne out by the data from Mongolian, another Altaic language, as shown below. (21) indicates that genitive subject is allowed in relative clauses in Mongolian.

(21)   öcügedür Baɣatur-ø/-un   hudaldun-ab-gsan   nom
        yesterday Baɣatur-Nom/-Gen buy-take-past.ADN book
        'the book Baɣatur bought yesterday'   (M)

At the same time, NP-Deletion is allowed in Mongolian, as shown in (22b).

(22) a.   Ken-nü obur-ø maɣu boi?   b.   Baɣatur-un   [$_{NP}$ obur/*e*].
          who-Gen attitude bad   Q   Baɣatur-Gen   attitude
          'Whose attitude is bad?'   'Baɣatur's (attitude).'   (M)

   There is another paradigm that distinguishes Korean from Japanese and Mongolian, as shown in (23), where only Korean does not have the *pro*-form meaning 'one.'

(23) a.   ppalkan*-uy/-ke(s)   b.   akai-no/-mono   c.   ulaɣan-ni/-yaɣuma
          red-one/-thing   red-one/-thing   red-one/-thing
          'red one/thing' (K)   'red one/thing' (J)   'red one/thing' (M)

The *pro*-forms in Japanese and Mongolian are somehow morphologically related to the genitive case markers. It seems then that in Korean, the morphological change from the genitive case marker to the *pro*-form was unsuccessful, probably due to its (stranded) affix.