ON THE GRAMMATICAL STATUS OF THE KOREAN PLURAL MORPHEME *DEUL*

<div dir="rtl">המעמד הדקדוקי של מורפמת הרבים DEUL בקוריאנית</div>

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I. Introduction:

The Korean particle 들 *deul*, which is most often referred to as a plural marker, has long been a topic of debate amongst linguists. Although it can indeed indicate plurality in a noun phrase (1), its usage is quite unlike other plural markers we see in languages such as English, Spanish, or Hebrew.

(1) Hayeong-eun   chingu-deur-irang   yeonghwa-reul   bwattda.
    Hayeong-TOP   friend-PL-with   movie-OBJ   see-PAST
    'Hayeong saw a movie with friends.'

Although (1) provides a relatively simple example of how *deul* can be used to indicate plurality, *deul* also exhibits properties that are not typical of other plural morphemes. For example, in Korean, plural-denoting noun phrases which denote humans require the plural marker (like in the example above), while other NPs either downright reject it (as is the case for mass nouns and NPs containing a numeral) or allow for a seemingly optional usage (specifically, animal nouns in object positions and inanimate nouns in all positions). Hence, while Korean deul seems to be sensitive to the mass/count distinction of nouns, an attribute which is typical of plural markers, it is on the other hand also sensitive to animacy (more specifically, humanness) and grammatical function, can be used with non-nominal elements, and is infelicitous in conjunction with numerals – all of which are behaviors not typical of most plural markers.

The peculiar behavior of Korean *deul* is all the more interesting given the fact that Korean is a classifier-obligatory language, in which we would not expect to see a plural marker at all. In fact, my preliminary research into plurality, numeral behavior, and classifier usage in Korean suggests that, although it is traditionally understood to be the Korean plural marker, *deul* may not actually be a "true" morphosyntactic marker of plurality, which is precisely what I will argue.

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It has been typically claimed that in classifier-obligatory languages all nouns are somehow inherently mass and that the function of classifiers is to turn these uncountable mass nouns into count nouns (Chierchia 1998). Naturally, such a language is not expected to distinguish between mass and count nouns or mark plurality on noun phrases. The case of Korean, then, poses a problem for this theory as it not only shows evidence for a mass/count distinction but also seems to mark plurality. A deeper understanding of *deul*, the Korean particle used to mark this apparent plurality, is needed for a thorough understanding of Korean noun phrases and how classifiers function in such a language. By extension, an understanding of Korean deul and whether or not it can be considered a true morphosyntactic plural marker will contribute to the wider discussion of the nature of NPs in classifier languages. If deul indeed indicates semantic plurality rather than morphosyntactic (grammatical) plurality as I will claim, this study will be important for understanding the differences between semantic distinction and syntactic features, contributing to the conversation already broached by Zeijlstra (2008).

II. Goal of the Study:

This thesis will aim to provide a unified explanation for why *deul* behaves the way it does, as well as whether or not it should really be considered a true marker of morphosyntactic plurality. I propose that it should not be considered as such. I will argue that deul marks a semantic distinction, rather than being a morphosyntactic feature.

If *deul* were a morphosyntactic feature, we could expect it to affect the structure and behavior of the NP with regard to agreement and interactions with other features. Furthermore, if number is expressed as a syntactic element, we would not expect animacy to be such a central factor in its distribution – but this is exactly what happens in the case of Korean, as we will see in the following section. Rather, just as certain languages do not express tense

grammatically but have other semantic ways of expressing the concept, I propose that *deul*, while it manifests as a morpheme, is a realization of semantic plurality in Korean which does not function as a grammatical feature. Once we have made the distinction between morphosyntactic and semantic plurality, this distinction will also have interesting implications for the way we think about Chierchia's 1998 typology. While Chierchia's analysis does not explicitly distinguish between semantic and morphosyntactic plurality, this distinction could prove useful in accounting for certain facts that otherwise seem puzzling.

Additionally, I will aim to provide a unified analysis for both nominal and non-nominal *deul* (cases where *deul* is attached to elements other than nouns), which often seem to be treated as different phenomena entirely.

III.   Preliminary Generalizations and Literature Review

A. Empirical Observations

During research for a prior seminar paper and preliminary research for this thesis, I have begun collecting empirical evidence. The following data more thoroughly illustrates the observations outlined in Section 1 regarding the behavior and distribution of *deul*.

As mentioned above, Korean *deul* is highly sensitive to animacy. That is, while humans always require the marking of plurality (2a, b) and inanimate count nouns usually allow for optional marking (3), usage of *deul* with animals tends to depend on the NP's role in the sentence (4a, b). In fact, conversations with my informants have seemed to suggest that Korean treats animacy as a continuum, which affects speakers' usage of *deul*. This, in turn, would mean that *deul*, rather than being a grammaticalized syntactic feature, requires semantic discernment and is context-dependent.

(2a) Na-neun   jib-e   kaseo   ai-ege   pab-eul   jweoyahanda.
         I-TOP   home-to   go-then   kid-to   food-OBJ   give-have to-PRESENT

'I have to go home and feed the kid.'

(2b) Na-neun   jib-e   kaseo   ai-deur-ege   pab-eul   jweoyahanda.
      I-TOP   home-to   go-then   kid-to   food-OBJ   give-have to-PRESENT
      'I have to go home and feed the kids.'

(3) Na-neun   jib-e   kaseo   sikmul-(deur)-e   mur-eul   jweoyahanda.
      I-TOP   home-to   go-then   plant-PL-to   water-OBJ   give-have to-PRESENT
      'I have to go home and water the plant(s).'

(4a) Na-neun   jib-e   kaseo   goyangi-ege   pab-eul   jweoyahanda.
       I-TOP   home-to   go-then   cat-to   food-OBJ   give-have to-PRESENT
       'I have to go home and feed the cat(s).'

(4b) Jib-eseo   goyangi-deur-i   meokgo   ittda
       House-at   cat-PL-SUB   eat-   exist-PRESENT PROG
       '(The) cats are eating at home.'

Interestingly, there are also contexts in which *deul* cannot be considered felicitous at all.

For all nouns, *deul* cannot appear with a predicate NP (5), nor can it be used in conjunction with

numerals (6).

(5) *Jon-gwa   Maeri-neun   euisa-deur-ida
      John-and   Mary-TOP   doctor-PL-is
      'John and Mary are doctors.'

(6) *Kongweon-e   kangaji-deul   se   mari-ga   ittda.
       Park-in   puppy-PL   3-NAT   CL-SUB   be-PRESENT
       'Three dogs are in the park.'

However, it is also important to note that *deul* can be combined with non-nominal

elements, as in (7). More details about this usage appear in the Literature Review section.

(7) Seo-ul-daehakyo   doseokwan   ppak-eseo-deul   kidarigo   ittda
      Seoul-university   library   outside-at-PL   wait-PRESENT PROG

    'They are waiting outside the Seoul University library.'

B. Literature Review

Although *deul* is generally thought of as the Korean plural marker, other theories have also been proposed. Several attempts have been made to pinpoint the exact function of this mysterious little particle, but the proposed solutions fall short.

Kwon and Zribi-Hertz (2004) claim that deul is a non-inflectional lexeme, which triggers both a collective reading and a rigid construal of the referent. Although they do consider this marker to indicate some form of plurality, they concede that it is of a different type than what we see in French or English. Not only does the distribution of *deul* vary from what we see in (for example) French, but its presence denotes a closed set with no possibility for a kind reading, which is somewhat the opposite of what occurs with French plural marking. That is, Korean NPs that appear with *deul* may not refer to an intensionally-construed open set. Pak (2008) takes a different opinion entirely, arguing that deul isn't a plural marker at all, but rather a distributive marker. And, Kiaer (2010), provides yet another stance with the proposal that deul is neither plural nor distributive but *expressive*, in the same sense that honorific markers give meaning in Korean. Kiaer argues that the use of deul is context-dependent and pragmatically decided, for which interesting support can perhaps be drawn from Baik (1994)'s claim that the usage of *deul* by native speakers has changed due to heightened contact with English.

None of these explanations is quite satisfying. Kiaer's analysis of *deul* as an expressive element is tempting, but it does not seem to account for the whole picture: if deul is purely expressive, it seems odd that there would be cases where it is entirely ungrammatical – and there are. Korean *deul* cannot be used to evoke abundance readings (8), nor can it be used in conjunction with numerals, as we saw in (6) above[1]:

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[1] For ease of understanding, I have glossed *deul* as PL (indicating plurality) in my examples, regardless of whether or not it truly is a morphosyntactic plural marker.

(8) *Uri-neun   maneun   mul-deur-eul   karojilleo   yeohaeng-haettda
    we-TOP   many   water-PL-OBJ   across   travel-PAST
    'We traveled across many waters.'
    Likewise, Pak's claim that *deul* is a purely distributive particle sets forth some interesting

examples, but also leaves out some important issues that need to be addressed. For example,

while we must concede that *deul* is required to express the plurality of a count noun in a

distributive context (9), if deul is only distributive, we would not expect it to be felicitous with

count nouns in a collective reading (10). Likewise, it seems odd that it would not be felicitous

with mass nouns in a distributive context.

(9) keompyuteo-deur-i   kojang   nattda.
     computer-PL-SUB   malfunction   occur-PAST
     'The computers are broken.'

(10) keompyuteo-deur-i manheun   jeongi-reul   soyo-handa.
      computer-PL-SUB   much   electricity-OBJ require
      'The computers consume a lot of electricity.'

(12) *pab-deur-i   ik-go   ittda.
      rice-PL-SUB   be done-PRESENT PROGRESSIVE
      'The rice is softening.'

Along the same vein: when a noun appears as a subject in a sentence, animacy usually

seems to be the deciding factor in terms of *deul* acceptability. While Pak claims that *deul* is a

distributive particle, this property seems to disappear when human nouns are involved. For

example, although (11) features a collective verb, *deul* is still felicitous – and even required, as

we can see from (12) – when the NP in question is human. If *deul* were purely distributive, why

would its distributivity be trumped by human animacy?

(11) kyosil-eseo   ai-deur-i   manna-go   ittda.
     classroom-in   kid-PL-SUB   meet-PRESENT PROGRESSIVE
     '(The) kids are meeting in the classroom.'

(12) *kyosil-eseo   ai-ga   manna-go   ittda.
     classroom-in   kid-SUB   meet-PRESENT PROGRESSIVE
     *'(A/The) kid is meeting in the classroom.'

Kwon and Zribi-Hertz provide the most satisfying account of Korean *deul*, arguing that

the difference between *deul* and plural marking in French is the *rigidity* effect that *deul* evokes.

That is, Kwon and Zribi-Hertz claim that a *deul* NP in Korean denotes a closed set of entities

(13) while the French plural does not (14):

   (13) *paendeo-gom-deur-eun   poyudongmur-i-da
        panda-bear-PL-TOP   mammal-be-PRESENT
        Literally: 'The (various) members of the panda species are mammals'.

   (14) les   pandas   sont   des   mammifère
        Det-PL   panda-PL   be-PRESENT-PL   det-PL   mammal-PL
        'Pandas are mammals'

Additionally, Kwon and Zribi-Hertz provide evidence that *deul* does not instantiate number

agreement elsewhere in a sentence as plurality often does in languages like English (15), an

observation that seems to support the view that *deul* is *not* a morphosyntactic feature and which

ties in with Zeijlstra (2008)'s work on formal features and their syntactic flexibility.

   (15) *i   saram-deur-eun   euisa-deur-i-da
        Dem   person-PL-TOP   doctor-PL-be-PRESENT
        Literally: 'These people are (several) doctors.'

Although Kwon and Zribi-Hertz's analysis successfully manages to explain why *deul* is

used to mark plurality for NPs while being unavailable for kind readings and not an agent of

number agreement, their analysis has some shortcomings. For one, their analysis does not offer

an explanation as to why Korean *deul* is sensitive to animacy/human-ness, which is something

we would not expect of a typical morphosyntactic plural marker. Second, Kwon and Zribi-Hertz

do not address the non-nominal use of *deul* at all, which could very well be an important piece

of the puzzle. It could, of course, be argued that non-nominal *deul* is an entirely separate

morpheme that only *looks* similar to nominal *deul* and therefore should not be analyzed in the same framework. However, given the fact that non-nominal *deul* cannot be used in conjunction with singular NPs as in (16), this argument seems flimsy. I will pursue the hypothesis that nominal *deul* and non-nominal *deul* are related and should be analyzed accordingly.

(16) *han   haksaeng-i kongbu-reul yeolsimhi-deul   haettda
   1-NAT   student-SUB study-OBJ hard-PL   do-PAST
   'One student studied hard.'

Given the typological observation that gender and class are not found on noun phrases in the absence of a number feature (Harley and Ritter, 2002), the fact that the required use of *deul* is largely tied to animacy, as we saw in examples (9-11) above, is interesting. In fact, this observation contrasts with my previous claims that Korean *deul* is not a morphosyntactic feature and instead suggests that *deul* is indeed a number marker in some sense, at least according to Harley and Ritter's feature geometry. This makes the picture even more interesting.

The relevance of animacy to Korean grammar can also be seen in the case of dative particles, which are also dependent on animacy, with *-e* being used for inanimate nouns and *-ege* being used for animate nouns (Kim, 2012), as in (17) and (18):

(17) Minsu-ga   kkoch-e   mur-eul   jweottda
   Minsu-SUB   flower(s)-to   water-OBJ   give-PAST
   'Minsu watered (the) flower(s).'

(18) Minsu-ga   Soyoon-ege   mur-eul   jweottda
   Minsu-SUB   Soyoon-to   water-OBJ   give-PAST
   'Minsu gave Soyoon (some) water.'

Given these instances, if we are to presuppose the accuracy of Harley and Ritter's feature geometry, it would seem that Korean's syntactic number feature is either somehow covert or optionally expressed through deul. It will be important in this study to clarify the nature of the relationship between animacy and number in Korean.

IV. Research Methods:

This thesis will be written within the framework of contemporary formal syntax and semantics, using such semantic theories of counting and plurality as Krifka (1995), Chierchia (1998), Bale and Coon, (2014), Sudo (2016), and Rothstein (2017). These works, which also deal with classifier function and the mass/count distinction (as well as how the two intersect), will serve not only as a foundation from which to build my claims, but also as a larger dialogue to which I hope my data will contribute – especially in the context of classifier language behavior.

My analysis will also be based on syntactic literature dealing with noun phrase structure and grammatical features, including works by Deprez (2004), Borer (2005), Cowper & Hall (2009), and Danon (2011, 2012). Borer (2005)'s analysis of the way that count and mass nouns behave syntactically in classifier languages will be especially applicable to my own research. I will also draw on prior work done by Bayanati and Toivonen (2019) regarding the relevance of animacy and human-ness in Persian and Inari Saami.

In addition to the data provided in previous work, I will also collect judgements from native Korean speakers. Having previously lived in South Korea, I have access to at least 5 native speakers whom I can contact via telephone; 2 additional native informants are students at Bar-Ilan University and can be contacted in person. Using the judgments collected, this thesis will seek to synthesize new data with the previous research referenced above, along with any other literature collected during the course of research.

The thesis will be organized as follows:

Section 1: The first section of this thesis will introduce the topic in broad terms, discussing its significance in the field and explaining pertinent concepts. The section will conclude with a clear statement of the research question: is deul truly a morphosyntactic marker of plurality?

Section 2: Here, the research question will be positioned within the larger discourse. Including (but not limited to) the works referenced above, the literature review will provide the reader with background on the topic and provide the foundation upon which the rest of the thesis will be built.

Section 3: I will explore evidence in favor of treating *deul* as a semantic feature:

- Data showing that deul is not a morphosyntactic plural marker

- Data showing that the usage of deul may actually be undergoing grammatical change

This section will explore what the judgments collected mean for the concept of a Korean plural marker and will tie back in with the current literature and other claims that have been made regarding deul. It will also present the data in terms of the larger discourse dealing with classifier languages and their noun phrase structure(s). Here, I will propose an analysis for Korean *deul* that argues that *deul* is not a true morphosyntactic plural marker. This section will also explain the methodology of the research, including details about the informants and the nature of the judgments collected.

Section 4: The thesis will conclude with a final section of concluding remarks, reframing the topic, summarizing the results of the study and how they relate to the general discourse, as well as indicating any limits of the research. It will be followed by a list of all cited works.

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