논문제목: Intentionality and Conative Constructions
이름: 이주원 (Juwon Lee)
소속: 경희대학교
지원분야: 의미론
이메일 주소: happyjuwon@gmail.com
연락처: 010-4577-2710
Intentionality and Conative Constructions

1. Introduction

This paper discusses the relation between the notion of intention and conative constructions in English. It is generally assumed in the literature that the intentionality is part of conative construction like (1a) (see Ikegami 1985, Pinker 1989, 2013, Levin 1993, Goldberg 1995, Beavers 2006, Kim 2009, Perek & Lemmens 2010, Vincent 2013, *inter alia*). However, not every “conative” construction requires intentionality on the part of the subject. For example, in (1b) the subject’s intention of drinking water is not necessary (see Rice 1987, van der Leek 1996, Broccias 2001).

(1)  
   a. I kicked *at* the door.  
   b. I sipped *at* a tumbler of water. (Broccias 2001)

Broccias (2001) uses the term, *at*-construction, which is a neutral label for both genuine conative constructions like (1a) and similar constructions like (1b). The primary purpose of this paper is to provide an explanation for how the interpretation of intentionality arises in *at*-constructions like (1a), but not in *at*-constructions like (1b).

2. Two types of *at*-constructions

The sentence in (1a) belongs to allative *at*-construction (in which the preposition *at* designates a target with which a forceful contact can be made) and the sentence in (1b) ablative *at*-construction (describing continuous actions accompanying movement from a target or a change of state of a target, in addition to necessary contact) (see Broccias 2001). However, we cannot simply say that the intentionality is inherent part of allative *at*-construction, since other allative *at*-constructions such as (2a) do not require the intentionality. The ablative *at*-construction in (2b) is parallel to (1b) in terms of the intentionality (Broccias 2001).

(2)  
   a. I threw the stone *at* the door.  
   b. I ate *at* the pie.

In short, only some allative *at*-constructions seem to require the subject’s intention among *at*-constructions. Then the basic property (i.e. allative motion) of allative *at*-constructions should bear on the intentionality of the *at*-conatives like (1a).

3. Conative hypothesis

In order to group *at*-conatives, there should be further constraints that properly restrict the set of allative *at*-constructions. I propose the Conative Hypothesis in the following:

(3) **Conative Hypothesis**: the *at*-construction headed by a verb entails the subject’s intention regarding the event denoted by the verb if and only if *at* targets the argument with which a contact is made in the final subevent of the causation event structure of the verb.

According this hypothesis, the sentence in (1a) entails the intentionality since the verb *kick* has a causation event structure (i.e. [[x ACT] CAUSE [y BECOME <kicked>]]) and the preposition *at* targets the ball, with which a contact is made (i.e. kicked) in the final subevent of the causation event structure of *kick*. However, the *at*-construction (1b) does not require the intentionality since although the object of *at* must be touched in the event of sipping (i.e. [[x ACT] CAUSE [y BECOME <sipped>]]), this contact is not the final subevent; the final subevent of the sipping event is the result state of being sipped.
4. Intended result

I show that the English conative constructions belong to the semantic natural class of intended result, along with Korean transitive verb constructions with intended result reading.

In (4), the Korean transitive verb sentence is ambiguous between actual result reading (in which the result of the verb is actually realized, but the intentionality is unspecified) and intended result reading (in which the result of the verb is intended, but the actual occurrence of the result is unspecified) (Lee 2015).

\[(4) \text{ku-ka changmwun-ul yel-ess-ta.} \]
\[\text{he-Nom window-Acc open-Pst-Dec} \]
\[\text{‘He opened the window.’ (actual-result reading)} \]
\[\text{(roughly) ‘He tried to open the window.’ (intended-result reading)} \]

As in Korean and English, an intended result meaning can be expressed in different syntactic structures: transitive verb construction in Korean and conative construction in English. Syntactically, these two types of constructions do not form a natural class. Nevertheless, the intended result generalization identifies a distinctive semantic profile: the final subevent of the verb must be intended. So even when syntactically apart, the two constructions in Korean and English still instantiate the same semantic phenomenon.

5. Agent control vs. intentionality

Agent control (the control of the agent over the described event) is required for non-culmination readings in Skwxwu7mesh (see Jacobs 2011, Demirdache & Martin 2013), but the subject’s intention, rather than the notion of control, is necessary in Korean intended result interpretations (Lee 2015). English conative construction is parallel to Korean in this respect:

\[(5) \text{[Context: Tom was wounded. So it was not easy for Tom to move his leg.]}\]
\[\text{Tom kicked at the door.} \]

In (5) Tom experienced the difficulty kicking the door (i.e. he had limited control), but the conative sentence is allowed in this context. This again shows that conative constructions in English belong to the semantic natural class of intended result, albeit they have distinct forms and constraints from Korean transitive verb constructions with intended result reading.

6. Conclusion

I argued that the interpretation of intentionality arises in English at-constructions if and only if the object of the preposition at is put into contact in the final subevent of the main verb and that the at-conatives are a type of the semantic natural class, intended result, along with Korean transitive verb construction with intended result reading. Whether this analysis is applicable to other languages such as German, which has nach-conative constructions (e.g. Er schlug nach dem Mann ‘He hit at the man’ from Perek & Hilpert 2014), is remained as future research.

Selected references

- Ikegami, Yoshihiki. 1985. ‘Activity’—‘accomplishment’—‘achievement’—a language that can’t say ‘I burned it, but it didn’t burn’ and one that can.