A Tautology is a Tautology: Specificity and Categorization in Nominal Tautological Constructions

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BLS 35, UC Berkeley, Feb 14-16, 2009
1.1 Observation: Japanese Nominal Tautologies (Okamoto 1993)

Meanings are determined by case markers:

a. –wa (topic marker): immutability of category, discreteness of an item

b. –ga (subject marker): undesirability

Their meaning distribution is complementary except for some cases (implied by Okamoto (1993))
Example

(1a) [Okamoto 1993: 447]

\[\text{okusan wa okusan da} \quad \text{‘a wife/lady is a wife/lady’}\]
wife TM wife Cop [category immutability]
(e.g. A wife should do what a wife should do)

\[\text{okusan ga okusan da} \quad \text{‘a wife/lady is a wife/lady’}\]
wife Nom wife Cop [undesirability]
INTRODUCTION

► Example

(1b) (from the newspaper Asahi Shinbun) [Okamoto 1993: 443]

*kimi wa kimi, ware wa ware nari, saredo nakayosi.*
You Top you I Top I Cop yet, (we) are good friends
‘you are you, I am I, yet we are good friends.’

The topic marker *-wa* goes with a reading of immutability of the category for the referred nominal and thus, it has a meaning of discreteness of the nominal.
INTRODUCTION

► Counterexample?

(2a) [When seeing a student, who has been known for his brilliance, solving a very tough question in a second without any hesitation,]

\[
tensai \ wa \ tensai-da \quad \text{‘A genius is a genius’}
\]
\[
genius \ Top \ genius-Decl \quad \text{(He IS a genius)}
\]

► Implications

☞ The topic marker -\textit{wa} can be used in a reading of desirability of the referred nominal, which is unexpected according to Okamoto’s account (2a).

☞ The interpretations of Japanese nominal tautology are, in fact, not discrete, but that their semantic ranges overlap each other.
INTRODUCTION

1.2 Korean Nominal Tautologies

► Korean and Japanese share similar grammatical structures:
   a. –un/ -nun (topic marker)
   b. -i/ -ka (subject marker)

☞ If grammatical conventions totally determine construal of the construction in a language, the construction in another language sharing the similar conventions should be construed in the similar manner.
1.2 Korean Nominal Tautologies

 Semantic ranges overlap each other:

(3) *os-un os-i-ci/-ya/-ney*

 clothes-Top clothes-Cop-Decl
‘(Lit.) clothes are clothes’

R1: The outfit is terrible. It can be hardly called an outfit (undesirable).
R2: That IS an outfit (desirable).
R3: That’s nothing but an outfit (immutability of category; *-ney)*.

☞ Is it plausible to say that grammatical conventionality totally determines the construal?
INTRODUCTION

1.3 Objectives

► To show that Okamoto’s (1993) argument that grammatical conventionality determines the construal is not enough,

► To propose alternative cues for the construal:
  a. The speaker’s knowledge about the entity that is expressed in the first nominal wrt its (non-) referential distinction
  b. The speaker’s categorization of the referred entity which is implicated in the second nominal based on the speaker’s background knowledge of social stereotypes, prototypes, etc.

► To better explicate the meaning distribution of the construction within Mental Space Theory (MST; Fauconnier 1997).
2.1 Debates between Radical vs. Non-radical approaches

- 1980’s Heated Debate

- **Radical** (Purely pragmatically vs. Purely semantically)
  RS: “Meanings are partly conventional and language-specific” (Wierzbicka 1987 and 1988 etc.).

- **Non-Radical** (Hybrid): linguistic forms as well as speakers’ embodied knowledge of the referred entity should be considered (Escandell-Vidal 1990, Farghal 1992, Fraser 1988, Gibbs 1994, Gibbs and McCarrell 1990 [with Experiments], Okamoto 1991, 1993; which this paper follows)
PREVIOUS APPROACHES

2.2 Okamoto’s (1993) Non-radical Approach

[Repeated]

► Meanings are determined by case markers:
  a. X wa X (topic): category immutability
  b. X ga X (Nom): undesirable quality

“Each core meaning [of tautological constructions in Japanese] is not fully analyzable by regular compositional semantics. Given their core meanings, ‘tautologies’ may convey additional meanings: which are only inferable pragmatically” (1993: 433).
PREVIOUS APPROACHES

2.3 Problems Raised

► The construal is not fixed by the proposed conventionality.
✓ X wa X (expected: category immutability)

(4) [A teacher utters evaluative comments on one of his students, on whom he has very bad impression.]

`seito wa seito da`
student Top student Decl
‘(Lit.) The student is (technically) a student’ (This student is barely called a student. This student is not a good student.)

☞ Possible to have undesirability reading
2.3 Problems Raised

- The construal is not fixed by the proposed conventionality.
- $X\sim X$ (expected: undesirability)

(5) [Okamoto 1993: 450]

*basyo ga basyo da kara, ki o tuke-nasai*

place Sub place Cop because, be careful.

‘Because the place is (not a safe) place, be careful.’

(6) [The speaker is talking about the very formal wedding to which she is invited.] [Okamoto 1993: 450]

*basyo ga basyo da kara, tyan to site ik-anakutya*

place Sub place Cop because, in a proper (dress) (I) must go

‘Because the place is (not an ordinary) place, I must go in a proper dress.’

☞ Not necessarily presuppose that the place is undesirable.
PROPOSED ALTERNATIVE

3.1 Proposed Cues: Specificity and Categorization
► Then, what determines the construal?

Hypotheses
(7) [a] If a nominal X refers to a general notion of the concept, or if both of the nominals refer to the same type of entities (spec-spec or gen-gen; “Token indifference” [Gibbs and McCarrell 1990]) the utterance is likely to convey reading of category immutability.

[b] If a nominal X refers to a specific entity, the utterance is likely to convey evaluative reading such as desirability or undesirability.

[c] It affects the construal which type of entity in the category (stereotypes, prototypes, etc.) the second nominal refers to.
3.1 Proposed Cues: Specificity and Categorization

► Korean Tautologies –(n)un [topic]/ -i or –ka [Nom]

(8) *pyeong-i/-un  
*pyeong-i-nikka  
cosim-ha-ela  
disease-Sub/-Top  
disease-Cop-because  
be.careful-do-Imp  
‘(Lit.) Because the disease is a disease, be careful’  
(Since your disease is fatal, be careful).
☞  (7b) works here (NP1: spec, NP2: stereotype).

(9) [when one breaks up relationship with her boyfriend,]
*icy-pwuthe  
*ne-nun  
*ne-iko  
*na-nun  
*na-ita  
now-from  
you-Top  
you-Cop.and  
I-Top  
I-Cop.Decl  
‘(Lit.) From now on, you are you and I am I’  
(From now on, we are not together any more).
☞  (7a) works here (spec-spec).
3.1 Proposed Cues: Specificity and Categorization

(10) [Undesirable attitude; specific NP1]
[Someone asks the speaker if X is the speaker’s friend and the speaker is not sure about that]

na-eeykey ku-uy cenhwapenho-ka iss-nun-kes-ul po-ny
I-to he-Gen phone.number-Nom Cop-Pres-Nmlz-Acc see-because

chinkwu-nun chinkwu-ney
friend-Top friend-Decl

‘(Lit.) Because I have his number, the friend is a friend’ (Considering that I have his number (in my cell phone), he might be my friend (I might have met him before)
3.1 Proposed Cues: Specificity and Categorization

(11) [Desirable attitude: specific]

tow-a  cwu-ese  cengmal  komawu-e.
help-Conn give-Conn.because  really  thank (you)-Decl

yeksi  chinkwu-nun  chinkwu-ney
doubtlessly  friend-Top  friend-Decl

‘(Lit.) Thank you for giving me help. The friend is a friend, doubtlessly’ (Thank you for giving me help. You ARE a friend.)
3.1 Proposed Cues: Specificity and Categorization

(12) [Immutability: non-specific]

[When advising your friend, who is afraid that friendship will turn to be bad and hesitates to tell her friend to give her money back, not to hesitate to.]

\[
\text{ese tal-lako ha-e.}\]
\[
\text{soon give.me-Comp do (say)-Decl}\]
\[
\text{ton-un ton-i-ko, chinkwu-nun chinkwu-ya}\]
\[
\text{money-Top Money-Cop-and friend-Top friend-Decl}\]

‘(Lit.) Tell him to give you the money back as soon as possible. Money is money and Friends are friends’ (Tell him to give you the money back. The thing is that money and friendship are separate matters)
3.1 Proposed Cues: Specificity and Categorization

(13) [Indifference: non-specific; any member of the category]

A: chinkwu-ka mwue-lako sayngkak-ha-ni?
friend-Nom what-Comp thought-do-Intr

B: chinkwu-nun chinkwu-ci.
friend-Top friend-Decl

‘(Lit.) What do you think is a friend? Friends are friends’ (How do you define a friend? There is nothing special about a friend)
PROPOSED ALTERNATIVE

3.2 Evidences for Subject Noun’s Specificity

3.2.1 Evidentiality

► Evidential Markers go well with (un)desirability readings:

a. Evidential markers such as –ney /-kwun/-tela (H.-S. Lee 1991): not likely to go with category immutability.

☞ Since evidentiality is likely to be based on the speaker’s specific experiences regarding the referred entity, the referred entity is likely to be referential/specific and thus, specificity matters in the construal of the constructions.
3.2.1 Evidentiality

(15=3) **os-un** **os-i-ci/-ya/-ney**
clothes-Top clothes-cop-Comm/Comm/Evid
‘(Lit.) clothes are clothes’

Possible contexts
a. The quality of the outfit is not good and it can hardly be called an outfit (spec-peripheral) [-ci/-ya/-ney].
b. The outfit is really nice (spec-prototype) [-ya/-ney].
c. An outfit is nothing but an outfit [-ci/-ya/*-ney].
3.2.1 Evidentiality

(16=11) [Desirable attitude: specific]

tow-a cwu-ese cengmal komawu-e.
help-Conn give-Conn.because really thank (you)-Decl
yeaksi chinkwu-nun chinkwu-ney
doubtlessly friend-Top friend-Decl

‘(Lit.) Thank you for giving me help. The friend is a friend, doubtlessly’ (Thank you for giving me help. YOU’RE a friend.)
3.2.1 Evidentiality

(17=12) [Immutability: non-specific]

[When advising your friend, who is afraid that friendship will turn to be bad
and hesitates to tell her friend to give her money back, not to hesitate to,]

ese tal-lako ha-e.
soon give.me-Comp do (say)-Decl

ton-un ton-i-ko, chinkwu-nun chinkwu-ya/*-ney
money-Top Money-Cop-and friend-Top friend-Decl

‘(Lit.) Tell him to give you the money back as soon as possible. Money is
money and Friends are friends’ (Tell him to give you the money back. The
thing is that money and friendship are separate matters.)
3.2.2 Negation

► Tautologies meaning category immutability are not likely to be negated as shown in (13).

(13) *os-un/ i os-i ani-ya
    clothes-Top/ Sub clothes-Sub Neg.Cop-Decl
    ‘(Lit.) clothes are not clothes’

☞ The negated utterance cannot have the category immutability reading at all, since there is nothing specific that can be negated.
3.2.3 Definiteness

► Definite expressions *ku*

(14) [A couple goes shopping. While shopping, the husband gets bored, but his wife keeps looking around. His wife picks an outfit and asks him how he thinks about it. The husband can mean ‘I don’t care about it, just pick anything,’ by saying the following utterance]

\[ ku-os-i \quad ku-os-i-ci/-ya/\ ?-ney \]
\[ \text{the-clothes-Sub} \quad \text{the-clothes-be-Decl1/ -Decl2/ -Decl3} \]

‘The clothes are the clothes.’

Generalization (7a) works here (Even though the first nominal might refer to a specific entity, the utterance yields category immutability reading; Irony).
3.2.3 Definiteness

► Proper Noun

(15) *pwusi-nun  pwusi-ney*

Bush-Top    Bush-Decl

‘(Lit.) Bush is Bush’ (He IS great!/ He IS stupid!/ I don’t care about him [with –ci or –ya, but not with -ney])

☞ Without any experience regarding him, people cannot understand what the utterance means; Depending of the speaker’s knowledge of him, the construal varies.
PROPOSED ALTERNATIVE

3.2.4 Old/New information

(16a)  *os-i*  *os-i-ney*
      clothes-Nom  clothes-cop-Evid.

(16b)  *os-un*  *os-i-ney*
      clothes-Top  clothes-cop-Evid.

☞ **Evidential seems to be sensitive to the novelty of the information:**
   In T-construction, the nominative marker seems to conflict with the evidential –*ney* without appropriate intonation. This might have resulted in the insufficient generalization that only case markers can determine the construal.
3.3 Evidences for Predicate Noun’s Prototypicality

Gibbs and McCarrell’s (1999) Experiments

“Our findings highlight the importance of speakers/listeners’ stereotypical understanding of people, activities, and concrete objects in the use and understanding of different tautological expressions.”

(1999: 125)

e.g. *A hat is a hat / Carrots will be carrots* \(<\!< *Business is business*

Dahlgren (1985): people possess more stereotypical knowledge for human nouns and abstract nouns than they would for concrete nouns.
TAUTOLOGIES IN MENTAL SPACE

So far, we’ve talked about..

✓ The construal is determined by whether the speaker has a specific entity by the first nominal in her mind
  ✓ If the speaker has it, the reading would be evaluative.
  ✓ If not, or if the two nominals indicate the same kind of entities, the reading is likely to yield a category immutability reading.

✓ It is also determined by what the speaker believes about the nominal expression by the second nominal.
  ✓ The meaning varies depending on whether the second nominal is mapped onto a stereotype, a prototype, a peripheral member, etc.
4.1 SPECIFICITY AND CATEGORIZATION

(17) *(ku chinkwu-ka) chinkwu-nun chinkwu-ci/-ya/-ney*[Evaluative]
(the friend-Nom) friend-Top friend-Decl

‘He IS a friend; He is my best friend’
4.2 Genericity and Categorization

(19) *chinkwu-nun* *chinkwu-ci/-ya* [Category Immutability]

friend-Top       friend-Decl

‘Friends are nothing but friends’
4.2 GENERICITY AND CATEGORIZATION

(20) `chinkwu-nun chinkwu-ci/-ya [Indifference]
friend-Top friend-Decl
‘(Lit.) friend is friend.’
5. DISCUSSION

► Some nominal tautologies seem to have similar illocutionary force to **proverbs**. When hearing the utterance, interlocutors can infer that the generic expression in the utterance will apply to the specific target in the given context.

  e.g. [When seeing their son messing around the room,]
  Eng. *Boys will be boys*
  Kor. *ay-tul-un ay-tul-i-ney* [boy-pl-Nom fboy-Pl-Cop-Decl]
     ‘Boys are boys’

► **T-Construction** involve a similar cognitive abstraction/specification process to GENERIC IS SPECIFIC mapping which is active in construing proverbs (Lakoff and Turner 1989: 162-166)
CONCLUSIONS

► This paper showed that grammatical conventionality is not enough for the semantic cue construing tautological constructions and that we need to consider other factors: (non-) specificity by the first nominal and categorization of a referred entity by the second nominal.

► In fact, we might not need the fixed meaning distinction such as category immutability or evaluative any more, since which type of member is linked to the second nominal and interaction between the two nominals will determine the construal.

► In order to support my claim, it was discussed that usage of evidential markers, negation, and definite expressions go well with evaluative readings, all of which is related to specificity.
CONCLUSIONS

► Gibbs and McCarrell’s (1991) experimental work also supports my claim that **prototypicality** of the second nominal affects the construal.

► In order to better show how our cognitive capability interprets the constructions, mappings within MST were shown.

✓ The future study should cover patterns of **intonation** which might be another critical cue for the construal, and also correlation between **information structure** and evidentials, and

✓ It would be more interesting to see how the proposed cues work for the clausal level tautologies.
References


**Acknowledgement**

I’d like to thank Eve Sweetser, George Lakoff, Yui Horiguchi, Rina Arai, Seiko Masuno, and the colleagues in CogSci 201 in Fall 2007 for their detailed feedback and wonderful comments.