Structure and interpretation in lexical nominalizations: accounting for polysemy

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In a recent overview of lexical nominalizations, Lieber (2018) identifies polysemy as a central issue in the analysis of nominalizations. Polysemy of nominalizers may involve the use of a given nominalizer in syntactic/grammatical and lexical nominalizations in some languages (English, Korean, Romance, Quechua, Malagasy, etc. – see Shibatani 2018 for additional languages). However, it is quite pervasive in lexical nominalizations in almost all languages. Deverbal nominalizations containing the same nominalizer can be associated with a variety of different construals: event vs. result; complex vs. simple event (Grimshaw 1990); different types of participant nominalizations (*driv-er, print-er, loan-er, din-er*); eventive/dynamic vs. habitual/dispositional interpretations (Alexiadou & Schäfer 2010).

Polysemy is a hallmark of Korean nominalizations as well. In addition to the well-known polysemy of *-um/-ki* as lexical and syntactic nominalizers, lexical nominalizations formed with various nominalizing suffixes (*-i, -kay, -um, -ki* etc) can be polysemous (C-E Song 1989; C-S Kim 1996, etc.). This is illustrated below with *-i*.

nol-i, pel-i, seys-pang-sal-i (Action/Event)
cec-mek-i, oyn-son-cap-i (Actor/participant)
kwu-i, pwuth-pak-i (Result)
mek-i, mi-tat-i (Theme)
palam-pat-i, tung-pat-i (Location or Instrument)
koki-cap-i, kwutwu-takk-i (Action/Event or Actor/participant)
kkoc-kkoc-i (Action/Event or Result)
ttay-mil-i (Action/Event or Actor)

Recent syntactic approaches to nominalizations (Alexiadou 2001 and subsequent work) take all or most types of polysemy to be due to differences in the type/size of syntactic structures that are nominalized. The sole function of nominalizers is nominalization. Polysemy does not arise from the nominalizer (except maybe the difference between event vs. participant nominalizers) but is attributed to differences in the base structure that is nominalized. Syntactic approaches thus make a prediction that differences in the structure that undergoes nominalization (or the 'smoking guns' that attest to hidden structure) should correlate with different interpretations/polysemy of nominalizers (cf. FBR 2001 on VPs within complex event nominalizations and Alexiadou and Schäfer 2010 on verbalizing morphology and event modifiers in *-er* nominalizations).

The syntactic approach to nominalizations has not yet found its way to generative work on Korean morphology on any significant scale, though Yoon (2021) examined the structure-interpretation prediction made by syntactic approaches and argued that a syntactic approach to eventively interpreted lexical nominalizations is not supported by the facts of Korean. We will show that its central predictions are not supported when we consider the wider range of polysemies found in lexical nominalizations of the type shown above.

And while nominalizer polysemy has been noted in the literature on (lexical) nominalizations in the kwukehak tradition, there is a dearth of proposals that offer specifics on how polysemy arises. The typical consensus seems to be that the nominalizer(s) has/have a basic meaning (as eventive/action nominalizers) but the nominalizations, once created, can develop additional meanings. While metaphor and metonymy are often invoked, specific proposals on how they work to produce the various polysemies are lacking. Y-J Choi (2012) is the only work we are aware of that proposes an explicit account of various polysemies within the framework of Panther and Thornburg (2009).

Our tentative idea about the polysemy of lexical nominalizations is as follows. While the four nominalizers (*-kay*, *-i*, *-ki*, and *-um*) share a common reification function, metonymy involved in the reification gives rise to polysemous meanings; these affixes attach to stems, yielding reified processes. Metonymy happens after the word formation, not during the process. For example, *-kay* is attached to the stem *ttu* 'knit' to result in a reified process 'knitting'. However, in most other cases, *kay* heavily induces a metonymic shift. In *cip-kay* 'tongs ', for example, the INSTRUMENT FOR ACTION metonymy is utilized. The other three nominalizers exhibit similar behaviors in that they too either reify a process or induce a specific metonymy. They differ concerning how strongly they render metonymy. While *-kay* induces metonymy most strongly, *-um* does so most weakly. The proposed order of metonymic manifestation with these nominalizers would look like the following (from the strongest to the weakest): *-kay* > *-i* > *-ki* > *-um*. We can then predict that polysemous meanings arise most frequently with *-kay* and *-i* because they induce metonymies stronger than the other two.

We emphasize that we are not claiming that affixes exhibit metonymy, which is different from Janda's (2011) view on metonymy and word formation. Rather, as extensively argued by Brdar and Brdar-Szabó (2014) in response to Janda (2011), a metonymic shift operates on a whole derived word as a source. See also Park and Park (2017).