

### Korean evidential *-te*, the past tense *-ess*, and the commitment of the speaker

**Puzzle.** Some literature on evidentials (Koev 2017, Lee 2013, a.o.) argues that whether an evidential is interpreted as direct perceptive or indirect depends on the temporal distance between the event described by the prejacent (the described event or DE) and the event where the speaker learns the DE (the learning event or LE): if the DE and the LE overlap, then an evidential is interpreted as direct perceptive, whereas if they do not overlap, then it is interpreted as indirect. This implies that the tense in the prejacent should be interpreted relative to the relation between the DE and the LE. For example, in (1a), since the DE overlaps with the LE, *-te* is interpreted to introduce direct perceptive evidentiality, whereas in (1b), since the DE precedes the LE, it is interpreted to introduce indirect evidentiality.

- (1) a. Pi-ka o- $\emptyset$ -te-la.  
 Rain-Nom come-Pres-*te*-Decl  
 ‘It rained.’ (with direct perceptive evidentiality: the DE overlaps with the LE)  
 b. Pi-ka o-ass-te-la.  
 Rain-Nom come-Past-*te*-Decl  
 ‘It rained.’ (with indirect evidentiality: the DE precedes the LE)

However, in Korean, there are cases where the evidential *-te* with the past tense *-ess* introduces the direct perceptive evidentiality, unlike the prediction made by these studies. Consider two scenarios in (2), where the speaker, Bill, has the direct perceptive evidentiality. Here (3a) is compatible with (2a), whereas (3b) is compatible with (2b).

- (2) a. John thought he lost his book yesterday, but when he came to his office today he found it was on his desk. Wondering when it came back, John asked Bill to check the security camera. Watching the security camera recorded 10 minutes ago, Bill said...  
 b. John found he lost his book when he came to his office today. John asked Bill to check the security camera. Watching the security camera recorded 10 minutes ago, Bill said...

- (3) a. (10-pwun cen-ey-to) chayksang wi-ey John-uy chayk-i iss- $\emptyset$ -te-la.  $\supseteq \supseteq$   
 (10 min. before-Loc-too) desk up-Loc J.-Gen book-Nom exist-Pres-*te*-Decl  
 ‘John’s book was on the desk (10 minutes ago).’ (with direct perceptive evidentiality)  
 → Felicitous with (2a) but not with (2b)  
 b. (10-pwun cen-ey-nun) chayksang wi-ey John-uy chayk-i iss-ess-te-la.  
 (10 min. before-Loc-Top) desk up-Loc J.-Gen book-Nom exist-Past-*te*-Decl  
 ‘John’s book was on the desk (10 minutes ago).’ (with direct perceptive evidentiality)  
 → Felicitous with (2b) but not with (2a)

**Interpreting data.** (2) and (3) suggest that, unlike what previous literature says, *-ess* under *-te* should be interpreted not relative to the LE, but relative to the utterance time (UT). In (3a), the prejacent should be ‘the book is on the desk’. In contrast, in (3b), the prejacent should be ‘the book was on the desk.’ This further implies that the speaker makes different commitments to the prejacent, depending on the presence/absence of *-ess*. The speaker makes his/her commitment to the fact that the book is on the desk at the UT in (3a). In (3b), the speaker makes his/her commitment to the fact that the book was on the desk before but is not any more at the UT. Previous literature on Korean *-te* (such as Chung 2007, Lim 2011, or Lee 2013) does not seem to consider this kind of relation between the presence/absence of *-ess* and the speaker’s commitment to the prejacent (and its implication). We also believe that no previous literature concerns the relation between the commitment to the prejacent and the UT.



In (3b) under (2b), when watching the camera, the speaker need not consider the relations between situations, but only the recorded scenes showing that the book was on the desk. Since the ES is equal to the IS (due to the camera), (4) is satisfied, even when *-te* with *-ess* is used under the scenario with direct evidentiality such as (2b).

(7) ES: the book was on the desk  
IS: the book was on the desk  
→ ES=IS (4 is satisfied)

### Selected References

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