

Revisiting Korean Case Particles *poko* and *tele*: A Linguistic Typological Perspective

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1 Introduction

This study presents an in-depth analysis of two Korean case particles, *poko* and *tele*, investigating their syntactic distributions and semantic functions from a linguistic typological perspective. The case particles *poko* and *tele* have conventionally been classified as dative markers, commonly understood to indicate either the object influenced by a certain action or the addressee of a verbal action. However, the broad categorizations prove insufficient in capturing the subtleties of *poko* and *tele*, as evidenced by their constrained usage in comparison to more commonly used datives such as *eykey* and *hanthey*.

- (1) cey-ka chelswu-{***poko**/***tele**/**eykey**/**hanthey**} chayk-ul cwu-ess-eyo.¹
I-NOM Chelswu-DAT book-ACC give-PST-DECL
'I gave Chelswu a book.'

¹ The following abbreviations are used: ACC = accusative; ALL = allative; CAUS = causative; CONN = connective; DAT = dative; DECL = declarative; GEN = genitive; HORT = hortative; IMP = imperative; NEG = negative; NOM = nominative; PL = plural; PST = past; QUES = question; QUOT = quotative; TOP = topic.

Japanese/Korean Linguistics 31.

Edited by William Giang, Lucien Brown, Shimako Iwasaki, Satoshi Nambu, and Daniel Pieper.

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- (2) cey-ka chelswu-{"**poko**/"**tele**/**eykey**/**hanthey**} ku iyaki-lul ha-yss-eyo.
 I-NOM Chelswu-DAT the story-ACC talk-PST-DECL
 'I told the story to Chelswu.'
- (3) cey-ka chelswu-{"**poko**/**tele**/**eykey**/**hanthey**} mence ka-lako ha-yss-eyo.
 I-NOM Chelswu-DAT first go-IMP.QUOT say-PST-DECL
 'I told Chelswu to go first.'

Examples such as (1), where *poko* and *tele* cannot designate the indirect object in a giving action, challenge the notion that they 'indicate the object influenced by a certain action.' Similarly, comparing (2) and (3) reveals that 'indicating the addressee of a verbal action' does not fully capture the semantic features of *poko* and *tele*. This evidence calls for a reconsideration of the traditional dative account of these particles.

This paper is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews previous literature and establishes the foundation for our discussion. Section 3 investigates the actual usage of the two particles based on contemporary Korean corpus data, analyzing them from a Construction Grammar point of view. Section 4 presents semantic maps related to dative and allative cases to position *poko* and *tele* in a crosslinguistic context. Finally, Section 5 summarizes the discussion and concludes the paper.

2 Literature Review

The literature on *poko* and *tele* can be mainly divided into synchronic and diachronic analyses. In terms of synchronic analysis, previous studies—primarily found in dictionaries and pedagogical grammars, including those by Lim (1999), Paik (2006), Ko and Koo (2018), and Yeon and Brown (2019)—have noted that *poko* and *tele* share similarities with *eykey* and *hanthey* and are predominantly used in reported speech contexts. However, most descriptions consider *poko* and *tele* to have more restricted usage compared to *eykey* and *hanthey*, often treating them as specialized forms rather than independent markers. Consequently, they have consistently been classified under the broader category of dative case markers.

While previous studies have largely treated *poko* and *tele* as subtypes of dative markers, recent research has provided a more nuanced perspective. A notable example is the study by Paik and Hou (2023), which, adopting the Construction Grammar framework, argues that the primary function of *poko* is to indicate the original addressee of the quoted speech. However, its usage is not limited to this; rather, it extends to a range of constructions, including naming, evaluative, and causative constructions, and the *na-poko ... rako* construction. This broader distribution challenges the traditional classification of *poko* as merely a dative marker and suggests the need for a more comprehensive analysis of its functions.

From a diachronic perspective, research by Yang (2000), Park and Lee (2009), and Lee (2021) has traced the historical origins of *poko* and *tele*. It has been suggested that *poko* originates from a conjugated form of the verb *pota* 'see', while *tele* derives from a conjugated form of *talita* 'accompany.' Although the grammaticalization pathways of these markers have been relatively well defined, the connection between their historical evolution and current usage remains insufficiently explored. Additionally, further investigation is needed to determine whether the development of *poko* and *tele* aligns with typologically recognized grammaticalization patterns across languages.

3 The Syntactic Distributions and Semantic Functions of *poko* and *tele*

This section examines the syntactic distributions and semantic functions of *poko* and *tele*. It builds upon the analysis of *poko* proposed by Paik and Hou (2023), and refines it to determine whether it can also be applied to *tele*. Our study finds that these two markers appear in four major constructions: speech quotation, naming, evaluative, and causative constructions.

3.1 Speech Quotation Construction

The speech quotation construction represents the primary function of *poko* and *tele*. The syntax of this construction follows the pattern ‘NP-*poko/tele* [Quoted Clause] VP’, where the VP consists of speech verbs such as *malhata* ‘speak’ or generic verbs such as *hata* ‘do’. Semantically, this construction attributes the quoted content to the NP, with *poko* and *tele* functioning as markers indicating the addressee of the verbal action.

This construction can be further classified based on the sentence type of the quoted clause, which may be imperative, cohortative, interrogative, or declarative. Each type is marked by a specific quotation marker: *lako* for imperative speech, *cako* for cohortative speech, *nyako* for interrogative speech, and *tako* for declarative speech. The following examples illustrate these different sentence types. Since imperative speech has already been demonstrated in example (3), it is omitted here.

(4) cey-ka Chelswu-**{poko/tele}** kathi pap mek-cako ha-yss-eyo.
I-NOM Chelswu-ALL together meal eat-HORT.QUOT say-PST-DECL
‘I told Chelswu, “Let’s eat together.”’

(5) cey-ka Chelswu-**{poko/tele}** nayil o-nyako mwul-ess-eyo.
I-NOM Chelswu-ALL tomorrow come-QUES.QUOT ask-PST-DECL
‘I asked Chelswu if he will come tomorrow.’

(6) cey-ka Chelswu-**{poko/tele}** palpyo calha-yss-tako
I-NOM Chelswu-ALL presentation do.well-PST-DECL.QUOT
chingchanha-yss-eyo.
compliment-PST-DECL
‘I complimented Chelswu, saying that he did well on his presentation.’

3.2 Naming Construction

It has been observed that *poko* and *tele* appear frequently in sentences involving naming actions. The syntax of this construction is ‘NP₁-*poko/tele* NP₂-(i)*lako* VP,’ where VP consists of naming verbs such as *pwuluta* ‘call’ or *chinghata* ‘name’. The semantic of this construction is to name NP₁ as NP₂. Thus, the function of *poko* and *tele* is to mark the object of a naming action.

This construction can be further classified based on the animacy of NP₁. As shown in (7a), when NP₁ is animate, both *poko* and *tele* are acceptable. However, as shown in (7b), when NP₁ is inanimate, *poko* is preferred, whereas *tele* is less acceptable.

- (7) a. ne na-**{poko/tele}** maennal kyemo-rako haji anh-ass-ni?
 you I-ALL always stepmother-DECL.QUOT do-CONN NEG-PST-QUES
 ‘Didn’t you always call me a stepmother?’
 b. nan-**{poko/tele}** phwul-i-lako ha-ney.
 orchid-ALL grass-be-DECL.QUOT say-DECL
 ‘They call the orchid “grass”.’

These examples indicate that *poko* is more flexible in combining with both animate and inanimate NP₁, whereas *tele* is primarily associated with animate referents. This suggests a distinction in their distribution within naming constructions.

Furthermore, (7a) and (7b) differed in that (7a) is more closely related to the speech quotation construction. Initially, it was used when the utterance of naming occurred in a real time situation. However, through metaphorical extension, it began to be used even in cases where the naming speech situation was not explicitly assumed simply to indicate how a certain entity is designated. The combination of animate NPs then extended to inanimate NPs. The distinction between (7a) and (7b) is explicitly confirmed by whether *poko/tele* can be replaced with *eykey/hanthey*. In (7a), *poko/tele* can be substituted with *eykey/hanthey*, but in (7b), this substitution is not possible.

Thus, naming constructions, while existing on the spectrum of declarative quotation constructions, have, through frequent use, developed into an independent usage. As a result, they now possess their own case frame that distinguishes them from quotation constructions. In such cases, *poko* and *tele* can be replaced with the accusative marker (*lul*).

3.3 Evaluative Construction

Another type of construction related to speech quotation constructions is the evaluative construction. The syntax of this construction can be illustrated as ‘NP-*poko/tele* [Embedded Clause] VP’, where VP consists of evaluative verbs such as *nukkita* ‘feel’ and *phyengkahata* ‘evaluate’. The semantics of evaluative constructions involve assessing the characteristics of the NP, with the evaluative content expressed in the embedded clause. In this context, *poko* and *tele* can be paraphrased as *ey tayhay* ‘about’, and the semantic role of the preceding NP can be analyzed as theme or conceptual target. In such cases, employing *eykey/hanthey* may feel less natural, as they do not convey the specific semantic nuances intended by *poko* and *tele*.

- (8) salam-tul-i ta acessi-**{poko/tele}** hokwu-la kulay-yo.
 people-PL-NOM all the.man-ALL pushover-DECL.QUOT say-DECL
 ‘Everyone says you (= the man) are a pushover.’

Unlike speech quotation constructions, evaluative constructions do not directly reproduce an utterance from an actual speech event. In (8), the speaker’s use of the expression *hokwu* ‘pushover’ constitutes an evaluation of *accessi* ‘the man’ rather than a direct quotation of speech addressed to him. In fact, such expressions often appear in contexts such as gossip or collectively recognized evaluations within a group, making it unlikely that they would be uttered directly to the referent. Even if such an evaluation were eventually conveyed to the referent, it is highly improbable that it would be expressed in exactly the same linguistic form as the one presented in the embedded clause.

3.4 Causative Construction

The fourth type of construction in which *poko* and *tele* appear is the causative construction. The syntax of this construction follows the pattern ‘NP-*poko/tele* [Embedded Clause] VP’, where VP consists of causative predicates such as *key hata* ‘make, let’ and *sikhita* ‘cause, order’. The semantics of causative constructions involves expressing a causative action towards NP. In this context, *poko/tele* functions as markers of the causee.

- (9) haksayng-tul-**{poko/tele}** palhyo-lul cwunpiha-key ha-yss-eyo.
 student-PL-ALL presentation-ACC prepare-CAUS let-PST-DECL
 ‘I had the students prepare the presentation themselves.’

In Example (9), *poko* and *tele* function as a marker of the causee, referring to the entity that is made to perform an action. Here, *haksayng-tul* ‘students’ is the causee, while the predicate *cwunpiha-key ha* ‘make prepare’ indicates the causative relationship between the subject and the causee.

The use of *poko* and *tele* in causative constructions suggests a reinterpretation of its function from marking an addressee in imperative speech to marking a causee in causative contexts. This shift is natural given the conceptual link between ‘telling someone to do something’ and ‘making someone do something’.

4 Mapping *poko* and *tele* from a Typological Perspective

We have analyzed the syntactic distribution and semantic functions of *poko* and *tele*, identifying four major constructions in which they appear. The relationship between these constructions follows a clear pattern: the speech quotation construction serves as the primary usage, from which other constructions extend. Specifically, declarative speech quotation gives rise to the naming and evaluative constructions, while imperative speech quotation leads to the causative construction. However, an open question remains regarding the precise case category of *poko* and *tele*. In this section, we address this issue from a typological perspective.

4.1 Dative and Related Case Marking in Linguistic Typology

The syncretism of the dative case has been widely studied within the semantic map approach. Haspelmath (2003) first proposed a semantic map of the dative case based on English, French, and German. Subsequent research expanded this framework to other languages, including Korean, Estonian, and German (Lambert 2010); Mandarin Chinese and various Chinese dialects (Zhang 2016); and Iranian languages (Mohammadirad & Rasekh-Mahand 2018).

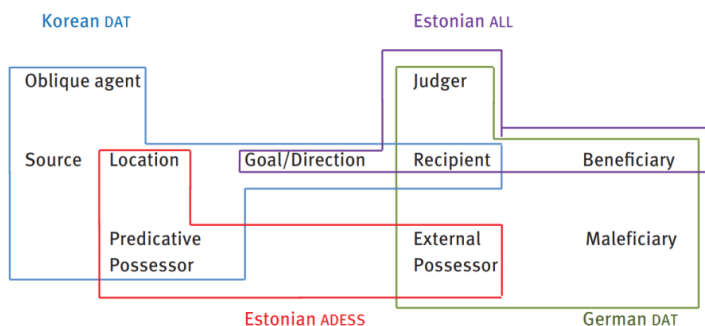


Figure 1: Semantic Map of the German and Korean Dative, Estonian Allative, and Estonian Adessive (Lambert 2010: 264)

As shown in the semantic map developed by Lambert (2010), the dative case lies between two primary semantic domains: one linked to spatial meanings, and the other to indirectly affected roles. Lambert's (2010) study of Korean *eykey* and *hanthey* demonstrates that they primarily occupy the spatial meaning, while the German dative *mir* aligns more closely with the indirectly affected meaning. The only shared function across both languages is the recipient role.

In this map, *poko* and *tele* appear to occupy only the Goal/Direction notion, as they cannot introduce the indirect object of a giving action and therefore do not function as true recipient markers. Their core function is to indicate the addressee of the quoted speech, which can be categorized as the target of communication.

4.2 Similar Grammaticalization Pathways to *poko* and *tele*

Crosslinguistic studies also support a similar grammaticalization pathway for *poko*, following the pattern SEE > ALLATIVE (Kuteva et al. 2019: 388). Evidence from various languages illustrates this developmental trajectory. In Bihari, the verb *tak* 'see' has evolved into *taka*, which carries the meanings 'up to, by, for' (Svorou 1994: 116). A similar shift is observed in Halia, where the verb *tara* 'look, see' has extended to meanings such as 'to', 'towards', and 'than' (Svorou 1994: 116). Likewise, in Tamil, the verb *paar* 'see' has undergone a semantic extension, with its participle form *paar-ttu* now functioning as the preposition 'towards' (Lehmann 1989: 129). These crosslinguistic examples suggest that perception verbs can evolve into markers of direction or goal, eventually extending to recipient and patient roles in certain languages.

As for *tele*, previous studies have attested to the grammaticalization pathway ACCOMPANY > COMITATIVE (Kuteva et al. 2019: 43). However, the potential development of *tele* along the pathway ACCOMPANY > ALLATIVE remains largely unexamined.

From a diachronic perspective, the pathway ALLATIVE > RECIPIENT is widely attested crosslinguistically (Kuteva et al. 2019: 52). Therefore, analyzing *poko* and *tele* as allative markers rather than dative markers aligns well with this established grammaticalization path.

4.3 Analyzing *poko* and *tele* as Allatives with Additional Constraints

Although we propose analyzing *poko* and *tele* as allative markers, they exhibit additional constraints that make them atypical instances of allatives. First, they do not express spatial movement, which is the prototypical function of the allative case. Unlike typical allative cases that denote

physical direction or movement toward a location, *poko* and *tele* are restricted to marking addressees.

Second, even within speech quotation constructions, not all quoted content is naturally acceptable. This restriction is captured by what we term the ‘on-the-spot’ constraint—*poko* and *tele* require that the marked NP be directly involved in the speech event. While *poko* and *tele* can sometimes be substituted by *eykey* or *hanthey*, the on-the-spot constraint distinguishes them from these dative markers. This constraint ensures that the NP marked by *poko* or *tele* is an immediate participant in the reported speech event.

- (10) a. Chelswu-ka na-**{poko, tele, eykey, hanthey}** hayngsacang-i nancangphan-i
 Chelswu-NOM I-ALL event.hall-NOM mess-NOM
 twa-yss-tako ha-yss-ta.
 become-PST-DECL.QUOT say-PST-DECL
 ‘Chelswu told me that the event hall has turned into a mess.’
- b. Chelswu-ka na-**{[?]poko, [?]tele, eykey, hanthey}** yengkwuk wangsil-uy
 Chelswu-NOM I-ALL British royal.family-GEN
 hayngsacang-i nancangphan-i twa-yss-tako ha-yss-ta.
 event.hall-NOM mess-NOM become-PST-DECL.QUOT say-PST-DECL
 ‘Chelswu told me that the British royal family’s event hall has turned into a mess.’

In (10a), *poko*, *tele*, *eykey*, and *hanthey* are all acceptable because the speech event involves a direct and immediate interaction between the speaker and the addressee. However, in (10b), *poko* and *tele* become less acceptable when referring to an indirect speech context involving a third party, such as the British royal family, which is unlikely to be directly engaged in the conversation. In other words, when the NP marked by *poko* or *tele* is no longer directly associated with the quotation content, its acceptability decreases. For (10b) to appear natural, *na* ‘I’ would need to be a directly involved participant capable of addressing the messy situation in the United Kingdom.

This contrast highlights how *poko* and *tele* function as allative markers with an additional on-the-spot constraint, requiring a more immediate and contextually anchored speech interaction than dative-like markers such as *eykey* and *hanthey*.

5 Conclusion

This study has examined the Korean case particles *poko* and *tele* from a linguistic typological perspective, analyzing their syntactic distribution and semantic functions. We have shown that these markers do not align with conventional dative markers like *eykey* and *hanthey*. Instead, they primarily mark the addressee in speech quotation construction, extending to naming, evaluative, and causative constructions.

A key insight is that *poko* and *tele* impose an on-the-spot constraint, requiring the marked addressee’s direct involvement within the quotation content. This real time interactional requirement further distinguishes them from general recipient markers.

Typologically, our analysis situates *poko* and *tele* closer to goal markers rather than recipient markers. This distinction underscores the need for a refined classification. Instead of treating them as dative markers, we propose reclassifying them as specialized allative markers. Future research

can further examine the subtle difference of these two particles and whether similar cases exist in other languages.

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