Typological differences between OV and VO languages have long been studied in a variety of linguistic fields. Ueno and Polinksy (2009) conducted an interesting cross-linguistic study in which they raised the question of whether the head direction affects processing strategies employed by the speakers of head-initial and of head-final languages. They proposed two strategies which are employed to minimize processing load: 1) pro-drop bias and 2) intransitive bias. The former strategy reduces the number of ‘overtly expressed arguments’ with the use of pro; it is more frequently used with two-place predicates than one-place predicates. The intransitive bias strategy reduces the processing load by utilizing more one-place predicates; it is used by head-final languages such as Korean as a way to reduce the number of preverbal arguments. According to Ueno and Polinsky, the former strategy is universal, whereas the latter is more common with head-final languages.

This paper is part of our on-going comparative study on processing strategies employed in spontaneous production by native speakers and learners of Korean and Japanese. The current study addresses questions of 1) whether both native speakers and non-native speakers of Korean employ aforementioned two strategies (pro-drop bias and intransitive bias) in order to lessen processing load, and of 2) whether these groups exhibit different/similar patterns in the use of these strategies.

The data used for the current study consists of OPI interviews of native and non-native speakers of Korean. So far, a total of 1515 clauses (1225 from the native speakers’ interviews and 290 clauses from the learners’ interviews) were extracted. The clauses were coded and analyzed for predicate types (e.g., two-place predicates vs. one-place predicates), instances of pro-drop (e.g., subject-drop, object-drop, Subject/Object-drop, or No-drop), and occurrence and location of a heavy constituent.

The preliminary findings indicate that the proportion of one place predicates is much lower than two place predicates among both native and non-native speakers of Korean (see Table 1), which is inconsistent with the prediction made by the intransitive bias strategy. On the other hand, a higher proportion of pro-drop was shown in two-place predicates than in one-place predicates (see Table 2). In other words, two-place predicates tend to entail more instances of pro-drop than one-place predicates. The native and non-native speakers of Korean did not show much difference in their production in this study. Both groups employed pro-drop strategy more frequently with two-place predicates than with one-place predicates, and intransitive bias was not observed in either group.