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How Animacy and Agenthood Influence Argument Order in the Translation of English Passive Constructions to Korean

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1. Introduction

Animacy, which can be represented in the following hierarchical scale, is regarded as an important feature in linguistic phenomena and has an impact on various linguistic areas such as syntax, morphology, language processing, and language acquisition (Comrie, 1989; Croft, 1995; among others):

(1) Human > (other) animate > inanimate > abstract

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Even though it is clear that the concept of animacy plays an important role in a wide range of linguistic phenomena, how the influences of the concept of animacy are realized in individual languages varies. In one group of languages, the concept of animacy is grammaticalized with grammatical constraints based on [+/- animate] or [+/- human] features, and in the other group, it is realized as a statistical tendency – i.e., NPs that appear in the subject position are higher than the other argument NPs in the animacy rank (Dahl and Fraurud, 1996; Kempen and Harbusch, 2004; Øverlid, 2004; Bresnan et al., 2007 as cited by Swart et al. 2008). English belongs to the latter group while Korean and Japanese share features with the former group. For instance, English does not differentiate [+/-human] features in plural forms while Korean is sensitive to an animacy or a humanness factor in employing the plural suffix *-tul* as illustrated in (2) and (3)[1]:

(2) a. There are many students in this room.
b. There are many lions in this room.
c. There are many cups in this room.

(3) a. I pang-ey haksayng-tul-i manhi iss-ta
This room-at student-PLU-NOM a lot be-DEC
b. ? I pang-ey saca-tul-i manhi iss-ta
This room-at lion-PLU-NOM a lot be-DEC
c. ?? I pang-ey cep-tul-i manhi iss-ta
This room-at cup-PLU-NOM a lot be-DEC

1) Thanks to the anonymous reviewer who pointed out that our observation of (3c) does not apply across the board. Consider:
(i) Pang an-ey sangca-tul-i manhi iss-ta
room in at box PLU-NOM a lot be-DEC
'There are many boxes.'
The reviewer claimed that (i) is acceptable if the plural of boxes is interpreted to mean that there are many types of boxes. We are claiming that unnaturalness still exists when the sentence is referring to many of the same type.

With respect to the subjecthood of a sentence, English does not have any grammatical constraints on having inanimate subjects in transitive sentences while Japanese does not allow inanimate subject as noted by Kuno (1973):

(4) a. The hurricane snapped trees.
b. *Taihuu-ga mado-o kawasita.
Typhoon-NOM window-ACC broke
'The typhoon broke the window.'
(Kuno, 1973:30 as cited by Palmer, 1994:29)

Animacy also seems to interact with thematic role of an argument in the sentence. van Valin and LaPolla (1997) claim that agent-like roles are normally [+animate] or [+human], and that arguments with agent-like roles occupy structurally higher positions such as subjects. Furthermore, Hale and Keyser (1993, 2002) and Folli and Harley (2008) claim that the structurally higher external argument position, such as a subject, is occupied by the agent which is typically considered to be animate. If this is the case, we can also attribute the unacceptable status of (4b) to *typhoon* being [-animate] agent as well as being [-animate] subject.

The correlation between animacy and agenthood with respect to selecting a surface subject is clearly shown in the following Korean examples:

(5) a. Ai-ka sakwa-lul mek-ess-ta.
Child-NOM apple-ACC eat-PAST-DEC
'The child ate the apple.'
b. ??Sakwa-ka ai-eykey mek-hi-ess-ta.
Apple-NOM child-DAT eat-PASS-PAST-DEC
'The apple was eaten by a child.'

The unacceptability of (5b) seems to be closely related to agenthood and animacy with respect to a surface subject: It not only has a [-animate] NP in the subject position but also has a [+animate] agent in a non-subject position.

Obviously, it is difficult to clear out which factor between animacy and agenthood is influencing the given linguistic phenomenon illustrated in (4-5).

This study starts its research questions from this point. First of all, if Korean is more sensitive to [+/-animacy] than English is, we would like to know whether this difference can surface in English to Korean translation tasks. If only animacy plays a role with respect to subjecthood, we would expect a lower rate of word-by-word translation when a [-animate] subject is given as a source sentence of translation.[2] If animacy plays a role in choosing a subject in tandem with agenthood, a lower rate of word-by-word translation will be expected when a [+animate] agent appears as a *by*-phrase agent in an English passive construction. In order to figure these out, we conduct a translation exercise performed by L1 Korean speakers of English passive sentences into their native language. To identify how the arrangement of arguments with different levels of animacy influenced the choice of voice and the reordering of arguments in the Korean translations, this experiment employs English passive sentences with NPs with different levels of animacy in subject position and in the *by*-phrase respectively. An analysis of the passivization rate – i.e. word-by-word translation- in the experiment clearly indicates that animacy interacts with agenthood in choosing a surface subject in English to Korean translation.

This paper is organized as follows: In section 2, we discuss previous analyses on effects of animacy in human language and see how it works in Korean sentences with different voice. Section 3 details the translation experiment of this study which produced 1792 Korean sentences translated by 56 native Korean speakers from the original English. Section 4 discusses the results of the experiment and its implications with respect to how animacy and agenthood correlates in selecting a surface subject in Korean.

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2) Word-by-word refers to a translation that strictly follows argument order and voice of the source sentence without regard to the actual acceptability or naturalness of the sentence in the surface structure of the Korean translation.

2. Previous Assertions of Animacy Constraints

2.1 General Assertions of Animacy for Human Languages

Although animacy is generally regarded as an important feature in human language, animacy, or the distinction between animate and inanimate entities, is so pervasive in the grammars of human languages that it tends to be taken for granted and become invisible (Dahl and Fraurud, 1996:47 as cited by de Swart et al., 2008:131). One way to see how animacy plays a role in language is to investigate different morphological realizations of suffixes with respect to animacy factors. For instance, in Dutch, the suffix *-n* is required for quantifiers such as *meeste* 'most' and *beide* 'both' when they have a [+human] referent while it is not allowed at all with a [-human] referent as discussed in Swart et al (2008) cited from Renkema (2002):

(6) a. De studenten hebben beide*(-n) het boek gelezen.
the students have both the book read
'The students both read the book.'
b. De boeken werden beide(*-n) door de studenten gelezen.
the books were both by the students read
'Both books were read by the students.'

As mentioned in the section 1 example (3), Korean also shows morphological sensitivity to animacy: the plural suffix *-tul* is acceptable with a human referent while it gets worse with a [-human] referent and becomes very unnatural when the entity refers to [-animate].[3)]

When it comes to syntax, animacy influences the arrangement of surface word order. Although there is variation among languages, one general conclusion about animacy effects on syntax is especially germane to the

3) See footnote 1.

purpose of this paper－the Animate First Principle (hereafter AFP) (Tomlin, 1986; Bock, and Warren, 1985; Shridhar, 1988; van Nice and Dietrich, 2003: Branigan et al., 2008 as cited by de Swart et al. 2008). The AFP states that an animate argument should appear at the beginning of the sentence. For instance, certain languages, like Navajo, are syntactically marked so that, in transitive sentences with arguments of different hierarchical values of animacy, an argument with a lower level of animacy in the object position cannot come before the subject when the argument has a higher level of animacy despite the flexible SOV, OSV word ordering of Navajo (Folli and Hale, 2008; de Swart et al. 2008). Other languages are also, even if less rigid, influenced by the AFP as evidenced by the fact that animate NPs are more often found in the subject position while inanimate NPs are more often found in the object position from various corpus studies (Dahl and Fraraud, 1996; Kempen and Harbusch, 2004; Øverlid, 2004; Bresnan et al., 2007 as cited by de Swartet al.2008). This suggests that even without a hard constraint there does exist a tendency to put the argument with higher animacy in the sentence initial position in human language.

The AFP is not just expressed syntactically and statistically. Evidence also exists in psycholinguistic research as well. Tanaka et al. (2011) conducted a sentence recall task that tested the effect of animacy in syntactic processing with native Japanese participants, and it showed that during recall the animate argument was preferred in the first NP position even when the original sentence presentation used an inanimate argument first. This evidence suggests that the constraint of animacy goes beyond mere grammaticality but is a byproduct of how humans conceptualize arguments in context.[4)]

4) In a similar vein, Folli and Harley (2008) point out that the constraint on grammaticality and syntactic processing are not necessarily determined by the obvious placement of an argument in the hierarchy of animacy. It is instead a more fluid, less definable, constraint that is determined by the notion of teleological capability, which refers to “the inherent qualities and abilities of the entity to participate in the

2.2 Claims of Animacy Effects in Korean

Now returning to the Korean, animacy is a feature that plays a role as a part of grammatical constraints in morphology as mentioned in section 1. From a syntactic perspective, Kim (1990 as cited by Hinkel, 2002) and Palmer (1994) point out that animacy plays a major role in determining argument order in passive constructions. Song (1987, as cited by Palmer 1994) also claims that the subject of a passive sentence "has to be, in general, animate and conscious." This is in keeping with the AFP, and example (5) above illustrates this assertion. Sentence (5b) is judged as unnatural in Korean, but (5a) would be acceptable. This study expects that this rule of presentation order based on the animacy hierarchy will have a significant impact on the way Korean ESL learners translate English sentences into Korean since the hierarchy of animacy presented by Croft (1995) as shown in (1) is more assertive in Korean than it is in English (Palmer 1994).[5)]

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eventuality denoted by the predicate." (Higginbottham, 1997 as cited by Folli and Harley, 2008). This idea suggests that inanimate arguments, and abstract arguments especially, can transcend their place in the hierarchy to take a syntactic position in the sentence that is traditionally disallowed in a specific language because it has the capacity to exhibit animate characteristics.

5) It is worthy to have a quick examination of the effect of animacy configurations in Korean causative constructions because both the passive and causative constructions in Korean have a short and long form where the morphology of short form passives (*hita* passives) are the same as those used for the short form causative construction. Also, in both the causative and passive, the long, periphrastic, form is more productive (Ihm et al., 2011). In a corpus study, the periphrastic causative construction (*key ha)* was tallied in terms of +/- animate in both the causer and the causee position which found a clear majority of animate causation at 68.6% (Sang, 2004). Interestingly, the corpus in English showed the opposite with 56.7% of all *make* causatives caused by inanimate; thus demonstrating flexibility of English in terms of animacy.

Two other interesting facts resulted from this study. First, the one configuration with a negative differential value (inanimate, animate) accounted for only 7% of the

In English, it is perfectly acceptable for an inanimate entity to be the subject of a transitive sentence while in Korean it is not natural. Consider the following differences:

(7) This saw cuts this type of wood.

(8) a. ?I top-un ilen congryu-uy namwu-lul calu-nta
this saw-TOP this typy-of wood-ACC cut-DEC
'This saw cuts this type of wood.'
b. I top-ulo ilen congryu-uy namwu-lul calu-nta
this saw-with this type-of wood-ACC cut-DEC
'We cut this type of wood with this saw.'

The natural translation of the English sentence in (7) to Korean will be (8b) where an animate agent is in the subject position and the inanimate NP *top* 'saw' appears as an instrument. If an inanimate argument is placed in the subject position, the sentence becomes unnatural.[6)]

The current study is conducted to provide a more refined understanding of how animacy influences the choice of voice and argument order in Korean.

3. The Experiment- English to Korean translation

3.1 Hypothesis

The purpose of this translation experiment is to see how animacy affects the determination of argument order for native Korean speakers. It is

causative constructions sampled. The other is the fact that the configurations of equal value were greater than the other two configurations of differential value. These two findings will be more relevant when compared to the findings of the translation task of passive English sentences in the current study.

6) This seems to be in line with a Japanese case mentioned in (4b).

hypothesized that, given Korean's preference of argument order as determined by animacy, there would be a variation in choice of voice in the Korean translation to avoid having an inanimate argument in the subject position. If animacy is also related to agenthood conceptually, Koreans would avoid word-by-word translation of English passive sentences with animate *by*-agents following the AFP that states animate arguments are preferred in the sentential initial position.

3.2 Subjects

For the translation task, 56 Korean learners of English were chosen. The subjects were first year university students in Korea at Seokyeong University. Their *sooneung* (standardized college entry test) rank for English ranged from 2 to 4 on a stanine scale. The median *sooneung* rank in English was 2.5. All of the students are accounting majors and are required to take all of their coursework in their third and fourth year in English, not Korean. A high level of English is required for admission into the program, and the first two years of study will include an intensive English curriculum in order to prepare them for their third and fourth year. This translation exercise was given to them at the beginning of their first semester in their first year before most of their intensive higher education takes place. Subjectively, all the students could be considered a homogeneous group.

3.3 Materials and Procedures

A translation exercise of English sentences into Korean was administered for this study. All of the target English sentences used the passive voice with a *by*-phrase construction, and the agents and patients were arranged so that all possible configurations of animacy were tested. 16 configurations were possible, and within those 16 possible combinations, 7 values of hierarchical distance were derived by assigning each category of animacy a value of 0 to 3 (with

abstract being the lowest at 0, inanimate equaling 1, animates other than human at 2, and human being the highest with a value of 3). Subtracting the value of the argument in the *by*-phrase from the value of the argument in the subject position as shown in table 1 for breakdown and examples.[7] Two English sentences for each configuration were given (32 sentences) along with 28 distracter sentences that used the active voice for a total of 60 sentences. Given the number of participants at 56, 112 sample translations will be produced for each of the 16 possible configurations (1,792 total). 10 versions of the test were administered with the English sentences presented in different orders to avoid a distortion of the results due to test fatigue or learning. The students were given 45 minutes to complete the translations.

Because the goal of this exercise was to test which argument orders are preferred by Koreans, the sentences contained simple vocabulary that would not become an impediment to their translation task. Individual assistance was provided for specific word translations but was limited only to the nouns on the task. No help was provided for the translation of verbs because if the students were given a specific verb in the Korean, their choice of voice could have been influenced. Most importantly, to avoid a word-by-word translation of the English into Korean, the students were instructed to translate the sentence into a Korean form that seemed the most *natural* to them.

Table 1. Animacy Configurations

	Argument Configuration	**Hierarchical Distance**	**Example English Sentence to be translated**
1	Human by human	0	The workers are hurt by the boss.
2	Animate by animate	0	The deer was eaten by the tiger.
3	Inanimate by inanimate	0	The rock was broken by the ice.
4	Abstract by abstract	0	Music can be explained by mathematics.
5	Human by abstract	3	John was hurt by his shame.
6	Human by inanimate	2	Tim was cut by a rock.

7) In the configurations and later results, the term “animate” refers to non-human animate arguments.

7	Animate by abstract	2	The tiger is threatened by extinction.
8	Human by animate	1	Tim was hit by the tiger.
9	Animate by inanimate	1	The ant was killed by the apple.
10	Inanimate by abstract	1	The rock was broken by the pressure.
11	Abstract by inanimate	-1	The laws of physics were broken by the rock.
12	Inanimate by animate	-1	The apple was eaten by the tiger.
13	Animate by human	-1	The ant was studied by Tim.
14	Abstract by animate	-2	Music is listened to by ants.
15	Inanimate by human	-2	The apple was dropped by Tim.
16	Abstract by human	-3	The music was written by John.

3.4 Results

The translated sentences for each target item from the test subjects were categorized as either [+passive] or [– passive]. Since all the target English sentences used the passive voice, the responses that were [– passive] indicated an avoidance of a word-by-word translation in favor of the active voice. In other words, word-by-word translations would result in 100 percent [+passive] translations, and the avoidance rate of the passive is the difference between 100 percent and the [+passive] results. Details of the results are in table 2, and a visual representation of the all the results are shown in figure 1.[8)]

8) Here are some examples from the 3 most extreme configurations with a negative value:

(i) The music was written by John. (Source Sentence)
John-i umak-ul ssessta. (Translation example)
John-NOM music-ACC wrote-PAST-DEC
'John wrote the music.'

(ii) The desk was moved by the scientist. (Source Sentence)
kwahakca-ka chayksang-ul olm-kyess-ta. (Translation example)
Scientist-NOM desk-ACC moved-PAST-DEC
'The scientist moved the desk.'

(iii) Music is listened to by ants. (Source Sentence)
kaymi-ka umak-ul tutnun-ta. (Translation example)
Ant-NOM music-ACC listened-DEC

All 1,792 target sentences are deemed valid although two English sentences gave the participants a noticeable amount of confusion. Those sentences were "*the students are paid by the teacher*," and "*the scientist was stopped by the problem.*"[9] Regardless, these test items are still included in the analysis.

Table 2. Rate of Passive Translations according to Animacy Configuration

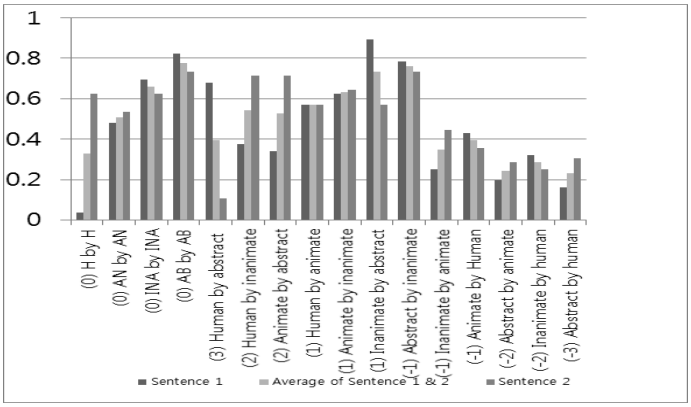
	Argument Configuration	**Hierarchical Distance**	**Percentage of [+ Passive] Translations**
1	Human by human	0	33.04 %
2	Animate by animate	0	50.89 %
3	Inanimate by inanimate	0	66.07 %
4	Abstract by abstract	0	77.68 %
5	Human by abstract	3	39.29 %
6	Human by inanimate	2	54.46 %
7	Animate by abstract	2	52.68 %
8	Human by animate	1	57.14 %
9	Animate by inanimate	1	63.39 %
10	Inanimate by abstract	1	73.21 %
11	Abstract by inanimate	-1	75.89 %
12	Inanimate by animate	-1	34.82 %
13	Animate by human	-1	39.29 %
14	Abstract by animate	-2	24.11 %
15	Inanimate by human	-2	28.57 %
16	Abstract by human	-3	23.21 %
	Total		49.61 %

9) The variance in the *human by human* test item is most likely due to a problem with the verb *are paid* because there is no possible *to be paid* form with a human subject in Korean. Another possible problem with this question is social level when dealing with *human by human* configurations in Korean. The two passive responses were:

(i) Haksayngtul-un sensayngnimtul-eyuyhay ton-i cipwul-toy-n-ta.
Students-TOP teachers-by money-NOM pay-PASS-PRES-DEC

(ii) Haksayngtul-un sensayngnimtul-eyuyhay ton-ul cipwul-pat-nun-ta.
Students-TOP teachers-by money-ACC pay-recieve-PRES-DEC

Figure 1. The Rate of Passive Translations into Korean[10)]



4. Discussion and Conclusion

The results show that the Korean participants not only had a stronger preference for the active voice when presented with a passive construction that violated the hierarchical expectations for subjecthood, but they also exhibited a strong preference to change the voice to active for all the given sentences regardless of the configurations of relative animacy. The overall rate of word-by-word translations was only 49.6%. This result indicates that the active voice is the preferred, or more natural, choice for translations from English to Korean regardless of the voice in the source sentences.

Now, let us consider how animacy is characterized in the Korean translation of English passive sentences. According to the AFP, an animate subject will be preferred as a natural translation output regardless of the

10) No further statistical analysis was performed with this data set because the goal of this study was simply to determine the student's preference of voice in the translation of English passive constructions. Further investigation is needed for more conclusive claims about the role of animacy in English to Korean translations.

animacy status of the source sentences. If an animacy-subjecthood relation is the only factor to consider for natural translation, we would expect that source sentences with a [-animate] subject will show lower rate of passivization than those with a [+animate] subject. However, the average rate of passive translations of the sentences with [-animate] subjects does not show any critical difference from that with [+animate] subjects as illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3. Rate of Passive Translations into Korean by Patientive Subject

[- Animate] Subjects		**[+ Animate] Subjects**	
Abstract by human	23.21 %	Human by abstract	39.29 %
Inanimate by human	28.57 %	Human by inanimate	54.46 %
Abstract by animate	24.11 %	Animate by abstract	52.68 %
Inanimate by animate	34.82 %	Human by animate	57.14 %
Abstract by inanimate	75.89 %	Animate by inanimate	63.39 %
Inanimate by abstract	73.21 %	Animate by animate	50.89 %
Inanimate by inanimate	66.07 %	Human by human	33.04 %
Abstract by abstract	77.68 %	Animate by Human	39.29 %
[- Animate] Average	**50.45 %**	**[+ Animate] Average**	**48.77 %**

Therefore, we can see that if interpretation of the AFP is restricted to a correlation between subjecthood and animacy, the translation data of the current experiment do not fully support the AFP as being a dominant influence in Korean argument order. However, a more careful examination of the data reveals that the AFP in relation to the level of animacy for the agent role does exhibit a strong influence in the ordering of arguments and choice of voice. So in the case of Korean, the Animate First Principle should be further clarified when dealing with matters of voice in a way that reflects the preference for an Animate Agent First.

Table 4. Rate of Passive Translations into Korean by Agent

[- Animate] Agents		[+ Animate] Agents	
Inanimate by inanimate	66.07 %	Animate by animate	50.89 %
Abstract by abstract	77.68 %	Human by human	33.04 %
Human by abstract	39.29 %	Abstract by human	23.21 %
Human by inanimate	54.46 %	Inanimate by human	28.57 %
Animate by abstract	52.68 %	Abstract by animate	24.11 %
Abstract by inanimate	75.89 %	Animate by Human	39.29 %
Animate by inanimate	63.39 %	Inanimate by animate	34.82 %
Inanimate by abstract	73.21 %	Human by animate	57.14 %
[- Animate] Average	62.83 %	[+ Animate] Average	36.38 %

As we can see in Table 4, there is a significant difference in passivization rates between [+animate] agents and [-animate] agents showing that Koreans change voice when a [+animate] agent is given in the *by*-phrase. They rather choose the active voice by fronting the animate agent NP in the subject position rather than leaving it as a passivized agent.

In other words, a new look at the data in the light of the new assumption that the animacy of the agent is the determining factor for choice of voice and argument order is presented in table 4. It is not merely the level of animacy that determines the order of the arguments but is instead influenced greatly by the thematic role of the argument which, if agentive, is preferred in the subject position as proposed by van Valin and LaPolla (1997). With only 36% of sentences translated word-by-word into passive Korean constructions when the by-phrase agent was [+ animate] as opposed to 63% passive translations when the agent was [- animate], it is clear that the level of animacy for the agent influences the Korean translator beyond the general preference for active voice in any configuration.

The lower passivization rates for animate arguments (*human and animate*) when tested in a zero-value hierarchical distance configuration as compared to

the zero-value configurations of inanimate arguments (inanimate and abstract) further supports this more refined conclusion[11]. Furthermore, the animate/animate and inanimate/inanimate configurations which both have a greater than average rate of word for word translations are in keeping with the corpus study of causatives by Sang (2004) which found these equally leveled configurations to be the most common configurations in usage. This similarity suggests that Koreans are less constrained in their choice of argument construction when identical levels of animacy are found in the two arguments. In other words, Koreans are afforded a greater degree of choice in terms of voice and argument order when the thematic roles are free of any differential value in terms of animacy.

Although this translation exercise had a great degree of variance for a couple of the animacy configurations, a general trend does appear. The salient observation that those configurations with the most extreme negative values for hierarchical distance are strongly resistant to word-by-word translations, as evidenced by at least a 60% percent avoidance rate, is enough to reaffirm the Animate First Principal and to establish a foundation in furtherance of a more refined understanding of how animacy affects the choice of voice and argument order in Korean. This study proposes that the thematic role of an argument must also be considered when it comes to decisions of argument order, and that order could be termed the Animate Agent First Principle.

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[Abstract]

How Animacy and Agenthood Influence Argument Order in the Translation of English Passive Constructions to Korean

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The Animate First Principle (AFP), which states that an animate argument must appear first in a sentence, has been observed in a large number of human languages and is asserted by many researchers to hold true in the specific instance of the Korean language. This study utilized a translation experiment with 56 Korean ESL students at a Korean university in an effort to understand how animacy and agenthood affect the translation of English into Korean. More specifically, it investigates how variations in animacy and argument structure influence the choice of voice, either active or passive, in the Korean translation. The results lead to the conclusion that passive constructions following a word-by-word translation are not preferred in all circumstances and are only strongly avoided when the agent is animate in the original English sentence. Thus, the findings support the AFP but needs to be amended to an Animate Agent First Principle when it comes to the choice of voice.

▸ Key Words: Animacy, Argument Structure, Translation, English to Korean, Voice

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