

Revisiting Sentence-Final Endings in Korean: Toward an (Un)markedness System

Inspired by the cartographic approach that seeks to uncover the universal architecture of functional categories in the left/right periphery (Rizzi 1997, Cinque 2006), much attention has been paid recently to the properties of various sentence-final endings in Korean (SFEs) from the viewpoint of the syntax-pragmatics interface. As is well-known, SFEs encode properties like formality, politeness, clause type, and so on. In this work, I take as a point of departure PPZ's treatment of the SFE *-eyo*, the marker of the so-called polite speech style. PPZ treat *-eyo* as a monomorphemic element that bears the [nonformal, S<A] feature, indicating that the addressee has a higher status than the speaker and that the utterance is not in formal style.

First, while I generally agree with PPZ's analysis of SFEs, I believe *-eyo* should not be analyzed as a monomorphemic element. Rather, it should be analyzed as a combination of *-e* and *-yo*. (To be fair, PPZ do note this possibility in a footnote, though they do not pursue it.) Concerning this, note first that *-e* can be used alone, as in (1). Note also that the politeness ending *-yo* can attach to any element that is morphologically complete. For instance, in (2), *-yo* is attached to a noun, which is a morphologically independent word.

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| (1) Toto wa-ss-e. | (2) (Who came?) Toto-yo. | (3) Toto wa-ss-e-yo. |
| Toto come-PAST-E | Toto-POL | Toto come-PAST-E-POL |
| 'Toto came.' | 'Toto did.' | 'Toto came.' |

As (1) shows, the sequence *wa-ss-e* can be used as a morphologically independent word, so that *-yo* can attach to it further, deriving the polite version of (1), as in (3). Therefore, the combination between *-e* and *-yo* is independently motivated as a legitimate option in the grammar of Korean.

The brief proposal above also raises an interesting questions. Note that when *-e* occurs alone as in (1), it expresses the so-called intimate speech style characterized by the feature [S≥A] in PPZ's system. (I ignore the formality feature here, as it is not crucial for the discussion.) As the notation indicates, this style is used when the speaker's status is equal to or higher than the addressee's. Assuming that *-eyo* is a combination of *-e* and *-yo*, we seem to predict there to be a conflict in speech style. That is, *-e* is used in [S≥A] situations, while the politeness ending *-yo* is used in [S<A] situations. Indeed, (2) can be used when the addressee has a higher status than the speaker, e.g., one's teacher, while uttering (1) to one's teacher will be regarded extremely rude. So, the question is why (3) sounds perfectly natural and moreover, polite, i.e., [S<A].

Part of the solution to this puzzle comes from An's (2021) discussion on *-e*, where it is argued that *-e* is not a genuine SFE. Note that unlike most SFEs, *-e* is not associated with any particular clause type. So, the different readings of (4) can only be distinguished by intonation.

- (4) Ike mek-e.
 this eat-E
 'I eat this (declarative) / Do you eat this? (interrogative) / Eat this! (imperative)'

-E can also be used in sentence-medial position unlike genuine SFEs, as in (5).

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| (5) a. Mek-e po-ass-ta. | b. S-e iss-ess-ta. |
| eat-E try-PAST-DEC | stand-E be-PAST-DEC |
| '(I) tried eating (it).' | '(I) was standing.' |

Crucially, what all the contexts involving *-e* have in common is that the host of *-e* is morphologically incomplete and cannot be used as an independent word. Thus, without *-e*, all the examples above become ungrammatical (cf. (1), (3), (4), (5)). An argues that the sole function of *-e* is to close a morphologically incomplete verb stem in order for the latter to behave as a well-formed independent word. In other words, *-e* is a morphological closer in the

sense of Kang 1988. This in turn means that *-e* is not a genuine SFE. It does not mark speech level. Nor does it mark clause type. This is the reason why the occurrence of *-e* does not cause any conflict with the politeness ending *-yo*, i.e., *-e* does not bear any feature relevant for marking politeness.

The next question that arises naturally is how the $[S \geq A]$ reading arises in sentences that end with *-e*, as in (1). Concerning this issue, it is important to note that the $[S \geq A]$ reading is not limited to sentences containing *-e* or any other SFEs for that matter, i.e., the presence of an SFE is not a prerequisite for an utterance to receive the $[S \geq A]$ reading. For instance, as Ahn & An (2011) note, an utterance like (6) always receives the $[S \geq A]$ reading despite the fact that there is no SFE in the utterance. It is also noteworthy that (6) can be made polite, i.e., it can express the $[S < A]$ reading, if the politeness marker *-yo* is attached to it, as in (7).

(6) (Who came?) Toto.

(7) (Who came?) Toto-yo.

Given this, I suggest that some SFEs are inherently or lexically specified to bear the $[S < A]$ feature, so that their occurrence indicates the speaker's politeness toward the addressee. This particular assumption might not be so different from the existing views. But, the difference is that I assume the $[S < A]$ feature to be a marked property. Crucially, I assume that the $[S \geq A]$ reading, i.e., the nonpolite reading, arises as an unmarked default value of speech level. Thus, it is not the case that some SFEs are lexically specified to bear the $[S \geq A]$ feature. Rather, it is the absence of an element with the marked $[S < A]$ feature that induces the $[S \geq A]$ reading, regardless of whether there is a particular SFE in the utterance or not. This of course means that whenever the speaker is in a situation where he is expected to show deference to the addressee, he must choose the appropriate lexical item that is specified for the $[S < A]$ feature. Failure to use such an item in the utterance naturally leads to a nonpolite reading regardless of the choice of an SFE in the utterance.

To summarize, the crucial element of the current proposal is the idea that the $[S \geq A]$, nonpolite reading arises as a default value of speech level independently of the choice of an SFE. This correctly captures the fact that sentence fragments without an SFE receive the same kind of speech level interpretation as those full sentences with some overt SFEs. This approach is more adequate than its predecessors in that it allows us to simplify the system of politeness marking considerably, because we can dispense with the need for a separate $[S \geq A]$ feature for specific SFEs, as well as allowing us to explain a wider range of empirical data—even those that do not involve SFEs. What remains to be seen is whether or how other aspects of the behavior of SFEs in Korean, e.g., whether they can be embedded, whether they encode clause type, whether they can be used with the politeness ending *-yo*, and so on, can be made consistent with the current proposal. I will explore these issues in the main presentation/paper.

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