

Complex Verb Constructions in Child Korean: Overt Markers of Covert Functional Structure

Meesook Kim and Colin Phillips
University of Delaware

1. Introduction

In this paper we will apply to Korean the standard techniques which have been used to show that young children represent functional projections mainly for European languages. And what we find is the following:

First, we suggest that the over-use of the default mood-inflection '-e' in the earliest speech of one Korean two-year old parallels root infinitive forms observed in other languages. Second, the absence of inflectional morphemes and the absence of correlations between specific verb forms and null-subjects, or tense markers, seem to be consistent with the view that children initially have only lexical categories. Despite this apparently strong evidence for a pre-functional analysis of child Korean syntax, we argue that the systematic presence of the linking morpheme '-ko-' in truncated auxiliary verb constructions implies that at least *some* level of functional structure is represented, even when it is never produced.

2. The Mood Morpheme '-e' as Default Inflection

2.1 Background on Korean Verbal Inflection

It is well-known that Korean is a *head-final* (basic SOV word order), *agglutinating* language. Additionally, *subjects*, *objects*, and Case markers can be dropped if they are licensed by discourse contexts.

Second, like other agglutinating languages, bare verb stems are impossible in adult Korean, as shown in (1). All roots must be supported by mood markers which represent clause-types, such as declarative, interrogative, imperative, or propositive, as shown in (2):

- (1) a. *mek- 'eat' b. *anc-'sit'
(2) a. mek-e b. mek-ca
 eat-Decl eat-Propos
 'I eat.' 'Let's eat.'

The basic mood morphemes used in adult Korean are given in Table 1:

Table 1: Mood Morphemes in adult Korean

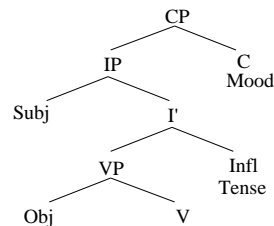
Declarative	Interrogative	Imperative	Propositive
-ta	-ni	-la	-ca
	-e		

The important point here is that in adult Korean, the mood marker '-e' functions as a *default* mood marker, in the respect that it is in free alternation with more specific mood markers. For example, the declarative mood markers '-e' and '-ta' are in free alternation, and the interrogative mood markers '-e' and '-ni' are in free alternation.

Third, the only overt tense inflection in Korean is the past tense suffix '-ess', because present tense marking is null, and future tense is not marked by a fixed morpheme. Therefore, one possible syntactic analysis of tense and mood morphemes is shown in (3):

(3) Syntactic analysis of Korean functional structure (cf. Yoon 1991)

mek-ess-ta
eat-Past-Decl



We assume that morphemes are inserted to spell-out syntactic features (e.g., Halle & Marantz 1993) and must satisfy the minimal morphological template for Korean verbs: V + Affix.

The more important point is that specific mood morphemes realize specific mood features, requiring the presence of a C-node. However, the default mood morpheme '-e' is spelled out in the absence of any mood features in C node. Therefore, '-e' may be used in the *absence* of syntactic functional categories¹.

2.2 Overuse of Mood Morpheme '-e'

Previous studies of the development of inflection in child Korean have reported that Korean children's use of verbal morphology is *error-free*, and therefore *adultlike* (Lee 1993 and Y.-J. Kim 1995). These studies have suggested early mastery of either an IP or a higher CP level of structure. In contrast, other studies claim that early child Korean does not exhibit functional categories, based on the absence or misuse of Nominative Case markers (Han 1993 and Chung 1993).

Our study goes beyond these earlier studies in the following respects. First, we controlled for the productivity of the morphological forms used. For example, frozen forms were excluded from counts of the productive use of mood morphemes². Second, we took into consideration of the important role in spoken Korean of discourse contexts for licensing of null subjects, case-drop and mood morpheme use. Third, we made comparisons with older children and adults in similar discourse situations.

Our database for this study consists of 3 Korean two-year olds, recorded and transcribed by SookWhan Cho (Cho 1982). All three children were growing up in a monolingual Korean environment in Canada. In this study we focus primarily on Jiyoung, the youngest of the three, whose spoken language appears

to be somewhat delayed. The general description of the corpus is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Description of Child Language Sample

Children	Study Period	MLU	Total Number of Sessions	Total Utterances
Jiyoung	2;2-2;7	1.15-2.73	10	1528
	2;2	1.15	2	249
	2;3	1.32	2	494
	2;4	1.82	2	424
	2;5	2.24	1	146
	2;6	2.73	2	110
	2;7	?	1	105
Paul	2;8-2;9	2.16-2.58	4	
Soyen	2;10-2;11	2.67-2.92	3	

The frequency of mood morphemes used by Jiyoung is shown in Table 3. As shown in Table 3, in her earliest recording sessions the default mood-marker '-e' is the *only* mood morpheme that Jiyoung used productively.

Table 3: Frequency of Mood Morphemes used by Jiyoung

Age	Total # M	-e/a	-ta	-ci	-ca/-yo	Modality-involving
2;2	42	42 (100%)				
2;3	132	132 (100%)				
2;4	207	185 (89%)	7	13	2	
2;5	89	86 (96.6%)		3		
2;6	79	70 (88.6%)	2		3	4
2;7	64	60 (93.7%)		2	2	
total	613	575	9	18	7	4

Jiyoung used the default mood marker '-e' in the full range of environments where it is possible in adult Korean, such as declarative, imperative, and interrogative sentences, as shown in (4):

- (4) a. mwe cwu-e b. i tak-e c. enni ka-(a)
mul give-Imper teeth brush-Decl sister go-Ques
'give water' '(I'm) brushing the teeth' 'Did sister go?'

Moreover, Jiyoung also used the default mood-marker '-e', by using it in some ungrammatical contexts, where adults must use more specific mood morphemes, as shown in (5):

- (5) a. mek-*e (ca) emma b. ayki pwo-*a (l-kkeya)
eat-Decl(propos) mommy baby look-Decl (presump)
'Let's eat, Mommy' 'Baby (I) will look at it'

Although productive use of additional mood morphemes begins at 2;4 and increases to 10% of verbal utterances by age 2;7, this remains *far* below the levels observed in the two older children and in Jiyoung's mother, as follows:

Table 4: Frequency of Mood Morphemes used by Paul and Soyeon

Age	Total # M	Basic Mood Morphemes				Modality-involving Mood			
		-e/a	-ta	-ci	yo	ya-tay	l-lay	kke-ya	etc
Paul 2;8-2;9	322	234 (72.7%)	12	5		5	10	15	41
S 2;10-2;11	191	56 (29.3%)	3	2	39	25	44	22	13

Table 5: Input Frequency of Mood Morphemes in Child Directed Speech

-e/a	-ta	-ya	-ni	-ci	-ca	Modality involving	total
908	137	318	145	221	48	238	2080
43.7%	6.6%	15.3%	7%	11%	2.3%	11%	100%

In addition, Lee (1995) reports that the default mood morpheme '-e' was used in 58% of verbal utterances and specific mood morphemes 42% of the time in a study of informal discourse in adult Korean. Therefore, our results show that the proportion of specific mood morphemes used by Jiyoung is very different from what we observe in older children, Jiyoung's mother, and other Korean adults, even though the vast majority of her utterances are grammatical.

Based on the results seen so far, we suggest that Jiyoung's over-use of default mood inflection '-e' parallels "root infinitive" usage in other languages, in the following respects. First, like root infinitives observed in other languages, Jiyoung's default verb forms are not marked for tense. Second, like root infinitive usage observed in other languages, the proportion of default verbal forms declines gradually over time.

Nevertheless, the over-use of '-e' parallels some but not all other languages, in the following respects. First, Jiyoung's default verb forms are not a specific infinitival form of the verb, as was also found in Greek (Varlokosta et al. 1996) and Inuktitut (Crago & Allen 1996). Second, Jiyoung's default verb forms are initially used 100% of the time, while studies of root infinitives in other languages typically show that RIs alternate non-default forms. There are only few reports of children who demonstrate an initial stage in which default verb forms are used 100% of the time.

However, unlike root infinitives reported in other languages, Jiyoung's default verb forms are almost always *grammatical* forms in adult Korean. That is, it is just her extreme *over-use* of the morpheme '-e' which is non-adultlike.

3. Lack of Additional Functional Morphology

So far, we have seen that the over-use of default mood morpheme '-e' in Jiyoung's earliest speech is comparable to root infinitive usage in other languages. Next, we discuss the question of whether child Korean shows evidence for functional structures, based on standard tests that have been used in European languages.

3.1 Past Tense

First, we looked at usage of tense morphemes. Obligatory contexts were identified as questions and completive events in Korean, as follows:

(6) *Linguistic contexts requiring the use of the past tense in Korean:*

Adult: What did Daddy give you yesterday?

Child: He gave me candy.

(7) *Completive events in Korean:*

chac-ass-ta

find-Past-Decl

'I've got it [found].'

Table 6 shows that Jiyoung in her earliest recording sessions does not use past tense morphemes at all, despite many obligatory contexts. In contrast, the two older children produce tense morphemes correctly in all obligatory contexts.

Table 6: Percentage of Past Tense Morpheme

Age	Use in Obligatory contexts	
	n	%
Jiyoung 2;2	0/5	0%
2;3	1/32	3.1%
2;4	8/34	23.5%
2;5	3/14	21.4%
2;6	4/7	57.1%
2;7	29/35	82.85%
Paul 2;8-2;9	45/45	100%
Soyen 2;20-2;11	27/27	100%

3.2 Nominative Case Markers

Second, we examined nominative case marker use. In colloquial Korean, we need to distinguish between two different contexts for the use of nominative case markers. In canonical word order (SOV), nominative case markers can be dropped in discourse-licensed contexts, as shown in (8), while in noncanonical word-order (OSV or OVS), or in *wh*-expression 'who', nominative case markers cannot be dropped, because those situations require nominative case markers grammatically (Schütze 1997), as shown in (9):

- SOV
- (8) a. emma-ka pap-ul mek-ess-e
 mom-Nom meal-Acc eat-Past-Decl
 'Mommy ate the meal.'
- OSV
- (9) a. pap-ul emma-ka mek-ess-e
 Acc Nom eat-Past-Decl
- b. emma pap-ul mek-ess-e
 Acc eat-Past-Decl
 (subject to discourse licensing)
- b. * pap-ul emma mek-ess-e
 Acc eat-Past-Decl
 (discourse licensing irrelevant)

As shown in Table 7, an analysis of adult input (Jiyoung's mother) to Jiyoung reveals a clear contrast between discourse-licensed and grammatically required contexts for nominative case markers. Nominative markers are regularly absent in discourse-licensed contexts, but almost never absent in grammatically required contexts in Jiyoung's mother. Nevertheless, nominative markers are absent in *both* kinds of contexts in Jiyoung's speech.

Table 7: Percentage of the Use of Nominative Case Markers

	% in discourse-licensed contexts	% in grammatically required contexts	in dependence of nom. use and word order (chi-square test)
Jiyoung's Mother	250/505 (50%)	64/67 (96%)	$p < 0.0001$
Jiyoung	1/114 (1%)	0/7 (0%)	$p = 0.81$

3.3 Verbal Morphology & Overtness of Subject

Third, a number of people have observed correlations between the presence of specific verbal inflections and the presence of overt subjects in other languages: French (Krämer 1993); Dutch (Weverink 1989, Krämer 1993); German (Poepfel & Wexler 1993); Danish (Hamann & Plunkett 1997). We looked for such a correlation in child Korean. Jiyoung's use of null-subjects declines gradually over time, as reported elsewhere for child Korean (cf. Y.-J. Kim 1995), but there is no relation between the rate of null-subjects and the use of specific mood or tense markers in child Korean, as shown by closeness of the regression lines for rates of null subjects in the two contexts (Table 8).

Table 8: Rate of Null Subject in Default Mood Morphemes and Non-Default Mood Morphemes

Age	Null Subject in Default Form	Null Subject in Non-Default Forms
2;2	39/42 (92.85%)	0
2;3	94/131 (71.75%)	1/1 (100%)
2;4	118/181 (65.2%)	18/27 (66.67%)
2;5	49/84 (58.3%)	3/5 (60%)
2;6	21/66 (31.81)	6/13 (46.15%)
2;7	9/31 (29%)	8/33 (24.2%)
total	330/535 (61.7%)	36/79 (45.6%)

Linear regression for rate of null-subjects (treating individual utterances as data points): default verb marker: intercept (age 2;2) 88.5% (s.e. 6.7%), slope (per month) 12.3% (s.e. 1.5%); non-default verb markers: intercept (age 2;2) 97.8% (s.e. 22.4%), slope (per month) 14.4% (s.e. 3.9%)

In showing no correlation between specific verbal inflection and overt subjects, Korean patterns with English (Phillips 1995); the lack of any effect is maybe not surprising, given that Korean is a null subject language.

3.4 Correlations Between Mood and Tense Marker Use

Fourth, we tried to test a possible prediction of Rizzi's (1994) clausal-truncation hypothesis, in which the presence of syntactically higher categories implies the presence of lower categories. We tested whether the use of non-default mood markers, by assumption associated with CP, increased the rate of

past tense morphemes, by assumption associated with IP. No correlation was found, as shown in Table 9:

Table 9: Rate of Tense-marking with Default and Specific Mood Morphemes

	Past tense	No past tense	chi-square test
Default '-e'	41	76	p = 0.75
Specific mood morphemes	4	6	

Additionally, given the strict head-finality of Korean, and its lack of overt wh-movement, there is no possibility of demonstrating the kinds of form-position correlations which have been so important in the analysis of early syntax in many other languages (Boser et al. 1992; Poeppel & Wexler 1993; Pierce 1992; de Haan 1987 among many others).

3.5 Implications (so far)

Based on the evidence seen so far, Jiyoung's earliest transcripts seem consistent with a 'pre-functional' analysis of her syntax, i.e. she only produces NPs and VPs (Radford 1990; Guilfoyle & Noonan 1988). We found extreme overuse of the default verbal suffix '-e', which is quite different from what we observe in adults. In addition to this, we found zero usage of past tense morphology, despite obligatory contexts; we found zero usage of nominative case markers, despite the presence of a number of obligatory contexts and a clear distinction between obligatory and optional contexts in the input; and we found no correlation between the use of non-default verb forms and the presence of overt subjects; we also found no correlation between the presence of specific mood markers and the presence of tense marking. Therefore, we have applied a series of tests that have been used to demonstrate early sophistication in the syntax of children learning European languages, and we have drawn a blank for child Korean.

4. Complex Verb Constructions in Child Korean

Despite the fact that none of the tests we applied in section 3 showed any evidence for functional structure in child Korean, we suggest that Jiyoung *does* represent at least some degree of functional structure, even if she fails systematically to produce it. In order to see this, we turn to Korean complex verb constructions involving combinations of auxiliaries and main verbs.

4.1 Properties of AUX Verb Constructions (AVC) in Korean

In this section, we look at Korean AUX-verb construction contexts. *V-ko-iss-* (be in the process of) occurs only with action verbs and expresses a progressive event or action, whereas *V-e-iss-* (be in the state of) represents continuity of a state as a result of the completed action, as shown in (10). The main form that we are interested in here is the form of the Aux-verb construction shown in (10a), which conveys a progressive meaning.

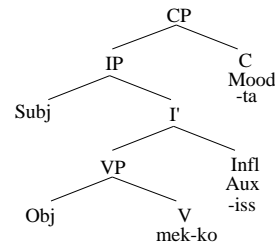
- (10) a. ku-ka pang-ey tuleka-ko-iss-ta
 he-Nom room-Loc enter-ko-be-Decl
 'He is entering the room.'
 b. ku-ka pang-ey tuleka-a-iss-ta
 he-Nom room-Loc enter-a-be-Decl
 'He has entered the room.'

Of particular importance here is the fact that the main verb and the auxiliary are connected by the morpheme '-ko-', which is generally considered to be a linking morpheme which serves to connect the main verb and the auxiliary. Important for our purposes here is the fact that the '-ko-' linking morpheme can never appear as a word-final suffix in adult Korean. For example, it is impossible to have verb forms like 'mek-ko', without additional verbal morphology to the right of the '-ko-'. A possible analysis of the syntactic structure that gives rise to the Aux-verb construction in adult Korean is given in (11).

- (11) Possible structure for the Aux-verb constructions:

mek-ko-iss-ta
 eat-ko-be-Decl

Note: '-ko-' does not spell-out any syntactic features; merely serves as linking morpheme for V and Aux.



Note that these facts about '-ko-' in adult Korean are similar but not identical to the facts about the distribution of the progressive morpheme '-ing' in English. The presence of an auxiliary in a progressive construction in English always entails the presence of the '-ing' suffix, but '-ing' may also appear without an auxiliary, as in gerunds and small clause complements to perception verbs. Therefore, although '-ing' forms in child English, with no auxiliaries may be analyzed as root small clauses or gerunds, the status of '-ko-' makes such an analysis impossible for child Korean, because '-ko-' only ever occurs in complex verb constructions, and never appears as a word-final suffix.

4.2 Truncation of Auxiliary Verb Constructions

Given this, an interesting finding in the early recordings of the Jiyoung corpus is that Jiyoung systematically truncates auxiliary verb constructions, failing to produce the Aux, but regularly producing the linking morpheme '-ko-'. An example of this is given in (12):

- (12) Adult: mwe ha-ko-iss-e
 what do-ko-be-Ques
 'What is he doing?'
 Child: sinbal sin-ko cikum
 shoes put on-ko now
 '(He's) putting on shoes now.' (Jiyoung 2;4)

In (12) an adult asks Jiyoung what somebody is doing, using the auxiliary-verb construction 'ha-ko-iss-e', and in responding Jiyoung uses the verb form 'sin-ko' (putting on), with no auxiliary following the '-ko-'. Table 10 gives frequencies for truncated and non-truncated Aux-verb constructions in each month of the recordings. The truncated '-ko-' forms mostly occur in the earlier recordings, while the non-truncated forms mostly occur in the later recordings.

Table 10: Frequency of Truncation in the AVC used by Jiyoung

Age	Truncated Forms		Full Aux contexts		total
	V-ko	V-e	V-ko Aux	V-e Aux	
2;2		1			1
2;3	9	3			12
2;4	16	8	1		25
2;5	3		1		4
2;6		2	1	1	4
2;7			2		2
total	28	14	5	1	48

We suggest that the presence of the linking morpheme '-ko-' in these truncated forms reflects the fact that Jiyoung is actually representing auxiliaries syntactically, even if she fails to produce them until the later transcripts. In effect, then, the linking morpheme is a convenient pointer, which tells us where there are null auxiliaries. In order to support this claim, though, we need to provide some additional evidence that these '-ko-' truncations are truncated Aux-verb constructions, and that they reflect productive knowledge of the Aux-verb construction rather than a frozen verb form.

First, we can show that the ko-truncations are used almost exclusively in contexts in which a full Aux-verb construction is required or at least appropriate. For example, in response to questions containing Aux-verb constructions it is highly preferred to use an Aux-verb construction, as shown in (13):

- (13) Adult: mwe ha-ko iss-e
 what do-ko-be-Ques
 'What are you doing?'
 Child: pap mek-ko
 meal eat-ko-(be-Decl)
 '(I)'m eating the meal.'

This holds for both *wh*-questions and for the Korean counterparts to *yes/no* questions, which cannot be answered with *yes* or *no* in Korean. Around half of Jiyoung's ko-truncations occurred in question contexts. For most of the remainder of the ko-truncations, we were able to draw on either repetitions and expansions provided by Jiyoung's mother, or on notes provided by the transcriber, to confirm that the Aux-verb construction was situationally appropriate. As the converse to this, there are very many contexts in the transcripts in which Aux-verb constructions would *not* be appropriate, and in

these contexts '-ko-' truncations are not found, and typically the default suffix '-e' is used instead.

Additionally, we can give some evidence that the '-ko-' truncations are used productively, rather than as frozen verb forms or as partial imitations of something that an adult has just said. As evidence that the '-ko-' forms are not truncated imitations of an adult utterance, we can give examples of adult-child exchanges, as shown in (14):

- (14) Adult: kabang ettekhe ha-ko-iss-e?
 bag how do-ko-be-Ques
 ‘How are you doing the bag?’
Child: kabang kac-ko
 bag take-ko
 ‘(I’m) taking the bag.’

The existence of a number of spontaneous examples of '-ko-' truncations also supports the view that these are not just shortened repetitions. Also, we checked to see that the verbs that Jiyoung used in '-ko-' truncations were also used with the default suffix '-e', and found that this was true for at least some verbs, such as *cry* ('ul-e' and 'ul-ko'), *sit* ('anc-a' and 'an-ko'), and *sleep* ('ca-a' and 'ca-ko').

We should point out that the linking morpheme '-ko-' appears in a number of different syntactic contexts in adult Korean: in sentential embedding and serial verb and control verb constructions as well as in Aux-verb constructions. Nevertheless, '-ko-' seems to function as a linking morpheme in all of these contexts. Furthermore, almost all of Jiyoung's '-ko-' forms occur in Aux-verb contexts, and we found no cases in the entire corpus which seem to require an analysis as a control verb structure or sentential embedding.

5. Conclusions

The findings about truncation of Aux-verb constructions provide an interesting foil to all that we reported in the first part of the paper. In the first half of the paper we demonstrated that Jiyoung's early files provide no evidence at all of functional syntactic structure, that is, just NPs and VPs are produced. The facts about ko-truncations are actually still possibly consistent with the generalization that only VP-material is *produced*, but we *do* find evidence for the presence of at least *some* level of functional structure in Jiyoung's syntactic representations. Since Jiyoung overwhelmingly uses the linking morpheme '-ko-' in exactly the AVC contexts where it should be used in the adult language, and since '-ko-' is never a word-final suffix in adult Korean, we infer that Jiyoung is *representing* the full Aux-verb Construction, even at the stage when she *never* produces the auxiliary. Despite the absence of any overt reflexes of syntactic functional categories, either in the form of word-order alternations or in the form of production of specific inflections, we found evidence that Jiyoung is representing at least some degree of functional structure.

What, then does the Korean data contribute to cross-linguistic accounts of early child syntax?

First, the ko-truncations seem to provide striking evidence for the suggestion that some child-adult differences can be accounted for by the presence of null-auxiliaries, as argued by Boser et al. (1992) and others. Korean is rather helpful in providing a morpheme that points out the existence of null auxiliaries. However, this certainly does not mean that null auxiliaries provide an explanation for *all* non-adultlike clauses – remember that the ko-truncations are far outnumbered by verb forms with the default ‘-e’ suffix.

Second, we want to stress the kind of analysis that the ko-truncation facts require. As we have shown, they seem to require an account in which what children produce is lacking certain material that is present in their syntactic representations (Bloom 1990; Boyle & Gerken 1996; Phillips 1995). But more importantly, what we need is an account in which the representation/production mismatches are *systematic*. We have to ensure that ko-truncations always consist of the main verb plus the linking morpheme, and never of the verb and the auxiliary but not the linking morpheme, and never of the linking morpheme plus the verb. So whatever the story, it must guarantee a systematic mismatch between representation and production, and on this point most existing accounts are left wanting.

Endnotes

* We are grateful to Gabriella Hermon and Carson Schütze for very useful feedback on this work. We also thank SookWhan Cho for allowing us to use her database.

1. The arguments presented below do not depend on this specific analysis of Korean syntax; they are compatible with any account which draws a distinction between open and closed-class morphemes. Therefore, our arguments are also consistent with the theory of Cho & Sells (1995), who assume an absence of functional projections in adult Korean.

2. Frozen forms ignored in 2;3 transcript were ‘*ep-ta*’ (there is nothing) five times and ‘*o-ci*’ (come) three times.

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