THE KOREAN VERB – STRUCTURED AND COMPLETE

Dick Grune and Cho Seongyeon

The Korean Verb – Structured and Complete

The Korean Verb – Structured and Complete provides an in-depth, systematic, and structured presentation of the Korean verb and its verb forms, a notoriously complex area for learners of the language.

The book presents learners with a method that simplifies the forming and understanding of Korean verb forms. The method is based on encapsulating the irregularities in the verb forms in three stem forms for each verb. After introducing the three-stem method, the subsequent chapters apply this method to the three verb classes, consonant stems, vowel stems, and ㄹ-stems.

The book has three main features: the three-stem method; the complete treatment of irregular and similar regular verbs; and a complete dictionary of over 200 verb endings and suffixes. Each is useful in its own right; together they embody a complete understanding of the Korean verb form.

The book is of prime interest to anybody who is involved in studying or teaching Korean, and more in particular to the intermediate and advanced student who likes to have a systematic way to tackle all Korean verb forms.

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Taylor & Francis
Taylor & Francis Group
http://taylorandfrancis.com

The Korean Verb – Structured and Complete

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Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2020
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
52 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Grune, Dick, author. — Cho, Seongyeon, author.
Title: The Korean verb - structured and complete / Dick Grune and Cho Seongyeon.
Description: 1. — New York : Routledge, 2019. — Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2019034247 (print) — LCCN 2019034248 (ebook) — ISBN 9780367266356 (hardback) — ISBN 9780429294280 (ebook)
Subjects: LCSH: Korean language–Verb. — Korean language–Inflection.
Classification: LCC PL921.7 .G78 2019 (print) — LCC PL921.7 (ebook) — DDC 495.75/6–dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2019034247
LC ebook record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2019034248

ISBN: 978-0-367-26635-6 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-0-429-29428-0 (ebk)

Publisher's Note
This book has been prepared from camera-ready copy provided by the authors.

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Preface

All languages have verbs, and almost all languages have irregular verbs. Students and even native speakers have to deal with both. Most English dictionaries feature a complete list of 300 or so irregular verbs; and for French there is a little book, 'Bescherelle – 1. La conjugaison pour tous' ('Conjugation for Everybody'), which covers the French verb completely. This book endeavours to do the same for the Korean verb: full coverage, including archaic forms that are still used in modern renderings of ancient Korean literature and plays, which are part of the Korean culture.

This makes this book of prime interest to anybody who is involved in studying or teaching the Korean language, and more in particular to the intermediate and advanced student of Korean who likes to have a work of reference at hand or occasionally feels the need for more detailed information.

Coverage

The purpose of this book is to explain all Korean verb forms, where a 'verb form' is defined as a stem connected to an ending, without intervening space. This means that the verb form 보내겠어요 is explained, but the verb expression 보낼 거예요 is not (although the verb forms 보낼 and 거예요 *are* explained).

Verbs, suffixes, and endings are introduced without regard to frequency of use. Most items presented in this book are in more or less everyday use, but for completeness' sake the lists of verbs, suffixes, and endings in this book contain many items which are sometimes considered 'rare'. Experience has shown, however, that 'rare' endings occur surprisingly often; we quote from a children's comic book on Korean history:[1] ... 고조선을 세웠느니라 – *... and it is a fact that I founded the Ancient Korean Nation*; within a few pages we find 세우겠노라, 하옵니다, and 없소이다; and the blunt speech style ending -소, of which Ho-Min Sohn writes '[M]any contemporary Koreans, including the author of this book, have not used this level at all in their lives' (Sohn Ho-Min, *Korean*, Routledge, 1994, page 9) was found as a publicity gimmick on a shop receipt in 2017: 필요한 건 다 있소 – *You need it - we've got it.* Almost all of Korean grammar is very much alive.

[1] *사회*, 6학년, 삼성출판사, page 8

All verbs listed in this book can be found in the larger dictionaries. With very few exceptions, we have avoided dialect forms and words.

How to use this book

This book has three main features: the three-stem method; the complete treatment of irregular and similar regular verbs; and the complete annotated list of verb suffixes and endings. Each is useful in its own right; together they embody a complete understanding of the Korean verb form.

The three-stem method splits the verb form in a stem part and an ending part, in such a way that the two parts are independent entities, which can freely be combined with other stems and endings. Traditionally a form like 먹어요 is divided 먹-어요, but in this book it is divided 먹어-요; likewise 먹으면 is divided 먹으-면 rather than traditionally 먹-으면. Together 먹-, 먹어-, and 먹으- represent the plain, extended, and padded stems of the verb 먹다. Each of the more than 200 endings in Chapter 7 combines with one of these three stems, supplying the reader with 200+ verb forms for the price of three stem forms. The three-stem method is explained in detail in Chapters 1 and 2. Since the consistent application of this method is new, care has been taken to introduce it in a reasoned and substantiated way.

Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6 use the three-stem method to simplify the treatment of the irregular consonant stems, vowel stems, ㄹ-stems, and generated verbs respectively. To provide familiarity with the resulting verb forms, full-page paradigms containing up to 26 verb forms are given for more than 30 representative verbs; more than 60 verbs are shown in shorter eight-form paradigms; and all irregular verbs are shown with four representative forms. It will be useful to go through the full-page paradigms and see how each form is built; the eight-form paradigms provide interesting detail; and the full lists of irregular verbs can be consulted as needed using the verb form index, or they can just be perused. The same applies to the entries for endings and suffixes in Chapter 7, which starts on page 133.

The verb form index, starting from page 203, contains all verb forms in the full-page paradigms and the short paradigms, and the basic ones from the one-line listings.

Acknowledgements

This book and its authors owe a major debt to S.E. Martin's *A Reference Grammar of Korean*. Prof. Martin's book is unsurpassed in scope, depth, and completeness, and is indispensable to the professional linguist specializing in the Korean language. But its terseness, absence of Hangeul, and non-standard romanization present a very high threshold to a more general public. We have drawn deeply from Prof. Martin's book; we have kept the completeness but hope to have reduced the threshold considerably.

Furthermore the authors of the book want to express their thanks to Arwen Grune, for advice on the format of the tables in this book and other typographical suggestions; to Bruce McDonough for the idea to include a Glossary and for

impressing upon us the need to use a more modern type font; and to one of Routledge's anonymous reviewers for providing us with a 'list of minor quibbles', which turned out to be very useful suggestions.

Next the Western author of this book wants to thank the 암스테르담 한글학교 – Korean School of Amsterdam, for their untiring efforts to teach the Korean language and culture to the population of a large area of the Netherlands, including this author.

And last but not least, our thanks go to Samantha Vale Noya and Rosie McEwan of Taylor & Francis (Routledge) for their much appreciated help in getting this book to the finish line.

The reference works and other books listed in Appendix B have been indispensable. Literature references are identified in the text by author name and book title where applicable.

Disclaimers

Even completeness has its limits, and the limits on the completeness of the material in this book have been stated in a few short disclaimers, inserted at their pertinent points. They can be found through the entry 'disclaimer' in the Subject Index.

Finally

The best text book or lecture for a student is the one of which he or she finds one third easy, one third informative, and one third difficult. We hope that our readers will still find something worth learning in the easy part, profit from the middle part, and occasionally delve into the difficult part.

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Amsterdam Area
October 2019

Taylor & Francis
Taylor & Francis Group
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머리말

2010년대 들어 외국어로서 한국어를 배우는 학생의 수는 눈에 띄게 증가하고 있고, 학습자의 연령, 직업, 동기도 훨씬 다양해졌습니다. 이는 저와 같은 재외 한글학교 교사에게 분명 반갑고 흥미로운 현상이지만 학습서나 부교재를 추천하는 일은 보다 까다로워졌습니다.

이 책은 한국에서 살아가기 위해 기본적으로 필요한 회화를 가르쳐 주는 책은 아닙니다. 그렇지만, 한글학교 교재의 문법 설명에 갈증을 느끼고, 좀 더 체계적인 활용 규칙을 탐구하는 학생에게 획기적인 발견이 될 것입니다. 아울러, 영문과 국문 문법설명서 사이의 괴리에서 고심하는 한글학교 교사들에게 효율적인 대안이 되리라 기대합니다.

이 책의 발간을 맞아, 한국어를 향한 지치지 않는 열정과 애정으로 후배 학습자들을 돕기 위해 노고를 바쳐 온 Dick Grune 교수님, 가족들, 친구 도라(Dora)에게 감사의 마음을 전합니다.

2019년 6월
암스테르담에서

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Chapter 1

Verbs and stems

The student of Korean is, almost from day one, confronted by irregular verbs. They seem to come in a wide variety and to attach themselves to verb endings in confusing ways. Likewise, the (foreign) student of English too is soon confronted by irregular verbs: *I have – he has*, *I write – I wrote*, etc.

Korean and English verbs are irregular in completely different ways, however. There are about 300 irregular verbs in English, each with just three forms (for example *to go - went - gone*), and they hardly form groups: each verb is individually irregular. All other English verbs are regular. Korean has a number of classes of verbs and each verb has between 150 and 250 forms, but these forms fall into four classes, and inside these classes everything is regular. There are very few individual irregularities and Korean is quite a regular language, despite appearances.

In summary, the English verbs are irregular but simple; the Korean verbs are regular but complex. English verbs can be mastered by just learning the three forms of the 300 irregular verbs; the rest is regular. For the Korean verb a different approach is needed, one based on structure.

1.1 The Korean verb form in a nutshell

Every Korean verb form consists of a stem, possibly modified, followed by an ending, also possibly modified. The rest of this book fills in the details of that simple observation.

Examples of verb forms are[1]

먹어요 – *someone eats*, from

먹- – *to eat* (stem) + -(아/어)요 (informal present tense ending),

봅니다 – *someone sees*, from

보- – *to see* (stem) + -(스)ㅂ 니다 (formal present tense ending),

and

[1] The notation for endings is explained on page 9.

추우니까 – *because it is cold*, from
춥- – *to be cold* (stem) + -(으)니까 (ending meaning *because*).

A Korean verb can literally have hundreds of forms[2]. This high number is obtained by gluing endings or ending combinations to the verb stem. One of the problems with the Korean verb is that these endings often modify the stem; and in some cases the stem modifies the ending. With thousands of verbs and hundreds of endings there are hundreds of thousands of verb forms[3] and if a large percentage of these forms were irregular, Korean would be impossible to learn.

Fortunately the verbs come in classes and the endings come in classes, in such a way that all verbs in the same verb class combine in the same way to all endings, and all endings in the same endings class combine in the same way with all verbs. So only the combinations of verb classes and endings classes will have to be specified to allow a person to come up with any desired form. That is the principle on which this book is based.

1.2 Basics

To discuss verbs, endings, and their forms we need to introduce a number of terms. Some of them are general and may be familiar to the reader, but some are specific to this book. Examples are 'extended stem' and 'padded stem'. An extensive list of terms can be found in the Glossary, starting on page 191.

Most of the definitions given here are approximate and some might even make linguists frown. But languages are too fuzzy to be caught in simple definitions, and we need a vocabulary to talk about them.

1.2.1 Letters and words

A word in Korean (and English) is made up of *consonants* and *vowels*. Each word contains at least one vowel: there are no words without vowels. The vowels of (written) English are *a*, *e*, *i*, *o*, *u*, and, in some words, *y*. The Korean vowels are, in dictionary order,

ㅏ, ㅐ, ㅑ, ㅒ, ㅓ, ㅔ, ㅕ, ㅖ, ㅗ, ㅘ, ㅙ, ㅚ, ㅛ, ㅜ, ㅝ, ㅞ, ㅟ, ㅠ, ㅡ, ㅢ, ㅣ.

These vowels can be divided in series and arranged in a table as follows:

[2]Estimates differ: the index of Yeon & Brown's *Korean – A Comprehensive Grammar* (Yeon & Brown 2011) has 160 verb endings and King's internet *Korean Grammar Dictionary* has 424 verb endings.

[3]Park's *500 Basic Korean Verbs* (Park 2011) shows more than 27000 verb forms.

basic vowels	ㅏ	ㅓ	ㅗ	ㅜ	ㅡ	ㅣ
fronted vowels	ㅐ	ㅔ	ㅚ	ㅟ	ㅢ	
y-series, basic	ㅑ	ㅕ	ㅛ	ㅠ		
y-series, fronted	ㅒ	ㅖ				
w-series, basic	ㅘ	ㅝ				
w-series, fronted	ㅙ	ㅞ				

The table shows that there are six basic vowels, each written with the simplest strokes possible. For five of these basic vowels there is a similar vowel that is pronounced more in the front of the mouth: the vowel is *fronted*. For example, 'ㅏ' becomes 'ㅐ', 'ㅓ' becomes 'ㅔ', 'ㅗ' becomes 'ㅚ', etc. The fronted vowels are written with an 'ㅣ' added to the right of the original vowels. They can be found in the above table directly below the vowels they derive from.

Six of the basic and fronted vowels can be preceded by a *y* sound, which is written as a small stroke added to the letter, next to the stroke that is already there; these form the *y-series*. And four of them can be preceded by a *w* sound, which is written as an 'ㅗ' or 'ㅜ' in front of the letter; these form the *w-series*.

The English consonants are *b*, *c*, *d*, *f*, *g*, *h*, *j*, *k*, *l*, *m*, *n*, *p*, *q*, *r*, *s*, *t*, *v*, *w*, *x*, in some words *y*, and *z*. The Korean consonants are, in dictionary order,

ㄱ, ㄲ, ㄴ, ㄷ, ㄸ, ㄹ, ㅁ, ㅂ, ㅃ, ㅅ, ㅆ, ㅇ, ㅈ, ㅉ, ㅊ, ㅋ, ㅌ, ㅍ, and ㅎ.

The consonants

ㄱ, ㄷ, ㅂ, and ㅈ

are called *plosives*, because they are pronounced with a little explosion; they also occur 'doubled' or 'tense':

ㄲ, ㄸ, ㅃ, and ㅉ,

and are then pronounces with a snap rather than with a little explosion. The consonants

ㄴ, ㄹ, ㅁ, ㅅ, and ㅇ

are called *non-plosives*, or *continuants*, because it is possible to continue them; the ㅅ can be doubled (made tense): ㅆ. And the consonants

ㅊ, ㅋ, ㅌ, ㅍ, and ㅎ

are called *aspirates*, from the Latin *aspīrāre - to breathe*, because they involve a lot of breath.

We distinguish these groups because they behave differently. For example aspirates do not occur in verb endings: there are verbs endings with a ㄷ in them, -다, -는데, etc., but there are no verb endings with a ㅌ in them. And while ㄲ and ㅆ occur in a few endings, the other double plosives are not found in any endings. In short,

ㄱ, ㄷ, ㅂ, ㅈ, ㄴ, ㄹ, ㅁ, and ㅅ

are the main building blocks of verb endings.

Korean words consist of *syllables*, character blocks that have a consonant at the top, where the ㅇ is silent, a vowel in the middle, and possibly a consonant at the bottom, where the ㅇ has an *ng* sound. The consonant at the bottom is called *batchim* (받침, 'support'). The double consonants ㄸ, ㅃ, and ㅉ do not occur as batchim, but the following 13 double consonants do:

ㄲ, ㄳ, ㄵ, ㄶ, ㄺ, ㄻ, ㄼ, ㄽ, ㄾ, ㄿ, ㅀ, ㅄ, and ㅆ.

For example, the syllable 할 consists of the consonant ㅎ, the vowel 'ㅏ' and the batchim ㄹ; and the syllable 읽 consist of the consonant ㅇ, silent here, the vowel 'ㅣ' and the double batchim ㄺ.

1.2.2 Sentences

In all languages words are strung together into *sentences*. In writing a sentence ends in a *dot* (.) (also called *period*). An example is:

사과를 먹어요. – *I eat an apple.*

Every sentence has a *subject*, the person or thing the sentence is about, and a *predicate*, which tells what the subject does or is. In the English translation above *I* is the subject and *eat an apple* is the predicate. In the Korean sentence the subject is also 내가 – *I*, but under the rules of the Korean language it has been left out. This is not as strange as it sounds: the subject of the English sentence *Go away!* is clearly *you*, but under the rules of the English language it has been left out. And 사과를 먹어요 is the predicate.

A predicate always contains a *verb form*, a form of a verb that fits the sentence. In the English translation, *eat* is the verb form; if the subject had been *he*, the verb form would have been *eats* to fit the sentence (as in *He eats an apple*). In the Korean sentence the verb form is 먹어요; in Korean the verb form is always the last word of the sentence, except in informal conversation.

Many verbs, especially those that describe an action, have not only a subject, which does the action, but also an *object*, which is the object of the action. A verb that can have an object is called *transitive*. In the English sentence above *an apple* is the object; in the Korean sentence it is 사과를. If the object is already known, it is left out in Korean: 이제 끝냈어요 but in English it has to be replaced by *it*: *Now I have finished it*.

Subjects and objects are nouns forms; a *noun* is a word that indicates a person, an animal, a thing, or an idea. We say 'noun *forms*' because in Korean (and in English) a noun can have different forms depending on its function in the sentence. The noun is 사과, but as an object it is 사과를 and as a subject it would be 사과가. In English a noun can have four forms at most (*apple*, *apples*, and perhaps *apple's*, and *apples'*); Korean nouns can have over thirty forms, but they are all regular, so

they present no particular difficulty.

Predicates are formed from verbs. The verb in the above example is 먹다 – *to eat* in its dictionary form, and in the present tense it has the form 먹어요. English verbs have three or four forms at most (*have*, *has*, *had* plus possibly *hath*); a Korean verb can have far over a hundred forms.

What is the subject and what is the object may seem to differ sometimes between English and Korean, but this is largely a semantic illusion. An example is the Korean sentence

저는 사과가 있어요. – *I have an apple.*

In Korean 사과**가** is marked as the subject, and in English the apple is clearly the object of *have*. But the Korean sentence literally means *As to me, there is an apple*, and there the apple is the subject of the verb form *is*, just as in English, so the apparent contradiction disappears.

1.3 Stems

The stems we have seen until now, 먹-, 보-, 춥-, etc., were all simple stems, but in general a stem can consist of several parts. Even English stems can show some structure, as in *computer-ise* or *familiar-ise*, but Korean takes this principle much, much further.

A *stem* consists of a *root* followed by zero or more *suffixes*, but to show how this works a larger example is needed:

할아버지께서 보시었겠어요. – *Grandfather may have seen (it).*

where 보시었겠어요 is the verb form. It consists of a stem 보시었겠- and an ending -(아/어)요, and it is in the stem that we are interested in here.

Where there is a stem there must be a verb, and indeed there is:

보시었겠다 – *to be likely that a respected person has seen something*

The English equivalent is quite a mouthful, but is exactly what 보시었겠다 means, and it makes sense in the literal translation: *It is likely that respected grandfather has seen it.*

The stem 보시었겠- consists of the stem 보시었- plus the suffix -겠-; the suffix -겠- creates stems for verbs that indicate likelihood. Because of the way they connect, stems are written with a connecting hyphen on the right, endings get one on the left, and suffixes get hyphens on both sides.

The stem 보시었- too comes with a verb:

보시었다 – *to have seen something (speaking of a respected person)*

It consists of the stem 보시- plus the suffix -었-; this suffix creates stems with past tense meaning.

The stem 보시- comes again with a verb:

보시다 – *to see something (speaking of a respected person)*

It in its turn consists of the root 보- plus the suffix -(으)시-. This suffix creates stems for verbs that should be used when the subject is a respected person; such forms are called *honorifics*.

And the root 보- comes with the *dictionary form* of the verb:

보다 – *to see something*

With the root we have reached rock bottom: it does not consist of something else and is just itself.

Suffixes are a peculiar sort of endings: a word cannot end in -시- or -었- or -겠-, but a stem can. Suffixes behave just like ending when they connect to a stem, so they are also included in the chapter about endings, in Section 2.4.

1.4 Plain, extended, and padded stems

Many endings seem to start with a vowel. Examples are -(으)니까 – *because*, -(아/어)요 – *informal present tense*, and -(으)면 – *if*:

받으니까 – *because somebody receives*

먹어요 – *somebody eats*

먹으면 – *if somebody eats*

Traditionally these initial vowels are regarded as part of the endings, but they disappear easily and their presence is often more visible in the stems they modify than in the endings themselves, as the following examples show:

가- + -(으)면 → 가면 – *if someone goes*,
in which the 으 disappears;

가- + -(아/어)요 → 가요 – *someone goes* (informal),
in which the 아/어 disappears;

낫- + -(아/어)요 → 나아요 – *it gets better*,
in which the stem is modified by the vowel of the ending;

돕- + -(아/어)요 → 도와요 – *someone helps*,
in which the 아/어 disappears and the stem is modified; and

가- + -(스)ㅂ니다 → 갑니다 – *someone goes* (formal),
in which the ending loses its first two letters.

(Items that require special attention are marked by a yellow background.)

Three classes of ending can be distinguished, based on how they connect to a stem:

- those that connect directly to the stem, without modification; these have a subclass of endings that attach directly to the stem but lose one or two of their initial letters if the stem ends in a vowel;