

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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The Korean Verb – Structured and Complete

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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://lcn.loc.gov/2019034247>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.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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October 2019



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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 are¹

먹어요 – *someone eats*, from

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

봅니다 – *someone sees*, from

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

and

¹The notation for endings is explained on page 9.

춥 - to be cold (stem) + -(으)ㄴ까 (ending meaning *because*).

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.

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.

1.2.1 Letters and words

I, H, E, H, I, II, F, FI, L, LI, LL, U, UL, T, TI, TT, P, PP, -, -|, |.

²Estimates 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.

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

basic vowels	ɪ	ɛ	ʌ	ʊ	—	ɨ
fronted vowels	ɪ̟	ɛ̟	ʌ̟	ʊ̟	—	
y-series, basic	ɪ	ɛ	ʌ	ʊ		
y-series, fronted	ɪ̟	ɛ̟				
w-series, basic	ɪ̠	ɛ̠				
w-series, fronted	ɪ̠̟	ɛ̠̟				

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, ‘|’ becomes ‘||’, ‘┘’ becomes ‘|||’, ‘┘┘’ becomes ‘┘┘|’, etc. The fronted vowels are written with an ‘|’ 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 '⊥' or '⊤' 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,

[illegible]

The consonants

 $\neg, \sqsubset, \boxplus, \text{ and } \boxtimes$

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

ㄗ, ㄘ, ㄙ, and ㅈ,

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

⌊, ⌋, □, ∧, and ○

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

 $\bar{s}, \exists, \in, \Pi, \text{ and } \bar{o}$

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, -ㄷ, -는데, etc., but there are no verb endings with a ㅌ in them. And while ㄱ and ㅋ 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 ㄸ

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 ㅆ do not occur as batchim, but the following 13 double consonants do:

ㄲ, ㄺ, ㄻ, ㄼ, ㄽ, ㄾ, ㄿ, ㅀ, ㅁ, ㅂ, ㅃ, ㅄ, ㅅ, ㅆ, ㅈ, ㅊ, ㅋ, ㆁ, and ㄷ.

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

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 사과가 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-, 춤-, 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;

- those that use 아 or 어 to connect to the stem; this may modify the stem; and
- those that use 으 to connect to the stem; this may modify the stem.

Two of these ending classes may modify the stem, so these processes leave the stem in one of three forms:

- The *plain stem*; this is the unmodified stem itself, the dictionary form without the -다. For 먹다 it is 먹-; for 돕다 it is 돕-. An example of an ending that attaches to the plain stem is -네: 돕네 – *He helps!*

Endings that attach to the plain stem are *plain endings*.

- The *extended stem*; it is the form the stem takes when an ending that uses 아 or 어 is appended to it. For 먹다 it is 먹어-; for 돕다 it is 도와-. An example of an ending that attaches to the extended stem is -(아/어)요: 도와요 – *someone helps*.

Endings that attach to the extended stem are *extending endings*.

- The *padded stem*; this is the form the stem takes when an ending that uses 으 is appended to it. For 먹다 it is 먹으-; for 돕다 it is 도우-. An example of an ending that attaches to the padded stem is -(으)면: 도우면 – *if someone helps*.

Endings that attach to the padded stem are *padding endings*.

The extended stem and the padded stem always end in a vowel.

We see that moving the initial vowel from the ending to the stem creates three stem forms and leaves the ending without the vowel. This simplifies the forming of verb forms: (almost) all verb forms now consist of the correct stem plus the vowel-less ending, without any further modification. Examples are:

with an extended stem:

먹어-요 – *he eats*

도와-요 – *he helps*

먹어-서 ... – *having eaten, ...*

도와-서 ... – *having helped, ...*

and with a padded stem:

먹으-면 – *if he eats*

도우-면 – *if he helps*

먹으-니까 – *because he eats*

도우-니까 – *because he helps*

This also applies to endings that start with a batchim, for example -(으)ㄴ for the past modifier or -(아/어)ㄴ for the past stem. But because the batchim takes its place below the final vowel of the extended or padded stem, we cannot just put a hyphen between the stem and the ending, but have to draw a frame around the extended or padded stem, to show the effect:

past stem of 먹다

past stem of 돕다

based on the extended stems 먹어- and 도와-, and the ending -(아/어) ㅅ; and

having eaten

having helped

based on the padded stems 먹은- and 도운-, and the ending -(으) ㄴ.

The fact that the vowel of the extended stem ('ㅏ' or 'ㅑ') depends on the stem and not on the ending is another argument to show that these vowels belong to the stems rather than to the endings.

These observations are the basis of the *three-stem method*.

1.5 The three-stem method

The three-stem method is based on the fact that (almost) all Korean verb forms can be made by just joining one of the three stem forms, plain, extended, and padded, to an ending suitable for the stem:

- plain stems to plain endings;
- extended stems to extending endings; and
- padded stems to padding endings.

The only verb forms that cannot be formed by simply joining the correct stem form to the ending involve endings that can lose some of their initial letters (for example -(스)ㄴ니다) or verb stems ending in ㄹ. The first are covered in Section 2.1.2, and the second in Chapter 5.

The possibility of making all verb forms by simply joining the correct stem form to the ending is typical of Korean (and a small number of other languages). The English verb form *brought* from *to bring*, for example, cannot be formed by joining a form of *bring* to a past tense ending.

1.5.1 Plain, extending, and padding endings

In Section 1.4 above we have incorporated the connecting vowels of the endings into the three stem forms. This leaves these endings without the vowels, so now we have to know for each ending if it connects to a plain, extended, or padded stem. There are a few rules, for example all endings that start with ㅏ or ㅑ attach to plain stems and all batchim endings attach to padded stems, except -ㅓ which attaches to the extended stem. But, like the last one, these rules have small exceptions, and it is better to indicate with each and every ending which stem form it attaches to. Therefore we mark each ending with a small copy of its connecting vowel, (아/어) for the extended stem, (으) for the padded stem, and nothing for the plain stem. These

are *context markers* for the left context required by the ending; they are *not* part of the ending, and the ending starts right after them. So we write

- []다 for the plain ending -다, which attaches to **plain** stems;
- (아/어)도 for the extending ending -도, which attaches to **extended** stems;
- (으)면 for the padding ending -면, which attaches to **padded** stems.

This is more natural than, for example, -(pln)다, -(ext)도, or -(pad)면, and is in line with the traditional view. The one or two letters that can be lost by some endings are put between parentheses: -(스)입니다, for -습니다/-입니다.

The collection of all forms of a verb is called the *conjugation* of that verb. In most languages conjugations are mainly about giving verb forms for the various personal pronouns as in the French *je suis, tu es, il est*; in Korean they are about joining the verb class to the ending class. An example of the conjugation of a Korean verb can be found on page 49.

1.6 Sentence-, clause-, and modifier endings

The endings -(아/어)요 and -(스)입니다 we showed above create verb forms like 먹어요 – *someone eats*, and 받습니다 – *someone receives*, which end sentences. Many other endings do the same, but there are also many endings that create verb forms which end ‘clauses’.

A *clause* is a part of a sentence that includes a verb form and makes sense by itself, but cannot be used as a full sentence. Examples of clauses in English are *if it's going to rain*; *whom I met yesterday*; *because they have five children already*; etc. Each of these make sense and can be used in a sentence, but they cannot be used as full sentences.

Clauses in English are created by small words which come at the start: *if, whom, because*, etc. Clauses in Korean are created by verb endings, which come, as the word says, at the end.

Whether a verb ending ends a sentence or a clause, and which kind of sentence or clause it ends, depends on the form and meaning of the ending. There are three possibilities; an ending can end:

- a main sentence; this can then be a statement, a question, a command, a proposal, etc.; an example is the sentence ending -자 in
가자 – *let's go* (proposal)
- a (subordinate) clause; the information provided by the clause applies to the whole sentence; an example is the clause ending -고 in
저는 사과를 먹고 ... – *I eat an apple and ...*
- a relative clause (also called ‘modifier’); the information provided by the clause applies to the following noun; an example is the modifier ending -는 in
제가 먹는 사과 ... – *the apple which I eat ...*

English and Korean relative clauses differ considerably. In English they follow the noun they modify, start with small words like *that*, *who*, or *which*, and express past, present, or future in the verb. In Korean they precede the noun they modify and end in -은, -는, -을, and one or two others, which also express time. Due to these differences the Korean relative clauses are called *modifier clauses* or *noun modifiers* or just *modifiers*.

Adverbs in English, like *easily*, often correspond to (adverbial) clauses in Korean: 쉽게 – *easily* from 쉽다 – *to be easy*. This is because in Korean adjectives are (descriptive) verbs, and so adverbs become (adverbial) clauses.

Endings are covered in detail in Chapter 2. Chapter 7 lists a large number of endings and specifies for each of them which sentence form it ends, in addition to many other details.

1.7 Consonant-, vowel-, ㄹ-, and generated stems

For conjugation purposes it is important how the stem of the verb ends. This gives the major division of the verbs, in those that end in a consonant, and those that end in a vowel. Among those that end in a consonant, those that end in a ㄹ differ so much in their conjugation from the rest that it is useful to consider them as a separate class. And among those that end in a vowel, the same applies to those that result from adding -(이)다 to a noun. This gives us the following classification:

- *Consonant-stem verbs* – verbs in which the last syllable of the stem ends in a consonant (so there is a batchim).

Examples of consonant stems are:

먹- – *to eat*
 좋- – *to be good*
 닦- – *to brush*
 괜찮- – *to be OK*
 없- – *to not be*

This class does *not* include verbs ending in ㄹ, because their conjugation is so different that they form a class in themselves.

The consonant stem verbs are subdivided in a number of subclasses; all verbs in such a subclass have exactly the same conjugation. The details of the consonant verbs are covered in Chapter 3.

- *Vowel-stem verbs* – verbs in which the last syllable of the stem ends in a vowel (so there is no batchim).

Examples of vowel stems are:

가- – *to go*
 오- – *to come*
 되- – *to become*
 자르- – *to cut*
 가시- – *to go* (honorific)

The vowel stem verbs are subdivided in a number of subclasses; there are also two irregular vowel stem verbs. The details of the vowel verbs are covered in Chapter 4.

- *ㄹ-stem verbs* – verbs in which the last syllable of the stem has the batchim ㄹ.

Examples of ㄹ-stems are:

살- – *to live*
 팔- – *to sell*
 길- – *to be long*
 만들- – *to make*

All ㄹ-verbs have the same conjugation. The details of the ㄹ-verbs are covered in Chapter 5.

- *Generated verbs* – verbs generated from nouns by attaching -이다 to them; the combination translates in English as *to be a(n)* Because the 이 is often dropped after a noun ending in a vowel, we will write the verb generator as -(이)다.

Examples of generated verbs are:

학생이다 – *to be a student*
 학교다 – *to be a school* (with the 이 dropped)

The generated verbs behave by and large as descriptive verbs, but are different enough to be treated in a separate chapter, Chapter 6. All generated verbs have the same conjugation.

1.8 Action-, descriptive, and generated verbs

Verbs in Korean either indicate an action, and then they correspond mostly to verbs in English, or describe a property, and then they correspond mostly to adjectives in English. The first are called *action verbs* (or *processive verbs*), the second *descriptive verbs* (or *adjectives*). Examples are

쓰다 – *to write* (action)
 좋다 – *to be good* (descriptive)
 앉다 – *to sit down* (action)
 괜찮다 – *to be OK* (descriptive)

보다 – *to see* (action)

예쁘다 – *to be pretty* (descriptive)

The difference between action and descriptive verbs does not show in the verb stem, only in its meaning, but it influences the way the verb is used. The most important differences are:

- The ending for the formal plain present tense is -(ㄴ)다 for action verbs and -다 for descriptive verbs:

쓴다 – *someone writes* (action verb)

좋다 – *it is good* (descriptive verb)

앉는다 – *someone sits down* (action verb)

괜찮다 – *it is OK* (descriptive verb)

본다 – *someone sees* (action verb)

예쁘다 – *someone is pretty* (descriptive verb)

So the formal plain present of a descriptive verb is equal to the dictionary form, but the formal plain present of an action verb always has -는- or -ㄴ- in front of the -다.

- Action verbs have different noun modifiers for the present and past tense; the endings are -는 and -(으)ㄴ, respectively. Descriptive verbs have only one modifier ending, -(으)ㄴ, and it makes what in English would be the adjective:

쓰는 ... – ... *who writes* (action verb)

쓴 ... – ... *who wrote* (action verb)

예쁜 ... – *a pretty ...* (descriptive verb)

- Descriptive verbs cannot be used in a number of verb expressions (see Section 1.11), the main one being -고 있다 – *to do something continuously*. We can have

기다리고 있다 – *to be waiting*

but we cannot have

~~예쁘고 있다~~ – *to be pretty*.

After all, 예쁘다 already means ‘to be pretty’.

There are eleven basic endings that have different forms for action verbs and descriptive verbs; these are discussed in Section 2.1.6.

What is action and what is description does not always match English usage or intuition. For example the verb 싶다 – *to want* is a descriptive verb:

제가 갖고 싶은 것 – *the thing I want to have*.

This is because 싶다 actually means something like ‘to be lacking, to be wanting’. On the other hand 틀리다 – *to be wrong* is an action verb:

문제를 계속 틀리고 있다 – *to get an exercise wrong repeatedly*.

This is because 틀리다 actually means 'to get something wrong' and 틀린 – *wrong* actually means 'having been gotten wrong'. Another example is 유행하다 – *to be in fashion*, which surprisingly is an action verb:

유행하는 옷 – *fashion clothes*.

The reason is that it actually means 'to spread (illness, wildfire, etc.)'.

Also, some English adjectives correspond to the past tenses of Korean action verbs. Examples are:

젖다 – <i>to become wet</i>	젖었다 – <i>to be wet</i>	젖은 – <i>wet</i>
마르다 – <i>to become dry</i>	말랐다 – <i>to be dry</i>	마른 – <i>dry</i>
늙다 – <i>to become old</i>	늙었다 – <i>to be old</i>	늙은 – <i>old</i>

There are a few verbs that are both action verbs and descriptive verbs, with unrelated meanings; these are actually different verbs that sound the same. Examples are:

쓰다 – *to use*
 쓰다 – *to be bitter*
 싸다 – *to wrap*
 싸다 – *to be cheap*
 적다 – *to write down*
 적다 – *to be few*

1.9 Honorific verbs

When speaking about a respected person, the use of a plain verb stem is not appropriate in Korean and an *honorific stem* ('honorific' means 'conveying honour') must be used. Such honorific stems are almost always formed by adding the suffix -(으)시- to non-honorific stems:

철수는 선물을 받아요. – *Cheolsu gets a present*.

할아버지께서는 선물을 받으세요. – *Grandfather receives a gift*.

This respect extends to personal possessions:

준서는 돈이 적어요. – *Junseo has little money*.

할아버지께서는 돈이 많으세요. – *Grandfather has much money*.

The person spoken about may be, but need not be, the person addressed. The verb form 늦으세요 – *a respected person will be late* can be used speaking to the respected person but also towards somebody else, when speaking about the respected person:

김 선생님, 오늘 늦으세요? – *Mr Kim, will you be late today?*

김 선생님이 오늘 늦으세요? – *Will Mr Kim be late today?*

Honorifics differ somewhat in their use from other verb forms:

- Honorifics cannot be used in the first person ('I' or 'we').
- Honorifics cannot be used in formal plain proposals: although one can say *이쪽으로 가십시오* – *let's go this way*, one cannot say *이쪽으로 가사자*.
- They can, however, be used in commands, where they have the function of a respectful request or suggestion.

Honorific forms are marked with (*hon.*) in this book.

For a few stems of a more personal nature even the honorific stem formed with *-(으)시-* is not normally used, and an *inherently honorific stem* is used instead. These stems are discussed in Section 2.4.3.

1.10 Sino-Korean verbs

Korean verbs can also be divided in native Korean verbs and 'Sino-Korean verbs'. Sino-Korean verbs consist of a Sino-Korean noun (a Korean version of a Chinese word), supported by a native Korean verb, usually *하다*. An obvious example is *공부하다* – *to study*, where the Sino-Korean noun *공부* – *study* is supported by the native Korean verb *하다*. Since it is the supporting verb that is conjugated (the Chinese part never changes), this distinction does not play a role in this book.

Not all verbs using a supporting verb are Sino-Korean verbs; for example, *따뜻하다* – *to be warm* uses *하다* as a support verb, but *따뜻* is not Chinese and the whole verb is of Korean origin.

1.11 Verb expressions

In many languages speakers can modify the meaning of a verb by using it with an *auxiliary verb*, a verb which helps adjusting the meaning. An example in English is *to be going to see*, in which *to see* is the main verb and *to be going to* the auxiliary verb. In this case the auxiliary verb moves the action of the main verb into the future. In English the main verb and the auxiliary are either connected by nothing (as in *I will see*) or by *to* (as in *I want to see*). In Korean there are more ways to make such *verb expressions*⁴. Korean has two main types of verb expressions,

- clause + auxiliary verb form
- modifier + noun + auxiliary verb form

in which both the clause and the modifier can have many different forms. We will now discuss both types in turn.

⁴Verb expressions are also known as *sentence patterns*, *complex predicates*, and others.

1.11.1 Clause + auxiliary verb form

The first type of verb expressions in Korean consists of two parts: 'clause + auxiliary'. Examples are:

이 음식이 맵지 + 않아요. – *This dish is not spicy.*

이 사과를 먹어도 + 돼요? – *May I eat this apple?*

공부하고 + 있어요. – *I am studying.*

in which the '+' separates the clause and the auxiliary verb form.

A special case of this form is 'extended stem + auxiliary verb form'. An example is:

선물을 사 + 줬어요. – *I've bought a present for you.*

in which the auxiliary verb 주다 adds the notion of 'for somebody' to the main verb 사다 – *to buy*. This form is very usual, up to the point that clause and auxiliary verb are often written without a space in between: 사줬어요 – *I bought (it) for someone*.

Some verb expressions of this form never appear with a space between extended stem and auxiliary verb form. An example is 돌아오다 – *to come back*, from 돌다 – *to turn about* and 오다 – *to come*. It is also possible to consider this combination as a verb in its own right, with the meaning 'to return'.

1.11.2 Modifier clause + noun + auxiliary verb form

The second type of verb expressions in Korean consists of three parts: 'modifier clause + noun + auxiliary'. Examples are:

수빈이가 결석하는 + 것 + 같아요. – *Subin seems to be absent.*

제주도에 간 + 적이 + 있어요? – *Have you ever been to Jeju Island?*

Very often the auxiliary verb in this type of verb expression is the verb generator -(이)다, so the verb expression becomes 'modifier clause + noun-(이)다'. An example is:

비가 올 + 거예요 (= 것이예요). – *It is probably going to rain.*

Verb expressions can be combined and very often are. A simple example is:

이 음식이 맵지 않은 것 같아요. – *This dish seems not to be spicy.*

Here the verb expression 이 음식이 맵지 않- – *this dish is not spicy* is turned into a modifier clause by adding the ending -은. This modifier is then used in the verb expression 'modifier + 것 같-' – *it seems that* Finally the whole construction is turned into a sentence by adding -(아/어)요.

The Korean language has a wealth of verb expressions, and they are a major part of the language. This book covers the components of the verb expressions – the clauses, the modifiers, and the auxiliary verb forms – but it does not discuss the verb expressions themselves. Extensive treatment of verb expressions can be

found in Yeon & Brown, *Korean – A Comprehensive Grammar* (Yeon & Brown 2011), where they are called ‘sentence patterns’; in Ihm, Hong, & Chang, *Korean Grammar for International Learners* (Ihm, Hong, & Chang 2015), where they are just called ‘patterns’; and elsewhere.

1.12 Meaning

Verb stems have a meaning and endings have a meaning, and the meaning of the verb form comes from a combination of both.

Disclaimer

The verbs, endings, and sample sentences in this book come with translations. But a Korean verb often has more than one possible translation in English; an adequate description of a Korean verb ending may require a full page of text or more; and the proper translation of a Korean sentence depends heavily on the context, which is meagre in a text book.

To keep things simple, only short indicative translations are given; in any given context better and more natural translations will almost certainly be possible. Details about the meaning of verbs and endings can be found in dictionaries and text books, some of which are mentioned in Appendix B.

1.13 Speech styles

As is well known Korean has different *speech styles*, also called *speech levels*, used for addressing the listener in different social settings. These styles are mostly expressed in verb endings, so we will have to be concerned with them here.

Text books distinguish between four and seven styles plus a quotation style, and because we aim at a complete coverage of the verb we present them all. They are collected and briefly described in Table 1.1; more extensive tables can be found at the end of the next chapter, in Section 2.7.

Forms and endings that differ for action verbs, descriptive verbs, and generated verbs are marked by putting *act.*, *descr.*, or *gen.* in front of them, as follows: act: -(ㄴ)다; descr: -다; gen: -(이)다.

The first column of the table shows the usual Korean name for the style; different names are in use and this one is derived from the command for the verb 하다 in that style. The 해체 (informal plain) style is sometimes called 반말 (banmal), while the 해요체 (informal polite) and 합시오체 (formal polite) styles together are sometimes called 존댓말 (jondaemal). The second column shows the English name for the style used in this book; many other names are used in text books and on the internet. No appropriate English name is available for ‘hageche’; see the Glossary under ‘hageche’. The third column gives the present tense of the verbs 하다 (for action verbs), 좋다 (for descriptive verbs), and 집이다 (for generated verbs) in that

Korean name	English name	Present tense	Short indication of use
하소서체	formal elevated	하나이다	• addressing a king, God, etc.
합쇼체	formal polite	합니다	• addressing a respected person
해라체	formal plain	act: 한다 descr: 좋다 gen: 집이다	• reporting, not addressing a specific person
하게체	hageche	하네	• older men addressing somewhat younger men formally but kindly
하오체	blunt	하오	• authoritatively addressing a person
해요체	informal polite	해요	• addressing a person informally and politely
해체	informal plain	해	• addressing a person informally
하라체	quoting	act: 한다고 descr: 좋다고 gen: 집이라고	• quoting

Table 1.1: The Korean speech styles

style. And the fourth column gives a short and very simplified indication of its use. An extensive guide to the proper use of the speech styles can be found in the first chapter of Choo & Kwak's *Using Korean – A Guide to Contemporary Usage* (Choo & Kwak 2008).

The speech styles are arranged in three groups in the table. The top five styles all carry an air of formality, while the next two styles are used for casual conversation. The last style (quoting) is used for quoting what somebody said, regardless of the original speech style. Its forms are almost all equal to those of the formal plain style + 고. Unlike the other forms in this table they do not end sentences but end clauses that need at least one further verb form to make a clause or a sentence.

The formal plain and quoting styles have different forms for action verbs, descriptive verbs, and generated verbs, as indicated by the 'act:', 'descr:', and 'gen:'.

In addition to speech styles Korean has honorifics (see Sections 1.3 and 1.9). The *speech style* expresses the relation between the speaker and the person to whom he or she speaks, whereas the *honorifics* express the relation between the speaker and the person *about* whom he or she speaks. An extensive guide to the proper use of honorifics can be found in the second chapter of Choo & Kwak's *Using Korean – A Guide to Contemporary Usage* (Choo & Kwak 2008).