

On the Syntactic Profiles of Korean Tense Markers

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates how the Korean past marker *-(e)ss* (-ESS) is realized in non-final clauses preceding verbal connectives, focusing on temporal mismatch (a past first clause with a present/future second clause). Revisiting the debate between phrasal-affix analyses of -ESS in *-ko* coordination (J.-M. Yoon 1990, 1996; H.-S. Yoon 1993, 1994) and Chung's (2005) null-tense proposal, I argue that neither uniform VP-coordination nor a simple coordination/subordination split captures the full distribution. A survey reveals a three-way pattern: only *-ko* and *-kena* (and *-nikka*) allow optional -ESS, other coordinators require it, and several subordinate connectives either require -ESS or categorically block it. I propose a connective-sensitive theory of tense-domain licensing in which connectives lexically select the T-profile of the non-final clause. *-ko* and *-kena* (and *-nikka*) are bifurcated between an overt-T coordination and a null-T dependent linkage, while *-ese* has a single null-T adverbial profile that blocks local [past] spell-out.

Keywords: -ESS, verbal connectives, temporal mismatch, null tense, T-profile licensing

1. Introduction

Kendal and H.-S. Yoon (1986), J.-M. Yoon (1990, 1996), and H.-S. Yoon (1993, 1994) analyze the connective *-ko* as a coordinating conjunction. Under this view, (1) admits a constituent structure such as (2), and they argue that Korean past tense *-ess* (henceforth, represented as -ESS) is a phrasal affix.

- (1) Chelswu-ka pap-ul ha-ko, Yenghuy-ka kwuk-ul kkulhi-yess-e.
C.-NOM rice-ACC cook-CONN Y.-NOM soup-ACC boil-PAST-DECL
'Chelswu cooked rice and Yenghuy made soup.' (J.-M. Yoon 1996, (4b))

The notion of phrasal affix is intended in the sense familiar from English

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possessive 's: a morpheme that attaches to a phrasal constituent rather than to a single word.

(2) [_{VP} Chelswu-ka pap-ul ha]-ko, [_{VP} Yenghuy-ka kwuk-ul kkulhi]-yess-e.

Against a uniform VP-coordination analysis, Chung (2005) presents empirical evidence that suggests a different structural profile for *-ko* clauses¹⁾ and, consequently, for the distribution of Korean past tense. Consider the following data, taken from Chung (2005):

- (3) a. motwu-ka ecey yehayng ttena(-ss)-ko
all-NOM yesterday trip leave-PAST-CONN
Cheli-nun honca cip-ul cikhi-ko iss-ta.
C.-TOP alone home-ACC staying be-DECL
'All others left on a trip yesterday and Cheli is alone staying home now.'
- b. Meyli-ka imi tochakha(-yess)-ko Con-i kot ttena-n.ta.
M-NOM already arrive-PAST-CONN C.-NOM soon leave-DECL
'Mary already arrived and John is going to leave soon.'
- c. apeci-nun caknyen-ey kyothongsako-lo tolakasi(-ess)-ko
father-TOP last.year-in traffic.accident-in pass.away-PAST-CONN
emenim-un cikum pyeng-ulo nwuwekyeysi-n.ta.
mother-TOP now illness.due.to lie.in.bed-DECL
'My father passed away in a traffic accident last year and my mother is now lying in bed due to an illness.'

A salient property of (3a-c) is that the two conjuncts are temporally mismatched: the first *-ko* clause describes a past eventuality (often explicitly anchored by temporal adverbials such as *ecey* 'yesterday' or *caknyen-ey* 'last year'), while the following conjunct is anchored to a present-time predication. Crucially, in precisely these configurations, the past marker *-ESS* on the verb in the first conjunct is frequently optional. This optionality is naturally interpreted as showing that tense in the non-final *-ko* clause need not be morphologically realized even when the

1) To make it explicit, a T-profile in this paper means the structural tense setup that a connective selects for its non-final clause-i.e., whether that clause projects a full TP with overt tense morphology, or a null/deficient tense configuration that limits or blocks local tense spell-out and instead relies on anchoring via adverbials/discourse (and/or the connective's semantics).

intended temporal interpretation is past.

Chung proposes that, in cases where the first conjunct lacks overt *-ess*, it nevertheless contains a null tense marker (\emptyset).² If this is correct, the analysis of sentences like (1) is affected in a direct way: (1) need not have the VP-coordination structure in (2), but may instead allow a structure like (4), in which the first conjunct projects a tense domain whose exponent is null.³

(4) [_{TP} Chelswu-ka pap-ul ha- \emptyset]-ko, [_{TP} Yenghuy-ka kwuk-ul kkunhi-yess]-ta.

On this approach, (2) corresponds to a VP-coordination analysis (with the subject taken to be VP-internal), whereas (3) motivates a TP-coordination analysis in which each conjunct may host its own tense specification (overt or null). If (1) can indeed be analyzed as in (4), then the empirical basis for J.-M. Yoon's and H.-S. Yoon's claim that Korean past tense *-ESS* behaves as a phrasal affix is substantially weakened, since it can be realized as null, thereby obviating a VP-coordination analysis.

The broader issue raised by this debate is that both J.-M. Yoon's & H.-S. Yoon's and Chung's proposals concentrate primarily on *-ko*. However, a full assessment of the "phrasal affix" view of Korean tense and the competing "(null) tense in non-final conjuncts" view requires a systematic examination of tense-marker distribution across coordinate clause linkage more generally, as well as across subordinating conjunctions/verbal connective endings. The present paper undertakes such an investigation, evaluating how far the observed (in)optionality and (im)possibility of *-ESS* in non-final clauses can be derived from independently motivated assumptions about clause structure, the (in)dependence of tense domains, and the morphosyntactic properties of Korean connective endings.

This paper is organized as follows: Section 2 establishes the core empirical generalization by surveying the distribution of the past tense marker *-ESS* under temporal mismatch across a wide range of coordinate and subordinate connectives;

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- 2) "Null tense" is commonly used to denote the tense found in English non-Exceptional Case Marking (ECM) infinitival clauses (cf. Chomsky 1995). In this paper, we instead adopt the term "deficient tense" for tense in English non-ECM infinitival clauses. We also distinguish null tense with connectives in Korean from "dependent tense" in English sequence-of-tense contexts, a contrast that will be clarified in the discussion below.
 - 3) More precisely, Chung (2005) argues that non-final conjuncts contain phonetically null functional elements (null tense or aspect morphemes) that allow them to have independent temporal or aspectual interpretations, which we will return to below.

Section 3 evaluates prior phrasal-affix and null-tense approaches and develops a connective-sensitive proposal in which connectives lexically select the T-profile (overt vs. null/blocked) of the non-final clause, with *-ko* bifurcated and *-ese* uniform; Section 4 distinguishes connective-licensed null tense from matrix-anchored tense in complement clauses by comparing Korean relative tense with English sequence of tense (SOT) and by showing that connective clauses are temporally anchored clause-internally; Section 5 turns to the restricted distribution of the alleged present tense marker *-(nu)n* in connective environments, arguing that present tense morphology does not pattern as an optional tense exponent in non-final connective clauses; and Section 6 refines the analysis by addressing the null realization of a tense-modality complex (e.g., *-ESS + -keyss*), and Section 7 situates the proposal in a broader typology via a brief comparison with Turkish clause-linkage morphology.

2. Distribution of the Past Tense Marker with Verbal Connectives

Before moving on, the first preliminary point is in order. It is to be noted that the status of the form commonly identified as a present-tense marker in Korean is not straightforward. In particular, it is unclear whether the morpheme *-(nu)n* in (5) should be treated as a genuine tense marker or instead as part of a clause-typing mood system.

- (5) Chelswu-ka mwulkoki-lul cap-nun.ta/nohacwu-n.ta.
C.-NOM fish-ACC catch-DECL/let.go.of-DECL
'Chelswu catches/lets go of a fish.'

Because of its unresolved grammatical status of *-(nu)n* in contemporary Korean,⁴⁾ the current study sets aside "present tense" (though we return to this issue briefly in Section 5) and focuses instead on the distribution of the Korean past marker *-(e)ss*, henceforth notationally standardized as *-ESS*.

The second preliminary point concerns the grammatical status of *-ko*. While *-ko* can be analyzed as a coordinating conjunction, it should also be understood more generally as one member of the Korean inventory of verbal (or verb-phrasal)

4) Given that the status of *-(nu)n* as an independent morpheme remains unresolved, we analyze *-(nu)nta* as *-(nu)n.ta* rather than *-(nu)n-ta*, assuming that *-(nu)n* is part of a mood marker (e.g., the declarative ending *-ta*).

connective endings, distinct from nominal (or noun-phrasal) connectives such as *-kwa*. Within the verbal connective system, Korean connective endings can be classified into three types (cf. Koo et al. (2015); Nam et al. (2019))

First, coordinate connective endings as in (6) link two clauses in an approximately symmetric relation.

(6) -ko, -(u)mye, -kena, -(u)na, -ciman, etc.

Functionally, this class expresses relations such as listing/parallelism, alternation, and opposition/contrast.

Second, subordinate connective endings as in (7) attach to a non-final clause and relate it to the following (main) clause by encoding temporal, causal, conditional, concessive, purposive, resultative, or background relations.⁵⁾

5) A conventional way to distinguish coordinate vs. subordinate connectives in Korean is to examine their syntactic behavior, not just their meanings. One of the widely used diagnostics is: clause order permutation (scrambling of conjuncts). With coordinate connectives, the two clauses are structurally symmetric, so swapping their order typically preserves grammaticality and yields only a minimal change in discourse emphasis.

- (i) a. insayng-un ccalp-ko yeyswul-un kil-ta. ↔
 life-TOP short-NOM art-TOP long-DECL
 'Life is short, and art is long.'
 b. ✓yeyswul-un kil-ko insayng-un ccalp-ta.
 ✓art-TOP long-CONN life-TOP short-DECL
 'Art is long, and life is short.'

With subordinate connectives, the first clause functions as an adjunct modifying the second clause (e.g., cause, condition). Reversing the order can produce ungrammaticality or invert the intended relation.

- (ii) a. pi-ka o-ase kil-i cil-ta. ↔
 rain-NOM come-CONN road-NOM muddy-DECL
 'Because it's raining, the road is muddy.'
 b. kil-i cil-ese pi-ka o-n.ta.
 road-NOM muddy-CONN rain-NOM come-DECL (the causal relation reversed)
 'Because the road is muddy, it's raining.'

The second diagnostic is insertion/embedding into the matrix clause. With coordinate connectives, the first clause cannot be "inserted" inside the second clause (e.g., after the second clause subject), reflecting the lack of structural containment.

- (iii) a. Chelswu-nun san-ey ka-ko Yenghuy-nun pata-ey ka-n.ta. →
 C.-TOP mountain-to go-CONN Y.-TOP sea-to go-DECL
 'Chelswu goes to the mountains, and Yenghi goes to the sea.'

- (7) *-e/ase, -(u)nikka, -(u)myen, -ketun, -camaca, -(u)myense, -(nu)ntey, -tolok, -key, -e/ato, etc.*

Functionally, these endings mark relations including temporal sequencing, reason/cause, condition/hypothesis, concession, purpose/intention, result, and backgrounding.

Third, auxiliary (or periphrastic) connective endings as in (8) link a lexical predicate with an auxiliary predicate, yielding a single integrated verbal complex (like a serial-verb construction).

- (8) *-e/a, -key, -ci, -ko, etc.*
- (9) a. *ka-a po-ass-ta(-a po-ta).*
 visit-CONN try-PAST-DECL
 ‘tried visiting’
- b. *ta ha-key toy-ta(-key toy-ta).*
 up do-CONN become-DECL
 end up finishing up
- c. *kaci an.h-nun.ta(-ci anhta).*
 go-CONN not.do-DECL
 ‘don’t go’
- d. *ilk-ko siph-ta(-ko siphta)*
 read-CONN want-DECL
 ‘want to read’

In what follows, auxiliary connective endings are set aside. Two properties motivate this restriction: as in (9a) through (9d), auxiliary connectives are uniformly

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- b. **Yenghuy-nun (Chelswu-nun san-ey ka-ko) pata-ey ka-n.ta.*
 *Y.-TOP (C.-TOP mountain-to go-CONN) sea-to go-DECL
 ‘Yenghi goes to the sea (while Chelswu goes to the mountains).’

With subordinate connectives, the initial clause behaves like an adjunct and can often be positioned after the matrix subject, consistent with embedding within the matrix clause domain.

- (iv) a. *pi-ka o-ase Chelswu-nun cip-ey ka-ss.ta. →*
 rain-NOM come-CONN C.-TOP home-to go-PAST-DECL
 ‘Because it rained, Chelswu went home.’
- b. ✓*Chelswun-un pi-ka o-ase cip-ey ka-ss.ta.*
 ✓C.-TOP rain-NOM come-CONN home-to go-PAST-DECL
 ‘Chelswu went home because it rained.’

VP-attaching elements in a tightly integrated verbal complex, and, correspondingly, they do not pattern as cases where independent past marking/construal is productively licensed in the way relevant for the present inquiry. The empirical domain of this paper is therefore the distribution of -ESS in the clauses immediately preceding (i) coordinate connective endings and (ii) subordinate connective endings.

2.1. Past tense marking in coordinate connective clauses

As already noted in (3) above, *-ko* in its listing/parallel use allows optional past tense marking in the first conjunct when the first conjunct denotes a past eventuality and the following conjunct is anchored to the present.

- (10) na-nun ecey pokose-lul ssu(-ess)-ko,
 I-TOP yester report-ACC write-PAST-CONN,
 tonglyo-nun cikum hoyuy-lul cwunpiha-n.ta.
 colleague-TOP now meeting-ACC prepapre-DECL
 ‘I wrote a report yesterday, and my colleague is preparing for a meeting now.’

The same point is reinforced by another coordinate connective. With *-kena* ‘or’ in its alternation use, -ESS in the first conjunct is optional when the first conjunct is interpreted as past:⁶⁾

- (11) a. cinancwu-ey hyeng-i mwulken-ul cwumwunha(-yess)-kena,
 last.week-in older.brother-NOM item-ACC order-PAST-CONN,
 tongsayng-i nayil cikcep maychang-ey ka-se sa-l keyeyyo.
 younger.brother-NOM tomorrow in.person store-to go-CONN buy-will
 ‘Either my older brother ordered the item last week, or my younger sibling will go to the store in person tomorrow to buy it.’

6) One reviewer points out that it is worth considering whether lexical aspect modulates the acceptability of -ESS omission. However, the predicates in our (10)/(11)–*pokose-lul ssu* ‘write report,’ *mwulken-ul cwumwunha* ‘order an item,’ *kichapyo-lul yemayha* ‘reserve a ticket’—are also naturally construed as bounded, culmination-oriented events (achievement-/accomplishment-like), much like Chung’s (3) predicates (*itena* ‘leave’, *tochakha* ‘arrive’, *tolakasi* ‘pass away’). That said, we do not claim that lexical aspect is irrelevant: since -ESS correlates with perfectivity/completion, inherently bounded predicates may make omission more acceptable for some speakers in certain connective environments. Crucially, the main optional/obligatory/blocked pattern still tracks connective-specific properties, not event type alone.

- b. ecey nwuna-ka kichaphyo-lul yeymayha(-yess)-kena,
 yesterday sister-NOM train.ticket-ACC reserve-PAST-CONN,
 apeci-ka nayil cha-lul cikcep wuncenha-yse ka-si-l keyeyyo.
 brother-NOM tomorrow car-ACC himself drive-CONN go-will
 ‘Either my older sister booked the train ticket yesterday, or my father will
 drive there himself tomorrow.’

By contrast, with *-(u)mye* ‘and’ in a more literary/expository parallel-listing function, *-ESS* in the first conjunct is obligatory in the corresponding temporal-mismatch configuration where the first conjunct clause is past while the second is present:

- (12) a. haksayngtul-i cinancwu-ey-nun sihem-ul chilu*(-ess)-umye,
 students-NOM last.week-in-TOP exam-ACC take-PAST-CONN
 kyoswu-nun cikum sengcek-ul cengliha-n.ta.
 professor-TOP now grade-ACC compile-DECL
 ‘The students took an exam last week, and the professor is now
 compiling the grades.’
- b. palam-i ecey-nun seccok-eyse pwul*(-ess)-umye,
 wind-NOM yesterday-TOP west-in low-PAST-CONN
 pi-ka onul-un tongccok-eyse nayli-n.ta.
 rain-NOM today-NOM east-in fall-DECL
 ‘Yesterday the wind blew from the west, and today rain is falling from
 the east.’

This contrast shows that optionality of *-ESS* is not a general property of coordinate linkage: it is sensitive to the particular connective ending.

Likewise, with *-(u)na* ‘but/whereas’ of a contrast function, past marking in the first conjunct is obligatory:

- (13) kesey-n palam-i cinanpamey-nun pwul*(-ess)-una,
 strong wind-NOM last.night-TOP blow-PAST
 pata-ka cikum-un maywu phyengonha-ta.
 sea-NOM now-TOP very calm-DECL
 ‘Last night a strong wind blew, but now the sea is very calm.’

Finally, with *-ciman* ‘although/but’ encoding concessive contrast, *-ESS* is again obligatory under temporal mismatch:

- (14) *tongsayng-un akka-kkaci-man ha-yto wul*(-ess)-ciman,*
brother-TOP a.while-ago-only do-even smile-PAST-CONN
emma-ka cikum-un hwanha-key wus-ko kyeysi-n.ta.
mother-NOM now-TOP brightly smile-ing be-DECL
‘My younger sibling was crying until just a little while ago, but now Mom is smiling brightly.’

In sum, among coordinate connective endings, the apparent optionality of *-ESS* is restricted to *-ko* and *-kena*. For other coordinate connectives, when the first conjunct denotes a past-time eventuality under temporal mismatch with the second conjunct, *-ESS* is obligatorily realized on the first.

2.2. Past marking in subordinate connective clauses

Turning to subordinate connective endings, we observe a further split. With *-e/ase* ‘because’ in its cause use, the first clause may denote a past situation but overt *-ESS* is not permitted:⁷⁾

- (14) *pi-ka ecey manhi wa(*-ss)-se,*
rain-NOM yesterday a.lot come-PAST-CONN,
tolo-nun cikum wuncencatul-eykey maywu wihemha-ta.
road-TOP now drivers-to very dangerous-DECL
‘Because it rained a lot yesterday, the roads are very dangerous for drivers right now.’

Similarly, with *-ko nase-pwuthe* ‘ever since’ in a succession function, overt *-ESS* in the subordinate clause is not permitted even when the subordinate eventuality is located in the past:

7) One reviewer notes that some younger speakers (in their 20s and 30s) increasingly permit *-ESS* within *-ese* clauses, typically with special interpretive effects and not across all contexts. As also discussed by Lee (2018), this development is consistent with our broader claim that the (non-)realization of pre-connective *-ESS* is shaped by grammaticalization. From a synchronic perspective, the emerging *-ESS-ese* pattern can be viewed as a usage-based extension within the connective system, even if it remains peripheral to the main analysis pursued here.

(15) kongyen-i ecey kkuthna(*-ss)-ko nase-pwuthe,
 performance-NOM yesterday end-PAST-ever.since
 kwankayktul-uy iyaki-ka cikum-kkaci kyeysoktoy-ko iss-ta.
 audience-GEN talk-NOM now-up.to continue-ing be-DECL
 ‘Ever since the performance ended yesterday, the audience’s talk has continued up to now.’

In contrast, with *-(u)nikka* ‘since/because’ in its reason/ground use, past marking in the subordinate clause seems to be optional when the subordinate eventuality is interpreted as past:

(16) a. Yenghuy-ka cinanpen-ey na-lul towacwu?(-ess)-unikka,
 Y.-NOM last.time-in I-TOP help-PAST-CONN
 na-nun onul Yenghuy-uy swukcey-lul towacwu-n.ta.
 I-TOP today Y.-GEN homework-ACC help-DECL
 ‘Since Yenghi helped me last time, I’m helping with Yenghi’s homework today.’

b. ney-ka ecey ku ilon-ul caseyhi
 you-NOM yesterday that theory carefully
 selmyengha-y cwu?(-ess)-unikka, na-nun cikum cal ihayha-n.ta.
 explain-give-PAST-CONN I-TOP now well understand-DECL
 ‘Since you explained that theory in detail yesterday, I understand it well now.’

A obligatoriness effect, however, arises with several other subordinate connectives. With *-(u)myen* ‘if’ in its conditional function, *-ESS* is obligatory when the antecedent clause is interpreted as past:

(17) hay-ka onul achimey tongccok-eyse ttu*(-ess)-umyen,
 sun-NOM this morning-in east-in rise-PAST-CONN
 ku hay-nun ohwuey seccok-ulo ci-nun pep-i.ta.
 that sun-TOP afternoon west-in set-be bound-COP-DECL
 ‘If the sun rose in the east this morning, it is bound to set in the west this afternoon.’

With *-ketun* 'if/once' encoding presuppositional condition for a following speech act, *-ESS* is likewise obligatory:

- (18) ney-ka ecey ku chayk-ul ta ilk*(-ess)-ketun,
you-NOM yesterday that book-ACC all read-PAST-CONN
na-nun cikum ku nukkim-ul tut-ko siph-ta.
I-TOP now that feeling-ACC hear-want-DECL
'If you finished reading that book yesterday, I want to hear how it felt now.'

With *-eto* 'even if' in a concession function, *-ESS* is also obligatory:

- (19) ney-ka ecey yele pen silswuha*(-yess)-eto,
you-NOM yesterday several times make.mistake-PAST-CONN
salamtul-un cikum ne-lul yecenhi sinloyha-n.ta.
people-TOP now you-ACC still trust-DECL
'Even though you made several mistakes yesterday, people still trust you now.'

With *-(u)ntey* 'given that/whereas' encoding backgrounding, contrast, and topic shift, *-ESS* is again obligatory:

- (20) ne-nun ecey halwu congil swi*(-ess)-nuntey,
you-TOP yesterday one whole.day rest-PAST-CONN
na-nun cikum honcase il-ul cheliha-ko iss-ta.
I-TOP now alone work handle-ing be-DECL
'You rested all day yesterday, but I'm handling the work alone right now.'

With *-(u)myense* 'while/although' encoding simultaneity or attitude-contrast, *-ESS* is obligatory as well, particularly in the attitude-contrast use:

- (21) ne-nun ecey himtul-ta-ko malha*(-yess)-umyense,
you-TOP yesterday hard.time-DECL-SUBORD say-PAST-CONN
cengcak chinkwutul-un cikum amwuleh-ci anh-key cinay-ko iss-ney.
actually friends-TOP now anything-NM not-NM do-ing be-DECL
'You said yesterday that you were having a hard time, but your friends are actually doing just fine now.'

Finally, there is a distinct subordinate pattern in which the event described in the first clause is necessarily interpreted as posterior to the matrix event (i.e., the subordinate clause sets a goal/limit or a purpose/result condition for the matrix). In such cases, even when the subordinate clause is associated with a past-oriented temporal adverbial, overt -ESS is not permitted. Thus, with *-tolok* ‘so that/to the extent that’ encoding goal, limit, and degree, -ESS is not licensed:

- (22) *nay-ka ecey pamnuc-tolok yensupha-l swu iss(*-ess)-tolok,*
 I-NOM yesterday late-until practice-can-PAST-CONN
thimwentul-un yehayng-ul ttenaki-lo ha-yss-ta.
 teammate-TOP trip-ACC leave-to decided-PAST-DECL
 ‘My teammates decided to go on a trip so that I could practice late into the night yesterday.’

With *-key* ‘so that’ in its result/purpose use, -ESS is likewise not licensed:

- (23) *ney-ka ecey phyenanha-key swi-l swu iss(*-ess)-key,*
 you-NOM yesterday comfortably-ADV rest-can-PAST-CONN
salamtul-un motwu oychwulha-yss-ta
 people-TOP all go.out-PAST-DECL
 ‘People all went out so that you could rest comfortably yesterday.’

The distributional landscape that emerges is therefore not captured by a simple dichotomy between coordination and subordination. Even within coordinate connectives, *-ko* and *-kena* stand out in allowing optional -ESS in temporally mismatched clause-linkage contexts, whereas other coordinate connectives force the presence of overt -ESS in the corresponding contexts (*-(u)mye*, *-(u)na*, *-ciman*). Within subordinate connectives, some endings categorically exclude overt -ESS (*-e/ase*, *-ko nase-pwuthe*, *-tolok*, *-key*), while others require it (*-(u)myen*, *-(u)ketun*, *-(e)to*, *-(u)ntey*, *-(u)myense*). Notably, the subordinate connective *-(u)nikka* allows optional -ESS in its clause under temporal mismatch. These fine-grained contrasts provide a principled testing ground for evaluating competing analyses of Korean tense -- whether as a phrasal affix, as the realization of clause-internal T, or as a feature whose spell-out is conditioned by the morphosyntax of connective endings -- and for determining the extent to which non-final clauses project independent, dependent, or defective tense domains.

3. Towards an Analysis

The discussion in Section 2 can be summarized as follows.

(24) Past tense marking on verbal connectives under temporal-mismatch

	past tense marking under temporal-mismatch		
	optional	obligatory	not allowed
coordinate connectives	-ko, -kena	-(u)mye, -kena, -(u)na, -ciman	
subordinate connectives	-(u)nikka,	-(u)myen, -ketun, -(e)to, -(u)ntey, -(u)myense	-e/ase, -ko nase-pwuthe, (-tolok, -key)

In light of the generalization in (24), I first provide a critical assessment of earlier analyses before presenting this paper’s proposal. First, when –ESS appears only in the second clause in *-ko* coordination, J.-M. Yoon (1990, 1996) and H.-S. Yoon (1993, 1994) analyze Korean past tense as a phrasal affix, attributing the relevant pattern to the coordinative status of *-ko*. However, this line of argument is undermined by the broader distribution in (24). In particular, with adversative coordinate *-ciman*, –ESS is not optional under temporal mismatch; rather, it is obligatory. If temporal mismatch in coordination in general forced a phrasal-affix analysis of –ESS, then the systematic obligatoriness of –ESS with *-ciman* would be unexpected. Put differently, the fact that coordination does not uniformly yield optionality weakens the claim that Korean past tense morphology is a phrasal affix solely on the basis of *-ko* coordination.

A second complication is that it is not clear that *-ko* has only a coordinative status. In the examples in (25), *-ko* does not behave like a simple symmetric coordinator; rather, it naturally supports several subordinate-like construals (including causal, backgrounding, and contrastive-subordinate relations). Importantly, even in these uses, past tense marking under temporal mismatch remains optional.

(25) a. Cause & effect:

nwun-i ecey o(-ass)-ko kil-i cikum
 snow-NOM yesterday come-PAST-CONN road-NOM now
 maywu mikkulep-ta.
 very slippery-DECL
 ‘It snowed yesterday, and the roads are very slippery now.’

b. Background:

kaltung-i akka phwulli(-ess)-ko pwunwiki-ka hyencay
conflict-NOM a.while.ago resolve-DECL-CONN atmosphere now
acwu hwakiayayha-ta.

very friendly-DECL

‘The conflict was resolved a little while ago, and the atmosphere is very friendly now.’

c. Contrastive subordination:

mwulka-ka cinantal ollu(-ass)-ko sopi-nun
price-NOM last.month rise-PAST-CONN consumption-TOP
hyencay ohilye nulena-ko iss-ta.

now actually increase-ing be-DECL

‘Prices rose last month, and consumption is actually increasing now.’

These facts suggest that the optionality/obligatoriness/impossibility of –ESS in the non-final clause is not reducible to a coarse coordination vs. subordination distinction. Rather, as noted above, it plausibly tracks lexical or construction-specific properties of the connective endings themselves—that is, the morphosyntactic requirements associated with particular connective items and the structures they license.

Turning to Chung’s analysis, the null tense marker proposal for the first *-ko* conjunct is an important and insightful step. Nevertheless, it does not provide a comprehensive account for the full distribution of –ESS across Korean connective endings. In particular, it does not establish how the *-ko* pattern relates to subordinate connectives such as *-e/ase* and *-ko nase-pwuthe* (as well as *-tolok* and *-key*), where –ESS is categorically absent. Nor does Chung’s analysis address why null tense marking is unavailable with coordinate connectives other than *-ko* and *-kena*, and why it is likewise unavailable with subordinate connectives such as *-(u)myen*, *-ketun*, *-(e)to*, *-(u)ntey*, and *-(u)myense*, where –ESS is obligatory under temporal mismatch (though it is optional with *-niika* in the same context. In short, while the null tense approach captures a key *-ko*-specific pattern, it leaves open the larger question of how a unified theory of tense realization and tense (in)dependence should be formulated across the broader system of Korean connectives.

This paper develops a unified account of past tense marking under temporal mismatch in Korean clause linkage. Focusing on the distribution of the past marker *-(e)ss* (henceforth –ESS) in non-final clauses headed by connective endings (*yenkyel-emi*), I show that the optionality, obligatoriness, and impossibility of –ESS

cannot be reduced to a simple coordination vs. subordination dichotomy, nor can it be captured by treating Korean tense uniformly as a phrasal affix. Instead, I propose that connective endings are lexically specified for (i) whether they allow a non-final clause to project a tense domain and (ii) what kind of tense domain is available—full vs. (in)dependent/defective, and, crucially for *-ko/-kena/-nikka*, whether multiple structures are licensed.

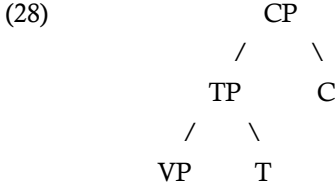
To rehearse, the empirical point of departure is the well-known contrast in which *-ESS* in the first clause is optional with *-ko/-kena/-nikka* but obligatory or prohibited with other connectives. First, with the listing coordinator *-ko* ‘and/then’, *-ESS* on the first conjunct is typically optional even when that conjunct is interpreted as past and the following clause is anchored to the present:

- (26) *motwu ecey yehayng-ttena(-ess)-ko*
 all yesterday trip-leave-PAST-CONN
na-nun honca onul cip-up cikhi-nta.
 I-TOP alone today home-ACC stay-DECL
 ‘All others left on a trip yesterday and I am alone staying home now.’
 (Chung 2005)

By contrast, with the adversative coordinator *-ciman* ‘but/although’ as in (27a), past marking in the first conjunct is obligatory under temporal mismatch. Finally, with the causal/sequential connective *-e/ase* ‘because/so/and then’ as in (27b), co-occurrence with *-ESS* is impossible for Korean speakers, yielding the familiar restriction against *-ESS-ese*:

- (27) a. *motwu ecey yehayng-ttena*(-ess)-ciman*
 all yesterday trip-leave-PAST-CONN
na-nun honca onul cip-up cikhi-nta.
 I-TOP alone today home-ACC stay-DECL
 ‘All others left on a trip yesterday, but I am alone staying home now.’
 b. *motwu ecey yehayng-ttena(*-ess)-ese*
 all yesterday trip-leave-PAST-CONN
na-nun honca onul cip-ul cikhi-n.ta.
 I-TOP alone today home-ACC stay-DECL
 ‘All others left on a trip yesterday, so I am alone staying home now.’

I argue that these patterns follow from a theory in which Korean connectives, like English complementizers (e.g., *that*, *for*), regulate the availability and overt/null realization of T in the non-final clause. On the assumption of the following clausal structure, Korean connectives occupy the head of CP:



In particular, I propose an asymmetric architecture for *-ko* vs. *-e/ase*: the optimal picture is that *-ko* has two T-profiles, whereas *-e/ase* has a single T-profile.

For *-ko*, the availability of overt past morphology is tied to genuine structural ambiguity. Under Structure A (overt T + *-ko*), *-ko* instantiates regular TP coordination: the first conjunct projects a full local TP, and *-ESS* is licensed as the overt realization of [past]. Under Structure B (null T + *-ko*), *-ko* yields tense inheritance via null realization, with temporal anchoring supported by adverbials (e.g., *ecey*) and discourse sequencing. This bifurcated analysis derives both the naturalness of overt *-ESS* with *-ko* and the robust acceptability of *-ESS* omission in temporal-mismatch contexts.

For *-e/ase*, I propose Structure B (null T + *-e/ase*) as its sole profile: *-e/ase* introduces an adverbial subordinate clause whose tense domain is realized by null tense, in the sense that local [past] spell-out is blocked (i.e., by a morphosyntactic ban on [past] realization in that configuration). The *-e/ase* clause remains clause-like in licensing arguments and event structure, but it cannot independently realize [past]. Like the second profile of *-ko* (i.e., null T + *-ko*), temporal anchoring is supported by adverbials (e.g., *ecey*) or discourse sequencing. In the latter case, temporal interpretation is computed relationally--typically as temporally anterior to the matrix eventuality and as standing in a causal/resultative (or enabling-condition) relation to it--via its temporal dependency on the matrix tense together with the semantics of causal/sequential linkage.

The behavior of *-ciman* instantiates Structure A (overt T + *-ko*). I treat *-ciman* as licensing a robust local TP in the non-final clause, but as forcing overt *-ESS* under temporal mismatch, especially when the matrix clause is anchored to utterance time. Because *-ciman* encodes concessive/contrastive linkage between two

discourse units, leaving the first conjunct without overt past marking strongly invites a coerced generic/habitual construal and produces interpretive strain; overt -ESS therefore surfaces as a morphosyntactic commitment to anteriority.

It should be noted that the null T posited for Korean verbal connectives is distinct from dependent T and defective T. In English, for example, dependent T as in (29a) refers to cases where an embedded tense is interpreted relative to the matrix tense despite being fully finite and morphologically normal (the familiar Sequence of Tense (SOT) effect). Defective T as in (29b-c), by contrast, characterizes non-finite environments in which the embedded clause lacks full tense/finiteness features, thereby restricting morphological realization.

- (29) a. John said Mary was sick can mean ‘sick at the saying time.’
b. I believe him to be honest. (Exceptional Case Marking (ECM))
c. John hopes to leave/*to left. (control structure)

The null tense at issue in Korean is different in kind. It is not a property of “genuine” embedded clauses in the usual sense; rather, it is a structural option that arises in the connective domain -- i.e., in the non-final clause when a particular verbal connective is merged. Crucially, the availability of this null tense is lexically selected by the connective: certain connectives license a non-final clause whose T is realized with a null exponent (or blocks local [past] spell-out), whereas others require overt -ESS.⁸⁾

More broadly, I argue that the distribution of -ESS across Korean connectives is best captured by a connective-sensitive theory of tense-domain licensing. On this view, (i) some connectives license a full local TP in the non-final clause, allowing overt [past] realization; (ii) others require a null-T configuration that blocks local [past] spell-out, with temporal anchoring supplied by adverbials and/or discourse sequencing; and (iii) at least *-ko/-kena/-nikka* is systematically bifurcated between these two structural options. This typology accommodates the *-ko*-based optionality

8) We argue that the availability of null tense is lexically selected by the connective, but we do not mean this as a stipulative move. Rather, we treat a connective’s selectional profile as the synchronic reflex of grammaticalization: recurrent discourse functions--such as tighter event integration, backgrounding, and causal/temporal linkage--become conventionalized as lexical constraints on the size and featural makeup of the non-final clause. On this view, “T-profile selection” encodes how a given connective has stabilized its clause-linkage function: some connectives grammaticalize a null/blocked-tense requirement, others require overt -ESS, and bifurcated connectives preserve two licensed linkage structures.

emphasized in earlier work while also deriving the obligatoriness and ban effects observed across a broader range of coordinate and subordinate connectives, thereby offering a sharper empirical basis for adjudicating between phrasal-affix and null-tense approaches.

4. Null Tense and SOT

In this section, we elaborate on how connective-licensed null tense differs from SOT-based dependent tense. English is commonly analyzed as exhibiting SOT: when the matrix predicate is past, an embedded present typically undergoes backshift, even if the intended interpretation is simultaneity with the matrix time. Thus a sentence like (30) uses *was* to align morphologically with the past matrix verb (*thought*), while still allowing a “simultaneous” reading (she is pretty at the thinking time).

(30) I thought she was pretty.

Korean is often described as relying more on relative tense anchoring: the temporal interpretation of the embedded clause is computed with respect to the matrix event (thinking/saying), and systematic backshift is not required. As a result, Korean can maintain a morphologically nonpast predicate under a past attitude verb, as in (31-32), yielding the interpretation that she was pretty at the time of thinking.

(31) na-nun [kunye-ka yeypu-ta-ko] sayngkakha-yss-ta.
 I-TOP she-NOM pretty-DECL-SUBORD think-PAST-DECL
 ‘I thought she was pretty.’

(32) na-nun [kunye-ka sewul-ey sa1-n.ta-ko sayngkakha-yss-ta.
 I-TOP she-NOM Seoul-in live-DECL-SUBORD] think-PAST-DECL
 ‘I thought she lived in Seoul.’

This matrix-anchored system becomes especially clear in reported speech. In (33), the nonpast form *ha-n.ta-ko* naturally signals simultaneity/ongoingness relative to the saying event; replacing it with *ha-yss-ta-ko* tends to push an anterior/completed interpretation. Likewise, future-oriented commitments are readily reported with the prospective marker *-keyss* in (34), without obligatory backshift, whereas English often uses *would*.

- (33) Chelswu-nun [Yenghuy-ka kongpwu-lul han-ta-ko]
 C.-TOP Y-NOM study-ACC do-DECL-SUBORD
 malha-yss-ta.
 say-PAST-DECL
 Chelswu said that Yenghi was studying.'
- (34) ku-nun [pro ka-keyss-ta-ko] malha-yss-ta.
 he-TOP go-will-DECL-SUBORD say-PAST-DECL
 'He said that he would go.'

Overall, the contrast can be stated as follows: English employs a grammaticalized backshift mechanism that affects embedded morphology under past matrices, while Korean typically preserves the embedded form and derives temporal relations (simultaneous/anterior/posterior) through relative anchoring to the matrix reference time.

In short, tense marking in embedded clauses of Korean--especially in complement clauses--has generally been characterized as receiving its interpretation via relative anchoring to the matrix reference time. That is, the temporal value of the embedded predication is computed with respect to the attitude/speech event introduced by the matrix predicate. By contrast, the past marker -ESS or null T that appears in the clause immediately preceding a connective is not interpreted primarily through such matrix-based anchoring. Rather, the temporal interpretation of the non-final connective clause is determined internally, by resources within the clause itself (e.g., temporal adverbials) and by the temporal/relational semantics contributed by the connective. The key evidence comes from (35).

- (35) a. Chelswu-ka pap-ul ha-∅-ko, Yenghuy-ka kwuk-ul
 C-NOM rice-ACC cook-∅-CONN Y-NOM soup-ACC
 kkulhi-yess-e.
 boil-PAST-DECL
 'Chelswu cooked rice and Yenghuy made soup.'
- b. Chelswu-ka pap-ul ha-yess-ko, Yenghuy-ka kwuk-ul
 C-NOM rice-ACC cook-PAST-CONN Y-NOM soup-ACC
 kkulhi-yess-e.
 boil-PAST-DECL
 'Chelswu cooked rice and Yenghuy made soup.'

At first glance, the null tense in (35a) might appear to be anchored relative to the reference time of the second conjunct clause. However, this is not in fact the correct characterization. As (36) shows, when the second clause is future-marked, the null tense in the first *-ko* clause is not interpreted as dependent on (or “inherited from”) the future reference time of the second conjunct. Instead, the temporal value of the first clause is anchored by the temporal adverbial within that clause (or, more generally, by clause-internal contextual anchoring), yielding an interpretation in which the first event is located independently of the second clause’s tense, as also noted by Chung (2005).

- (36) Chelswu-ka (cikum) pap-ul ha-∅-ko,
 C.-NOM today rice-ACC do-∅-CONN,
 Yenghuy-ka (onul ohwu-ey) kwuk-ul kkunh-il kes-i-ta.
 Y-NOM (this afternoon-in) soup-ACC boil-will
 ‘Cheolsu is making rice (now), and Younghee will make soup (this afternoon).’

Moreover, the same point extends to cases with overt *-ESS* in both the first and the second connective clauses. If tense in the first conjunct were computed by a SOT-like mechanism relative to the tense of the following clause, then the presence of *-ESS* in the first conjunct should force an anterior/completed interpretation relative to the second conjunct’s past as in (35b) eventuality. In practice, however, the most natural interpretation is often one of simultaneity between the two eventualities (or at least a non-obligatory anteriority relation), depending on discourse and aspectual properties. This again indicates that the tense of the non-final connective clause is not straightforwardly determined by “relative anchoring to the reference time of the second conjunct clause.”

The general conclusion, then, is that tense in Korean complement clauses and tense in connective environments have importantly different grammatical profiles. In complement clauses, temporal interpretation is typically derived via anchoring to the matrix attitude time. In connective constructions, by contrast, temporal anchoring for the non-final clause is established independently--through clause-internal temporal adverbials and/or through the connective’s own temporal/relational contribution--rather than through dependence on the tense of the following clause. From this perspective, we further propose that null tense is a property of connective constructions: it is licensed by particular connectives in non-final clauses, but it is not posited for embedded complement clauses whose

temporal interpretation is determined through matrix anchoring.

5. Distribution of *-(nu)n* with Connectives

This section examines whether the marker *-(nu)n*, often introduced in descriptive grammars as a present tense marker,⁹⁾ can surface in non-final clauses headed by verbal connectives in the same way that past marking (-ESS) may appear (optionally or obligatorily) under temporal mismatch. Consider first the present-time counterpart of (1):

- (37) Chelswu-ka pap-ul ha-(*nun)-ko, Yenghuy-ka kwuk-ul
C-NOM rice-ACC cook-NUN-CONN Y-NOM soup-ACC
kkulhi-n.ta.
boil-PRES-DECL
'Chelswu cooks rice and Yenghuy makes soup.'

If *-(nu)n* were a freely available present tense exponent in Korean, then one might expect it to be optionally realizable in the first conjunct of a *-ko* construction, parallel to the optional realization of -ESS in certain *-ko* environments. That expectation is not borne out: as (37) indicates, *-(nu)n* is not licensed in the *-ko* clause in this configuration.

This distributional fact is unsurprising once we recognize that the grammatical status of *-(nu)n* is controversial. As noted above, its occurrence is sharply restricted: it appears primarily with non-static predicates in specific sentence styles (e.g., *mek-nun-ta* 'eat-PRES-DEC') and in adnominal clauses. Lee (1991) analyzes *-(nu)n* as an imperfective aspect marker rather than a pure tense exponent, while Choi (1983) treats it as a present progressive form. Synchronically, the unmarked present is often taken to be null (\emptyset), especially with statives (e.g., *pucilinha- \emptyset -ta* 'is diligent').¹⁰⁾ Huh (1987) further argues that *-(nu)n-* is a marked form expressing

9) In Middle Korean, the present-tense prefinal ending *-nu-* is argued to have included an inherent coda *n*, which—given Hangeul's segmental (phoneme-based) orthographic principles—was phonographically represented as *-nun-*. This historical composition plausibly underlies the Modern Korean declarative form written as *-(nu)n-*. While *-n-* follows vowel-final stems, *-nun-* follows consonant-final stems;

10) Note also that the null present tense marker (\emptyset) is distinct from the null tense posited for Korean connective clauses, which receives its temporal anchoring independently within those

anaphoric simultaneity with a reference time. Importantly, under the tense system proposed in this paper--where the T-profile of a non-final clause is selected by the connective--the relevant generalization is that *-ko* selects null T, not *-(nu)n*, even when the *-ko* clause is interpreted as simultaneous with a reference time.

At the same time, the fact that *-ko* does not combine with *-(nu)n* does not entail that Korean connectives in general are incompatible with *-nu(n)*. On the contrary, several connectives plausibly incorporate a reflex of *-nu(n)* as the result of grammaticalization and fusion, yielding connective forms that contain *-n/-nu-* material synchronically, such as the ones in (38a-d).

(38) a. *-(nu)ntey* (backgrounding; strengthened contrast/adversative):

Chelswu-ka pap-un mek(-ess)-nunmey yenghuy-nun
 C.-NOM rice-TOP eat-PAST-CONN Y-TOP
 ppang-ul mek-nun.ta.
 bread-ACC eat-DECL

‘Chelswu ate rice, but Yenghi eats bread.’

b. *-nikka* (strong evidence/reason, or discovery of a new fact):

nay-ka ta selmyengha(-yess)-nikka icye ne-to a-l ke an-ya.
 I-NOM all explain-PAST-CONN now you-also know-don’t

‘Since I explained everything, you know now, don’t you?’

c. *-nuni* (action listing/comparison):

yekise sikan-man ponay-nuni chalali ka-se cikcep
 here time-only spend-than rather go-and directly
 hwakinha-y po-ca.
 check-try-PROP

‘Rather than just killing time here, let’s go and check it ourselves.’

d. *-nulako* (an ongoing action as the cause):

chinkwu-wa thonghwa-lul ha-nulako
 friend-with phone-ACC do-CONN
 cwungyoha-n kongci sahang-ul tut-ci mos-ha-yss-ta.
 important-MOD announcement-ACC hear-couldn’t

‘Because I was on the phone with a friend, I couldn’t hear the important announcement.’

clauses.

A crucial observation is that in forms such as *-(nu)ntey* and *-nikka*, past marking may precede the connective, indicating that the *-nu(n)* segment fused into these connectives no longer functions as an independent present tense marker. In other words, the *-n/-nu-* material inside these connectives should be treated as part of the connective morphology (a grammaticalized component), rather than as the productive realization of present tense in the non-final clause. This supports the broader architecture argued for in this paper: tense realization immediately before connectives is regulated by the connective-specific T-selection system (yielding null T, overt *-ESS*, or a ban on [past] spell-out), while the presence of *-nu(n)* inside certain connective forms reflects diachronic fusion rather than synchronic tense marking.

Furthermore, the phenomenon of insubordination--where former connective endings develop into matrix clause-final endings--offers an additional window into the syntactic status of *-(nu)n* in Modern Korean. A clear case is *-e/a*, which historically derives from a connective ending but has grammaticalized as a sentence-final ending in informal registers. Notably, this clause-final *-e/a* as the *hay*-style ending or as part of the *hay.yo*-style ending can co-occur with the past tense marker *-ESS*, but it cannot combine with the so-called present tense marker *-(nu)n*. A parallel pattern is found with a register-restricted clause-final use of *-ko*, which likewise originates as a coordinating connective but can function as a sentence-final ending in certain contexts; here too, *-ko* combines with past *-ESS* but resists co-occurrence with present *-(nu)n*. The distribution in (39a-b) thus supports the broader conclusion that *-(nu)n* is not a uniformly available present tense exponent in Contemporary Korean. Instead, its synchronic behavior is highly constrained, and its incompatibility with connective-derived sentence-final endings suggests that its role is better understood as a marked, construction-sensitive element rather than as a general present tense marker productively realized wherever a “present (or simultaneous with a reference time)” interpretation is intended.

- (39) a. Chelswu-ka hakkyo-ey ka(*nun)e/kasse.
 C-NOM school-to go(*NUN)-CONN/go-PAST-CONN.
 ‘Cheolsu goes to school/ went to school.’
- b. Yenghuy-ka achimul mek(*nun)ko/mek-ess-ko.
 Y.-NOM breakfast eat(*NUN)-CONN/eat-PAST-CONN
 ‘Younghee eats breakfast/ate breakfast.’

6. Past Tense + Modality -keyss Complex as One Entity

Chung (2025) notes that in (39), only the final conjunct bears BEGIN – PAST – GUESS (-keyss)- declarative ending (DE), but the first conjunct can recover morphemes. Readings in (40) available to (39) show that BEGIN and GUESS are optionally recovered, whereas mood is obligatorily recovered. Crucially, not all logical recoveries are allowed: the unavailable set in (39e-h) rules out various ‘subexpression’ or gapped patterns.¹¹⁾

(40) [John-i nolayha]-ko [Mary-ka chwumchwu-ki sicakha-ess-keyss-ta].
J.-NOM sing-and M.-NOM dance-NM BEGIN-PAST-GUESS-DE

- a. (BEGIN+ PAST+ GUESS)
‘John probably began to sing and Mary probably began 10 dance.’
- b. (BEGIN+ PAST+ GUESS)
‘John probably sang and Mary probably began to dance.’
- c. (BEGIN+ PAST+ GUESS)
‘John began to sing and Mary probably began 10 dance.’
- d. (BEGIN+ PAST+ GUESS)
‘John sang 30 Mary probably began 10 dance.’
- e. (BEGIN+ PAST+ GUESS)
#‘John probably begin 10 sing and Mary probably began 10 dance.’
- f. (BEGIN+ PAST+ GUESS)
#‘John begin to sing and Mary probably began 10 dance.’
- g. (BEGIN+ PAST+ GUESS)
#‘John probably sing and Mary probably began 10 dance.’
- h. (BEGIN+ PAST+ GUESS)
#‘John sing and Mary probably began 10 dance.’

(41) further shows that progressive aspect may scope only over the second conjunct.¹²⁾

11) For simplicity, I review the possible and impossible readings that Chung (2005) discusses for (39), setting aside the question of whether DE is included.

12) One reviewer notes that (40) sounds more natural if both the -ko clause and the following clause are interpreted as progressive.

- (42) [John-un ka]-ko [Mary-nun o-nun.cwung-i-ta].
 J.-CON go-and M.-CON come-PROG-be-DE
 'John went/has gone and Mary is coming.'

Furthermore, sporadic recovery in Chung's terms is clearest in (41): the conjuncts share tense and mood, but GUESS crucially scopes only over the last conjunct.

- (43) John-un cwuk-ko anay-to cwuk-ess-keyss-ta.
 J.-CON die-and wife-also die-PST-GUESS-DE
 'John died and his wife probably died also.'

This contradicts bare VP coordination plus phrasal-suffix theories, and supports Chung's (2005) own analysis based on coordination of larger functional projections with null elements.

Reconsidering the data in (39)–(41) in light of the preceding discussion in this paper, we suggest that their implications diverge in an important respect from Chung's conclusions. What these examples most clearly show is an asymmetry between tense and epistemic modality in null realization: past tense can surface as null by itself, but the epistemic modality marker *-keyss* ('GUESS') cannot be realized as a stand-alone null modal. This is precisely what the unavailability of the relevant readings for (39) (e.g., the would-be "GUESS-only" recoveries corresponding to the unattested interpretations in (39e, g)) indicates. In other words, if *-keyss* is to be silent in a non-final conjunct, it must be part of a tense–modality complex--i.e., a fused unit with past tense--rather than an independently recoverable functional head.

This conclusion also coheres with the broader claim that the temporal interpretation of the first *-ko* conjunct need not be derived by inheriting the tense of the second conjunct. As argued above, the first conjunct can be temporally anchored independently (e.g., by clause-internal anchoring and discourse), which explains why it can be interpreted as past even when the second conjunct receives a different temporal value. Extending this point, a past-only null T and a past+*-keyss* null complex can both receive an independent temporal (and modal) interpretation in the first conjunct, without being fixed by the tense of the following clause. We therefore propose that *-ko* lexically selects either (i) a null past tense or (ii) a null tense–modality complex (past + *-keyss*), but crucially cannot select a null *-keyss* alone.

7. A Cross-Linguistic Mirror: Korean *-ko* and Turkish Clause-Linkage Morphology

The bifurcated behavior of Korean *-ko* -- argued in this paper to license two distinct “T-profiles” for the non-final clause -- invites a natural comparison with Turkish, a language in which broadly similar interpretive options are distributed across two overtly distinct linkage strategies (cf. Kornfilt (1997), Haspelmath (1995)). The key analytical point is that Turkish lexicalizes, via different morphemes, what Korean packages into a single connective (*-ko*): (i) a null-T linkage that suppresses inflection in the non-final clause and (ii) an overt-T coordination strategy that requires full inflection on each conjunct. This contrast directly parallels the paper’s claim that connectives can lexically select the tense resources of the preceding clause.

First, Turkish *-ip* as in (42) displays the profile expected of the null-T construal of Korean *-ko*: it links events while categorically disallowing independent tense/person morphology on the non-final verb, yielding a “suspended” inflection pattern in which temporal anchoring is supplied by the final predicate.

- (44) Kar yağ-ıp fırtına çık-tı.
snow fall-CONN storm rise-PAST
‘Snow fell and a storm arose.’

Under the analysis developed here, this pattern corresponds to Korean *-ko* under Structure B (null T + *-ko*): the first conjunct is morphologically underspecified for tense, and temporal interpretation is inherited from the tense-bearing clause (or supported by adverbials/discourse sequencing).

By contrast, Turkish *ve* in (43) patterns like the overt-T construal of Korean *-ko*: it coordinates clauses that are independently inflected, and it resists “tenseless” first conjuncts.

- (45) Kar yağ-dı ve fırtına çık-tı.
snow fall-PAST and storm rise-PAST
‘Snow fell and a storm arose.’

This maps to Korean Structure A (overt T + *-ko*): coordination at the TP/CP level, with full tense resources available in the first conjunct and overt past

morphology freely licensed.

The conceptual payoff is straightforward: whereas Korean allows a single connective to alternate between an overt-T and a null-T structure, Turkish largely forces the speaker to choose between two distinct linkers (*-ip* vs. *ve*) that transparently encode the difference.

Second, the Korean pattern where certain subordinating connectives categorically block local past spell-out (e.g., *-e/ase*, *-ko nase-pwuthe*) has a close parallel in Turkish converbial subordinators such as *-ince* ‘when’ that likewise restrict the internal realization of tense on the subordinate predicate.

- (46) Sen gel-ince başla-dı-k.
you come-WHEN start-PAST-1PL
‘When you came, we started.’

For present purposes, the relevant point is structural: the subordinator in (44) selects a subordinate clause that does not freely host overt tense morphology, forcing temporal interpretation to be computed relative to the matrix clause and the connective’s semantics—precisely the profile argued here for Korean Structure B (null T + *-ese*), where local [past] spell-out is blocked.

Finally, Korean *-(u)myen-*—which as shown above in this paper patterns unlike *-ese* by allowing (and often requiring) overt past marking under mismatch—finds a natural counterpart in Turkish reason clauses built on nominalized/participial morphology, which permit overt temporal distinctions in the subordinate clause, as in (45).

- (47) Dün kar yağ-dığı için ...
yesterday snow fall-PART.PAST because
‘Because it snowed yesterday, ...’

The parallel is not morphological identity but functional architecture: the subordinate clause in these constructions behaves as a tense-bearing domain capable of providing its own temporal anchor, which becomes especially salient when the causal eventuality (past) and the matrix situation (present) are temporally mismatched.

The Turkish comparison provides a particularly transparent “mirror” of the Korean results. Korean *-ko* is argued to be bifurcated, selecting either a full TP with overt tense realization or the structure with null tense. Turkish externalizes this bifurcation by distributing the two options across distinct morphemes (*ve* vs.

-*ip*). More generally, both languages support the conclusion that tense realization in non-final clauses is not governed by a single global rule (e.g., “coordination suspends tense”), but instead is lexically and constructionally regulated by the connective/subordinator.

8. Conclusion

This paper has argued that the distribution of Korean past morphology (-ESS) in non-final clauses preceding verbal connectives provides a precise diagnostic for the structure of clause linkage and, in particular, for how tense domains are licensed in connective environments. The central empirical contribution is the documentation of a robust three-way pattern under temporal mismatch: optional -ESS with *-ko/-kena/-nikka*, obligatory -ESS with most other coordinate connectives (e.g., *-(u)mye*, *-(u)na*, *-ciman*), and categorical ban effects with a subset of subordinate connectives (e.g., *-e/ase*, *-ko nase-pwuthe*, *-tolok*, *-key*), alongside obligatoriness with others (e.g., *-myen*, *-ketun*, *-eto*, *-(u)ntey*, *-(u)myense*). This fine-grained typology is difficult to reconcile with a uniform “phrasal affix” analysis of -ESS motivated primarily by *-ko* coordination, and it also shows that a simple coordination/subordination dichotomy is too coarse to predict tense realization.

To capture these patterns, I proposed a connective-sensitive theory of tense-domain licensing in which connective endings are lexically specified for the T-profile they allow in the immediately preceding clause. Two consequences follow. First, *-ko* is genuinely bifurcated: it permits a regular TP-coordination structure with overt T, yielding free realization of -ESS, and it also permits a linkage with null T, yielding robust acceptability of -ESS omission when temporal anchoring is recoverable from adverbials or discourse sequencing. Second, *-ese* differs sharply in having a single adverbial profile whose tense is realized as null and in which local [past] spell-out is blocked; temporal interpretation is therefore computed relationally in virtue of the connective’s semantics and discourse sequencing. The behavior of *-ciman* falls out as the third profile: it licenses a robust local TP but forces overt -ESS under temporal mismatch because its concessive/contrastive discourse function requires two temporally well-formed units, and leaving the first conjunct morphologically tenseless invites an unwanted generic/habitual construal.

A broader theoretical payoff is the sharpened distinction between connective-licensed null tense and other well-known notions such as SOT-style dependent T and defective

T in English. The Korean null tense discussed here is not an embedded-clause phenomenon anchored to a matrix attitude time; rather, it is a structural option selected by particular connectives in the clause-linkage domain. Finally, the distribution of *-(mu)n* corroborates this view: its failure to appear as an optional present exponent in *-ko* clauses, together with the fossilized *mu(n)* material inside certain connectives, supports a model where connectives regulate T-realization locally. Future work should extend this approach to additional connective classes and to interactions with aspect, event structure, and prosody, thereby refining the mapping between connective morphology and the syntax of tense dependency.

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