

Postposition constructions in Korean: morphology and syntax

The paper considers nominal postposition constructions in Korean¹. Since Korean case markers have clitic properties, it is difficult to draw an explicit distinction between case clitics (intonationally dependent from their host but having certain grammatical properties of an independent word) and postpositions (free words or derived (e.g. from nouns) bound stems used in a grammatical function similar to case markers). First, I compare different groups of postpositions, e.g. free/ relational nouns (locative postpositions), bound denominative postpositions having certain nominal properties and some clitic properties. Second, possible syntactic analyses of constructions containing these postpositions are looked at.

The criteria used for fixing grammatical features of postpositions are taken from studies on clitics and genitive/ attributive/ juxtaposed constructions, e.g. [Pullum, Zwicky 1983: 503-504]; [Martin 1992: 162]; [Cho, Sells 1995]; [Yoon 1995]; [Lapointe 1996: 76]; [Sohn 1999: 270-271]; [Plungian 2000: 21, 33]; [Hualde 2002: 326-328]. Important features of clitics (e.g. *ccum* ‘approximately’, *kkaci* ‘until’, *cohca* ‘even’) are: non-separable from the host by a word (bound); ellipsis of the host is impossible; case and delimiter particles can attach to each other in any order; occurrence of clitics as a “group flexion”; clitics are often not sensitive to categorical distinctions (transcategorical), and usually do not form idiomatic constructions.

Using the criteria above, locative (and some temporal) postpositions such as *wi* ‘upside’, *mith* ‘underneath’ are free nouns (relational nouns) even when they function as grammatical markers of location: they can be divided from the nominal they attach to by a word (1); they can attach different case markers (2)-(3); the nominal they attach to can be omitted when it is an anaphoric pronoun (3); the nominal they attach to can optionally have the genitive marker (4)². This is consistent with [Martin’s 1992: 196-197] analysis and not consistent with treating all postpositions as particles [Chang 1996: 67]; [Sohn 1999: 212-215].

Bound denominative postpositions (“postnouns” in [Martin’s 1992: 156] terminology, e.g., *cen* ‘before/ until’, *nim* ‘esteemed person’³), are nominal stems, but they are grammatically dependent. They cannot be divided from the nominal they attach to by a word (5); the nominal they attach to cannot be genitive (6); the nominal they attach to as a rule cannot be omitted (7). However, they, unlike particles, can only precede case particles (8); they can attach only to certain nouns (not transcategorical) (7), (9), and can be part of idiomatic constructions (10). Thus, “postnouns” are not identical to particles regarding their grammatical properties and preserve some nominal features.

An important issue also discussed is the formal analysis of bound postposition constructions: head incorporation, head-complement structure, mixed categories structure, compound-like structure, etc., cf. [Koopman 2000: 204-261], [Stump 2001: 96-137], [Hale 2003: 33], [Spencer 2005], [Yoon 2005].

¹ Korean has a wide range of nominal, adverbial- and adjectives-like postpositions; we do not consider prepositions with “subcategorization”, those that assign case to the noun it follows, such as NP_{ACC} + *sikhyese* ‘forcing’ [NP_{ACC} being a causee]:

(i) ...caki pwuha-lul sikhy-ese yucengswu
self subordinate-ACC force-POST Ywu_Ceng_Swu
sikkwu-tul-ul samwusil-lo teulye o-la ha-ko...
relative-PL-ACC office-DIR bring-INF come-IMPER do-CONV

“(He) told his subordinates to bring Ywu Ceng Swu’s relatives to the office...” [Nikol’ski 1962: 59]

² [Yoon 1995], [Kim 1997], [Moon 2006] show that case marker omission is widespread in Korean.

³ As free nouns, *cen* is ‘front’; *nim* is ‘one’s beloved’ [poetic], ‘your majesty’ [obs.].

- (1) Ku namwupalo **mith-ey-nun** khonkhulithu phan-tul-i
 this tree **just under-LOC-TOP** concrete slab-PL-NOM
 nohi-e iss-ess-ta
 lie-INF exist-PAST-DECL
 “Concrete slabs were lying just under the tree” [also: *namwu* has the *ku* modifier]
- (2)a. Hayphali-ka pata **wi-ey** tte iss-ta
 jellyfish-NOM see **on-LOC** float-INF exist-DECL
 “Just on the see surface a jellyfish is floating”
 b. chayksang **wi-uy** chayk
 desk **on-GEN** book “book on a desk” [Martin 1992: 927]
- (3) Ku-ka palo **ku/ i/ Ø** **wi-lul** cinaka-l kka yo?
 he-NOM just **this/ it/ Ø** **on-ACC** pass-PRT.FT Q POL
 “Will he step directly on/ through this?” [e.g., a pool of paint mentioned earlier]
- (4) Sensayng-nim(-uy) **twi-ey-nun** ku-uy
 teacher-HON(-GEN) **behind-LOC-TOP** he-GEN
 swuceyca-ka ka-ko iss-ta
 best_student-NOM go-CONV exist-DECL
 “The Teacher’s best student is going behind him”
- (5)a. *kihan **cenghakhi** **cen-ey** [cf. (1)]
 date/term **exactly** **before-LOC**
 b. **cenghwakhi** kihan **cen-ey**
exactly date/term **before-LOC** “exactly before the date/term”
- (6) kihan(*uy) **cen-ey**
 date/term **before-LOC** “before the (fixed) date/term” [cf. (4)]
- (7) Sensayng-nim-un/ *ku-nim-un/ ??Ø nim-un capswu-si-pnita
 teacher-HON-TOP/he-HON-TOP/??Ø HON-TOPeat.HON-HON-DECL.FORM
 “He [esteemed] has {had dinner} [esteemed verb form]” [cf. (3)]
- (8)a. kihan **cen-ey** b. *kihan-ey-cen [postnoun]
 date/term **before-LOC** **date/term-DAT-before**
 “before the (fixed) date/term” [Kholodivich 1954: 216]
- (9)a. myech-il **cen-ccum-kkaci** [noun + “postnoun” + particles]
 how_many-day **before-APPR-UNTIL** “Until which month...?”
 b. encey-kkaci/ *cen-ccum-kkaci [adverbial + particle/ * + “postnoun”]
 when-UNTIL/ *-before-APPR-UNTIL “Until when...?”
- (10)a. sahum **cen-ey** b. sip-nyen cen-ey
 three_days **before-LOC** ten-year **before-LOC**
 “Three days ago/ before” “Ten years ago”

Selected references:

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