

# On the verbalizing suffixes in Korean and their implications for syntax and semantics



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## Abstract

Despite the apparently identical surface realization of their verbalizing element, the Sino-Korean verbs suffixed with *-ha* 'do' correspond to two quite distinct syntactic structures, with attendant consequences for case marking, clause typing, compatibility with progressive aspect, and adverb modification. The verbalizers associated with native Korean roots exhibit the same contrasts, with the only difference being their phonological realization. I argue that a fine-grained classification of *v* (Harley, 1995, 2002; Folli and Harley, 2005, 2007), combined with the major assumption of Distributed Morphology (Halle and Marantz, 1993) that the spell-out of a functional morpheme is determined in reference to its syntactic context, captures the morphological, syntactic, and semantic behaviors of Korean verbalizers in a principled way. © 2016 Elsevier B.V. All rights reserved.

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## 1. Derivation of Sino-Korean roots and Korean verbalizers

Korean vocabulary is divided into three categories based on origin: Sino-Korean, native Korean, and other loan words. Among those, Sino-Korean words, which are lexical items borrowed from Chinese, Sino-Japanese, or Sino-Korean words coined in Korea, form about 60 percent of the Korean vocabulary, while 35 percent correspond to native Korean words/affixes (Sohn, 1999). This paper investigates the syntactic function and locus of two kinds of verbalizers in Korean—*ha* 'do' and its counterpart with a zero phonological realization.

Extensive research has been devoted to the Korean verbal suffix *-ha* because *-ha* appears in the light verb construction, which on its own raises important empirical and theoretical questions (Ahn, 1990, 1991; Park, 1992; Kim, 1993; Chae, 1996, 1997, 2003; Han and Rambow, 2000; Jung, 2002; Ahn, 2002; Choi and Wechsler, 2002; Paek, 2011 a.o.). (1) Illustrates the so-called light verb construction, whose composition alternates between (1a) and (1b), resembling its Japanese counterpart involving *-suru* 'do' (Grimshaw and Mester, 1988; Sato, 1993; Saito and Hoshi, 2000 a.o.). In (1), the verb *-ha* can either appear on its own as in (1a), or it can be attached to the preceding verbal noun as in (1b)<sup>1</sup>:

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<sup>1</sup> The abbreviations used in this study are the following: Pres (present tense), Past (past tense), Gen (genitive), Nom (nominative), Acc (accusative), Dat (dative), Decl (declarative), Impr (imperative), Exhr (exhortative), Prom (promissive), Prog (progressive), Neg (negation), Caus (causative), nmlz (nominalizer).

- (1) a. Chelswu-ka ku ceyan-ul swulak-ul ha-ess-ta.  
 Chelswu-Nom the offer-Acc acceptance-Acc do-Past-Decl  
 ‘Chelswu accepted the offer.’
- b. Chelswu-ka ku ceyan-ul swulak-ha-ess-ta.  
 Chelswu-Nom the offer-Acc acceptance-do-Past-Decl  
 ‘Chelswu accepted the offer.’

The examples in (1) belong to the category of light verb constructions because the Sino-Korean verbal noun *swulak* ‘acceptance’ behaves like the sentential predicate in substance, with minimal semantic contribution made by *-ha*. Not surprisingly, most studies on the light verb construction have concentrated on (1a), where the predicate *swulak* occurs in the form of a noun. The central questions that involve Korean *-ha* so far have been: (i) whether the associated *-ha* in (1) is heavy or light (Im, 1979; Ahn, 1990; Park, 1992; Kim, 1994; Chae, 1996); (ii) how the first object *ku ceyan* is thematically and structurally related to the second object, the verbal noun *swulak* in (1a) (Grimshaw and Mester, 1988; Kim, 1993; Kim, 1997); and (iii) whether the verbal nouns such as *swulak* in (1a) should be categorized purely as a noun (Chae, 1996, 1997; Jun, 2003; Yoon and Park, 2003) or a verb (Ahn, 1990, 1991; Park, 1992) or if they are underspecified between the two categories (Manning, 1993; Sells, 1995; Pak, 1999; Han and Rambow, 2000; Choi and Wechsler, 2002).

The present study seeks to answer a rather different set of questions that are raised by *-ha* in the example (1b), as well as other structural and morphological contexts in which *-ha* and its null counterpart occur. As shown in (1), agentive Sino-Korean roots such as *swulak* zero-derives as a noun when used on its own as in (2a), whereas it becomes a verb with the attachment of the suffix *-ha*. In this sense, *-ha* in (1b)/(2b) is a verbalizing suffix, and at least this much is agreed on in the literature on Korean light verb constructions.

- (2) a. *swulak* ‘acceptance’  
 b. *swulak-ha* ‘accept’

Now, Sino-Korean roots that express a psychological state exhibit a similar derivational pattern in that they are nouns if no other suffix is attached as in (3a), while they become verbs with the suffix *-ha* attached as in (3b). Unlike agentive Sino-Korean roots, however, psych roots can be followed by an additional instance of *-ha*, which alters the meaning of the derived stem, as in (4).<sup>2</sup>

- (3) a. *minmang* ‘embarrassment’  
 b. *minmang-ha* ‘be embarrassed’
- (4) *minmang-ha-eha* ‘show embarrassment’

Two questions arise: (i) Are *-ha* in (2b) and that in (3b) identical as they both verbalize their Sino-Korean complement? and (ii) why does adding another *-ha* in (4) result in an agentive-like interpretation?

In this study, I will show that despite the apparently identical surface realization of their verbalizing element, the verbs suffixed with *-ha* in (2b) and (3b) correspond to two quite distinct syntactic structures. Specifically, I argue that the verbalizer *-ha* heads two distinct flavors of *v*—namely, the agentive  $v_{DO}$  and the stative  $v_{BE}$  (Harley, 1995, 2002; Folli and Harley, 2005, 2007; cf. Jung, 2002)—depending on the type of the complement it takes. In so doing, I connect the agentive interpretation in (4) to the outer  $v_{DO}$  layer of the verbal stem. I further show that the verbalizers attached to native Korean roots behave in the same way, with the only difference being their phonological spell-out. The systematic differences between the two verb groups in case-marking, clause typing, possibility of progressivization, and adverb modification are compatible with the current disjunctive analysis of the overt verbalizer *-ha* and the verbalizer with a zero phonological exponent.

The idea that Korean *-ha* can either be stative or agentive is not completely new (Jung, 2002; Paek, 2011; cf. Ahn, 1990, 1991; Chae, 1996; Ahn, 2002). However, a comprehensive picture is missing from the previous studies that make the distinction. This is because they address only the overt *-ha* cases like (2) and (3), but not the stacked *-ha* in (4) or the distributions of the null verbalizer associated with native Korean verbal roots.<sup>3</sup> It is this gap that this study aims to fill.

<sup>2</sup> The linking vowel *-e* on the second instance of *-ha* in (4) is inserted if it attaches above another bound morpheme. The two overt verbalizers in (4) are pronounced closer to *hayha*, and written with the *-e* vowel belonging to the preceding syllable *-ha* in the character block in the Korean orthography. However, I will keep indicating it as *-e* to mark the morphological breaks and compare it with other occurrences of *-e* whose form and sound are kept intact. We will see in section 3 that the same *-e* occurs with native Korean roots, all of which are bound.

<sup>3</sup> Jung (2002) covers the widest range of data, to my knowledge, as he does talk about some native Korean verbal roots besides the Sino-Korean roots like (2b) and (3b). However, the discussion of native Korean roots is limited to certain putative psych roots with the focus mostly on the agentive overt *-ha*. In sections 2, 3 and 5, I show that the presence of the covert functional categories (e.g., *v*, *n*) has some critical empirical consequences.

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