Approximation markers in Korean: classifier construction

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Korean has two rows of numerals – Native Korean [NK] and Sino-Korean [SK]. SK numerals have regular morphemes to derive ordinal numerals from the “basic” cardinal numerals; approximate numerals (beginning from 10) are also regularly derived (Table 1).

NK numerals have a different, not so regular pattern of derivation. Besides the “basic” cardinal form used as a modifier of a classifier (1a) or a noun (1b), NK numerals have an “enumeration” [ENUM] form that has both numeral and classifier features (2a-b). Only numerals 1–4 and 20 have their ENUM form different from the regular one (2a); the ENUM form does not co-occur with a classifier (2b). The ordinal form is derived with the affix -ccay: ilkop-ccay ‘7[NK]-CARD[NK]’ “the 7-th”, cf. the SK ordinal prefix cey- in Table 1.

NK numerals 1–10 have an approximate -e(s) form: twue(s) ‘about two’. [Martin 1992: 178] mentions the NK derivation pattern similar to the SK -ye pattern: “Num + -namun” ‘odd/a little more than’ (sumwu-namun ’20-odd’); nam-un is a frozen form of nam-ta ‘be left’. This pattern is used only with round numbers and is highly lexicalized.

The NK particle -ccum has an ‘approximately’ [APPR] meaning; -ccum can attach to a classifier in a classifier construction (3a) or to an ENUM form (3b). -Cum has grammatical properties of phrasal affixes [Yoon 1995]. First, when -ccum attaches to a classifier, its scope is the whole Class(ifier) P(hrase): [classooleyeci payk kay]-ccum in (3a). Second, -ccum can attach to any classifier, or to a SK noun denoting measure/ period of time in (4a) – these are Type 3 classifiers following [Martin 1992: 182].

-Ccum attaches not only to quantity words/ expressions but also to deictics, interrogative words (4b) and denominative postpositions (4c). It must be used after nouns, but otherwise it has no restrictions on its host (-ccum is a nominal phrasal affix in terms of [Yoon 1995]). Examples (4c-d) from [Martin 1992: 632] show that -ccum can be part of so-called “multiple particle constructions” [Sohn 1999: 270], in which particles can in some cases be switched. In Type 3 classifier constructions, numerals frequently go with nouns of the same origin (5).

The ‘APPR’[SK] affix -ye (see Table 1) attaches to numerals, besides 1–9: see (6a); -ye can also attach to ‘period of time/ measure’ nouns (Type 3 classifiers) instead of attaching to a numeral (6a-b); -ye cannot attach to other classifier types – cf. (6c) and (3a).

-Ye has essential derivation affix features (except for adnominal position (6a-b)); it cannot attach to a non-Type 3 classifier construction in a way similar to -ccum (6c). -Ccum, on the other hand, is a phrasal affix (phrasal affixes are typically non-derivational).

Thus, Korean has two morphemes for the approximation meaning: the SK derivation affix -ye and the NK phrasal affix -ccum. These two morphemes can coexist in one phrase with no additional change of meaning (payk-ye ‘100-APPR[SK]’is possible in (3a)). They can co-occur in one word: [rare] (sip) nyen-ye-ccum ‘(10) year[SK]-APPR[SK]-APPR[NK]’.

Use of both -ye and -ccum in one phrase mentioned above, as well as examples with only one APPR marker because the other one is prohibited (cf. (6a) and (3a)/ (6c)) show that -ye and -ccum have essentially identical grammatical function, even though their formal properties drastically differ: they belong to the derivational vs. agglutinative inflection grammar components. In the paper, besides -ye and -ccum, other approximation constructions will be considered, such as the postposition cengto, the noun nameis, etc.
Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cardinal</th>
<th>Ordinal</th>
<th>“Odd”/ Approximate</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>sip</em> ‘10’</td>
<td><em>cey-sip</em> ‘10-th’</td>
<td><em>sip-ye</em> ‘a little more than 10’</td>
</tr>
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(1) a. *yel* kwen-uy chayk(-ul)  
10[NK] CLASS-GEN book(-ACC)  
b. chayk *yel* kwen(-ul)  
book 10[NK] CLASS(-ACC)

“Ten books”

(2) a. *sey* ‘3’ ➔ *seys* ‘3.ENUM’  
b. pongthwu *seys(-ul) (cang)  
envelope three.ENUM[NK](-ACC) (CLASS) “3 envelopes”

(3) a. Oleynci payk kay-ccum  
orange 100[SK]-APPR[SK] CLASS[SK]-APPR[NK]  
“Around 100 oranges”
  b. Haksaeng *sumwul-ccum* student 20.ENUM-APPR [NK]  
“Around 20 students”

(4) a. Sipi-wel *isip-il-ccum* [SKLD]  
12[SK]-month[SK] 20[SK]-day[SK]-APPR[SK]“Around December 20”
City_Hall where-APPR[SK] exist-SUSP PTCL.POL  
“Whereabouts is the City Hall?”
  c. myechil *cen-ccum-kkaci* ku-nun kenkangha-yss-ta.

a. few days before-APPR[SK]-UNTIL he-TOP healthy-PAST-DECL  
“Before around 5 days passed,…”
  d. [Sey si-kkaci-ccum]/ [Sey si-crum-ccum]  
pota-(ka) an o-myen ka-l they-ya
and_than(-NOM) NEG come-COND go-PRT.FUT MOD-EMPH
“I will wait till around 3 o’clock, and then if you haven’t come I’ll leave”

(5) sey hay/ sam nyen

(6) a. *han-ye* sikan/ *han* sikan-ye  
1[SK]-APPR [SK] hour[NK]/ 1 hour[NK]-APPR[SK]“Around 1 hour”
  b. *isip-ye* pwun / *isip* pwun-ye  
20[SK]-APPR[SK] CLASS.minute/ 20[SK]CLASS.minute-APPR [SK]  
“Around 20 minutes”
  c. *oleynci* payk kay-ye  
orange 100 CLASS[SK]-APPR[SK] “Around 100 oranges”

References: