

A Semantic Analysis of *(u)ni* and *(e)se*

Jungno Ree

(Florida State University)

In most books on Korean grammar—for example, Lukoff(1947), Vandesande and Park (1967), Martin and Lee(1968), or Defense Language Institute(1959)—one can find either a brief mention or some discussion of the verbal endings *(u)ni* and *(e)se*, with various examples hoping to demonstrate their correct uses. Most students of Korean are aware of such syntactic and/or semantic problems as *nun*, *ka*, double subject, speech levels, and so forth. As for the verbal endings under consideration, it seems that they are rather straightforward, and that students learning Korean will not have much difficulty in understanding and learning how to use the forms. At least this seems to be what is suggested by the above-mentioned grammar books.

Well then, what is linguistically so interesting about these verbal endings and what problems do they pose? My awareness and subsequent interest in these endings go several years back to the time when I was teaching Korean as a graduate student at Indiana University. In Unit 9 of Lukoff(1947), which was used as a textbook at that time, appear the following sentences.¹

- (1) onul un com pappu-ni kuman twu-si-yo.
'I'm busy today, so never mind.'
- (2) nan cal molu-ni cohun kes ulo sikhi sip-si-yo.
'I don't know [how to order] very well, so you order something good.'
- (3) com sicang ha-ni amuketto coh-sup-ni-ta.
'I'm so hungry anything'll be all right.'
- (4) com me-ni catongcha hantay pwulu-ci-yo.
'It's pretty far, so I'll call a taxi.'
- (5) ilkopsi-ni incey tatul kot-osi-key-ss-ci-yo.
'It's seven o'clock, so they'll probably come soon.'
- (6) swul i cohun kes kath-uni wuli swul com hal-kka-yo.
'The wine seems to be good, so shall we have some?'
- (7) pyello halkkes eps-uni mwesitunci haci-yo.
'I've got nothing special to do, so anything is okay.'

¹ The Yale Romanization is used in transcribing all sentences. I now feel that the title of this paper should probably be called "A note on *(u)ni* and *(e)se*," but I retain the original title simply to be consistent with the titles of the other papers presented at the conference.

Notice that in all of these sentences the *(u)ni* which ends the subordinate clauses has a causal meaning. At this point, one can simply say, as I did and as the above-mentioned grammar books do, that *(u)ni* is a "causal conjunctive ending which may be used with any verb and expresses reason or cause. It corresponds to English 'because', 'since', 'therefore', or 'so'" (Vandesande and Park 1967:pt.I:323). It was not until I heard some students produce sentences such as the following that I came to realize how inadequate and naive my approach to the problem had been.

(8) *com me-ni catongcha lo ka-ss-upni-ta.

'I went by car because it was a little far'.

(9) *pyello halkkes i eps-uni chinku cip ey nol le ka-ss-upni-ta.

'I didn't have anything to do, so I went to see my friend.'

Before we examine these sentences, let us consider some sentences containing *(e)se* which are introduced in Unit II of Lukoff (1947).

(10) malssum com mwule polkkes i iss-ese wa-ss-upni-ta.

'I came because I had something to ask you.'

(11) pol il i com iss-ese Chonglo ey ka nun kil-ipni-ta.

'I'm on my way to Chonglo [as I have] to see about some business.'

(12) keki pang i eps-ese ili wa-ss-upni-ta.

'I came here because they didn't have any room there.'

Lukoff explains the *(e)se* as follows:

The element *-se* places the action of the stem of ϕ gerund *before* the time of the action of the following verb stem. Thus, it may mean an action simply earlier in time, and then the English equivalent will be '*and*', or it may mean an action earlier in time and therefore the *cause* of the following action, in which case the English equivalent will be '*since*', '*because*', '*so*', etc. (p. 308)

Let us see what happens to sentences (10), (11), and (12) if the ending *(u)ni* is replaced by *(e)se*.

(13) *malssum com mwule polkkes i iss-uni wa-ss-upni-ta.

(14) *pol il i com iss-uni Chonglo ey ka nun kil-ipni-ta.

(15) *keki pang i eps-uni ili wa-ss-upni-ta.

Note that sentences (13), (14), and (15) are ungrammatical in the same way as (8) and (9) are.

As it should be obvious, Lukoff's explanation does very little in accounting for the syntactic and/or semantic differences between the conjunctive endings. Faced with the awesome task of having to teach the usage of these endings, some mechanism had to be found, at least to prevent the generation of sentences such as (8), (9) and the like if not to explain their ungrammaticality. A careful examination of sentences like (1), (2), (10) and (12) revealed that the occurrence or choice of either ending seemed closely related to the following main clause. That is, in (1) and (2) the clauses *kuman twusiyo*

and *sikhisipsiyo* denote a command or suggestion, and in (10) and (12) the verbs in the main clauses are in the past. An analysis of more of similar sentences, given below, seemed to confirm my initial hypothesis which is stated in (18).

(16) a. com pol il i iss-uni mence ka-seyo.

'I have something to take care of, so you go ahead'

b. *com pol il i iss-ese mence ka-seyo.

(17) a. com pol il i iss-ese mence ka-ss-upni-ta.

'I went ahead because I had some business to attend to'

(18) If the illocutionary force of main clause is ordering or suggesting, the conjunctive ending denoting cause or reason must be (u)ni, and if the main clause is in the past, the ending is (e)se.

What is stated in (18) seems adequate in accounting for unacceptable sentences such as (8), (9), (13), etc. but it definitely fails to explain among many others sentences like (11), repeated here as (19), whose main clause is not in the past tense, and (21) whose main clauses do not seem to have the meaning of command or suggestion.

(19) a. pol il i iss-ese Chonglo ey ka nun kil-ipni-ta.

'I'm on my way to Chonglo [as I have] to see about some business.'

b. *pol il i iss-uni Chonglo ey ka nun kil-ipni-ta.

(20) a. com sicang ha-ni amwuketto coh-ss-upni-ta.

'I'm so hungry anything'll be all right.'

b. *com sicang hay-se amwuketto coh-ss-upni-ta.

(21) a. ilkopsi-ni incey tatul kot o-si-kess-ci-yo.

'It's seven o'clock, so they'll probably come soon.'

b. *ilkopsi-la-se incey tatul kot o-si-kess-ci-yo.

Of course, I was aware of this inadequacy, but finding myself unable to pursue the problem and improve (18), I merely hoped that further research sometime in the future might enlighten me. That future research happens to be this paper. I am afraid, however, I may not be able to shed much light on the problem, because after my racking brains for some time it turns out that there are more problems than what little generalization I have been able to capture through my informants' responses as well as my own intuitive reactions to a large number of sentences.²

Before I proceed, I would like to make one comment about the data to be discussed shortly. I am fully aware of some linguists' recent revolt against the "In-my-idiolect-I-say-such-and-such" syndrome. In other words, the argument has often been heard that "linguistic facts are so subtle as to render them impenetrable by any but a native-speaker linguist" himself (Teeter 1973:80). However, in view of the fact that differences in

² As a matter of fact, I almost gave up the attempt, but I could not bring myself to totally dispensing with the idea that one cannot be working on just those problems that will make him rich and famous.

meaning between sentences containing *(u)ni* and *(e)se* are in many cases very elusive plus the fact that to my knowledge these endings have not been investigated previously, in what follows I offer more or less my own sentences and judgments merely as a starting point.

Returning to the problems under discussion, there are largely two questions to ask: (1) Why is it that *(u)ni* permits only a main clause that denotes suggestion or command? To put in another way, can the *(u)ni* form allow a main clause denoting a completed action of some sort, which the ending *(e)se* seems to favor? (2) How are the two facts, the illocutionary force of suggesting or ordering on one hand, and an action or event in the past on the other, related to each other, if indeed they are related? I suggest that there are definable semantic constraints to which these endings are subject, and that there is an underlying principle which may be capable of capturing the facts presented above as well as those to be discussed.

Let us first consider some characteristics of *(u)ni* and *(e)se* themselves. One interesting feature of *(e)se* is that it does not take the past-tense form *ass*. That is, for the construction meaning 'because it rained' the Korean equivalent with the use of *(e)se* is *pi ka wa-se* not **pi ka wa-ss-ese*. In fact, unlike what Martin and Lee (1968:130) state, not even a single example comes to mind where the presence of the past tense form does not cause unnaturalness. *(u)ni* on the other hand must take the past tense form *ass* in order to show events in the past, as in

(22) 'because it rained'

a. *pi ka wa-ss-uni*

b. **pi ka o-ni* [because it is raining]

Consequently, constructions with *(e)se* typically denote some occurrence in the past, although there are cases, such as the following, where native speakers do not seem to agree.³

(23) *cen chinku ka wa-se cip ey iss-kess-upni-ta.*

a. 'I am going to stay home because a friend of mine has come to visit me.'

b. 'I am going to stay home because a friend of mine is coming to visit me.'

Let us now consider the following sentences which contain neither an imperative nor a perfective meaning but the speaker's attitude or mood.

(24) *cen com phikon hay-se mence* { *ka-pni-ta.*
 ka-ya-kess-upni-ta.

'I'm a little tired, so I'm leaving [before you].'

(25) *?cen com phikon ha-ni mence* { *ka-pni-ta.*
 ka-ya-kess-upni-ta.

(26) *cen com phikon ha-ni mence* { *ka to kwaynchanh-ayo.*
 ka-lkka ha-nun-tey-yo.
 ka-kosiphun-tey-yo.

³ To me (23) means only (a) but to my wife and other informants the sentence is ambiguous.

'I'm a little tired, so may I leave now?'

(27) *cen com phikon hay-se mence ka to kwaynchanh-ayo

To me sentence (24) sounds much better than (25) for the meaning intended. What I am suggesting here is that in the case of (e)se what the following main clause clearly implies is the speaker's 'definite desire' or 'determination'; whereas in the case of (u)ni the speaker either makes an 'appeal' of some sort or suggests something that seems to require the hearer's 'approval' or 'agreement'. Thus at a class outing, for example, I would not use sentence (24) to seek from the teacher permission to leave early.

If my comments about these sentences sound too Whorfian, consider the following:

(28) pay ka koph-ase mwes com mek-eya-kess-upni-ta.

'I'm hungry, so I've got to eat something [no matter what you say]'

(29) pay ka koph-uni mwes com mek-eya-kess-upni-ta.

'I'm hungry, so I would like to have something to eat [if it's all right with you].'

I suggest that the idea that the (e)se form involves the speaker's 'determination' or 'definite feeling' may be extended to cases of completed action, action already in progress, established facts, or statements which do not require the hearer's confirmation. Note the following:

(30) a. pihayngki ka noph-ase cal an poi-pni-ta.

'The airplane is high up in the sky, so we can't see it too well.'

b. *pihayngki ka noph-uni cal an poi-pni-ta.

(31) a. wuli apeci nun uysa-la-se pam ey cal naka-si-pni-ta.

'My father being a physician often goes out at night.'

b. *wuli apeci nun uysa-ni pam ey cal nakasi-pni-ta.

(32) a. yekin sikkulewe-se silh-ss-upni-ta.

'I don't like it here because it's noisy.'

b. ?yekin sikkule-ni silh-ss-upni-ta.

(33) a. onul un phalilo-la-se hyukang-i-pni-ta.

'We have no school today because it's Independence Day'. [the holiday has already begun]

b. ?onul un phalilo-ni hyukang-i-pni-ta.

c. onulun phalilo-ni hyukang-i-pni-ta. kuleni hakkyo ey ka-ci-ma-seyo.

'There will be no school today because it's Independence Day, so [be informed and] don't show up at school.'

(34) a. yekin yelum ey siwenhay-se motwu-tul o-pni-ta.

'Many come here in the summer because it's cool.'

b. ??yekin yelum ey siwenha-ni motwu-tul o-pni-ta.

All of these sentences seem to confirm what I have suggested above.

Similarly, in the case of (u)ni, too, the idea of 'suggestion' may be extended. Examine the following.

- (35) a. Changswu nun kongpwu lul an hay-ss-uni(kka) sihem ey ttelece-ss-kess-ci.
 'Changsu probably flunked the test because [I know] he didn't study.'
 b. ?Changswu nun kongpwu lul an hay-se sihem ey ttelece-ss-kess-ci.
- (36) a. mwul ul masi-ni(kka) com nas-kwun-yo.
 'I feel better, I think, after that drink of water.'
 b. ?mwul ul masye-se com nas-kwun-yo.
- (37) a. mwulka ka ollaka-n-ta-ni manhi satwe-ya-kess-upni-ta.
 'They say prices will go up, so I think I'd better buy a lot and store them away.'
 b. *mwulka ka ollaka-n-ta-hay-se manhi satwe-ya-kess-upni-ta.
- (38) a. kipwun i com coh-ci anh-uni pakk ey com naka-ss-ta o-kess-upni-ta.
 'I'm not feeling too well, so I'm going outside to get some fresh air; I hope it's all right.'
 b. ?kipwun i com coh-ci anhay-se pakk ey com naka-ss-ta o-kess-upni-ta.

Note that all of these sentences imply either something uncertain or an action to be performed or contemplated. I suggest that with hypothesis under consideration the questionable acceptability of the sentences discussed above may be explained.

Let us now consider the following.

- (39) a. pol il i com iss-ese Chonglo ey ka-nun kil-ipni-ta.
 'I'm on my way to Chonglo because I've some business to attend to.'
 b. *pol il i com iss-uni Chonglo ey ka-ya-ha-lkkes-kath-ss-upni-ta.
 c. pol il i com iss-uni Chonglo ey ka-ya-ha-lkkes-kath-ss-upni-ta.
 'I think I'll have to go to Chonglo as I've some business to take care of.'
- (40) a. ilkopsi-ni incey ta-tul kot o-si-kess-ci-yo.
 'It's seven o'clock, so they'll probably come soon.'
 b. *ilkopsi-la-se incey ta-tul kot o-si-kess-ci-yo.
 c. ilkopsi-la-se ta-tul wa-iss-upni-ta.
 'Everyone is here because it's seven o'clock.'

Note that (39b) and (40b) are unacceptable precisely because (*u*)*ni* and 'action already in progress' and (*e*)*se* and 'probability', respectively, are incompatible. Furthermore, the hypothesis also explains the two facts discussed earlier; that is, the illocutionary force of suggesting or ordering in the case of (*u*)*ni* and action or event in the past in the case of (*e*)*se*. The ending (*e*)*se*, for example, which requires some definite action or fact, cannot be expected to occur in a sentence whose main clause denotes something uncertain or to be implemented.

Now imagine a case where a husband suspects before setting out for his business trip that his wife might not attend his friend's wedding, because she has told him several times that she does not have presentable clothes to wear, to which he has failed to respond. Then the husband, upon returning from his trip, asks his wife and engages in

the following dialog:

(41) kyelhonsik ey ka-ss-ese?

'Did you go to the wedding?'

(42) an ka-ss-se.

'No'

(43) way?

'Why?'

(44) a. os i eps-unikka⁴ an ka-ss-ci.

b. os i eps-ese.

In a case like this (44a) rather than (44b) will most likely be used because what the wife is saying is quite obviously: "What nerve! I told you lots of times that I didn't have anything to wear, so you *know* the reason; so why? Obviously you are not still convinced, eh?" It is, of course, the (u)ni ending that gives this interpretation. (44b) on the other hand implies that the reason given is personal and there is no reason why the hearer should or would have known it.

In order to formulate a generalization capable of capturing all the facts presented so far, it seems that some very sophisticated semantic rules are needed.⁵ I am not certain at the moment how such rules may be formulated. I merely hope that this paper has at least raised some linguistically interesting questions.

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⁴ For reasons unclear to me, the optional *kk* seems necessary in this case.

⁵ Features such as [\pm definite], [\pm resolved], [\pm complete] [\pm settled], [\pm persuasion], [\pm objective] come to mind, which do not seem adequate, however, for the problems in question.