

# Adjectives in Korean are NOT \*

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Choi, YoungSik. (2019). Adjectives in Korean are NOT. *The Linguistic Association of Korea Journal*, 27(1), 122–141. I argue that putative adjectives in Korean do not form a separate syntactic category but fall into the category of verbs. I critically review the arguments for the adjectives in Korean as a separate syntactic category, and present various arguments against them. I further go on to argue that putative adjectives in prenominal position are not attributive adjectives, but actually verbs, forming a relative clause and thus behaving as predicatives. It will be shown that the various interpretations of putative adjectives in Korean in the prenominal position follow from the present proposal.

**Key words:** adjective, verb, negation, relative, prenominal

## 1. Introduction

Adjectives are among the major lexical categories in languages, along with verbs, nouns and prepositions. It is thus of no surprise that adjectives are commonly witnessed across languages. But it is also true that there is a considerable variation across languages with regard to the existence of the syntactic category of adjectives. English, Germanic more generally, has the adjective as the open class, Mandarin and Samoan do not have the syntactic category of adjectives, and Yoruba has a small closed class of adjectives as observed by Dixon (1982, 1994, 2004), and Cinque (2010), among others. In this paper, I claim Korean is one of the languages without the syntactic category of adjectives.

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Adjectives in Korean, as I claim, actually fall into the syntactic category of verbs. Throughout, I will use the term adjective for Korean only for the expository purpose. The organization of the present paper is as follows: in section 2, I briefly touch on the traditional diagnostic for the adjectivehood, and section 3 critically reviews arguments in Korean literature for adjectives as a separate syntactic category. In section 4, I suggest that adjectives in Korean are actually verbs, challenging the common view in Korean literature. In section 5, I suggest that the attributive adjective in prenominal position in Korean is not attributive but form a relative clause where it behaves as a verb. Section 6 is the prediction of the present analysis of the adjectives in the prenominal position. Section 7 is the conclusion.

## 2. Standard Diagnostic for Adjectives

It has been a standard view that Korean has adjectives. Choi (1935), Sohn (1996, 1999), Horie and Moria (2002), and Suh (2013) all claim or assume it has a distinctive category of adjectives. Choi (1935: 483), for example, classifies adjectives in Korean into five groups, existential, comparative, quantitative, referential, and descriptive, the classification not accepted universally, though.<sup>1)</sup>

- (1) a. existential: *iss-ta* ‘exist, stay’  
 b. comparative: *kass-ta* ‘be the same,’ *talu-ta* ‘be different’  
 c. quantitative: *cek-ta* ‘be small in amount or number,’ *manta* ‘be large in amount or number’  
 d. descriptive: *celm-ta* ‘be young,’ *phalass-ta* ‘blue,’ *kippu-ta* ‘be happy,’ *tep-ta* ‘be hot’  
 e. referential: *ileha-ta* ‘be this way,’ *celeha-ta* ‘be that way’

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1) Sohn (1999: 210), for example, classifies Korean adjectives in four groups: copula, existential, sensory, and descriptive as below in (i).

- (i) a. copula: *i-ta* ‘be’  
 b. existential: *iss-ta* ‘exist, stay’  
 c. sensory: *sulphu-ta* ‘be sad,’ *pulep-ta* ‘be envious,’ *tep-ta* ‘be hot’  
 d. descriptive: *celm-ta* ‘be young,’ *phalah-ta* ‘be blue’

The common diagnostic for the adjectivehood is whether it can serve as an attributive in the prenominal position (see Choi, 1935, Freidin, 1975, Wasow, 1977, Bresnan, 1978, 1982, Levin and Rappaport, 1986, Haspelmath, 1994, Sohn, 1996, 1999, Suh, 2013, among many others). As an illustration, consider the following sentences in (2):

- (2) a. The musician was influential in the sixties.  
 b. The musician was an influential celebrity in the sixties.

As one can see, *influential*, predicative in (2a), can also appear as an attributive in (2b), passing the diagnostic for adjectivehood.

When it comes to Korean, the adjectives *celm-ta* ‘be young’ and *phalah-ta* ‘be blue’ below in (3) are predicatives, and they can behave as attributives as well as shown in (4), like the adjective *influential* in English in (2), although the attributive adjectives in Korean need a special morpheme *un* or *n* that serves as a relative clause marker (REL, henceforth).

- (3) a. John-i celm-ta.  
 John-NOM young-IND  
 ‘John is young.’  
 b. Kaul hanul-i phalah-ta.  
 fall sky-NOM blue-IND  
 ‘The fall sky is blue.’
- (4) a. John-un celm-un kyoswu-i-ta.  
 John-TOP young-REL professor-be-IND  
 ‘John is a young professor’  
 b. John-un phala-n hoswu-lul coahan-ta.  
 John-TOP blue -REL lake-ACC like-IND  
 ‘John likes a blue lake.’

Disregarding the special morphemes marking relative clauses, one may thus suggest that *celm-ta* ‘be young’ and *phalah-ta* ‘be blue’ above in (3-4), like English adjective *influential* in (2), are indeed adjectives in Korean.

Recently, Cinque (2010), however, argues against the validity of the long cherished diagnostic for the adjectivehood using the modification fact on *very* and *much* in English.

As one can see below in (5–7) involving *very* and *much* in English, adjectives and verbs behave differently in that the former is compatible with *very* but not *much*, and vice versa for the latter.

- (5) a. The linguistic theory was very influential in the sixties.  
b. \*The linguistic theory was much influential in the sixties.
- (6) a. The musician was a very influential celebrity.  
b. \*?The musician was a much influential celebrity.
- (7) a. \*John likes sugar very.  
b. John likes sugar very much.

Now, the fact that the attributive participles below in (9), like the predicative participles in (8), can be modified by *much* strongly suggests that they are verbal not adjectival in nature.

- (8) a. John is much respected.  
b. Global warming is much debated.
- (9) a. John is a [much respected ] scholar.  
b. Global warming is a[ much debated ] issue.

The paradigm above in (8–9) thus strongly suggests that appearing in the prenominal position as attributives cannot be a valid diagnostic for the adjectivehood of the expressions in question.

### 3. Arguments for Adjectives in Korean

Now, given that being an attributive as a valid diagnostic for adjectives is disregarded, what are the arguments for the adjectives in Korean then? As a matter of fact, arguments for adjectives as a separate syntactic category in Korean were made, which are semantic, morphological and syntactic in nature.

Consider the semantic argument first. According to the proponents for the adjectives in Korean, adjectives, quite unlike verbs, denote state, as shown below in (10) with *yeppu-ta* ‘be beautiful,’ and this is claimed to be one of the strong arguments for the adjectives in

Korean as in Choi (1935), Sohn (1996, 1999) and Suh (2013) among many others.

- (10) Mary-ka yeppu-ta.  
 Mary-NOM beautiful-IND  
 'Mary is beautiful.'

Next, as for the morphological arguments, a typical argument is that adjectives, quite unlike verbs, cannot take the morpheme *nun* or *n*, a non-past indicative morpheme, as below in (11) in contrast to the verbs in (12), a claim made by Sohn (1996, 1999).

- (11) a. John-i Mary-ka pwulep-(\*nun)-ta.  
 John-NOM Mary-NOM envious-nun-IND  
 'John is envious of Mary.'  
 b. John-i kippu-(\*nun)-ta.  
 John-NOM happy-nun-IND  
 'John is happy.'
- (12) a. John-i pap-lul mek-nun-ta.  
 John-NOM meal-ACC eat-nun-IND  
 'John is eating the meal.'  
 b. John-i talli-n-ta.  
 John-NOM run-n-IND  
 'John is running.'

When it comes to the syntactic arguments for the adjectives in Korean, a representative one is that adjectives are not allowed to be made progressive with the progressive forming construction 'ko issa,' as shown below in (13) again quite in contrast to verbs in (14), a claim also attributed to Sohn (1999: 275).

- (13) \*Mary-ka cikum yeppu-ko iss-ta.  
 Mary-NOM now beautiful is-IND  
 'Mary is being beautiful now.'
- (14) John-i cikum ku mwuncey-lul phwul-ko iss-ta.  
 John-NOM now that problem-ACC solve is-IND  
 'John is solving that problem now.'

The arguments for the adjectives as forming a separate syntactic category in Korean, however, are not convincing enough. Consider the semantic argument, first. As is well-known, semantic argument is not a reliable one to classify syntactic categories (see Poole, 2011, and Finegan, 2015, among others), since verbs can also denote state as well cross-linguistically as illustrated with the English verbs below in (15).

- (15) a. John knows the answer  
 b. John likes Mary.  
 c. John wants a book on linguistics.  
 d. John seems to be happy.

Next, given the morphological argument for the adjectives in Korean with regard to the morpheme *nun* or *n*, it cannot be a convincing argument, either, since one may equally suggest that *pwulep-ta* ‘be envious’ in (11a) and *kipu-ta* ‘be happy’ in (11b) are simply stative verbs, which are not compatible with morphemes *nun* or *n* that denotes activity.<sup>2) 3)</sup>

As for the syntactic argument for the adjective in Korean involving ‘ko issta,’ one can equally argue that it is because *yeppu-ta* ‘be beautiful’ above in (13) is a stative verb not compatible with ‘ko issta,’ which denotes the progressive aspect.<sup>4)</sup> As we

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2) In my intuition, *nun* or *n* is not a non-past indicative morpheme but non-past indicative morpheme of activity.

3) Given the morphological argument for the adjectives regarding the progressive forming morpheme *nun* or *n*, it follows that *ita* ‘be’ below in (ia) is an adjective, whereas *iss-ta* ‘be’ in (ib) is a verb, which is quite a strange conclusion, though, since both are certainly copula verbs.

(i) a. John-i            haksayng-i-(*\*nun*)-ta.

John-NOM student-be-nun-IND

‘John is a student.’

b. John-i            yocum    halwucongil    tosekwan-ey    iss-(*nun*)-ta.

John-NOM these days entire day library-at be-nun-IND

‘John is in the library for the entire day these days.’

An anonymous reviewer, however, notes that (ib) with *iss-nun-ta* is not good, quite different from my intuition.

4) It is a well-known fact, as an anonymous reviewer points out, that adjectives can sometimes take progressive forms too as in English, which in a sense suggests that taking a progressive cannot be a valid test for adjectives.

saw thus far in section 3, none of the arguments for the adjectives in Korean as a separate syntactic category are convincing enough. I propose Korean adjectives are stative verbs, thus falling into the category of verbs. Below in section 4, I will present arguments against adjectives in Korean forming a separate syntactic category.

## 4. Argument against Adjectives in Korean

There are convincing arguments against adjectives as a separate syntactic category in Korean, syntactic and morphological in nature. Consider the syntactic argument first, which has to do with sentential negation.

### 4.1. Syntactic Argument

Sentential negation negates the entire clause unlike constituent negation that negates one of the constituents without the result being a negative sentence, as illustrated with the English examples below in (16a) and (16b), respectively. One can thus represent (16a) as (17a), but not (16b) as (17b).

- (16) a. John did not invite Bill to the party.  
b. John lives not far from here.

- (17) a. NOT (John invited Bill to the party)  
b. NOT (John lives far from here)

At this point, note that it is a well-known observation across languages that sentential negation negates verbs since sentences are essentially a verbal projection and by negating the verb, the entire clause will be negated (see Jespersen, 1917, Klima, 1964, Payne, 1985, and Haegeman, 1996, among many others). Specifically, there are four ways of expressing sentential negation across languages, all involving verbs. According to the cross-linguistic study by Payne (1985), all languages use at least one of the four strategies for sentential negation or standard negation as he calls it, and some languages use more than one. Among the four strategies, one is to negate a clause with a negative marker that has the characteristics of a verb taking a sentential complement as shown below in (18) in

Tongan, a Polynesian language.

(18) Tongan

- a. Na'e 'alu 'a Siale  
 Asp go ABSOLUTE Charlie  
 'Charlie went.'
- b. Na' e 'ikai [ ke 'alu 'a Siale]  
 PAST NEG SUBJ go ABSOLUTE Charlie  
 'Charlie did not go.'
- Payne (1985: 208)

The negative marker *'ikai* is a verb taking its sentential complement introduced by the subjunctive marker *ke*, and preceded by the tense marker *Na'e*. Another strategy is to negate a clause via a negative marker which has the property of an auxiliary with the feature specification of person, number, tense, aspect followed by the lexical verb as witnessed below in (19) in Evenki, a Siberian language.

(19) Evenki

- a. Bi dukuwun-ma duku-cā-w  
 I letter-OBJ write-PAST-1-SG  
 'I wrote a letter.'
- b. Bi ə-cə-w dukuwün-ma duku-ra  
 I NEG-PAST-1-SG letter-ACC write-Part  
 'I didn't write a letter.'
- Payne (1985: 213)

A third strategy is to use a negative marker in the form of a particle, which is usually associated with the verb. English *not* below in (20) is a typical example.

- (20) a. John is not happy.  
 b. John does not work hard.

The last strategy is that negative markers are part of the derivational morphology of the verb as a prefix, a suffix or an infix, a good illustration being Turkish below in (21).



(21) Turkish

- a. Jan elmarlar-i ser-di  
 Jan apple-ACC like-PAST  
 'John liked apples.'
- b. Jan elmarlar-i ser-me-di  
 John apple-ACC like-NEG-PAST  
 'John did not like apples.'

The negative marker *me* above in (21b) is a suffix that comes right after the base of the verb and precedes other affixes of tense, mood, person and number. So, it is indeed the case that sentential negation, across languages, involves no other than the syntactic category of verbs

With the cross-linguistic observation in mind that sentential negation negates the verb, let us turn to sentential negation in Korean. Korean has two types of sentential negation. One is long form negation, the other short form negation (see Kim, 1977, Cho, 1994, Choi, 1999a, 1999b, 2013, and Hagstrom, 2000, among many others).<sup>5)</sup>

- (22) a. John-i pap-ul mekci an hayss-ta. (long form negation)  
 John-NOM meal-ACC eat NOT did-IND  
 'John did not eat the meal.'
- b. John-i pap-ul an mekess-ta. (short form negation)  
 John-NOM meal-ACC NOT ate-IND  
 'John did not eat the meal.'

As one can see, Korean sentential negation containing verbs take different forms depending on the particular type of negation, long form negation above in (22a) taking the form of the verb root + *ci* followed by the negation *an* 'not' and *hata* 'do,' and short form negation in (22b) the form of *an* preceding the fully inflected verb. Interestingly enough, putative adjectives in Korean can also have the long form and short form negation precisely in the same way as the verbs as illustrated below in (23).<sup>6)</sup>

5) According to Kim (1977: 674), Korean had originally only the short form and the long form negation developed (also see Horie and Moria, 2002: 177).

6) Moreover, no elements can intervene between the negation and the predicate as

- (23) a. John-i celm-ci an ha-ta. ( long form negation)  
 John-NOM young NOT do-IND  
 'John is not young.'
- b. John-i an celm-ta. (short form negation)  
 John-NOM NOT young-IND  
 'John is not young.'

It thus follows that adjectives in Korean in (23) taking the two types of sentential negation in Korean should also fall into the category of verbs. Otherwise, one has to claim that Korean is truly exceptional in that adjectives can also employ sentential negation.<sup>7) 8) 9)</sup>

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shown below.

- (i) a. \*John-i an ppalli tallin-ta.  
 John-NOM NOT fast run-IND  
 'John does not run fast.'
- b. \*John-i an mwucek celm-ta.  
 John-NOM NOT very young-IND  
 'John is not very young.'

This state of affairs may suggest that the originally independent negative particle has become part of the verb as prefixes via the process of cliticization like Persian negative particles (see Choi, 1999a, 199b, 2013 for the related discussion). Note in passing that prefixation of negation is more common than suffixation, possibly owing to a reluctance to attach negatives as final suffixes to the already inflected verbs as pointed out by Payne (1985: 226).

- 7) As one can see, the following sentence below, which is another instance of constituent negation, admits only the reading where 'un' negates the adjective.  
 Everyone is unhappy.  
 a. 'Everyone is such that they are unhappy.'  
 b. #'It is not that everyone is happy.'
- 8) An anonymous reviewer notes that certain putative adjectives like *saylop-ta* 'be new' does not combine naturally with the negation *an* 'not' in Korean. I suggest it has to do with some lexical constraints going on when it comes to the morphology of the short form negation.
- 9) An anonymous reviewer suggests that it may be the case that negation *an* 'not' in the short form negation in Korean combines with the predicate in the sentence not with the verb per se whereas negation in long form negation certainly combines with the verb.

## 4.2. Morphological Argument

Next, let us turn to morphological arguments against adjectives as a separate syntactic category in Korean. It is a well observed fact (Sohn, 1996, 1999, and Suh, 2013 among others) that Korean adjectives, like verbs, take the same sentence ending morphemes including indicative and question (Q, henceforth) as respectively shown below in (24–25) and (26–27).

- (24) John-i            acik    celm-ta.  
       John-NOM      still young-IND  
       ‘John is still young.’
- (25) John-i            mayil        hakkyo-ey    kan-ta.  
       John-NOM      everyday school-to    go-IND  
       ‘John goes to school every day.’
- (26) John-i            acik    celm-ni?  
       John-NOM      still    young-Q  
       ‘Is John still young?’
- (27) John-i            mayil        hakkyo-ey    ka-ni?  
       John-NOM      everyday school-to    go-Q  
       ‘Does John go to school every day?’

As one can see, the adjective *celm-ta* ‘be young’ and the verb *kan-ta* ‘go’ can appear in the same position of the predicate, with the same indicative morpheme *ta* in (24–25), and *ni* for the question in (26–27) without any special marker of a grammatical function exclusively for the adjective.<sup>10)</sup> Note that in English, for example, where

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10) It has been observed that adjectives, quite unlike verbs, cannot be used in certain moods as below in (i–ii), with IMP and PROP standing for imperative and propositive, respectively.

- (i) a. \*John-ah,    kipwun-i        coa-la.  
       John-VOC mood-NOM    good-IMP  
       ‘John, be happy.’
- b. \*John-ah,    kipwun-i            coh-ca.  
       John-VOC mood-NOM    good-PROP  
       \*‘John, let us be happy.’

adjectives and verbs are separate syntactic categories, adjectives require the copula *be* to serve as the predicate of the sentence as illustrated below in (28).

- (28) a. John runs every day.  
 b. John is young.

Furthermore, in addition to the same morphology of a sentence ender of the indicative and the question above in (24–27), both adjectives and verbs can take tense, honorific and aspect morphology as respectively illustrated below in (29–31), with HON and ASP standing for honorific and aspect, respectively.

(29) tense

- a. John-i            ecey            hakkyo-ey    ka-ss-ta.  
 John-NOM    yesterday    school-to    go-PAST-IND  
 ‘John went to school yesterday.’
- b. John-i            onyen            cen-ey-nun    celm-ess-ta.  
 John-NOM    five year    ago-at-TOP    young-PAST-IND  
 ‘John was young five years ago.’

(30) honorific

- a. Sensayng-nim-i            hakkyo-ey            ka-si-ess-ta.

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- (ii) a. John-ah,            hakkyo-ey            ka-la.  
 John-VOC    school-to            go-IMP  
 ‘John, go to school.’
- b. John-ah            hakkyo-ey            ka-ca.  
 John-VOC    school-to            go-PROP  
 ‘John, let us go to school.’

One may take this as an additional argument for the existence of adjectives as distinct from verbs in Korean. This, however, has to do with the nature of the putative adjectives denoting state, thus not compatible with the particular moods above in (i–ii) as Suh (2013: 730) notes. Although there have been other arguments for the existence of the syntactic category of adjectives in Korean literature, I will not go over every one of them in detail, since they hold for only a subgroup of putative adjectives in Korean, only to suggest that their behavior in question may have to do with lexical aspects (see Sohn 1996: 275ff).

- teacher-HON-NOM school-to go-HON-PAST-IND  
 'The honorable teacher went to school.'
- b. Sensayng-nim-i onyen cen-ey-nun  
 teacher-HON-NOM five year ago-at-TOP  
 celm-u-si-ess-ta.  
 young-HON-PAST-IND  
 'The honorable teacher was young five years ago.'

(31) aspect

- a. John-i ecey hakkyo-ey ka-ss-ess-ta.  
 John-NOM yesterday school-to go-PAST-ASP-IND  
 'John had gone to school yesterday.'
- b. John-i onyen cen-ey-nun celm-ess-ess-ta.  
 John-NOM five year ago-at-TOP young-PAST-ASP-IND  
 'John had been young five years ago.'

What is more, both the adjective and the verb take the same morpheme of the relative clause marker *un* or *nun* in the prenominal position as shown in (32), and (33), respectively.

- (32) John-un [ malk-un ] mwul-ul masyess-ta.  
 John-TOP clean-REL water-ACC drank-IND  
 'John drank clean water.'
- (33) John-un [ mayil hakkyo-ey ka-nun ] haksayng-i-ta.  
 John-TOP every day school-to go-REL student-be-IND  
 'John is a student who goes to school every day.'

The remarkable parallel between the putative adjectives and verbs both in terms of syntax and morphology as we saw thus far strongly suggests that they belong to the same species, namely, verbs. <sup>11)</sup> <sup>12)</sup>

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11) It should be noted that there is another piece of evidence against the adjective as a separative syntactic category in Korean, which has to do with loan words. Korean has lots of loan words, comprising about 5 percent of the contemporary Korean lexicon (Sohn 1999: 87). The way they are borrowed into the Korean lexicon is in accord with the Korean grammar.

(i) a. Ku enehak ilon-un fantastic-ha-ta.

## 5. Putative Adjectives in Prenominal Position

I argued in the previous section that Korean does not have the adjective as a separate syntactic category but falls into the category of the verb. It follows thus from the present proposal that adjectives in prenominal position in (4) repeated below as (34) are verbs but not attributive adjectives.

- (34) a. John-un        celm-un        kyoswu-i-ta.  
           John-TOP    young-REL    professor-be-IND  
           ‘John is a young professor’
- b. John-un        phala-n        hoswu-lul coahan-ta.  
           John-TOP    blue -REL    lake-ACC    like-IND  
           ‘John likes a blue lake.’

At this point, one may then wonder what the precise structure including the adjectives in the prenominal position is above as in (34). I suggest that the putative adjectives in prenominal position in Korean in fact form a relative clause with the following structure in (35) with RC standing for a relative clause.<sup>13) 14)</sup>

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- that linguistics    theory-TOP    fantastic-is-IND  
           ‘That linguistic theory is fantastic.’
- b. John-i        happy-ha-ta.  
           John-NOM    happy-is-IND  
           ‘John is happy.’

As one can see above in (i), *fantastic* and *happy* are adjectives, and they cannot appear in the predicate position by themselves, only to be transformed into Korean predicates by combining with *ha* ‘is’ verb. If adjectives alone can serve as predicates in Korean, there should be no *ha* ‘is’ verb support to transform them into Korean predicates.

- 12) Note that the relative clause marker *nun* cannot combine with putative adjectives. One may take this as evidence for the adjectives as a separate syntactic category. However, this state of affairs simply suggests that the particular relative clause marker cannot combine with verbs denoting state such that the choice of the relative clause marker is semantically conditioned.
- 13) Japanese does not have any marker for the adjective in prenominal position unlike Korean where the putative adjective in the prenominal position has a relative clause marker.

- (i) a. Kono        kuruma-wa    hayai.  
           this        car-TOP    fast

(35) [NP [ RC putative adjective-REL ] [NP ]]

Recall that adjectives in the prenominal position in Korean, like verbs, take a relative clause marker *un* or *n* as above in (34). At the same time, one may still suggest that the structure in (35) is compatible with adjectives as predicatives, not necessarily supporting the present thesis. But if so, one is hard-pressed to answer why Korean adjectives always behave as predicatives but not attributives, against the common phenomenon across languages.

## 6. Predictions

The present proposal for putative adjectives in prenominal position in Korean as forming relative clauses, where the putative adjectives behave as predicatives makes interesting predictions.

### 6.1. Restrictive and Non-restrictive Reading

As observed by many researchers including Jespersen (1924), Bolinger (1967), Larson and Marušič (2004), and Cinque (2010) among others, adjectives in prenominal position are ambiguous with both restrictive and nonrestrictive readings, whereas those in post-nominal position that form a relative clause is not, with a restrictive reading only, as illustrated below in (36–37).<sup>15)</sup>

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‘This car is fast.’  
 b. Kono-wa hayai kuruma desu.  
    this-TOP fast car is  
    ‘This is a fast car.’

Still, it is quite a controversy among Japanese linguists whether Japanese has adjectives as an independent syntactic category. (Hajime Hoji, personal communication)

- 14) An anonymous reviewer wonders how one can derive the following expression *say kabang* ‘new bag’ from the proposed structure in (35). I suggest that *say* ‘new’ is not a putative adjective in its full-fledged form, behaving rather like a prefix from *saylop-ta* ‘be new.’
- 15) It has been quite a long tradition in generative grammar to derive the attributive adjective from the predicative adjective going as far back to Chomsky (1957). A growing body of research

- (36) All of his unsuitable acts were condemned.  
 a. ‘All his acts were condemned; they were unsuitable.’  
 (nonrestrictive)  
 b. ‘All (and only) his acts that were unsuitable were condemned.’  
 (restrictive)
- (37) Every word unsuitable was deleted.  
 a. #‘Every word was deleted; they were unsuitable.’  
 (nonrestrictive)  
 b. ‘Every word that were unsuitable was deleted.’  
 (restrictive)  
 (Cinque 2010: 7–8)

The sentence with the adjective in the post-nominal position above in (36) is quite unlike the one with the attributive adjective in (37) that admits restrictive reading only. Interestingly enough, Korean adjectives in the prenominal position as illustrated with *nappu-ta* ‘bad’ below in (38) have the restrictive reading only, behaving exactly like the English predicative adjective ‘unsuitable’ in the post-nominal position in (36) that forms a relative clause.

- (38) Motun [ nappu-n ] tane-ka sakceytoyess-ta.  
 every bad-REL word-NOM was deleted-IND  
 a. # ‘Every word was bad; they were deleted.’ (nonrestrictive)  
 b. ‘Every word that was bad was deleted.’ (restrictive)

This fact regarding the restrictive vs. nonrestrictive interpretation of adjectives also follows from the present proposal that the attributive adjective in (38) is not attributive but predicative, forming a relative clause, like the predicative adjective in post-nominal position in English.

## 6.2. Intersective and Non-intersective Reading

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suggests otherwise. See Winter (1965), Bolinger (1967), Levi (1975), Emonds (1976), and Cinque (2010). among others.



As Larson (1995) originally observes, the adjective in prenominal position below in (39) in English is ambiguous between an intersective and a nonintersective reading.

- (39) Olga is a beautiful dancer  
a. ‘Olga is a beautiful dancer.’ (intersective)  
b. ‘Olga dances beautifully.’ (nonintersective)

The adjective *beautiful* above in (39) can either refer to the set of beautiful entities intersecting with the set of dancers, meaning ‘Olga is beautiful as a person and is a dancer.’ Or it can modify the intension of dancer, in which case its interpretation is adverbial rather than intersective, meaning ‘Olga dances beautifully.’ In the meantime, adjectives in the post-nominal positions that form a relative clause are not ambiguous, admitting an intersective reading only, as illustrated below in (40).

- (40) Olga is a dancer who is beautiful.  
a. ‘Olga is a beautiful dancer.’ (intersective)  
b. #‘Olga dances beautifully.’ (nonintersective)

Korean adjectives in the prenominal position, that is, attributive adjectives, behave exactly like English adjectives in post-nominal positions, strongly suggesting that it is predicative. The sentence below in (41) thus has an intersective reading only, which again follows, given the present proposal that the attributive adjective in Korean forms a relative clause where it behaves as a predicative.

- (41) Mary-nun alumta-un mwuyongswu-i-ta.  
Mary-TOP beautiful-REL dancer-be-IND  
a. ‘Mary is a beautiful dancer.’ (intersective)  
b. #‘Mary dances beautifully.’ (nonintersective)

## 7. Conclusion

I thus far argued that adjectives in Korean do not constitute a separate syntactic

category but fall into the category of verbs. I critically reviewed the previous arguments, syntactic, morphological and semantic in nature, for the adjectives as a separate syntactic category in Korean. I showed that none of them were convincing. I also argued that adjectives in prenominal position are not attributive adjectives but verbs, which in turn form a relative clause and behave as predicatives. I showed that the various interpretations of the putative adjectives in the prenominal position also follow from the present proposal that they are not attributive adjectives but verbs behaving as predicatives.

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