

On Some Unique Complementation Patterns in Korean: The Case of Monologual Question Complements

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Abstract—Korean has a large number of quotative constructions that have been grammaticalized into diverse functions in the domains of text and discourse (Koo & Rhee, 2019). Among these is a class of constructions that involve the speaker's self-quoted monologual questions that serve the role of complement of verbs of locution, cognition, and perception. Even though these verbs are structurally the matrix-clause predicates, the matrix-clause subject typically does not surface, i.e., the matrix clause is subject-less. These complement constructions involving monologual questions (MQCCs) present intriguing features from the grammaticalization perspective. Self-quoted questions characterize a 'dialogue' between the speaking self and the thinking/hearing self (cf. Koo & Rhee, 2019, p. 256). This type of feigned interactivity makes a text more dramatic and vivid as compared to the texts that do not employ such rhetorical devices. The functions of MQCCs are not associated with a specific form but rather exist in the configuration of juxtaposed clauses, with contextual effects. Therefore, this grammaticalization involves no formal changes with observable trajectories but functional reinterpretation of existing forms, one resembling grammaticalization as reported in Koo and Rhee (2019). MQCCs not only display unique complementation patterns but also present diverse grammaticalized functions through formal and conceptual extension, including many far removed from their original quotative function.

Index Terms—complementation, monologual question, grammaticalization, Korean

I. INTRODUCTION

Korean has a large number of complementation patterns. Complementizers (COMPs) are used in indirect quotation constructions (i.e., reportative constructions), developed from direct quotation constructions (i.e., quotative constructions). A unique type of quotative construction is one involving a directly quoted monologual question that serves the role of the complement of a set of verbs of locution, cognition, and perception. These monologual question complement constructions (MQCCs hereafter) present interesting grammaticalization scenarios. Despite such merits, they have not received attention in earnest to date, and this paper intends to fill the gap.

This paper is organized in the following way. Following this introduction, Section II provides a brief review of extant research; Section III provides a brief exposition on theoretical background focusing on a few topics that are relevant to the present topic in order to facilitate the discussion; Section IV briefly describes the research methodology; Section V reports unique patterns of complementation observed from the data sources; Section VI analyzes the development of MQCCs with respect to structural development, grammaticalization parameters, pragmatic operations, and conceptual networks; and Section VII summarizes the major findings and concludes the paper.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

As briefly indicated above, MQCCs have not yet received much attention. The issues partly related to the topic have been addressed by Lee (1982b) with respect to the development of sentence-enders, Hoe and Kim (2022) focusing on complement choice, Song (2018) with respect to the quotative suffix *-tanta*, and Park (2022) with specific focus on adnominal clausal modifiers. A notable study is Lee (1986), in which the development of the markers of 'internal questions' (i.e., monologual interrogatives) has been investigated. More recently, Koo and Rhee (2019) analyzed the self-quoted questions developing into grammatical markers, and Rhee (2019a) extended the focus to diverse 'fake quotations' and 'feigned questions' and analyzed their development from a grammaticalization perspective. Noteworthy advancements notwithstanding, a comprehensive treatment of MQCCs has not yet been attempted.

III. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In order to facilitate the discussion of the development of MQCCs, a brief explanation on a few issues is in order, i.e., typology, sentence enders, and complementation in general. Typologically, Korean is an agglutinating, head-final, SOV, suffixal, non-tonal, and postpositional language (see Rhee, 2020, for detailed information on typological profiles of

Korean). Multiple suffixes and postpositions may stack and occupy slots of relatively fixed order. Argument NPs are often omitted and may occur without postpositional particles, and interpretive flexibility thus created often affects or even triggers reanalysis resulting in grammaticalization. Finite verbs are marked for tense, aspect, mood, and modality, whereas non-finite verbs are marked with converb-markers, also known as connectives, linkers, adverbializers, and non-finite markers, whose main function is adverbializing a non-finite verb (Bisang, 1995; Haspelmath, 1995; Haspelmath & König, 1995). Among the converb-markers, numbering about 26 (Hatcher, 2013), *-e/a* and *-ko*, both denoting ‘and’, are the most productively used forms, the former with more ‘consolidating’ effect on the described events combined (e.g., ‘hit and break’ for ‘destroy’) and the latter with more ‘isolating’ effect (e.g., ‘sleep and go’ for ‘sleep and then depart’) (Koo, 1987; Rhee, 2007). The final slot of the finite-verb morphology is occupied by the sentence-type marker, i.e., one signaling the type of the speech-act (see below).

Korean has an impressive inventory of sentence-type markers, known as ‘sentence-enders’, i.e., those signaling the speech-act of the clause, such as declarative, imperative, interrogative, hortative (propositive), promissive, exclamative, etc. (Rhee, 2020, p. 594). The sentence-type markers are modulated by the degree of honorification-politeness via an elaborate system of honorification, known as *hwakye* ‘speech-level’, partly illustrated in Table 1.

TABLE 1
SENTENCE-ENDERS (SOHN, 1999, P. 355, MODIFIED)

	Declarative	Interrogative	Imperative	Propositive
a. Plain	<i>-(n)ta</i>	<i>-ni?/-nunya?</i>	<i>-ela/-ala</i>	<i>-ca</i>
b. Intimate	<i>-e/-a</i>	<i>-e?/-a?</i>	<i>-e/-a</i>	<i>-e/-a</i>
c. Familiar	<i>-ney</i>	<i>-na?/-nunka?</i>	<i>-key</i>	<i>-sey</i>
d. Blunt	<i>-(s)o</i>	<i>-(s)o?</i>	<i>-(u)o</i>	<i>-(u)psita</i>
e. Polite	<i>-eyo/-ayo</i>	<i>-eyo?/-ayo?</i>	<i>-eyo/-ayo</i>	<i>-eyo/-ayo</i>
f. Deferential	<i>-(su)pnita</i>	<i>-(su)pnikka?</i>	<i>-(u)sipsio</i>	<i>-(u)sipsita</i>
g. Neutral	<i>-(n)ta</i>	<i>-nunya?</i>	<i>-(u)la</i>	<i>-ca</i>

Even though Table 1 shows a complex system of honorification, the listed forms are only representative forms for each level and each speech act. A more comprehensive list is overwhelming. For instance, Kim (2001, pp. 147-151) lists 381 sentence-enders across speech-acts (see also Rhee & Koo, 2017; Yae et al., 2024). Furthermore, the inventory is still increasing since more sentence-enders emerge through insubordination, whereby former connectives develop into sentence-enders.

Korean has a number of constructions which involve reporting speech, thoughts and perceptions. These constructions have been grammaticalized into diverse functions. They belong to two broad types: direct quotation constructions or ‘quotatives’ (with the known author) and indirect quotation constructions or ‘reportatives’ (with unspecified author). Quotatives have a locution verb *ha-* ‘say’, indicating that the embedded clause is what was ‘said’. Reportatives involve complementizers (COMPs), which introduce an utterance being reported as the complement of a verb. Reportatives are complex constructions involving a sentence-ender (speech-act marker), a locution verb (‘say’), and a linker (converb marker). Contemporary Korean has many grammatical markers, whose origins are ultimately traceable to reportatives. Quotatives and reportatives are exemplified in the following constructed examples:

(1) a. Quotative (with a locution verb *ha-* ‘say’)

ku-nun atul-eykey “salangha-n-ta” ha-ko malha-yss-ta
 he-TOP son-to love-PRES-DEC say-CONV say-PST-DEC
 ‘He said to (his) son, “(I) love (you).”’

b. Reportative (with a declarative COMP *-tako*)

ku-nun atul-eykey salangha-n-tako malha-yss-ta
 he-TOP son-to love-PRES-COMP say-PST-DEC
 ‘He said to his son that he loved her.’

Historically, the declarative COMP *-tako* is a phonologically eroded form of *-ta-ha-ko* (bold-faced and underscored in [1a]), from which the locution verb *ha-* is lost. Since quotatives involve direct quotation, which is a finite clause, the finite verb of the embedded clause needs to be marked properly by the speech level. In contrast with quotatives, reportatives do not involve speech-level differences in the complement clause of the report: reportatives use COMPs to mark the complement and each speech-act has only one COMP. The COMP for declarative clause complement is *-tako* (and its allomorphic variant *-lako*), as shown in (1b). The COMP *-tako* is related to the sentence-ender *-ta*, the ‘audience-blind’ declarative ender (Koo & Rhee, 2013; Rhee & Koo, 2017), the same as the ‘neutral’ speech level in Table 1. In addition to declarative COMP *-tako* (and its variant *-lako*), there are COMPs for other speech acts: *-nyako* for interrogative, *-lako* for imperative, and *-cako* for hortative.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study uses a conceptual, qualitative research method supplemented by descriptive frequency analysis, and involves no experimentation. The data have been collected from diverse sources, including lexica, historical and contemporary corpora. In particular, two corpora are used as data sources. The Korean Historical Corpus is a 15-million-

word historical corpus consisting of the texts from the 15th century through the early 20th century. Contemporary Korean data have been collected from the Drama and Cinema Corpus, a 24-million-word corpus, consisting of 7,454 scenarios of dramas and cinemas dating from 1992 through 2015. All complementation constructions were retrieved from the corpora and hand-screened to select valid instances and they were classified according to their forms and functions.

V. RESULTS

From the data collection, a large number of complementation patterns have been identified. Among various constructions that take a clausal complement is a set of MQCCs, which involves self-quoted monological question in the form of direct quotation, i.e., one in which the main clause directly embeds the speaker's question as the complement (for a similar grammaticalization scenario, see Koo & Rhee, 2019). We will look into the morphosyntax of MQCCs, their functions, and their formal and functional extensions.

A. MQCC Morphosyntax

As briefly indicated above, MQCCs involve the speaker's self-quoted questions, i.e., monological interrogative sentences, which serve the role of complement of verbs of locution, cognition, and perception, e.g., *ha-* 'say', *siph-* 'think/suppose/want', *molu-* 'not know', *po-* 'see', etc. It has been widely known that these verbs tend to have unique complementation patterns across languages (e.g., Kirsner & Thompson, 1976; Van der Auwera, 1985, for perception verbs; van Bogaert, 2011; Long & Deng, 2022, for locution and cognition verbs). MQCCs in Korean carry a unique characteristic of using the 'audience-blind' interrogative enders *-nka*, *-na*, *-kka*, and *-ci*, which belong to a larger set of the audience-blind forms (Koo & Rhee, 2013; Rhee & Koo, 2017). Audience-blind interrogatives have been variously named as 'internal questions' (Lee, 1963; Ahn, 1964), 'internal speech' (Lee, 1986), 'indirect questions' (Lee, 1979; Lee, 1982a, 1982b) and 'monological questions' (Koo & Rhee, 2013). A MQCC involving a verb of cognition, *siph-* 'think; inclined to think' and a monological question ender (MQ) *-nka*, is shown in (2), with an analytic gloss in (2i) in addition to a grammaticalized gloss in (2ii):

- (2) MQCC (MQ: *-nka*; V: *siph-* 'think')
- | | | | |
|------|---|--------------|-------------------------------|
| | <i>icey</i> | <i>tutie</i> | <i>kaul-i-nkasiph-ta</i> |
| (i) | now | at.last | fall-be- <u>MQ think</u> -DEC |
| (ii) | | | fall-be- <u>CNJC</u> -DEC |
| (i) | '(I) think (asking myself), "Now, is it finally fall?"' | | |
| (ii) | 'It seems that it's finally fall.' | | |

Example (3) is a MQCC in which *-nka.siph-* carries the function of marking conjecture ('it seems', 'perhaps'), which grammaticalized from the string of a MQ (*-nka*) and a verb of cognition (*siph-* 'think'). The grammaticalization of this type of MQCCs proceeded to such an extent that contemporary speakers do not take the sentence analytically as in (2.i). A similar example involving different MQs (e.g., *-na*, *-nka*, *-ci*, etc.) and verbs (e.g., *po-* 'see' and *ha-* 'do, be, say'). It is to be noted that since the form is not taken analytically, the speaker is not likely to have said the monological question 'Now, is it finally fall?' to themselves. Therefore, the complement clauses in MQCCs are 'pseudo-self-quotations' that have not been uttered in reality.

MQCCs carry a number of unique traits in morphosyntax. It is noteworthy that there exists some discrepancy between the subject and the predicate in MQCCs. In other words, even though the cognition/locution/perception verbs in them are structurally the matrix-clause predicates, the matrix-clause subject ("I") typically does not, or often cannot, surface, i.e., the matrix clause is often subjectless. For instance, the thinker in (2) is only implicit. The surface subjects 'now' in (2) was originally the subject of a lower clause, thus the grammaticalization of MQCCs involved 'syntactic upgrading' (Heine et al., 1991; Rhee, 2014, 2022), commonly found in Korean grammaticalization episodes (see VI-C for more).

Another interesting morphosyntactic feature of MQCCs is that, unlike other clause-taking complement constructions, MQCCs are not compatible with COMPs, i.e., they cannot be converted into reportatives. For instance, the monological question-enders *-na*, *-nka*, *-kka* and *-ci* in MQCCs cannot be replaced by the interrogative COMP *-nyako* and retain the same meaning. This strongly suggests that the internal cohesion ('bondedness', 'coalescence', Lehmann, 2015, 1982) between the MQs and the verbs in MQCCs has reached to the point of inseparability through grammaticalization. The great extent of interlexical cohesion is also evident in that no material (notably a verb- or clause-modifying adverb) is allowed to be inserted between the two formants, such as 'truly' (for 'truly think') for (2).

Still another feature, though not applicable across the board, is the loss of morphosyntactic flexibility of the verb. The verb inflection is often highly restricted; MQCCs tend to be strongly tied to 'here and now' of the speech situation. For instance, most verbs in MQCCs are not inflected by tense, aspect, and modality. This feature is not uniformly applicable to all MQCC verbs, but the lack of morphosyntactic flexibility is also evident in that the *siph-* 'think' in (2) tolerates past-tense marking but not future-tense marking (see VI-B for more).

B. MQCC Functions

The primary functions of MQCCs are to mark conjecture and uncertainty. Since conjecture involves lack of certainty, the two functions are closely related. In the following, these two functions are discussed with examples.

(a). Conjecture

Questions inherently carry the indeterminacy meaning, supposedly from ‘absence of knowledge’, ‘desire to know’, ‘have reason to ask’, etc. associated with them. Inheriting such indeterminacy, monologal questions embedded in MQCCs developed into the markers of the notions related to it: ‘conjecture’ and ‘uncertainty’. The most common function of marking conjecture has been exemplified in the above in (2) but the conjectural function is not restricted to it; many combinations of monologal question markers and cognition/perception/locution verbs carry this function. For instance, the monologal question marker *-ci* and the cognition verb *siph-* ‘think’ form a MQCC with the conjectural function as shown in the following:

(3) Conjectural MQCC (MQ: *-ci*; V: *siph-* ‘think’)

- ku-ka tochakha-yss-ci siph-ta*
 (i) he-nom arrive-pst-MQ think-DEC
 (ii) arrive-pst-CNJC-DEC
 (i) ‘(I) think, “Did he arrive?”’
 (ii) ‘He may have arrived./ He seems to have arrived.’

Since illocutionary force of an interrogative speech-act makes little difference by the negative and affirmative polarity (cf., ‘Did he arrive?’ and ‘Didn’t he arrive?’), the monologal questions of either polarity seem to carry nearly identical, or at least very similar, meaning in some MQCCs, as illustrated below:

(4) Conjectural MQCC (MQ: *-na*; V: *siph-* ‘think’)

a. affirmative

- ku-ka tochakha-yss-na.siph-ta*
 he-NOM arrive-PST-CNJC-DEC
 ‘He seems to have arrived. (lit. I think, (asking myself) “Did he arrive?”)’

b. negative

- ku-ka tochakha-ci.anh-ass-na.siph-ta*
 he-NOM arrive-NEG-PST-CNJC-DEC
 ‘He seems to have arrived. (lit. I think, (asking myself) “Didn’t he arrive?”)’

(b). *Uncertainty*

Conjecture is indeterminate in nature and thus may involve variable degrees of certainty. Even though conjecture is typically highlighting some degree of certainty (e.g., ‘He seems to have arrived’), it may signal a very low degree of certainty, i.e., uncertainty (e.g., ‘He may come but it’s uncertain’). Despite the shared feature of indeterminacy, the two functions have distinct flavor and are treated as constituting different functional categories. The uncertainty-marking function of MQCCs is exemplified in the following examples:

(5) a. Uncertainty MQCC (MQ: *-na*; V: *molu-* ‘not know’)

- ku-ka o-na.molu-keyss-ta*
 he-nom come-UNC-FUT-DEC
 ‘He may be coming, but it is not certain if he is coming.’

b. Uncertainty MQCC (MQ: *-kka*; V: *siph-* ‘think’)

- ku-ka cengmal o-l-kka.siph-ta*
 he-nom really come-FUT-UNC-DEC
 ‘(I) am wondering if he is really coming; he may not.’

(c). *Variability in Degree of Certainty*

As discussed briefly above, the primary functions of MQCC are to signal conjecture and uncertainty. Different MQCCs have slightly different nuances and different degrees of perceived realizability or certainty. Obviously, the differences in nuances and the epistemic strengths are partly due to the semantics of the verbs and the context (cf. Heine, 2002). This is illustrated with the following set of examples involving different verbs, i.e., *po-* ‘see’, *siph-* ‘think’, and *molu-* ‘not know’ (note that the verb *molu-* ‘not know’ normally occurs with the future marker *-keyss-* without a future meaning):

- (6) a. *ku-ka cwuk-ess-na.po-ta* (< *po-* ‘see’)
 b. *ku-ka cwuk-ess-na.siph-ta* (< *siph-* ‘think’)
 c. *ku-ka cwuk-ess-na.molu-keyss-ta* (< *molu-* ‘not know’)
 he-NOM die-PST-CNJC-DEC
 a/b/c. ‘He seems to have died.’

All three examples can be translated as ‘He seems to have died’, but (6a) involving the verb *po-* ‘see’ signals the highest degree of perceived certainty, followed by (6b) involving the verb *siph-* ‘think’, and (6c) involving the verb *molu-* ‘not know’ signals the lowest degree of certainty (thus, highest degree of uncertainty). The reason for differential strengths between ‘see’, ‘think’, and ‘not know’ seems to be straightforward from the verbal semantics.

Another contributor to the variability is the context, i.e., the content of the monologal questions serving as a complement. For instance, if the complement question is unrealistic or plainly exaggerated, the degree of certainty encoded by the MQCC decreases. This is illustrated in the following contrast:

- (7) a. *ike-y cikum kkwum-i-nka.siph-ta*
 this-NOM now dream-be-CNJC-DEC
 ‘This seems to be a dream now.’
- b. *pakk-ey nwuka w-ass-nu-nka.siph-ta*
 outside-at someone:NOM come-PST-CR-CNJC-DEC
 ‘It seems that there is someone outside.’

In the examples above, both signal conjecture (e.g., ‘it seems...’), but (7a) is more unlikely, thus of a lower level of certainty or truthfulness, than (7b). Our knowledge tells us that the speaker of (7a) is not dreaming now if they are speaking to their interlocutor. However, the speaker makes their point that what is referred to is beyond realistic, by employing this MQCC. Seemingly trivial, this plays a rather important role; this has to do with the motivation for innovating MQCC. Having a ‘direct quotation’ (often imagined or exaggerated) as the complement of MQCCs creates a more dynamic and vivid flavor, as compared to the non-MQCC counterparts. It has been observed that Korean uses pseudo-quotations that, first used by the speaker’s desire for dramatization and expressivity, are grammaticalized into diverse functions, e.g., reason marker, concessive topic marker, pejorative topic marker, purposive marker, intention marker, and diverse stance markers (Rhee, 2019a, pp. 204-209; Rhee & Koo, 2020; see also Rhee, 2009, for development of certain adverbs through use of such pseudo-quotations).

C. Functional Extension of MQCC

As the main verb and its formal complement in MQCCs become syntagmatically and conceptually tighter, MQCCs acquire diverse functions that are even more removed from the quotative meanings of conjectural and uncertainty, such as diverse epistemic and emotional meanings. The development of new functions is a result of conceptual extension from conjecture and uncertainty through a selective focus on certain aspects of an event or state of affairs. These extended functions are evolutive functions from cognitive operations or are contextually-modified functions from the co-occurring markers (such as connectives). The extended functions may be of the endings (i.e., in the main clause) or of the connectives (i.e., in the non-main clause). New epistemic and emotional meanings include probability, doubt, apprehension, tentative intention, and emphasis.

(a). Probability

The probability-marking function emerges as the interlocutors pay attention to the realizability or likelihood of a described event or situation; it indicates that the speaker is inclined to affirm the proposition suggested by the monological question. For instance, when the speaker uses MQCCs involving the monological question “is it true?”, they indicate that its converted proposition (i.e., ‘it is true’) is probable (i.e., ‘it is probably true’). This function is exemplified in the following examples:

- (8) a. Probability MQCC (MQ: *-nka*; V: *po-* ‘see’)
ku-uy mal-i cengmal-i-nka.po-ta
 he-GEN word-NOM truth-be-PROB-DEC
 ‘What he says seems to be true.’
- b. Probability MQCC (MQ: *-nka*; V: *siph-* ‘think’)
ike-n eccelswueps-nun inyen-i-nka.siph-ta
 this-TOP be.unavoidable-ADN destiny-be-PROB-DEC
 ‘This seems to be an unavoidable destiny.’

(b). Dubitative

On the opposite side of the probability on the affirmative-negative spectrum is doubt, though not as extreme as negation. Evidently, this function of marking doubt and suspicion has grown out of the uncertainty function through increased negativity. MQCCs in this function signals that the speaker is inclined to doubt the proposition derived from the monological question. For instance, when the speaker uses MQCCs involving the monological question “will it rain?”, they indicate that its converted proposition (i.e., ‘it will rain’) is unlikely (i.e., ‘it is unlikely that it will rain’). This function is exemplified in the following example:

- (9) Dubitative MQCC (MQ: *-kka*; V: *siph-* ‘think’)
Ilen nal pi-ka o-l-kka.siph-ta
 this.kind day rain-NOM come-FUT-DUB-DEC
 ‘It is unlikely that it will rain on a day like this.’

(c). Apprehensional

Still another derived function is to mark apprehension. By using MQCC in this function the speaker signals that they are inclined to fear an event or situation related to the monological question. When the doubt or suspicion is intensified and the context involves an event that is likely to happen and undesirable (cf. Schultze-Berndt, 2015; Vuillermet, 2018; Yae et al., 2023), there emerges a new function of marking fear caused by it. For instance, when the speaker uses MQCCs

involving the monological question “is this the end of my luck?”, they indicate that its converted proposition (i.e., ‘it is the end of my luck’) is something that the speaker fears (i.e., ‘I’m afraid this is the end of my luck’). This function is exemplified in the following examples:

- (10) a. Apprehensional MQCC (MQ: *-nka*; V: *siph-* ‘think’)

ike-llo kkuth-i-nka.siph-ta
 this-with end-be-APPR-DEC
 ‘(I) am afraid that this is the dead-end.’

- b. Apprehensional MQCC (MQ: *-na*; V: *po-* ‘see’)

amwulayto cencayng-i na-lye-na.po-ta
 by.all.meanswar-NOM break-PURP-APPR-DEC
 ‘(I) am afraid a war might break out in all probability.’

This function may use either positive (‘is it?’) or negative (‘isn’t it?’) monological questions as complements, with no noticeable semantic distinction.

(d). *Tentative Intention*

A more recent development involves acquisition of conative meanings, i.e., marking the speaker’s tentative intention. The conceptual motivation of this development is straightforward: the speaker asks a question to themselves because they are thinking about it, and if it involves something to do, they are likely to pursue it. This intention, though, is tentative as it is indicated by a question not a statement. For instance, when the speaker uses MQCCs involving the monological question “should I quit the job?”, they indicate that its converted proposition (i.e., ‘I should quit the job’) is something they are considering doing, at least for the moment (i.e., ‘I may as well quit the job’). This function is exemplified in the following examples:

- (11) a. Tentative intentional MQCC (MQ: *-kka*; V: *siph-* ‘think’)

cikcang-ul kumantwu-l-kka.siph-ta
 job-ACC quit-FUT-INTN-DEC
 ‘I might as well quit the job.’

- b. Tentative intentional MQCC (MQ: *-kka*; V: *po-* ‘see’)

yehayng-ina ka-l-kka.po-ta
 travel-TEP go-FUT-INTN-DEC
 ‘I might as well go on a trip.’

(e). *Emphatic*

The last function extended from conjecture and uncertainty is that of emphasis. The motivation of this development may not be immediately clear, but it is related to the strategic use of a rhetorical question and hyperbolic negation. By a rhetorical question, the speaker signals that the answer is obvious and thus is not needed, and by a hyperbolic negation, the speaker is pushing the intensity to the maximum by claiming unknowability. This is illustrated by the following examples:

- (12) a. Emphatic MQCC (MQ: *-kka*; V: *po-* ‘see’)

ecci nay nala-lul ic-ul-kka.po-nya
 how my country-ACC forget-FUT-EMPH-Q
 ‘(I) never forget my country. (lit. Does it seem that I will..?)’

- b. Emphatic MQCC (MQ: *-nka*; V: *molu-* ‘not know’)

nalssi-ka elmana tewu-nka.molu-a
 weather-NOM how be.hot-EMPH-END
 ‘The weather is very hot. (lit. (I) don’t know how hot...)’

D. *Extended MQCCs*

As seen in the above, MQCCs started out as a complex sentence, in which the MQCC verb is the main predicate, i.e., it occurred as the part of a verbal morphology of a finite clause. In recent times, MQCCs have undergone, or been undergoing, structural extension in a number of ways. The most prominent changes are (i) becoming connectives by allowing connectives to follow them (note that the functional category of the final form of a periphrasis determines that of the entire construction), (ii) allowing non-MQ enders (i.e., regular question markers), and (iii) allowing non-Q enders (i.e., regular speech-act markers). The structural extension leads to functional extension as well into different, yet related, functions. The first type preserves the original characteristics of MQCCs, e.g., the use of MQ and the use of the verb of cognition, perception, or locution, the only difference being followed by a connective instead of a sentence-ender; the other two, on the other hand, depart from MQCCs by not using the MQ or not using a question ender.

(a). *Connectives*

MQCCs elaborated in 3.2 and 3.3 involve the verbs of cognition, perception, and locution that are the predicates of the main clause. But they may function as connectives by being hosted by another connective (i.e., converb) and thus occurring in subordinate clauses or coordinate clauses, depending on the recruited connective. The following is such an example, in which the MQCC is followed by a causality-marking connective *-ese* (or its variant *-yse*) and the whole construct *-nka.ha.yse* serves the function of a causal connective with a strong sense of possibility:

(13) Causal connective (MQ: *-nka*; V: *ha-* 'say'; CONN *-ese*: CAUSAL)

- kunye-ka o-nu-nka ha-yse manhi kitaly-ess-ta*
 (i) she-nom come-CR-Q say-CSL much wait-PST-DEC
 (ii) come-CR-CSL
 (i) 'Because (I) said (to myself), 'Is she coming?', (I) waited long.'
 (ii) '(I) waited long because she might be coming.'

Example (13) involves the monologal question ender *-nka* and the verb of locution *ha-* 'say', which together form a MQCC, which, in turn, is followed by the causal connective *-yse*. The function of marking causality with a strong sense of possibility is compositional directly inheriting 'possibility' from the MQCC and 'causality' from the connective. Similarly, another MQCC-based connective, i.e., circumstantial connective, is built on the circumstantial/causal connective *-ni* 'as it happens to be', as shown in the following:

(14) Circumstantial connective (MQ: *-kka*; V: *ha-* 'say'; CONN *-ni*: CIRCUMSTANTIAL)

- myengphwum.payk-ul sa-l-kka.ha-ni ton-i mocala-n-ta*
 luxury.brand.bag-ACC buy-FUT-CIRC money-NOM be.short-PRES-DEC
 'As it happens (I) don't have enough money to buy a luxury-brand bag.'

There are cases, however, whose newly acquired functions are not transparently deducible from the function of the connective that is recruited. For instance, the general consolidating connective *-a/e* 'and' is involved in the development of an apprehensional connective ('for fear of; fearing that; lest') and the conditional connective *-myen* (similarly with the circumstantial connective *-ni* in [14]) is involved in the development of a topic-presentation connective ('as for'), as exemplified below:

(15) a. Apprehensional connective (MQ: *-kka*; V: *po-* 'see'; CONN *-a/e*: CONSOLIDATOR)

- moki-eykey mwulli-l-kka.po.a pakk-ey mos naka-keyss-ta*
 mosquito-to be.bitten-FUT-APPR outside-to cannot go.out-FUT-DEC
 'Fearing that I might be bitten by mosquitoes, I can't go outside.' (Rhee, 2019b, p. 108)

b. Topic-presentation connective (MQ: *-nka*; V: *ha-* 'say'; CONN *-myen*: CONDITIONAL)

- keki-ka eti-nka.ha.myen nay kohyang-i-ta*
 there-NOM where-TOP my hometown-be-DEC
 'As for the place (lit. if (one) asks "Where is there?"), that is my hometown.'

(b). Extension to non-MQ Enders

Formal extension of MQCC also occurred with the question enders that are not used in monologal questions, e.g., *-nya* and *-lya*, the latter inherently futuristic (related to the archaic future marker *-li-*). For instance, a new connective *-nya.siph.key* [Q.think.CONN] functions as a hypothetical simulative marker ('as if'), and a new connective *-lya.siph.e* [Q.think.CONN] functions as a marker of cause or reason, as exemplified below:

(16) a. Simulative connective (Q: *-nya*; V: *siph-* 'think'; CONN *-key*: MANNER)

- encey nanli-ka na-ss-nu-nya.siph.key hankalow-un mosup-i-ta*
 when war-NOM occur-PST-CR-SIM be.idyllic-ADN appearance-be-DEC
 'It appears to be idyllic as if the war did not break out. (lit. '... in a manner of asking "When did a war break out?")'

b. Causal connective (Q: *-lya*; V: *siph-* 'think'; CONN *-e/a*: CONSOLIDATOR)

- encey tto po-lya.siph.e setwulle po-le ka-ss-ta*
 when again see-CSL hurriedly see-PURP go-PST-DEC
 '(I) hurriedly went to see (him) because I might not see him again. (lit. '... thinking, "When will I see (him) again?")'

(c). Extension to non-Q Enders

More recently, there occurred the structural extension to non-question enders, e.g., declarative, infinitive, and transferentive. Declarative sentence-ender is used for statements and infinitive is for verbal roots. Transferentive is a unique connective signaling a sudden change of scenes (e.g., 'from studying to falling asleep', 'from walking to being run over', etc.). New functions that arise from the extension are many and varied, including causal, circumstantial, transferentive, simulative, etc. The causal connective function is illustrated by the following:

(17) a. Causal connective (END: DECLARATIVE; V: *siph-* 'think'; CONN *-e/a*: CONSOLIDATOR)

- khunil na-keyss-ta.siph.e ellun ku cali-lul ttena-ss-ta*
 big.trouble occur-FUT-CSL quickly that spot-ACC leave-PST-DEC

‘I quickly left the place because a big trouble might occur. (lit. ... thinking, “A big trouble will occur.”)’

- b. Causal connective (END: TRANSFERENTIVE; V: *po-* ‘see’; CONN *-ni*: CAUSAL)

ton-i *eps-tu.po.ni* *maum-to* *wichwuktoy-n-ta*
money-NOM not.exist-CSL mind-also get.disspirited-PRES-DEC

‘Since (I) don’t have money, I become even daunted at heart. (lit. ... seeing, “There is no money.”)’ (Rhee, 2019b, p. 109)

VI. DISCUSSION

Based on the description of MQCCs and their formal and functional relatives, we will discuss a few issues of theoretical importance, e.g., developmental patterns, grammaticalization parameters, pragmatic operations, and conceptual network.

A. Structural Patterns

In the preceding sections, structural and functional characteristics of MQCCs and their extended forms were elaborated. Individual forms have their own complex developmental paths, and thus the developmental patterns cannot be mapped in a streamlined, step-by-step fashion for individual cases. Despite the complexity, overall patterns are observable from historical and contemporary data. Even though not every MQCC or its extension could be elaborated, the constructions’ patterns of MQ/converb and the verb can be summarized as in Tables 2 and 3.

TABLE 2
MAIN-CLAUSE USAGE

MQ	<i>ha-</i> ‘say’	<i>siph-</i> ‘think’	<i>po-</i> ‘see’	<i>molu-</i> ‘not know’
<i>-nka</i>	<i>-nka.ha-</i>	<i>-nka.siph-</i>	<i>-nka.po-</i>	<i>-nka.molu-</i>
<i>-na</i>	<i>-na.ha-</i>	<i>-na.siph-</i>	<i>-na.po-</i>	<i>-na.molu-</i>
<i>-kka</i>	<i>-kka.ha-</i>	<i>-kka.siph-</i>	<i>-kka.po-</i>	<i>-kka.molu-</i>
<i>-ci</i>		<i>-ci.siph-</i>		<i>-ci.molu-</i>

TABLE 3
NON-MAIN CLAUSE USAGE

CONV	<i>ha-</i> ‘say’	<i>siph-</i> ‘think’	<i>po-</i> ‘see’	<i>molu-</i> ‘not know’
<i>-e/a</i> (consolidator)	<i>-na.ha-e</i>	<i>-nka.siph-e</i> <i>-na.siph-e</i> <i>-lya.siph-e</i> <i>-ta.siph-e</i>	<i>-kka.po-a</i> <i>-na.po-a</i>	<i>-ci.molu-a</i> <i>-na.molu-a</i>
<i>-ese/ase</i> (sequential)	<i>-na.ha-ese</i>	<i>-nka.siph-ese</i> <i>-na.siph-ese</i> <i>-lya.siph-ese</i> <i>-ta.siph-ese</i>	<i>-nka.po-ase</i> <i>-kka.po-ase</i>	<i>-ci.molu-ase</i> <i>-nka.molu-ase</i> <i>-kka.molu-ase</i>
<i>-ni</i> (causal)	<i>-kka.ha-ni</i> <i>-nka.ha-ni</i>	<i>-nka.siph-te-ni</i> <i>-na.siph-te-ni</i>	<i>-ta.po-ni</i>	<i>-ci.molu-ni</i> <i>-na.molu-ni</i>
<i>-key</i> (manner)		<i>-nya.siph-key</i>		
<i>-i</i> (manner)		<i>-ta.siph-i</i>		
<i>-ko</i> (coordinator)	<i>-na.ha-ko</i> <i>-kka.ha-ko</i> <i>-nka.ha-ko</i>			<i>-ci.molu-ko</i>

Tables 2 and 3 show a few notable characteristics. The original MQCC structures are evenly spread across the MQs and the verbs (apart from individual form’s strengths reflected in frequency of use), with an exception of *-ci*. The reason for the more restrictive nature of *-ci* is not immediately clear, but it may be partly due to the fact that the *-ci* in Modern Korean specializes in occurring in negative sentences, marked by either morphologically marked (by *an* ‘not’ or *mos* ‘cannot’) or lexically marked (by *molu-* ‘not know’). Its use in a non-negative context is only the MQCC usage. This means that in a grammatical paraphrase, a participating form’s lexical or morphological characteristics may affect its distributional patterns of the whole construct.

Another characteristic is that in extension to non-main clause usage, the most frequently utilized converbs are the consolidator *-e/a* ‘and’ and the sequential *-ese/ase* ‘and then’, across all verb types. This is likely due to the fact that these converbs present an event and signals that there is something else after that (from the ‘and’ and ‘then’ meanings), which triggers evocation of diverse relationships between the events or states sequentially linked by them, e.g., causal, apprehensional, etc. In this respect, the other converbs, marking cause and manner, can be said to be too restrictive and do not leave much room for inferences, hence less diverse functions.

B. Grammaticalization Parameters

In grammaticalization research, a number of mechanisms, principles and parameters have been proposed (notably, Lehmann, 2015, 1982; Heine et al., 1991; Hopper, 1991; Bybee et al., 1994; Kuteva et al., 2019; Khammee, 2024, among others). The four parameters proposed in Kuteva et al. (2019) are desemanticization, extension, decategorialization, and erosion. In the following, we will briefly discuss each of these.

Desemanticization refers to loss in meaning content, or semantic bleaching. The major target of desemanticization is a lexical item such as nouns and verbs. MQCCs involve verbs as the major contributor of lexical meaning. It is evident that the verb meanings have been considerably bleached, to the point of classifying some uses of those verbs, e.g., *po-* ‘see’, *siph-* ‘think’, and *ha-* ‘say/do/be’ as adjectives in dictionaries. Desemanticization with *siph-* is extensive: it meant ‘think’ in historical times but now its meaning is similar to ‘be inclined to think’ (Rhee, 2021). In MQCCs, *siph-* does not have the cogitation meaning but signals that the speaker has a situationally motivated reason to think, hence, conjecture. Similarly, the verb *po-* generally means ‘see’ (which inflects), as a transitive verb, but also means ‘seem’ (which does not inflect), as an intransitive verb. Hence, the lack of perceptive action meaning led to its classification as an adjective by lexicographers. Desemanticization is observable not only with lexical forms but also with grammatical forms, i.e., MQs. The question meaning associated with the audience-blind question markers has been completely lost in MQCCs. Only the notion of indeterminacy associated with questions survived in the uncertainty meaning in MQCCs.

Extension, also known as context generalization, refers to use in new contexts. MQCCs started out as genuine quotative constructions, i.e., syntactic constructions, but their usage was extended to non-quotative contexts. Also, MQCCs were part of the main clause predicates, but their usage has been extended to subordinate clause predicates.

Decategorialization refers to loss in morphosyntactic properties characteristic of lexical or other less grammaticalized forms (Kuteva et al., 2019). A notable instance of decategorialization is observed with the verb *po-* ‘see’, which, as briefly indicated above, lost its transitive verb features of taking the experiencer and the theme as its arguments. Likewise, the verbs *siph-* ‘think’ and *ha-* ‘say, do, be’ have lost much of their categorial features (and meaning). Some of these changes occurred in the history of Korean as a general process, not restricted to MQCC, but since changes are cumulative and intertwined in mutual feeding relationships, the change that occurred in MQCCs may have contributed to the general change of those verbs.

Erosion, or phonetic reduction, refers to loss in phonetic substance. MQCCs are periphrases, involving the MQ and the verb (and historically a tense marker), and are written with inter-lexical spacing between them according to the orthographic rules. Phonological erosion of MQCCs is not visible in writing, even though erosion of grammaticalized forms, in general, is frequently observed for the agglutinating nature of Korean. Despite the conservative nature of normative writing, there is a clue suggesting erosion of the forms in MQCCs in popular writing. The interrogative marker (i.e., the final element of the complement) and the matrix verbs of locution, cognition, and perception have strong internal bondedness, and the string (along with further suffixes attached later) behaves as fully ‘univerbated’ single grammatical morphemes. Due to the increase of internal cohesion and desemanticization of the verb, they are often written without lexical spacing in popular writing. This strongly suggests that they have lost, or are losing, the autonomy of the participating forms. A more subtle type of erosion, also not observable in writing, is that since MQCCs have acquired grammatical meaning, they do not carry phonological salience (e.g., they are not stressed). Thus, MQCCs arguably have undergone some erosion, but still the level of erosion is minimal.

C. Pragmatic Operations

Grammaticalization of MQCCs involves some pragmatic operations, which may have triggered or facilitated the process, such as discourse motivation, reinterpretation, reanalysis and analogy. We now turn to a discussion of each of these.

There is no conclusive motivation for innovation of MQCCs, but considering the source structures, we can make reasonable guesses as to the motivation. Monologual question complements characterize a ‘dialogue’ between the speaking self and the thinking/hearing self (Koo & Rhee, 2019; Rhee & Koo, 2020). This type of feigned interactivity makes a text more dramatic and vivid as compared to the texts that do not employ such rhetorical devices (cf. Rhee, 2025). There are many instances of grammaticalization that resulted from strategic or feigned interactivity for dramatic effect (Rhee, 2009, 2014, 2019; Koo & Rhee, 2019; Rhee & Koo, 2020, among others).

The innovation of multiple paradigms from a syntactic construction is largely due to analogy, pragmatic inferencing, and functional reinterpretation. The MQCC functions can be said to exist in the configuration of juxtaposed clauses (note that the source construction and the grammaticalized MQCC do not show differences in surface form). Therefore, this grammaticalization involves no formal changes with observable trajectories but functional reinterpretation of existing forms. The most prominent reinterpretation is observable in syntactic upgrading briefly mentioned in V-A. The original matrix verb has lost its main verb status; and the verb in the embedded complement clause has become the main verb. This process seems to have been facilitated by the syntactic idiosyncrasy of a pro-drop language, i.e., argument omissibility. This is shown in Figure 1, in which the complement clause subject (‘he’) becomes the main clause subject (instead of the implicit ‘I’) and the complement clause predicate (‘die’) becomes the main clause predicate (instead of ‘see’).

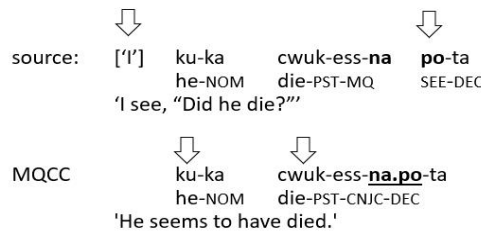


Figure 1. MQCC and Syntactic Upgrading

Another significant pragmatic operation is analogy. Describing the complex history of MQCCs is beyond our scope, but a rough diachronic development is as follows. Historical records suggest that the functions of the oldest MQCC forms, which involved MQs *-kka* and *-nka* (in their historical variant forms), may have been the model of the later MQCCs (involving the MQs *-ci* and *-na*). The earliest occurrence patterns of the MQCC involved the locution verb *ha-* ‘say’ (which, being a light verb, also had the meanings of ‘do, be, make’), which occurred with the MQs *-ka/-ko* in Old Korean, the predecessors of *-kka* and *-nka* (cf. Ko, 2011, pp. 89-90) (note that MQ *-ko* is a moribund state in contemporary Korean). In Early Middle Korean, MQCCs additionally use the verbs of cognition and emotion, e.g., *cehu-* ‘worry’ (which, however, fell into disuse). This negative context seems to have contributed to the emergence of apprehensional functions (cf. Rhee & Kuteva, 2026). In Late Middle Korean, MQCCs additionally use the perception verb *po-* ‘see’ (15th century), cognition verbs *siph-* ‘think’ (16th century) and *molu-* ‘not know’ (17th century), etc. It is likely from this observation that the extension has been enabled by the analogy based on semantic and structural affinities between the earliest model of [MQ + ‘say’] (*-ka/ko.ha-*) ‘say, asking oneself’ and the innovated forms with different MQs and verbs.

D. Conceptual Networks

Since MQCC functions are results of conceptual extension through inferencing and the changes are not discrete but gradient, they form a conceptual network or a semantic map (Narrog & Ito, 2007; Narrog, 2010), as shown in Figure 2.

Recapitulating the discussion in preceding sections, the core functions of MQCCs are to mark conjecture and uncertainty in the main clause. Later functions in the main clause include signaling probability, doubt, suspicion, intention, apprehension, and emphasis. When MQCCs recruited connectives (converbs), they also became periphrastic connectives marking apprehension, cause, circumstantiality, scene transfer, and topic presentation. When the MQCCs are extended to structures involving non-MQ forms, they begin to mark similarity, cause, and scene transfer. These functions are conceptually closely related, and some of them are strongly influenced by the functions of the newly recruited markers.

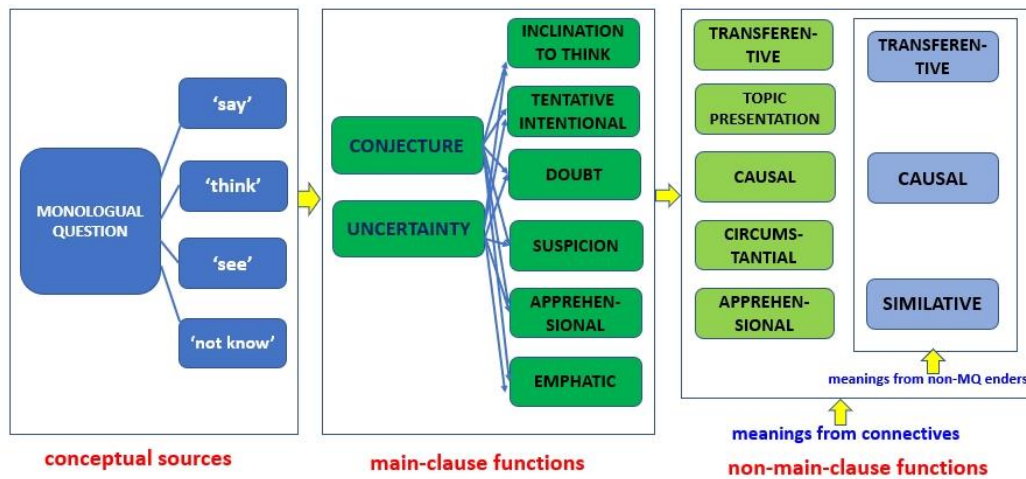


Figure 2. Functional-Conceptual Network of MQCCs

VII. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Korean has a number of monologal question complementation constructions (MQCCs), developed from monologal question enders (*-nka*, *-kka*, *-na*, and *-ci*) and verbs of locution, cognition, and perception (‘say’, ‘think’, ‘not know’, and ‘see’). Direct quotations of monologal questions served as the verbal complement, but soon the interrogative meanings disappeared. The indeterminacy meaning (from ‘absence of knowledge’, ‘desire to know’, ‘have reason to ask’, etc.) associated with monologal questions transformed into the meanings of ‘conjecture’ and ‘uncertainty’, which were the earliest functions of MQCCs.

MQCCs also developed diverse functions through the conceptual and pragmatic processes. New epistemic and emotional meanings of MQCCs include possibility, doubt, suspicion, tentative intention, apprehension, emphasis, etc. As

MQCCs became extended by allowing non-MQs and recruiting connectives, they became part of periphrastic connectives and acquired diverse meanings, often with the semantic contribution of the participating connectives, e.g., apprehension, cause, circumstantial, transferentive, topic presentation, similitive, etc.

The patterns of formal and functional extension as attested in historical data suggest that certain forerunner forms (MQ-forms *-nka* and *-kka* and the locution verb *ha-* ‘say’) served as the model of analogy based on structural and semantic affinities between the model and the later innovative forms.

APPENDIX

ABF: audience-blind form; ACC: accusative; ADD: addressee; ADN: adnominalizer; APPR: apprehensional; CIRC: circumstantial; CNJC: conjectural; COMP: complementizer; CONN: connective; CONV: converb; CSL: causal; DEC: declarative; DUB: dubitative; EMPH: emphatic; END: sentence-ender; FUT: future; GEN: genitive; HON: honorific; HUM: humilitive; INTN: intentional; MQ: monologual question marker; MQCC: monologual-question complement construction; NEG: negative; NOM: nominative; NOMZ: nominalizer; PERF: perfective; PLUP: pluperfect; PRES: present; PST: past; PURP: purposive; Q: question; SIML: similitive; SPK: speaker; SUBJ: subject; SUSP: suspicion; TAM: tense-aspect-modality; TOP: topic; TP: topic presentation; TRNS: transferentive; UNC: uncertain

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