

Teaching Korean *Cosa* to Native Speakers of Bulgarian: Preliminary Notes

Spas Rangelov
(SOAS, University of London)
rangelovsa@yahoo.com

This paper examines some preliminary issues of teaching the grammar of Korean *cosa* and the Korean nominal phrase as a whole to learners of Korean whose native language is Bulgarian, a language that is quite different both typologically and socio-culturally from Korean.

Traditionally, and indeed justifiably, the structure and the properties of the verbs and the verb forms have received somewhat more attention in the literature on Korean grammar than the structure of the nouns and the noun phrases, although recently that seems to be changing. Bulgarian learners also have been impressed and attracted to the rich conjugation system of Korean verbs, their numerous regular and irregular forms, their intriguing impact on the morphosyntax of Korean and the overall implications of the complicated verb structure for Korean grammar.

Nonetheless, Korean nouns and Korean noun phrases possess features that make them not less interesting for exploration. Here we will try to examine the implications of the complex structure of the Korean nominal phrase for the teaching of some Korean *cosa* to learners of Korean in practical foreign-language course for adult learners at an early level, i.e. the challenges facing both students and teachers when the meanings and the functions of Korean language units have to be explained to someone whose linguistic background is different from Korean.

1. What *cosa* are and how they are understood

Korean *cosa* are functional elements that are attached to the head, or the main substantive, of the nominal phrase, or to a *cosa* already attached to it. They are bound forms, i.e. they cannot be used separately; they only appear attached to nouns or noun-*cosa* complexes. They show the role of the nominal phrase in the syntactic structure of the sentence. Some *cosa* mark the role of the nominal phrase in the argument structure of the predicate of the sentence (e.g. 이/가 **i/ka**, 을/를 **ul/lul**); some are used to mark the nominal phrase as modifier within a complex nominal phrase (의 **uy**); some mark the nominal phrase as an adjunct in the structure of the sentence (e.g. 예 **ey**, 에서 **eyse**, (으)로 **(u)lo**, 까지 **kkaci**). Their word-order place is very strict: they always follow the head of the nominal phrase. The head of the nominal phrase in Korean always follows its modifiers. Due to the strict word order inside the Korean nominal phrase they are always post-positioned, hence some authors call them postpositions or postpositional particles. For other authors, some of the *cosa* are postpositions, a term they use symmetrically with the term preposition (usually uniting prepositions and postpositions into “adpositions”) and some are not. The ones that are not regarded as postpositions are called case markers. There is also an issue regarding the predicating formative 이다 **ita**: for a lot of Korean researchers it is a “predicative case *cosa*”, while for a lot of non-Korean researchers it is not a *cosa* at all, but something else (a copula, an auxiliary verb, etc).

It is not always clear which *cosa* are grouped as case markers and which *cosa* are the postpositions. The existing classifications are quite contradictory. There seems to be a consensus on two *cosa* though, namely 이/가 **i/ka** and 을/를 **ul/lul**. They are almost always treated as case

markers. As for some others, like 예 **ey**, 예게 **eykey**, 예서 **eyse**, (으)로 **(u)lo**, there seems to be disagreement: for some authors they are case markers, for others they are just postpositions. There are authors for whom some of the usages of a single *cosa* count as a case marker, and other usages group the *cosa* with the postpositions. There are also authors who even talk about homonymous case markers, e.g. the nominative case marker 이/가 **i/ka** and the complement case marker 이/가 **i/ka** (Nam, Ko 1985 and others). In the following sentence the first occurrence of i/ka is a nominative case marker and the second is a complement case marker:

네가 벌써 어른이 되었구나.

Ney ka pelsse elun i toy.esskwuna.

you NOM already adult COMPL become.PAST.EXCL

You have grown up!

Distinctions have been made in the theoretical linguistic literature between syntactic case markers and semantic case markers (e.g. Park 1995), which complicates the matter of *cosa* classification even further. It is only normal for Korean *cosa* to receive such controversial treatment. One of the reasons is that morphologically and syntactically all *cosa* share quite a lot of similarities, while semantically they are quite diverse: some of them function at the interface of syntax and semantics which is unusual for most case markers and adpositions of the traditionally well studied languages. For example in languages like German and Russian the syntactic positions as well as the functions of case endings and prepositions are quite distinct from each other and more or less clearly definable. It is also normal there to exist a controversy about the number of the case markers in Korean, just like across languages where the case

endings are well defined the number of cases and the number of functions they cover can vary from language to language. This is quite obvious if we compare, for example, Latin, Russian and German. We can say that Korean *cosa* have organized and codified in morphologically similar structures quite diverse categories from the syntactic, semantic and information structures of the grammatical constructions. This is just another manifestation of the arbitrariness of organizing and codifying language categories into morphological units that is observed across languages.

2. Korean *cosa* for the major groups of Bulgarian learners of Korean

In Bulgaria Korean is studied almost exclusively at the Sofia University's Centre for Oriental Languages and Cultures, where Korean language courses were initiated for the first time in Bulgaria in 1992. The students who study Korean intensively at the Korean philology section are supposed to have mastered at least one of the following foreign languages: English, French, German, Russian, Spanish and Italian. That is part of the entry requirements. There are also courses of Korean as a second Oriental language for students that major in one of the other Asian languages taught at the Centre, including Turkish, Arabic, Hindi, Persian, Chinese, Japanese.

For Bulgarians who study Korean *cosa* are something that is not similar to any word or morpheme class in their native language. Bulgarian, uniquely among Slavic languages, does not possess a declension of nouns. Also, Bulgarian exclusively uses prepositions rather than postpositions. It

is true that some Korean postpositions correspond semantically to some Bulgarian prepositions but that is not much help when it comes to the *cosa* that usually have to be studied first and that are among the most discussed in the literature, namely 이/가 **i/ka**, 을/를 **ul/lul**, 은/는 **un/nun**, 도 **to**, 의 **uy**. The difficulties come not only from the meaning of these *cosa* but also from the idiosyncrasies of their usage. It is hard to find precise parallels even among languages that have postpositions and are also studied in Bulgaria. For example Turkish and Hindi have both postpositions and post-positioned case endings but they have nothing paralleling 이/가 **i/ka** or 은/는 **un/nun**, or the *cosa*-dropping phenomena that Korean has. Although Korean is sometimes said to be genetically related to the Turkic languages within an “Altaic family”, there seem to be only typological similarities. By the way, it is interesting to note that Korean has a lot of typological similarities with Hindi and Persian as well (see also Rangelov 1997 among others), although Hindi and Persian are Indo-European languages and in theory are genetically as distant from Korean as, say, Dutch or Albanian.

One interesting feature of Korean *cosa* that learners who have studied languages like Hindi and Turkish notice is that when there are both case markers and postpositions on the same noun (phrase) in Hindi and Turkish the case markers are closer to the noun base than the postpositions. In fact, in these languages (as well as in languages with prepositions like Russian and German) the case markers are perceived as an integral part of the noun that cannot be omitted. In Russian, for instance, the nominal endings are polysemantic simple (i.e. morphologically simple, semantically complex) morphemes that cannot be dropped. They contain information not only about the case but also about the number, the gender and the declension type of the noun. In Korean, typically for functional morphemes in

agglutinative languages, *cosa* are normally monosemantic: they contain information about a single category.

When there is *cosa* stacking on a noun (phrase) the postpositions are closer to the noun base than the case markers. Also, in Korean the case marking *cosa* could be quite often omitted, seemingly without any major syntactic or semantic consequence.

The only strikingly similar parallel to Korean *cosa* are the Japanese *joshi*. They are similar in all ways: phonologically, morphologically, syntactically, semantically, in the information structure. There are also direct parallels in the individual *cosa* and the constructions they are used with the Japanese *joshi* and the respective constructions. Despite some differences, it is easy to classify *cosa* and *joshi* into parallel phenomena. It is obviously not a coincidence that besides being typologically extremely similar to Korean, Japanese is also one of the closest geographical neighbours of the Korean language. For Bulgarian learners of Korean who have already studied Japanese the nature of *cosa* is not a problem; in fact some students report interference of *cosa* and *joshi* in production, presumed to be due to the multiple parallels (personal communication).

For most Bulgarian learners though, including first-year Korean philology students, *cosa* is a new and exotic phenomenon that has to be studied carefully and extensively in order to be fully understood.

3. Morphological status of Korean *cosa* in the context of teaching Korean as a foreign language

The morphological status of Korean *cosa* is important for the understanding of their nature. Are they suffixes? Are they inflection? Are they clitics? The general theoretical works have not yet provided a

satisfactory account that could easily incorporate them into a universally recognized grouping, which has been done for functional words in other languages (e.g. Klavans 1985, Bybee 1985, Comrie 1981, Croft 2003 and numerous other works on similar topics).

The analysis of the morphological status of *cosa* within certain theoretical frameworks has proved to be quite complicated and inconclusive. They have a lot of features that are typical of suffixes but at the same time there are strong arguments against treating them as (inflectional) suffixes. They do possess a lot of characteristics that are usually associated with clitics but at the same time few theoreticians have made a strong case for Korean *cosa*, or Japanese *joshi* for that matter, to be treated as a specific groups of clitics although that seems to be a very appropriate classification at least for some of them. There are a lot of good descriptions of their meaning and usage (including Martin 1954, Martin 1992, Lee 1989, O'Grady 1991, Lee and Ramsey 2000, Yeon 2003).

Whatever their morphological status from a theoretical point of view, we obviously need a convenient label for them for the practical task of teaching Korean as a foreign language to people who want to master the language for very practical and utilitarian purposes rather than reach theoretical insights into the linguistic description of the language. That need is immediate and has to be met urgently for very practical purposes. With respect to that need, it is irrelevant whether theoretical linguistics is ready to supply an accurate term or a conclusive description. Applied linguistics often makes use of provisional and convenient concepts dictated by its immediate practical necessities.

As for Korean *cosa*, it seems that there is a consensus already reached indirectly in the literature on the subject, mainly textbooks and grammar books for students of Korean as a foreign language. The "term" that has

been widely used for some time, and has obviously been borrowed from the already vast literature on Japanese as a foreign language, is “particles”. It is convenient and at the same time comprehensible enough for most learners and provides an almost immediate access to some of the external features of Korean *cosa*. As every makeshift “term” though, it has the ability to conceal as much as to reveal about the object or phenomenon it has come to signify. That is why one should be careful in using the received “term” in contexts different from the specific field of applied linguistics, namely teaching and studying Korean as a foreign language. Using it outside that context to signify the “concept” bears the risk, especially when used in text purported to belong to theoretical linguistics, to make the wrong assumption that we are dealing with an actual term and a well defined concept, which is not the case. The word “particle” for a Korean *cosa* is not a real term but rather a convenient label, a skilful means, an *upaya* expedient, that was almost randomly chosen, albeit with a wide consensus, for the practical purpose of naming a specific phenomenon in the Korean language in the context of teaching Korean to foreign-language learners, not an actual linguistic term that has a scientific definition within the theoretical description of a single language or cross-linguistically. Of course, we should acknowledge that the words *joshi* and *cosa* do come from theoretical descriptions by Japanese and Korean scholars within certain theoretical frameworks. In fact *cosa* (조사 助詞) is the Korean equivalent of the Japanese *joshi* (助詞 ジョシ), that was introduced by Japanese scholars describing the Japanese language and identifying an ‘auxiliary word class’ among other word classes called *shi* (詞 シ). The word *cosa* has some theoretical value and consequently it is not random. That is one of the reasons we would rather use ‘*cosa*’ and ‘*joshi*’ than the word “particle” or even “functional particle”. In the

Korean-language literature on Korean grammar there is another word that is sometimes used with basically the same meaning as *cosa*: the “native” Korean word *tho* (토). It is preferred by some authors, especially in present-day North Korean writing, thus avoiding the “foreign” word. After all, “*joshi/cosa*” is a *Hancha* word originally coined in the Japanese language from Classical Chinese language elements (Chinese morphemes). The word *tho* could also be ambiguous outside the concrete context that it is being used in: often it is just used to signify any “auxiliary morpheme”, including verbal suffixes. In these cases it is simply synonymous with the broad term “(functional) formative”. The problem with these words/terms is that they are too language-specific and their meaning and overall theoretical significance is extremely limited compared to the contemporary efforts of general linguistics to deal with concepts that have cross-linguistic and even universal validity. Still, the terms *joshi* and *cosa*, along with *tho*, could be well utilized in the description of Japanese and Korean, including in comparative/contrastive studies of the two languages.

Using the word *cosa* in the explanations of Korean grammar to beginning students of Korean, even when the explanation is given in Bulgarian, i.e. using the word “чоча/*chosa*” in the Bulgarian discourse on Korean grammar, has many advantages. Firstly, the exotic word draws attention to the peculiar character of these functional words or morphemes that do not have direct parallels in Bulgarian. Secondly, by using the language-specific word, a major confusion is avoided with other potential usages of the word “particle”, or “частица/*chastica*”, regarding other languages. For example, *cosa* are very different, both semantically and syntactically, from what traditional Bulgarian grammarians term “частица/*chastica*” in the descriptions of the Bulgarian language, not to mention the usage of the word “particle” in the descriptions of numerous

other languages. The literature on Korean grammar in Bulgarian is very scarce (e.g. Rangelov 1998) and it seems that there is still a long way to go before a unified theoretical discourse emerge in this field. The students in the Korean Studies section at Sofia University are well positioned to join and expand the debate being part of the Faculty of Classical and Modern Philologies where a heavy accent is placed on the study of both general theoretical and applied linguistics.

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