

Symmetrical Patterns of Verb Construction in Indonesian and Korean: A Contrastive Analysis

Fahdi Sachiya¹; Muhammad Darwis²; Fitri Meutia¹

¹, Universitas Nasional Jakarta, Indonesia

², Hasanuddin University, Indonesia

ABSTRACT: The verb construction patterns of Indonesian and Korean has several differences. Indonesian generally follows the Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) pattern, while Korean tends to use the Subject-Object-Verb (SOV) pattern. However, both have similarities in the use of verbs as the core of the verbal clause and the presence of affixes that change the meaning of the verb. This study aims to; 1) describe the differences in sentence patterns of Indonesian and Korean, and 2) describe the forms of subject pronouns and particles in both Indonesian and Korean. The results of the study show that in the Indonesian Sentence pattern: The common sentence pattern is SVO (Subject-Verb-Object), for example: "I eat rice", while in Korean: The common sentence pattern is SOV (Subject-Object-Verb), for example: "저는 밥을 먹어요" (Jeonun bapeul meogeoyo) which means "I eat rice". As for the BI subject pronouns (I, you, he, etc.) can be omitted if the context is clear, for example: "Eat rice!", and this does not happen in Korean where the subject pronoun is usually not omitted, even in informal language, because the subject marker particle (은/는) helps identify the subject, for example: "밥을 먹어요" (bapeul meogeoyo) still indicates the subject is "I" (저는, jeo-neun) even though it is not stated explicitly. Another pattern found is that Indonesian particles do not have subject, object, or adverbial marker particles as in Korean. Korean uses particles (eun/neun, reul/ul, etc.) to mark the function of words in sentences, for example "은/는" (eun/neun) to mark the subject/topic, "을/를" (eul/reul) to mark the object

Keywords: *Indonesian, Korean, Symmetric Pattern, Verb Construction, Contrastive Analysis*

I. Introduction

Languages are structured systems of communication, and one of the key elements in understanding their uniqueness lies in analyzing their grammatical patterns—especially verb constructions. Indonesian and Korean, although geographically located in Asia, belong to different language families and exhibit distinct syntactic structures. Indonesian, as part of the Austronesian language family, typically follows a Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) sentence pattern, while Korean, which belongs to the Ural-Altaic or Koreanic language family, primarily uses the Subject-Object-Verb (SOV) structure (Cha, 2020; Sohn, 2019; Sachiya et al., 2025). These contrasting structures shape how meaning is conveyed and interpreted within each language. While Indonesian relies heavily on word order to determine grammatical roles, Korean uses particles to signal the function of each word in a sentence (Lee & Ramsey, 2011; King, 2007; Youngsun et al., 2024; Mochammad et al., 2025). This makes verb placement and morphological marking key areas of interest in contrastive linguistic studies.

These structural differences significantly influence how meaning is conveyed and understood across the two languages. For instance, while Indonesian relies more on word order to signal grammatical relationships, Korean employs particles and verb endings to indicate case, tense, and politeness levels. Such contrasts highlight the importance of not only mastering vocabulary but also grasping the deeper syntactic and pragmatic rules that govern communication in each language.

Despite these fundamental differences, both languages share certain structural similarities, particularly in the centrality of the verb within a clause and the use of morphological processes such as affixation to modify meaning (Kim, 2020; Jung et al., 2025; Lee, 2015). These parallels offer a unique opportunity to explore symmetrical patterns and divergences in their grammatical construction, especially when examined through a contrastive lens. Understanding these similarities and differences is crucial not only for theoretical linguistic analysis but also for practical applications such as second language acquisition, translation, and cross-cultural communication (Connor, 2011; Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2008; Ringbom, 2007). For learners and educators of Indonesian and Korean, recognizing how verbs function within sentence structures and how meaning is shaped through affixes and particles can significantly improve the mastery of grammar and communicative competence in both languages.

This study is motivated by the need to understand how verb constructions function in both languages, not only in terms of sentence structure but also in the roles played by subject pronouns and particles. Indonesian often omits subject pronouns when the context allows, while Korean, although sometimes omitting the pronoun, still retains grammatical markers that indicate the subject. Moreover, the use of particles in Korean to mark grammatical functions (e.g., subject, object, topic) has no equivalent in Indonesian grammar, making this aspect particularly significant in comparative linguistic analysis.

Therefore, this article aims to (1) describe the structural differences between Indonesian and Korean sentence patterns, with a focus on verb placement, and (2) examine the role and form of subject pronouns and grammatical particles in both languages. By doing so, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of contrastive grammar and supports language learning, teaching, and translation efforts involving Indonesian and Korean.

II. Literature Review

Contrastive Analysis

Contrastive analysis is an approach in applied linguistics that aims to compare two or more languages to identify structural differences and similarities between them. According to Lado (1957), contrastive analysis can help predict the difficulties faced by second language learners by comparing the native language system with the target language. Therefore, this approach is often used in foreign language teaching, particularly in developing relevant learning materials.

In the context of Indonesian and Korean, previous studies have discussed the differences in syntactic and morphological patterns between the two. Indonesian tends to follow the SVO (Subject-Verb-Object) pattern, while Korean follows the SOV (Subject-Object-Verb) structure. Additionally, Korean uses particle markers (such as *은/는* for subjects and *을/를* for objects), whereas in Indonesian, sentence structure is not significantly influenced by such particles. Research by Kim (2016) and Suryadi (2020) shows that these structural differences often lead to interference in foreign language learning.

Moreover, in second language acquisition, understanding the use of verbs and affixes in both languages is essential. Indonesian is known for its complex affixation system (prefixes, suffixes, and circumfixes), while Korean uses verb conjugation to convey grammatical information such as tense and levels of politeness. A contrastive analysis of verb constructions in both languages can assist in developing effective learning strategies,

especially for Indonesian speakers learning Korean, or vice versa.

Syntactic and Morphological Analysis

Syntactic and morphological analyses are two main approaches in structural linguistics that serve to deeply understand the structure of language. Syntactic analysis deals with how words are arranged in sentences and the relationships among components such as subject, predicate, object, and adverbials. According to Radford (2004), syntax is the study of how words are combined to form meaningful phrases and sentences, while Chomsky (1957) emphasized the importance of deep and surface structures in generating sentences through specific syntactic rules.

Meanwhile, morphological analysis focuses on the internal structure of words, including word formation processes through morphemes, the smallest units of meaning. Katamba (1993) states that morphology examines word forms through inflectional and derivational processes, while Bauer (1983) adds that morphology also includes the formation of new words through affixation and compounding.

In contrastive studies between Indonesian and Korean, syntactic analysis is used to identify differences in word order patterns, such as SVO (Subject-Verb-Object) in Indonesian and SOV (Subject-Object-Verb) in Korean, whereas morphological analysis is used to observe differences in the use of affixes and particles in verb constructions of each language. These two approaches complement each other and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the structure and function of verbs in two different language systems.

III. Research Methodology

This study used a descriptive qualitative approach with a contrastive analysis method to compare verb construction patterns in Indonesian and Korean. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research is suitable for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem, making it appropriate for describing structural differences and similarities in language systems based on linguistic data that is analyzed in depth. The data used in this study are sentences containing verbs from both languages, both in the form of simple and complex declarative sentences. Data sources were obtained from various written references, such as grammar books, dictionaries, and Indonesian and Korean sentence corpora, including examples of relevant daily conversations.

The steps in the analysis are carried out through three main stages: a) Data collection, namely identifying and collecting sentences containing verb constructions in Indonesian and Korean. b) Data classification, namely grouping data based on syntactic structures (such as SVO and SOV patterns), as well as morphological aspects such as the use of affixes and particles. c) Data analysis, namely comparing sentence structures based on syntactic and morphological theories and the principles of contrastive analysis. In this process, the form and function of subject pronouns and particles that mark word functions in sentences are also studied. d) The results of the analysis are presented in the form of narrative descriptions and comparative tables, to make it easier for readers to understand the differences and similarities in verb construction patterns in both languages. Data validity is maintained through source triangulation and peer review to ensure the accuracy of the linguistic analysis carried out.

IV. Results

Findings

To gain a clearer understanding of the verb construction patterns in Indonesian and Korean, this study systematically analyzes syntactic and morphological data from both languages. The following findings are presented based on the results of contrastive analysis of sentence structure, subject pronouns, and the use of affixes and particles in verb construction.

Table 1. Syntactic Pattern Data (SVO vs SOV)

No	Language	Sentences	Structure	Translation
1	Indonesia	Saya makan nasi.	SVO	I eat rice.
2	Korea	저는 밥을 먹어요. (Jeoneun bapeul meogeoyo)	SOV	I eat rice.
3	Indonesia	Mereka membaca buku.	SVO	They read a book.
4	Korea	그들은 책을 읽어요. (Geudeureun chaegeul ilgeoyo)	SOV	They read a book.
5	Indonesia	Kami menonton film.	SVO	We watch a movie.
6	Korea	우리는 영화를 봐요. (Urineun yeonghwareul bwayo)	SOV	We watch a movie.

The data obtained show significant structural differences between Indonesian and Korean in verb construction, which are analyzed through a contrastive approach. In Indonesian, the common pattern used is Subject-Verb-Object (SVO), as seen in the sentences "I eat rice," "They read a book," and "We watch a movie." In contrast, Korean follows the Subject-Object-Verb (SOV) structure, as illustrated in the sentences "저는 밥을 먹어요" (Jeoneun bapeul meogeoyo), "그들은 책을 읽어요" (Geudeureun chaegeul ilgeoyo), and "우리는 영화를 봐요" (Urineun yeonghwareul bwayo). The contrastive approach enables researchers to identify systematic similarities and differences in sentence structures between the two languages, including how verbs function as the core of the clause. The analysis also reveals that Korean heavily relies on grammatical particles (such as "은/는" for subjects and "을/를" for objects) to indicate syntactic functions, whereas Indonesian does not use such markers and instead depends on word order and context. By comparing these two language systems, contrastive analysis helps uncover potential difficulties language learners may face and contributes to the fields of language teaching and comparative syntax studies.

Furthermore, the contrastive analysis of verb morphology reveals notable distinctions in how the two languages convey grammatical information. Indonesian verbs are often modified through the use of affixes such as *me-*, *ber-*, or *di-* to indicate voice, aspect, or transitivity, as seen in the transformation from *makan* (to eat) to *memakan* (to consume). In contrast, Korean verbs undergo conjugation involving changes in verb endings, such as *먹다* (meokda, "to eat") becoming *먹어요* (meogeoyo) in the polite informal form. While Indonesian uses affixation to form new meanings and grammatical roles, Korean conjugations are primarily used to express tense, mood, and politeness. These morphological differences are crucial for language learners to understand, as errors in affix or conjugation usage can significantly alter sentence meaning and social appropriateness.

Table 2. Data on the Use of Pronouns and Particles

No	Language	Sentences	Highlighted Elements	Remarks
1	Indonesia	Makan nasi!	Subject removed	It can be understood from the context
2	Korea	밥을 먹어요. (Bapeul meogeoyo)	Implied subject, object particle을	Particles help identify structures
3	Korea	저는 영화를 봐요. (Jeoneun yeonghwareul bwayo)	Particle 은 & 를	은 as a topic/subject, 를 as an object
4	Indonesia	Dia menulis surat.	Explicit subject, without particles	There are no function word markers
5	Korea	그는 편지를 써요. (Geuneun pyeonjireul sseoyo)	는 and 를	Subject and object function markers

The presented data further highlight the syntactic and morphological contrasts between Indonesian and Korean, especially regarding subject presence, particle usage, and sentence structure, which are central to contrastive analysis.

In Sentence 1, the Indonesian imperative "Makan nasi!" omits the subject entirely. This is common in Indonesian when the subject is understood from the context. In contrast, Sentence 2 in Korean, "밥을 먹어요" (Bapeul meogeoyo), may appear to omit the subject as well, but Korean uses the object particle "을" (eul) to clarify the grammatical role of "rice" (밥). This structural clarity is due to Korean's reliance on particles that function as grammatical markers, a feature not present in Indonesian.

Sentence 3 ("저는 영화를 봐요") shows an explicit subject and object in Korean, with the particles "은" (eun) marking the topic/subject and "를" (reul) marking the object. These particles are crucial in Korean syntax and help convey meaning clearly, even if word order varies slightly. This is in contrast with Sentence 4 in Indonesian ("Dia menulis surat"), which uses an explicit subject and object but lacks any functional particles to indicate grammatical roles. Instead, Indonesian depends heavily on fixed word order (SVO) and context for clarity.

Finally, Sentence 5, "그는 편지를 써요" (Geuneun pyeonjireul sseoyo), again demonstrates how Korean consistently marks both subject ("그는") and object ("편지를") using particles ("는" and "를"). These grammatical tools enable Korean to maintain syntactic clarity even when the sentence structure becomes more complex.

Through contrastive analysis, we see that while both Indonesian and Korean are structurally distinct—Indonesian relying on word order and context, and Korean on particles and structure markers—each language reflects its own strategies to convey meaning. Understanding these contrasts is essential for language learners and teachers, as it helps anticipate potential areas of confusion, especially in syntactic roles and sentence interpretation.

Table 3. Verb Affixation Data

No	Language	Basic Verbs	Affix Verb	Remarks
1	Indonesia	makan	memakan	The affix me- indicates active action.
2	Indonesia	tulis	menulis	meN- indicates active actor
3	Korea	먹다 (meokda)	먹어요 (meogeoyo)	-어요 informal polite form
4	Korea	쓰다 (sseuda)	써요 (sseoyo)	Vowel changes due to conjugation

The data above illustrate how verb constructions in Indonesian and Korean differ morphologically, particularly in terms of affixation and conjugation, which are central to contrastive analysis in language structure comparison.

In Indonesian, verbs are modified through affixation, especially prefixes. For example, the base verb "makan" (to eat) becomes "memakan", where the prefix "me-" indicates an active verb form. Similarly, "tulis" (to write) becomes "menulis", with the "meN-" prefix signaling that the subject is actively performing the action. These affixes do not indicate tense or politeness but rather grammatical roles and verb types (active vs. passive).

In contrast, Korean uses verb conjugation rather than affixation. For instance, the base verb "먹다" (meokda, to eat) becomes "먹어요" (meogeoyo) in the informal polite form, which reflects both mood and politeness level but not tense through affixation. Similarly, "쓰다" (sseuda, to write) becomes "써요" (sseoyo), where the vowel change and the -어요 ending mark politeness and aspect, rather than changing the root through prefixes.

Through contrastive analysis, we can see that Indonesian relies on affixation (prefixes like "me-", "men-", "mem-") to alter verb meaning or grammatical function, while Korean utilizes stem changes and suffixation (like "어요") for conjugation, especially to show politeness. Additionally, Indonesian verb affixation typically doesn't convey politeness or speech level, while in Korean, this aspect is integral and always reflected in verb endings.

Understanding these contrastive patterns is valuable for learners of either language, as it reveals different

morphological systems: Indonesian's is more straightforward with affix use, while Korean's is more complex with layered conjugation rules. This comparison helps language teachers and learners predict common difficulties when transitioning between these two linguistic systems.

V. Discussion

The findings from this study highlight the structural and morphological contrasts between Indonesian and Korean verb constructions. One of the most evident differences lies in the syntactic structure of sentences: Indonesian typically follows a Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) pattern, while Korean follows a Subject-Object-Verb (SOV) structure. This foundational distinction affects how learners of each language approach sentence formation and understand grammatical roles within a sentence.

For example, an Indonesian sentence such as "*Saya makan nasi*" clearly places the verb immediately after the subject, whereas the Korean equivalent "*저는 밥을 먹어요*" delays the verb until the end of the clause. This variation requires language learners to reorient their cognitive processing of sentence construction when shifting between the two languages. Through contrastive analysis, these syntactic variations can be systematically identified and addressed in language teaching.

Furthermore, the use of subject pronouns and grammatical particles provides additional contrast. Indonesian often omits subject pronouns if they are understood from context ("*Makan nasi!*"), a phenomenon known as pro-drop. In Korean, although the subject may not always be explicitly spoken, its presence is often still marked by particles such as *은/는* for the subject and *을/를* for the object. These particles serve an important role in clarifying syntactic functions, particularly in languages like Korean where word order is more flexible than in Indonesian.

In terms of verb morphology, Indonesian employs affixation to modify verb meanings and grammatical functions. Prefixes like *me-*, *men-*, and *mem-* indicate active voice or transitivity, as seen in *menulis* (to write) and *memakan* (to eat). On the other hand, Korean modifies verbs using conjugation and stem alternation, which reflect levels of politeness and speech formality. For instance, the base verb *먹다* (meokda) becomes *먹어요* (meogeoyo) in the informal polite form. Unlike Indonesian, Korean does not use affixes to denote voice or verb type but instead focuses on formality and aspect through verbal endings.

These differences underscore the importance of contrastive linguistic studies in language pedagogy. By understanding the systematic divergences in verb usage between Indonesian and Korean, educators can anticipate areas of difficulty for students and design targeted instructional materials. Learners of Korean from an Indonesian background, for example, may struggle with the use of particles and verb-final sentence structure, while Korean learners of Indonesian may need to adapt to the absence of grammatical markers and different word order rules.

Overall, this contrastive analysis not only enriches the comparative study of languages but also contributes to the field of applied linguistics, particularly in the area of foreign language acquisition and instruction.

VI. Conclusion

This study has examined the differences and similarities in verb construction between Indonesian and Korean using a contrastive approach. The analysis shows that Indonesian typically follows a Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) pattern, while Korean follows a Subject-Object-Verb (SOV) structure. Furthermore, Korean uses grammatical particles such as *은/는* and *을/를* to indicate subject and object functions, which are absent in Indonesian. In morphology, Indonesian verbs are formed through affixation (e.g., *me-*), whereas Korean verbs undergo conjugation with vowel changes to mark politeness and tense.

These findings highlight the value of contrastive analysis in identifying linguistic features that may pose challenges to language learners. Understanding these syntactic and morphological distinctions is particularly useful for educators and learners engaged in Indonesian-Korean or Korean-Indonesian language instruction. It also contributes to broader linguistic research by providing insights into how different languages structure meaning through grammar and verb usage.

References

- [1] Bauer, L. (1983). English word-formation. Cambridge University Press.
- [2] Cha, J. H. (2020). A typological comparison of Korean and Southeast Asian languages: Focus on word order and grammatical markers. *Journal of Comparative Asian Linguistics*, 14(1), 45–62. <https://doi.org/10.23925/2349-7888.2020v14i1>
- [3] Chomsky, N. (1957). Syntactic structures. Mouton.
- [4] Connor, U. (2011). Intercultural rhetoric in the writing classroom. University of Michigan Press. <https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.178004>
- [5] Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- [6] Jarvis, S., & Pavlenko, A. (2008). Crosslinguistic influence in language and cognition. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203937284>
- [7] Jung, S., Ko, Y., Kyeongjae, P., Sosrohadi, S., & Rahman, F. F. (2025). Bridging Cultural Gaps: Addressing Translation Issues in Korean Language Expression for Indonesian Learners. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Applied Science*, 10(3), 1-8.
- [8] Katamba, F. (1993). Morphology. Macmillan.
- [9] Kim, J. B. (2020). The role of verbal morphology in Korean grammar. *Journal of East Asian Linguistics*, 29(2), 143–168. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10831-020-09100-5>
- [10] Kim, H. K. (2016). A contrastive analysis of Indonesian and Korean sentence structures. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 12(2), 45–58.
- [11] King, R. (2007). *Korean: A linguistic introduction*. Cambridge University Press.
- [12] Lado, R. (1957). Linguistics across cultures: Applied linguistics for language teachers. University of Michigan Press.
- [13] Lee, H. (2015). A morphological analysis of Korean affixation and its implications for language learning. *Korean Linguistics*, 17(1), 55–78. <https://doi.org/10.1075/kl.17.1.03lee>
- [14] Lee, I., & Ramsey, S. R. (2011). *The Korean language*. State University of New York Press.
- [15] Mochammad, T. P. A., Sachiya, F., Faisal, R., Sosrohadi, S., & Mahdori. (2025). *A Pragmatic and Equivalence-Based Analysis of Korean Honorifics in Indonesian Translation*. *International Journal of Innovative Science and Research Technology*, 10(3), March. <https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/25mar872>
- [16] Radford, A. (2004). English syntax: An introduction. Cambridge University Press.
- [17] Ringbom, H. (2007). Cross-linguistic similarity in foreign language learning. *Multilingual Matters*.
- [18] Sachiya, F., Faisal, R., Sosrohadi, S., Mahdori, M., Aditya, T. P. M., & Andini, C. (2025). A comparative analysis of Indonesian and Korean verbs: A semantic and pragmatic perspective. *International Journal of Arts and Social Science*, 8(3), 89-97.