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제6장

Effective Strategies for Teaching the Korean Morphemes ‘-었’ (-eoss) and ‘-었었-’ (-eosseoss-) to Italian Learners

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1. Introduction

In modern society, with the increase in globalization and cultural exchange, the necessity for understanding differences between various languages is being emphasized more than ever. Particularly, Korean and Italian have different language systems and grammatical structures, which often cause learners to experience difficulties with tense expressions. This study aims to conduct an in-depth analysis of the similarities and differences between the two languages by comparing Korean and Italian tense systems, focusing especially on the past tense.

By analyzing in detail the function of ‘-았’ (*-eoss*), the primary morpheme that represents the past tense in Korean, we seek to clarify its grammatical status within Korean grammar and systematically explain its role and importance within the tense system. Through this, we aim to promote a clear understanding of how tense expressions in Korean are constructed and used.

Furthermore, by subdividing and analyzing the corresponding patterns in Italian according to the various functions of ‘-았’, we intend to develop educational methods that help native Italian speakers understand and use the Korean past tense more accurately. This research is expected to contribute to improving the quality of Korean language education by providing educational tools that enable learners to acquire tense usage effectively.

A comparative analysis of Korean and Italian tense systems reveals fundamental differences in how each language structures time expressions. Korean’s reliance on tense markers and context contrasts with Italian’s use of combined mood and tense conjugations to convey both temporal information and the speaker’s perspective. These differences can pose challenges for native Italian speakers learning Korean, particularly in mastering the context-dependent nature of Korean non-past tenses and distinguishing between simple and complex past forms.

Therefore, Korean language education for Italian speakers should adopt strategies that account for these linguistic differences. Educators should clarify the distinctions between Korean tense expressions and Italian tense-mood conjugations, emphasize the role of context and auxiliary verbs in Korean tense usage, provide varied sentence structures and situational contexts for practicing Korean tenses, and utilize comparative materials that analyze the tense systems of both languages. Through such educational approaches, learners can achieve a deeper understanding of the Korean tense system and effectively navigate the complexities introduced by the differences between Korean and Italian, thereby enhancing language acquisition and communicative competence.

2. Tense Systems of Korean and Italian

2.1. Time Expressions and the Linguistic Diversity of Tense

Time expressions in language are manifested through a variety of grammatical elements and lexical means, which inherently differ based on each language’s unique characteristics and cultural contexts. Among these elements, tense stands as a pivotal grammatical category that designates the temporal positioning of events or states—past, present, or future—relative to the speaker’s moment of utterance. This temporal categorization is fundamental for structuring discourse and facilitating mutual temporal comprehension between interlocutors.

In many languages, such as Italian, the tense system adheres to a traditional division encompassing past, present, and future. These tenses are typically expressed through verb conjugations, allowing speakers to convey the temporal sequence of actions precisely. For example, in Italian, the verb ‘parlare’ (to speak) is conjugated as ‘parlo’ (I speak) in the present tense, ‘*parlai*’ (I spoke) in the *passato remoto* (remote past), and ‘parlerò’ (I will speak) in the future tense. This explicit conjugation system aids in the clear demarcation of time within conversations and narratives, enhancing the listener’s ability to track the progression of events.

Beyond tense, aspect serves as a crucial grammatical dimension that conveys the internal temporal structure of actions, indicating whether an action is ongoing, completed, habitual, or repeated. Aspectual distinctions enrich the semantic depth of language by highlighting the manner in which actions unfold over time. For instance, in Korean, the progressive aspect is articulated with the suffix ‘-고 있다’ (*-go itda*), as seen in ‘먹고 있다’ (is eating), which emphasizes the ongoing nature of the action. Similarly, the past perfect aspect is expressed with ‘-았/었었다’ (*-ass/eoss-eoss-da*), as in ‘먹었었다’ (had eaten), indicating a completed action prior to another past event.

Actionality pertains to the inherent characteristics of verbs, delineating whether actions are continuous, complete, or instantaneous. This concept is instrumental in understanding the nature and progression of actions within a temporal framework. For example, the Korean verb ‘걷다’ (to walk) implies a slow, continuous action, whereas ‘달리다’ (to run) denotes a fast, continuous action. These distinctions enable speakers to convey not only when an action occurs but also how it unfolds, adding layers of meaning to temporal expressions.

Temporal adverbs play an indispensable role in specifying particular points or periods in time, thereby providing explicit temporal context within sentences. Adverbs such as ‘어제’ (yesterday), ‘오늘’ (today), and ‘내일’ (tomorrow) serve to anchor

actions or states within a specific temporal framework. When combined with tense, these adverbs offer critical clues that aid in accurately interpreting verb forms. For instance, the presence of ‘어제’ (yesterday) alongside a past tense verb like ‘먹었다’ (ate) unequivocally situates the action in the recent past, enhancing the clarity of the temporal relationship. The methods and categorizations of tense expression exhibit significant diversity across languages. Not all linguistic systems distinctly separate past, present, and future tenses; some languages adopt alternative frameworks, such as past/non-past distinctions or entirely eschew explicit grammatical tense markers. For example, Mandarin Chinese relies predominantly on temporal adverbs and contextual cues rather than verb conjugations to convey temporal information. In sentences like ‘我昨天去’ (wǒ zuótiān qù - I yesterday go), the adverb ‘昨天’ (yesterday) provides the temporal context, rendering verb conjugation unnecessary for indicating past action. Understanding the linguistic diversity of tense systems is essential for both language learners and educators. Recognizing how different languages encode temporal information through tense, aspect, actionality, and temporal adverbs can inform more effective teaching strategies. For instance, Italian learners of Korean must navigate the complexities of aspectual distinctions that are less pronounced in their native language. Conversely, Korean speakers learning Italian must grasp the nuanced interplay between mood and tense that characterizes Italian verb conjugations. The study of time expressions and the linguistic diversity of tense reveals the intricate mechanisms through which languages encode temporal information. While traditional tense systems like those in Italian provide clear temporal demarcations through verb conjugations, other languages such as Korean employ a combination of tense, aspect, actionality, and temporal adverbs to convey time-related nuances. This diversity underscores the importance of contextual and comparative linguistic analyses in understanding and teaching tense systems across different languages. By appreciating these variations, linguists and language educators can better facilitate effective communication and comprehension in multilingual contexts.

2.2. An Overview of Korean and Italian Tense Systems

Korean and Italian exhibit significant differences in their tense systems, reflecting their distinct grammatical structures and methods of time expression.

Korean tense systems have traditionally been categorized into three-tense and two-tense frameworks, which have been extensively studied to analyze the complexity of time expressions and to understand the structural and functional roles

of tense within the language. In the three-tense system, traditional Korean grammar divides tenses into past, present, and future, with each tense being clearly marked through specific verb conjugations. For instance, the past tense is expressed using verb endings such as ‘-았-’ and ‘-었-’ (e.g., 먹었다 [*meogeotda*] and 갔다 [*gatta*]), the present tense describes actions or states that are currently ongoing or represent general truths, often appearing without a specific tense marker or with endings like ‘-는/-는’ (e.g., 먹는다 [*meokneunda*] and 간다 [*ganda*]), and the future tense conveys actions or states that will occur in the future, primarily utilizing endings such as ‘-겠-’ (*-getda*) or ‘-을 것이다’ (*-eul geosida*) (e.g., 먹겠다 [*meokgetda*] and 갈 것이다 [*gal geosida*]). Conversely, some linguists have proposed a two-tense system, categorizing tenses into past and non-past, thereby simplifying the understanding of Korean tense structures through a binary distinction. Within this bifurcated approach, the past tense is further divided into simple past, which indicates straightforward past actions (e.g., 먹었다 [*meogeotda*]), and complex past, which emphasizes actions that were completed in the past but have since ceased (e.g., 먹었었다 [*meogeot-eoss-eotda*]). The non-past tense encompasses both present and future actions, with present actions often expressed without a specific tense marker and future actions relying on auxiliary verbs or contextual cues (e.g., 먹는다 [*meokneunda*] and 먹을 것이다 [*meogeul geosida*]). This two-tense system gained prominence in Korean tense research post-1980s, influenced by Indo-European linguistic paradigms, which advocate for streamlined tense classifications. The evolution from a three-tense to a two-tense system reflects ongoing efforts to reconcile Korean tense expressions with broader linguistic theories, thereby enhancing the precision and applicability of tense analysis in Korean language studies.

In contrast to Korean, Italian employs a more intricate system by combining mood and tense to create a multifaceted framework for verb conjugation. This sophisticated interplay allows Italian to convey not only the temporal aspect of actions but also the speaker's intent, attitude, and emotional state, thereby enabling a more nuanced expression of meaning. The Italian verb system is organized around several primary moods, each serving distinct communicative functions. The Indicativo is the most commonly used mood, employed for objective statements of fact and encompassing a wide range of tenses, including various past and future forms—for example, the present indicative ‘parlo’ (I speak) denotes a current action. In contrast, the Passato Prossimo ‘ho parlato’ (I have spoken) indicates a completed action in the recent past. The Congiuntivo expresses subjective judgments, hopes, doubts, or uncertainties and

is often used in subordinate clauses introduced by conjunctions like ‘che’ (that), as in *Spero che tu venga* (I hope that you come). The Condizionale conveys hypothetical situations or conditions, often expressing actions that would occur under certain circumstances, such as *Vorrei un caffè* (I would like a coffee). The Imperativo is utilized for commands, requests, or instructions, exemplified by *Mangia!* (Eat!). Additionally, non-finite verb forms such as the Infinitivo (‘parlare’ - to speak), Particípio (‘parlato’ - spoken), and Gerundio (‘parlando’ - speaking) perform various functions within sentences. Italian tenses further diversify through their combination with these moods, resulting in a comprehensive system that captures not only when an action takes place but also the speaker’s perspective regarding that action. Within each mood, tenses include the Present (e.g., ‘parlo’), multiple Past Tenses such as the Imperfetto (‘parlavo’ - I was speaking/I used to speak), Passato Prossimo (‘ho parlato’ - I have spoken), Trapassato Prossimo (‘avevo parlato’ - I had spoken), and Passato Remoto (‘parlai’ - I spoke), which is primarily used in written language to denote actions completed in the distant past. Future tenses include the Futuro Semplice (‘parlerò’ - I will speak) and Futuro Anteriore (‘avrò parlato’ - I will have spoken), which express actions that will occur in the future and actions that will have been completed by a certain point in the future, respectively. This comprehensive system underscores the ability of Italian to convey complex temporal and modal nuances, enhancing the expressive capacity of the language.

2.3. Comparison of Korean and Italian Tense Systems

Italian’s complex interplay of mood and tense sharply contrasts with the relatively straightforward Korean tense system. While Korean relies primarily on tense markers and contextual information to denote time, Italian utilizes verb endings that simultaneously convey time and the speaker’s attitude or intent. This dual function of Italian verb conjugations results in a more layered and nuanced expression of meaning, requiring learners to grasp not only when an action occurs but also the speaker’s perspective regarding that action.

A comparative analysis of Korean and Italian tense systems reveals fundamental differences in how each language structures time expressions. Korean’s reliance on tense markers and context contrasts with Italian’s use of combined mood and tense conjugations to convey not only temporal information but also the speaker’s perspective. These differences can pose significant challenges for native Italian speakers learning Korean, particularly in mastering the context-dependent nature of

Korean non-past tenses and distinguishing between simple and complex past forms.

To address these challenges, Korean language education for Italian speakers should adopt strategies that account for these linguistic differences. Firstly, clarifying differences in tense expression is essential. Educators should elucidate the distinctions between Korean tense expressions and Italian tense-mood conjugations, helping learners understand that Korean uses specific morphemes like ‘-았’ (-eoss) and ‘-있었-’ (-eoss-eoss-) to indicate past tense without conveying additional nuances related to the speaker’s attitude or emotional state. Secondly, emphasizing contextual dependency is crucial. Highlighting the role of context and auxiliary verbs in Korean tense usage can aid learners in comprehending how temporal information is often inferred rather than explicitly stated.

Additionally, providing ample practice opportunities is vital for reinforcing the understanding of Korean tenses. Offering varied sentence structures and situational contexts for practicing Korean tenses allows learners to apply their knowledge in diverse scenarios, thereby enhancing retention and practical usage. Lastly, utilizing comparative linguistic approaches can be highly effective. Using materials that analyze the tense systems of both languages side by side enables learners to draw parallels and distinctions, fostering a deeper comprehension of each system’s unique characteristics.

Through such educational methodologies, learners can achieve a deeper understanding of the Korean tense system and effectively navigate the complexities introduced by its differences from Italian. This, in turn, enhances language acquisition and communicative competence, enabling learners to communicate more effectively in Korean. For instance, the Italian Indicativo mood with its various tenses allows speakers to specify not just the timing of an action but also its completion and relevance to other actions. This is evident in the difference between ‘ho parlato’ (I have spoken) and ‘parlo’ (I speak). Conversely, Korean uses separate morphemes like ‘-았’ and ‘-있었-’ to indicate past tense without conveying additional nuances related to the speaker’s attitude or emotional state. These distinctions necessitate tailored pedagogical approaches when teaching Korean to Italian speakers, as learners must adjust from a system where verb forms carry multifaceted meanings to one where tense markers are more functionally specialized.

Understanding the depth and complexity of the Italian tense system highlights the challenges Italian learners may face in mastering Korean tense expressions. This emphasizes the need for targeted instructional strategies that bridge these linguistic

differences effectively, ensuring that learners can transition smoothly between the two systems and achieve proficiency in Korean.

3. The Korean Past Tense

Tense, as a grammatical category, functions to express the time of actions or events as psychologically perceived by the speaker within a sentence. This allows the past tense to be defined as a category denoting actions or events that occur before the point of utterance. Both Korean and Italian typically utilize the past tense to indicate that a situation precedes the reference time, which is generally the moment of speech. The past tense is employed in various contexts, such as when an action has been completed in the past and has no relation to the present, to describe past states, feelings, habitual or repetitive actions, and to convey historical facts. These usages are realized through grammatical elements like pre-verbal endings attached to verb or adjective stems.

In Korean, the presence or absence of the tense morpheme ‘-았-’ categorizes the tense into past and non-past, with the non-past further subdivided into present and future tenses (Go & Gu 2008). Additionally, the morpheme ‘-었었-’ is employed to denote a distant past, as classified by the National Institute of Korean Language (2005:198). It is used to distinctly mark actions or events that occurred long before the present or to reference historical events. This form represents the ‘past of the past’ or ‘distant past’, a concept first acknowledged in Yu Gil-jun’s *Daehan Munjeon* (1909) and Ju Si-gyeong’s *Joseon Eo Munbeop* (1911). However, overuse and errors in the distant past form, such as the incorrect usage of ‘했었었다’ instead of the correct ‘했었다’ have been documented (Kim 2015), highlighting challenges in accurately translating complex past tenses from English to Korean. The Korean suffixes ‘-았-’ and ‘-었었-’ both serve to indicate past actions, but their specific meanings differ in terms of the relevance of the past action to the present. The use of these suffixes is particularly important in distinguishing between actions with any ongoing effects and those without relevance.

For example:

- (1) a. 이곳에는 코스모스가 피었지.
(Igose-neun koseumoseuga pieotji)
(The cosmos flowers are currently blooming here.)

- b. 이곳에는 코스모스가 피었었지.
(Igose-neun koseumoseuga pieosseotji)
(The cosmos flowers were blooming here, but they are no longer blooming now.)

In the first sentence, ‘-었-’ indicates that the cosmos flowers bloomed in the past and are still blooming at the time of speaking. Conversely, in the second sentence, ‘-었었-’ is used to show that although the cosmos flowers bloomed in the past, they are no longer blooming now. Thus, ‘-었-’ implies a resultant state, where the action has a lasting effect, while ‘-었었-’ conveys result cancellation, meaning the effect of the action has been reversed or is no longer applicable. In traditional Korean grammar, ‘-었었-’ is often erroneously described as representing the pluperfect or distant past. However, this interpretation oversimplifies the function of ‘-었었-.’ In contrast to Indo-European languages, Korean has a less developed concept of tense but incorporates elements of modality (the speaker’s psychological state) and aspect (the action’s status, such as progression, completion, or future intention) into its tense system. The suffix ‘-었-’ embodies these multiple functions, while ‘-었었-’ adds the layer of temporal discontinuity, indicating that the event or state is no longer connected to the present.

As a polysemous grammatical element (discontinuous past, DP), ‘-었었-’ can express this temporal disconnection across various contexts. Park Jinho (Park 2019, 91–92) illustrates the usage of ‘-았-’ and ‘-었었-’ in the following dialogues:

- (2) (A cold winter day: Gab was in another room and came into this one. The window is closed, but it’s still quite cold.)
A: 창문 열어 났*(었)어?
(Changmun yeoreo noat(eoss)eo?)
(Did you leave the window open?)
B: 응, 환기 좀 시키려고 열어 났*(었)어.
(Eung, hwangi jom sikiryeogo yeoreo noat(eoss)eo.)
(Yes, I opened it a bit to ventilate.)
- (3) (30 minutes ago, when Gab came to see Eul, Eul wasn’t at their desk. Now, Gab comes back and sees that B is back.)
A: 어디 갔*(었)어?
(Eodi gat(eoss)eo?)
(Where did you go?)

B: 은행에 갔*(았)어.

(*Eunhaenge gat(eoss)eo.*)

(I went to the bank.)

In these examples, both ‘-았-’ and ‘-았었-’ mark past actions, but their key distinction lies in whether the result of the past action persists in the present. ‘-았-’ typically signifies that the action still has a current impact or resultant state, whereas ‘-았었-’ emphasizes that the result has been canceled or is no longer valid. This nuanced difference highlights the importance of selecting the appropriate suffix to convey the intended meaning accurately in Korean.

By understanding the distinction between these two suffixes, learners can more precisely express the temporal relationship between past actions and their relevance to the present, avoiding common errors such as the overuse of ‘-았었-’ in contexts where ‘-았-’ would be more appropriate. This distinction is particularly important when translating between languages with more rigid tense structures, such as English, where the pluperfect or past perfect is used to indicate a distant past, compared to the more flexible usage in Korean.

3.1. Differences in the Function and Grammatical Status of ‘-았-’ and ‘-았었-’

In Korean, there is no dedicated morpheme for the perfect aspect or pluperfect tense (cf. Moon 2005)¹. However, the past tense in Korean can convey meanings similar to those expressed by the pluperfect tense in other languages.

- (4) a. 그 학생은 내가 예상했던 것보다 시험을 잘 봤다.

(*Geu haksang-eun naega yesanghaetdeon geotboda siheom-eul jal bwatda.*)

(That student did better on the exam than I had expected.)

- b. 나는 한국에서 샀던/산 노트북을 이탈리아에서 잃어버렸다.

(*Naneun hangug-eseo satdeon/san noteubug-eul itallia-eseo ilh-eobeollyeotda.*)

(I lost the laptop I had bought in Korea while in Italy.)

In these examples, the use of the past tense indicates actions that were completed before other past events. Korean can express what is conceptually a pluperfect using the past tense, although there is no separate grammatical marker for the pluperfect.

3.1.1. Debate on the Existence of a Pluperfect Morpheme in Korean

On the other hand, some scholars argue that Korean does possess a morpheme for the pluperfect (cf. Ahn & Choi 2006). The use of ‘-았었-’ is considered by some as a marker of the pluperfect or distant past.

- (5) a. 나는 존을 보았었다.

(*Naneun John-eul boasseotda.*)

(I had seen John.)

- b. 나는 어디선가 그 남자를 보았다고/보았었다고 생각했다.

(*Naneun eodiseonga geu namja-reul boassdago/boasseossdago saenggakhaetda.*)

(I thought I had seen that man somewhere.)

- c. 그들은 내가 도착했을 때 떠났었다.

(*Geudeul-eun naega dochakhaess-eul ttae tteonasseotda.*)

(They had left when I arrived.) (pluperfect)

- d. 그들은 내가 도착했을 때 떠났다.

(*Geudeul-eun naega dochakhaess-eul ttae tteonatda.*)

(They left when I arrived.) (the temporal sequence is unclear)

- e. 그들은 내가 도착했을 때 이미 떠났었다/떠났다.

(*Geudeul-eun naega dochakhaess-eul ttae imi tteonasseotda/tteonatda.*)

(They had already left when I arrived.)

The use of time adverbs, such as ‘이미’ (*imi*; already), clarifies the temporal relationship between the events.

3.1.2. Aspectual Nuances and Temporal Disjunction

The suffix ‘-았었-’ is characterized by its disconnection from the present, indicating that the past event has no bearing on the current situation. This temporal disjunction is a key feature of its pluperfect-like function in Korean. Specifically, ‘-았었-’ is used to express a contrast with a past event or to denote a past action or state that is no longer connected to the present, indicating a ‘discontinuous past’ with no ongoing relevance. In contrast, ‘-았-’ can imply a connection with the present, depending on the aspectual properties of the verb it is combined with; however, when using ‘-았었-’, this connection is lost, resulting in the clear meaning that the past event, action, or result no longer persists or has any effect on the current state.

3.1.3. The Sequence of Events and the Use of ‘-었었-’

In Korean, the temporal sequence of events can often be conveyed without the explicit use of the suffix ‘-었었-’. This challenges the view that ‘-었었-’ functions strictly as a pluperfect marker indicating a ‘past before the past.’ Even when events occurred earlier in the past, the sequence can be understood from context without ‘-었었-’, as can be seen in the following examples (Mun Sukyoung 2003, 67–68).

- (6) a. 부모님께서 어디로 여행 갔어? 네가 갔던 베네치아로 갔어?
(*Bumonimkkeseo eodiro yeohaeng gaseo? Nega gatdeon Benechia-ro gaseo?*)
(Where did your parents go on vacation? Did they go to Venice, where you went?)
b. 아니, 나는 베네치아로 갔었고, 부모님께서는 로마로 갔어.
(*Ani, naneun Benechia-ro gasseosseotgo, bumonimkkeseoneun Roma-ro gaseo.*)
(No, I had gone to Venice, but my parents went to Rome.)

And the following are Korean sentences that can correspond to the English sentence “I met Cheolsu when I went to Busan” in Example (6).

- (7) a. 나는 부산에 갔을 때 철수를 만났다.
(*Naneun Busan-e gaseul ttae Cheolsu-reul mannatda.*)
b. 나는 부산에 갔을 때 철수를 만났었다.
(*Naneun Busan-e gaseul ttae Cheolsu-reul mannasseotda.*)
c. 나는 부산에 갔었을 때 철수를 만났다.
(*Naneun Busan-e gasseosseul ttae Cheolsu-reul mannatda.*)
d. 나는 부산에 갔었을 때 철수를 만났었다.
(*Naneun Busan-e gasseosseul ttae Cheolsu-reul mannasseotda.*)

3.1.4. ‘-었었-’ as Expressing Past Tense and Emphasis on Experience

These examples illustrate that the sequence of events can be indicated without necessarily using ‘-었었-’. This suggests that viewing ‘-었었-’ solely as a pluperfect marker may be insufficient. The suffix ‘-었었-’ conveys the notion of past tense and, aspectually, emphasizes experiential meaning. It is particularly prevalent in spoken discourse, often accompanied by non-verbal elements such as intonation and facial expressions, which enhance its contextual significance. According to Seong Ki-cheol (1974), the grammatical meaning of ‘-었었-’ is tied to the concept of experience. It is

analyzed as a composite of ‘-었₁-’ (indicating past meaning) and ‘-었₂-’ (indicating the subject’s experience). Based on this analysis, ‘-었었-’ is classified as a modal category representing the subject’s past experiences, reflecting the speaker’s attitude toward the utterance.

3.1.5. The Aspectual View of ‘-었었-’ as Discontinuous Aspect

Some linguists view ‘-었었-’ primarily as an aspect marker. Its core meaning is associated with expressing discontinuity or interruption of a state. Go Yeong-geun (1986) identifies contrast and discontinuity as central to the meaning of ‘-었었-’. Nam Gi-sim (1972) considers ‘-었었-’ to represent a discontinuous aspect, indicating that a completed state does not persist up to the reference time.

- (8) a. 그는 빨간 옷을 입었다.
(*Geuneun ppalgan oseul ip-eotda.*)
(He wore red clothes.)
b. 그는 빨간 옷을 입었었다.
(*Geuneun ppalgan oseul ip-eosseotda.*)
(He had worn red clothes.)

- (9) 그 학생은 오늘 일찍 도서관에 왔었다.
(*Geu haksang-eun oneul iljik doseogwan-e wasseotda.*)
(That student had come to the library early today.)

In these cases, ‘-었었-’ conveys a sense of disconnection from the present, indicating that the past action or state does not continue into the current moment.

3.1.6. ‘-었었-’ in Relation to the Speaker’s Attitude and Psychology

The suffix ‘-었었-’ is closely related to the speaker’s attitude and psychological state, conveying meanings of past experience or re-affirmation.

- (10) a. 근데 아까 전에 그 철학 선생님 봤었잖아/봤잖아.
(*Geunde akka jeone geu cheolhak seonsaengnim bwasseotjanha/bwatjanha.*)
(But we saw that philosophy teacher earlier, didn't we?)
(Kim Eun-jeong, 2008: 26)

- b. 어젯밤에 꿈을 꾸었는데, 거기서는 내가 대단한 부자였었어/부자였어.
(*Eojjeotbame kkumeul kku-eotneunde, geogiseoneun naega daedanhan buja-yeosseosseo/buja-yeosseo.*)
(I had a dream last night, and in it, I was a great rich person.)
(Song Yeong-ju, 1990: 454)
- c. 그녀가 너한테 전화했었다/전화했다는 거, 그게 중요해!
(*Geunyeoga neohante jeonhwa haesseotda/jeonhwa haettaneun geo, geuge jungyohae!*)
(The fact that she called you, that's important!)
- d. 어제 백화점에서 스마트폰 세일했었어/세일했어.
(*Eoje baekhwajeom-eseo seumateupon seil haesseosseo/seil haesseo.*)
(Yesterday, there was a smartphone sale at the department store.)
- e. 그 사람은 자살하려고 했었어/했어.
(*Geu sarameun jasalharyeogo haesseosseo/haesseo.*)
(That person had tried to commit suicide.)

3.1.7. The Recollective Meaning of ‘-었었-’ and Comparison with ‘-더-’

Given that ‘-었-’ and ‘-었었-’ may not always be used distinctly based on temporal precedence, it is argued that ‘-었었-’ cannot be strictly considered a pluperfect tense. Instead, ‘-었었-’ often conveys a sense of recollection regarding past actions.

According to Song Yeong-ju (Song 1990, 453):

- (11) a. 너는 그날 참 훌륭했었어.
(*Neoneun geunal cham hullyunghaesseeosseo.*)
(You were really great that day.)
- b. 다른 사람은 그렇게 안 보던걸?
(*Dareun sarameun geureoke an bodeongeol?*)
(Didn't others see it that way?)
- c. 다른 사람은 그래도 내가 보기는 참 훌륭하더라.
(*Dareun sarameun geuraedo naega bogineun cham hullyunghadeora.*)
(Even if others didn't, I saw you as truly excellent.)

While both ‘-었었-’ and ‘-더-’ share the aspect of recollection, they differ significantly in terms of objectivity and subjectivity. ‘-었었-’ includes elements of objectification, providing certainty and precision. In contrast, ‘-더-’ emphasizes a

more subjective and personalized approach, not stressing factual accuracy, thus reducing the cognitive burden on the listener and facilitating empathy.

3.1.8. Extension of ‘-었-’

The suffix ‘-었-’ is sometimes extended beyond its typical past tense usage to convey various nuances, including hypothetical or emphatic meanings.

- (12) a. 이제 사랑은 끝났다.
(*Ije sarang-eun kkeutnatda.*)
(Now, love has ended.)
- b. 앗, 내일이 한글날이(었)네!
(*At, naeiri Hangeulnari(eot)ne!*)
(Oh, tomorrow is (was) Hangul Day!)

In Korean, the suffix ‘-었-’ is primarily associated with the past tense, but it can also be used in specific contexts to refer to future events. This usage often implies a completed action or a certain result that will have been achieved by a specific point in the future. While ‘-었-’ typically marks past actions, in the context of the future tense, it can denote a future perfect meaning, where the action is anticipated to be completed at a future time. For example:

- (13) a. 내년 이맘때쯤에는 너도 졸업했겠다.
(*Naenyeon imamjjeum-eneun neodo joreophaetgetda.*)
(Around this time next year, you will have graduated.)
- b. 쉬었다가 가세요.
(*Swieotdaga gaseyo.*)
(Please rest before you go.)
- c. 연애는 그만하고 이제 결혼했으면 좋겠어요.
(*Yeonaeneun geumanhago ije gyeolhonhaesseumyeon jokesseoyo.*)
(I wish you'd stop dating and finally get married now.)
- d. 너 이제 죽었다!
(*Neo ije jugeotda!*)
(You're dead now!)

In these cases, ‘-었-’ indicates that by a certain future time, the action (graduation) will already be completed. Thus, ‘-었-’ can imply a sense of completion in the future when combined with certain modal or time expressions, transforming it into a future perfect form.

3.2. The Correspondence of ‘-었-’ , and ‘-있었-’ in Italian

When expressing past events in Korean and Italian, the Korean past tense ‘왔다’ can be compared to the Italian Passato Prossimo (present perfect or simple past), and ‘왔었다’ to the Italian Trapassato Prossimo (pluperfect).

For example:

(14) 그녀는 시에나 캄포광장에 왔다.
(*Geunyeoneun Siena Campo-gwangjang-e watda*)
Lei è venuta in Piazza del Campo a Siena. (Passato Prossimo)
(She came/has come to Piazza del Campo in Siena.)

(15) 그녀는 시에나 캄포광장에 왔었다.
(*Geunyeoneun Siena Campo-gwangjang-e wasseotda*)
Lei era venuta in Piazza del Campo a Siena. (Trapassato Prossimo)
(She had come to Piazza del Campo in Siena.)

Additionally, in some contexts, the Italian assato Remoto(preterite) can also be used:

(16) *Lei venne in Piazza del Campo a Siena.*
(She came/had come to Piazza del Campo in Siena.)

In terms of form, ‘왔다’ is structurally closer to the Passato Remoto in Italian but conceptually more aligned with the Passato Prossimo. Meanwhile, ‘왔었다’ is both structurally and conceptually similar to the Trapassato Prossimo or Passato Remoto.

Both Passato Prossimo and Passato Remoto are used to express past events in Italian, but they differ in context and nuance. Passato Prossimo (Present Perfect or Simple Past) is employed to describe past events that are connected to the present or hold relevance to it. It is formed by combining the present tense of the auxiliary

verb (*essere or avere*) with the past participle of the main verb. For example, ‘Ho mangiato’ (I have eaten) indicates a completed action with present relevance.

In contrast, Passato Remoto (Preterite) is used for events that occurred in the distant past, typically with no connection to the present. This tense is often found in literary works, historical narratives, or when describing specific points in time in the distant past. Passato Remoto is formed by adding specific past tense endings directly to the verb stem. For instance, ‘Mangiai’ (I ate) refers to an action completed long ago without present relevance.

Although Korean ‘왔다’ is predominantly mapped to the Italian Passato Prossimo, ‘왔었다’ more precisely aligns with either Trapassato Prossimo or Passato Remoto, contingent upon contextual parameters. In particular, Trapassato Prossimo (the pluperfect) foregrounds the chronological precedence of one past event relative to another, thereby paralleling the function of ‘왔었다’, which emphasizes that a given occurrence took place prior to another. Conversely, when ‘왔었다’ designates a remote past event devoid of present relevance, it is most aptly conveyed through Passato Remoto. Such distinctions underscore the complexity of tense usage and aspectual nuance, reflecting a more profound interplay of temporality and discourse relevance than a mere indication of chronological sequencing. In Italian, Passato Prossimo (the present perfect) and Passato Remoto (the simple past) are delineated according to multiple criteria: Passato Prossimo is typically employed in quotidian conversation to denote recent events, whereas Passato Remoto often appears in literary compositions, historical narratives, and other formal registers to depict occurrences perceived as significantly distant from the present. Additionally, Passato Prossimo generally encodes a closer temporal relationship to the present, while Passato Remoto signifies greater temporal distance. These nuanced distinctions illuminate how morphological and syntactic choices reflect divergent conceptualizations of time, ultimately shaping how speakers frame and interpret past events across linguistic contexts.

3.2.1. Correspondence between Italian Passato Prossimo and Korean ‘-었-’ and ‘-있었-’

Let’s examine the correspondence between the Italian Passato Prossimo (present perfect) and the Korean suffixes ‘-었-’ and ‘-있었-’ through the following examples:

(17) a. Expressing actions that occurred in the recent past
나는 조금 전에 누리를 보았다.

(*Naneun jogeum jeone Nuri-reul boatda.*)

Io ho visto Nuri poco fa.

I saw Nuri just a moment ago.

- b. Expressing actions that occurred within a time frame that has not yet completely passed

올해 우리는 지출을 너무 많이 했다.

(*Olhae urineun jichureul neomu mani haetda.*)

Quest'anno abbiamo speso troppo.

This year, we have spent too much.

- c. Expressing past events that still influence the present or are considered important by the speaker

나는 이 자동차를 20년 전에 샀다.

(*Naneun i jadongchareul isip nyeon jeone satda.*)

Ho comprato questa macchina 20 anni fa.

I bought this car 20 years ago.

- d. Emphasizing past experience and reaffirmation with ‘-었었-’

어제 백화점에서 스마트폰 세일했었어.

(*Eoje baekhwajeom-eseo seumateupon seilhaesseosseo.*)

Ieri c'era una promozione sugli smartphone al centro commerciale.

There was a smartphone sale at the department store yesterday.

- e. Adding the recollective meaning of ‘-었었-’

너 그날 발표 참 잘했었어.

(*Neo geunal balpyo cham jalhaesseosseo.*)

Quel giorno la tua presentazione è stata davvero buona.

You really did a great job on your presentation that day.

- f. Expressing events certain to occur in the future using Passato Prossimo and Korean ‘-었-’¹

도착하면, 전화해!

(*Dochakhamyeon, jeonhwa hae!*)

Quando sei arrivato (sarai arrivato), telefonami.

When you have arrived, call me.

일이 너무 많아서 내일 잠은 다 잤다!

(*Iri neomu manhaseo naeil jam-eun da jatda!*)

Domani ho così tanto lavoro che non potrò dormire!

I have so much work tomorrow that I won't be able to sleep!

These examples illustrate the nuanced ways in which the Korean suffixes ‘-었-’ and ‘-었었-’ correspond to the Italian Passato Prossimo. While ‘-었-’ generally aligns with actions that have relevance to the present, ‘-었었-’ adds layers of emotional resonance, personal experience, or emphasizes the disconnect with the present. Understanding these subtleties is crucial for accurate translation and effective communication between Korean and Italian, especially in conveying the speaker's attitude and the temporal context of events.

3.2.2. The Italian Passato Remoto and the Korean ‘-았-’ and ‘-었었-’

The Italian Passato Remoto is used to express actions that were completed in the past and have no relation to the present, especially when these actions feel temporally distant. It is typically employed to describe events that happened long ago.

- (18) (오래 전에 우리는 이탈리아를 여행했다.

(*Orae jeone urineun Itallia-reul yeohaenghaetda.*)

Molto tempo fa viaggiammo in Italia.

A long time ago, we traveled to Italy.

The Passato Remoto is used even for important facts that have no impact on the present and remain solely within historical time.

- (19) 고대 로마인들은 많은 길을 건설했다.

(*Godae Romain-deureun maneun gil-eul geonseolhaetda.*)

Gli antichi Romani costruirono molte strade.

The ancient Romans built many roads.

- (20) 고대 로마인들은 지금까지 사용되는 많은 길을 건설했다.

(*Godae Romain-deureun jigeumkkaji sayongdoeneun maneun gil-eul geonseolhaetda.*)

Gli antichi Romani hanno costruito molte strade che sono ancora in uso oggi.

(The ancient Romans built many roads that are still used today.)

According to the National Institute of Korean Language (2005: 198), the distant past marker ‘-었었-’ should be used to indicate historical events or facts that occurred a very long time ago and are clearly distinguished from the present. However, the

¹ In some cases, the Italian Passato Prossimo is used instead of the Futuro Anteriore (future perfect) to express events that are certain to happen, corresponding to the Korean use of ‘-었-’.

examples above suggest that this guideline may not be valid in practice. In Korean, the past tense marker ‘-았-’ might be more appropriate than ‘-었었-’ when describing historical facts.

- (21) 세종대왕은 한글을 1443년에 창조했다.
(*Sejong Daewang-eun Hangeul-eul cheonsabaek sasipsam nyeon-e changjohaetda.*)
Re Sejong creò l'Hangul nel 1443.
King Sejong created Hangul in 1443.

- (22) 위대한 시인 단테는 1265년에 피렌체에서 태어났다.
(*Widaehan si-in Dante-neun cheon i-baek isip-o nyeon-e Pirenche-eseo taeonatda.*)
Il grande poeta Dante nacque a Firenze nel 1265.
The great poet Dante was born in Florence in 1265.

- (23) 크리스토퍼 콜럼버스는 1492년에 아메리카를 아주 우연히 발견했다.
(*Keuriseutopheo Kolleomboseu-neun cheonsabaek gusip-i nyeon-e Amerika-reulaju uyeonhi balgyeonhaetda.*)
Cristoforo Colombo scopri per caso l'America nel 1492.
Christopher Columbus accidentally discovered America in 1492.

These examples indicate that in Korean, when describing historical events, the past tense marker ‘-았-’ is commonly used instead of ‘-었었-’. Even though ‘-었었-’ is prescribed as the marker for the distant past by the National Institute of Korean Language, in practice, ‘-았-’ is preferred for historical facts. This suggests that ‘-았-’ may be more suitable for expressing actions completed in the distant past that remain significant in the present context. While the Italian Passato Remoto is used for actions completed in the distant past with no relation to the present, the Korean past tense marker ‘-았-’ is often used to describe similar historical events. This highlights that the function of ‘-았-’ in Korean aligns more closely with the Italian Passato Remoto than ‘-었었-’ does. Therefore, when translating or teaching these grammatical concepts, it is important to recognize that ‘-았-’ is more appropriate for conveying historical past actions in Korean, despite the theoretical prescriptions regarding ‘-었었-’.

3.2.3. The Italian Imperfetto and the Korean ‘-았-’ and ‘-었었-’

The Imperfetto in Italian is a past tense that expresses actions or states that were incomplete, continuous, or habitual in the past, without specifying their beginning or end. Unlike the Passato Prossimo (which denotes completed actions), the Imperfetto is used to describe ongoing, repeated, or habitual actions, physical or psychological states, and background descriptions in the past.

In comparison, the Korean suffix ‘-았-’ is often defined as a marker of completion. However, when it corresponds to the Italian Imperfetto, its function can extend to representing incomplete or ongoing actions, as well as habitual behaviors and descriptions in the past.

- (24) a. 그 당시에 나는 항상 피곤했다.
(*Geu dangsi-e naneun hangsang pigonhaetda.*)
In quel periodo ero sempre stanco.
At that time, I was always tired.
b. 그녀는 자기 일에 만족했다.
(*Geunyeoneun jagi ire manjukhaetda.*)
Lei era soddisfatta del suo lavoro.
She was satisfied with her job.

(25) Describing states that continued for an unspecified or specific period:

When referring to a state that lasted over an unspecified period in the past:

- a. 나는 잠을 이루지 못하고 있었다.
(*Naneun jam-eul iruji mothago isseotda.*)
Non riuscivo a dormire.
I was unable to sleep.
b. 그 당시에는 소수의 사람들만 자동차를 갖고 있었다.
(*Geu dangsi-eneun sosu-ui saramdeulman jadongcha-reul gatgo isseotda.*)
In quel tempo, solo poche persone avevano un'auto.
At that time, only a few people had a car.
c. 그는 항상 모든 사람들에게 친절했다.
(*Geuneun hangsang modeun saramdeurege chinjeolhaetda.*)
Era sempre gentile con tutti.
He was always kind to everyone.

d. 하늘은 맑고 바다는 고요했다.
(*Haneul-eun malgo badaneun goyohaetda.*)

Il cielo era chiaro e il mare era calmo.

The sky was clear and the sea was calm.

e. 옛날 옛적에 나무토막이 있었다.
(*Yennal yetjeog-e namutomach-i isseotda.*)

C'era una volta un pezzo di legno.

Once upon a time, there was a piece of wood.

(26) **Describing situations or states at specific moments in the past:** The Imperfetto and Korean ‘-았-’ can both be used to describe a situation or condition that existed at a specific point in time in the past:

a. 내가 베네치아에 왔을 때 이탈리아어를 하지 못했다.
(*Naega Benechia-e watseul ttae itallia-eoreul haji mothaetda.*)

Quando sono arrivato a Venezia, non parlavo italiano.

When I arrived in Venice, I couldn't speak Italian.

b. 그때 나는 아는 사람이 아무도 없었다.
(*Geuttae naneun aneun sarami amudo eopseotda.*)

In quel momento non conoscevo nessuno.

At that time, I didn't know anyone.

(27) **Describing habitual or repeated actions in the past:** Both Imperfetto and ‘-었-’ can be used to describe actions that were performed repeatedly or habitually in the past:

a. 그녀는 시에나에 (주말마다) 왔다.
(*Geunyeoneun Siena-e jumalma-da watda.*)

Lei veniva a Siena ogni fine settimana.

She used to come to Siena every weekend.

b. 방학 동안에 나는 항상 늦잠을 잤다.
(*Banghak dongan-e naneun hangsang neujjam-eul jatda.*)

Durante le vacanze sempre dormivo fino a tardi.

During the vacation, I always slept late.

c. 내가 이탈리아에 있었을 때 자주 저녁에 친구들과 와인을 마셨다.
(*Naega Itallia-e isseosseul ttae jaju jeonyeog-e chingudeul-gwa wain-eul masyeotda.*)

Quando ero in Italia, spesso bevevo vino con gli amici la sera.

When I was in Italy, I often drank wine with friends in the evenings.

(28) **Describing actions in progress at a specific moment in the past:** In both languages, the Imperfetto and ‘-았-’ can describe actions that were ongoing at a specific moment in the past, equivalent to the past progressive in English:

a. 내가 네게 전화했을 때 너는 무엇을 하고 있었니?
(*Naega nege jeonhwa haesseul ttae neoneun mueos-eul hago isseotni?*)

Cosa facevi (stavi facendo) quando ti ho chiamato?

What were you doing when I called you?

b. 부모님께서 집에 돌아오셨을 때 나는 이미 자고 있었다.
(*Bumonimkkeseo jibe dol-a-osyeosseul ttae naneun imi jago isseotda.*)

Quando i miei genitori sono tornati a casa, io dormivo (stavo dormendo) già.

When my parents came home, I was already sleeping.

c. 전기가 나갔을 때 나는 컴퓨터로 작업하고 있었다.
(*Jeongiga nagasseul ttae naneun keompyuteoro jag-eob hago isseotda.*)

Quando è andata via la corrente, lavoravo (stavo lavorando) con il computer.

When the power went out, I was working on the computer.

In summary, while the Korean ‘-았-’ is often viewed as a marker of completed actions, its functions overlap significantly with the Italian Imperfetto when it comes to describing continuous, habitual, or incomplete actions in the past, as well as physical or emotional states. Understanding these parallels allows for a more nuanced use of ‘-았-’ when teaching or translating between Korean and Italian, particularly when dealing with past events that have an ongoing or repetitive nature.

3.2.4. The Pluperfect and the Korean Past Tense

The Italian Pluperfect (trapassato prossimo) refers to an action that was completed before another past action, and as such, it corresponds to the Korean ‘-었었-’, which also indicates a past action that was completed and has no relevance to the present.

(29) **Pluperfect-Passato Prossimo:** This sentence is the most natural one because it follows the tense agreement.

a. 나는 그녀가 결혼했었다는 것을 이미 알았다.

(*Naneun geunyeoga gyeolhonhaesseotdaneun geoseul imi aratda.*)

Avevo saputo già che si era sposata

I already knew that she had gotten married.

(30) **Passato Prossimo-Passato Prossimo:** Lacks the clear sequence of events between past actions.

나는 그녀가 결혼했다는 것을 이미 알았다.

(*Naneun geunyeoga gyeolhonhaetdaneun geoseul imi aratda.*)

Ho saputo già che si è sposata.

I already knew that she got married.

(31) **Pluperfect-Pluperfect:** While grammatically possible, this combination doesn't fit well in most everyday speech.

나는 그녀가 결혼했었다는 것을 이미 알았었다.

(*Naneun geunyeoga gyeolhonhaesseotdaneun geoseul imi arasseotda.*)

Avevo Saputo già che si era sposata.

I had already known that she had gotten married.

(32) **Passato Prossimo-Pluperfect:** The tense mismatch creates an unnatural expression.

나는 그녀가 결혼했다는 것을 이미 알았었다.

(*Naneun geunyeoga gyeolhonhaetdaneun geoseul imi arasseotda.*)

Ho saputo già che si era sposata

I had already known that she got married.

The first sentence in each example is the most natural because it adheres to tense agreement. Sentences (17) and (18) do not reflect this agreement, leading to a mismatch in the temporal relationship between the two actions. Sentence 4 further violates tense alignment, making it less suitable. Moreover, in Korean, the use of ‘-었었-’ in subordinate clauses (e.g., describing the action of ‘getting married’) can emphasize past experience or disconnection from the present, which might correspond more to Pluperfect usage. The question remains whether the usage of

‘-었-’ or ‘-었었-’ should vary based on the verb in the main clause, such as ‘knowing’ vs. ‘marrying’, and how this affects tense agreement.

4. Suggestions for Effective Teaching of the Korean Morphemes ‘-었-’, and ‘-었었-’ for Italian-Speaking Learners

According to Bruno (Bruno 2017, 167–168), the Korean suffix ‘-었-’ is explicated within the context of past events, actions, or situations, thereby emphasizing the application of the past tense in Korean. Bruno delineates the distinction between ‘-았/었-’ and ‘-았었-/었었-’ by drawing parallels to the Italian Simple Past and Remote Past tenses, respectively. The Simple Past form (‘-았/었-’) signifies actions or events whose effects may extend into the present, indicating that the past action retains a lasting impact or relevance. For instance:

(33) a. 누리가 왔어요.

(*Nuri ga wasseoyo.*)

Nuri è venuta (ed è ancora qui).

Nuri came and is still here.

b. 누리가 왔었어요.

(*Nuri ga wasseosseoyo.*)

Nuri era venuta (ora non è più qui).

Nuri had come but is no longer here.

In contrast, the Remote Past form (‘-았었-/었었-’) denotes actions that are confined to the past, devoid of any influence on the present, such as historical events or actions without ongoing consequences. For example:

(34) a. (어제) 김선생님을 만났어요.

(*Eoje Kim-seonsaengnim-eul mannasseyo.*)

(Ieri) ho incontrato l'insegnante Kim.

(Yesterday) I met Teacher Kim.

b. (얼마 전에) 김선생님을 만났었어요.

(*Eolma jeone Kim-seonsaengnim-eul mannasseyo.*)

(Molto tempo fa) incontrai l'insegnante Kim.

(A long time ago) I had met Teacher Kim.

Bruno's analysis elucidates how '-았/었-' in Korean correlates with the Italian Passato Prossimo (present perfect) or the English Simple Past/Present Perfect, while '-었었-' aligns more closely with the Italian Trapassato Prossimo (pluperfect) or Passato Remoto, and the English Past Perfect. However, complications arise in equating '-었었-' with Passato Remoto, given that the latter can be translated into English as either the preterite or the simple past, thereby complicating the classification of '-었었-' as solely representing the pluperfect.

De Benedittis (2014: 135; 2018: 13–15) introduces a nuanced distinction within Italian tenses, differentiating between the Simple Past (Il passato semplice) marked by '-았/었/였-', and the Double Past (Il doppio passato) also marked by '-았/었/였-' but repeated twice to convey completed experiences that do not recur. For example:

(35) 나도 미국에 한 번 갔었어요.

(*Nado Migug-e han beon gasseosseoyo.*)

Anch'io sono stato una volta negli USA.

I have also been to the USA once.

According to De Benedittis, the Double Past corresponds to the Italian Passato Prossimo rather than Trapassato Prossimo, presenting a problematic classification when aligning with the Korean tense system.

(36) 그 친구는 일본에 유학 갔었어요.

(*Geu chinguneun Ilbon-e yuhak gasseosseoyo.*)

Quell'amico è stato in Giappone a studiare.

That friend has been to Japan to study.

In this instance, the Italian translation implies a completed action with potential present relevance, which conflicts with the Korean interpretation based on experiential usage.

(37) 그 친구는 일본에 유학 갔어요.

(*Geu chinguneun Ilbon-e yuhak gasseoyo.*)

Quel amico è andato a studiare in Giappone.

That friend has gone to study in Japan.

Further, conflicting definitions emerge when contrasting Korean and Italian tense usages. For example:

(38) 어렸을 때는 피부가 참 좋았었습니다.

(*Eoryeosseul ttaeneun pibu-ga cham joasseosseumnida.*)

Quand'ero piccolo avevo una pelle davvero bella.

When I was young, I had really good skin.

(39) 그 사람 이름을 알았었어요.

(*Geu saram ireumeul arasseosseoyo.*)

Io sapevo il suo nome (ma ora l'ho dimenticato).

I used to know his/her name, but now I've forgotten it.

In these instances, '-었-' and '-었었-' are rendered in Italian as the Imperfetto, a tense used to describe past states or actions that were habitual or ongoing. The utilization of the Imperfetto in Italian to represent both '-었-' and '-었었-' creates contradictions, particularly when defining Double Past as conveying a completed experience that does not recur. The Imperfetto in Italian typically describes past states or actions that were habitual or ongoing, leading to a mismatch with the Korean usage of '-었-' and '-었었-' for completed actions or experiences.

For the effective instruction of '-었-' and '-었었-' to Italian learners, it is imperative to differentiate between actions with ongoing relevance (akin to Passato Prossimo) and those disconnected from the present (similar to Trapassato Prossimo or Passato Remoto). Emphasis must be placed on the specific context in which these tenses are employed, especially during translation between Korean and Italian, to avert confusion and misinterpretation of past events.

The contrast between '-었-' and '-었었-' in Korean exemplifies significant discrepancies when compared to Italian tense systems. For example:

(40) a. 그는 빨간 옷을 입었다.

(*Geuneun ppalgan oseul ip-eotda.*)

Lui ha indossato vestiti rossi.

He wore red clothes.

b. 그는 빨간 옷을 입었다.

(*Geuneun ppalgan oseul ip-eosseotda.*)

Lui aveva indossato vestiti rossi.

He had worn red clothes.

c. 그 학생은 오늘 일찍 도서관에 왔다.

(*Geu haksang-eun oneul iljjik doseogwan-e wasseotda.*)

Lo studente era venuto presto in biblioteca oggi.

The student had come to the library early today.

In these cases, ‘-았었-’ conveys a sense of disconnection from the present, indicating that the past action or state does not continue into the current moment. This functional divergence underscores the complexity involved in teaching these Korean tenses to Italian speakers, necessitating a thorough understanding of both linguistic systems to accurately convey temporal relationships. The comparative analysis between Korean and Italian tense systems reveals intricate nuances that must be meticulously addressed in language instruction. Bruno (2017) and De Benedittis (2014, 2018) highlight the complexities of aligning Korean past tenses ‘-았-’ and ‘-았었-’ with Italian tenses such as Passato Prossimo, Imperfetto, Passato Remoto, and Trapassato Prossimo. The overlapping and conflicting functionalities of these tenses necessitate a nuanced pedagogical approach that emphasizes contextual differentiation and comparative analysis. By fostering a deeper understanding of these distinctions, educators can better equip Italian learners with the tools necessary to navigate and utilize Korean past tenses effectively, thereby enhancing their overall linguistic proficiency and reducing potential areas of confusion.

Regarding the teaching methods of ‘-았-,’ this paper highlights that most Korean language textbooks do not explicitly cover its aspectual meanings, resulting in a significant gap in educational content. To address this deficiency, it is essential to clearly present and teach the various aspectual meanings that ‘-았-’ carries, doing so progressively in alignment with learners’ proficiency levels. Several teaching strategies are proposed to bridge this gap: Firstly, explicit differentiation of ‘-았-’ and ‘-았었-’ is necessary, categorizing the grammatical meanings of ‘-았었-’ into aspects such as pluperfect, past perfect, discontinuity, disconnection, experience, certainty, reaffirmation, emphasis, and recollection. Secondly, contrasting ‘-았-’ with Italian tenses—such as Passato Prossimo (present perfect), Imperfetto (imperfect), Passato Remoto (preterite), and Trapassato Prossimo (pluperfect)—can

help Italian learners understand the layered meanings of ‘-았었-’ through comparative analysis. Additionally, comparing Italian Passato Prossimo and Passato Remoto tenses will clarify the interpretation of past events in Korean, while utilizing the Italian Imperfetto can elucidate the continuous or habitual aspects of ‘-았-’ in Korean non-past events. Furthermore, contrasting the aspectual meaning of ‘-았-’ with both Passato Prossimo and Imperfetto in Italian will highlight how ‘-았-’ indicates the completion or continuity of actions. Time adverbs should also be addressed by comparing Korean and Italian counterparts, demonstrating how they interact with tense and aspect markers to provide temporal context. Lastly, teaching students to recognize the core and contextual meanings of ‘-았-’ across sentences, especially in relation to tenses like present perfect or future perfect in both Korean and Italian, will enhance their understanding of how context shapes the meaning of ‘-았-’. These strategies collectively aim to provide a more comprehensive approach to teaching ‘-았-’ and ‘-았었-’ to Italian learners, facilitating their grasp of aspectual nuances and temporal relations through effective comparative analysis with Italian tenses.

5. Conclusion

Effective Korean language education necessitates that educators possess a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the Korean tense system, as well as a keen awareness of the challenges and limitations inherent in teaching tense. Such expertise is crucial for enhancing the overall effectiveness of the educational process and ensuring that learners achieve genuine proficiency in real-world language use. Unlike Italian, which relies heavily on explicit tense markers, Korean emphasizes modality and context-based expressions to convey temporal information. Consequently, it is imperative for teaching methodologies to integrate these linguistic features strategically, thereby equipping learners with the skills necessary to navigate and utilize the language adeptly in diverse, authentic scenarios.

Time adverbs are integral to determining tense within Korean sentences, playing a pivotal role in shaping the temporal context of actions and events. Therefore, Korean language educators must meticulously explain the function and significance of these adverbs to ensure that learners fully understand their critical role in conveying meaning. For Italian learners of Korean, the instructional approach often involves leveraging the grammatical structures of their native language. This underscores the necessity for developing effective comparative frameworks that highlight the

similarities and differences between Korean and Italian tense systems. By facilitating such comparative analyses, educators can help learners bridge the linguistic gaps, thereby maximizing their learning outcomes and fostering a more seamless transition between the two languages.

Furthermore, there is a pressing need for continued exploration into the aspectual functions of the Korean morpheme ‘-았-’. This morpheme presents particular challenges when juxtaposed with Italian tense systems, as its usage does not always align directly with Italian equivalents. An in-depth analysis of these discrepancies is essential for fostering a more accurate and practical understanding of how ‘-았-’ operates within various contexts. The multifaceted meanings and functions of ‘-았-’ and ‘-었었-’ in Korean correspond to different Italian past tenses, such as Passato Prossimo, Imperfetto, Passato Remoto, and Trapassato Prossimo. Therefore, teaching strategies should be meticulously designed to elucidate these nuances, enabling learners to apply the morphemes correctly across a range of contexts.

Although ‘-았-’ is commonly introduced as a past tense marker in Korean language education, it encompasses a broad spectrum of syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic functions beyond mere temporal indication. This complexity necessitates a deeper and more comprehensive educational approach that encourages educators and learners to adopt a more expansive perspective on the usage of ‘-았-’. By embracing this broader viewpoint, educators can more effectively convey the intricate aspects of Korean grammar, thereby equipping learners with the skills required to understand and utilize the language with greater precision and fluency.

In summary, advancing pedagogical strategies related to the Korean tense system—particularly the aspectual nuances of ‘-았-’ and ‘-었었-’—is essential for fostering effective language acquisition among Italian learners. Through targeted comparative analyses, explicit instructional methodologies, and a holistic understanding of Korean linguistic features, educators can significantly enhance the learning experience. This, in turn, enables students to achieve a higher level of communicative competence in Korean, bridging the gaps between the two languages and facilitating more effective and meaningful language use.

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