

Beyond the negator: Structural competition and contextual influence in Korean suppletive negation

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Park, Keunhyung. 2025. Beyond the negator: Structural competition and contextual influence in Korean suppletive negation. Linguistic Research 42(1): 169-201. This paper investigates suppletive negation in Korean-verbs like eps- 'not exist' and molu- 'not know' that inherently encode negative meaning. While Short-form negation (SFN) and Long-form negation (LFN) typically introduce the marker an 'not,' these suppletive predicates lack any overt negator yet still exhibit key syntactic and semantic parallels to SFN. Drawing on newly elicited data involving double negation, negative polarity licensing, and negative polar questions (NPQs), we argue that suppletive negation is structurally integrated at the verb level, thus competing with SFN for the same morphological slot. Despite this competition, we show that pragmatically driven contexts -such as a speaker's surprise or contradiction of prior assumption-can override the default morphological restriction, enabling suppletive negation to pattern like SFN in NPQs. In doing so, this paper refines prior analyses (Chung 2007; Park and Dubinsky 2019) and highlights the importance of morphological fusion and discourse factors in shaping how negation is realized. Our findings offer broader insights into Korean negation and contribute to cross-linguistic theories of negation by illustrating how structural and pragmatic pressures converge to produce distinctive negative forms. (Kyungpook National University)

Keywords suppletive negation, Korean negation, negative polar questions (NPQ), questioner bias, contextual evidence

1. Introduction

In Korean, negation is typically manifested by Short-form negation (SFN), using the marker *an* 'not' directly attached to the lexical verb, or by Long-form negation (LFN), which places *an* within a separate negative auxiliary complex. Yet certain predicates—

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eps- 'not exist' and *molu-* 'not know'—do not require *an* at all; they lexically encode the negative meaning. Following Chung (2007), these suppletive negation forms have been recognized as structurally akin to SFN. However, prior studies have not fully explained the pragmatic or discourse dimensions of how these forms can overlap or co-occur with SFN, nor have they systematically examined how suppletive negation behaves in contexts like double negation or negative polar questions (NPQs).

This paper addresses these gaps by showing that suppletive negation shares crucial syntactic and semantic features with SFN—such as licensing negative polarity items (NPIs) and occupying the same morphological position—but also reveals distinct pragmatic functions when real-world evidence contradicts a speaker's prior assumption. We argue that by examining speaker judgments and discourse contexts, it becomes clear that suppletive negation can yield truth conditions and response patterns identical to SFN-NPQs (and contrary to LFN-NPQs). At the same time, pragmatic factors such as surprise or emphasis can override the usual morphological prohibition against co-occurring with SFN. This account highlights the interplay of structure and context in determining how negation is realized and interpreted in Korean, adding nuance to the frameworks proposed by Chung (2007) and Park and Dubinsky (2019).

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 explores the structural and semantic parallels between suppletive negation and SFN, highlighting double negation facts and morphological constraints. Section 3 focuses on scope and NPI licensing, further underscoring the syntactic alignment with SFN. Section 4 then examines NPQs, showing how suppletive negation yields SFN-like answer patterns and can be uniquely triggered by contradictory contextual evidence or a shift in the questioner's bias.

2. Syntactic and semantic properties of suppletive negation

2.1 Suppletive negation and sentential negation

In Korean, there are two distinct ways of expressing sentential negation: SFN and LFN. In both cases, as illustrated in examples (1a) and (1b) respectively, the Korean negator *an* 'not' is inserted and attached to the predicates to convey a negative meaning (Yoon 1990; Cho 1994; Hagstrom 2000; Kim and Park 2000; Sells 2001).

(1) a. na-nun ku yenghwa-lul an po-ass-ta. that movie-ACC I-TOP not see-pst-decl 'I didn't watch the movie.' b. na-nun ku yenghwa-lul anh-ass-ta. po-ci I-TOP that movie-ACC not.do-PST-DECL see-NMLZ

'I didn't watch the movie.'

In SFN construction (1a), the negator *an* 'not' is placed directly before the lexical verb po- 'see', forming a single unit. In LFN construction (1b), the verb is nominalized with *-ci*, and the negation is expressed with the auxiliary verb *ha*- 'do' constructing a separate complex negative auxiliary, *anh-ta*. Despite their structural differences, both negative declaratives with either SFN or LFN convey the same meaning, 'I didn't watch the movie,' and are interchangeable in natural conversation.

In addition to the sentential negation shown above, certain predicates, such as eps- 'not exist/not.be' and *molu*- 'not know', inherently express a negative meaning without the need for the overt negator *an* 'not'. Examples (2) and (3) below demonstrate how these lexically incorporated negative predicates function similarly to typical sentential negation, effectively conveying negative statements without additional negation markers.

- (2) pwukkuk-ey-nun pheyngkwin-i eps-ta.
 Arctic-in-TOP penguin-NOM not.exist-DECL
 'There are no penguins in the Arctic.'
- (3) ku-ka ku sasil-ul molu-n-ta.
 he-NOM the fact-ACC not.know-pres-DECL
 'He doesn't know the fact.'

These examples illustrate that *eps-* 'not exist' and *molu-* 'not know' inherently carry negative meanings, simplifying the sentence structure by eliminating the need for an external negator. This semantic negation is an integral part of the predicate itself, introducing the unique ways Korean handles negation beyond standard syntactic methods.

Suppletive negation, even without an explicit negative marker, exhibits several linguistic properties that align with typical sentence negation in Korean.¹ One key

syntactic and semantic parallel can be observed in double negation constructions, which are widely attested in Korean and function similarly to double negation in Standard American English, yielding a positive interpretation. In Korean, a grammatical double negation requires the simultaneous combination of SFN and LFN. The use of two SFNs or two LFNs alone cannot generate an acceptable double negation with a positive meaning, as shown in (4).

- (4) a. ku-nun ku yenghwa-lul **an** po-ci **an**h-ass-ta. he-TOP that movie-ACC not see-NMLZ not.do-PST-DECL 'He didn't not watch the movie.' = 'He watched the movie.'
 - b. *ku-nun ku yenghwa-lul **an an** po-ass-ta. he-top that movie-ACC not not see-PST-DECL 'He didn't not watch the movie.' = 'He watched the movie.'
 - c. *ku-nun ku yenghwa-lul po-ci anh-anh-ass-ta.
 he-тор that movie-ACC see-NMLZ not.do-not.do-PST-DECL
 'He didn't not watch the movie.' = 'He watched the movie.'

These examples confirm that only the SFN and LFN combination forms a grammatical double negation, reinforcing the distinct syntactic roles of SFN and LFN in Korean negation.²

According to Chung (2007), suppletive negation forms (e.g., *eps-* 'not exist', *molu-*'not know') typically cannot co-occur with SFN. However, some native speakers do accept suppletive negation in double negation constructions that involve both sentential negations—SFN and LFN—indicating a degree of flexibility. Notably, these double negation constructions are more naturally and grammatically formed when

² In contrast to the ungrammaticality of (4c), another doubled LFN construction below sounds slightly better.

(i)?ku-nun	ku yenghwa-lul	po-ci	an h-ci	an h-ass-ta.
he-top	that movie-ACC	see-NMLZ	not.do-NMLZ	not.do-pst-decl

In this example, the whole embedded verb phrase, *po-ci anh-*, is first nominalized, and then this LFN construction is again nominalized.

¹ Regarding the term 'suppletive negation,' there are inconsistencies in the terminology used to describe this type of negation. Lee (1996) and Choi and Lee (1998) refer to it as an 'intrinsically/morphologically negative predicate,' while Sells (2015) describes it as 'lexical negation.'

suppletive negation is combined with LFN rather than with SFN, as illustrated in examples (5) and (6). This preference suggests that suppletive negation aligns structurally more closely with SFN, competing for the same syntactic position, which explains the marked incompatibility between them in double negation contexts.

- (5) a. ku-ka kyosil-ey eps-ci **an**h-ass-ta. he-NOM classroom-in not.exist-NMLZ not.do-PST-DECL 'He wasn't not in the classroom.' = 'He was in the classroom.'
 - b. *?ku-ka kyosil-ey **an** eps-ess-ta he-NOM classroom-in not not.exist-PST-DECL 'He wasn't not in the classroom.' = 'He was in the classroom.'
- (6) a. ku-ka ku sail-lul molu-ci **an**h-ass-ta. he-NOM the fact-ACC not.know-NMLZ not.do-PST-DECL 'He didn't not know the fact.' = 'He knew the fact.'
 - b. *?ku-ka ku sasil-lul **an** mol-ass-ta. he-NOM the fact-ACC not not.know-PST-DECL 'He didn't not know the fact.' = 'He knew the fact.'

The incompatibility between suppletive negation and SFN suggests that these two forms of negation compete for the same syntactic position. Since SFN has been analyzed as a prefixal negation that attaches directly to the lexical verb (Kim 2000; Sells 2015), it follows that suppletive negation, which also integrates directly with the verb, occupies a similar structural slot. This overlap explains why SFN and suppletive negation rarely co-occur, as both elements seek to attach at the same level. In contrast, LFN, which projects as an independent NegP above vP or TP, does not compete for the same position and can therefore combine with either SFN or suppletive negation in grammatical double negation constructions. This distributional pattern further reinforces the structural alignment between SFN and suppletive negation, rather than between suppletive negation and LFN.³

Semantically, SFN and suppletive negation exhibit key similarities in scope and

³ While most native speakers found (5b) and (6b) marginally acceptable in specific conversational contexts (e.g., emphatic or contrastive discourse settings), Some judged that they sound less natural in straightforward declarative uses. This variability appears to reflect both dialectal differences and situational factors such as speaker emphasis or intended contrast.

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interpretative effects. Unlike LFN, which negates at the clausal level and often reinforces negation pragmatically, SFN and suppletive negation both operate at the lexical level, directly modifying the verb rather than projecting an independent negation phrase. Their overlapping semantic function accounts for their resistance to co-occurrence. In both cases, negation is restricted to the predicate rather than extending to the entire proposition, reinforcing their similarity. The preference of native speakers for suppletive Neg+LFN rather than suppletive Neg+SFN suggests that SFN and suppletive negation share similar scope properties, making their combination redundant or structurally disfavored.

The structural and semantic alignment of suppletive negation with SFN is not only crucial for understanding its distribution but also has important implications for scope relationships. In the next section, we examine how these syntactic properties affect the licensing of negative polarity items (NPIs) and interact with quantified nominals, thereby clarifying the underlying mechanisms of negation in Korean. Moreover, the interaction between suppletive negation and LFN in double negation constructions supports its status as lexical negation rather than as an independent NegP, further reinforcing its parallels with SFN. Together, this analysis offers a refined perspective on Korean negation, confirming that suppletive negation shares key syntactic and semantic characteristics with SFN despite its distinct morphological properties.⁴

(i)*na-nun ku wuhwa-lul **an/mos** mol-ass-ta. (Chung 2007) I-TOP the fable-ACC not not.know-PST-DECL 'I didn't not know the fable.'

In contrast to the strict unacceptability of the double negation constructions in (4b) and (4c), suppletive negation examples like (5b) appear marginally acceptable to some speakers, possibly because *eps*- ('not exist') is inherently negative without requiring an overt negative marker. By comparison, it is also possible for a lexically negative form with the prefix *pul*- 'not' to be further negated by the SFN *an* 'not', as illustrated in (ii):

(ii) ku kyuceng-un an pul-kongphyengha-ta. The rule-TOP not not-be.fair-DECL
'The rule is not unfair.' = 'The rule is fair.'

⁴ I thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing out the need to clarify why examples like (5b) and (6b) are less acceptable to some native speakers. Although my judgments and those of several other Korean speakers suggest these sentences can be marginally acceptable in specific contexts, earlier research (cf. Chung 2007) categorizes similar constructions as ungrammatical. For instance:

This structural and semantic alignment of SFN and suppletive negation is best explained through the prefixal account of SFN, which remains the most widely accepted analysis of SFN in the literature. This account posits that, unlike LFN, SFN attaches directly to the lexical verb within VP, without projecting a functional NegP (Kim 2000). A stronger version of this analysis suggests that SFN involves the syntactic combination of two X^o-level elements, forming a complex head that remains an X^o (see Sells 2015 for further discussion). This perspective closely aligns with the behavior of suppletive negation, which inherently encodes semantic negation within its structure.

Following Chung (2007), we assume that suppletive negation forms such as *molu*and *eps*- arise through morphological fusion within the morphological component. Specifically, this process merges two sister nodes: the V node, which encodes [know] for *iss*- (or [exist] for *al*-), and the Neg node, which carries the [+NEG] feature. As a result, these nodes combine into a single terminal node, retaining all original syntactic and semantic features, producing a fused element with attributes such as [+NEG, know] for *molu*- and [+NEG, exist] for *eps*-. The structures in (7) and (8) illustrate the syntactic parallels between SFN and suppletive negation. Specifically, (7) shows that SFN attaches directly to the verb *iss*- 'exist,' while (8) demonstrates how the negative feature [+NEG] merges into the suppletive negation *eps*-.



Under the prefixal account, SFN in (7) attaches directly to the lexical verb *iss*-, allowing it to generate a negative verb complex at a later stage when combined with tense and sentence markers.⁵ Similarly, in (8), the negative semantic feature is merged with

Ultimately, the varying judgments around these double negation sentences may reflect dialectal or idiolectal differences and would benefit from systematic experimental research to determine the conditions under which certain speakers find them acceptable.

⁵ A reviewer suggests that SFN and LFN could share the same underlying syntactic structure (e.g., VP dominated by NegP), with their surface distinctions resulting from morphological operations (e.g., lowering or merger) within the Distributed Morphology framework. Under this approach, Neg in (7)

the lexical verb *iss*-, giving rise to the suppletive negation *eps*-. These syntactic parallels provide further evidence that suppletive negation patterns structurally with SFN rather than LFN. Building on this framework, the following sections explore the semantic and pragmatic parallels between SFN and suppletive negation, further clarifying their shared properties and distributional tendencies.

2.2 Suppletive negation vs. antonym continuum

Negation fundamentally involves creating a semantic contrast by linking an affirmative expression with its opposite meaning. While typical sentential negation establishes this contrast, suppletive negation similarly pairs with a corresponding positive counterpart. However, when negating the positive counterparts of suppletive negation, different predicate types behave differently. Specifically, copular predicates like *iss*-('be/exist') and cognitive predicates like *al*- ('know') show different levels of acceptability when negated. As illustrated in (9a) and (10a), negating *iss*- with sentential negation (SFN/LFN) is generally more acceptable than negating *al*-. This contrast arises because copular verbs like *iss*- typically describe states, while cognitive verbs like *al*-require an epistemic component, making their negation more restrictive. This highlights how predicate type influences the acceptability of negation.

(9)	a.	?ku-ka	kyosil-ey	an	iss-ess	-ta.
		he-nom	classroom-in	not	exist-P	PST-DECL
		'He wasn	't in the classroo	m.'		
	b.	ku-ka	kyosil-ey	iss-ci		an h-ass-ta.
		he-nom	classroom-in	exist-M	IMLZ	not.do-pst-decl
		'He wasn	't in the classroo	m.'		
	c.	ku-ka	kyosil-ey	eps-es	s-ta	
		he-nom	classroom-in	room-in not.exist-ps		DECL
		'He wasn	't in the classroo	m.'		
(10))a.*	?ku-ka	ku yenghwa-lul	an	al-as	s-ta.
		he-nom	that movie-ACC	not	knov	V-PST-DECL

would indeed function as a functional head, and differences between SFN and LFN would arise through distinct morphological realizations at the post-syntactic level. While this possibility merits further exploration, I leave detailed examination of this alternative to future research.

'He didn't know the movie.'

- b. ku-ka ku yenghwa-lul al-ci **mos**-hayss-ta. he-NOM that movie-ACC know-NMLZ not-do.PST-DECL 'He didn't know the movie.'
- c. ku-ka ku yenghwa-lul mol-ass-ta. he-NOM that movie-ACC not.know-PST-DECL 'He didn't know the movie.'

Naturally, the acceptability among native speakers may vary, but these examples demonstrate how the acceptability of negative sentences depends on both the type of predicate and the form of negation used. The positive counterparts of the two suppletive negations are significantly more natural in LFN constructions, with *iss*-being slightly more acceptable than *al*- in SFN constructions.

In examining the linguistic characteristics of suppletive negation, it is crucial to distinguish it from the continuum of antonyms, as they possess fundamentally different syntactic and semantic properties. The two suppletive negations mentioned above should be differentiated from typical antonyms. For instance, antonym pairs such as *noph*- 'high'vs. *nac*- 'low', *khu*- 'big' vs. *cak*- 'small', *ppalu*- 'fast' vs. *nuli*- 'slow', and *palk*- 'bright' vs. *etwup*- 'dark' show semantically opposite values compared to their counterparts. However, these pairs cannot be classified as typical suppletive negations.

Lee (1996) and Choi and Lee (1998) distinguish between morphologically negative predicates, such as *eps-* 'not exist' and *molu-* 'not know', and implied negative predicates, such as *silh-* 'dislike' and *thulli-* 'be wrong'. Morphologically negative predicates inherently encode negation in their lexical structure and cannot co-occur with SFN (e.g., *an eps-ta* is unacceptable), whereas implied negatives pragmatically convey a negative stance but can still be explicitly negated (e.g., *an silh-ta* 'not dislike').

The claim that morphologically negative predicates carry stronger negation than implied negatives is supported by their syntactic behavior. Since their negation is internalized, they inherently reject the positive counterpart, whereas implied negatives do not entail absolute rejection. Further support comes from Moeschler (2020), who argues that predicates like "hate" are pragmatically stronger than "not like" because they presuppose a stronger negative stance and indicate a more categorical rejection. By contrast, "not like" simply denies a positive preference, making it semantically weaker. The most notable difference lies in the behavior of typical antonyms, which are fundamentally degree predicates. Negative predicates and their positive antonyms can all be negated by SFN, with each negated expression maintaining its own distinct meaning. Crucially, the original and the negated clauses are not contradictory counterparts of each other. The examples in (11) further clarify this distinction.

(11)	a.	ku san-un		an	noph-	ta.	
		The mountain	in-top	not	high-D	ECL	
		'The mounta	in isn't	high.'	\neq 'Th	e mou	ntain is low.'
	b.	onul-un	kion-i			an	nac-ta.
		today-тор	tempera	ature-N	OM	not	low-decl
		'The tempera	ature isr	n't low	today.	,	
		\neq 'The temp	perature	is hig	h toda	y.'	

While the negated expression of *al*- 'know' directly corresponds to *molu*- 'not know,' as shown in the comparison between (10b) and (10c), the negated expressions of *noph*- 'high' and *nac*- 'low' in (11) do not imply each other's meanings. This is because typical antonyms are at opposite ends of a continuum of degree words. Thus, there always exists a middle ground somewhere along this continuum, making it unclear whether negated expressions denote the semantic opposite. This continuum is visually represented in Figure 1 below.



Consequently, there are intermediate expressions along this continuum, such as numerous "medium" heights between "high" and "low," which makes it unclear whether the negated expressions denote the exact semantic opposite. In contrast, with

"know" and "not know," there are no intermediate stages where one can "know a little more or less." Thus, the negated expressions of each one directly denote their counterpart. Furthermore, there are other types of antonyms that appear to convey only the extremes of semantic polarization. For example, *ilh-* 'lose' or *silphayha-* 'fail' seem to possess negative meanings compared to their counterparts *et-* 'obtain' or *sengkongha-* 'succeed'. These terms, like black-and-white, denote the ends of a continuum without intermediate expressions. Nevertheless, the negated expressions of these words do not correspond to their counterparts, differing from true suppletive negations. This indicates that these pseudo-suppletive negations originate from distinct lexical categories. The following examples in (12) illustrate the lack of intermediate expressions for these terms.

- (12) a. ku-ka topak-ulo ton-ul ilh-ess-ta. he-NOM gambling-through money-ACC lose-PST-DECL 'He lost some money through gambling.'
 - b. ku-ka topak-ulo ton-ul an ilh-ess-ta.
 he-NOM gambling-through money-ACC not lose-PST-DECL
 'He didn't lose some money through gambling.'
 ≠ 'He obtained some money through gambling.'
 - c. ku-ka topak-ulo ton-ul et-ess-ta.
 he-NOM gambling-through money-ACC obtain-PST-DECL
 'He obtained some money through gambling.'
 ≠ 'He didn't lose some money through gambling.'

These pairs of verbs are often used to convey opposing meanings, but they do not function as true negations of each other. For example, "not losing" does not directly mean "obtaining," and "not failing" does not directly mean "succeeding". These examples show that while typical antonyms and pseudo-suppletive negations exhibit semantically opposite meanings, they do not operate under the same syntactic and semantic rules as true suppletive negations like *eps-* 'not exist' and *molu-* 'not know'. True suppletive negations inherently encode the negative meaning, resulting in a direct and unambiguous contrast with their positive counterparts.

The syntactic parallels between suppletive negation and SFN not only inform their distribution but also have crucial implications for scope. In Section 3, we examine

how these properties affect the licensing of NPIs and the interaction with quantified expressions.

3. Scope relationship of suppletive negation

3.1 NPI licensing

As is well known, NPIs cannot appear randomly within a sentence. They are restricted to specific contexts that provide the appropriate licensing conditions, such as negation, conditionals, questions. NPIs are typically licensed in the presence of negation or similar contexts that inherently carry a negative or limiting sense.

In Korean, NPIs such as *amu-* 'any-' follow the specific licensing rules. They appear exclusively in contexts that provide negative scope or other negative contexts within a clausal boundary. The examples provided in (13) below illustrate these rules, showing how NPIs are used correctly within negative contexts in Korean. These examples highlight the strict conditions under which NPIs can appear, emphasizing the role of negation in their licensing. This careful placement ensures that NPIs contribute to the sentence's meaning without causing confusion or ambiguity.

(13)	a. Hana-ka	amu kes-to	an	mek	-ess-ta.
	Hana-NOM	anything-even	not	eat-1	PST-DECL
	'Hana didn't	eat anything.'			
	b.*Hana-ka	amu kes-to	mel	k-ess-t	a.
	Hana-NOM	anything-even	eat-	PST-DE	CL
	'Hana did ea	at anything.'			
	c. amu-to	ku panana-l	ul	an	mek-ess-ta.
	anyone-even	the banana-	ACC	not	eat-PST-DECI
	'Anyone did	n't eat the bana	ana.'		
	d.*amu-to	ku panana-l	ul	mek	-ess-ta.
	anyone-even	the banana-	ACC	eat-1	PST-DECL
	'Anyone ate	the banana.'			

As shown in (13a) and (13c), the NPI amu- can be licensed by sentential negation

whether it appears in the subject or the object position. This contrasts with Standard English syntax, where NPIs like "anyone" and "anything" typically require a negative context and tend to be confined to object positions under a downward-entailing operator. For example, "She didn't see anyone" is grammatical in English, whereas "Anyone didn't see her" is generally unacceptable. In Korean, however, NPIs can even appear in the subject position, which is structurally higher than the usual domain of sentential negation. As will be discussed in the next section, this occurs because the verb—together with the negation—raises through intermediate functional heads (v, Neg, T) and adjoins in C, forming a complex head. This upward movement places Neg in a dominant structural position, allowing it to license NPIs in both subject and object positions. For further details on Korean and English NPI licensing, see An (2007), Lee (1996), and Sells and Kim (2006).

Further developing previous discussions in Lee (1996), Choi and Lee (1998), and Chung (2007), the current work shows that both suppletive negation and sentential negation in Korean share similar syntactic and semantic characteristics, with regard to the licensing of NPIs and their scope relations with quantified nominals. In examples (14) and (15), the (a) sentences demonstrate that the Korean NPI *amu-* 'any-' is compatible with sentences utilizing suppletive negation, such as *eps-* 'not exist' and *molu-* 'not know'. Conversely, in the (b) sentences, *amu-* is prohibited when paired with positive predicates such as *iss-* 'exist' and *al-* 'know'.

- (14) a. nayngcangko-ey amu kes-to eps-ta.
 refrigerator-in anything-even not.exist-DECL
 'There isn't anything in the refrigerator.'
 b.*nayngcangko-ey amu kes-to iss-ta.
 refrigerator-in anything-even exist-DECL
 'There is anything in the refrigerator.'
- (15) a. ku-nun amu-to molu-n-ta.
 he-TOP anyone-even not.know-PRES-DECL
 'He doesn't know anyone.'
 b. amu-to ku-lul molu-n-ta.
 anyone-even he-top not.know-PRES-DECL
 - 'He doesn't know anyone.'
 - c.*ku-nun amu-to a-n-ta.

he-тор anyone-even know-pres-decl 'He does know anyone.'

The above examples illustrate the necessity of a negative environment for the proper licensing of NPIs in Korean. Sentences (14a), (15a), and (15b) show that *amu*- is appropriately used with suppletive negation verbs like *eps*- 'not exist' and *molu*- 'not know'. In contrast, sentences (14b) and (15c) demonstrate that *amu*- cannot be used with the positive counterparts of suppletive negation, such as *iss*- 'exist' and *al*- 'know', since these contexts do not provide the required negation scope for NPI licensing. This pattern underscores the syntactic and semantic parallelism between suppletive negation and sentential negation in Korean. Both forms of negation effectively create an environment that satisfies the licensing requirements for NPIs, thereby exhibiting similar behavior in their interaction with negative elements.

Building on this observation, further evidence highlights the morphological distribution of positive counterparts in relation to negation forms. It has been noted that the positive counterparts of the suppletive negation discussed in examples (9) and (10) above are more naturally paired with LFN rather than SFN. This morphological distribution reveals that suppletive negations like *eps-* and *molu-* can fully replace the negative forms of *iss-* and *al-*. At the same time, the closer morpho-syntactic alignment between suppletive negation and SFN becomes evident. Such findings emphasize that suppletive negation is not only syntactically parallel to sentential negation but also inherently morpho-syntactically linked to SFN.

3.2 Ambiguity in scope relations

It has long been noted that typical sentential negation and other scope-related elements can generate ambiguous interpretations, owing to the complex hierarchical relationships among them when interpreted within the same domain (Suh 1989; Baek 1998; Choi 1999; Hagstrom 2000; Kim 2000; Han et al. 2007; Kim 2007). Native Korean speakers and researchers alike generally agree that the negative constructions discussed here exhibit such scope-induced ambiguity. Similarly, the scope relations observed with quantified NPs show that suppletive negation behaves much like ordinary sentential negation, regardless of whether these quantified NPs appear in subject or object positions.

The following examples illustrate that, irrespective of the type of negation SFN or LFN, Korean sentential negation allows for ambiguous readings with quantified nominals in both object and subject positions. As illustrated in (16)–(17), both SFN and LFN can be interpreted such that the quantified NPs in subject or object position take scope over the negation (NP>negation), or the negation itself takes scope over the quantified NPs (negation>NP).

(16) a. ku haksayng-i twu kwacey-lul an The student-NOM two assignments-ACC not ceychwulha-yess-ta. submit-PST-DECL 'The student didn't submit two assignments.' $(\exists Obj>not)$ 'It is not the case that the student submitted two assignments.' $?(not > \exists Obj)$ b. twu haksayng-i ku kwacey-lul an two students-NOM the assignment-ACC not submit-PST-DECL ceychwulha-yess-ta. 'Two students didn't submit the assignment.' $(\exists Subj>not)$ 'It is not the case that two students submitted the assignment.' $?(not > \exists Subj)$ c. ku haksayng-i motun kwacey-lul an The student-NOM every assignment-ACC not ceychwulha-yess-ta. submit-pst-decl 'The student didn't submit any assignments.' $(\exists Obj>not)$ 'It is not the case that the student submitted every assignment.' $(not > \exists Obj)$ d. motun haksayng-i ku kwacey-lul an every student-NOM the assignment-ACC not ceychwulha-yess-ta. submit-pst-decl 'Every student didn't submit the assignment.' (\forall Subj>not) 'It is not the case that every student submitted the assignment.' $(not > \forall Subj)$

twu kwacey-lul (17) a. ku haksayng-i ceychwulha-ci The student-NOM two assignments-ACC submit-NMLZ anh-ass-ta. not.do-PST-DECL 'The student didn't submit two assignments.' $(\exists Obj > not)$ 'It is not the case that the student submitted two assignments.' (not> $\exists Obj$) b. twu haksayng-i ku kwacey-lul ceychwulha-ci two students-NOM the assignment-ACC submit-NMLZ anh-ass-ta. not.do-pst-decl 'Two students didn't submit the assignment.' $(\exists Subj>not)$ 'It is not the case that two students submitted the assignment.' (not> \exists Subj) c. ku haksayng-i motun kwacey-lul ceychwulha-ci The student-NOM every assignment-ACC submit-NMLZ anh-ass-ta. not.do-PST-DECL 'The student didn't submit any assignments.' $(\exists Obj > not)$ 'It is not the case that the student submitted every assignment.' (not> \exists Obj) d. motun haksayng-i ku kwacey-lul ceychwulha-ci every student-NOM the assignment-ACC submit-NMLZ anh-ass-ta. not.do-pst-decl 'Every student didn't submit the assignment.' (\forall Subj>not) 'It is not the case that every student submitted the assignment.' (not>∀Subj)

In both SFN and LFN constructions, existentially and universally quantified NPs in subject or object positions can create these two readings. According to native Korean judgments, however, LFN constructions (as seen in (17)) tend to exhibit a clearer

ambiguity, allowing for two nearly equivalent interpretations: either the quantified nominal has scope over the negation, or the negation has scope over the quantified nominal. SFN (as in (16)), on the other hand, is often perceived as having a somewhat narrower interpretive range, more commonly yielding a reading in which the quantified nominal has scope over the negation.

LFN constructions permit greater interpretive flexibility by allowing negation to occupy a position where both wide-scope readings (negation>subject) and narrow-scope readings (negation>object) are possible (cf. Chung 2007; Han et al. 2007). This is linked to the proposal that the Neg head can move overtly to a position higher than T (specifically C), thereby c-commanding both subject and object DPs in their derived positions. Still, there are contexts where Neg remains in its original, lower position, allowing the subject or the object to move above negation and thus has scope over it. Since Korean is characterized by functional heads that affix or cliticize the verb stem, these overt movements are visible at PF. Consequently, Neg's role as a syntactic operator heading NegP is pivotal for enabling it to license NPIs and to determine scope relations with higher arguments.

In addition, from a native speaker perspective, LFN is intuitively more ambiguous, partly because it leaves room for additional pragmatic forces to shape its interpretations. Conversely, SFN imposes a more restrictive interpretive framework: when negation directly precedes the verb, a narrower scope reading typically results. The subject nominal generally retains scope above the negation, while the object nominal, structurally lower, falls under the negation's scope.

The ambiguity in scope relations raises a key question: How does suppletive negation influence truth conditions in polar questions? Given its structural alignment with SFN, suppletive negation is expected to exhibit similar answering patterns in NPQs. The next section examines these truth conditions, integrating experimental and theoretical insights into how negation placement affects speaker interpretations and responses. Before analyzing the interaction between suppletive negation and NPQs in detail, the following examples illustrate that suppletive negation is more naturally interpreted with narrow scope. While both broad and narrow readings are possible, the default interpretation tends to favor a narrow-scope reading, where the subject NP takes scope over negation, as shown in (18)–(19).

- (18) a. nayngcangko-ey sakwa sey kay-ka eps-ta.
 refrigerator-in apple three CL-NOM not.exist-DECL
 'There aren't three apples in the refrigerator.' (∃S>not.exist)
 'It is not the case that there are three apples in the refrigerator.' ?(not.exist>∃Subj)
 - b. nayngcangko-ey motun sakwa-ka eps-ta.
 refrigerator-in every apple-NOM not.exist-DECL
 'There are no apples in the refrigerator.' (∀Subj>not.exist)
 'It is not the case that there is every apple in the refrigerator.' ?(not.exist>∀Subj)
- (19) a. ku kyoswu-ka twu haksayng-ul molu-n-ta.
 The professor-NOM two student-ACC not.know-PRES-DECL
 'The professor doesn't know two students.' (∃O>not.know)
 'It is not the case that the professor knows two students.'
 ?(not.know>∃Obj)
 - b. Twu kyoswu-ka ku haksayng-ul molu-n-ta. Two professor-NOM the student-ACC not.know-PRES-DECL 'Two professors don't know the student.' $(\exists S > not.know)$ 'It is not the case that two professors know the student.' ?(not.know> $\exists Subj$)
 - c. ku kyoswu-ka motun haksayng-ul molu-n-ta. The professor-NOM every student-ACC not.know-PRES-DECL 'The professor doesn't know every student.'($\forall O$ >not.know) 'It is not the case that the professor knows every student.' ?(not.know> $\forall Obj$)
 - d. Motun kyoswu-ka ku haksayng-ul molu-n-ta. Every professor-NOM the student-ACC not.know-PRES-DECL 'Every professor doesn't know the student.'(∀S>not.know) 'It is not the case that every professor knows the student.' ?(not.know>∀Subj)

In (18), the existentially quantified nominal *sakwa sey kay* 'three apples' and the universally quantified nominal *motun sakwa* 'every apple'in subject position typically have scope over the suppletive negation, yielding a narrow negation reading. Although

a wide-scope reading is theoretically possible if the negated predicate were to move above the subject, native speakers generally prefer the narrow reading. Similarly, as illustrated in (19), both existentially and universally quantified nominals tend to scope over suppletive negation, which supports the observation that SFN and suppletive negation share comparable scope relations. Structurally, negation is placed above internal NPs (such as objects) but below external NPs (such as subjects), leading to these nuanced interpretation patterns. These scope ambiguities raise an important question regarding the interpretation of polar questions. Section 4 extends this discussion by exploring how the placement of negation—including suppletive negation and both forms of sentential negation—influences truth conditions and response patterns in NPQs.

4. Truth conditions of polar questions with suppletive negation

Building on the theoretical insights from the earlier sections, Section 4 examines how these syntactic and semantic properties play out in everyday language, especially in polar question constructions. In particular, we delve into how suppletive negation influences the truth conditions of the core proposition in yes-no questions. While Chung (2007) demonstrates that SFN and suppletive negation share much in terms of distribution and polarity licensing, we extend that analysis in two ways: (i) by testing newly elicited data (Examples (23)-(24)) that place suppletive negation in pragmatic scenarios not previously examined, and (ii) by highlighting the morphological and discourse-based factors that shape their acceptability. These examples build on Park and Dubinsky's (2019) notion of proposition-internal/external negation, but apply it specifically to suppletive negation contexts, revealing how morphological fusion can intensify the speaker's sense of contrast or surprise. By comparing response patterns among positive polar questions (PPQs), negative polar questions (NPQs) with sentential negation (both SFN and LFN), and NPQs with suppletive negation, we show that suppletive negation—even in the absence of an overt negative marker-can yield a truth condition opposite that of its affirmative counterpart, thereby underscoring a clear linguistic parallel between suppletive negation and SFN.

4.1 Impact of suppletive negation on truth conditions

As widely discussed, NPQs featuring VP-internal or VP-external negation can elicit opposite answers (Kramer and Rawlins 2012; Holmberg 2013; Claus et al. 2017; Kim 2017; Wee 2019; Dimitrova 2022; Kim 2024; Kim et al. 2024). According to Park and Dubinsky (2019), Korean NPQs can display contrasting answering patterns depending on the position of negation. Specifically, SFN is generally interpreted within the proposition of the question, whereas LFN is typically interpreted outside the proposition, imparting an additional pragmatic force. However, the conditions surrounding NPQs with suppletive negation have not yet been thoroughly examined. Before addressing the possible answers to NPQs that involve suppletive negation, examples (20)–(22) illustrate how SFN-NPQs and LFN-NPQs are interpreted in typical contexts.

(20)	Q:	Hana-ka l	ku chayk-ul	ilk-es	ss-ni?	(PPQ)
		Hana-NOM t	the book-acc	read-	PST-Q	
		'Did Hana re	ad the book?'	,		
	A:	Ung. (ilk-ess	-e.)			
		yes (read-ps	st-decl)			
		'Yes, she read	l it.'			
	A:	Ani. (an ilk-es	ss-e.)			
		no (notread-P	PST-DECL)			
		'No, she didn	n't read it.'			
(21)	Q:	Hana-ka ku	u chayk-ul	an	ilk-ess-ni?	(SFN-NPQ)
		Hana-NOM th	ne book-acc	not	read-pst-q	
		'Did Hana no	ot read the bo	ook?'		
	A:	Ung. (an ill	k-ess-e.)			
		yes (not re	ead-pst-decl)			
		'Yes, she didr	n't read it.'			
	A:	Ani. (ilk-ess	-e.)			
		no (read-ps	ST-DECL)			
		'No, she did	read it.'			
(22)	Q:	Hana-ka ku	u chayk-ul	ilk-ci	an h-ass-ni?	(LFN-NPQ)
		Hana-NOM th	ne book-acc	read-мм	lz not.do-pst-q	
		'Didn't Hana	read the boo	k?'		

A: Ung. (ilk-ess-e.) yes (read-PST-DECL)
'Yes, she did read it.'
A: Ani. (an ilk-ess-e.) no (not read-PST-DECL)
'No, she didn't read it.'

As shown in the question-answer pairs above, the answering pattern for an NPQ with VP-internal negation (i.e., low-negation; SFN) is the opposite of that for a PPQ. Conversely, when negation is positioned outside the core proposition (i.e., VP-external; high-negation; LFN), the answering pattern aligns with that of a PPQ. This demonstrates that the placement of negation within a question's surface structure decisively (but not absolutely) influences the interpretation of the NPQ and, by extension, its typical answering patterns. Specifically, low-negation NPQs ask whether the negated proposition $\neg p$ is correct, leading to responses that run counter to those of PPQs, whereas high-negation NPQs ask whether the positive proposition p is correct, resulting in answer patterns similar to PPQs. It is important to note that these patterns represent the most typical answers to high- and low-negation NPQs; however, negation scope can be ambiguous, and the ultimate interpretation may not always match the surface positioning. In other words, depending on the context, any NPQ can be treated as high or low negation, despite its overt syntax.

Recent research further underscores the complexity of these constructions. Wee (2019) argues that ambiguity in Korean LFN is primarily due to pragmatic and literal interpretation differences rather than multiple antecedents (as in English), while Kim (2024) proposes a discourse-based direct interpretation model that treats Korean response particles as non-sentential anaphors referring to a single salient proposition. Building on these insights, Kim et al. (2024) use experimental data to show that both SFN and LFN yield distinct answer preferences depending on contextual bias, indicating that a pragmatic assumption-based explanation is more apt than a purely syntactic account. Collectively, these recent studies highlight that although surface negation placement typically determines whether the NPQ is understood as asking about $\neg p$ or p, context can introduce additional layers of ambiguity. Thus, the interplay between surface structure, discourse context, and pragmatic forces jointly shapes the full range of answering behaviors in Korean NPQs.

Building on the observation that both SFN- and LFN-NPQs can exhibit ambiguous answering patterns, we now turn to NPQs with suppletive negation and show how they can display similar ambiguity. Despite morphological differences, our previous analysis suggests that suppletive negation typically parallels SFN in its surface positioning and scope behavior. This means that the negated proposition is structurally interpreted within the VP, which often leads to a narrower scope reading of negation (i.e., the quantified nominal or subject can have scope over negation).

Just as SFN- and LFN-NPQs can be answered in various ways, NPQs with suppletive negation also allow for more than one interpretation. However, based on the current analysis, we expect that NPQs with suppletive negation would generally follow patterns similar to SFN-NPQs and differ from those of LFN-NPQs. In typical contexts, narrow negation readings (where the NP has scope over negation) are more naturally acceptable with suppletive negation. This parallel with SFN underscores a syntactic and semantic affinity, implying that the negative predicate occupies a position above internal NPs (e.g., objects) and below external NPs (e.g., subjects)—much like SFN.

Crucially, although Chung (2007) establishes that SFN and suppletive negation occupy the same syntactic slot, his analysis leaves open how discursive factors (e.g., speaker emphasis, conversational context) might occasionally override that while Park competition. Similarly, and Dubinsky (2019)examine proposition-internal/external negation in NPQs, they give limited attention to suppletive forms like eps- and molu-. Our analysis addresses these gaps by showing precisely when and why suppletive negation can co-occur or pattern with SFNparticularly in polar questions where contextual cues (e.g., unexpected evidence) heighten contrast or surprise. Consider the following examples in (23), which illustrate two distinct NPQs with SFN and LFN, as well as an NPQ with suppletive negation that essentially asks whether he was in the classroom. Although Chung (2007) argues that SFN and suppletive negation occupy the same slot (thus ruling out their co-occurrence), Native-speaker judgments indicate that the questions in (23) may elicit various answers from (24), depending on discursive factors like emphasis or contrast. This leads us to ask whether a more flexible morphological framework is needed.

(23)	3) a. ku-ka kyosil-ey		iss-ess-ni?			
		Не-пом	classroom-in	exist-P	ST-Q	
		'Was he	in the classroom?	,,		
	b.	ku-ka	kyosil-ey	eps-ess	s-ni?	
		Не-пом	classroom-in	not.exi	i st- PST-C	2
		'Was he	not in the classro	oom?'		
	c.	ku-ka	kyosil-ey	an	iss-ess	-ni?
		Не-пом	classroom-in	not	exist-p	ST-Q
		'Was he	not in the classro	oom?'		
	d.	. ku-ka kyosil-ey		iss-ci		an h-ass-ni?
		Не-пом	classroom-in	exist-N	MLZ	not.do-pst-q
		'Wasn't he in the classroom?'				

The examples in (24) below illustrate all possible answers to the questions in (23). Each question can be answered positively or negatively, producing four potential response options.

(24)	a.	Ung,	(ku-ka	kyosil-ey)	iss-ess-e.
		yes	he-nom	classroom-in	exist-pst-decl
		'Yes,	he was in	the classroom.	,
	b.	Ani,	(ku-ka	kyosil-ey)	eps-ess-e.
		no	he-nom	classroom-in	not.exist-PST-DECL
		'No, I	he wasn't	in the classroom	m.'
	c.	Ung,	(ku-ka	kyosil-ey)	eps-ess-e.
		yes	he-nom	classroom-in	not.exist-PST-DECL
		'Yes,	he wasn't	in the classroo	m.'
	d.	Ani,	(ku-ka	kyosil-ey)	iss-ess-e.
		no	he-nom	classroom-in	exist-pst-decl
		'No, I	he was in	the classroom.'	

As previously discussed in literature, SFN- and LFN-NPQs are inherently ambiguous, so NPQs like (23c) and (23d) can elicit any of the four responses in (24), depending on the addressee's interpretation. Nevertheless, their most typical answering patterns—governed by surface structure—are those outlined in (21) and (22). Thus, the

SFN-NPQ in (23c) usually aligns with answers shown in (24c) and (24d), while the LFN-NPQ in (23d) typically matches (24a) and (24b).

In contrast to LFN-NPQs but similarly to SFN-NPQs, the NPQ with suppletive negation in (23b) is best answered via (24c) and (24d). In other words, this question asks for confirmation of the negated proposition ($\neg p$, meaning "he was not in the classroom"). A "yes" answer confirms $\neg p$, and a "no" answer rejects $\neg p$, affirming instead that "he was in the classroom." Consequently, these patterns reinforce the idea that suppletive negation largely behaves like SFN in terms of structural positioning and interpretation. By examining these examples, we see once more that the surface position of negation—whether with SFN, LFN, or suppletive forms—can profoundly affect the interpretation of NPQs and shape how speakers naturally respond.

Crucially, these data extend Chung's analysis by showing that while SFN and suppletive negation are indeed structurally in competition, there can be pragmatic pathways to override this competition. While Chung has thoroughly demonstrated that both SFN and suppletive negation license NPIs and exhibit similar scope interactions with quantifiers, our reanalysis of examples (23) and (24) reveals subtle differences in their behavior in polar questions. In contrast to Chung's findings, we observe that the pragmatic effects—such as conveying surprise or contrast—are more pronounced under certain contextual conditions, suggesting a potential refinement of the existing model. Regarding this issue, in the following subsection, we propose that these unique pragmatic effects result from how suppletive negation encodes the negative feature within the lexical core—intensifying contrastive or unexpected readings in negative questions—whereas SFN, being morphologically 'shallower,' affords a relatively flexible but less inherently contrastive negation.

4.2 Bias and contextual evidence in polar questions

This section provides a general framework for understanding how suppletive-negation PQs (alongside SFN- and LFN-NPQs) interact with questioner bias and contextual evidence. We first review how bias and evidence shape the appropriateness of different polar-question types in general before turning to the specific case of suppletive negation in Section 4.3. Different conversational settings can make a given question type more or less appropriate and using a particular form of PQ without regard for context can lead to awkwardness or miscommunication (Ladd 1981; Büring and

Gunlogson 2000; van Rooy and Safárová 2003; Romero and Han 2004; Repp 2013; Sudo 2013; Goodhue 2022; Romero 2024). Successful communication requires the questioner to choose a PQ type that aligns both with their own stance on the proposition and with the situational cues evident to the addressee.

4.2.1 Questioner's bias

The questioner's bias refers to what the speaker believes or presupposes about the proposition's truth at the time of asking. For example, if you enter a windowless office and it was sunny earlier, you might ask, "Is it sunny outside?" either assuming it still is or maintaining a neutral stance. By contrast, if a coworker arrives soaked and carrying an umbrella, you might believe it is raining and ask, "Is it raining now?" expecting a confirmatory "yes."

NPQs are particularly sensitive to this bias. When speakers have a positive bias that a proposition pis true, they often use an NPQ to confirm it: seeing someone in rain gear could prompt "Isn't it raining outside?" Conversely, "Is it **not** raining outside?" fits a scenario where the speaker initially thought it was raining but encounters contradictory cues—someone arrives completely dry, suggesting the speaker's prior assumption (it's raining) may be mistaken. Table 1 (adapted from Romero and Han 2004) illustrates typical PQ strategies for various questioner biases.

Questioner bias	PPQ	Low-negation NPQ	High-negation NPQ
Positive for p	N/A	1	1
Neutral	✓	1	*
Negative for p	✓	N/A	*

Table 1. Speaker bias and possible PQs in Romero and Han (2004)

High-negation NPQs strongly encode a positive bias (the speaker believes p) and seeks confirmation, whereas low-negation NPQs are often used when the speaker suspects p may not hold—or at least doubts it—even if they formerly believed p. As Romero and Han (2004) note, the speaker's bias stems from both prior knowledge and immediate observation, so the "right" NPQ type depends on aligning linguistic form with these beliefs.

Building on work by Romero and Han (2004), Goodhue (2022) expands the

analysis of polar questions to four main types: Plain Polar Questions (PPQs), Low-negation NPQs, High-negation NPQs, and Polarity Focus Questions (PFQs). Crucially, Goodhue argues that PFQs can exhibit a context-sensitive bias (sometimes positive, sometimes negative) depending on whether someone else has asserted p or if there is strong contextual evidence. By contrast, High-negation NPQs always encode a positive bias (the speaker believes p), and Low-negation NPQs typically align with either neutral or "negative-for-p" stances. Table 2 below summarizes how each question type aligns with speaker bias in Goodhue (2022).

	1			,
Questioner	PPO	Low-negation	PEO	High-negation
bias	PPQ	NPQ	rrų	NPQ
Positive for p	1	# (unusual)	✓ (context)	✓ (required)
Neutral	1	✓	✓ (context)	#
Negative for p	1	1	✓ (context)	#

Table 2. Speaker bias and possible PQs in Goodhue (2022)

Thus, NPQs are not a monolithic category. High-negation NPQs generally convey "I believe p (don't you?)", whereas low-negation NPQs signal a less confident or even contrary stance toward p. Whether a given NPQ is felicitous depends on how strongly the speaker believes p and how well the form matches that belief.

4.2.2 Contextual evidence

Contextual evidence complements the questioner's bias by providing situational information that ensures clarity in question-answer exchanges. A well-matched context allows the addressee to interpret the question appropriately. For instance, a coworker arriving with a wet umbrella and raincoat would support a question like "Isn't it raining now?" This question aligns with the speaker's belief and the evidence provided by the situation. Asking "Is it sunny outside?" in this scenario would seem incongruous.

In other situations, the speaker's own prior knowledge may clash with immediate appearances. Suppose the weather forecast predicted rain, but you saw sunlight during your commute. You expect it to rain soon, but a colleague arrives without an umbrella, looking dry. This scenario could trigger a low-negation NPQ like "Is it **not** raining outside yet?": a form that captures the speaker's initial belief (that it should be raining) in tension with contradictory evidence. Table 3 (Büring and Gunlogson 2000) shows

how contextual evidence can determine the aptness of different PQ types.

Contextual	DDO	Low-negation	High-negation
evidence	PPQ	NPQ	NPQ
Positive for <i>p</i>	✓	*	*
Neutral	✓	*	1
Negative for <i>p</i>	*	✓ <i>✓</i>	✓ <i>✓</i>

Table 3. Contextual evidence and possible PQs in Büring and Gunlogson (2000)

Taken together, the speaker's bias and the contextual evidence form the backbone of well-formed PQs. If either factor is mismatched—for example, a strong positive bias in the face of negative evidence—miscommunications arise. As the following section will discuss in greater detail, these insights also apply to suppletive negation NPQs, which can convey unexpected contrasts or shifts in assumption when used under the "wrong" or "right" conditions. In the next section, we apply these notions of bias and evidence specifically to suppletive negation NPQs, showing how their morphologically embedded negation can heighten surprise or disbelief when assumptions are overturned.

4.3 Questioner bias and contextual evidence in suppletive negation

Expanding on our earlier discussion of bias and context in PQs, this section examines how Korean NPQs formed with suppletive negation (e.g., *molu-* 'not know', *eps-* 'not exist') behave in discourse. As with SFN- and LFN-NPQs, suppletive negation NPQs are highly sensitive to the questioner's assumptions about the proposition and to any situational evidence that either confirms or contradicts those assumptions.

Revisiting examples (23)–(24) above, we see contexts in which native speakers produce or judge suppletive negation NPQs as more acceptable than previously described. This contrasts with Chung (2007), who treats these forms as strictly ungrammatical under SFN competition. By examining these borderline or context-driven cases, we reveal how pragmatic emphasis, or contrast can override the default morphological restriction—ultimately extending and refining Chung's account.

A central observation is that suppletive negation often conveys surprise or disbelief when new information upends the speaker's initial expectations. For example, if a speaker already believes that Student B is in the classroom (positive bias) and instructs Student A to deliver a laptop to B, the speaker would be startled if A returns holding that laptop (contradictory evidence). While a plain PPQ (as in 23a) sounds relatively neutral, a low-negation NPQ—whether formed via suppletive negation (23b) or SFN (23c)—places sharper emphasis on the unexpected fact that B was not there after all. In this way, these NPQs fulfill a dual role: they confirm a revised assumption while simultaneously signaling the questioner's disbelief.

It is noteworthy that questioner bias comprises both an epistemic dimension (the speaker's personal belief about the proposition) and an evidential dimension (observational clues). When these two dimensions conflict—for instance, the speaker's knowledge suggests B should be present, but direct evidence indicates otherwise—suppletive negation NPQs can be especially potent in signaling surprise: "I'm caught off guard by this development; please confirm!"

Consider (23) somewhat differently, where the questioner assumes Student B is in the classroom based on prior knowledge or cues (e.g., noticing B's belongings). To focus solely on the questioner's bias, suppose the interaction takes place over the phone, with the questioner asking Student A whether B is actually in the classroom. If no new information—such as B leaving with the laptop—reaches the questioner, then the form of the question depends entirely on the speaker's initial assumption. Table 4 below illustrates how various question types map onto different biases when no further contextual evidence intervenes. In other words, Table 4 captures how a speaker's bias alone—without additional real-world clues—shapes the choice of PQ.

Questioner bias	PPQ	Low-negation NPQ	High-negation NPQ	Suppletive Neg NPQ
Believe student B is in the classroom	<i>√ √</i>	*	J J	*
Do not have any specific bias	J J	1	*	1
Believe student B is not in the classroom	1	1	*	<i>J J</i>

Table 4. Expanded speaker bias and possible PQs

In addition to the questioner's initial bias, whenever new evidence emerges that shifts the questioner's expectations (e.g., student A returning with the laptop), the speaker may select a different type of question. In doing so, the questioner both confirms their updated assumption and conveys an undercurrent of surprise or disbelief. This combined role—verification and expressing unexpectedness—is a hallmark of suppletive negation NPQs, setting them apart from other polar question forms. In relation to the examples in (23), we imagine two contrasting scenarios: student A returns with the laptop or without it. Table 5 below illustrates how the questioner's chosen question type aligns or conflicts with their original bias, depending on the new contextual evidence.

Contextual evidence	PPQ	Low-negation NPQ	High-negation NPQ	Suppletive Neg NPQ
When student A returns without the laptop	J J	*	V	*
When student A returns with the laptop	1	1	1	J J

Table 5. Expanded contextual evidence and possible PQs

Although suppletive negation NPQs and SFN-NPQs differ in surface form—one encodes negation in the verb stem, while the other uses an overt negator *an* 'not'—they share notable semantic and pragmatic functions. Both exhibit "low" (VP-internal) negation, highlighting the possibility that pis unexpectedly false. Both readily capture a sense of shock or recalibration when fresh evidence disrupts the speaker's prior stance. Indeed, from a discourse perspective, either form can neatly convey, "I thought p was true, but evidence says otherwise—can you clarify?"

Where suppletive negation stands out is in its intensified sense of contradiction. Since the negative feature is bound directly within the lexical predicate (e.g., *eps*-'not exist'), it can feel more forceful in emphasizing the gap between the questioner's old assumptions and the new reality. This stronger contrast can be especially useful in contexts featuring complex or contradictory evidence, where the speaker wants to underscore their revised belief. By fusing the negation into the verb itself, suppletive negation can sharpen the interrogative force, making clear that the speaker is confronting a proposition they formerly took for granted.

In short, although suppletive negation NPQs often align with SFN-NPQs in how

they convey disbelief, they may impart a more pronounced contrast or "shift in perspective." As we have discovered in this section, this property proves important for our understanding of Korean negative questions: it illuminates how morphological differences in expressing negation can yield subtle but consequential variations in pragmatic effect.

5. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that suppletive negation in Korean—specifically, verbs like *eps*- 'not exist' and *molu*- 'not know'—functions as a lexically fused negative form that parallels SFN in both syntactic and semantic respects. First, distributional patterns in double negation and NPI licensing illustrate how suppletive negation competes with SFN for the same morphological slot, suggesting that the negative feature is incorporated at the verb level. Second, an examination of NPQs shows how suppletive negation influences truth conditions in a manner resembling SFN, and how contextual cues—particularly speaker surprise or contradictory evidence—can override morphological constraints, thereby intensifying the sense of unexpectedness.

These findings refine earlier accounts (Chung 2007; Park and Dubinsky 2019) by indicating that discourse factors (e.g., questioner bias, contextual evidence) are not mere afterthoughts but are central to understanding how suppletive negation is realized. Crucially, the study points to an integrated approach wherein morphological fusion, syntactic competition, and pragmatic triggers collectively govern negation in Korean. Future research might expand on the dialectal and cross-linguistic aspects of suppletive negation or apply experimental methodologies to quantify speaker variation, thereby offering a more comprehensive view of how morphological and pragmatic constraints interact across languages.

In sum, the Korean data presented here reveal that even "markerless" negative verbs can mirror overt negation structures, with significant implications for negation theory. By drawing attention to the synergy between structure and context, the account underscores that understanding negative forms requires examining not only their surface morphological profile but also the pragmatic environments in which they emerge.

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Received: 2024. 12. 09. Revised: 2025. 03. 14. Accepted: 2025. 03. 14.