



Emphatic *ku* in Korean as an anaphoric degree intensifier^{*}

Kyumin Kim^{**} · Emily Elfner^{***}
(Chungbuk National University · York University)

Kim, Kyumin and Emily Elfner. 2026. Emphatic *ku* in Korean as an anaphoric degree intensifier. *Linguistic Research* 43(2): 377-401. This research investigates the syntax of emphatic *ku* in Korean, which expresses the strong surprise of the speaker at an unexpected situation. Studies on emphatic *ku* are scarce except for two recent studies. One is Kang (2018)'s study on the pragmatics of *ku*, and the other is Kim and Elfner (2025)'s study on the prosodic properties of *ku*. However, neither of these have addressed the syntax of emphatic *ku* in detail. An important property of emphatic *ku* is that it has to appear with a gradable adjective, which has been noted but not addressed in the previous studies. Taking this distribution of emphatic *ku* seriously, this paper analyzes emphatic *ku* as an anaphoric degree intensifier: being anaphoric, it projects idxP (indexP), and as a degree intensifier, it merges in the specifier of the Deg(ree)P, an extended functional projection of adjective. This analysis is informed by the analysis of *same* in English, in which it is an anaphoric element that merges in DegP (Hanink 2021a). An interesting consequence of the proposed account is the unification of the morpheme *ku* in various contexts as an anaphoric pro-form, which shows a strong parallel to a pro-form that appears in kind and degree contexts in a wide range of languages. (Chungbuk National University · York University)

Keywords emphatic, degree, index, anaphoric, adjective

1. Introduction

This paper examines emphatic *ku* in Korean, which has not received much attention in the literature, except for two recent studies, Kang (2018), and Kim and Elfner (2025), discussed below. An example of emphatic *ku* is illustrated in (1). Emphatic

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** First Author

*** Corresponding Author

ku is mentioned to be prosodically prominent (Kang 2018), as indicated by the upper case letter in (1). It expresses the strong surprise of the speaker at the unexpected situation, as indicated by the gloss ‘it is unbelievable’ in (1). Example (1) can be uttered in the context where the speaker likes tofu and believes that tofu is delicious (Kang 2018), which will be discussed more detail in section 2.1. In the rest of the paper, we indicate emphatic *ku* in lower case, abstracting away from its prosodic prominence for the purpose of the paper.

- (1) (Kim-i) KU masiss-nun twupwu-lo masep-nun
 Kim-Nom KU savory-Rel tofu-with unsavory-Rel
 yoli-lul mantul-ess-e.
 dish-Acc cook-Past-DEC
 ‘Oh, it is unbelievable that Kim cooked an unsavory dish with that
 much savory tofu.’ (Kang 2018: 597)

In Korean, the emphatic meaning is realized via prosodic prominence, lexical means (e.g., emphatic adverbs), morphological means (e.g., reduplication), or syntactic movement (e.g., Kwen 1992; Park 2007). In these studies, emphatic *ku* has not been recognized at all, but the two studies mentioned earlier examined emphatic *ku* in some detail (Kang 2018; Kim and Elfner 2025). In Kang (2018), the focus was on the pragmatic properties of emphatic *ku* and it is proposed that the pragmatic role of emphatic *ku* is to intensify the unexpectedness of the speaker for a given situation. Kim and Elfner (2025) examine the prosodic properties of emphatic *ku* in comparison with anaphoric *ku* and shows that emphatic *ku* is prosodically distinct from anaphoric *ku*. These studies on emphatic *ku* are further discussed in section 2.1.

However, neither of the studies address the syntax of emphatic *ku*, but merely assume that as an intensifier it belongs to an AP. This assumption is building on the fact that emphatic *ku* is possible only in the presence of a gradable adjective such as *massinun* ‘delicious’ in (1). This paper takes this distribution of emphatic *ku* seriously, and proposes that emphatic *ku* belongs to a family of degree modifiers similar to English *very*, which modify adjectives. In particular, similar to degree intensifiers such as *very* or *extremely* in English, emphatic *ku* as a degree intensifier merges in the specifier of Deg(reeP), an extended functional projection of adjectives (e.g., Abney 1987; Corver 1990, 1997). Nevertheless, it differs from typical degree

intensifiers in that it refers to a previously mentioned entity, similar to anaphoric *ku*, as noted in Kim and Elfner (2025). Building on this fact, this paper analyzes emphatic *ku* as being anaphoric and as such it projects idxP (indexP). Thus, as an idxP, *ku* merges in DegP, which captures its role as an anaphoric degree intensifier. This analysis is informed by the analysis of *same* in English, which is also an anaphoric element that appears in DegP (Hanink 2021a). This proposal also builds on a recent proposal in which an anaphoric *ku* is the realization of idxP in DP (Kim 2025a) as well as relevant studies on idxP (e.g., Hanink 2018, 2021b; Jenks and Konate 2022). This paper identifies other uses of *ku* that appear in DegP, namely *ku* in kind (*ku-len* + A) and degree (*ku-lehkey* + A) contexts, thereby supporting the proposed analysis of emphatic *ku* in DegP. One of the interesting consequences of the proposed analysis is that it can unify the broad distribution of *ku* in Korean as an instantiation of idx head that projects idxP, which is striking in resemblance to a pro-form that appears in kind and degree contexts in a wide-range of languages (e.g., Anderson and Morzycki 2015).

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 discusses two recent studies on emphatic *ku* and provides the necessary background on idxP, which is proposed for anaphoric definite *ku*. Section 3 discusses an analysis of the anaphoric degree modifier *same* in English, which this paper builds on for the analysis of emphatic *ku*. Section 4 proposes that emphatic *ku* realizes idxP, which merges in DegP. Section 5 discusses the consequences of the proposed account. Section 6 concludes the paper.

2. Emphatic *ku* and anaphoric *ku*

2.1 The previous studies: Emphatic *ku*

Not much attention has been paid to emphatic *ku*, but there are two recent studies that have initiated research on emphatic *ku*. One is Kang (2018) which provides a pragmatic analysis of emphatic *ku*.¹ The other one is Kim and Elfner (2025) which

1 In Kang (2018), emphatic *ku* is viewed as a scalar intensifier and contributes a non-truth conditional meaning to the sentence. Specifically, emphatic *ku* implicates the subject's assumption on a likelihood scale and it is associated with the least likely end of the likelihood scale. We do not further discuss Kang's (2018) pragmatic analysis, as it is well beyond the scope of this paper.

investigates prosodic properties of emphatic *ku* in comparison with anaphoric *ku* (see footnote 2 and 3 for more discussion).

This section discusses the distribution of emphatic *ku* as identified in these previous studies. In Kang (2018), it is mentioned that emphatic *ku* is prosodically prominent, and it indicates the speaker's emotional attitude of surprise. Consider the example of emphatic *ku* in (2) in the context provided. In the presence of emphatic *ku*, the sentence indicates the speaker's *strong* surprise at the unexpected situation, i.e., Kim's cooking unsavory food with delicious tofu. A strong surprise reading of the speaker is indicated by the gloss 'it is unbelievable that' in (2). This reading is available only when emphatic *ku* is present. Building on this type of data, Kang (2018) proposes that emphatic *ku* intensifies the speaker's surprise at the given situation (see footnote 2 for relevant discussion). The gloss of emphatic *ku* is indicated as 'that much' in Kang (2018), as shown in (2). In the rest of the paper, we add a subscript EMPH on 'that much' to reflect the interpretation of *ku* as an intensifier (e.g., 'that very'), and to rule out a quantity reading of 'that much'.

(2) Context: Yesterday, Mary was invited to Kim's place. Kim made dinner with tofu. Today, Ann asks Mary how the dish tasted.

Mary tells Ann that the cooking was bad. Mary was surprised at the fact that the dish made with tofu could be unsavory because she likes tofu and tofu is delicious. Mary says:

(Kim-i) ku masiss-nun twupwu-lo masep-nun yoli-lul
 Kim-Nom ku savory-Rel tofu-with unsavory-Rel dish-Acc
 mantul-ess-e.
 cook-Past-DEC

'Oh, it is unbelievable that Kim cooked an unsavory dish with [that much]_{EMPH} savory tofu.' (Adapted from Kang 2018: 597)

Kang (2018) suggested that prosodic stress on emphatic *ku* is focal, following the general assumption in which focus marking is associated with an emphatic statement (Krifka 1995). In Kang (2018), however, no evidence for this proposal was provided. Kim and Elfner (2025) address this issue and show that prosodic prominence on emphatic *ku* is emphatic, but may not be focal.²

An important property of the distribution of emphatic *ku* observed in Kang (2018) is that emphatic *ku* has to appear with a gradable adjective. In (2), emphatic *ku* precedes the adjective *masissnun* ‘delicious’. Kang (2018) noted that without the adjective, *ku* does not indicate its emphatic meaning but rather indicates an anaphoric interpretation. In Kang (2018), however, it is left unclear what role emphatic *ku* plays with respect to the gradable adjective. Kim and Elfner (2025) propose that emphatic *ku* is an intensifier modifying the adjective, similar to Kang (2018), and that emphatic *ku* appears in AP, which is different from anaphoric *ku*, which appears in DP.³ However, no further discussion of the syntax of emphatic *ku* has been provided.

In both Kang (2018) and Kim and Elfner (2025), what is lacking is the account for the contribution of the gradable adjective to the structure of emphatic *ku*. This issue is not trivial, as the adjective is required with emphatic *ku*, unlike with anaphoric *ku*. Building on these two previous studies, we propose that emphatic *ku* is an intensifier that modifies an adjective. With this proposal, this paper addresses the syntax of emphatic *ku*.

Although we build on these two previous studies, the central focus of this paper is to address the syntax of emphatic *ku*. We are not arguing that the proposed syntactic account for emphatic *ku* should capture the previously recognized prosodic property (Kim and Elfner 2025) or pragmatics (Kang 2018) of emphatic *ku*. In fact, the proposed syntactic account for emphatic *ku* in this paper does not necessarily predict how prosody or pragmatics of emphatic *ku* should be mapped to syntax or vice versa. Such issues belong to the realm of syntax-prosody interface or syntax-pragmatics interface, which would form separate research questions on their own, and does not lie within the scope of this paper.⁴

2 Kim and Elfner (2025) show that emphatic *ku* is prosodically strong: it carries an LH(rising) pitch contour (indicating that it begins a new prosodic phrase). However, there is no evidence that emphatic *ku* necessarily results in phonetic dephrasing of the material following emphatic *ku*, as would be expected from a focused element.

3 Kim and Elfner (2025) suggest that the distinct syntactic structure is also responsible for the difference in pronunciation. Specifically, they proposed that emphatic *ku*, as an intensifier, behaves like a prosodic word, while anaphoric *ku* behaves like a function word. This difference accounts for why emphatic *ku* is prosodically prominent, while anaphoric *ku* is prosodically reduced.

4 For the same reason, we do not question issues of whether other demonstratives such as *i* ‘this’ or *ce* ‘that over there’ in the language can be used emphatically in a similar way as previously identified for emphatic *ku*, i.e., having prosodic stress and a certain pragmatics, and accordingly whether they can be analyzed in the same syntactic way as proposed for emphatic *ku* in this paper. Although *i* and *ce* are categorized as a demonstrative with *ku* in the current literature, this fact does not provide a

2.2 Anaphoric definite *ku* as idxP (indexP)

Demonstrative *ku* has been proposed to indicate anaphoric definite meaning (e.g., Lee 1987; Chang 2009; Ahn 2019; S. Park 2020; Kang 2021; M. Park 2022; M. Kim 2023; Kim 2024, 2025a, b), as illustrated in (3). In (3b), the nominal with *ku* refers to an antecedent that is previously mentioned, i.e., the indefinite noun phrase *chayk* ‘a book’ in (3a). The anaphoric link between them is indicated by the same indexation. In (3b), *ku* is obligatory in order to indicate the anaphoric meaning.

- (3) a. *nay namtongsang-i ecey chayk₁-ul sa-ss-ta.*
 I brother-NOM yesterday book-ACC buy-PAST-DEC
 ‘My brother bought a book yesterday.’
- b. *nay-ka onul *(ku) chayk₁-ul ilk-ess-ta.*
 I-NOM today DEM book-ACC read-PAST-DEC
 ‘Today, I read the book (that my brother bought yesterday).’
 (Kim 2025a: 265)

Most of the previous literature mentioned above has focused on the semantics or pragmatics of anaphoric definite *ku*, but there are no detailed studies on the syntax of anaphoric definite *ku*. Recent studies in Kim (2024, 2025a, b) have investigated the syntax of anaphoric definite *ku*. In particular, Kim (2025a) is relevant to the proposed analysis of emphatic *ku* in this paper. In the rest of this section, we discuss the core parts of Kim’s (2025a) syntactic analysis on anaphoric definite *ku*.

Kim (2025a), in addressing the syntax of anaphoric definite *ku* and 3rd person singular pronominal *ku*, proposes that *ku* instantiates a functional projection, idxP (indexP) within DP (e.g., Hanink 2021b; Jenks and Konate 2022). Both anaphoric definites and pronominals across languages have been identified as indexed definites, suggesting that they have an index in their syntax as well as in their semantics (e.g., Giusti 2002, 2015; Schwarz 2009). This insight has been further developed into a structural term in which indices are not merely semantic notation, but they head

necessity to apply the same analysis proposed for emphatic *ku* to the demonstratives *i* or *ce*. These issues are well beyond the scope of this paper, which we leave for future research. Consequently, we are not able to address the question of what differences there may be among the demonstratives if *i* and *ce* were emphatics.

their own functional projection such as *idxP* (e.g., Hanink 2021b; Jenks and Konate 2022). Interestingly, major supporting evidence comes from the fact that the same morpheme is shared by both demonstratives and pronominals across numerous languages (e.g., Elbourne 2005, 2008; Schwarz 2009; Arkoh and Matthewson 2013; Hanink 2021b; Jenks and Konate 2022; Royer 2022, among others), such as Washo (isolate) (Hanink 2021b) and Marka-Dafing (Mande) (Jenks and Konate 2022). Studies on these languages have shown that *idxP* is realized in the structure of demonstratives and pronouns that are interpreted as a variable which picks out a referent in the context.

Building on the language-specific evidence that the same morpheme *ku* realizes both anaphoric definite and the 3rd person singular pronoun, similar to other languages discussed above, Kim (2025a) proposes that *ku* in both its anaphoric definite and its pronominal form are also instantiations of the *idx* head. The structure of anaphoric definite *ku* is schematically illustrated in (4). In (4), the *idx* head realized by *ku* has an index value such as 1. The role of the index in anaphoric definite *ku* is to identify the referent, such as ‘a book’ in (3a), that it refers to, namely the referent that is identical to the entity assigned at the given index.

- (4) [_{DP} [_{idxP} [_{idx} 1]] [_{D'} NP D]]
 ku *chayk* ‘that book’

(Adapted from Kim 2025a: 269)

In analyzing emphatic *ku* in the following sections, we assume the *idxP* approach to anaphoric definite *ku* proposed in Kim (2025a). We also adopt the featural analysis of *idxP* proposed in Jenks and Konate (2022) which Kim (2025a) adopted in order to account for the realization of *ku* in various syntactic contexts, and which does not include emphatic *ku* or other contexts of *ku* discussed in this paper. This will be discussed in section 5 where the analysis of emphatic *ku* is detailed.

3. *idxP* in DegP: The case of English *same*

This paper proposes that emphatic *ku* is an anaphoric degree intensifier. In its analytical terms, it is the realization of *idxP* that appears in the specifier of DegP

The proposal that *same* is a degree head is built on Heim (1985), in which degree constructions can target two points on a scale, 1 or 0, i.e., the scale of (non-)identity. Moreover, *same* is able to be modified by degree modifiers as shown in (7a), similar to equative comparatives in (7b) (Alrenga 2007; Oxford 2010).

- (7) a. Mary's answers were just/exactly the same as I expected.
 b. Mary's answers were just/exactly as good as I expected.

(Oxford 2010: 6)

Building on this type of distribution of *same*, similar to degree equatives, Hanink (2021a) argues that *same* is a Deg head which makes reference to identity. That is, as in (6), *same* as an equative Deg head selects its own index-hosting head, idxP, as a complement which represents a null argument that is anaphorically linked to an antecedent e.g., *a woman*₁ (5a), via the same indexation.⁵

In the next section, this paper analyzes emphatic *ku* as an instantiation of idxP that merges in the specifier of DegP.⁶ Thus, emphatic *ku* is not exactly the same as *same* in English, but it is also a type of idxP that can appear in DegP.⁷

5 According to Hanink (2021a), definite descriptions with and without *same* have essentially the same meaning, but they are structurally different. In definite descriptions without *same*, idxP appears in the specifier of DP, building on Schwarz (2009) (e.g., as proposed for Korean (4)). The different position of idxP with or without *same* has a consequence for P-D contraction in German. See Hanink (2021a) for details.

6 An anonymous reviewer questioned whether anaphoric and emphatic *ku* can co-occur as in *ku ku masissun twupwu* 'that [that much]_{EMPH} delicious tofu'. Since their structural positions differ, the co-occurrence seems to be possible. However, a brief investigation with a few native speakers reveals that it is grammatical for some but not for others. This may be due to the fact that an idxP occurs twice, and thus the phrase sounds redundant. Also, as suggested by the reviewer, phonological haplogy may take place, as two instances of *ku* occurs adjacently. We leave this issue for future research.

7 The point of the discussion in this section is that emphatic *ku* is associated with idxP in DegP, similar to *same* in English. It is not clear whether emphatic *ku* has other similarities to *same* other than those noted in this section, which we do not pursue for the purpose of this paper.

ontologically have scale in their meaning, and degree adverbs emphasize a certain point on the scale indicated by gradable adjectives. Building on these studies of Korean, we assume that gradable adjectives in the language also project the functional category Deg similar to English (8b), and degree emphatic adverbs like *acwu* ‘very’ appear in the specifier of DegP similar to *very* in English. This paper takes this distribution of emphatic *ku* seriously, and proposes that emphatic *ku* belongs to a family of degree modifiers similar to English *very*, which modify adjectives.

Emphatic *ku* shares certain syntactic and semantic properties with these degree emphatic adverbs, as discussed in section 2: (i) it has to appear with a gradable adjective, (ii) it is identified as an intensifier (Kang 2018; Kim and Elfner 2025), and (iii) it emphasizes a certain point in the scale indicated by the gradable adjective. As such, we propose that emphatic *ku* appears in the specifier of DegP, as schematically illustrated in (9). The proposed structure in (9) accounts for the role of emphatic *ku* as an intensifier, and its similarity to usual degree intensifier adverbs. The structure in (9) will be further detailed in the next section. As with the previous studies on adjectives (e.g., Abney 1987; Cover 1990; Svenonius 1992; Kennedy and Merchant 2000), DegP is analyzed as the adjunct to an NP, as in the case of attributive degree modifiers.

(9) [_{NP} [_{DegP} *ku* Deg [_{AP} A]]] [_{NP}]

We provide more data on emphatic *ku* with various adjectives as in (10). When expressed in proper contexts, these phrases convey the speaker’s strong surprise at the unexpected situation, as proposed in Kang (2018).¹⁰

10 An anonymous reviewer questioned whether emphatic *ku* can appear with a numeral instead of an adjective, as illustrated in (i). As indicated in (i), *ku* in this instance is interpreted as an anaphoric definite. It cannot have an emphatic interpretation. As shown in this paper, an important distributional characteristic of emphatic *ku* is that it has to appear with a gradable adjective, which is accounted for by the proposal in (9). Numerals do not denote gradable meaning. Thus, as a degree intensifier, emphatic *ku* cannot appear with numerals.

(i) *ku twupwu sey key*
ku tofu three CL
 ‘those three pieces of tofu.’/ *[that much]_{EMPH} three pieces of tofu’

- (10) a. *ku sinsenhan yachay*
 ku fresh vegetable
 Lit. '[that much]_{EMPH} fresh vegetable'
- b. *ku swuyun kwuycu*
 ku easy quiz
 Lit. '[that much]_{EMPH} easy quiz'
- c. *ku chakhan salam*
 ku good man
 Lit. '[that much]_{EMPH} good man'
- d. *ku olayn chinkwu*
 ku old friend
 Lit. '[that much]_{EMPH} old friend'

In Kim and Elfner (2025), though, it is pointed out that emphatic *ku* is not limited to expressing the *surprise* of the speaker but can be viewed to generally express the speaker's emotional attitude toward a given situation, which we assume in this paper. As illustrated in (11), for example, the speaker was disappointed with the fact that Minswu (her brother) spoiled the easy quiz.

- (11) Context: Minswu is a top student in the class. Yesterday, without a notice, class had an easy quiz. Minswu was sick and got zero marks on the quiz. Minswu's sister heard about this, and said:

Minswu-ka *ku**(swuyun) kwuycu-ul mangcheysse.
 Minswu-NOM *ku* easy quiz-ACC spoiled
 'It is disappointing that Minswu spoiled [that much]_{EMPH} easy quiz.'

In (11), the adjective has to be present for the emphatic reading to be available, as observed in Kang (2018). Without the adjective, an anaphoric reading would be available with a proper context, as also pointed out in Kang (2018).¹¹

¹¹ Anaphoric *ku* can place contrastive focus on its nominal (Chang 1984; Ionin et al. 2012), and this use of *ku* is noted to be similar to English demonstrative *that* (Ionin et al. 2012). Note that in this case *ku* is anaphoric (Ionin et al. 2012), and is not emphatic as the absence of adjective indicates. We leave this use of *ku* for future research.

4.2 Emphatic *ku* as idxP in DegP

According to Kang (2018), emphatic *ku* is not anaphoric, unlike anaphoric definite *ku*. However, in a recent study on emphatic *ku* (Kim and Elfner 2025), it was shown that emphatic *ku* can be anaphoric, as illustrated in (12). In (12b), the nominal with the emphatic *ku* refers to the delicious tofu that was mentioned in the previous context as in (12a). Note that it has also been found in languages other than Korean that emphatic elements can be anaphoric: for example, emphatic reflexives (Ahn 2010), or stressed demonstrative nominals (Beller 2013).¹²

- (12) a. Eycey emma-ka [masissun twupwu]₁-lul
 yesterday mother-NOM delicious tofu-ACC
 sawass-e, kurentae...
 buy-bring-DEC but...
 ‘Yesterday my mother bought and brought [delicious tofu]₁, but...’
- b. Nwuna-ka [ku masissun twupwu]₁-lo masep-nun
 older sister-NOM ku delicious tofu-INST unsavory-Rel
 yoli-lul mantul-ess-e.
 dish-Acc cook-Past-DEC
 ‘It is disappointing that my older sister cooked an unsavory dish with
 [that much]_{EMPH} delicious tofu.’

(Adapted from Kim and Elfner 2025: 281)

Thus, emphatic *ku* can be represented as an idxP, similar to the anaphoric definite *ku*. However, emphatic *ku* differs from anaphoric *ku* in that it appears in DegP, as proposed in the previous section (see (9)). Taken together, we propose that emphatic *ku* is an instantiation of idxP in DegP. It is noted in Kim and Elfner (2025) that emphatic *ku* in data such as (12) appears to have a dual role, being anaphoric as well as emphatic, but no analysis for this fact has been provided. The proposed analysis of emphatic *ku* as idxP in DegP captures this observed dual role.

¹² In Kim and Elfner (2025), it is shown that emphatic *ku* is anaphoric, similar to stressed demonstrative nominals (SDN) in English (e.g., *that CREEP*). In Beller (2013), SDNs are shown to be anaphoric, unlike stressed definite expressions such as *the NP* (e.g., *the CREEP*) that are focal and not anaphoric (e.g., Akmajian and Jackendoff 1970).

- (13) [NP [DegP [idxP idx] Deg [AP A]] [NP]]
ku \emptyset *masissun* *twupwu*

The proposed account in (12) suggests that in Korean DegP can be associated with an anaphoric use. There is independent evidence in the language that supports this association. The morpheme *ku* has another anaphoric use associated with degree, namely *ku-len* ‘such’ illustrated in (14). In (14b), *ku-len* refers to a kind of dog (as indicated by the subscript k) that is playful as mentioned in the previous context such as (14a).

- (14) a. Chelswu-eykey-nun hwalpalhan kangaci-ka iss-ta.
 Chelswu-DAT-TOP playful dog-NOM be-DEC
 ‘Chelswu has [a playful dog]_k.’
 b. Swuni-eykey-to ku_k-len kangaci-ka iss-ta.
 Swuni-DAT-also ku-ADJ dog-NOM be-DEC
 ‘Swuni also has such_k a dog.’

The English correspondent to *ku-len* is *such*, which has been analyzed as a kind anaphor that appears in DegP. Landman (2006), building on Carlson (1977), proposed that *such* is a pro-form that refers to a kind mentioned in the previous context. For example, the English equivalent to Korean data (14b) is shown in (15): *such* refers to the playful-dog kind mentioned in the first sentence.

- (15) Johanna has a playful dog. Mary too has such_k a dog.
 (Adapted from Hanink 2018: 28)

The kind anaphor *such* in English shares a similar distribution with the sequence of Deg and A such as *so tall* (Bresnan 1973; Carlson 1977). Along the same line, recent semantic proposals have analyzed *such* as appearing in DegP (e.g., Landman 2006; Anderson and Morzycki 2015). Abstracting away from semantic detail not relevant to the current discussion, an important commonality of the previous proposals regarding the English kind anaphor *such* is that *such* has the syntax of DegP with an anaphoric variable index. In particular, building on the observations made in Bresnan (1973) and Carlson (1977) in which *such* shows a parallel distribution to

degree constructions such as *so* + A (e.g., *so tall*), Landman (2006) proposes that *such* is morpho-semantically composed of Deg *so* and A *like*, treating *such* as the category of adjective, as illustrated in (16).¹³

(16) [_{DegP} *so*_i Deg [_{AP} A *like*]] 'such'

(Adapted from Landman 2006: 52)

The index component is directly encoded on *so*, which denotes a variable over kinds or objects.¹⁴ The adjective *like* relates a kind and an individual; it maps a kind to the property of objects that instantiate that kind. These meanings of *so* and *like* are combined to express the meaning of *such*, a kind anaphor. See footnote 14 for semantic details.

Given the fact that *ku-len* 'such' in Korean indicates anaphoric meaning of a kind like English *such* (see (15)), we assume that *ku-len* 'such' has a similar semantics to English *such* as proposed in Landman (2006). In particular, it has an index which bears a variable over kinds, which accounts for its role as a kind anaphor, i.e., a pro-form that refers to a kind mentioned in the previous context (see (14)). Translating the view of Landman (2006) on the kind anaphor *such* in English into the current view on indices as syntactic objects (see section 2.2), the kind anaphor *such* may be represented in DegP with idxP in it. Setting aside the specifics of syntax and morphology of *ku-len* (see footnote 15 for relevant discussion), we assume that *ku-len* 'such' shares the core structural component with English *such*, namely DegP with idxP in it. Under this view, *ku-len* is another instance that suggests that in Korean it is possible for DegP to be associated with anaphoric use as shown with emphatic *ku*.

13 In Landman (2006), assuming the studies such as Chomsky (1965), Heim (2000), and Bhatt and Pancheva (2004), DegP is assumed to appear in the specifier of AP. In (16), we present the structure in accordance with our assumption in which DegP is a functional projection above A. We do not question this issue, as the main point of this paper does not hinge on this.

14 The semantics of *so* + *like* = *such* proposed in Landman (2006) is shown in (i). For the purpose of the paper, we do not further discuss the semantic composition of *such*.

(i) a. $[[so_i]]^g: g(i)$
 b. $[[like]]: \lambda k_e [\lambda x_e [x \leq k]]$
 c. $[[such]]_g: \lambda x_e [x \leq g(i)]$ (Landman 2006: 52)

5. Consequences: *Ku* in emphatic, kind and other contexts

In this section, we discuss further evidence that suggests that kind anaphor *ku-len* is associated with DegP. We also discuss the consequences of this paper by focusing on the overall distribution of *ku* across various contexts. It should be stressed that it is not the purpose of this section to analyze the internal structure of *ku-len*, but it is to show that idxP can be associated with DegP as proposed for emphatic *ku*. We discuss two pieces of evidence. One is the fact that kind anaphor *ku-len* shows a similar distribution to adjectives that project DegP. The other is provided from the cross-linguistic pattern of pro-forms across different contexts such as kinds and degrees.

The kind anaphor *ku-len* is similar to *such* in that it belongs to a category of A that projects a higher functional phrase, DegP. In Korean, the morpheme *-(u)n* that appears in *ku-len* has been treated as adjectival suffix (e.g., Choy 1971; Yu 1998; Sohn 1999; Mok 2002; Kang 2006; M. Kim 2014). The suffix can be realized as *-un* or *-n* depending on the preceding stem sound. With a stem that ends with a consonant as in (17a), it is realized as *-un*; otherwise, it is *-n* as shown in (17a). These *-(u)n* suffixed adjectives show typical properties of adjectives, such as being able to be modified by degree adverbs such as *acwu* ‘very’, as discussed for adjectives in Korean in section 3.2. This is exemplified in (17c) with example (17b).

- (17) a. *nop-un* b. *khu-n*
 high-un *big-un*
 ‘high’ ‘big’
- c. *acwu khu-n*
 very big-un
 ‘very big’

Building on these studies, we propose that *ku-len* belongs to the category of adjective that projects a higher DegP. The first supporting fact is that the kind anaphor *ku-len* shares the same suffix *-(u)n* with those adjectives in (17a-b).¹⁵ It also appears

¹⁵ The status of *-le* is not clear. The morpheme *-le* does not seem to form a root together with *ku*, as it appears productively with other demonstratives to indicate similar kind anaphoric meaning, *i* ‘this’ or *ce* ‘that over there’; e.g., *i-len/ce-len*. With these kind anaphors, *-le* also appears in another derivative

as a prenominal modifier, for example, see the data in (14b). Like other adjectives, *ku-len* indicates a degree meaning, as suggested by the fact that it can be modified by a degree adverb such as *acwu* ‘very’. In the context of (14a), repeated as (18a) below, just like *-(u)n* adjectives in (17), *ku-len* can be modified by the degree adverb *acwu*, as shown in (18b).¹⁶ The adverb modifies the meaning indicated by *ku-len* ‘such’, i.e., a kind of dog that is playful.

- (18) a. Chelswu-eykey-nun hwalpalhan kangaci-ka iss-ta.
 Chelswu-DAT-TOP playful dog-NOM be-DEC
 ‘Chelswu has [a playful dog]_k.’
 b. Swuni-eykey-to acwu ku_k-len kangaci iss-ta.
 Swuni-DAT-also very ku-ADJ dog-NOM be-DEC
 ‘Swuni also has [Lit.: very such_k a dog].’

Further support for the proposal of *ku-len* ‘such’ being associated with DegP comes from the cross-linguistic evidence shown in Anderson and Morzycki (2015). It is shown that a single anaphoric morpheme across languages is used as a pro-form for kind and degree meanings, and it has the property of appearing cross-categorially.¹⁷ This is illustrated with the Polish anaphoric morpheme *tak* in (19). In kind (19a), *tak* appears with the noun ‘dog’ while in degree (19b) it appears with the adjective ‘tall’. A similar pattern is found in a wide-range of languages such as German, English, French, Japanese and so on (see a full list of languages in Anderson and Morzycki 2015).

- (19) a. tak-i pies (kind)
 such-MAS dog

adjectives such as *ku/i/ce-lehata* ‘like that’. However, it is not clear at all what meaning *-le* carries apart from the demonstratives if it is a separate morpheme. It is also not clear what meaning it adds to the whole phrase if it is a part of stem together with the demonstratives. We leave this issue for future research, and in this paper we indicate *-le* and *-n* together.

16 In (18b), the adverb *acwu* and *ku-len* co-occur. As the internal structure of *ku-len* needs further research, we tentatively suggest that both appear in the specifier of DegP assuming that multiple specifiers are allowed.

17 Across-languages, a relevant pro-form also appears in a manner context (e.g., ‘behave that way’) which is also the case for Korean (e.g., *ku-lehkey hangdonghata* ‘behave that way’). For the purpose of this paper, we note this fact but do not further discuss it.

- b. *ku-lehkey khun degree*
ku-Adv big
 ‘such big/tall’

Considering the overall distribution of *ku* discussed in this paper, the morpheme *ku* is an instantiation of idxP that appears in different contexts, such as anaphoric definite, emphatic, kind, or degree. In fact, this distribution appears to be part of the broader distribution that the morpheme *ku* exhibits. In investigating anaphoric *ku* and pronoun *ku*, a similar observation on *ku* has been made in Kim (2025a). In Kim (2025a), *ku* as idx head is viewed as being category-neutral, appearing cross-categorially as D, V, or N, which is formalized in terms of features, as illustrated in (21).

- (21) a. [idx, D] anaphoric definite *ku* ‘that’
 b. [idx, V] *ku-leha* ‘like that’ (as in *ku-leha-ta* ‘do so’)
 c. [idx, N] *ku-ttay* ‘at that time’ (Kim 2025a: 272)

In accounting for the category-neutral nature of *ku*, Kim (2025a) assumes a featural analysis in Jenks and Konate (2022). In brief, Jenks and Konate (2002) propose that the head idx is a feature that can combine with any lexical or functional category which produces an indexed counterpart of that category. Specifically, idx forms a complex head with a category feature F, i.e., [idx, F] which is a phrasal projection with the distribution of F. According to Jenks and Konate (2022), this proposal captures the fact that pro-forms across languages show category-neutral distribution. For example, the idx counterparts of various categories for English are provided in Jenks and Konate (2022), and some of them are shown in (22). The demonstratives and pronouns with the features (22a) are the center of focus in Jenks and Konate (2022), but no further structural analysis of (22b)-(22d) has been provided, which we do not question.¹⁹

¹⁹ The focus of Jenks and Konate (2022) is on anaphoric demonstratives (e.g., *that linguist*) and pronominal definites (e.g., *we linguists*). They propose that in these phrases idxP appears in the specifier of DP and idxP has a complex head [idx, D]. See Jenks and Konate (2022) for detail, which we do not replicate for the purpose of this paper.

- (22) a. [idx, D] = *this, that*, other pronouns
 b. [idx, V] = *so, that* (as in *do so* or *do that*)
 c. [idx, Deg] = *so, that* (as in *so tall* or *that tall*)
 d. [idx, Adv] = *so, thus*

(Jenks and Konate 2022: 8)

Assuming this featural analysis of idxP in Jenks and Konate (2022), Kim (2025a) proposes that idx realized by *ku* in Korean also forms a complex head with different categories, which captures the cross-categorial distribution of *ku* observed in the language, such as in (21).

Note that the distribution of *ku* across different contexts discussed in this paper, namely emphatic, kind, and degree, is not discussed in Kim (2025). Assuming the featural analysis in Jenks and Konate (2022) and its implementation for Korean in Kim (2025a), we propose that the occurrence of *ku* across emphatic, kind, and degree contexts arises due to its category-neutral nature, as shown with *ku* in Korean (21) and demonstrative *that* in English (22). Specifically, we propose that idx that is associated with emphatic *ku* forms a complex head with Deg, as illustrated in (23a). Kind *ku* is similar to emphatic *ku* in that it shares a common structural property, idxP, and it appears in DegP. Thus, idx head in kind *ku* may form a complex head with Deg as in (23b). *ku* in a degree context as in *ku-lehkey* + A (see (20b)) would form a complex head with Adv (23c) as indicated by the adverbial suffix *-lehkey*, which in turn would appear in DegP.

- (23) a. [idx, Deg] = emphatic *ku* '[that much]_{EMPH}'
 b. [idx_k, Deg] = *ku-len* 'such'
 c. [idx, Adv] = *ku-lehkey* (as in *kulehkey kun*)

The featural representation in (23) should *not* be understood as suggesting that emphatic *ku* has the same structure as kind and degree *ku*. Although they share the core structural component idxP that appears in DegP, it remains to be seen to what extent the entire structure of kind *ku* and degree *ku* are similar to or different from the structure of emphatic *ku*. For example, as discussed in section 4.2, idx in kind contexts indicates a variable over kinds, notated as idx_k in (23b) unlike emphatic *ku* or degree *ku*. Regarding morphology, unlike emphatic *ku*, kind *ku* and degree

ku each have suffixes, which may contribute to the characterization of the structures of kind and degree *ku*.

A meaningful consequence emerging from the discussion on the broad distribution of *ku* is that *ku* is category-neutral, which is exactly what has been found for a pro-form cross-linguistically observed in the previous studies mentioned above.²⁰ In this paper, along with Jenks and Konate (2022) and Kim (2025a), its category-neutral status is accounted for by a featural approach. Language-internally, *ku* can be understood as a pro-form realized as idx head, but the resulting phrases in which it appears will have different syntax and semantics depending on what category it combines with.²¹

6. Conclusion

This paper examined the distribution of emphatic *ku* with a particular focus on its syntactic properties. It is proposed that emphatic *ku* is the realization of the idxP that appears in DegP. As with the recent studies on emphatic *ku* (Kang 2018; Kim and Elfner 2025), the current paper is meaningful in that it identifies emphatic *ku* as an independent category of its own, specifically as a syntactic category.

A new contribution of this paper is that it is the first study to provide a syntactic analysis of emphatic *ku*, which has interesting consequences both language-internally and cross-linguistically. The morpheme *ku* in Korean turns out to be a pro-form in various contexts, and in line with the analysis of emphatic *ku* as idxP, different anaphoric uses of *ku* are unified as idxP that appears cross-categorially. Strikingly, this analysis is in accordance with the cross-linguistic observation that a single morpheme is used as an anaphor in different contexts such as kind, degree or manner (e.g., Landman and Morzycki 2003; Anderson and Morzycki 2015). Thus, the current study not only provides new empirical evidence, from rarely discussed uses of *ku*,

20 In Kim (2025a), deictic demonstratives *i* ‘this’ and *ce* ‘that over there’ are also identified as being category-neutral and a similar featural analysis is proposed (see Kim 2025a for detail). We note that these morphemes are similar to *ku* in that they also appear in the contexts of kind, degree, or manner, e.g., *i-len*, *ce-len* / *i-lesskey*, *ce-lesskey*. An interesting consequence is that in Korean, the morphemes *ku*, *i*, and *ce* appear to be a general pro-form that are category-neutral.

21 As suggested by an anonymous reviewer, within DegP contexts (23), *ku* may not be category-neutral, unlike in the non-DegP contexts in (21), but it may be considered a separate type of *ku* associated with DegP. Considering the entire distribution of *ku* discussed in this paper, however, *ku* appears to belong to one identical category-neutral pro-form, which we maintain at this stage.

for the recent growing literature on idxP (e.g., Schwarz 2009; Hanink 2018, 2021b; Jenks 2018; Jenks and Konate 2022; Royer 2022; Kim 2025a, b), but also advances the understanding of *ku* in Korean, which has been known mostly for its demonstrative or pronominal uses without any connection with its apparent appearance in other anaphoric contexts.

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Kyumin Kim

Associate Professor
Department of English Language and Literature
Chungbuk National University
1 Chungdae-ro, Seowon-gu,
Cheongju, Chungcheongbuk-do 28644, Korea
E-mail: kukim@chungbuk.ac.kr

Emily Elfner

Associate Professor
Department of Languages, Literatures and Linguistics
York University
4700 Keele Street
Toronto, Ontario M3J 1P3, Canada
Email: eelfner@yorku.ca

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