# Turn-taking in Korean conversation

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## Abstract

On the basis of Sacks et al.'s (1974) turn-taking model, I explore the flexibility of the Korean turn-taking system. Noting first that speakers bring a turn to a stop without projected final turn elements, I propose that the turn stop is a legitimate completion specifiable as a transition-relevance place (TRP). I view turn construction as a process of improvisation in which lexical chunks are accumulated one after another to deliver a recognizable action; a TRP is thus constituted at the completion of a lexical chunk loosely tied to a prior lexical chunk. In parallel, a turn stop occurs at a lexical boundary in which the lexical chunks thus far accumulated have conveyed a complete action. I argue that any lexical boundary can serve as a TRP on the condition of action completion, as negotiated and determined by the participants' shared knowledge and experiences. This flexibility of TRP constitution is proposed as a specification of Sacks et al.'s (1974) generic model applied to Korean conversation.
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## 1. Introduction

Sacks et al. (1974) proposed that turns are constructed from basic building blocks called turn constructional units or TCUs, which allow the projection of a possible completion point specifiable as a transition-relevance place (TRP). This projectability allows changes in speaker to occur with minimal gaps and overlaps. I explore how this turn-taking model is specified in Korean conversation.

I first introduce a notable phenomenon in Korean where certain turn final elements that have been projected during turn development are left unarticulated. These unarticulated final elements frequently include a verbal group, predominantly due to the language's SOV word order. In the linguistics literature, this phenomenon has been characterized as an ellipsis in that the unarticulated main sentential elements are easily retrievable from context (Sohn, 2013: 401). However, there is much more to discuss in relation to turn construction. Consider excerpt (1) below, for example. Prior to this excerpt, Park had noted that the colleges of his university had recently rejected a non-activist student group in favor of an activist group that supports a national student association called *Hanchonglyen*, and he is here clarifying the point. Note that (--) in the English translation is used to indicate the final turn elements that are projected and yet unarticulated.

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Excerpt (1)

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1  P:    =e.  kukka  tantay-nun: kka   wenlay::   kukka  caknyen-ey
          yes I.mean college-TC  I.mean originally I.mean last.year-at
          Yes. I mean, as for colleges, I mean, originally:: I mean, last year

2         myech kay-ka pikwen-ey        tongcolul hay-ss-ess-nuntey,
          some  CL-NM  non-activist-with align-PST-PST-but
          some of them aligned with non-activists but

3  L:     e.
          yes
          Yeah.

4  P:→    olhayn       tasi  Hanchonglyen        kyeyyel-lo ta.
          this.year:TC again ((Organization name))line-to    completely
          as for this year, again, (they)(--)to the Hanchonglyen line
          completely.

5  L:     a  kulen ke-yess-e?
          ah such  thing-be:PST-INT
          Ah is (that) it?
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At lines 1 and 2, Park says that some colleges had supported the non-activists in the previous year. At line 4, he moves on to *olhayn* ('this year'). Given his earlier talk and his use of the contrastive token -*nun*, it is anticipated that he will subsequently remark on the shift in the colleges' support to the activist group that follows *Hanchonglyen*. Indeed, Park subsequently produces the adverb *tasi* ('again'), followed by the adverbial expression *Hanchonglyen kyeyyel-lo* ('to the Hanchonglyen line'). Although the core of his message is now clear, he adds the adverb *ta* ('completely'), affirming the comprehensive nature of the shift in the colleges' support. At this point, a verbal element similar to *pakkwiesse* ('changed') is clearly projected, but Park brings the turn to a stop with prosodic completion. At line 5, Lee immediately begins the next turn, whereby he acknowledges Park's turn.

The turn stop exemplified above clearly satisfies the 'external' criteria for legitimate turn completion (such as action completion, prosodic completion, and the immediate start-up of the next turn), with one exception: the turn (specifically the portion shown at line 4) projects a final verbal element, which, however, is left unarticulated. The result is a turn installment made of a series of four adverbial expressions: *olhayn* ('this year'), *tasi* ('again'), *Hanchonglyen kyeyyel-lo* ('to the Hanchonglyen line'), and *ta* ('completely'). The turn could thus be viewed as grammatically incomplete, with the immediate speaker change merely incidental. However, I propose that the turn stop marks a legitimate completion that is specifiable and thus specified as a TRP.

To support the proposal put forward, I explain how turns are constructed in Korean conversation and show that turn stops are in parallel with any turn completion on the critical condition of action completion. This will demonstrate the flexibility of the Korean turn-taking system in terms of TRP constitution, which I propose as a specification of Sacks et al.'s (1974) generic model applied to Korean conversation.

## 2. TCUs and TRPs

Since first conceptualized, TCUs have been viewed as grammatical units. Sacks et al. (1974) observed that turn transitions occur at discrete grammatical points that happen to fall at the completion of syntactic units such as words, phrases, clauses, and sentences. This observation has been corroborated in research on languages other than English (e.g., Lerner and Takagi, 1999; Tanaka, 1999; Thompson and Couper-Kuhlen, 2005). Clauses, in particular, are viewed as interactionally warranted units due to their provision of the critical component (i.e., a predicate) although clause construction is acknowledged to differ between languages (Thompson and Couper-Kuhlen, 2005).

Central to this account of TCUs is their projectability. Sacks et al. (1974: 702) explained this concept by stating that '' [instances] of the unit-types so usable allow a projection of the unit-type under way, and what, roughly, it will take for an instance of that unit-type to be completed.'' Researchers further noted that the projection of turn type and shape occurs at the very beginning of a turn, which is usually marked by certain regular linguistic elements (such as a nominative personal pronoun or an interrogative pronoun) (e.g., Schegloff, 1987; Thompson and Couper-Kuhlen, 2005). However, languages such as Korean and Japanese rarely permit such early projection due to the lack of regular linguistic resources at the