

Utterance-final *-ketun* in spoken Korean: A particle for managing information structure in discourse[☆]



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Abstract

This paper explores the functions of the utterance-final particle *-ketun* in Modern Spoken Korean. In it, I analyze naturally occurring spontaneous conversational data to provide a unified account of utterance-final *-ketun*'s several apparently disparate functions, arguing that its basic function is to manage the flow of information in discourse. Specifically, I claim that *-ketun* presents a pragmatic assertion that, in the speaker's view, should be or should have been a pragmatic presupposition, as if it were a pragmatic presupposition. The data analyzed in this study suggest that *-ketun* is a useful device by which speakers can ease the disorderly flow of information in spontaneous conversations, in particular to repair or avoid potential hitches in the order of presentation. This basic information-management function can be extended to highlight or manage mismatches between the speaker's and the hearer's states of knowledge, as part of either politeness strategies or impoliteness strategies. Collectively, the usages of *-ketun* discussed in this paper suggest that it is a highly intersubjective marker, in that it reflects the speaker's attention to the hearer's state of knowledge and changes in that state of knowledge. © 2015 Elsevier B.V. All rights reserved.

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1. Introduction

In formal written Korean and in older varieties of the spoken language, *-ketun* is one of many connective endings that connect two clauses together within a sentence. Specifically, *-ketun* has been called a conditional connective ending, as the two clauses it connects are typically in a conditional relationship. The conditional connective ending *-ketun* has certain syntactic restrictions, as it can only be used in imperative, hortative or promissory sentences (K.-D. Lee, 1993; Chae, 1998; Yeom, 2005; Kim and Suh, 2010a), as the example in (1) demonstrates.¹

- (1)
- a. *nalssi-ka coha-ci-ketun san-ey ka-la.*
weather-NOM good-INCHOA-COND mountain-LOC go-IMPR²
'If the weather gets better, climb the mountain.'

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¹ All of the Korean examples in this study are transcribed using the Yale Romanization system. Examples borrowed from other papers that used different systems have been modified to the Yale system for consistency.

² Some abbreviations in examples borrowed from other papers may have been slightly modified to be consistent with the conventions used in this paper. Abbreviations used for morpheme-by-morpheme glossings are provided in [Appendix A](#).

- b. *nalssi-ka coha-ci-ketun san-ey ka-ca.*
 weather-NOM good-INCHOA-COND mountain-LOC go-HORT
 'If the weather gets better, let's climb the mountain.'
- c. *nalssi-ka coha-ci-ketun san-ey ka-ma.*
 weather-NOM good-INCHOA-COND mountain-LOC go-PROM
 'If the weather gets better, I promise to climb the mountain.'

(Yeom, 2005:751–752)

In (1), the clause *-ketun* is attached to specify the condition under which the activity described in the following clause might occur; due to this conditional relationship between the two clauses, *-ketun* can be translated in English as 'if' or 'when.'

However, in contemporary spoken Korean, *-ketun* often functions as an utterance-final particle, rather than connecting two clauses together. Example (2) illustrates such a case in line 3, marked with an arrow.

(2) 4CM00003

(Context: P1 and P2 are talking about divorce.)

- 1 P2: *ay-ka iss-nun kyengwu-ey-nun ku-ke-n an toy-keyss-ta-nun*
 child-NOM exist-ATTR(RL) case-LOC-TOP that-thing-TOP NEG become-DCT.RE-COMP-ATTR(RL)
sayngkak-i tul-te-la.
 thought-NOM come.in-FH.EV-DECL
 'I don't think it's a good idea if you have kids.'
- 2 P1: *ung ku-chi.*
 yeah that-COMT
 'Yeah you're right.'
- 3→ *wuli= wuli cakun apeci-ka cayhon-ul ha-si-ess-ketun?*
 my my little father-NOM remarriage-ACC do-HON-ANT-ketun
 'My= my uncle got married again-ketun?'
- 4 P2: *ung.*
 yes
 'Yeah.'
- 5 P1: *kuntey ku cakun emma casik-i twu myeng-i-ess-kwu,*
 but that little mom child-NOM two CLSF-COP-ANT-CON
 'But my new aunt had two kids of her own and,'
- 6 *cakun appa casik-i twu myeng-i-ess-e,*
 little dad child-NOM two CLSF-COP-ANT-INDC
 'My uncle had two kids,'
 (P1 continues his story)

In example (2) above, which is an excerpt from a corpus of natural spoken Korean,³ *-ketun* is clearly neither connecting two clauses together nor conveying a conditional meaning.

Many scholars have already noted this new usage of *-ketun* as an utterance-final particle in spoken Korean.⁴ They have variously described the novel usage as having an epistemic-marking function (S.-J. Park, 1999; Chae, 1998; Koo and Rhee, 2001; Shin, 2000; Park and Sohn, 2002; Kim and Suh, 2010a, 2010b), diverse discourse-connecting functions (Koo and Rhee, 2001; Jo, 2011; Y.-Y. Park, 1998; K.-H. Kim, 2010; Kim and Suh, 2010a, 2010b), a politeness-marking function (Koo and Rhee, 2001; Chae, 1998; Jo, 2011), and an impoliteness-marking function (Y.-Y. Park, 1998; K.-H. Kim, 2010; Kim and Suh, 2010a, 2010b). However, this paper attempts to provide a novel approach to the diverse functions of

³ This excerpt is from the 21st Century Sejong Corpus; detailed information about the data for this study is given in section 3. The transcription conventions used in this paper are explained in Appendix B.

⁴ Specifically, many Korean linguists categorize this novel use of *-ketun* in spoken Korean as a "sentential ending" (Jeon, 2002; Son and Kim, 2009), a "sentence ending suffix" (Kim and Suh, 2010a, 2010b; K.-H. Kim, 2010), a "sentential end marker" (Koo and Rhee, 2001), or a "sentence final particle" (Y.-Y. Park, 1998). These terms indicate that the function of *-ketun* is to end a *sentence*; however, it is not clear that this is actually true. This use of *-ketun* only occurs in spoken Korean and (at least at present) never in written Korean, and because the grammar of spoken language differs greatly from that of written language, what is called a "sentence" in written language hardly ever occurs in spoken language. Thus, it might be problematic to describe the novel function of *-ketun* as marking the end of a "sentence." Consequently, I propose the alternative term *utterance-final particle* to describe this use of *-ketun*. The advantage of this alternative term is that it specifies that *-ketun* occurs at the end of an *utterance* – which carries the additional implication that it is a characteristic of spoken language.

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