

Grammar as an emergent response to interactional needs: A study of final *kuntey* ‘but’ in Korean conversation



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Abstract

This paper illustrates the interactional uses of the Korean contrastive connective *kuntey* ‘but’ in a previously unexamined position – sentence-final position – and suggests that this final *kuntey* is on a grammaticalization pathway to a sentence-final particle. While the target ‘final *kuntey*’ exhibits similar functions to those of turn-initial *kuntey* described in prior research, occurring in such contexts as dispreferred responses, topic resumption, and sequence closings, the primary context in which final *kuntey* is found involves the speaker rejecting the course of action proposed by the prior speaker and shifting the prior talk’s frame to a slightly revised one. Such actions are ‘disaffiliative’ and are commonly managed as delicate social actions in interaction. We argue that the final position that *kuntey* occupies in a turn is a resource with which speakers delay their disaffiliative stance and use as a face-saving strategy. We further argue that final *kuntey* may be a case of grammaticalization from a discourse connective to a sentence-final particle. Being attached to sentence-ending suffixes, final *kuntey* becomes a prosodic appendage of the preceding element and forms a single intonation unit. The development of final *kuntey* indicates that the emergence of new grammatical constructions interacts with prosody and social actions.

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1. Introduction

Speakers in conversation can decline a solution offered by other speakers or disagree with others’ opinions. There is a range of ways speakers begin this sort of action. For example, English speakers use the contrastive discourse connective *but* (e.g., van Dijk, 1979; Schiffrin, 1987; Fraser, 1998; Hancil, 2014), and Korean speakers have available a comparable contrastive connective, *kulentey* (or *kuntey*) which consists of the deictic predicate *kule(ha)* ‘that is so’ and the clause-final suffix *-nuntey* ‘but, while’ (Park, 1997; Do, 2005; Choi, 2007). Given that these connectives mark a logical contrastive relationship between the prior sentence and the upcoming sentence, it is not surprising to see in conversation that they are used at the beginning of a turn that issues a disagreement, refusal, or rejection.

Actions such as refusals, rejections, or disagreements are referred to as ‘dispreferred’ (as opposed to ‘preferred’) responses in conversation analytic research. In a number of studies from a range of different languages and cultures, it has been documented that dispreferred responses frequently occur with features that mitigate the force of the action. These include a temporal gap between the prior turn and the dispreferred action, as well as items that defer the action, such as *well*, *uh*, appreciations (e.g. *thanks for the offer, but...*), and accounts (Pomerantz, 1984; Sacks, 1987; Schegloff,

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2007; Schegloff and Lerner, 2009). Using such a set of practices, speakers are able to manage courses of action that promote social solidarity among the parties involved. In other words, these practices “maximize the likelihood of affiliative, socially solidary actions, and minimize the likelihood of disaffiliative, socially divisive ones” (Heritage, 1984: 265-80) (also see Schegloff et al., 1977; Pomerantz, 1978, 1984; Sacks, 1987; Lerner, 1996; Schegloff, 2007).

Many of the practices of marking dispreferred actions mentioned above utilize the turn beginning space; this illustrates the importance of turn beginnings in social interaction. The turn beginning is a sensitive place that reveals or projects the speaker’s action that is unfolding (Schegloff, 1987, 1996). Indeed, items that appear near or at the beginning of a turn are commonly involved in showing the relationship between the current turn-in-progress and that preceding it, and in projecting the action embodied by the ensuing turn (Schegloff, 1987, 1996; Heritage, 1998; also see Heritage, 2013 and Kim and Kuroshima, 2013 for a review of research on turn-beginning particles; for Korean, see Kim, 2013a,b). For example, with the turn-initial connective *but* (or *kulentey/kuntey* in Korean) in response to some first action (e.g., a request), the recipient can immediately project, at the moment of hearing the connective, that the impending turn will be in some way contrastive to, or shifted from, the direction taken by the prior turn (Park, 1997, 2001).

However, portraying a disaffiliative stance at the outset of a turn can be an undesirable (or even risky) undertaking which threatens the “minimiz[ation] of the disaffiliative, social divisive [actions]” (Heritage, 1984: 265-80). Our analysis shows that Korean speakers have a resource with which they can delay the displaying of their disaffiliative stance: *kuntey* deployed in sentence-final position. In this study we follow Stivers’s (2008) definition of *stance*, which is the speaker’s “affective treatment of the events he or she is describing whether that is communicated explicitly or implicitly” (p. 37). As Stivers describes, *affiliative stance* shows support or endorsement of the recipient’s conveyed stance, while *disaffiliative stance* shows a lack of support or endorsement.

Consider the following example, in which Jun is responding to a suggestion offered by the other speaker about buying a hand sanitizer for Jun’s dad to prevent the swine flu (line 7). Mia offers her initial suggestion in line 1.

Extract (1)

- 01 Mia: kuke: satulye:: appa.
that buy:benefactive dad
“Why don’t {you} buy that. {For your} dad.”
- 02 Jun: a: son so[tokha-nun ke?
ah hand sterilize-ATTR thing
“Oh: the thing for sterilizing hands?”
- 03 Mia: [ung ung
“Yes yes”
- 04 kuke-lato iss-umyen toyçi anh-ulkka?
that-even have-if be okay not-Q
“Wouldn’t {it} be okay to have at least that?”
- 05 (0.2)
- 06 Mia: son cincca mos takk-ul [ttay?
hand really unable wash-ATTR when
“When {he} really can’t wash {his} hands?”
- 07 Jun:-> [son cincca cal ssieya toyn-tay kuntey.
hand really well wash must-QT kuntey
“{People say you} have to wash your hands really well kuntey”
- 08 (.)
- 09 twayçi tokkam-un.
swine flu-TOP
“{For} the swine flu.”
- 10 kuke-pakkey:: (0.1) tsk! pyel:
that only special
“Only that seems {to work}.”
- 11 (0.1)

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