

A distinct declarative question design in Korean conversation: An examination of turn-final *ko* questions



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Abstract

This study identifies the use of the clausal connective suffix *ko* 'and' as a question-formulating device in Korean conversation. While previous studies of question devices in Korean mainly discuss sentence-ending suffixes, this study illustrates how the clausal connective suffix *ko* in turn-final position with a rising intonation formulates a distinct type of declarative question. The turn-final *ko* question syntactically shows a parasitic relation to another question or an informing turn in the interaction, which it treats as a host. The question is constructed in relation to prior turns as an insertion. This parasitic characteristic explains how the turn-final *ko* declarative question differs from other types of declarative questions formulated with different sentence-ending devices. This study also examines cases of the turn-final *ko* question independently functioning as a declarative question without a parasitic relationship to prior turns or talk, which further suggests that the turn-final *ko* has become grammaticalized as a marker of a full and complete declarative question. This study adds to cross-linguistic understanding of question formulation by illustrating question design features of Korean, an agglutinative language with a subject–object–verb structure.

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1. Introduction

This paper examines a previously undescribed format for asking a question in Korean conversation, in which the question is formulated with a clausal connective suffix *ko* 'and' in turn-final position. As Korean is a predicate-final agglutinative language, wherein a long chain of suffixes are attached to predicate stems (Sohn, 1999:15), the clausal connective *ko* typically appears in clause-final position attached to a predicate. The connective suffix *ko* serves to connect clauses that express parallel actions or propositions within a sentence (Lee, 1991; Sohn, 1999), as in the following example.¹

enni-nun pwusan-ey sal-ko oppa-nun inchen-ey sal-a.
sister-TOP Pusan-in live-ko older:brother-TOP Incheon-in live-IE
(My) sister lives in Pusan, and (my) brother lives in Incheon.

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¹ In Korean, the conjunctive adverb *kuliko* 'and' is a similar resource, which like the English discourse marker *and* serves as a pre-positioned connector. However, unlike the connective suffix *ko*, which is a bound morpheme, *kuliko* is a full lexical item.

In natural conversational data, *ko* serves to connect turn-constructive units, and it can be used multiple times within a turn, constituting a multi-unit turn, as in Extract (1).² This extract comes from a conversation between two friends, Soyoung and Joowon.

(1) [KO_5637 00:48]

01→S: ceki mwe-ya, (.) wuli enni ayki paykil-to iss-**kwu** ,
DM what-IE our sister baby one:hundred:day-also have-ko
*What is it? My sister's baby is having her hundred
day celebration, and*

02→ wuli oppa sayngil-to cina-ss-**ko** ,
our brother birthday-also pass-PST-ko
my brother's birthday passed, and

03 J: ung[:].
Yeah:.

04→S: [wuli] appa hh sayngil-to iss-**kwu** ,
our dad birthday-also have-ko
my father's birthday is coming up, and

05 J: e:. [ku--
oh that
Oh:. that-

06 S: [kulayse yepen yo-- yopen wikhu na vacation hay-ss-e.
so this this this week I vacation do-PST-IE
so, this, this, this week, I am taking some time off.

In this segment, Soyoung reports the latest news about each of her family members, which accounts for her plans to take time off and visit her family. She extends her informing turns with the clausal connective *ko* as she adds each family member's news (lines 1–2, 4).

An examination of natural conversational data shows another pervasive usage of *ko*. *Ko* appears in turn-final position with a rising intonation (not always, but usually) and formulates a distinct type of question, as in Extract (2).³ This extract comes from a conversation between a mother (M) and her younger daughter (D), in which the mother asks the younger daughter whether the older daughter went to church or not.

(2) [KO_6173 05:40]

01 M: ceki-nun ettehkey tway-ss-e?
DM-TOP how become-PST-IE
What happened to (her)?

02 D: nwukwu?
Who?

03 M: (Eun Hye)-nun sengtang-ulo ka-ss-e?
NAME-TOP catholic:church-to go-PST-IE
Did (Eun Hye) go to church?

² Due to vowel raising, the clausal connective *ko* is frequently pronounced as *kwu* in conversation, as in lines 1 and 4 of Extract (1) and in other data segments.

³ A turn-final *ko* question is usually produced with a rising intonation, however, the intonation itself does not warrant its status as a question. Because the talk produced by the turn-final *ko* is a B-event statement (Labov and Fanshel, 1977), a statement about matters that belong to the addressee's domain of knowledge, it functions as a question eliciting confirmation or disconfirmation from the addressee (Hayano, 2013:397). Many studies show that such knowledge asymmetry or *recipient-tilted epistemic asymmetry* plays a major role in hearing an utterance as a question (Heritage, 1984, 2010; Stivers and Rossano, 2010).

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