Answering questions about the unquestionable in Korean conversation

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Abstract

Conversation analytic studies have shown many dynamic ways of answering and resisting questions across languages. This study identifies a routine practice in Korean with which recipients indicate problems with questions, and it explains the role of the delimiter particle *ya* 'of course' in displaying resistance. Examinations of the sequential environments in which *ya* occurs demonstrate that traditional accounts of *ya* as an emphatic marker fail to capture its interactional import. In responses to questions, recipients commonly use *ya* to overtly stress the evident nature of a matter, and thus display resistance toward questions that (a) inquire about unquestionable matters that the questioner should not have asked about or doubted; (b) raise an obvious thus pointless matter that is ancillary or off the sequential track; or (c) inquire about referents that are obviously irrelevant. As a delimiter particle, *ya* can be attached to any of several specific linguistic elements to pick out particular aspects of a matter; this feature allows the recipients to problematize those aspects of a question rather than the whole question itself. With a simple attachment of *ya*, recipients walk a fine line between addressing problems in questions and answering them. This study sheds new light on the interactional import of delimiter particles.
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1. Introduction

In recent years, a number of conversation analytic studies in different languages have demonstrated how question recipients display their resistance to questions by deploying a range of resources. This paper examines the delicate ways Korean speakers resist the implications and constraints imposed by questions by utilizing available linguistic resources, in particular, a delimiter particle.[1]

When a speaker asks a question, s/he places various constraints on the recipient. The recipient is expected to answer the question in the next turn (Schegloff, 1968), in a type-conforming way (Raymond, 2003), and in a manner that abides to the terms, presuppositions, action agenda (Clayman and Heritage, 2002; Bolden, 2009; Stivers and Hayashi, 2010), and epistemic (a) symmetry (Heritage and Raymond, 2005) imposed by the question. Despite the strong constraints that questions impose on question recipients, a question recipient can resist and depart from these constraints. A recipient can redirect the question back to the questioner, thereby reversing the direction of the sequence (*counter*, Schegloff, 2007:17). A recipient can take evasive action by deliberately providing an ambiguous answer, which is often seen in news interviews (Clayman, 2001; Clayman and Heritage, 2002; Heritage and Clayman, 2010). A recipient can also initiate repair and interrupt the contiguity and progressivity of the ongoing course of action (Drew, 1997; Schegloff, 2007).

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[1] Delimiter particles (Yang, 1972; Sohn, 1999) are also called focus particles (Martin, 1992) and discourse-function particles (Chang, 1996).

In addition, a recipient can resist or reject the terms and implications of the question by designing a response in particular ways. In Russian, the recipient provides a *repeat-prefaced* response, repeating (part of) a question, in order to contest the premises imposed by the question (Bolden, 2009). Partial repeats identify the problematic aspect of the question, while full repeats problematize the action as a whole. Fox and Thompson's (2010) study on English (type-specifying) *wh*-questions illustrates that while phrasal responses do the job of simple answering, clausal responses do more than just answering the question. Clausal responses suggest trouble or problems with the question or sequence. According to Stivers and Hayashi's study (2010) on English and Japanese, a recipient can provide *transformative answers*, through which the recipient can replace or specify the terms of the question or transform the focus or presupposition imposed by the question. Extract (1) is a case in point, provided by Stivers and Hayashi, and with their analysis.

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(1) SB1 39.35 (Stivers and Hayashi, 2010:10)
01  Tara:      =and I <cri:ed.> (1.1)
02             ((other conversation in progress))
03  Kristina:  (You did it) on thuh pho:ne?
04  Tara:      What?
05  Kristina:  You cried to him on the pho:ne?
06  Tara:      Not on purpose:
07             (0.4)
08  Kristina:  Oh::, ([that's cu^:te.)
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Here, Tara informs Kristina that she cried while talking to an ex-boyfriend (line 1). Kristina asks Tara *You cried to him on the pho:ne?* (line 5). Note how Tara provides a *transformative answer* in line 6. She does confirm that she cried, but she resists the question's terms 'cried to him', which possibly suggest that she cried on purpose. Tara precisely denies this by specifying the terms of the question with 'not on purpose'. Transformative answers allow the recipient to implicitly and retroactively adjust the design and/or agenda of the question.

Furthermore, the recipient can deploy specific words or expressions to display resistance to questions. English's *oh*-prefaced answers (Heritage, 1998), German's multiple response particles *jaja* (Golato and Fagyal, 2008), the Chinese particle *a* (Wu, 2004), and the Danish modal adverb *da* 'really', 'surely' (Heinemann, 2009) are used when question recipients find a question to be inapposite as it inquires about something that was already known, presented, or implied in prior talk. Many of these different resources from particular languages accomplish similar practices in interactions. Recently, Stivers' (2011) study also shows that similar expressions across different languages, such as English (*of course*), Dutch (*natuurlijk*), Japanese (*mochiron*), and Italian (*certo*), function in the same way in that they contest the presupposition of a question's askability. When the recipient responds with 'of course' to a polar (i.e., yes/no) question, s/he is not simply confirming, but is contesting the question's presupposition that both confirmation and disconfirmation are possible, as shown in Extract (2). This extract and the following analysis are from Stivers' study.

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(2) Stivers, 2011:89, Extract (11)
01   J:  Well don't tell Bernie but I got him a hat fer his birthday.
02   S:  Oh you got Bernie a hat?
03   J:  Yeah.
04       (.)
05   J:  Cuz you took his. It's sort of like
06   S:  ^I [didn't take his. <I paid him for it. what he paid for it.
07   J:     [m
08   J:  Oh you paid him for it.
09→  S:  Of ^course!
10   J:  Oh:. So I got him one sortuvv li:ke that.
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Here, Joyce implicitly accuses Stan of taking Bernie's hat (line 5), and Stan denies the accusation and asserts that he bought the hat (line 6). As Joyce further requests confirmation, 'Oh you paid him for it.' (line 8), note how Stan answers 'Of ^course!' (line 9). The response 'of course' does confirm that Stan paid for the hat; however, it does more than simply confirming. 'Of course' contests the presupposition of a polar question that both confirmation and disconfirmation are possible answers. Although Joyce's declarative question is biased toward confirmation, the question still treats disconfirmation as possible. Thus, by responding with 'of course', Stan challenges the need for the question—which insinuates that he might have taken the hat without paying for it—to be asked.

Research on resistant answers is at an early stage in Korean language studies. Yoon's (2010) study provides an overall description of the question-response system in Korean conversation, and includes a discussion of