

A Pragmatic Study of the *-Kes Kaththa* Construction in Korean

As a study of investigating social or interactional meanings of pragmatically oriented constructions, this research investigates the meanings and functions of the modal marker *-nun kes kaththa* 'I think' based on an analysis of Korean spoken discourse in the Sejong Corpus Database and collected conversations (Tannen 1987, Ochs, Schegloff, & Thompson 1996, Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson 1974, Schegloff 2007). The (predicate-*nun/-ul*) *kes kath-ta* can be analyzed as in the following: 'predicate+present/future affix + thing seem-DECL', delivering the meaning of 'be like' or 'be the same (as)'. When *kath-ta* occurs in the construction [proposition+*-nun/ul kes katha*], it functions like a modal marker, which can be seen as a grammaticalized modal marker (cf. Hopper & Traugott 2003). This marker displays speaker's epistemic attitudes toward the proposition, signaling pragmatic meanings such as 'seems like', 'looks like', 'I presume', and 'I think', as in (1).

- (1) A: 아 얘기 들었던 것 같은데? 누가 너 보고 벌레 같다 그러던데?
ah yayki tules-ten **kes kathun**-tey? nwuka ne poko pelley **kathda** keletenty.
'Oh, I think/presume I heard something about you, the talk that you are like a bug.'
B: 오빠가 그랬잖아, oppa-ka kulaysscianha-a.
brother (you)-NM say-DECL 'you said that.'

In (1), while the second *kaththa* has the meaning '(be) like' or 'the same as', the first *kaththa* with *-nun kes* has the meaning 'I think/it seems (to me)', displaying not only the state of speaker's knowledge about a state or event but also the speaker's stances toward the proposition being delivered.

Based on this observation, first, this research provides a brief summary of the previous studies of discourse markers, grammaticalization, conversation analysis, corpus linguistics, and interaction and grammar as background for the present research (Tannen 1987, Hopper & Traugott 2003, Ochs et al. 1996, Schegloff 2007), claiming that *-nun kes kaththa* is a grammaticalized modal marker, and that its pragmatic meanings and functions can be properly characterized in the contexts where it is used. Second, this study examines contexts in the corpus and conversation database for the use of *-nun kes kaththa* instead of using the declarative sentence suffixes such as *-(i)ta* and *-e(yo)* which signal definiteness and conclusiveness of the proposition produced by the speaker. Examination shows that *-nun kes kaththa* is used in the contexts where speakers do not have clear and certain evidence for the utterance or when they do not want to commit themselves to the truth of the proposition. Third, based on this observation, this research explores pragmatic meanings and functions of *-nun kes kaththa* in three terms: (i) speaker's guessing or supposition which is made based on indirect and inferable evidence (cf. Grice 1975), (ii) speaker's attitudes not to commit him-/herself to the proposition delivered, and (iii) speaker's strategy of not imposing on others (Brown and Levinson 1987). Examination shows that the use of *-nun kes kaththa* is related to the speaker's stance toward his/her guessing/supposition toward an event/state. Fourth, the present study illustrates how the sequential structure is organized when the marker *-nun kes kaththa* invites the next speaker's agreement, disagreement, or additional information.

In sum, based on the claim that the *-nun kes kathta* construction is a grammaticalized modal marker, this research shows pragmatic, interactional meanings and functions of *-nun kes kathta* through an examination of the spoken corpus and conversation data, claiming that *-nun kes kathta* is an epistemic, stance marker which displays speaker's non-committal attitudes toward the proposition being delivered. This study also proposes that a corpus-based analysis and an interactional approach serve as useful methods for characterizing grammatical constructions in their contexts.

References (Selected)

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