The Korean vocative interjection *ya* ‘hey’ beyond its summoning action

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Drawing on a conversation analysis framework and methodology, this study examines the unexplored functions of the Korean vocative interjection *ya* ‘hey’ for a variety of actions beyond summoning. *Ya* is classified as a vocative interjection used for calling or summoning an addressee of younger or same age, close in relation (Chang, 1996), as seen in (1).

However, an investigation of naturally occurring interactions shows that this account is incomplete; *ya* appears when there is no need for calling or summoning an addressee. For instance, *ya* occurs in dyadic telephone conversations where there is no ambiguity in understanding to whom the speaker is addressing and when the addressee is already engaged in an ongoing interaction, as seen in excerpt (2). *Ya* even appears in the middle of a speaker’s turn, as seen in (3). Despite its high frequency in unexpected occurrences in interaction, there does not appear to be any empirical research focusing on the diverse uses of *ya*. The paper aims to investigate what functions and actions *ya* performs beyond the act of summoning in interaction. The analysis is based on 375 instances of *ya* found in audiotape data comprised of 32 different telephone calls (960 minutes) and 31 instances of *ya* found in videotape data of two face-to-face multi-party interactions among speakers of Korean (120 minutes).

The findings show that *ya* systematically occurs in turn-initial and turn-medial positions and serves important functions in the organization of turns and turn-taking. In a turn-initial position, speakers regularly use *ya* when initiating a new topic or action sequence, as seen in (2). Since the recipient is already engaged in the talk, *ya* does not function to summon, but rather serves to alert and prompt the recipient’s attention to a new topic or action sequence the speaker is about to launch. By beginning the turn with *ya*, the speaker signals that s/he is about to depart from the prior talk. *Ya* is thus a resource for the speaker to secure the recipient’s attention and, at the same time, to take the turn and floor.

In a turn-medial position, *ya* operates as a turn-constructional pivot, a resource for extending turns at talk (Walker, 2007; Clayman, 2012), as seen in (3). *Ya* can syntactically and prosodically belong to both the preceding and the subsequent units of talk, simultaneously completing a prior unit and launching the next. As a pivot, *ya* serves to extend a turn beyond a projected or incipient transition space, thus enabling the speaker to secure her turn and further elaborate her prior unit of talk. The speaker quickly provides elaboration on her prior talk with no gap since her talk is at odds with the recipient’s claim or stance, making her talk vulnerable to a recipient’s challenge.

As the findings show, *ya* plays important roles in the organization of turns and turn-taking; speakers can initiate or extend their turns at talk in situations where they may be at odds or in competition with other talk in topic, action, or stance. These multifaceted functions of *ya* can be explained by its original summoning property, which is the root of these other functions. *Ya’s* syntactically optional character also enables it to appear in various positions. This study hopes to contribute to uncovering the diverse functions *ya* and expanding our understanding of the usages and roles of interjections in interactions.
Excerpt (1)

ya, kathi ka-ca.
hey together go-PR
'Hey, let’s go together.’

Excerpt (2)

1 Mina: caseyhi alapwa-ya-ci.[hh hh]
in:detail find:out-must-COMM
'I must find out (the directions to your place) in detail. hh'

2 Bora: [ung ung]
'Yeah, yeah.'

3→ Mina: ya pwumonim-un cal kyeysi-nya?
ya parents-TOP well do-Q
'YA, are your parents well?’

4 Bora: ung.
'Yes.'

A shift of topic from Mina’s plan to visit Bora’s place (lines 1-2) to Mina’s inquiry of Bora’s parents’ well-being (lines 3-4).

Excerpt (3)

1 Mia: han tal-ey phalsip pwul.
one month-per eighty dollar
'It’s eight dollars a month.’

cheap-NML-either not-and expensive-NML-either not-and be:so-UNASSIM
'It’s neither cheap nor expensive.’

3→ Mia: pissa-ci ya hankwuk-ey pihaysen pissa-ci.
expensive-COMM YA Korean-compared:to expensive-COMM
'It’s expensive YA compared to Korea, it’s expensive.’

4 Ara: hankwuk-ey pihaysen pissa-ntey,
Korea-compared:to expensive-but
'Compared to Korea, it’s expensive, but,’

References