Reporting past experience with the immediate perception marker -ney in Korean conversation

Hye Young Choi Smith  
University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa

This paper aims to explore pragmatic expansion of the Korean sentence ender -ney in reporting the speaker’s past perception, using a conversation analytic framework. A number of studies have contributed to establishment of the semantic and pragmatic profiles of -ney, and there is a general agreement among researchers on the essential feature of -ney: it conveys “factual realization” of “newly perceived information” (Lee, 1991:434) and signals “a consciousness shift within the speaker” (Strauss, 2005:437), as in (1).

It is widely accepted that -ney expresses direct evidentiality such as the speaker’s immediate sensory perception or firsthand experience conveying surprise or counter-expectation, although the typological categorization of -ney still remains as an issue due to its multifaceted nature. Pragmatic functions of -ney have been relatively underexplored, and among the littlest known, assessment is counted as the a major function of -ney (Kim, 2004; Strauss, 2005). However, little attention has been paid to a “reporting” function of -ney, thus this study purports to provide the ground on which more in-depth discussions on the pragmatic expansion of -ney can be built.

In order to investigate the pragmatic contexts where -ney is deployed, I analyzed approximately 600 minutes of Korean telephone conversations from Linguistic Data Consortium (LDC) corpus using conversation analytic methods. Among 191 tokens of -ney, 35 were used in reporting activities. The results showed that -ney is used for a pragmatic strategy to reenact the speaker’s past perception in reporting/storytelling activities. By adopting this strategy, the speaker can accomplish cognitive and pragmatic effects such as (a) retrieving a past perception and sharing his/her emotional stance with the interlocutor; (b) describing the reported event as uncontrollable and claiming a reduced accountability for it; (c) proffering a conclusion or summary of the reported event.

In (2), Sun reports on her lazy day to her friend by reenacting her past sensory experience (line 3). By verbally demonstrating her past reaction with a moderately rising tone, Sun displays her surprise to the unexpected information and invites Mee to attend to noteworthiness of the perceived event. In (3), Jun’s story is initiated by telling a result of the story: he is hungover from drinking too much yesterday (lines 1-2). Jun’s report summary of his having a drinking party (lines 6-7) is conveyed with the sentence ender -ney, adopting a distanced and self-observing stance, implying that overdrinking was beyond his control. I suggest that a semantic feature of -ney (signaling ‘surprise’) provides here a background for the upcoming information, how astonishing amount of vodka he drank with his friends, and its noteworthiness and ridiculousness that is also portrayed in the expression kkutcangul nayssta “we drained it” (lines 9-10).

The uses of -ney in reporting perception exemplified in this paper differ from the general profile of -ney (used in signalling immediate, present perception) in that it is used strategically to report a past event and the speaker’s cognitive/emotional stance in a present voice, as if the speaker is still in the effect of the past perception. Therefore, I propose that pragmatic context expansion which caused atypical uses of -ney needs more attention in future research.
(1) Pap-i cham masiss-ney.  
   rice-NOM very tasty-ney  
   “The rice is very tasty!”

(2)  
01 Sun: ya =na: cinca hhh ya- na- nauy onul haiwu-nun mwe- 
    hey I really hhh hey I my today day-TOP what  
02 mwe-n-ci a-nyać  
    what-DISJ know-INTERR  
    “Really, hey, do you know what my day was like today?”  
03 → ca-ko ilena-ss-teni:: yeltwu-si-neyć  
    sleep-and wake:up-PST-RETRO twelve-o’clock-ney  
    “I woke up, and it is 12 o’clock!”

(3)  
01 Jun: na-nun ecey ↑swul-ul >nemwu manhi masy-ekacko<  
    I-TOP yesterday alcohol-TOP too much drink-so  
02 onul opaitu hay-ss-ta.  
    today throw:up do-PST-DECL  
    “Yeah, I drank too much yesterday, so I threw up today.”  
03 Pyo: mwe ha-n|takoć  
    what do-for  
    “What for?”

(4)  
01 Sun: a: yeltwu-si-kwuna:: hhh sin:nakey mek-ko: hh  
    ah twelve-o’clock-UNASSIM hhh intensely eat-and hh  
    “(I thought) Oh, it’s 12 o’clock, and I binge ate,”

References  