

## Formulating ‘Tag Questions’ in Korean: Indexing Commitment as a Practice for Managing Epistemic Asymmetry

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<Abstract>

Korean ‘tag questions’ are primarily formulated as a declarative question marked with ‘pseudo-tags’ *ci* (‘committal’) or *cianha* (*ci* + NEG + informal ending) (Suh 2006; Yoon 2010), a *ci*-based sentence-ending suffix (SES) (Kawanish & Sohn 1993). As SESs, these particles are ‘agglutinated’ (rather than ‘tagged’) to the sentence-final predicate stem (cf. Tzeltal sentence-final particles, Enfield et al. 2012):

- (1) *hophu laynchi-nun hanpen-to mos kapwass-ci.*  
‘We have never been to the Hope Ranch (**right?**)’
- (2) *pothong cwungkwuk yoli-ey cwukswun manhi tuleka-cianha.*  
‘In Chinese food, bamboo shoots are normally used a lot, **aren’t they/right?**’

Recipient-tilted epistemic asymmetry plays a major role in the way these utterances are recognizably understood as a declarative ‘question’ (rather than an ‘assertion’) (Heritage 2012), though the gradient-tilting processes associated with the two constructions are distinctively organized. The *ci*-marked declarative question indexes the speaker’s raised commitment to the factually ascertainable character of shared information, often collusively and/or parenthetically deployed to initiate a ‘fact-checking’ sequence addressing a baseline empirical domain to be acknowledged by the recipient non-problematically (Example (1)) (Mazeland 2007). In the *cianha*-marked declarative question, the speaker engages in a more discursively-oriented activity geared to raising the recipient’s commitment; *cianha* marks ‘general knowledge’ (Schiffrin 1984; Kawanish 1994) whose relevance is negotiated as the normative basis for mobilizing the recipient as a ‘co-member’ to endorse the speaker’s personal agenda (Example (2)). The normatively-accountable character of the *cianha*-marked declarative question (cf. Peräkylä 1998; Robinson 2016) draws upon the speaker’s assumption of the recipient’s ‘latent epistemic confidence’ to be restored from the current state of (momentarily) lowered commitment (indicating lapse) (cf. Enfield et al. 2012).

Another type of ‘tag questions’ involves the question tag *kulehci* (or its contracted forms *kuchi/kuci*) (‘is like that’ + *ci*), a *ci*-marked tag-type clause:

- (3) *pwumo-nim-i kulen sayngkak-ul ha-sey-yo, (.) ku-ci-yo.*  
‘Parents tend to think that way. (.) **right (=it is like that)?**’

The question tag *kulehci*, produced as an ‘add-on’, embodies the speaker’s remedially-motivated orientation to pursuing reciprocity, e.g., fishing for an aligning party other than the (non-aligning) addressee in multi-party interactions (Example (3)) (cf. Levinson 2012). Here, traces of accountability can be identified in remedying the delicate, troublesome, or otherwise ‘non-response-mobilizing’ character of the prior TCU (as evidenced by the lack of recipient uptake) (Stivers & Rossano 2012). The speaker orients to reconstructing the import of the prior TCU as commitment-worthy, i.e., as an exemplification of broader (though not specified) import, through ‘et cetera’ provision invoked by *ci* marking the indexical expression *kuleh* ‘like that’ (Garfinkel 1963).

From the perspectives of conversation analysis and interactional linguistics, these three types of Korean ‘tag questions’ are analyzed by way of examining audio- and video-recorded face-to-face interactions. The findings furnish the grounds for illuminating how recipient-tilted epistemic asymmetry is organized through the

accountability-managing practice of displaying commitment (indexed by the committal marker *ci*), e.g., with reference to factual vs. discursive, normative/general vs. personal/specific dimensions (cf. Kamio 1998). The role of prosody is considered in terms of how it further elaborates gradient-tilting distinctions (Couper-Kuhlen 2012), e.g., falling intonation projecting a ‘loaded’ action trajectory contingent upon the recipient’s confirmation. The committal *ci* is compared with other ‘non-committal’ SESs that mark variously ‘nuanced’ questions designed to entice confirmation by way of ‘formulating’ an aspect of the B-event at hand (Heritage & Watson 1979) as unwittingly ‘noticed’ (*ney* ‘factual realization’), pointedly ‘inferred’ (*kwun* ‘inferential realization’), or cautiously ‘conjectured’ upon quasi-self-directed enquiry (*nka* ‘dubitative’) (Lee 1993; Kim & Suh forthcoming).

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