

The Multifunctional Use of a Discourse Marker *okay* by Korean EFL Teachers

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Schiffrin (1987) defines discourse markers (henceforth DMs) as “sequentially dependent elements which bracket units of talk” (p. 276). DMs have been regarded as a signpost used by a speaker to display a certain attitude or embedded intention in a spoken discourse. However, few studies have investigated how DMs are used in a spoken discourse of English as Foreign Language (henceforth EFL) learning context. The purpose of the present study is to examine how *okay* is used as a DM by Korean teachers of English in their naturally-occurring discourses of EFL classes. The data for this study was obtained from recorded videos of English classes taught by six Korean teachers of English. The data were transcribed verbatim and analyzed on the basis of the Conversation Analysis framework. The multifunctional use of the DM *okay* deployed by the teachers can be classified as follows: (i) getting attention, (ii) signaling approval and acceptance as a feedback device, and (iii) working as a transition activator.

Key words: discourse marker *okay*, multifunctional use, Korean teachers of English, EFL classes, Conversation Analysis

I . Introduction

A great number of studies on DMs have been conducted with diverse perspectives during the last few decades. The scholarly attention is reflected on a variety of labels indicating DMs. They have been labelled as sentence connectives (Fraser, 1999; Halliday & Hasan, 1976), discourse particles (Schourup, 1985), discourse operators (Gaines, 2011), pragmatic markers (Aijmer, 2013; Brinton, 1996; Redeker, 1990), and so on. Despite the multiplicity of terms given in the literature, there is a general agreement that DMs have a fundamental effect on the organization of native speaker discourse (Liao, 2009). According to Fung and Carter (2007), “DMs signal transitions in the evolving process of the conversation, index the relation of an utterance to the preceding context, and indicate an interactive relationship between speaker, hearer, and message” (p. 411). Thus, it seems reasonable to say that DMs assist the spontaneous verbal interaction between interlocutors by facilitating the process of listening comprehension.

Schleef (2005) argues that the same structure of a DM can serve different functions. In this vein, the multifunctionality is widely accepted as an important feature of DMs (Aijmer, 2002; Brinton, 1996; Svartvik, 1980). House (2013) claims that the multifunctional feature of DMs can enable interlocutors “to achieve a maximum of interactional functions with a minimum of linguistic and cognitive effort in a variety of different interactional positions” (p. 63). According to Aijmer (2002), the shared common knowledge ground between native speakers guides them to use the multifunctionality of DMs without being troubled. If so, without the shared common knowledge, it would not be easy for non-native speakers to correctly interpret and employ the differing functions of DMs. Considering EFL learning environments in which L2 learners have insufficient opportunities to be exposed to natural spoken English, the multifunctionality of DMs needs to gain special attention in a language learning classroom of EFL context.

In this vein, this study examines how a DM *okay* is used by non-native teachers of English in their real time English classes. The reason why this DM was chosen for the current study is that it is one of the most prevalent DMs in the data. In other words, while analyzing the data from an emic approach, *okay* was observed to be used not only highly frequently by all the participating teachers but also with different functions. According to House (2013), the DM *okay* is “one of the most versatile, most broadly applicable and most frequently used DMs” (p. 63). Therefore, the DM *okay* is worthy of being explored in depth.

Conversation Analysis (henceforth CA), a study of the order of talk-in-interaction was adopted as a core framework for analysis in the current study. Since the late 1970s, it has expanded its interest beyond ordinary conversation into institution-based interactional forms (ten Have, 2007). The CA interest of institutional interactions can be compatible with the growing number of studies on the use of DMs in a variety of contexts. Fuller (2003) remarks that “DMs are indeed used in different ways depending on the roles and the relationships of the interlocutors” (p. 25). In this aspect, the attempt to investigate the DM *okay* used by Korean teachers of English in Korean EFL classrooms in this study can contribute to gaining a better understanding of teacher discourse as well as the multifunctional use of the DM *okay* in the institutional EFL classroom setting.

II. Theoretical Background

2.1 Discourse markers and Multifunctionality

As a verbal interaction takes place in real time, it requires immediate cognitive processing, most of which occurs below the level of consciousness (de Klerk, 2005). For this reason, indexical clues regarding what to focus on, how to interpret what is being said and when to take the speakership need to be provided in order to activate the listener's cognitive processing. DMs have been considered from numerous perspective as dispensable elements facilitating the listener's interpretation of the speaker's utterance (Aijmer, 2002). Schiffrin (1987) defines DMs as "sequentially dependent elements which bracket units of talk" (p. 31). According to Brinton (1996), the key function of DMs is to express the relation or the relevance of an utterance to the preceding utterance or to the context. It means that they contribute to giving clues to the listener and in turn, facilitate understanding of pragmatic meanings of the spoken discourse.

DMs are generally considered as grammatically optional (Liu, 2013). Schiffrin (1987) states that they are "syntactically detachable elements from a sentence" (p. 328). Brinton (1996) argues that "DMs occur either outside the syntactic structure or loosely attached to it and hence have no clear grammatical function" (p. 34). The deficiency of a propositional meaning is also regarded as one of major features of DMs. It is conventionally thought that "DMs do not contain meaning in that they do not enlarge the possibilities for semantic relationship between the elements they associate" (Schourup, 1999, p. 231).

Recently, however, several studies have indicated that DMs have meanings that are considered to be "procedural rather than conceptual" (Aijmer, 2002; Blakemore, 2002; Fung & Carter, 2007), and "potential rather than fixed" (Aijmer, 2013). Aijmer (2013) explains that "the meaning potentials allow different possible readings depending on the situated use" (p. 9). According to Norén and Linell (2007), "(a) theory of meaning potentials assumes that parts of a word's meaning are evoked, activated or materialized, foregrounded or backgrounded, *in different ways in the different contexts*, in which it is exploit" (p. 390). The rich meaning of DMs seems to be compatible with deixis, whose interpretation is relative to the extra-linguistic context of the utterance (Fischer, 2006). Fischer (2006) claims that deixis can be taken as a central mechanism of the pragmatic functioning of DMs. She points out that it is associated with the multifunctionality of the DMs, because the deictic elements help the DMs to be recognized in one way or another.

The multifunctionality has been referred to as a noteworthy feature of DMs (Aijmer, 2002; Brinton, 1996; Erman, 2001; Lenk, 1998). Brinton (1996) explains that "DMs may be multifunctional, operating on the local (i.e., morphophonemic, syntactic, and semantic) and global (i.e., pragmatic) levels simultaneously, as well as on different planes (i.e.,

textual and interpersonal) within the pragmatic component” (p. 35). In the same vein, Aijmer (2002) states that “DMs are different from ordinary words in the language because of a large number of pragmatic values that they can associate with” (p. 3).

Native speakers know what a DM signifies and are able to use it appropriately or differently with varied intentions (Aijmer, 2002). However, it is not the case for L2 learners who have limited opportunities to learn about diverse functions of DMs with authentic exemplars from a natural setting. Even worse, numerous researchers claim that DMs have not been explicitly dealt with in the curriculum or classrooms (Hays, 1992; Hellermann & Vergun, 2007). Thus, it seems difficult for L2 learners to interpret or deploy differing functions of DMs in a native-like way. Here, it is significant to note that a large number of studies have pointed out that the misuse of DMs may cause non-native English speakers to sound unfriendly or awkward in their utterance (Aijmer, 2011; Liao, 2009). Accordingly, more studies focusing on the differing use of DMs as a multifunctional resource in real time interactive spoken discourse need to be carried out. The necessity of further research is emphasized as well in Müller’s (2005) concern that they are insufficiently researched in studies of language learning in spite of their crucial role in the organization of native speaker discourse.

Furthermore, there are even fewer studies conducted on how DMs are differently employed in the Korean EFL context. To closely examine the EFL language classroom, then, has a great importance as it seems to be the only place which L2 learners can be exposed to the multifunctional use of DMs through their teacher’s on-going talk. It is hoped that this study will provide comprehensive insight into how differently non-native teachers of English use the target DM in their language classrooms.

2.2 Discourse marker *okay*

Notwithstanding a spate of research on DMs, there is no agreement with regard to which linguistic items are considered as DMs. Brinton (1996) states that “depending on one’s definition of pragmatic markers, the item included can differ quite widely” (p. 32). Including substantive studies associated with the meaning and function of DMs, Brinton (1996) presents the inventory of DMs as follows.

TABLE 1

Inventory of Discourse Markers in Modern English provided by Brinton (1996, p. 32)

ah	and like	if	mind you	or	sort of	yes/no
	that					
actually	anyway	I mean	moreover	really	then	you know
after all	basically	just	now	right	therefore	you see
almost	because	go 'say'	oh	so	uh huh	
and	but	like	o.k.	say	well	

In the literature of DMs, the DM *okay* has been regarded as one of the most broadly and diversely used DMs (House, 2013; Levin & Gray, 1983; Schlee, 2005). Thus, it has received considerable scholarly attention (Fillipi & Wales, 2003) and a variety of studies have been conducted in a wide range of native spoken discourse. For instance, it has been explored in the request interaction of service encounters (Merritt, 1980), telephone conversations (Beach, 1993; Shegloff & Sacks, 1973), family-decision making (Condon, 1986), courtroom interactions (Beach, 1990), computer science seminar facilitation (Rendle-Short, 2000), joint project navigation (Bangerter & Clark, 2003), police interviews (Gaines, 2011) and so on. Findings from these studies have shown that *okay* fulfills a series of functions across varied discourse. It functions as a signal for approval, acceptance or affirmation (Condon, 1986; Merritt, 1980), a bridge device linking two phases (Goffman, 1981). It also performs as a marker of information-state transitions, which has been structurally described. In several studies, it is subdivided as a pre-closing device (Shegloff & Sacks, 1973), a return marker from a digression (Bangerter & Clerk, 2003), and a text-bracketing device (Rendle-Short, 2000).

Many of the aforementioned studies investigated a variety of functions of the DM *okay*, concentrating on describing its various functions in several institutional settings as well as in everyday conversation discourse. Concerning a variety of institution-based interactions, ten Have (2007) contends that “institutional interactions could be identified as being more restricted than conversational interaction in that actions, forms or sequence of everyday conversation seem to be not observable in institutional settings” (p. 175). Particularly, academic lectures, a type of institutional discourse, are produced further restrictively under numerous social constraints (Schlee, 2005). Schlee (2005) argues that “academic discourse provides an ideal context for a more refined analysis of naturally occurring language as it contains variably social and contextual constraints” (p. 24). Lectures are informationally dense, monologic and obviously more planned than casual conversations (Schlee, 2005). It can be assumed, therefore, that DMs can function as effective pragmatic tools for listeners to understand lecturers’ intentions in the monologic type of lecture. At

this point, it is significant to note that while a considerable amount of research has been conducted on the use of the DM *okay* in non-instructional conversation, few attempts to analyze its multiple use in lectures have been made (Fagan, 2012). With regard to *okay* and *mmhmm*, Guthrie (1997) demonstrates in academic advisement sessions that *okay* is more often used as an acknowledgement token, while *mmhmm* emerges as a continuer. Levin and Gray (1983) analyze the functions of *okay* occurring among ten English-speaking native lecturers in a graduate seminar. They report five types of *okay* occurring invariably from the lecturers, which are canonical *okay*, introductory *okay*, elaboration *okay*, conclusion *okay* and embedded hesitation *okay*. Othman (2010) investigates as to how the DMs *okay*, *right* and *yeah* are used by four native English speaking lecturers from various subject disciplines. The finding of the study indicates that *okay* with a rising tone functions as a progression or confirmation marker and as an attention-getter if used with a falling tone. In the similar vein, Schlee (2008) examines the use and functions of *okay*, *alright*, *right*, and *now* in the speech of 24 American university lecturers. He argues that the preferred teaching styles and contents in lectures across academic divisions influence the use of the DMs in academic settings. All of the aforementioned studies use the data from native speakers of English and on the level of university lectures.

More recently, Fagan (2012) investigates the DM *okay* as a feedback device in the data from five instructors of English as Second Language (ESL) in an adult community program. The result suggests that the DM *okay* has been used to give differing forms of positive and negative feedback. The study holds significance in that it expands the focus of the previous research to the functions of the DM used by teachers in the classrooms. However, even though the data used in Fagan's (2012) study consist of the spoken discourse from non-native speakers from Korea, Taiwan or Japan as well as English native speakers, the data analysis is conducted without considering the distinction of native speakers from non-native speakers. Therefore, it is difficult to find out how the DM *okay* functions in the non-native English teacher talks. Nunan (1987) maintains that the style of language used by teachers in the classroom may considerably affect a student's ability to communicate in the real world. It seems therefore necessary to closely inspect non-native teachers' language in the naturally-occurring discourse of an English class.

As described above, the DM *okay* in academic discourse has not been paid sufficient attention to or in detail. In addition, most of the previous studies put focus on the spoken data which come from native English lecturers on the level of university lectures. Furthermore, to my knowledge, there is no research concerning functions of the DM *okay* used by non-native teachers of English in the EFL context. In order to fill this unanswered gap in research, the present study examines how Korean teachers of English use the DM *okay* in their EFL classrooms and aims to describe the multifunctionality of the marker by focusing on its various uses.

III. Methodology

3.1 Data

The focal participants involved in this study are six Korean teachers of English (five females and one male). Their ages are in the range of mid-thirties and early-forties. All the teachers have taught English for over ten years at secondary public schools in Korean EFL context. The data for this study are drawn from six English lessons where the teachers are in charge. Each class is made up of around 30 students of mixed proficiency levels. The analysis focuses on the participating teachers' speech data during their lessons. The typical interaction pattern in which the classes are carried out is a full-class, teacher-fronted presentation. Each class lasted approximately 45 minutes, where the medium of instruction is English. At the time of data collection, all the participating teachers have attended an in-service English Teacher Training program on the purpose of officially acquiring a professional certificate in teaching English through English. To be qualified for the training program, aside from a variety of requirements for admission, teachers have been asked to pass an English speaking test conducted by three native English speaking interviewers. All of them have scored over 80 out of 100 scores on the English oral communicative test and finally met the criterion to be selected as trainee teachers. Based on the rubric of oral proficiency assessment and selection used at the in-service English teacher training program, they are expected to be advanced-level English speakers. Therefore, it is assumed that they hold a certain level of professionalism in teaching English through English in their class. Further information is provided in Table 2. The teachers have been assigned Korean pseudonyms to protect their privacy.

TABLE 2
Description of Participants and Data

Teachers' Names	Gender	Age	Affiliation	Recording length	Students Profile (grade, gender)
Yoon	Male	43	Middle School	45 minutes	3rd, Males only
Lee	Female	37	Middle School	45 minutes	2nd, Males & Females
Kim	Female	36	Middle School	45 minutes	3rd, Males & Females
Choi	Female	40	Middle School	45 minutes	3rd, Males & Females
Park	Female	38	Middle School	45 minutes	3rd, Males & Females
Cho	Female	37	Middle School	45 minutes	3rd, Females only

To secure the naturally-occurring speech data, the participating teachers have not been told what was being investigated in their speech. They did not know that their use of DMs was the focus of this research. Accordingly, it was made sure that their speech was not affected by their awareness of the objective of this study. To capture the teachers' real-time utterances, all the classes were video-recorded. For the video-recording, two cameras were set up at the back of the classroom before the class began and recorded the class throughout. Consequently, all the teacher talk presented in the classroom are obtained along with their verbal and nonverbal behaviors and students' corresponding reactions.

3.2 Data Analysis

3.2.1 Conversation Analysis methodology

CA was employed as an analytic methodology for this study. This section will present a highly abridged review concerning the principles which is fundamental to CA. The review here is provided to help understand the analysis of the current data.

CA originated in the 1960s by sociologists Harvey Sacks, Emanuel Schegloff and Gail Jefferson (Wong & Waring, 2010) in attempts to deal with the organization and order of social actions in interaction (Psathas, 1995). Under the CA framework, the organization and order is developed by the interactants in situ (Seedhouse, 2004). The CA practitioners have established an emic perspective and uncovered the organization and order of the interaction. According to ten Have (2007), along with its organizational and procedural perspective on human interactions, "the analytic purpose of CA is not to explain why people act as they do but to explicate how they do so" (p. 9). Thus, it aims to characterize the organization of the talk-in-interaction by abstracting exemplars of specimens of the interaction (Seedhouse, 2004).

People engage in a verbal interaction through turn-taking. A turn, an array of words uttered by one speaker, is regarded as the standard unit of analysis in the CA research. It holds one or more "turn-constructional units (henceforth TCUs)" as building components. TCUs can be a word, a phrase, a clause or a sentence (Wong & Waring, 2010) and they are syntactically as well as prosodically complete units to achieve a communicative action (Sacks et al., 1974). As Wong and Waring (2010) put it, TCUs project their possible ending point, "transition-relevance place (henceforth TRP)", where a speaker transition is often made.

In the CA tradition, it is maintained that turns at talk are connected with neighboring turns in systematically organized sequences. Put it simply, a chain of turns constitutes a sequence organization in an orderly and meaningful way to implement courses of actions. In this regard, Schegloff (2007) claims that "sequences are the vehicle for getting some

activity accomplished” (p. 2). Considering the occurrence of the DM *okay* within an ongoing discourse, it is essential to closely examine the multifunctional use of the DM in the sequential organization of turns in spoken discourse. Correspondingly, CA methodology is a useful tool for identifying a variety of functions of the DM *okay* and describing how it fulfils its particular functions in the sequential and interactional contexts.

3.2.2 Analytic Procedure

The main consideration of this study is to explore the multifunctionality of the DM *okay* used by Korean EFL teachers in the real-life classroom discourse. To achieve this goal, the general guideline suggested by CA analysts (Heritage, 1988; ten Have, 2007) has been employed including obtainment of the audio or video recordings of naturally occurring interactions, transcription of the recorded data in whole or in part, and analysis of selected episodes of the data. Following the guideline, the whole video-recorded data were transcribed verbatim. For the time efficiency, this transcription process was conducted in a broad manner since its purpose was only to figure out what kinds of DMs were employed in the spoken classroom discourse.

Then, a computer research tool called Antconc was run on the transcribed data in an attempt to obtain the list of types and frequencies of DMs. The analysis¹ presented the DM *okay* as the most frequently used one with the highest frequency rate. After the analysis, all the *okays* used by both the participating teachers and students were counted. When the frequency of the DM *okay* employed separately by teachers and students was compared, the teachers’ utterances turned out to be the overwhelmingly leading source.² This might be attributed to the prevalence of teacher talk over student talk.

Bolden (2009, p. 977) states that “one difficulty in studying DMs is in isolating their functions from other interactional phenomena that may be operating simultaneously”. Considering this statement, for the in-depth analysis of the current data, a tripartite functional classification presented in Tanghe’s (2016) study was adopted in order to distinguish the functions of the DM *okay*. That was because the classification provides the

¹ The analysis produced six types of DMs *okay*, *and*, *so*, *yes*, *oh* and *right* which were most prevalently found in the spoken data with a total of 24287 tokens. Simultaneously, it demonstrated that there were considerable differences in the frequency of the six DMs in the data. The most frequently used DM was *okay* with 612 occurrences. It was followed by the DM *and* with 335 occurrences. The third most frequent DM was *so* with 263 occurrences. The DM *yes* represented 158 occurrences as the fourth frequent item. The DMs *oh* and *right* showed with 122 and 121 occurrences respectively. Bybee and Hopper (2001) state that a higher word frequency concurs with a higher tendency of being polysemous. Thus, the most frequent DM *okay* was expected to act with a higher degree of multifunctionality.

² In the students’ spoken data from six classes, only five occurrences of the DM *okay* were found.

specific descriptors to categorize and subdivide a variety of functions of DMs. According to Tanghe (2016, p. 18), “the three macrofunctions that can be distinguished for the DMs under consideration are: (1) the *cognitive* function (CON) when the DM is used to urge or encourage the hearers to do something or to change their behavior, (2) the *expressive* function (EXP) when the DM expresses the attitude or feelings of the speaker, and (3) the *metadiscursive* function (MD) since a DM can serve to support the course of the discourse”.

Next, sequences where the particular function of the DM *okay* appears in the teachers’ spoken data were selected and analyzed on the basis of the CA framework. In the subsequent section, the data excerpts will be presented basically following the transcription conventions developed by Jefferson (2004) and ten Have (2007; see the transcription convention provided in Appendix), but not in a considerably detailed manner in order to secure better readability. Non-verbal features such as pause, gap and overlap, however, are included since they are expected to play significant roles in distinguishing a variety of functional uses of the DM *okay* in the on-going spoken discourse. The big letter ‘T’ denotes teachers while ‘S’ signifies students in the data excerpts. Korean words were respelled by following the Yale Romanization system with their English equivalents presented in parenthesis.

IV. Result and Discussion

The DM *okay* in the current data was found to perform a range of functions in the participating teachers’ utterances. The recognizable functions accomplished by the DM *okay* can be subsumed under the three macrofunctions mentioned earlier, that is, *cognitive*, *expressive* and *metadiscursive*. Thus, this section is divided into three subsections. In line with the affirmation that “they [the macrofunctions] break down into various, more specific subfunctions” (Tanghe, 2016, p. 19), each subsection provides a representative subfunction commonly implemented by the DM *okay* in the teachers’ spoken discourse.

4.1. The *Cognitive* Function; Getting Attention

Teachers often employ the DM *okay* as a device in order for students to pay attention to their instructions. Thus, the attention-getting *okay* can be classified into the *cognitive* function since it tends to be used in an attempt to encourage students to concentrate on what the teacher is saying. In other words, by using the attention-getting *okay*, teachers mark the opening of a new round of the classroom discourse and make sure that all the students are listening to them. This *okay* deployment is usually observed at the very beginning of a class or at a switch to the new learning floor. Excerpt (1) shows the typical

first action sequence of a lesson, prefaced with the DM *okay*.

Excerpt (1) [teacher Park (03:45-04:34)]

- ((classroom noise))
- 01 → T: ((looking at students)) oka::y↓(1.5)
- 02 good morning, everyone?
- 03 Ss: good morning?
- 04 T: is anyone, isn't anybody here? is anybody
- 05 absent today?=
06 Ss: =no.
- 07 T: okay³, great. let's greet each other.
- 08 everybody ↑ before, please stand up. stand up.

In line 1, the teacher starts her class by using the DM *okay* as a turn-initiator and leads the lesson. Shortly before the introductory *okay*, the classroom is filled with various noises from students' other behaviors such as dragging a chair, turning pages or chatting. However, as soon as the teacher's first *okay*-prefaced turn takes place, the noise decreases rapidly. By the time the teacher finishes her greeting, the classroom has calmed down. It is important to note that the teacher slowly enunciates *okay* with *o* at an average pitch and *kay* at a high fall intonation. Thus, it can be said that by giving prominence to the starting point of the class and grabbing students' attention, the DM *okay* functions to diminish the noise level. Line 3 shows that a majority of students respond loudly to the teacher's greeting presented in the foregoing turn. In lines 4-5, the teacher asks students to check the attendance. As soon as the question is asked by the teacher, a number of students give answers in a loud voice again, as indicated in line 6. Here, it is significant to note the overlap signs in lines 5-6. According to Gnisci, Maroni and Pontecorvo (2008), when students are deliberately encouraged to participate in the interaction, overlapping might occur. In this regard, it can be argued that by understanding the action projected by the teacher's *okay*-prefacing, students pay attention to what their teacher is saying and consecutively, participate in the classroom discourse.

Excerpt (2) provides the second example for this subsection.

³ Line 7 shows that by deploying *okay*, the teacher claims her "hearing-understanding" (Jefferson, 2002, p. 1353) to students' previous response. According to Beach (1993, p. 331), "free-standing okays are employed by the current speakers who initiate such activities as question, and having received an affirmative, acceptable, and/or clarifying answer from recipient, move next to mark recognition and/or approval in third slot via okay". This *okay* tends to be used when the prior talk displays "completeness" (Guthrie, 1997, p. 412).

Excerpt (2) [teacher Kim (02:10-03:48)]

- ((classroom noise))
- 01 → T: awka::y↓, so. (.)good morning everyone↑
- 02 Ss: good morning.
- 03 T: how are you today?
- 04 Ss: fine.
- 05 T: fine? go::od, thank you, me too. as you
- 06 know today is last day. last class before vacation
- 07 starts.do you know that?
- 08 Ss: yeh::s.

At the beginning of Excerpt (2), the teacher opens the class by using the initiating nature of the DM *okay* as an attention-getter and then, greets her students. The greeting is immediately followed by her students' greetings as indicated in line 2. Such prompt and relevant reactions from students can be observed in the successively following turns repeatedly. In line 3, the teacher asks students how they feel. Students provide *fine* in line 4. When she asks them in line 5-7 if they know that it is the last class in the semester, students present *yes*. Accordingly, it can be mentioned that in this Q & A sequence, the actions projected by first pair part (FPP) are achieved by the appropriate answers as second pair part (SPP) from CA perspective. The students' rapid and relevant answers demonstrate that the introductory *okay* deployed by the teacher succeeds in grabbing the students' attentions. This example is considerably similar to Excerpt (1) in that the teacher's DM *okay* serves as a turn-entry device for opening the class with a greeting, invites students' attentions to their teacher, and finally leads to students' participation. In addition, as in Excerpt (1), the DM *okay* presented in Excerpt (2) is also pronounced slowly yet clearly in an average speaking pitch first and completed with a high fall intonation. Furthermore, Excerpt (2) also shows that noise in the classroom dwindles away as the teacher's DM *okay* catches students' attention. It means it allows the teacher to initiate the class with more attentive atmosphere.

Excerpt (3) shows a similar yet somewhat different example in which the attention-getting *okay* occurs during a class activity, not in the beginning of the lesson. Plus, the DM *okay* in Excerpt (3) provides a distinctive prosodic feature from those in both Excerpts (1) and (2). In this example, students are learning a conditional sentence. The teacher asks the students to do the assigned group work which requires them to write their wishes on a given worksheet.

Excerpt (3) [teacher Cho (19:29-25:15)]

- 01 T: =rub ra::it rub the magic lamp. just think (.)
 02 just imagine. genie is out of the lamp and ask you.
 03 hwat do you want? then, hwat will you say?
 04 Ss: (3.0) mmhmm
 05 T: alright. I'm gonna give this worksheet to you in a group.
 06 so, rite your wish in the bubble, in the bubble.
 07 and talk about it in your group, ok?⁴
 08 using I wantu::: (0.7) do you understand? Gi-Chan?
 09 S1: ney (yes). (1.0) ah.no. yi::es.=
 10 Ss: =hhh
 11 ((classroom noise arises))
 12 → T: ((knocking on the whiteboard) okay okay.
 13 (2.0) so, every group keeper, cum to me.
 14 ((a teacher gives the worksheet to the keepers))
 15 T: I'm gonna give you three minutes, three minutes,
 16 rite your wishes in the bubble on the worksheet.
 17 ((around 3 minutes later))
 18 → T: okay, (.) time's up, okay.
 19 ((students continue the group work))
 20 stu:: (.) everyone, look at me.
 21 → ((clapping her hands)) oka::y look at me plea::se.

In lines 1-3 of Excerpt (3), the teacher asks students what they would ask for if they meet a genie. But, they provide no answer. Then, in lines 5-8, she gives the direction that students should write their wishes on the worksheet and talk about their wishes with their group members. Before she finishes her multi-unit turn, however, the teacher notices that *Gi-chan* is having a chat with a student behind. Consequently, as shown in line 8, she addresses him in order to get his attention back. Line 9 shows that *Gi-chan* gives an affirmative answer in Korean, claiming his understanding. However, along with a noticing proposed by *ah*, he realizes what he has done and switches his answer to its English equivalent. As described in line 10, his behavior causes other students' spontaneous

⁴ This *okay* with rising intonation is used as a tag question. Schlee (2005) states that a paraphrase of the meaning of *okay* with rising intonation is "is that clear?" (p. 68). He adds that "this seem to be attempt to elicit some sort of confirmation or backchanneling" (Schlee, 2005, p. 68).

laughter, which results in classroom noise. At this point, the teacher employs a cluster of the DM *okay* in full voice under a single and flat intonation contour in line 12. The single intonation is a remarkable feature of the DM *okay* in Excerpt (3). Moreover, it is noteworthy that the teacher's *okay* is accompanied with *knocking on the whiteboard*. Just after the deployment of *okay*, she waits for two seconds until the noise subsides and moves to the next stage for classroom management. Considering this specific flow of the class, it is confirmed that the action projected by a cluster of the DM *okay* in line 12 is to attract the attention of students who are distracted by gaining control over the noise that students make.

The DM *okays* in lines 18 and 21 fulfil the same function with the one in line 12. In lines 15-16, the teacher says that she is going to give everyone three minutes for doing the aforementioned activity. Three minutes later, the teacher uses the DM *okay* as a turn-initiator again. With the *okay*-prefacing, the teacher informs students that they should stop writing their wishes. However, as indicated in the parenthesis of line 19, they continue doing their work. As soon as she recognizes it, the teacher claps her hands and employs the DM *okay* one more time with a consistently flat intonation. Here, it can be said that the teacher utters the DM *okays* to bring students' attention back and to mark a change in her orientation.

This subsection provides significant instances in which teachers deploy the DM *okay* in order to secure the students' attention. Othman (2010) states in her study that a lecturer is "literally requesting for the students' attention" by uttering the DM *okay* (p. 676). In this vein, the role of the DM *okays* provided in this subsection seems to correspond with what the previous study (Othman, 2010) argues. Despite the correspondence, stark contrasts are drawn between Othman's (2010) study and this study. More concretely, she maintains that "*okay* with falling tone is observed to function as an attention getter, especially when there are transitions between activities within the lectures' talk" (p. 675). The findings of the data for this subsection, however, demonstrate that the attention-getting *okay* can be articulated in each individual differently. Additionally, it turns out in the present study that the DM *okay* tends to occur at the very beginning of the class as well as between learning activities during the class when the teacher notices that students are not paying attention to what he or she is saying. Lastly, Othman (2010) does not deal with any features accompanied by the attention-getting *okay*. Unlike her study, this current study provides the facts that the teacher's intention to mitigate students' distraction is identified in not only the teachers' full-voiced *okay* but also their diverse body languages such as clapping hands, directly looking at students or knocking on the whiteboard. Accordingly, this study is of importance since it demonstrates that voice intensity and body movements are types of strategic behaviors to further strengthen the effect of the attention-getting *okay* in the real life classroom discourse.

4.2. The *Expressive* Function; Signaling Approval and Acceptance as a Feedback Device

This subsection explores the DM *okay* by which a teacher presents approval and acceptance in the F-move of IRF sequence framework. Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) claim that a key concept in classroom discourse is IRF sequence. The sequence is composed of three moves in which a teacher initiates (Initiation), learners respond (Response), and the teacher provides feedback on the response (Feedback). Consistent with the statement, the present study has noticed that teachers deploy the DM *okay* to indicate approval and evaluation of or agreement with learners' response in the third turn of IRF sequence. The function of the DM *okay* here is to be *Expressive* in that it implies the attitude of the teacher on the appropriateness of the student's response.

From CA perspective, some of what pre-empts the F-move such as *okay*, *oh*, and *great* have been mentioned as the sequence-closing third (Schegloff, 2007). According to Schegloff (2007), they are "not to specifically designed to project further talk within the sequence" (p. 118). However, Waring (2008) argues that "in classroom discourse, assessment in and of itself does not automatically engender sequencing-closing" (p. 581). In line with Waring's (2008) argument, this subsection demonstrates that the teacher's *okay* in the F position does not seem to orient to her acceptance as sequence-closing or case-closing. This is evident in the teacher's ensuing questions for more elicitation. The following is a representative example of the usage of the DM *okay*.

Excerpt (4) [teacher Lee (05:15-06:10)]

- | | | |
|----|------|--|
| 01 | T: | Awkay ⁵ , <u>today</u> we are going to learn(.) |
| 02 | | proverbs.do you know >wat proverb is?< |
| 03 | S1: | sokddam? (<i>proverb</i>) |
| 04 | → T: | <u>sok</u> ddam. sokddam. ((smiley voice) ok::ay. |
| 05 | | yeah, so proverb is sokddam. hwho can |
| 06 | | tell me anything of proverb? in <u>English</u> ? |
| 07 | | (2.0) |
| 08 | S2: | °no pain no gain?=
=ri::te, no pain no gain. |
| 09 | T: | |
| 10 | → | ((nodding his head)) okay, good. |
| 11 | | it is a big example. anything else? |

⁵ This *awkay* functions as an attention-getter. (For a more detailed discussion on this, see subsection 4.1.)

-
- 12 (2.0)
 13 T: alright. let's take a look. take a look at
 14 hwat the problem is.

In line 1, the teacher introduces a lesson objective to students and asks what the word “*proverb*” means. To the question, S1 generates a correct answer in line 3. Shortly after the answer is provided by the student, the teacher echoes the student’s answer twice and utters the DM *okay* with the confirmation token, *yeah* in line 4. At this turn, an interesting point to note is that the *okay* is pronounced with “no-gap onset, slight stress and quick pace” (Waring, 2008, p. 586) by the teacher which makes it “hearable as acceptance” (Waring, 2008, p. 586). Hence, it can be said that the *okay* in the F move of IRF sequence serves as a positive feedback, indicating that the teacher approves and accepts the answer as a correct one. It is significant to note that lines 5-6 show the teacher’s acceptance accompanied with a fuller formation of the S1’s response is immediately followed by a new question that urges students to provide an answer. Two seconds later, the action of urging SPP projected in the preceding teacher turn is performed by S2’s answer, *no pain no gain*. As soon as the relevant SPP ensues, in line 9, the teacher presents the token, *right*, to the prior answer, self-repeats the answer, and delivers, in line 10, the DM *okay* along with a positive assessment term, *good*. As such, the S2’s correct answer is receipted with the DM *okay* from the teacher. What is interesting is that, in line 11, the teacher registers another question to elicit further answers from her students as that of lines 4-6.

Similar cases are observed in other lesson as well, as can be shown in Excerpt (5).

Excerpt (5) [teacher Choi (19:26-21:05)]

- 01 T: and hwhat is the main idea of our reading?
 02 our main idea is hwhat?
 03 Ss: °mmhmm
 04 (2.0)
 05 S1: alleh::
 06 T: alleh?
 07 Ss: °mmhmm
 08 T: (3.0) Do-young, it is your turn.
 09 S2: (1.0) °some people focus onda deep picture.
 10 others focus on details. ah:: the (.) ah::
 11 the important thing is that they find satisfaction.
 12 → T: awkay awkay↓ ri::te, finding satisfaction is
 13 the most important to be happy or in conclusion,

-
- 14 it means, think hhow?
 15 S2: positively=
 16 → T: =po::sitively, ok. wow. that's the main idea
 17 of our reading, ((looking around the whole class))
 18 understand?
 19 Ss: yi::es

The objective of the class in Excerpt (5) is to learn how to catch the main idea of the reading texts. At the beginning, the teacher asks what the main idea is in the passage which they read. However, nobody answers as illustrated in lines 3-4. After a short period of pause, S1 claims his group name, *alleh* in line 5. He seems to expect one of his group members to provide an answer to the teacher's question. His group members, however, fail to give an immediate and correct answer, as can be seen in line 7. Then, the teacher addresses S2, *Do-young*, one of the students in the group. With one-second pause, *Do-young* provides his answer. It is in lines 12-14 that the teacher affirms his answer via her repetition of the DM *okay* and asks a further question. To be more specific, shortly after the student's answer ends in line 11, the teacher self-repeats the DM *okay*, accompanied with the token, *rite* (right) that denotes correctness. Consecutively, she rephrases *Do-young's* correct answer with a slight adjustment and asks another question to him again in the mid-TCU of the turn in progress. As soon as his second answer to the previous question is given in line 16, the teacher generates the DM *okay* one more time coupled with the exclamation, *wow*, displaying a strong level of approval.

In the examples of this subsection, it was observed that teachers employ the DM *okay* to express approval and acceptance. By doing so, they provide a positive feedback which is placed adjacently to students' response and finally perform IRF sequence. However, unlike what Shegloff (2007) argues, the teachers do not treat the DM *okay* as case-closing. As can be seen in the excerpts above, they proceed to ask questions for inviting their students to the on-going discourse. In this regard, the findings provide empirical support to Waring's (2008) claim that "*okay* may be produced to indicate that more is to come" (p. 587).

4.3. The *Metadiscursive* Function; Working as a Transition Activator

This subsection introduces another function of the DM *okay* which teachers employ in the mid-TCU with the intention of transition. More specifically, the deployment of the DM *okay* is done in an attempt to signify the ending and the beginning of a stage teacher has involved for supporting the overall flow of classroom discourse. In this regard, the

function of DM *okay* can be subsumed under the *metadiscursive* function. According to Beach (1993), *okay* may work “in activity shift-implicative ways” and such usage can be recognized as “prefigurings of movements toward next matters” (p. 341). It means that *okay* serves as a link between different levels of discourse organization. Excerpt (6) shows a typical instance found in this data in which the DM *okay* functions as a transition activator.

Excerpt (6) [teacher Yoon (30:13-32:09)]

- 01 T: ((pointing the video clip on whiteboard))
 02 hwhat is Saenta doing?
 03 S1: [they are playing the guitar]
 04 S2: [he skate]
 05 S3: [krismas]
 06 T: (.) playing the guitar:: hwhat about this one?
 07 ((pointing another video clip on whiteboard))
 08 hwhat is saenta doing?
 09 S4: °santa is driving?=
 10 T: =ah:: yi::es, can you guess today’s lesson?
 11 ((looking around the whole class))
 12 (1.0)
 13 S5: santa?
 14 T: saenta... hh possible=
 15 S6: =present?
 16 T: present, good. (.) and?
 17 (2.0)
 18 T: alri::te, alri::te. saenta is doing many things,
 19 doing many things, u::m you can guess the lesson.
 20 (3.0)
 21 S7: °tell me
 22 T: I’ll not tell you anymore, um:: let me
 23 → tell you:: later, (1.0) °ok so let’s see (.)
 24 next one, let’s review the last lesson:: last class,
 25 we learned hhow to make the verb with i en gee,
 26 yes? can you remembrit?
 27 (1.0)
 28 → T: yes? aw::kay now, ((loading the ppt slides))
 29 we are going to check what we learned.

As shown in lines 1-8 of this excerpt, the teacher encourages her students to talk about the presented video clip. As soon as S4 gives a correct answer by using the gerund form in response to the teacher's prior question, the teacher says *yes* and asks what the objective of the on-going lesson is in line 10. However, nobody answers as signified by a gap sign in line 12. It seems difficult for his learners to exactly produce an answer to the question. The reason for this may be because the teacher's question is conveyed in haste without any additional cue which may help students respond. In line 16, the teacher registers his question by using a short continuative, *and* with a rising intonation. This usage of *and* is dedicated to the action referred to as a request for more trials from the students. However, even though such *and* induces the floor for the next turn to be open to everyone in the classroom, a gap follows again in line 17. It can be inferred that the students still have no idea of what they are supposed to say. In line 18, the teacher selects himself as the next speaker for deterring the pause from being longer and repeats *alright*. Then, he recycles the part of his statement, encouraging students to guess the lesson of the day. However, still any response is not provided from the students as evidenced by a three-second pause in line 20. It is in line 23 where the teacher deploys the DM *okay* as a transition device between two different discourse segments. To put it in detail, during his turn through lines 22-26, the teacher gives a reaction to S7's request for an answer, says *okay* following the one-second pause and then, starts off his instruction to move onto the next stage for reviewing. Hence, the *okay* can be said to work as a cue signal to imply transition which marks a discourse boundary from an interactional dialogue to a monologue. In the CA framework, a pause is regarded as a sign of an end to the previous utterance in order to take up the talk following the pause. Accordingly, the argument that the DM *okay* in line 23 signals a new move is supported by the pause preceding *okay* as well. In line 26, the teacher asks whether students remember the last lesson. However, he cannot get any response from his students as illustrated in line 27. In line 28, the teacher selects himself as a respondent and produces *yes* with a rising intonation. It is noteworthy that the *yes* with a rising intonation seems to project nothing. In other words, it appears that there is no relevant action that the students must achieve. This interpretation is plausible because shortly after he utters the *yes* with a rising intonation, the teacher proceeds to his next utterance without any pause or gap to wait for an answer from students. Immediately, the teacher employs the DM *okay* in the on-going turn and prefaces the next activity. In this transitional environment, it can be concluded that the DM *okay* functions as a bridge that links the two phases and helps the teacher to manage and control the flow of the lesson.

To sum up, this subsection has illustrated that teachers signpost a closing of the prior stage and an opening of another by means of employing the DM *okay*. This finding seems to echo Fung and Carter's (2007) claim that *so* preceded by the DM *okay* acts as a topic-

changing device. An interesting point from Excerpt (6) is that the teacher's *okays* in lines 23 and 28 are preceded by students' reactions which can make the classroom management difficult. In detail, the *okays* come after unfilled pauses from the students. Considering the aspect, the DM *okay* can be also said to be used by the teacher in an attempt to relieve from the embarrassing moments caused by students' nonresponse and move on to a new stage without discontinuing classroom discourse. In this regard, the finding of this subsection supports Beach's (1993) affirmation that "*okay* usages are both closure-relevant and continuative" (p. 341).

V. Conclusion

The current study has investigated the multifunctionality of the DM *okay* found in Korean EFL teachers' talk by exploring naturally-occurring discourses in the classrooms. For this purpose, various functions of DM *okay* employed by the teachers were closely examined. Major findings of the study are provided as follows.

First, the DM *okay* is commonly used to draw attention from students. Teachers have a strong tendency to start off their utterance using the DM *okay* as a turn-initiator in order to grab attention. The attention-getting DM *okay* generally occurs at the very beginning of a sequence in class. It also emerges during the class to gain control over the students when teachers notice that they are not listening to what they are saying. In short, the DM *okay* helps teachers ensure students' attentions and ultimately lead their participation in class. Second, one of differing functions that the DM *okay* performs in teachers' spoken discourse provides a feedback signifying acceptance and approval of students' response to the teachers' previous question. Hence, this type of the DM *okay* appears in the third turn, a F position of IRF sequence. What is noticeable here is that teachers in the current study do not deal with the DM *okay* as a sequence-closing or case-closing marker. That is, even after the utterance of the DM *okay* used as a positive feedback, the teachers allow the possibility of continuation of the ongoing interactive discourse. Lastly, teachers deploy the DM *okay* as a transition activator to close off the discourse segments and gear up to the next stage. More concretely, when teachers want to terminate the sequence in progress and move on to the next phase, they use the DM *okay*. In this case, the DM *okay* often might be of significant help for teachers to prepare themselves and resume a new utterance without breaking the flow of classroom discourse. In this regard, it can be said that the DM *okay* as a transitional device helps teachers to manage classroom discourse in a deliberate manner.

There are two limitations inherent in this study. First, it was impossible to capture all the utterances produced by the participating teachers. Especially when the teacher and students spoke at a time or classroom noise arose, the teacher's speech was unintelligible.

If such part of speech had been collected without loss, more diverse interpretation could have been done for this study. Second, the analysis for the study was restricted to a tripartite functional classification. Considering that only one subfunction was identified for each of the three macrofunctions, there remains the possibility for more cases. Despite these limitations, this study holds its own importance in that it is the first attempt to investigate the multifunctional use of the DM *okay* by Korean teachers of English and it provides a new overview of the institutional contexts where the DM *okay* is usually deployed.

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Appendix: Transcription Convention

The glossary of transcript symbols presented below is mostly based on the descriptions provided in Jefferson (1989) and ten Have (2007).

Speaker identification

T	Teacher
S1	Identified student 1
Ss	Several or all students simultaneously

Sequencing

[]	Overlap between utterance
= =	One is positioned at the end of one line, and the other, at the beginning of the next line, indicating no 'pause' between the speakers' talk. This is called <i>latching</i> .

Time intervals

- (0.5) Numbers in parentheses indicate the duration of silence timed in seconds.
- (.) A dot in parenthesis indicates small untimed pause.

Speech production characteristics

? Interrogative tone

Word Underline indicates stress by means of voice intensity

hhh laughter

:: Colons indicate prolonged syllable or sound.

° ° The utterance between the degree signs is noticeably softer than the surrounding talk

↑↓ Arrows indicates upward rise or downward fall in intonation.

Transcriber's doubts and comments

(()) Double parenthesis indicates transcriber's descriptions.

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