Closing the Talk-So-Far with Reduplicated OKAYs in Japanese and Korean Conversations

Originating from English, okay has increasingly been used by speakers of a number of languages including Korean and Japanese. The okay token has been described as a transition marker (Beach, 1993), as a token of agreement, compliance or confirmation (Thompson et al., 2015), or as a token of acknowledgement and topical closure (Beach, 1995). This paper focuses on the ways in which the repetition of okay (i.e. okay okay) accomplishes social actions across Japanese and Korean conversations, using Conversation Analysis as its analytic framework. Studies on double sayings (e.g. Golato & Fagyal, 2008; Stivers, 2004) have shown that they perform "an action that is discrete from the item being repeated" (Stivers, 2004, p. 268). The data come mainly from ordinary conversations in addition to institutional interactions such as architectural design meetings.

The analysis shows that Japanese and Korean speakers multiply okay in two particular sequential environments: a) after a minimum two-turn sequence (e.g. Q-A) becomes expanded (e.g. extract 1), and b) when the previously halted activity is now relevant for progression (e.g. extract 2). While the similarly positioned, single okay token is used to simply close the immediately prior sequence without issue (e.g. A: Is this fine? B: Of course. A: Okay), reduplicated okays treat the currently ongoing sequence so far as more than sufficient and necessary and propose that the sequence be closed. For instance, in extract 1, a graduate student group is discussing the date of an event they are organizing. Jian informs the rest that she won't make it to the event (line 3). To understand the reason for Jian's unavailability, Myounghoon asks a confirmation-seeking question referring to a conversation they had (line 5). Although the question is designed for, and presupposes, a simple confirmation yes, Jian's response is expanded (lines 6-7, 9). Immediately upon hearing the expansion of Jian's turn, Myounghoon produces the reduplicated okays in slight overlap (line 10). These okays propose to close the sequence, suggesting that sufficient information has already been provided. The reduplication, compared to the single okay, also conveys that the prior speaker has persisted unnecessarily in the prior course of action and should properly halt it (similar to what Stivers (2004) has demonstrated for double sayings (e.g. No no no) in English). Another sequential position the reduplicated okays commonly occur is shown in extract 2 from a Japanese conversation. Three young mothers are planning a cooking event for their children. Right before the excerpt, they have been going through a list of items deciding which items they should supply. Then, an intervening activity occurs in line 1-8, during which they discuss the ending time of the event. After a lapse (line 9), Yumi produces the reduplicated okays and resumes the previously halted activity of going through the items (“Then what's left is No. 5”) (line 10). Here the reduplicated okays close off the inserted activity (i.e. talking about the ending time) and propose to return to the remaining business of going through the list.

Overall, the cases found in both languages suggest that reduplicated okays, occurring in particular sequential positions, propose the talk-so-far be closed, as more than necessary information has been provided. The study also contributes to our understanding of how loanwords may be adopted from one language to another by serving various interactional goals.

References:
Extract 1 [KGS0506(4) 03:10]

01 **HON:** ((nodding)) sipsam-il cemsim.

Thirteenth, lunch.

02 **MYO:** yey, cemsim-ey=

Yes, at lunch.

03 **JIA:** =na an-toy-l hwakyul kwoyngchanghi nophay-yo,

It’s very likely I won’t be able to make it.

04

(0.1)

05 **MYO:** a, mwe qual iss-ta kulay-ss-ci,

Oh, ((you)) said ((you)) have a qualifying exam, right,

06 **JIA:** qua- qual-un yuwal mal-ey- yuwal tal-ey iss-nuney

Qual- Qualifying exam is the end of June, it’s in June, but

07 sip- yuwel isip-il-kkaci (.} nonmwu nay-l ke iss-ketun-yo?

((I)) have an article to submit until June 20=

08 **HON:** [a::

Oh

09 **JIA:** [deadline-i iss-e{se, (kkuth-kkaci)

Because ((I)) have a deadline,

10 **MYO:** -> [Okhe=okhe ((nodding))

Okay okay

11 **JIA:** kukka [na-nun mos ka-l-cito moll-a.

so I may not be able to make it.

Excerpt 2 [T003-004 [5:45]]

01 **HAR:** juuni ji tes[shuu: na kanji da yone.= At noon, (we) need to leave, right?

02 **YUM:** [</soo>

Right.

03 **YUM:** =>soo soo [soo<

Right right right.

04 **HAR:** [un un un.= Yeah yeah yeah.

05 **YUM:** =juuni ji ni owaru kara *ne:.

It will be over at 12.

06 **HAR:** un[ un.

Yeah yeah.

07 **YUM:** [are {.} ano asoko heya ga ne:={

That {.} that room is ((available only till 12?))

08 **HAR:** =un un.

Yeah yeah.

09 (2.0)

10 **YUM:** ^okkee |okkee. .hh jaa ato go

okay okay. .hh Then what’s left is No. 5,

11 (3.3)

12 **NOZ:** a

Oh

13 (1.0)

14 **NOZ:** jitsuwa sa:::

In fact,