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## Backchannels in Korean Language: Their Structure and Functions

The purpose of this study is to present and analyze the backchannels in everyday Korean conversation. The backchannel is a tool used as a major resource in everyday communication. Listeners often use them to support and supplement the speaker's words in order to sustain a conversation and make it go smoothly. This study provides a general overview of backchannels, considering their types and functions. Backchannels can be divided into verbal and nonverbal types. Verbal backchannels can be classified according to function into support, agreement and emotion; according to form into exclamation, adjective, verb, and other. Nonverbal can be represented by laughing, nodding, and clapping. Backchannels play an important role in conversation, showing the concern and consideration for the speaker. This paper also provides data analysis of backchannels in Korean language textbooks and comes to a proposal of what should be considered in teaching them to students.

### Introduction

Conversation is a process of speech exchange between two or more participants. During the conversation, speakers take turns holding the floor, making this process potentially complex. Studies concerning conversation analysis tended to focus more on the speaker's role than on the listener's role. To keep a conversation going smoothly without obstacles and problems, language has provided us with some tools. Yngve (1970)<sup>1</sup> first introduces the term *backchannel* and defines it as when "the person who has the turn receives short messages such as 'yes' and 'uh-huh' without relinquishing the turn." As we can see, it encourages the speaker to continue the conversation. Duncan and Fiske (1977) go further and broaden backchannels to expressions such as 'mm-hmms,' sentence completions, requests for clarification, and brief statements. They also propose so called visual backchannels such as head nods and handshakes. But these tools of active listening were recognized early on by Polish-born anthropologist Malinowski (1923), who created the notion of 'phatic communion,' and further adapted by Jakobson (1960) into his model of communication between hearer and speaker. In Jakobson's work, 'phatic' communication is that which concerns the channel of communication. In English for example, "You're welcome" is not intended to convey the message that the hearer is welcome; it is a phatic response to being thanked, which in turn

<sup>1</sup> Note that Clancy et al. (1996) says that Fries and Kendon did research about backchannels before Yngve but did not use word backchannels. For further information refer to Clancy et al. (1996: 356).

is a phatic whose function is to acknowledge the receipt of a benefit. In Japanese, these expressions are referred as *aizuchi* and play very important role in communication.

The strategy of backchanneling in conversation is most likely to be universal. Actual types, functions and operation of backchannel devices differ from one speech community to another (Maynard, 1986). In this paper, I will refer to types of backchannels that function in Korean language. I will provide a general overview of backchannels, focusing on previous works done on this topic in Korean literature, and try to provide a list of backchannels with their Romanization and English glosses. The main part of this study will be the classification of backchannels according to function and form as well as showing a few of them in the short conversation examples. The last part of this study will consider their usage in different books which teach Korean as a foreign language on different levels together with some comments for further clarification.

### Theoretical background

Defining the notion of backchannels is not a very easy task; it varies according to the means of approach and usage. Here I want to present a rough picture of discourse structure and put backchannels into this picture. The following diagram from Stenström (1994, p. 30) gives some idea of the number of units which are needed to describe spoken discourse on different levels:

Table 1

Spoken Discourse on different levels

Transaction	consists of one or more exchanges dealing with one single topic; one or more transactions make up a conversation
Exchange	is the smallest interactive unit consisting, minimally, of two turns produced by two different speakers
Turn	is everything the current speaker says before the next speaker takes over; it consists of one or more moves
Move	is what the speaker does in a turn in order to start, carry on and finish an exchange, i.e. the way s/he interacts; it consist of one or more acts
Act	signals what the speaker intends, what s/he wants to communicate; it is the smallest interactive unit

The diagram shows how these units can be arranged hierarchically. For example, Archer et al. (2012) comprises transaction to a lesson which consists of several *exchanges* which are made up of *turns and moves*. *Act* refers to a discourse or interactional act. According to Archer et al. (2012, p.115) “An important feature of turn-taking is the minimal response or backchannel, which has many functions, from signaling attentiveness to showing agreement or disagreement”. As we can notice, backchannels are kinds of turns in spoken discourse. Maynard (1986) defines backchannel as ‘turn-internal listener backchannel’ where an interlocutor who primarily assumes the role of listener sends short message during the other interlocutor’s speaking turn. Based on data analysis from English and Japanese he proposes five main functions of backchannels:

- 1) continuer
- 2) display of understanding of content
- 3) support and empathy toward the speaker
- 4) agreement
- 5) strong emotional response

He describes them as follows: *Continuer* is justified on the basis of turn-taking system, specifically on the non-primary speaker forsaking the opportunity to take turn and giving the opportunity for repair. *Displaying an understanding of content* is identified when the confirmation of the listener's understanding is felt necessary. *Support and empathy* for the speaker is observed where the speaker makes an evaluative statement to which support and empathy is felt necessary by the listener. *Agreement* is identified when the speaker's turn performs a speech act of questioning or question-like statements. *Strong emotional response* is identified when the listener sends exclamatory phrases or laughs. As can be seen, these functions sometimes overlap and each backchannel can perform one or more of the functions proposed.

Schegloff (1996) names lexical items such as 'no', 'yes', 'mm mm' as 'turn constructional units,' which are devices for the structuring of talk in turns. By 'turn constructional unit' it may be recalled that these units can possibly constitute complete turns; on their possible completion, transition to a next speaker becomes relevant although not necessarily accomplished (Schegloff, 1996, p. 55).

Clancy et al. (1996); Young and Lee (2004) use term *reactive tokens* and define them as "a short utterance produced by an interlocutor who is playing a listener's role during the other interlocutor's speakership." So reactive tokens will not normally disrupt the primary speaker's speakership, and do not in themselves claim the floor (Clancy et al., 1996, p. 355). She divided them into backchannels, reactive expressions, collaborative finishes, repetitions and resumptive openers. The table shows the definitions she proposed while analyzing English, Japanese and Mandarin.

Backchannels	If a reactive token is a non-lexical vocalic form, serves as a continuer and display of interest, it is considered as backchannel
Reactive expressions	If the non-primary speaker utters a short non-floor-taking lexical phrase or word, it is a reactive expression
Collaborative finishes	When the non-primary speaker finishes a previous speaker's utterance, it is collaborative finish
Repetitions	If the non-primary speaker reacts by repeating the portion of the speech of the primary speaker, it is repetition
Resumptive openers	Resumptive openers refer to a type of non-lexical element which is used at turn initial points, those elements could be coded as backchannels if they were not followed by full turns

Her work divides reactive tokens generally into lexical and non-lexical, as well as according to non-primary speaker's reaction. In this paper, I define backchannels in a broad way which means backchannels are lexical and non-lexical items which help the speaker in having smooth-running conversation. The following section closely examines Korean backchannels, focusing on the forms and functions of them in Korean conversation.

Talking about backchannels in general theoretical way we cannot forget about nonverbal communication context in which backchannels do exist. Active listeners use backchannel signals, some of which may be only visual, nonverbal. Remland (2009, p.233) states that vocalizations such as 'uh-huh,' 'mm-hmm' and 'yeah' usually combine with intermittent head nods and responsive facial gestures to keep someone talking and presents the following nonverbal backchannels with different intentions:

Table 2

### Turn taking signals

Intention	Visual Signals
Turn maintaining	Continued gesticulation, gazing away from listener, 'Stop' emblems, touching listeners
Turn yielding	Cessation of illustrative gestures, gazing at listener, eyebrow raising
Turn requesting	Raised index finger, forward lean, gazing at speaker, quickened head nods
Turn denying	Gaze aversion, relaxed posture, head nods and shakes, smiles

Brunner (1979) claims that even smiles can be backchannels and the placement of the smile in conversation can be parallel to that of backchannel but the following conditions have to be met: 1) an acceptable statistical relation between the occurrence of the smile beginning and previous display of the within-turn signals 2) auditor's smile beginnings must be more loosely distributed with respect to segment boundaries than auditor turn attempts are, 3) auditor's smile beginning must not be suppressed by the speaker's gesticulation. In this paper, video and auditory materials are not taken into consideration, therefore the approach is theoretical; only verbal backchannels are taken into consideration, which means the analysis is based on previous research and observations on the language. In Korean, Noh Eun-hee (2002) mentions that smiles and hand touching, as well as clapping one's hands, can be considered as backchannels. There is no detailed literature on this topic.

### Types of backchannels in Korean language

The list that will be proposed here is based on previous research, which means this is a collection of examples proposed by Korean researchers and available mainly in Korean language. Sometimes it is difficult for people who do comparative studies to find diverse examples in Korean, thus an aim of this list is to help further comparative research.

Studies concerning backchannels mainly were focused on English with comparison to Japanese and recently to Mandarin. Those that are available in English about the Korean language for a wide audience are few in number. We can cite here Kim Kyu-hyun (1999), Kim Haeyeon (2004), Young R. & Lee Jina (2004). The table with examples of backchannels in Korean provided in English literature can be presented as follows:

Table 3

**Korean Backchannels proposed in English literature**

Author	Backchannel	
	Korean[Romanization]	English gloss
Kim Kyu-hyun (1999)	아[a], 예[ye] – Oh, I see 예[ye], 네[ne], 응[eung] – Yes	
Kim Haeyeon (2004)	어[eo] – uh 아[a] – ah 음[eum] – um 응[eung] – uh-huh	
Young R. & Lee Jina (2004)	예[ye], 예[e], 네[ne] – uhuh, yeah, okay 아[a], 어[eo] – uhuh, yeah, okay 음[eum], 응[eung] – uhuh, mhm 하[ha], 해[he] – wow 어머[eomeo] – wow, oh 그래(요)?[keur aeyo] – oh yeah? 맞아(요)[majayo] – yes right 정말(요)?[jeongmalyo] – really?	

Young R. & Lee J. (2004) use term reactive tokens following Clancy et al. (1996) and compare English and Korean backchannels. Kim Haeyeon (2004) follows the same nomenclature as Clancy et al. (1996) and refers to only four backchannels, investigating the properties of them in social interaction in Korean conversation. Kim Kyu-hyun (1999) analyzes phrasal unit boundaries in Korean conversation and in his work we can find only few backchannels. The above list is not satisfactory. There are claimed to be around 150 backchannels in Japanese<sup>2</sup>. Korean, an agglutinative language like Japanese, has some similarities with it and also has plenty of non-lexical and lexical items which can play the role of backchannels.

***Classification according to function***

As we mentioned before, backchannels can have different functions such as displaying agreement, understanding, or emotions. Korean scholars propose different functions—at least two main functions like *support* and *agreement* are mentioned by Kim Sun Ja (1999); Oh Hyun Ju (2004) and Kim Hyung Nam (2012) propose five of them which are: *listening to*, *understanding*, *agreement*, *negation* and *emotion*. These functions differ quite a lot depending on what kind of corpus the research is based on and what words appear in which context. What we can generalize here, the *listening to* and *understanding* function can be categorized into one big *support* function, and *negation* with *emotions* can be tied into *emotion* function as negation itself expressed by words comes under category of emotions. *Agreement* remains unchanged. What is proposed in this paper in Korean backchannels we

<sup>2</sup> Backchannels in Japanese are referred as *aizuchi* and play very important role in conversation. For further information see White Sheida (1989).

Table 4

### Classification according to function

Function	Expression	
	Korean [Romanization]	English gloss
Support	네 [ne] , 네네 [nene]	Yes, yesyes
	아 [a]	Aha
	어 [eo]	Yea
	예 [ye] , 예예 [yeye]	Yes, yesyes
	으흠 [euheum]	Ahem
	음 [eum]	Um
	응 [eung]	Yeah
Agreement	그래 [keurae]	Yes, that's it, you are right
	그래야죠 [keuraeyajyo]	=
	그래요 [keuraeyo]	=
	그러게 [keureoge]	=
	그러니까 [keureonikka]	=
	그러세요 [keureoseyo]	=
	그러시군요 [keureosigunyo]	=
	그런 거구나 [keureon koguna]	=

New Romanization System since 2000 (The Ministry of Culture and Tourism)

ㅏ	ㅑ	ㅓ	ㅕ	ㅗ	ㅛ	ㅜ	ㅠ	ㅡ	ㅣ	ㅐ	ㅒ	ㅖ	ㅙ	ㅚ	ㅜ	ㅠ	ㅝ	ㅞ	ㅟ	ㅠ	ㅡ
a	eo	o	u	eu	i	ae	e	oe	wi	va	veo	vo	vu	Yae	ve	wa	wae	wo	we	ui	

ㄅ	ㄌ	ㄊ	ㄎ	ㄇ	ㄏ	ㄋ	ㄋ	ㄐ	ㄑ	ㄒ	ㄓ	ㄔ	ㄕ	ㄖ	ㄗ	ㄘ	ㄙ	ㄚ
k	n	t	h	m	h	s	ng	j	ch	k	t	n	h	kk	tt	pp	ss	ii

initial final		○	ㄱ	ㄴ	ㄷ	ㄹ	ㅁ	ㅂ	ㅅ	ㅈ	ㅊ	ㅋ	ㅌ	ㅍ	ㅎ
			G	N	d	r	m	b	s	j	ch	k	t	p	h
ㄱ	k	g	Kg	Ngn	kd	ngn	ngm	kb	k	kj	kch	kk	kt	kp	kh
ㄴ	n	n	Ng	Nn	nd	(nn)	nm	nb	ns	nj	nch	nk	nt	np	nh
ㄷ	al	r	Lg	Ll	ld	ll	lm	lb	ls	lj	lch	lk	lt	lp	lh
ㅁ	m	m	Mg	Mn	md	mn	mm	mb	ms	mj	mch	mk	mt	mp	mh
ㅂ	p	b	Pg	M	pd	mn	mm	pb	ps	pj	pch	pk	pt	pp	ph
ㅇ	ng	ng	Ngg	Ngn	ngd	ngn	ngm	ngb	ngs	ngj	ngch	ngk	ngt	ngp	ngh

	그럼 [keureom], 그럼요 [keureomyo]	Of course
	그렇군요 [keureokunyo]	Yes, that's it, you are right
	그렇습니다 [keureoeumnida]	=
	그렇지 [keureochi], 그렇죠 [keureochyo]	=
	그치 [keuchi]	=
	글쎄 [keulsse]	Well
	맞아 [maja], 맞아요 [majayo], 맞습니다 [majseumnida]	You are right
	물론이야 [mulloniya], 물론이죠 [mullonijyo], 물론입니다 [mullonimnida]	Sure
	알겠어요 [algesseoyo], 알겠습니다 [algesseumnida]	I know
	음, 좋아 [eum, joa]	Yeah good
	좋아 [joa], 좋아요 [joayo], 좋습니다 [joseumnida]	Good
	좋은 생각이야 [joeun saenggagiya]	Good idea
Emotion	말도 안 돼 [maldo an twae]	That's out of question
	세상에 [sesange]	What on earth
	아 [a]	Ah!
	아유 [ayu]	My goodness
	아이구 [aigu]	Oh dear
	아휴 [ahyu]	Oh!
	안 됐다 [an twaetda]	Nonsense
	야아 [yaa]	Whee
	어머! [eomeo]	Dear me
	어허 [eoheo]	Heavens
	예고 [ego]	Oh! dear
	와 [wa]	Wow
	웬일이니? [wenirini]	What's the racket
	저런 [jeoreon]	Oh crumbs
	정말? [jeongmal]	Really?
	진짜? [jinjja]	Really?
	쯧쯧 [jjeut jjeut]	Tsk, tsk

	참[cham]	Oh no
	하하[haha]	Ha-ha
	허[heo]	Ho
	헐[heol]	Lol
	대박[daebak]	Oh wow!

It is easy to see that there are not many examples which express *support* but the non-lexical items like 네[ne], 네네[nene], 예[ye], 예예[yeye], 어[eo], 응[eung] are widely used in everyday life. It is worth noting that listener who uses 네[ne], 네네[nene], 예[ye], 예예[yeye] is inferior to the speaker who holds the floor in comparison with the forms 어[eo], 응[eung] which are used in intimate style when the listener is similar in age with the speaker or they are of the same social status. This different use of different forms of backchannels comes out because Korean is a language which has the category of honorifics. This is going to be discussed in the classification according to form. The *agreement* function is expressed by many words but can be lexically narrowed to a few words which are 그렇다[keureota], 맞다[matda], 좋다[jota] and 알겠다[algetda]. They often appear when agreement to the speaker is expressed. Especially the word 그렇다[keureota] is worth mentioning as its base connects with many endings. A huge amount of emotional expressions are used as backchannels to express sympathy with the speaker. It can be surprise like 와[wa], 웬일이니?[wenirini], 어머![eomeo], 정말?[jeongmal], 진짜?[jinjja], 헐[heol], 대박[daebak]; the last two are widely used by the young generation these days. Anger can be expressed with 참[cham], 말도 안 돼[maldo an twae], and empathy for the interlocutor can be expressed with 아이구[aigu], 저런[jeoreon]. Here are few examples of the functions of backchannels:

Example 1:

A: 나 어제 술 먹으러 갔는데 [na eoje sul meogeuro kanneundae]. I went to drink last night.

B: 응[eung]. Yeah.

A: 가는 길에 여친 만났어 [ganeun gire yeochin mannasseo]. On the way I met my girlfriend.

B: 응[eung]. Yeah.

A: 딱 걸렸다 [ttak keollyeotda]. And I was caught by her.

B: 응[eung]. Yeah.

Example 2:

A: 비 오는 날에 막걸리 먹잖아 [bi oneun nare makkolli meokjana]. Don't we drink makkoli when it's raining?

B: 그렇지 [keureochi]. Yes, that's right.

Example 3:

A: 여기가 우리 집이야 [yeogiga uri jibiya]. Here is our house.

B: 와 [wa]! Wow!

A: 넓지 [neolbji]. Big one, right?



In Example 1, Speaker A is talking continuously about his experience last night and what Speaker B does is only sending speaker A support by saying word 응[eung] ‘Yeah’ which means Speaker A continues talking without interruption by Speaker B. This is very good example of *support* function. During the speech act, the listener is supporting the speaker without claiming the floor. Example 2 shows that Speaker A talks about rainy days and seeks agreement that on such days they drink makkolli. Listener B agrees with Speaker A, saying 그렇지[keureochi] ‘Yes, that’s right’. Lastly, Example 3 is about two people who are in the house and Speaker A shows his house while Speaker B expresses his emotional surprise with 와[wa]! ‘Wow!’ which enables Speaker A to continue by saying that the house is a big one. Those and the other examples exist in Korean and good knowledge of their use can lead to successful conversation. In the next section we will have a closer look at the form of backchannels.

#### *Classification according to form*

When describing the forms of backchannels, Korean scholars like Noh Eun-hee (2002) and Oh Hyun Ju (2004) use the terms *basic form*, *affirmative form*, *repetitive form*, *emotional form*, *agreement form*. Park Jung Sun (2005) uses the nomenclature like type 1, type 2 and type 3. What all of those divisions of form of backchannels have in common is that they are made according to the function backchannels have, but actually they do not reflect the full morphological structure of the items. What I want to propose here is division according to parts of speech which is quite a new approach to what was said before. It should be mentioned here that Park Sun-yong (2006) uses the division of forms proposed by Noh Eun-hee (2002), but takes into consideration 18 words and tries to divide them according to their part of speech. She discusses exclamations, adverbs, and adjectives. In the table below, it is proposed that backchannels be divided into exclamations, adjectives, verbs and others. Others can be divided into the N+이다[ida] form, phrases and nouns or adverbs. Of course the list proposed here is not exhaustive, but it deals with many examples used in everyday life. Examples like 아[a] and 응[eung] are non-lexical; 물론이야[mulloniya] and 그렇죠[keureochyo] are lexical what indicates rough division of backchannels into two categories. For the reader’s comfort in this section Romanization and translation are not used as these can easily be referenced in Table 4.

Table 5

Classification according to form

Part of speech	Expression	
	Non-lexical	Lexical
Exclamation	네, 네네 아 어 예, 예예 으흠 음 응 아 아유	글쎄 참 그럼 그럼요 그러게 저런

		아이구 아휴 야아 어머! 어허 에고 와 쫘쫘 하하 허 헐		
Adjective			그래 그래야쵸 그래요 그리세요 그리시군요 그런거구나 그렇구나 그렇군요 그렇습니다 그렇지 그렇죠 그치 그러니까 좋아, 좋아요, 좋습니다	그렇+아 그렇+야쵸 그렇+아요 그렇+세요 그렇+시군요 그렇+ㄴ거구나 그렇+구나 그렇+군요 그렇+습니다 그렇+지 그렇+쵸 그렇+지 그렇+니까 좋+아 좋+아요 좋+습니다
Verb			맞아, 맞아요, 맞습니다 알겠어요, 알겠습니다	맞+아 맞+아요 맞+습니다 알+겠+어요 알+겠+습니다
Other	N+이다		물론이야 물론이쵸, 물론입니다 웬일이니?	물론+이+야 물론+이+쵸 물론+이+ㅂ니다 웬일+이+니?
	Phrase		음, 좋아 좋은 생각이야 말도 안 돼 안 됐다	
	N / ADV		세상에 정말? 진짜? 대박	

Classification according to form shows us that an abundance of the backchannels in Korean language is occupied by exclamations. Adjective forms are represented mainly by two adjectives, irregular 그렇다[keureota] which means ‘yes, that is right’ and regular 좋다[jota] which means ‘good’. Verb forms are similar to adjective forms and are represented by 맞다[matda] which means ‘correct’ and 알겠다[algetda] which means ‘I see, I know.’ The N+이다[ida] form is mainly represented by 물론이다[mullonida] which means ‘sure.’ Noun / Adverb forms are represented, for example, by 진짜?[jinjja] which means ‘really?’. A phrase like 좋은 생각이야[joeun saenggagiya] which has the meaning of ‘good idea’ is often used in everyday conversation as a backchannel as well. In the Adjective, Verb and N+이다[ida] column it is disclosed the base form plus ending which is attached to the base form.

As mentioned before, Korean is an agglutinative language. In everyday conversation people use different endings which can demonstrate their social status, level of intimacy, and personal relations. Those endings play a different grammatical role in backchanneling; for example -아[a] is the intimate speech style ending, -아요[ayo] indicates polite speech style, -습니다[seumnida] indicates formal speech style, -지[ji] is the sentence ending with the functions similar to the tag questions in English, -군요[gunyo] is the exclamatory ending, showing surprise.<sup>4</sup> The next section will discuss the placement of backchannels.

### Placement of backchannels

It is not easy to define where exactly backchannels are placed and to make general rules about this, but Kim Kyu-hyun (1999) and Young Richard & Lee Jina (2004) observe that backchannels are placed at an intra-turn unit boundary which means before TRPs<sup>5</sup>. It means that the listener is not willing to take a turn at talking or disturb the speaker while s/he is making an act of speech, rather to provide overt support for the current speaker. Example 4 is adapted from Young Richard & Lee Jina (2004, p. 395) and shows that listener places the backchannel 음[eum] after the head noun ‘black-and-white movie’ before participle -를[reul] while the speaker is making his speech.

#### Example 4:

A: 그런 흑백영화 (B: 음 [eum]. Yeah.) -를 안봤는데 [keureon heuk-baekyeonghwa -reul an bwanneunde]. That kind of black-and-white movie I didn’t see though.

Kim Haeyeon (2004) argues that backchannels can be placed after sentential units, clausal units, noun phrases and adverbial phrases. Example 5, adapted from Kim Haeyeon (2004, p.81), shows that the backchannel 응 [eung] appears after sentential unit “when I make a phone to Korea and ask”.

<sup>4</sup> Exclamation here is perceived as a grammatical form, for example: backchannel 그렇+군요 [keureokunyo] will express agreement and will be an adjective with exclamation ending.

<sup>5</sup> Intra-unit boundary place also called Transition Relevance Places (TRPs) are places in an ongoing informal conversation where the turn at talk may legitimately pass from one speaker to another.

**Example 5:**

A: 한국에 맨날 전화해서 물어보면 [hanguge maennal jeonhwahaeseo mureobomyeon]... When I make a phone to Korea and ask...

B: 응[eung]. Yeah.

As we can notice from the examples above, backchannels can be placed at intra-unit boundaries, or after sentential units, clausal units, noun phrases and adverbial phrases, but what important is that a backchannel is placed in conversation whenever the listener wants to support, agree and show his sympathy to the speaker without disturbing and turn-taking the conversation. But it can also be connected with speaker's intonation, as Lee Ji Na (2010) points out that a sound stretch of the final or middle vowel in a word or syntactic unit with intonational contour invites listener's backchannels.

### **Teaching books for backchannels in Korean language**

Backchannels play an essential role in everyday conversation life and are widely used by native speakers of Korean language. Park Jung Sun (2005) argues that during Japanese language teaching classes, special attention is paid to proper use of backchannels, along with head nods and other gestures. It means that advanced learners of Japanese must use backchannels properly. Park Jung Sun (2005, p. 52) analyzes six-level books teaching Korean to foreign students from Kyunghee University, Sogang University, Seoul National University, Yonsei University and Ehwa Women University and comes to conclusion that from backchannels like 아[a], 어[eo], 네[ne], 예[ye], 음[eum], 응[eung] only 네[ne] appears in the textbook from Sogang University and the others do not appear in the textbooks. But instead of that, all backchannels represented by forms of the adjective 그렇다[keureota] appear frequently in all textbooks.

Oh Hyun-ju (2004) analyzes only two textbooks from Kyunghee University and Ehwa Womens University which teach Korean at advanced level and claims that forms like 아[a], 어[eo], 네[ne], 예[ye], 음[eum], 응[eung] appear in those textbooks. On the other side, Park Sun-yong (2006) analyzes textbooks from Kyunghee University, Korea University, Seoul National University and Ehwa Women University and confirms that different kinds of backchannels appear in textbooks but there is a problem because only small number of statements or questions take place immediately following backchannels in the conversation dialog. So what he proposes is the reconstruction of the dialogs where the backchannels can appear by themselves. What we can notice is that distribution of backchannels in Korean textbooks should be reanalyzed to make clear what kindsof backchannels are used, as data provided by different scholars are not reliable. One thing which is certain is that teaching backchannels in Korean as a foreign language is neglected. It is probably because textbooks are focused more on the speaker rather than the listener in conversation, and teaching proper conversation is the most important thing. The second thing, as indicated by Park Sun-yong (2006), is that after backchannels turn-taking takes place which means pure backchannels appear very rarely in conversation texts, perhaps because of space saving. The third thing is, backchannels should be taught systematically according to the level of learners and at the advanced level they should be diverse according to the system of honor-

ifics and diversity of endings. Teachers of Korean as a foreign language should probably pay more attention to backchannels while teaching conversation to the students.

## Conclusions

This paper analyzes the backchannels which play a very important role in everyday Korean conversation. The backchannel is defined as a lexical or non-lexical item which helps the speaker in keeping smooth conversation running. Korean has a variety of backchannels which can be classified according to form and function. Three main functions of backchannels provided here are support, agreement, and emotion. The majority of backchannels in Korean represent agreement and emotion. The form of backchannels is analyzed morphologically according to parts of speech. A large number of backchannels are presented by exclamations then by adjectives and verbs. The minority is presented by ‘noun+이 다[ida]’ construction, simple nouns and adverbs as well as by short phrases. The teaching of backchannels in Korean textbooks is definitely neglected. Books are more focused on the speaker than on the listener’s part. Given the important role they play in social interaction, backchannels should be taught systematically and books should provide more information on them to foreign students.

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