

Discourse Markers *Mwe* and *Way* in Korean Conversation*

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Abstract

Suh, Kyung-hee. 2007. Discourse Markers *Mwe* and *Way* in Korean Conversation. *The Sociolinguistic Journal of Korea* 15(1). From the perspective of conversation analysis, this study aims to explore the interactional aspects of the Korean *wh*-words *mwe* and *way* with reference to their functions as discourse markers. The examination of conversation data reveals that the discourse markers *mwe* and *way* can be used as conversation fillers, filling in a necessary interactional space when the speaker encounters trouble in producing the next item due; *way* is found to more actively solicit the hearer's involvement or uptake than *mwe*. The discourse markers *mwe* and *way* are also found to be employed as a hedging device and a boosting device respectively often in disaffiliative actions. *Mwe* helps to mitigate the import of the statement by virtue of its sense of underestimation or downtoning while *way* helps to increase the force of an utterance while introducing a negative tone. The various interactional functions of *mwe* and *way* are claimed to be derived from their distinctive referential meanings; *mwe* as signifying that 'something is uncertain to the speaker', and *way* as signifying that 'something is questionable, problematic, unexpected, and extraordinary to the speaker'.

Keywords: Korean conversation, discourse markers, conversation fillers, hedging device, boosting device.

I. Introduction

This paper aims to explore the interactional functions of the Korean *wh*-phrases *mwe* and *way* in naturally occurring conversation from the perspective of conversation analysis with special reference to their functions as discourse markers (Atkinson & Heritage 1984; Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson 1974; Schegloff 1968). The *wh*-phrases *mwe* and *way*, although playing a fundamental role in spoken discourse, have been mainly analyzed in terms of an interrogative and an indefinite pronoun. It is quite recently that their functions as a discourse marker have been given some attention (Kim 2005; Lee 1997, 1999; Lee 1992; Suh 2003, 2005 among others.)

The following illustrates *mwe* and *way* in their functions as (a) an interrogative, (b) an indefinite pronoun and (c) a discourse marker respectively.

- (1) a. S: 지금 뭐 녹음하고 계신 거예요? (What are you recording now?)
F: 어 자료 때문에 (Uh.. because of data collection)
- b. S: 뭐가 있다고 그렇게 바라보고 있냐? (Is there anything which makes you stare like that?)
- c. L: 이제 그만 가지 뭐 (Now, let's get going, I guess)
- (2) a. K: 왜 어제 안 왔어? (Why didn't you come yesterday?)
b. (*way* is not used as an indefinite pronoun)¹⁾
c. F: 그런 거 있잖아 왜 눈 올 때 하는 거 (You know something like that, what you usually do when it snows)

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¹⁾ Unlike other interrogatives, *way* is not used as an indefinite pronoun (Kim 2005; Lim 1998)

These instances of *mye* and *way* indicate that their functions are not limited to information-seeking functions. The *wh*-phrases *mye* and *way* in non-interrogative contexts in oral discourse are in the service of pragmatic function, carrying out textual and interpersonal functions and indexing the speaker's epistemic and affective stance (Suh 2003).

The *wh*-phrases *mye* and *way* as interrogatives are considered to be evolved into the discourse markers; according to Kim (2005), interrogatives started to have divergent meanings in the late 18th century, and after the intermediate stage where the interrogatives were first used in indirect questions, they began to be used as indefinites. Along this path of grammaticalization, interrogatives as discourse markers emerge through context-induced reinterpretation or pragmatic strengthening (Koo 1999). Kim (2005) used a large corpus to show that 93.0% of the tokens of *mye* found in the corpus were identified to be functioning as a discourse marker, and as for *way*, 31.5% of the tokens served as a discourse marker. This result suggests that *mye* and *way* play an important role as a discourse marker in Korean oral discourse.

II. Previous Studies

1. What is a discourse marker?

There is no generally agreed upon definition of the term 'discourse markers' even though there has been a large body of literature on discourse markers (cf. Fraser 1990, 1999; Schiffrin 1987; Schourup 1985 on English). A variety of terms have been used to refer to these concepts: for instance, discourse marker (Schiffrin 1987), discourse particle (Aijmer 2002; Schourup 1985), pragmatic particle (Östman 1995), pragmatic marker (Briton 1996; Fraser 1990, 1996), and pragmatic expression (Erman 1987) are among them. Accordingly, the kinds of linguistic expressions and functions thereof which are allegedly covered under each term vary. The functions undertaken by discourse markers

are considered to comprise discourse connectors, turn-takers, confirmation-seekers, intimacy signals, topic-switcher, hesitation markers, boundary markers, fillers, prompters, repair markers, attitude markers, and hedging devices (Jucker & Ziv 1998).

The full and systematic analysis of discourse markers was first made by Schiffrin (1987), where discourse markers are defined as "sequentially dependent elements which bracket units of talk" and "members of a functional class of verbal (and nonverbal) devices which provide contextual coordinates for ongoing talk". Holker's (1991:78-79) list is worthy to mention as basic features characterizing what is called 'discourse markers': (1) they do not affect the truth conditions of an utterance; (2) they do not add anything to the propositional content of an utterance; (3) they are related to the speech situation and not the situation to talked about; and (4) they have an emotive, expressive function rather than a referential, denotative, or cognitive function.

Along the same line of argument, Maynard's (1993) discourse modality indicators lend support to the notion of a discourse marker, in the sense that "discourse modality indicators are non-referential linguistic signs whose primary functions are to directly express personal attitude and feelings" (Maynard 1993:47). As such, discourse modality "conveys the speaker's subjective emotional, mental, or psychological attitude toward the message content, the speech act itself or toward his or her interlocutor in discourse... it [Discourse Modality] directly expresses the speaking self's personal voice on the basis of which the utterance is intended to be meaningfully interpreted" (Maynard 1993:38-39).

The above discussion overall suggests that the principal features characterizing discourse markers include the connectivity in discourse as is claimed by Fraser (1996), who defines the discourse marker as "an expression which signals the relationship of the basic message to the foregoing discourse" (Fraser 1996:186). Other features also include its procedural property, namely, a set of instructions on how to process conceptual representation and direct the inferential process involved in interpretation; discourse markers are characterized as prototypically not affecting truth conditionality determination,

not contributing to the propositional content (Jucker & Ziv 1998). Thirdly, the discourse marker serves as marking the speaker's attitude towards the message or the speech act or the interlocutors (Briton 1996, Maynard 1993, Östman 1981 among others). Also included is the multifunctionality of discourse markers; they can operate on several linguistic levels, carrying out several functions simultaneously.

2. *Wh*-phrases as discourse markers

The *wh*-phrases *mve*, *way*, *mwusun*, and *eti*, although playing a fundamental role in oral discourse, have been mainly analyzed in terms of their role as an interrogative and an indefinite pronoun. It is quite recently that their functions as a discourse marker have been given some attention (Kim 2005, 2006, Kim 1995; Kim 2000; Koo 2000; Lee 1997, 1999; Lee 1992, Suh 2003, 2005). However, these markers are mostly analyzed on the basis of made-up sentences. A few studies use a corpus with the lack of full consideration of the surrounding context. On top of that, most of the studies focus on simply listing the various functions served by these markers. However, I am not able to locate any studies which aim to demonstrate how their expressive functions are interactionally motivated, sequentially occasioned and contextually interpreted, and what kinds of action are undertaken by these markers in naturally occurring conversation.

Nam and Koh (1985) classified *mve* and *way* as interjections along with the expressions such as *huh*, *ah*, *kulssey* ('well'), all of which are basically seen as a marker of verbal hitching or stammering without any other meaning of its own. Lee (1992), however, claims that *mveya* (*mve+ya*) should be categorized as a discourse marker rather than as an interjection or stammering. Following Schiffrin (1987), *mveya* is analyzed as marking a 'transition of information state'.

Koo (2000) gives an account of the development of *mve* as a discourse marker; *mve* is claimed to emerge through the grammaticalization process of context-induced reinterpretation or pragmatic strengthening. Koo admits that

the basic meaning of *mve* may not explain its varying discourse functions even though most of its discourse functions derive from its basic meaning signalling "something is questionable or uncertain."

Lee (1999) claims that the pragmatic functions of *mve* can be inferred from its basic meaning in accordance with the Gricean Cooperative Principle. He pays attention to the non-interrogative functions of *mve* and defines its basic meaning as "something is uncertain to the proposition/situation" and lists the pragmatic functions of *mve* as follows: (1) to express the uncertainty of the utterance and the speaker's hesitation (2) to repair the utterance (3) to emphasize the statement. Most researchers agree upon its basic meaning as "something is questionable to the speaker" (Chung 2000; Kim 2005; Kim 1995; Koo 1999; Lee 1999; Suh 2004). Of special interest is a study (Kim 1995), where the basic meaning of *mve* is defined as 'the weakening of the (utterance) force', which can account for its pragmatic functions such as mild negation, weak agreement, trivialization and underestimation.

The hearer's uptake is demonstrated to be associated with *way* in Kim (1995), where the meaning of *way* as a discourse marker is defined with reference to its confirmation-seeking function; she notes that "when a speaker's belief or expectation turns out to be problematic, he/she seeks a confirmation from the hearer." Along the same line of argument, Kim (2000) claims that by the use of *way*, the speaker confirms whether the hearer is familiar with the information being asserted by the speaker himself and further urges the hearer to activate what the speaker is going to assert, which lends support to the observation that *way* as a conversation filler is used when the speaker expects the hearer to come up with the relevant information and solicit the hearer's uptake (cf. Kim 2005; Suh 2004).

Kim (2005) gives a diachronic and synchronic account of the development of interrogatives as discourse markers in Korean, focusing on the comparison of *mve* and *way*. Based on the corpus analysis, she claims that *mve* is a speaker-oriented subjective marker whereas *way* is a hearer-oriented intersubjective marker, which can account for their various expressive functions.

While drawing upon Kim's (2005) observation, this study is concerned with identifying the interactional aspects of *mve* and *way* and kinds of actions undertaken by these markers from the perspective of conversation analysis, examining how speakers strategically employ these markers to display their cognitive and affective stance in naturally occurring conversation.²⁾ As such, these markers are shown to be interactionally motivated, sequentially occasioned and contextually interpreted, with the assumption that their expressive functions can be derived from their distinctive referential meanings as interrogatives. In addition, my focus is to explore how *mve* and *way* as discourse markers are used to index the speaker's cognitive/affective stance towards the proposition, the speech act itself, or the addressee.

III. Discourse markers *mve* and *way*

The current study is based on the assumption that the interactional

2) Data used for this study, except where indicated, are taken from seven collections of naturally occurring conversations as follows:

- A. *After Dinner*: a face-to-face conversation of graduate students and their families
- B. *Lunch Talk*: a face-to-face conversation of graduate students studying in the U. S.
- C. *After the conference*: a face-to-face conversation of four colleagues
- D. *K & H*: a face-to-face conversation between two male friends
- E. *S & H*: a face-to-face conversation between two male friends
- F. *S-H Park Data*: a face-to-face conversation of graduate students at a University in Korea.
- G. *Students' Data*: face-to-face conversations collected as class project (*About movies, At dinner, At the pub*)

Occasionally I also used overheard conversations. The first three sets were collected and transcribed by the author; K & H and S & H were collected and transcribed by Hyo Sang Lee; S-H Park Data were collected and transcribed by Seonghyeon Park.

functions of the *wh*-phrases *mve* and *way* as a discourse marker derive from their referential meanings as an interrogative. Along this line of argument, the interactional functions of *mve* are suggested to derive from its referential meaning, i.e. "something is uncertain to the speaker" (Lee 1999; Suh 2003). As such, *mve* signifies unknown, unavailable, unaccessible, unidentifiable and insignifiable information, which explains why *mve* is used in information-seeking questions in the first place (cf. Maynard 2000). As for *way*, its interactional functions can be treated as deriving from its referential meaning signifying "something is questionable, problematic, unexpected, and extraordinary to the speaker" (Kim 2005; Lee 1997; Suh 2004), hence "asking for confirmation or uptake from the hearer".

When *mve* and *way* occur in contexts other than information-seeking interrogatives, they are put in the service of pragmatic goals, carrying out interpersonal and expressive functions, thus serving as discourse markers.

Mve and *way* as discourse markers are often found on the interactional level to index the speaker's stance. When the speaker experiences difficulties about the interactional aspects of communication, thus expressing his/her own concern in searching for the right word, *mve* and *way* can be employed as conversation fillers. Specifically, when the speaker directs his/her attention to participants, *way* is opted for. In this vein, *mve* is claimed to be a 'speaker-oriented' marker while *way* is a 'hearer-oriented' marker (Kim 2005).

What the speaker is doing with the *wh*-phrase *mve* in non-interrogative contexts is to index his/her attitude not to make a full commitment to the specific and precise characterization (Suh 2003). In this sense, I argue that *mve* is used as a discourse marker by which the speaker foregrounds his/her non-commitment to specificity. The use of *mve* is more oriented to what the speaker is experiencing in the context of word-searching trouble by virtue of its referential meaning signifying "something is unknown, unavailable to the speaker"; thus, the speaker employs *mve* when he/she experiences difficulties in searching for the right expression.

In contrast, a hearer-oriented *way* is employed when the speaker expresses his/her attitude towards the interlocutor's (non)verbal action which is

questionable, problematic, or inappropriate to the speaker (Suh 2004). Here the speaker is questioning why the hearer's uptake is not coming or even appealing to the hearer for more active involvement.

One context where the discourse markers *mwe* and *way* appear is where the speaker is having difficulties producing the next item due. They are often employed as a place holder, in which the speaker is delaying the production of an utterance in order to leave the discussion open to further elaboration or to avoid verbalization/specification (cf. Kim 2005; Suh 2000, 2003, 2004).

Another context where these markers frequently occur is where the speaker undertakes some type of actions, often in the form of negative speech acts, where he/she either mitigates the illocutionary force of the utterance with the use of *mwe* or intensifies the force with the use of *way*. In this sense, *mwe* can be said to serve as a hedging device while *way* as a boosting device.

The speaker's non-commitment to specificity indexed by *mwe* is often translated into the speaker's attitude predisposed to underestimate and downgrade the situation or the current statement. They are suitable for forming 'downstatement' (cf. Hübler 1983:68). As such, *mwe* is often found in gentle negation to the offer, weak challenge to the previous speaker, or mild disagreement with the interlocutor. *Mwe* is also used to index the speaker's non-imposing stance in uttering the directives.

The hearer-oriented *way* serves as a boosting device by increasing the force of an utterance; *way* often expresses the speaker's critical and/or accusatory attitude and introduces a negative tone by signifying that "something is questionable, problematic, unexpected, and extraordinary to the speaker" and by expressing his/her attitude i.e. the not-so-prompt response or non-response or the lack of attention/understanding from the interlocutor is not appropriate. As such, the discourse marker *way* is often found in the speech acts of criticism, rebuke, complaint, accusation, challenge and scolding, where it helps to intensify the illocutionary force of any utterance.

My special concerns in this study are how these expressive functions are interactionally motivated. In what follows, I present how the speaker employs these two discourse markers in the context of word-searching trouble and in

disaffiliative actions, paying special attention to how the referential meaning of each form contributes to the different interactional practice indexed by each discourse marker.

1. *Mwe* and *way* in the context of word-searching trouble

Mwe, signifying the unknown, unavailable, and insignifiable in discourse, is often employed when the speaker expresses uncertainty at the time of speaking; the speaker faces the need to say something when no words can be found. The use of *mwe* or its related forms *mweya*, *mwenya* as conversation fillers indicates that the speaker encounters trouble in producing a next item due in the ongoing development of the current turn. By indexing his/her non-commitment to specificity with the use of *mwe*, the speaker indicates that what is presented is an approximation to the truth, which should not be taken too literally. Consider the following.

(3) (S & H)

S: GPA가 3.2 뭐 3.3 그랬어요.

S: *I've heard that the GPA was 3.2 or 3.3 something like that.*

In example (3), the use of *mwe* flanking the number 3.2 or 3.3 indicates that the speaker just gives an approximation to the thought she has in mind. *Mwe* is primarily used to indicate the speaker's uncertainty about a given referent and/or her non-commitment to specificity as well as to earn a processing time.

Example (4) is another case in point where the discourse marker *mwenya* is employed when the speaker shows the cognitive difficulties in retrieving his memory, which in turn suggests that what is presented is just an approximation to what he has in mind.

(4) (At the Pub)

1. C: 아 () 남양주에 있는 게 그거예요?

2. A: = 근데 사실 양평갔을 때도, 그 **뭐냐**, 그 다음날 비가 온다고 어쩌구 해가지고 별 하나도 안 보였잖아
1. C: *Ah () Are you talking about the place in Nam-Yangchu?*
2. A: = *By the way, when we went to Yangpyung, what-d'you-call-it, it was reported that it would be raining the next day and we were not able to see the stars.*

In the same vein, the following examples illustrate the case where the discourse marker *mve* is used to communicate difficulties encountered by the speaker in recalling the appropriate words.

(5) (S-H Park)

288. S: 그 그 언어 야 언어학회 그거 있잖아 **뭐** 주소랑 **뭐** 그거 없어

289. Y: 뭐

290. S: 어디루 오라는 거

288. S: *That linguistics um the linguistics society, that thing, you know. Things like the address, don't you have something like that?*

289. Y: *What?*

290. S: *Something like the direction about where we should go.*

(6) (S-H Park)

578. S: 대처수상이 그 저 인터뷰를 하는데 근까 젠더하고 그 컨버세이션하구 //어떻게 작용이 //일어나느냐 **뭐** 그런 게 있어요. 그래서 여자는 **뭐** 어떻게 **뭐** 이렇게 나오는데

579. J: //응

578. S: *When the Prime Minister Thatcher was interviewed, (they analyzed) how conversation is interacting with gender something like that. So women tend to do such and such.*

579. J: *I see*

Of particular interest with regard to the use of *mve* is a case where the discourse marker *mve* appears as a part of the set-marking tags (Dines 1975)³⁾, such as *mve kuke*, *mve ilenke*, *mve hanunke* ('stuff like that') in (5) and (6). *Mve* in these set marking tags signals that the speaker is highlighting his/her non-commitment to specificity by generalizing the category. By saying 주소랑 뭐 그거 ('things like the address') in (5) and 어떻게 작용이 일어나느냐 뭐 그런 거 뭐 어떻게 뭐 이런게 ('how conversation is interacting with gender something like that') in (6), the speaker describes a more general category, but cannot name the particular members she has in mind. Instead, she names just one of the members of the set, pointing to other unspecified possibilities, thus the precise nature of the set of the referents being not at stake (Suh 2003).⁴⁾ As such, the use of *mve* as a set marking tag also evidences that *mve* signifies unavailable information in a discourse, indexing the speaker's non-commitment to specificity.

The use of *mve* as a conversation filler often conveys the speaker's belittling attitude towards his/her own statement. The *mve*-utterance in (7) conveys the sense of "what I'm doing right now is just a tutoring job or what?"⁵⁾, with the act itself (i.e. her doing a tutoring job) being underestimated and trivialized:

(7) (At dinner)

-> X: 내가 막 안 바쁜 건 아닌데 우선 일하는 건 **뭐** 과외하나예요.

X: *I cannot say that I am not terribly busy. However, what I'm doing right now is a tutoring job.*

3) Dines (1975) characterizes a discourse function for set-marking tags as that of "cuing the listener to interpret the preceding element as an illustrative example of a more general case" (1975:22).

4) Dines (1975) found that set-marking tags in English were also used to relate parts to an unknown whole or to a vague complex of ideas.

5) Such use of *mve* is resonant of the peremptory 'or what' in English (Lighter 1998), which usually does not expect an answer: "이미 이야기 끝난거지 아님 뭐야" ("Then it is all over, or what?")

In this vein, the discourse marker *mve* can be characterized as 'downtoners' or 'detensifier' (cf. Hübler 1983:68). The underestimating or downtoning functions of *mve* will be further discussed with reference to its function as a hedging device in the following section.

The use of *mve* as a conversation filler is often found to be flanked with a pause as is illustrated in (8)⁶.

(8) (after the conference)

1349. U: =바로 그 짝을 데가 없어요 //일단은 (0.5) 그리고 뭐 (0.3)=

1350. S: //음음

1351. S: =사람들이 이것만 할 때 좀 (.) 언컴퍼터블 하지 않았나 비디오 들이 대면 약간

1349. U: =It's hard to videotape// First (0.5) and what-d'you-call-it (0.3)

1350. S: // uhm uhm

1351. S: = When people are videotaped, they seem to feel uncomfortable, once they were in front of the camcorder.

While the above discussion suggests that *mve* is used in the context of word-searching trouble mainly due to the speaker's cognitive difficulties in recalling the right expressions, the following shows a case where the speaker chooses *mve* even when he could have stated his utterance more precisely, just trying to avoid saying something that could be taken in negative light. The use of *mve* in this context sounds rather euphemistic:

(9) (About movies)

6) Typical features of word search can be characterized as follows (Mori 2007): (1) orientational shift such as eye gaze, posture (2) head tilts, manual and facial gestures such as iconic gestures and 'thinking face', (3) intra-turn pauses, word cut-offs, sound stretches, rising intonation, (4) delaying devices, (5) self-addressed questions for recollection, (6) direct appeal for a word, (7) the use of distal demonstrative pronoun as a place holder

1. M1: 300!=

2. M2: =300은 재미없어

3. F1: 난 재미있었//는데?

4. M2: //난 재미있었어? 내용은 없잖아 계속 죽이고 뭐::

5. F1: 난 그런 거 좋아해

1. M1: *Movie 300*=

2. M2: (*The movie*) *300 is not fun*

3. F1: *I liked// it?*

4. M2: //Did you like it? *There is no substance with a lot of killing scenes and something like that::*

5. F1: *I like that kind of stuff.*

In (9), the interactants have been talking about the movies they saw recently. In line 4, M2 disagrees with F1, adding that the movie contains a lot of cruel scenes including killing scenes. Here notice the use of *mve* with a prolonged stretch of the sound indicated with double colons. What the speaker is doing with *mve* is to avoid explicitly labelling what he has in mind, presumably because this may be inappropriate to the situation; making his thoughts explicit would run the risk of creating an uncomfortable situation. Here the specificity is avoided by the use of *mve*. Here the speaker is focusing on the psychological and interactional/social aspects of communication (Suh 2003)⁷.

The use of the discourse marker *mve* as a conversation filler may be motivated by any of following reasons. On the one hand, the speaker may not be able to recall the intended item because he/she does not know the item or cannot access it at the time of speech. On the other hand, the speaker may name the item but choose not to do so. Therefore, the use of *mve* signals that the speaker is delaying the production of an utterance in order to leave the discussion open to further elaboration or to avoid verbalization/specification. In

7) The speaker may not be able to get access to the appropriate expression at the moment of speaking.

this sense, *mue* seems to serve as an important communicative need, i.e. embodying the speaker's option not to commit him/herself to any definite, precise characterization.

While another *wh*-phrase *way* is often used as a conversational filler/space-holder, filling in a necessary interactional space when the speaker encounters trouble in producing a next item due in the ongoing development of the current turn, the way it is employed as a filler is quite different from the way *mue* is used, which can be observed in terms of the degree of the hearer-involvement (Suh 2004). By uttering *way*, the speaker indexes his/her stance, i.e. conveying the sense that something is questionable or problematic on the interactional level. The speaker employs *way* to express his/her assumption that the addressee is familiar with the information being asserted in the proposition and should understand the speaker's own utterance or the situation because it is assumed to be commonsensical or even obvious. The speaker, by the use of *way* in this context, indicates that the interlocutor's not-so-prompt uptake is questionable to the speaker and accordingly further prompts the interlocutor to align himself/herself to the utterance. The speaker strategically exploits this marker as a way to involve the interlocutor in the joint construction of a representation.

The use of *way* in this context illustrates that the speaker expresses his/her attitude i.e. the not-so-prompt response or non-response or the lack of attention from the interlocutor is not appropriate. With the use of *way*, the speaker tries to invite collaboration from the interlocutor in bringing up a new element in the discourse and prompts the interlocutor to come up with the relevant information or the uptake.

(10) (After dinner)

1. S: 그게: 왜 잘 못 사갔구 옛날에 안 매운 거 있지?//
2. Y: //이게 고거예요? =
3. S: =그거: (.) 응
4. Y: =내가 좀 가져갈게

1. S: *That is.. What I bought was of poor quality pepper powder. So it is not hot enough, you know?//*
2. Y: *//This is what you're talking about?*
3. S: *That's that: (.) yes.*
4. Y: *Then I will take some of them with me.*

In (10), S has already stated that the kind of red pepper power she bought is not of good quality, which is now a shared information between the interlocutors. The use of *way* in line 1 indicates that S is asking for the confirmation about her claim from Y since Y is supposed to understand why the red pepper powder is not hot enough.

(11) (S-H Park)

1. J: 그 중에 한 여자가 요기 왜 슬림형으로 나오는 티 있잖아 ()
 2. 왜 요기 끈 요렇게 하나만 있는 거
 3. 그걸 //입구서는 지하철을 탄거야
 4. H: //예 예
 5. B: 요새 많이 입는데요.
1. *J: One of the girls wears this, you know, the slim t-shirts ()*
 2. *You know, the shirt with only one strap (on the shoulder).*
 3. *She takes the subway with that shirt on.*
 4. *H: //I see I see*
 5. *B: I notice that those shirts are popular these days.*

In (11), *way* is used in the utterance-middle in line 1 and the utterance-initial position in line 2 to communicate the difficulties encountered by the speaker in recalling the appropriate word, to announce a delay in the progression of the utterance, and finally to encourage the addressee to participate in the search for the relevant words. The use of *way* in line 1 serves as the speaker's appeal for the hearer's involvement, as demonstrated with the co-occurrence with *-cyana* (Suh 2002)⁸⁾ since the speaker assumes

that the hearer is familiar with the item at issue. However, when there is no uptake coming from the interlocutor, speaker J, in line 2, elaborates on her previous statement to help her interlocutors understand what she is referring to. Here notice the use of *way* in the utterance-initial position, which functions to further prompt her interlocutor's involvement in what she is stating. Notice here that H's overlapping utterance ("I see I see") in line 4 shows that she is aware of what J is talking about, and in line 5 another interlocutor B comes up with further elaboration of the item at issue, i.e. the tank top in vogue, which demonstrates that B is familiar with the information being asserted.

(12) (After dinner)

1. K: Federal building 옆에 공터가 있나?
2. J: 거기 westwood 공원이라고 있어요
3. S: 거기 있잖아 왜
4. J: Federal building 남쪽으로

1. K: *Is there an empty lot besides Federal Building?*
2. J: *There is Westwood park over there.*
3. S: *(You can figure out) where it is located, you know.*
4. J: *At the southern part of Federal Building.*

(12) is a dinner conversation of the two couples, where K inquires about the location of Westwood park. Upon J's explanation on the location, K is still not able to identify the place, which is perceived to be questionable and problematic to his wife, S. It is at this point where S comes in, and with the use of *way* along with *keki isscyana* ('you can figure out where it is located, you know'), expresses her attitude that K should be familiar with that specific

8) *-cyana*, often in the form of *isscyana* ('you know'), is found in contexts where the speaker is oriented to eliciting agreement or confirmation from the hearer by negotiating a common ground among interlocutors (Suh 2002). They are often translated into English discourse marker 'you know' (cf. Jucker & Smith 1998, Goldberg 1981).

location, further inviting K's alignment to the sought-for item. Here the use of *way* signals that K's inability to identify the place is perceived to be questionable to the speaker.

There is a case, however, the use of a conversation filler, *way* also carries the risk that the addressee may fail to make the expected interpretation:

(13) (S-H Park)

1. J: 응 그러면 요 마이크가 요렇게 요렇게 집어넣니
2. 고런 마이크가 있잖아 왜
3. S: =몰라요 근데
4. J: =이렇게 보통 마이크가 저 소리까지 다 들어가는 마이크가 있구
5. 인제 그냥 여기서 아무리 떠들어봤자 우리 말소리만 들어가는 것도
6. 있구 막 그래

1. *J: Yes, then, there is a microphone like this, like the one that can*
2. *be inserted here, you know.*
3. *S: =I have no idea. So..*
4. *J: =Normally there are microphones that catch every noise, and*
5. *some microphones only catch our human voice even when there*
6. *is a lot of noise.*

The speaker uses the discourse marker *way* in line 2 in a way to solicit the interlocutor's uptake, inviting the interlocutor's involvement in her word-searching process. However, S's latched utterance in line 3 shows that she does not share the information at issue, contrary to J's expectation. The observation that S responds to J in such a way suggests that she is demonstrably oriented to what J is doing at the interactional level, i.e. soliciting S's confirmation.

2. *Mwe* as a hedging device

The speaker's non-commitment to specificity marked by *mwe* is often

translated into the speaker's attitude to underestimate and downgrade the situation or the current statement. The use of *mve* in this context is rendered not so much displaying the speaker's uncertainty about his utterance (cf. Lee 1998)⁹, as foregrounding his non-commitment to specificity; *mve* is associated less with the certainty of information and more with emotional expression, indexing the speaker's affective stance i.e. to avoid specificity for some interactional and/or social reasons, which in turn leads to underestimation about his/her utterance. So *mve* can be called 'downtoner' or 'detensifier' and it is suitable for forming 'understatement' (Hübler 1983:63-68).

When *mve* functions to index the speaker's attitude of underestimation towards what is being asserted or what is being undertaken, it serves various interactional functions in contexts where it is situated. *Mve* can serve as a hedging device by mitigating the illocutionary force of any utterance with which it co-occurs. *Mve*, for example, often serves as a preface for framing a dispreferred response in an adjacency pairs. As such, *mve* often appears in the context where the speaker expresses a weak challenge to the previous statement or rejection to offer. *Mve* is often used to attenuate the force of negatively affective speech acts such as directives. *Mve* is also found in a response to a compliment, where the speaker shows modesty to a compliment by understating the message contents. Consider the following:

(14) (S-H Park)

125 J: 압력없을까 그렇게 해서

126 Y: 뭐 압력을 //두려워하시겠냐 선생님이

127 H: //압력?

125 J: *I wonder there can be some pressure (from the authority) if he does so.*

126 Y: *The professor will not be //afraid of any pressure, I suppose.*

127 H: *//Pressure? (what pressure are you talking about?)*

9) According to Lee (1998), *mve* signals that the following utterance is not exactly what the speaker has in mind.

In (14), the speaker's use of *mve* functions to weaken the challenge by mitigating the import of her statement. The rhetorical question, when accompanied by the discourse marker *mve* seems to mean "contrary to what you think, he[the professor] will not be afraid of any pressure from the authority, I suppose".

Example (15) speaks to the similar issue, where the discourse marker *mve* in turn-final position is used in a mild negation.

(15) (S-H Park)

223. H: 얼굴 하얗잖아 원래

224. N: 그래두 여기 잡티가 많아서 (얼굴 빛깔이)

225. J: 그 정도면 뭐 준수한테 뭐 (mild negation)

223. H: *You have fair complexion.*

224. N: *Still I have a lot of freckles here. (My complexion)*

225. J: *Your skin still look pretty good even with your freckles, I guess.*

Sometimes the use of *mve* alone marks the negative response. By inserting verbalization without a specific referent, the use of *mve* helps to create an interactional space, rendering the conversation less abrasive even without the explicit mention of "no", which in turn nuances a gentler negation. In (16), the use of *mve* indexes the speaker's criticizing or challenging attitude. The employment of *mve* makes it possible to criticize or challenge the interlocutor's (non)verbal action even more mildly by virtue of not resorting to any specificity. Consider example (16):

(16) (At the Pub)

76. T: 그냥 //기념일 날 가면 안 돼요

77. N: //근데 오히려 직장인들//은 비스마르크에 갔더니 "아 짜네"@이러고@ 있는데=

78. H: = 아니 그야

79. J: 그거야 뭐

76. T: *Just//you should not go to that place in the anniversary.*
 77. N: *//But on the contrary when salaried men visited Bismark (i.e the name of a pub), they would say "this is a budget-friendly place". That's what they say=*
 78. H: *= No, that's because*
 79. J: *That's because, you know*

In line 79, J attempts to challenge N's claim mildly, implying that we cannot compare salaried men with students since their level of spending is much higher than that of students. Without explicitly saying "no", the speaker challenges or negates a particular action mildly by representing the situation without specificity. The sense of vagueness conveyed by the use of *mve* contributes to reducing the force of the face-threatening speech act (cf. Brown and Levinson 1987).

The above discussion suggests that the speaker's non-commitment to specificity marked by *mve* is translated into underestimating and undertoning what is being asserted or what is being undertaken. The speaker-oriented *mve* seems to serve as a hedging device by reducing the force of an utterance by virtue of its meaning signaling the speaker's lack of commitment to any precise characterization, which turns out to constitute an action geared to having the situation underestimated. That explains why *mve* is often found in mild disagreement or gentler negation.

The discourse marker *mve* may attenuate the force of both negatively affective face threatening utterances such as directives as in (17) and (18), and of positively affective utterance, such as compliment as in (19), by underestimating the propositional content of the utterance. Notice that *mve* occurring with the directives or the suggestions serves as a mitigator or a hedging device, which helps to reduce the illocutionary force of the speech act:

(17) (S-H Park)

509. F: *영어과 화장실 붙어쓰라 그리지 뭐*
 510. Y: *아 완전히 미치겠어. 정말*

509. F: *Well, we can suggest that the study room of English major students should be located next to the rest room.*
 510. Y: *Ah, That drives me crazy, really...*

(18) (overheard conversation)

1. K: *나, 지금 뭐 해야 되?*
 2. S: *뭐 방이나 치우든지*

1. K: *What am I supposed to do now?*
 2. S: *Why don't you, well, clean up the room?*

In (17), F suggests that the study room of English major students should be located just next to the rest room, where *mve* serves to belittle the impact of her statement, thus sounding a mild suggestion. Likewise, S in (18) asks her husband, K, to clean up the room, where *mve* functions to attenuate the force of the directive.

Mve is also found in a response turn to a compliment, where its use sounds a mild negation to the message content, which in turn indexes the speaker's modesty to a compliment by underestimating the propositional contents. Examples (19) and (20) speak to the issue¹⁰:

(19) (overheard conversation)

- K: *너 이번에 정말 수고많았다.*
 Y: *어휴 제가 뭐 특별히 한 일 있나요 뭐*

- K: *You did a good job this time.*
 Y: *Oh, well I didn't do much*

10) Given that the compliments in (19) and (20) are all from higher status persons, it is likely that Korean speakers tend to show modesty to higher status complimenters by using deflection strategy in their responses to compliments (cf. Baik 1998), hence *mve* being employed as a 'scale down' substrategy.

(20) (overheard conversation)

L: 장교수의 새로운 리더십으로

C: 아 예 뭐

L: *Professor's Chang's leadership (has made this possible)*

C: *Ah yes, well...*

What *mve* is doing in (19) is to deflate or deflect the compliment by employing the substrategy of 'scale down' (cf. Herbert 1990); the addressee disagrees with the complimentary force, claiming that the praise is overstated. Likewise, in (20) C expresses his appreciation with the assessment made by L (with the token of "yes") and then he avoids self-praise and shows modesty with the use of *mve*.¹¹⁾

As is discussed, the speaker-oriented *mve* often serves as a hedging device by underestimating the propositional contents or attenuating the force of the speech acts. In the following section, I turn to the function of *way* in the context of negatively affected speech acts.

3. Way as a boosting device

The hearer-oriented *way* serves as a boosting device by increasing the force of an utterance; *way* often expresses the speaker's critical and/or accusatory attitude by signifying that "something is questionable, problematic, unexpected, and extraordinary to the speaker" (Suh 2004) and by voicing unanswerable questions. As such, *way* introduces a negative tone and accordingly it is often found in the speech acts of criticism, rebuke, complaint, accusation, challenge and scolding, where it serves as intensifying the illocutionary force of any

11) Pomerantz (1978:81-82) claims the two conditions which govern the act of responding to a compliment:

- (a) Agree with your conversational coparticipant.
- (b) Avoid self-praise.

utterance. *Way* is often formulated as part of *wh*-questions but it is not designed to make answers relevant, i.e. speakers do not have to give answers to the *wh*-questions.

(21) (a husband to his wife who takes too much time in doing her makeup)

H: 왜 대충 하지 늦었는데

H: *Why don't you finish it quickly? We're already late.*

In (21), the use of *way* serves as an emphatic request, adding the speaker's criticism against his wife's delay. Without the discourse marker *way*, the utterance would still sound as a request or a suggestion. However, with the use of *way*, the speaker displays his stance acknowledging that the interlocutor's action is problematic and further expresses inability to accept his wife's action as is, thus challenging and criticizing her action. Here the use of *way* introduces a negative tone and contributes to intensifying the negative speech act. Such an utterance is usually accompanied by an account, *necessnuntye* ('we're already late.').

Way is often used when the speaker disagrees with the interlocutor or challenges the ground for the prior claim or action made by the interlocutor on the ground that it is perceived to be problematic or questionable to the speaker. The following is a case in point.

(22) (Overheard Conversation)

1. H: 이거 너무 크지 않아?

2. M: 왜 너무 커? 잘 맞는 거 같은데..

3. H: 그런가

1. H: *Don't you think these shorts are way too big for me?*

2. M: *Why, do you think they are too big for you?*

I guess they fit you.

3. H: *You may be right. (Is that so?)*

In (22), H's claim that the shorts seem to be too big for him is perceived questionable to M, and M in line 2 expresses his disagreement prefaced by *way*. Note that by latching an account or other utterances to the *way*-utterances, speakers can display that they are not inviting answers to the questions. In response, H accepts M's disagreement: his next move in line 3 ('*you may be right.*') aligns with the negative assertion conveyed by M (Suh 2004).

Even though *way*-marked utterances are designed grammatically as questions, they are not used to do questioning but rather to convey the speaker's assertive, challenging stance. The *way*-utterances are not designed to make answers relevant. Nor are they treated by recipients as information-seeking questions which make answers relevant. Rather, they are treated by both speakers and addressees as challenges to prior claim or action (Koshik 2003).

Overall, *mve* conveys the speaker's underestimating attitude towards his/her own statement or reducing the force of the speech act, thus serving as a hedging device. In contrast, *way* conveys the speaker's challenging and criticizing attitude towards the (non)verbal action of the interlocutor, intensifying the illocutionary force of any utterance in which it is used.

IV. Conclusion

Given that vagueness is not only an inherent feature of natural language but also an interactional strategy (Jucker et al. 2003), the interrogatives, *mve* and *way* seems to belong to vague expressions, by which speakers indicate their degree of commitment towards a proposition and/or their expectation of the hearer's upshots. Such vague utterances also allow speakers to maintain fluency when they cannot get access to information at the point where it is needed in the ongoing conversation, where *mve* and *way* serve as place-holders or conversation fillers. In formulating such vague expressions,

speakers rely on their assumption about the hearer's cognitive abilities as well as their assumption about their shared common ground (Jucker et al. 2003). The speaker assumes that the hearer is able to access the contextual assumptions intended by the speaker. The speaker chooses *way* over *mve* when he/she solicits the hearer's involvement in pursuing the sought-for information and seeking for the uptake from the hearer.

Secondly, *mve* and *way* are found to serve various social actions. They may soften a negative evaluation/statement (in the case of *mve*) or introduces a negative tone, thus intensifying the force of the speech acts (in the case of *way*) by virtue of their distinct meanings.

While the present study compares the discourse markers *mve* and *way*, detailed analyses and descriptions of similarity and differences in the interactional functions of other interrogatives such as *mvusun* and *eti* await further research.

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