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Author(s): Kyung-Hee Suh and Kyu-Hyun Kim

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The Korean modal marker *keyss* revisited: A marker of achieved state of intersubjectivity

KYUNG-HEE SUH

Hankuk University of Foreign Studies

KYU-HYUN KIM

Kyung Hee University

0. Introduction

In previous research, the Korean modal marker *keyss* has been extensively studied as a marker of the speaker's epistemic judgment, and focus has been given to identifying the source of evidence or determining the degree of certainty, i.e., the likelihood of occurrence of an event (J.-S. Suh 1978, K.-C. Sung 1979). In this paper, we hope to propose an analysis of *keyss* that complements this 'epistemically-oriented' line of analysis and examine its functions from an 'interactionally-oriented' perspective (cf. J. Ree 1995). From a conversation-analytic perspective (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson 1974), this study analyzes *keyss* as a marker of an achieved state of intersubjectivity, drawing upon a previous analysis of *kyess* as a marker of the speaker's 'involving stance' (cf. Gee & Savasir 1985, K.-H. Suh & K.-H. Kim 1991).

The modal functions of *keyss* can be categorized under the two semantic types of modality: (i) speaker-oriented modality marking the speaker's intention and (ii) epistemic modality expressing the speaker's epistemic judgment of and commitment to the truth of a proposition. The first type of *keyss* is used with the first person subject and an action verb, as in example (1) below. The second type of *keyss* yields a number of different messages depending on the nature of the verb and the subject person. A case in point is example (2):

- | | |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------|
| (1) <i>ka-po-keyss-supnita.</i> | "I'll now go." |
| (2) <i>coh-keyss-ne-yo</i> | "You/He must be happy." |

Many previous studies analyze *keyss* by comparing it with another epistemic modal marker with a similar meaning, (*u*)*lkes* (or its simplified form (*u*)*lke*). They suggest that *kyess* is used when the source of information is subjective whereas (*u*)*lkes* is used when the evidence is objective (C. Suh 1978). C. Suh's analysis is criticized by K. Sung (1978) on the grounds that the basis for judgment or

deduction is inherently subjective. Sung suggests that the function of *keyss* should be understood in terms of the source of evidence. He argues that the source of evidence for the *keyss*-utterance lies in the speaker's current experience, while the source of evidence for *(u)lkes* tends to be based on the speaker's past experience.¹ In a similar vein, K. Chang (1984) proposes that *keyss* is used to mark an 'outcome' from a certain 'source' which is retrievable from the discourse context or which exists in the speaker's mind.

In this paper, these previous observations, which focus on the speaker's inner state and subjective experience, are recast in an interactional light and related to the function of *keyss* evoking the interactants' interpersonal commitment toward achieving shared understanding. What is marked by *keyss* is proposed as being associated with the speaker's (and hearer's) collaborative move to formulate an event as an intersubjectively shared experience that has significant sequential implications for the following discourse contexts.

The approach we are taking in this paper is a conversation-analytic approach (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson 1974). Following up on our previous research, where we analyzed *keyss* as a stance-marker indexing interpersonal involvement between the speaker and the hearer, we will examine various uses of *keyss* in terms of the kind of action constituted by the *keyss*-utterance and the sequential implicativeness in the subsequent context as well as its orientation toward the preceding context. From the participants' perspective as displayed by the sequential development of conversation, the interactional function of *keyss* is analyzed with reference to its context-shaped aspect, i.e., in terms of how *keyss* utterances are used in response to the preceding context, and to its context-renewing aspect, i.e., in terms of how they shape the subsequent context (Heritage 1984). The analysis of these sequential aspects is an inquiry into the procedures interlocutors use and rely on to interpret the other's utterance and design their contribution to the interaction in-progress (Heritage 1984: 242).

The data analyzed in this paper include audiotaped telephone conversations (*P & S* and *Military Generals*). *P & S* is a conversation between a professor (the second author of this paper) and his student. *Military Generals* is a conversation between military officers.² Also included in the data is a segment from a telephone conversation which was written down on the basis of memory immediately following the conversation (*F & S*).

1. Joint attention as ground for judgment and action

As a marker of epistemic judgment, *keyss* is used for formulating the speaker's deduction or judgment on the basis of some evidence (K. Chang 1984, H. Lee 1991). Consider example (3), where the speaker produces the *keyss*-utterance

¹ In a similar vein, J. Ree (1995) suggests that *keyss* is associated with the speaker's new experience/unfamiliarity with a particular discourse situation.

² This conversation is part of a set of conversations between military generals recorded surreptitiously by the Korea Central Intelligence Agency during the 1979 military coup d' état in Korea.

while observing some dark clouds in the sky:³

- (3) *pi o-keyss-ta.* "It looks like rain." ((Noticing some dark clouds in the sky))

One important observation that we can make about example (3) would be that the use of *keyss*-utterance in predicting weather conditions is warranted by the fact that the speaker has led the hearer to notice the dark clouds and share the evidence with him/her. The upshot of the utterance lies in leading the hearer to accept the speaker's judgment (i.e., "It looks like rain.") on the basis of the hearer's co-orientation to the shared evidence thereof (i.e., dark clouds) and in engaging the hearer in some subsequent action.

This interactive process evoked by *keyss* provides a solid intersubjective ground on which a subsequent action can be initiated as a next action relevant to the participants. For instance, in example (3), the *keyss*-utterance may initiate a subsequent joint action such as finding a shelter, canceling plans to go on a picnic, or producing small talk about weather. That the speaker's judgment is formulated as being based on something that can be easily shared by the hearer increases the likelihood that a collaborative uptake will follow.

In some contexts, what is noticed by the speaker as the source of his/her judgment is the information provided by the interlocutor in the immediately preceding context. Consider example (4), which shows a segment of a telephone conversation between father (F) and son (S):⁴

(4) (F & S)

1 F: *sensayngnim myet si -ey o -a.*
teacher what time-LOC come-IE

2 S: *twu si.*
two o'clock

((about two lines omitted))

→ 5 F: *ung ku -ttay-kkaci cwunpi com hay-ya -toy -keyss-ney:::*
yes that-time-until preparation a little do -OBL-become-MOD-

FR

6 S: *ung. kulay -ya -ci.*
yes do like that-OBL-COMM

[English version]

1 F: "What time is your tutor coming?"

2 S: "Two o'clock."

³ Note that (*u*)*lkes*, the competing form of *keyss*, cannot be used in this context. As we will discuss below, (*u*)*lkes* tends to mark the judgment as based on the speaker's own knowledge not shared by the hearer.

⁴ Each of the conversational segments is followed by a rough English translation. The transcription notation used for this paper was adapted from Atkinson & Heritage (1984) and Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson (1974).

((about two lines omitted))

→ 5 F: "I see. Then **I believe you should do some preparation** till then."

6 S: "You're right. I should."

As the son tells his father that his tutor will come at two, the father produces a *keyss*-utterance in line 5, by which he suggests that the son should prepare for his lesson. Here what the father does with the *keyss*-utterance is to show that he has incorporated the information provided by his son as the evidential basis of the judgment he makes 'on the spot'. In this way, he shows that the information about the tutor's arrival time is now shared between them through his collaborative act of 'noticing' the information and using it as a basis of his judgment.

Note that the use of *keyss* provides the father with a solid ground for formulating his judgment as an indirect way of 'giving a directive' to his son, i.e., as a prompt leading him to study. This would be a very efficient way of giving a directive because, since the father formulates his judgment on the basis of an apparently shared source of information, his judgment is likely to be accepted by the son. In this sense, *keyss* enables the father to give the directive from a 'shared' perspective, and not surprisingly, the son accepts it (line 6).

On the basis of these observations, the epistemic function of *keyss* can be accounted for as follows. First, *keyss*-marked judgment displays the speaker's presuppositional endorsement of a fully shared source of information provided in the immediate context. Second, *keyss*, by virtue of marking the speaker's judgment as being based on some shared source of information, evokes an interactive process in which the hearer's attention is intensely drawn to the speaker's judgment and/or its source of information. Third, with the source of information being shared, and with the speaker's judgment grounded on the shared understanding, the speaker solicits and achieves the hearer's uptake of the action being constituted by his *keyss*-marked utterance. The formulation of the speaker's judgment as a shared one, or as something that can be reasonably shared by the hearer, offers the speaker the means to initiate an action *from the hearer's (or a shared) perspective* and solicit a collaborative uptake.⁵ The 'presuppositional' sense of intersubjectivity initially indexed by *keyss* is thus procedurally fulfilled and interactively constructed as an 'achieved' state of intersubjectivity by the hearer's immediate co-orientational move and collaborative uptake.

⁵ While the hearer's response is likely to be a collaborative one, it may problematize the speaker's judgment or its source of information. Either in agreement or in disagreement, its responsive force is likely to be intense by virtue of the fact that the speaker of *keyss* has presuppositionally asserted that his/her judgment and/or its source of information is something to be agreed to and shared by the hearer. In general, we can say that there are three aspects of the use of *keyss* to which the hearer may be oriented as a target domain to deal with subsequently: the speaker's judgment, its source of information, or the action upshot of the *keyss*-utterance, i.e., the subsequent action that it initiates.

These interactional features of *keyss* are also observed in example (5). In this telephone conversation, the participants (a student, S, and her professor, P) are deciding on the most convenient time for S to visit P's office. *Keyss*-utterances are found in lines 36, 46, and 48. These *keyss*-utterances are produced while P and S are considering several options in the course of setting the appointment time:

(5) (P & S)

- 30 P: *ah (.) uh:: ama sipi il -un com (kuleh -ta)*
DM probably twelve day-TOP a little like that-DECL
31 *sipsam ilnal nay-ka mikwuk ka-ketun,*
thirteen day I -NOM U.S. go-INFORM

((several lines omitted))

- 36 S: *e::ng .hhh kulem pappu-si -keyss -kwun-a::*
yes then busy -HONOR-MOD-IR -IE
37 *kulemyen sipkwu il -ccum::,*
then nineteen day-around
38 P: *kulehkey ha-lkka?*
like that do-SUGG

((several lines omitted))

- 45 S: *.hhh em:: () mwe ku cen -ey mwe*
DM what that before-LOC what

- 46 *mili yenlak-ul mos tuli -keyss -ney-yo,*
in advance call -ACC not able give-MOD-FR-POL
47 *kyoswunim-i an kyesi-nikka,*
professor -NOM NEG exist-REASON

- 48 P: *e ku -ttay -n kule -keyss -kwun-a ko cwu -nun*
DM that-time-TOP like that-MOD-IR -IE that week-TOP
49 *ko cwu -nun.*
that week-TOP

- 50 S: *kulemyen-un assali sam wel isip il il -ccum -ey:,*
then -TOP completely three month twenty one day-around-

LOC

[English version]

- 30-31 P: "Oh, uh:: I don't think the 12th is the right time, because I'm going to the U.S. on the 13th."

((several lines omitted))

- 36-37 S: "I see. .hhh Then **you'll probably be busy**. Then, how about sometime around the 19th?"

- 38 P: "Shall we meet that day, then?"

((several lines omitted))

- 43-47 S: "**I probably won't be able to reach you before then** since you'll be out of the country."

- 48-49 P: “Oh yeah, **you’re probably right**. You probably won’t be able to contact me that week.”
- 50-51 S: “Then how about this. Around March 21st...”

In the context preceding this fragment, the student proposed the 12th as a candidate day of appointment, but in lines 30 and 31, the professor says that that day is not such a good time because he is scheduled to leave for the U.S. the next day. On the basis of this remark, S, in line 36, produces a *keyss*-utterance by which she expresses her inference that he may be busy on that day and not available for appointment (“You’ll probably be busy.”).

It is important to note here that what *keyss* indexes in line 36 is the sense in which S has ‘noticed’ and formulated P’s schedule presented in the immediately preceding context as the shared focus of joint attention and as the basis of her judgment. By doing so, S displays that she has made her judgment on the basis of her intersubjectively shared understanding of P’s schedule, thus expressing a highly collaborative and empathetic attitude toward P.

As in example (4), it is important to point out that this co-orientational shift marked by *keyss* serves to provide a common ground for the participants to engage in a subsequent action. Note that S’s *keyss*-utterances in lines 36 and 46 provide a ground for the joint action of ‘withdrawing’ the proposal made earlier; S uses *keyss* as she withdraws the proposal she has made on the basis of the shared understanding of P’s itinerary. We also find that P uses *keyss* in line 48 to affirm S’s judgment and, by doing so, formulates the withdrawing of the prior proposal as a joint, collaborative act. These utterances mark the boundary at which the participants discard an option and proceed to consider another on the basis of mutual agreement.

It should be noted in passing that *keyss* is frequently used with sentence-final modal particles such as *-kwun* (a marker of inference-based realization) or *-ney* (a marker of factual realization), as shown in lines 36, 46, and 48 in example (5) and in line 5 in example (4). The particle *-kwun* is used for marking the proposition as the inference that the speaker has newly made (Lee 1991), and the particle *-ney* for marking the proposition as the information that the speaker has realized on the basis of some factual evidence (Lee 1991, Choi 1995). Note that these sentence-ending particles are not compatible with *(u)lkes*, the competing modal form of *keyss*:

- (6) *pappu-si-keyss-kwun-a* / **-lke-kwun-a*. “Then, you’ll probably be busy.”
- (7) *mili yenlak-ul mos tuli-keyss-ney-yo* / **-lke-ney-yo*, “I probably won’t be able to reach you before then”

As for *(u)lkes*, there is no sense of sharedness. The source of information for *(u)lkes* exclusively belongs to the integral part of the speaker’s own knowledge, and hence is not compatible with modal particles like *-kwun* and *-ney*. The fact that *-kwun* or *-ney* is compatible with *keyss*, therefore, supports the observation

that the source of evidence for *keyss* lies in the immediately preceding context and is immediately perceived on the spot as the source of judgment.

2. Enactment function of *keyss*

As we have noted in examples (4) and (5), the display of an achieved state of co-orientation and joint attention tends to provide a basis for soliciting a collaborative uptake from the hearer in the context of involving the hearer in the current action. In this respect, the hearer is often sequentially invited to make an interpersonal commitment and collaborative adjustment to the action constituted by the *keyss*-marked utterance. Consider an imaginary situation where the participants are in a hurry to leave:

- (8) *nuc-keyss-ta*. "We'll be late." ((hurrying up))

By using *keyss*, the speaker establishes their current situation as the focus of joint attention and on the basis of this shared ground presents his/her epistemic judgment that they may be late. Note that the action constituted by this *keyss*-utterance is an indirect form of suggestion or a 'warning', which is likely to solicit some kind of uptake from the hearer. From the shared perspective, the hearer, for example, is invited to make an orientational shift or readjustment toward terminating whatever he/she is doing at the moment or toward finding another means of reaching their destination on time. If we use *(u)lkes* instead of *keyss* here, such an enactment function will be lost, and there will be no sense of the hearer being invited to make some responsive action. Formulated with *(u)lkes*, the utterance would turn into an information-giving statement, which does not evoke any immediate action.

Such an enactment function of *keyss* is saliently observed where *keyss* marks speaker-oriented modality. Imagine a situation where a pastor says the following to the congregation during a church service:

- (9) *kito-ha-si-keyss-supnita*. "You will pray. (= Let's pray.)" ((getting ready to pray))

In (9), the *keyss*-utterance performs a special type of 'announcement' action, which evokes interpersonal commitment for the hearers to make a collaborative adjustment to the action being initiated by the speaker. For example, this *keyss*-utterance will be followed by the participants' subsequent action of joining the pastor in prayer, taking the praying posture and getting themselves ready to pray. In this sense, the speaker of *keyss* is making an announcement to which a prompt adjustment and display of co-orientation is sequentially evoked on the part of the hearers (Suh & Kim 1995).⁶

⁶ As the English translations of these *keyss*-utterances suggest, *keyss* as a speaker-oriented modal marking the speaker's intention to act displays features similar to those of *will* in English, which,

3. *keyss* as acknowledgment marker

On the basis of the preceding analysis of *keyss*, we will move on to examine a context in which *kyess*-utterances are used as an acknowledgment marker displaying the speaker's commitment to undertaking a particular action.⁷ Consider example (10), which shows a segment of a wired telephone conversation in which A, a military general, is receiving orders from his superior officer, B. In line 2, A uses *keyss* with an action verb ("I will do as you have directed.") in acknowledging B's order. In line 54, he uses *keyss* with the verb of cognition *al-ta* 'to know' in acknowledging B's order ("I understand."). In line 56, *keyss* is also used as the speaker initiates the closing of the conversation in earnest, conveying the meaning "I will hang up now.":

(10) (Military Generals)

((B has been giving a series of orders to A.))

1 B: *tasi hanpen hwakin -ul hay-cwu-sey -yo.*
again once confirmation-ACC do -give -HONOR-POL

→ 2 A: *kulehkey ha-keyss-supnita.*
like that do -MOD-FPOL

((about 50 lines omitted))

53 B: *nay mal kaciko-to an toy -pnita.*
my language with -also NEG become-FPOL

→ 54 A: *al -keyss-supnita.*
know-MOD-FPOL

55 B: *ko -kes -man hwakin -hay-cwu-sey -yo.*
that-thing-only confirmation-do -give-HONOR-POL

→ 56 A: *tul -e -ka-keyss-supnita.*
go in-CONN-go-MOD-FPOL

57 B: *O.K.*

58 A: *tul -e -ka-si -psio.*
go in-CONN-go-HONOR-FPROP

59 B: *Thank you.*

60 A: *yey.*
Yes

[English version]

((B has been giving a series of orders to A.))

1 B: "Please confirm it one more time."

→ 2 A: "I will do as you have directed."

as Gee & Savasir (1985) aptly observe, are associated with the activity type of 'undertaking'.

⁷ It should be noted that this type of *keyss*-utterance indexes a high degree of formality and politeness. This would be attributable to the interactive process in which the speaker displays a collaborative orientation toward complying with the hearer and/or soliciting the hearer's interpersonally committed permission to allow him/her to initiate the action (see discussion below).

((about 50 lines omitted))

- 53 B: "You can't override it, not even with my order."
 → 54 A: "**I understand.**"
 55 B: "Please make sure that you confirm the order no matter what."
 → 56 A: "**I'll go in** (=I'll hang up now)."
 57 B: "O.K."
 58 A: "Please go in (=Please hang up now)."
 59 B: "Thank you."
 60 A: "Yes."

In these *keyss*-utterances, A acknowledges B's order and shows his intention to undertake the order as directed. By using *keyss*, the speaker shows that his intention to act or his cognitive shift is the outcome of his collaborative adjustment to the interlocutor's order in the preceding context. The interlocutor's order is 'affirmed' as the source of his new realization and his subsequent action.

This explains why *keyss*-utterances are often used as 'compliance' to commands. Here *keyss* goes beyond marking the receipt of the information and presents the speaker's collaborative intention as a 'reassurance'. Just like other *keyss* utterances we have examined above, these *keyss*-utterances furnish the participants with the common ground on which the participants intersubjectively affirm the receipt of the order and proceed to address themselves to the next order.

The use of *keyss* with such cognitive verbs as 'know' or 'don't know', as in "I understand." or "I don't understand.", is often perceived as a puzzle to learners of Korean as a foreign language. Actually, there does not seem to be any plausible motivation to use *keyss* when the speaker shows that he has understood the other's point. Consider example (11), which reintroduces lines 53 and 54 in example (10). Here *keyss* is compared with (*u*)*lkes*, and also with the perfective particle *ass* (*al-ass-supnita*. "I understand."), which is often used as an acknowledgment marker in conversation:

(11) B: *nay mal kaciko-to an toy-pnita*. "You can't override it, not even with my order."

A: *al-keyss-supnita*. /**al-lke-pnita*. /*al-ass-supnita*. "I understand."

First note that the use of (*u*)*lkes* in this context is out. As a marker of the information belonging to the speaker's exclusive knowledge, it is not compatible with the context where the speaker acknowledges the information provided by the interlocutor.

The perfective *ass*-utterance could be used here instead of *keyss*. However, the *ass*-utterance simply registers the fact that the speaker has received a piece of information from the interlocutor and understood it. What is missing in the *ass*-utterance is the speaker's displayed adjustment of the cognitive state and collaborative orientation toward the interlocutor's order. Compared with the *keyss*-utterance, the *ass*-utterance only marks the receipt of the information,

lacking the sense in which the speaker is interpersonally committed to undertaking the action as directed. It may be for this reason that the *keyss*-utterance is viewed as a more polite expression than the *ass*-utterance.

Now it is important to note that the *keyss*-utterance in line 54 in example (10) is used as a pre-closing signal, which leads to the initiation of the closing segment of the telephone conversation. As Schegloff and Sacks (1973) observe, the function of a pre-closing signal is to show that the speaker has nothing more to say. By doing so, the speaker provides the hearer with the opportunity to agree to close the conversation or to bring up hitherto 'unmentioned mentionables', i.e., whatever the hearer has not had a chance to talk about. Note that A's *keyss*-marked pre-closing signal in line 54 does not lead the conversation to a close but is followed by B's repeated order and further reminder produced as an unmentioned mentionable on B's part. In this respect, note in line 56 that A produces another *keyss*-utterance as a pre-closing signal that the closing is imminent. This *keyss*-utterance, which has the literal meaning of "I'll go in.", is a particular type of formulaic expression signaling the speaker's intention to hang up. Note that this utterance does lead to the terminal exchanges (lines 57-60).

Given our description of the function of *keyss*, a *keyss*-utterance would be a nice candidate for a pre-closing signal, because, by using *keyss*, the speaker can express his negotiable intention to terminate the call and invite the hearer to establish the act of terminating the conversation as a joint action. In this case, the subsequent action which *keyss* provides the basis for would be 'terminating the conversation'.

4. Conclusions

The analysis of *keyss* we have presented here touches on an important aspect of the ways in which expressions of modality are inherently associated with the organization of discourse contexts. *Keyss*, either as a speaker-oriented modal or as an epistemic modal, has the sequential function of showing the listener that a state of intersubjectivity has been or is to be achieved on the spot. Various interactional and sequential functions of *keyss* can be taken as deriving from the participants' collaborative adjustment and interpersonal commitment toward affirming such a state retroactively or prospectively.

It is important to note, in this respect, that the upshot of the *keyss*-utterance as an epistemic modal is not found in providing the speaker's judgment *per se*, but in providing the common ground for the hearer to *share the speaker's judgment and its source of information as a basis for executing some action (or joint action) from a shared perspective*. The kinds of action thus constituted will vary according to the context, which include such actions as displaying empathy, giving a directive, making a suggestion, giving a warning, teasing, joking, offering, etc. The interactional basis for these actions is provided by *keyss* evoking a sequential commitment of the hearer toward accepting the speaker's judgment whose source of information lies in some situational or emotional aspects noticeable and shareable by the hearer.

The state of achieved intersubjectivity and shared ground indexed by a *keyss*-utterance could be variably presented and dealt with by the interlocutors. While it is often affirmed and collaboratively responded to by the hearer, it may be contested or rejected. In either case, *keyss* evokes the pressure toward co-orientation and joint attention by virtue of indexing the speaker's strong intersubjective expectation of a collaborative uptake (e.g., a display of strong empathy) and thus often invites an affectively intensive response (e.g., wholehearted support/approval, inquisitive repair-initiator, or a firm denial). This feature makes *keyss* a resourceful means of making comments and generating topics in a highly interactive fashion. In the process, the hearer is involved as a partner whose solicited contribution to the current action makes the action a mutually affirmed one impinging upon both parties (cf. Gee 1985, Gee & Savasir 1985). Explicating these various kinds of specific actions performed by *keyss* and their sequential configurations would be an interesting research topic for a follow-up study.

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Kyung-Hee Suh
Department of English
Hankuk University of Foreign Studies
270 Imun-Dong, Dongdaemun-Gu
Seoul 130-791, Korea

E-mail: ksuh@maincc.hufs.ac.kr

Kyu-hyun Kim
School of English
Kyung Hee University,
1 Hoegi-Dong, Dongdaemun-Gu
Seoul 130-701, Korea

E-mail: khkim@nms.kyunghee.ac.kr