

# Semantic evidence for the non-compositional nature of the echo question marker *tako* in Korean

Seoyeon Jang | UC San Diego Linguistics | 2024 LSA Annual Meeting  
 ✉ s7jang@ucsd.edu 🏠 seoyeonjang.github.io

## Objectives

- To **semantically examine** the traditional morpho-syntactic assumption that the Korean echo question marker **다고 tako** is compositional.
- To argue that it should be analyzed as a **non-compositional atomic unit**.

## Background on Echo Questions (EQs)

**EQs**: a type of interrogative clause that conveys a question whose answer needs confirming or repeating **what has been previously said**, by partially or fully copying a previously uttered sentence. [1], [2], [5], [6], [15], [16], a.o.

🇰🇷 Korean (SOV, a clause-final marker required in every clause)  
 The **clause-final marker & final rise** (↑, H% tone<sup>[10]</sup>) distinguish EQ vs. ordinary questions (OQs)

1 제니는 어디에 갔니?  
 Jennie-nun eti-ey ka-ss-**ni**?  
 Jennie-TOP where-to go-PST-Q  
 'Where did Jennie go?'

2 제니는 한라산에 갔어.  
 Jennie-nun Hallasan-ey ka-ss-**e**.  
 Jennie-TOP Hallasan-to go-PST-DECL  
 'Jennie went to Mt. Halla.'

3 제니는 어디에 갔**다고**↑?  
 Jennie-nun eti-ey ka-ss-**tako**↑?  
 Jennie-TOP where-to go-PST-EQ  
 'Jennie went to WHERE?'

## Use of clause-final markers **다 ta**, **고 ko**, and **↑** in clauses other than EQs

**다 ta** → λp<st>.p : identity function over propositions

S	O-/+WH	V	<b>-다 ta</b>	↓: declarative [neutral] ↑: declarative [extra discourse effect] <sup>[12]</sup>
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**고 ko** → λp<st>/<stt>:∃q<st>/<stt>[uttered(q) ∧ R(p, q)].p : discourse conjunction & presupposition

#(a preceding sentence) <sup>[13], [17]</sup>	S	O-/+WH	V	<b>-고 ko</b>	↓: declarative ↑: polar OQ
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**The rise ↑** : no association with a particular interpretation

S	O-/+WH	V	clause-final marker	↑: declarative / polar OQ
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**다고 tako without ↑** : no EQ interpretation

S	O-/+WH	V	<b>-다고 tako</b>	↓: declarative [extra speaker attitude] <sup>[4]</sup>
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scan me for the full set of examples

## Proposal

Deriving the meaning of EQ 'Jennie went WHERE?' by **다 ta + 고 ko + ↑**:

<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">제니는 Jennie-nun Jennie-TOP</td> <td style="padding: 5px;">어디에 eti-ey where-to</td> <td style="padding: 5px;">갔 ka-ss go-PST</td> <td style="padding: 5px;">→ λp∃x.[place'(x) ∧ p = λw.went'(w, m, x)] (type &lt;stt&gt;)<sup>[8], [11]</sup></td> </tr> </table>	제니는 Jennie-nun Jennie-TOP	어디에 eti-ey where-to	갔 ka-ss go-PST	→ λp∃x.[place'(x) ∧ p = λw.went'(w, m, x)] (type <stt>) <sup>[8], [11]</sup>	<p>✗</p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;"><b>-다</b> <b>-ta</b> <b>-TA</b></td> <td style="padding: 5px;">→ λp.p (type &lt;st,st&gt;)</td> </tr> </table>	<b>-다</b> <b>-ta</b> <b>-TA</b>	→ λp.p (type <st,st>)	<p>✗</p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;"><b>-고</b> <b>-ko</b> <b>-KO</b></td> <td style="padding: 5px;">→ λp:[uttered(q) ∧ R(p, q)].p (type &lt;st,st&gt; or &lt;stt, stt&gt;)</td> </tr> </table>	<b>-고</b> <b>-ko</b> <b>-KO</b>	→ λp:[uttered(q) ∧ R(p, q)].p (type <st,st> or <stt, stt>)	<p>→ Impossible 😞</p>
제니는 Jennie-nun Jennie-TOP	어디에 eti-ey where-to	갔 ka-ss go-PST	→ λp∃x.[place'(x) ∧ p = λw.went'(w, m, x)] (type <stt>) <sup>[8], [11]</sup>								
<b>-다</b> <b>-ta</b> <b>-TA</b>	→ λp.p (type <st,st>)										
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## Existing semantic analyses of EQs

Two families of existing semantic analyses of EQs:

- 1 EQs = OQs**

  - Discourse-pragmatics** tells it's an EQ by means of
    - Presupposition<sup>[7]</sup> / focus<sup>[1]</sup> / contextually restricted Question Under Discussion<sup>[3]</sup>
  - 🙄 The discourse-pragmatic content in **고 ko** doesn't state that the previous utterance must be the answer.

**2 EQs ≠ OQs**

  - Semantics** tells it's an EQ by means of...
    - Echoed wh-word denotation(≠ ordinary wh-word)<sup>[6], [16]</sup>/ specialized covert C<sup>[6], [16]</sup> / a new semantic relation<sup>[5]</sup>
  - 🙄 **Neither 다 ta nor 고 ko** bears any of the above.

## Conclusion

**다고↑ tako↑**: a **non-decomposable unit** marking EQs in contemporary Korean from a synchronic perspective.

- The precise semantic and pragmatic contents should be assigned to it.

## Future research

- Whether there is an influence of historical development
- Whether Korean has other 'chunky' clause-final markers that are seemingly compositional but semantically non-compositional

[1] Artstein, Ron. 2002. A focus semantics for echo questions. [2] Banfield, Ann. 1982. Unspeakable sentences: Narration and representation in the language of fiction. [3] Biezma, Maria, Bettina Braun & Angela James. 2021. Prosody is adding what? echo questions are not a thing. [4] Chae, Sookhee. 2019. Types of sentence-final '-tako' and reported evidentiality. [5] Comorovski, Ileana. 1996. Interrogative phrases and the syntax-semantics interface. [6] Dayal, Veneeta. 1996. Locality in wh quantification: questions and relative clauses in Hindi. [7] Jang, Seoyeon & Ivano Caponigro. 2022. A semantic analysis for Korean echo questions. [8] Hamblin, Charles Leonard. 1973. Questions in Montague English. [9] Jun, Sun-Ah & Mira Oh. 1996. A prosodic analysis of three types of wh-phrases in Korean. [10] Jun, Sun-Ah. 2005. Korean intonational phonology and prosodic transcription. [11] Karttunen, Lauri. 1977. Syntax and Semantics of Questions. [12] Kim, Hye Ri Stephanie. 2010. A high boundary tone as a resource for a social action: The Korean sentence-ender -ta. [13] Kim, Mary Shin. 2015. A distinct declarative question design in Korean conversation: an examination of turn-final ko questions. [14] Lee, Hyeran. 2010. Echo questions in Korean. [15] Noh, Eun-Ju. 1995. A pragmatic approach to echo questions. [16] Sudo, Yasutada. 2010. Metalinguistic semantics for echo questions. [17] Yeon, Jaehoon & Lucien Brown. 2019. Korean: a comprehensive grammar. | Illustrations: <https://www.irasutoya.com/>