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Comment Markers in Spoken English in Korea

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The present study examines the use of four categories of comment markers among Korean speakers of English, a category of grammatical items whose use is prompted by pragmatic factors, using the data from the elicited conversation in English. Previous research on comment markers has suggested that comment markers are more frequent in the Inner Circle varieties than in the Outer Circle varieties and that there are systematic differences in the distribution of comment markers between Kachru's Inner and Outer Circles. Since English is learned and used as an important foreign language in Korea, Korean society which belongs to the Expanding Circle is a suitable context for research on world Englishes and English as a lingua franca as well. Findings from the data analysis indicate that the use of comment markers among Korean speakers of English displays similar features with that of the Outer Circle varieties of English, especially East Asian varieties. Epistemic markers constitute the most sizable subcategory and the frequency of hearsay markers are relatively high raking the second in the data. The implications of the findings for the stylistic preferences and areal co-patterning are suggested. This paper contributes to the body of comment markers across the world Englishes.

[comment marker/world Englishes/Inner Circle/Outer Circle/Expanding Circle]

I. INTRODUCTION

Defined as grammatical items whose use is induced by pragmatic factors, comment markers are treated as subcategories of the functional-grammatical category of adverbials or adjuncts (Collins, 2022). Comment markers, therefore, are considered to lie on grammar-pragmatics interface (Brinton, 1996, 2008; Fraser, 1997; Unuabonah & Gut, 2018). In the reference grammar of English (Biber, et al., 1999; Huddleston & Pullum, 2002), they have

been demonstrated to play supplementary role within the sentence serving to comment upon the propositional content or the speech act itself being performed. More recent research (Aijmer, 2015; Aijmer & Simon-Vandenbergen, 2011; Butler, 2008) treat comment marker as a subclass of discourse-pragmatic markers due to their interpersonal functions and parenthetical procedural nature. Though meaning of comment markers, Brinton (2008) further argues, is mainly concerned with commenting upon the proposition over which they have scope, it also pertains to the speakers' attitudes toward the interactional relation at the point.

For their forms and functions, comment markers have been demonstrated to be versatile since they indicate metapragmatic awareness and interpersonal relation (Brinton, 2008). The majority of research, however, has focused on comment markers in monolingual Anglophone context or the difference in the forms and frequencies of comment markers between L1 and L2 varieties of English from the world English perspective. The use of comment markers is understudied aspect in EFL context or ELF interaction such as English in Korea, suggesting that its potential remains largely untapped. This gap, therefore, offers a rationale for the current study. This study examines the frequencies and uses of four categories of comment markers in spoken English among Korean speakers and compares the results with those in the Inner Circle and the Outer Circle varieties.

The present study may contribute to variational pragmatics (Schneider & Barron, 2008) which involves the systematic analysis of patterns of social pragmatic variation across dialects or sub-varieties of a language. The application of this relatively new branch of pragmatics to the varieties of English across the world has been facilitated by the compilation of large-scaled corpora representing varieties of English (Collins, 2022). Though the data analysis in this study is based on small sized elicited conversation not a large sized corpus which represents the varieties of English used in Korean society, this study may also give some insights the field of variational pragmatics by providing an analysis of comment markers in the little-described spoken discourse among Korean speakers of English as an Expanding Circle context.

World Englishes theorizing and modelling can get meaningful pointers from the discourse-pragmatic scope and it would be highly advisable to see more inclusion of this area in the study of world Englishes. While morpho-syntatic features also play an important role in investigating variations across varieties of English, expanding this realm to features such as comment markers as a type of discourse-pragmatic markers and politeness strategies is highly likely to result in new impetus for the fields of variational pragmatics and world Englishes as well due to them being frequently overlooked in language classroom environment.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. In chapter one, four subcategories of comment markers are introduced and exemplified. Chapter two also presents the models of

world Englishes and reviews literatures on comment markers across the varieties of English. Chapter three outlines the methodology for the study. Chapter four presents and discusses the findings of the study. Chapter five provides the conclusion.

II. COMMENT MARKERS

1. Comment Markers

The categories and labels of comment markers, and differing types of delineation between the categories vary in the literature. Fraser (1997) presents six categories of comment markers: 'assessment', 'evidential', 'style', 'perlocutionary', 'mitigation', and 'emphasis'. Based largely on Fraser's taxonomy, Unuabonah and Gut (2018) recognize five categories: 'emphasis', 'assessment', 'evidential', 'manner', and 'hearsay'. Quirk et al. (1985) present four categories: 'value judgement of content', 'conditions for truth of content', 'modality', and 'respect'.

TABLE1
Comment Markers Labels (Collins, 2022)

Authors	Subcategories of Comment Markers			
Biber et al. (1999)	Attitudinal	Epistemic	Style of speaking	N/A
Collins (2022)	Evaluative	Epistemic	Style	Hearsay
Fraser (1997)	Assessment	Evidential	Manner of speaking	N/A
Huddleston & Pulllum (2002)	Evaluative	Modal	Speech act-related	N/A
Quirk et al. (1985)	Content: value judgement of content	Content: conditions for truth of content	Style: modality & manner	N/A
Unuabonah & Gut (2018)	Assessment	Evidential	Manner of speaking	Hearsay

Table 1 above from Collins (2022) presents a representative set of labels for categories of comment markers. Based primarily on the comprehensive set of comment markers in Unuabonah and Gut (2018), Collins (2022) recognizes four categories: 'evaluative', 'epistemic', 'style', and 'hearsay'. The category 'hearsay' is only recognized by Collins (2022) and Unuabonah and Gut (2018). This study, adopting the taxonomy of Collins (2022), recognizes four categories of comment markers. The four subcategories of comment markers and the list of the members of each subcategory are summarized in Table 2 below.

TABLE 2
Comment Marker Subcategories and Examples

Subcategories	Examples
Evaluative	hopefully, importantly, inevitably, ideally, rightly, thankfully, fortunately, sadly
Epistemic	perhaps, maybe, possibly, obviously, probably, seemingly, supposedly, surely, I think, I don't think, I know, I don't know, I believe, I suppose, I guess, I hope, I'm sure, I'm not sure
Style	generally, honestly, personally, seriously, briefly
Hearsay	it appears, allegedly, reportedly, I hear, I heard, it is said, they say

1) Evaluative markers: express the speakers' assessment or evaluation of the proposition as in (1), (2), (3) and (4).

(1) **Hopefully**, I can make it and move on this year.
(2) **Fortunately**, that did not happen to me and my family.
(3) **Thankfully**, my teacher gave me every convenience for the exam.
(4) **Sadly**, all of us may not avoid the blame for being irresponsible.

In many occurrences involving an evaluative marker, an alternative construction with extraposition is available as in (4) compared to (2).

(5) It is fortunate that that did not happen to me and my family.

Evaluative markers can only be used in declaratives because the clause over which they have scope presents factual information (Collins, 2022). When they are used with negative clause, evaluative markers take scope over clausal negation as seen in (2) above.

2) Epistemic markers: as the most commonly occurring category of comment markers (Biber et al., 1999), they are mainly used to express epistemic modality, indicating the speaker's confidence in and commitment to the truth of proposition uttered (Collins, 2022). In example (6) below, 'obviously' expresses the speaker's commitment to the truth of the proposition 'They are enjoying the current situation'. In (7), 'seemingly' also conveys the speaker's commitment to the proposition being uttered.

(6) They are **obviously** enjoying the current situation.
(7) He is **seemingly** controlling every member of the committee.

According to the degrees of strength of the speaker's conviction, Huddleston and Pullum (2002) divided epistemic markers into four: strong, quasi-strong, medium, and weak. Strong modal adjuncts commit the speaker to the truth of proposition ('obviously', 'surely', 'undoubtedly'). Quasi-strong ones imply a limited acceptance of the proposition as the speaker makes presumption ('evidently', 'presumably'). Medium ones express some degree of doubt as to the truth of the proposition, but rate the chance of its being true as greater than even ('arguably', 'probably'). Finally, weak one signals that its chances of being true are in the range of from slight to even, though the proposition is not known to be false ('perhaps', 'possibly') (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002).

3) Style markers: relate to the speech act itself performed by the speaker or expected as a response, not to the proposition expressed in uttering the clause as shown in (8) and (9) below. They are, thus, regarded as more peripheral than other categories of comment markers (Collins, 2022). In (8), 'honestly' is a style marker commenting on the speech act itself ('I am being honest when I tell you this') and in (7) the listener is being requested to respond with seriousness. Style markers with this usage occur only in sentence-initial position.

(8) **Honestly**, umm, teachers and students do not know how to communicate each other.
(9) **Seriously** what do you have in your mind?

4) Hearsay markers: signal that the proposition is the view of others not the speaker, thereby absolving the speaker of responsibility of the proposition uttered. Though some taxonomies (Biber et al, 1999; Huddleston & Pullum, 2002) include hearsay markers in the epistemic ones due to the similarities of two types, hearsay markers evoke 'evidentiality' (Collins, 2022) distinguished from epistemic markers. 'they say', 'allegedly', and 'it appears' are commonly used as hearsay markers to ascribe the proposition uttered to an unspecified source as shown in (10) and (11).

(10) **They say** Joe Biden won't the election this time.
(11) **It appears** that people in modern society confuse reality and fiction, and cannot distinguish which one is real and which one is the other.

2. Comment Markers and World Englishes

While comment markers have been extensively studied in L1 varieties of English, they have not been considerably dealt with in the World Englishes paradigm except Unuabonah and Gut (2018)'s study on comment markers in Nigerian English as an Outer Circle variety and Collins' (2022) extensive study which analyzed comment markers in both Inner Circle

and Outer Circle varieties of English across the world. As one of the influential models of world Englishes, Schneider's (2003, 2007) dynamic model accounts for the formation and historical development of different Englishes. The dynamic model identifies the process of identity construction and linguistic developments at five stages of development; foundation, exonormative stabilization, nativization, endonormative stabilization, and differentiation. While Kachru's (1985) three concentric circle is synchronic, Schneider's model is diachronic.

Based on the framework of Schneider's model, particulary, a number of studies reported that developmental stages are related to degrees of the target variety from the reference varieties, that is, British English and American English. Hundt (2018) and Schneider (2007) found that such divergence is more commonly shown in categories that belong to the periphery of grammar than those lying on the core of grammar. Comment markers definitely can be located in the periphery not in the core of grammar (Collins, 2022). Mair (2013), on the contrary, focuses on hierarchical interrelations between varieties of English. Mair views shifts in normative orientation between varieties of English and points that the most significant shift is the development of American English into hyper-central hub variety.

Drawing on the three influential models of world Englishes aforementioned, Collins (2022) compares the frequencies and uses of four categories of comment markers across the 20 varieties of English represented in Global Web-based Corpus of English. Collins frame a set of research questions based on the predictions legitimized by each model. In his in-depth quantitative study, Collin's findings indicate a strong tendency for comment markers to be more frequent in the Inner Circle varieties than in the Outer Circle with an exception of hearsay markers. Collins suggests face-threatening aspect of comment markers as a possible explanation for the difference. There are speakers in the Outer Circle varieties who regard the speaker-intrusiveness of comment markers to be face-threatening, but tolerate hearsay markers which efface the intrusiveness (Collins, 2022). In his study, it is also revealed that the Inner Circle varieties show the strongest preference for epistemic markers, which are much more popular in the Inner Circle than the Outer Circle; arguably being the most prototypical comment markers so far, epistemic markers are less popular in the Outer Circle varieties; 'I think' is the most commonly used epistemic marker across all varieties, followed by 'I know'; weak epistemic markers are preferred in the Inner Circle, while strong ones are preferred more in the Outer Circle; hearsay markers are the only category where the Outer Circle varieties outscore the Inner Circle. Collins (2022) suggests that the preference for hearsay marker is most likely associated with their role in backgrounding the speaker in the extent of the speakers' exploitation of the resources of the proposition in the utterance.

The development of comment markers in language is reportedly attributed to the process of pragmaticalization (Brinton, 2008). Thus, they are susceptible to pragmatic variation across sub-varieties of English, since speakers' attitudes and aims in relation to the interaction can show cross-varietal variation. There have been studies focusing on the

discourse markers including comment markers among L1 and L2 speakers (Brinton, 2008; Butler, 2008; Collins, 2022; Mohr, 2021; Rüdiger, 2021b; Unuabonah & Gut, 2018; Unuabonah & Oladipupo, 2021), but the studies on discourse markers in Expanding Circle are rare, suggesting its potential remains largely untapped. Therefore, the description of comment markers as a subclass of discourse markers in Expanding Circle remains to be made.

The presence of English in Korea is omnipresent (Rüdiger, 2021b). English has been penetrated in many areas in Korean society. This concerns both the linguistic landscape and the education system (Tan & Tan, 2015). While English in Korea has been characterized as a foreign language unlike other countries in the Outer Circle, the salient role of English in Korea is evident in functional and attitudinal ranges that English has. (Park, 2009). Globalization has also played a significant role to the current status of English in Korea. English is positively adopted and re-signified by Koreans (Lee, 2006, 2011; Shim & Park, 2008). Therefore, to deal with English in Korea as just a learner language ignores the current status of English. Nonetheless, there has been few studies on the way English has been accepted and re-signified from a social and linguistic perspective. The pragmatic aspects of English used in Korea has received even less attention in world Englishes research except Min (2022, 2023) and (Mohr, 2021). The pragmatic aspects are particularly important in world Englishes research as they are not usually taught and learned in educational setting (Rüdiger, 2021b)

The contexts in which comment markers are used are notable for some reasons. First, comment markers have interpersonal and procedural functions (Aijmer, 2015) and indicate speaker's metapragmatic awareness. Second, they are powerful tool for achieving glocalization which refers to meeting the local needs in global context, and this is exactly applied to world Englishes. This study, thus, compares uses of four categories of comment markers among Korean speakers of English and takes a step in offering a first look at the potential research field. Since comment markers are usually not explicitly learned in the context of classroom in the Expanding Circle, the study of comment markers by L2 speakers in the Expanding Circle can have an insight into the acquisition of pragmatic competence (Muller, 2005).

III. METHODS

The data for the present study came from the elicited conversations in English. The participants talk about some topics of general interest given by the researcher, such as 'English as global language', 'Hallyu', and 'politicians and election'. The topics are chosen to elicit the expressions of feelings and personal opinions while the participants are in

argumentative discourse interaction. The participants are asked to exchange their opinions on the topics under discussion. The discussion lasted for about sixty minutes without the presence of the researcher. The conversation was tape-recorded in university setting. Eight female and six male speakers, with an average age of 33 (ranging from 25 to 47) participated in the discussion. All of the participants are native Korean speakers and highly educated. Six of the participants are professors and nine participants are graduate students in various majors. All professors got their doctoral degree in Anglophone countries and seven graduates reported having spent time in an Anglophone environment. The participants self-assessed their English proficiency in three domains: spoken production and listening, and interactional capacity. Their scores in all domains were averaged and the self-rated English proficiency ranges from medium high to high. As aforementioned, variation in discourse markers including comment markers has been understudied in the context of Expanding Circle. The current study, therefore, contributes some insight into the use and variation of comment markers in Expanding Circle varieties.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

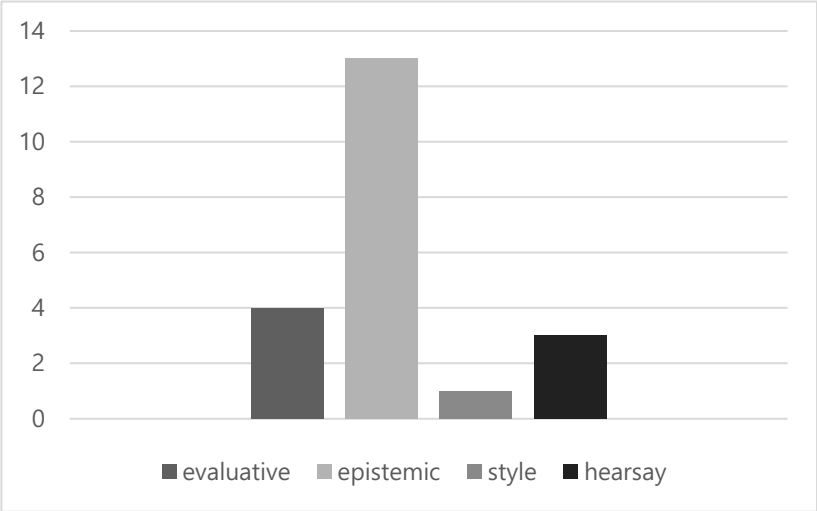
The quantitative findings of the study are presented and discussed. Figure 1 below show an overview of the four comment markers' frequencies from the data. Consider the findings for categories of comment markers, starting with epistemic markers.

1) Epistemic markers

As can be seen in Figure 1, epistemic markers constitute the most sizeable subcategory of comment markers in the data. They have the biggest frequencies. At the other extreme, style markers have the smallest frequencies. Epistemic markers have high numbers of occurrence (14 tokens) compared with the other three subcategories (evaluative four tokens, style one token, and hearsay four tokens). 'I think' is the most commonly used epistemic marker in the data (six), followed by 'I know' (four).

Functionally, 'I think' expresses agreement, shares personal experience, and also draws conclusions, thus it is quite versatile in L2 interaction rather than in L1 context (Baumgarten & House, 2010). Structurally, 'I think' in L2 English is used frequently as a main clause construction as in (12), (13), and (14).

FIGURE 1
Comment Markers Frequencies



(12) **I think** it's just people, I mean the people from different cultural background. This is so evident.

(13) **I think**, yes, **I think** we have to change ourselves first. Then, we can expect others to change too. It's very important. It is a matter of attitude.

(14) **I think** we need to deal with some issues of continuing education in an effort to develop our potentials.

The semantically similar 'maybe' and 'perhaps' occur once and twice each.

(15) Leaning a foreign language, **maybe**, is not a critical issue anymore in this globalized community.

(16) Yes, **perhaps**, the idea is too much stressful for youngsters.

There was one occurrence of 'obviously' used as a noun modifier not a comment marker as shown in (17). Therefore, it was not counted.

(17) Yes, I belong to obviously the older generation already. Ha! @

Epistemic markers, 'perhaps', 'maybe', 'probably', 'I think' and 'I know' all directly express degrees of epistemic modality.

The results show that Korean speakers of English prefer relatively strong epistemic markers such as 'I think' and 'I know'. This is consistent with Collin's (2022) study which

indicate a tendency for weak epistemic markers, such as ‘maybe’ and ‘perhaps’, to be preferred more in the Inner Circle varieties than the Outer Circle. Collins (2022) ascribes the results to a tendency for Inner Circle speakers to be generally less definite and categorical than Outer Circle speakers.

2) Evaluative markers

The frequency of evaluative markers in the data ranks the second. According to Collins (2022), the frequency of evaluative markers is greater in the Inner Circle as a whole, compared with in the Outer Circle. Unuabonah and Gut (2018) also reports an even stronger tendency of using evaluative markers in Inner Circle varieties, particularly British English. Collins (2022) suggests that the Inner Circle is leading the way over the Outer Circle in rising trajectory for evaluative markers. In the data of current study, comment markers appeared four times as shown in (18), (19), and (20) below.

(18) **Hopefully,** their service is very good enough.
(19) **Thankfully**, my colleagues and students … as well… are doing their jobs in their place.
(20) We have to face up the reality **rightly**, whatever it is or however it looks, in the journey in life, **inevitably**

There were occurrences of ‘sadly’ and ‘ideally’ used as a manner adjunct and a degree modifier, respectively as shown in (21) and (22). They were not used as comment markers, so they were excluded.

(21) One of my students sadly told me that she failed in exams.
(22) I agree that his long-cherished ambition has ideally been materialized if we accept the current situation.

3) Style markers

Style maker, ‘generally’, occurs once in the data. Compare (23), where ‘generally’ is a style marker commenting on the proposition, with (24), where ‘generally’ is used to modify the adjective.

(23) **Generally**, they perform in the huge sized stadium worldwide.
(24) We need… a, a politician **generally** esteemed, we all know this.

It occurs in sentence-initial position as other occurrences in both Inner Circle and Outer

Circle varieties are limited to those occurring in sentence-initial position. The result is in line with the findings of Collins (2022) which proved style markers are more popular in the Inner Circle than the Outer Circle.

4) Hearsay markers

Hearsay markers, as can be seen in Figure 1, ranks the second with the evaluative markers in the current data.

(25) **It seems that** K-culture, Hallyu is one of the most interesting phenomena, recently.
(26) **They say** that RM, right RM… is not only the best singer in the group but also a model young man for various reasons.
(27) **Reportedly**, leading the K-culture, the K-pop is another level in the pop world. But the thing is that K-culture, also Hallyu, and the K-pop are two different things.
(28) **The say**, Chat GPT and all, yes, all kinds of AI are leading all sorts of society. But as for me, well…, @ it is a sort of intolerable. Maybe, @ I am so outdated?

This result is consistent with that of the Outer Circle varieties of Collins (2022). While hearsay markers such as *they say*, show the declining tendency in Inner Circle varieties, they are more frequently used in the Outer Circle varieties of English (Collins, 2022). Hearsay markers are the only comment markers category where the Outer Circle varieties outscore the Inner Circle in Collins (2022). Given the declining tendency for hearsay markers category, Collins (2022) infers that the Inner Circle is leading this change. Compared with that of hearsay markers, the frequency of evaluative markers is much higher in the Inner Circle. In contrast, the number of occurrences of both hearsay markers and evaluative markers is same in the current study.

However, the question of why there should be a link between the practices of speakers avoiding the imposition of their opinion through the ascription of proposition uttered to an unknown source and varietal differences (Outer and Expanding Circles) is one that would repay further investigation. In contrast, as aforementioned above, Korean speakers of English prefer relatively strong epistemic markers such as ‘I think’ and ‘I know’. This means Korean speakers of English tend to express their opinion or assessment quite directly. Unuabonah and Gut (2018) explain the high frequency of hearsay markers in Nigerian English which belong to the Outer Circle is relevant to the Nigerian socio-cultural norm and the long-lasting oral traditions in countries like Nigeria and Jamaica.

The insights that this study offers into the relative importance of the four categories of comment markers may be inferred like that in English used by Korean speakers, epistemic markers are the most frequently occurring category of comment markers followed by

evaluative and hearsay markers, and finally style markers. This ordering is different from that of Inner Circle varieties (Collins, 2022) in which style markers and evaluative markers rank the second and third, and finally hearsay markers.

In both Inner Circle and Outer Circle varieties, according to Collins (2022) and Unuabonah and Gut (2018), epistemic markers have the biggest frequencies, and hearsay markers have the smallest frequencies. The present study shows that the high frequency of epistemic markers in Korea is align with that of the two previous studies and that the various means for expressing epistemic modality including pragmatic markers, and auxiliary and lexical verbs are a fundamental resource in the English used in Korea as well as the Inner Circle and Outer Circle varieties. However, hearsay markers show different tendency in this study. In their studies (Collins, 2022; Unuabonah & Gut, 2018), hearsay markers have the smallest frequencies, while epistemic markers have the biggest frequencies in the Inner Circle and Outer Circle.

Collins (2022) and Unuabonah and Gut (2018) confirm a tendency for comment markers to be used more commonly in more informal genres, their corpus being broadcast interviews, business transaction, and blogs. Undoubtedly these genres have higher level of informality than other genres such general prose. Biber et al. (1999) supports this claim by presenting high frequencies of epistemic and style adverbials and suggests that this is consistent with the general features of conversational interaction which convey subjective information focusing on interpersonal relation.

As Collins (2022) indicates, there is a strong tendency for comment markers to be more frequent in the Inner Circle varieties than in the Outer Circle, the only exception being hearsay markers. In the same line, Gilquin (2015) shows the overall lower use of discourse markers in English as L2 varieties of English. A possible explanation suggested by Collins (2022) for the Inner Circle vs. Outer Circle difference is that there are some speakers in the Outer Circle who find the speaker-intrusiveness of comment markers to be face-threatening, but embrace the hearsay makers and that their first language may be another factor in using comment markers in English. Then relatively high frequency of comment markers in the current study may be explained in the same perspective.

Non-native speakers of English in the Expanding Circle as well as the Outer Circle may consider the speaker-centeredness of comment markers to be possibly face-threatening, and, by contrast, embrace the hearsay markers which imply that the view of others in be quoted not the speakers. The ascription of the proposition uttered to an unspecified source by using hearsay makers such as ‘they say’, the speaker may avoid the responsibility for the proposition and, at the same time, exercise linguistic politeness by saving face. This tendency is possibly affected by Korean language and Korean culture in which speakers in conversational interaction seek to save face via linguistic politeness of using a resource that enables speakers to deferentially distract attention from themselves.

The relative preference for hearsay markers by Korean speakers is most likely associated with their role in backgrounding the speaker's role in the utterance as in the Outer Circle varieties (Collins, 2022). Their strongest preference for epistemic markers, according to Collins (2022), may be ascribable to the more abstract nature of epistemic modality whose assessment based on aspects of the situation given in the proposition. On the other hand, evaluative markers are based on its likelihood of occurrence and style makers are on the nature of the speech act itself.

V. CONCLUSION

This study has examined the frequencies of comment markers, a category of grammatical items whose use is induced by pragmatic factors in Korean speakers of English. Four categories of comment markers were compared. Compared with the study of Collins (2022), the findings of the study indicate that the similar tendency was noted for comment markers in Korean speakers of English with that of the Inner Circle varieties except hearsay markers, whose relative frequency shows similarity with that of the Outer Circle varieties. The relative preference for hearsay markers is due to their role in backgrounding the speaker's role in the proposition uttered. The comment markers in Korean speakers evidence the strongest preference for epistemic markers, which differ from other three subcategories in that they are used to assess the likelihood of occurrence of the situation given in the proposition. They form a part of overall spoken English repertoire of Korean speakers.

According to Collins (2022), American English, the dominant variety of in the Inner Circle varieties, and also overall for all comment markers except hearsay marker type, has a strong claim to central status in English worldwide. In the main Outer Circle varieties, the preference for evaluative, style, and epistemic markers was consistently expressed. The findings of the study show that the use of comment markers in Korean speakers of English is similar to that in the Inner Circle varieties, especially American variety of English with hearsay markers being only exception. Comment markers as one categories of discourse markers are usually outside of the realm of classroom activities, particularly in English learning environment of Korea. English has already established a presence outside of the classroom setting in Korea. This is an important hint towards language contact outside the language classroom and the uses of English beyond the classroom in Korea. This suggests that spoken English in Korea cannot be conceptualized as mere learner language. It can be concluded that English language in Korea has undoubtedly establishes a presence beyond English classroom.

World Englishes theorizing and modelling can get meaningful pointers from the discourse-pragmatic realm. Thus, discourse-pragmatic uses of comment markers can provide

significant pointers in modelling English in world Englishes research (Rüdiger, 2021a). In examining variational process of English in Korean context in world Englishes research, morpho-syntactic analyses have played a significant role. As a first step to describe the use of comment markers in spoken English in Korea, this study leaves a number of issues related to the factors which affect the use of the comment markers such as gender, genre, formality of context, and English proficiency. They are outside scope of this study. Therefore, the findings failed to provide more detailed description of comment markers employed by Korean speakers of English and, therefore, yielded inconclusive results. There is a need for further research on the comment markers in Korean speakers of English in systematic analyses using large scaled corpus and in a more qualitative study that deals with both the social and stylistic shades of comment markers and their distribution.

It is hoped that the present study will prompt others to explore the potentials of comment marker research in the Expanding Circle as a critical component of world Englishes research. Moreover, it is also hoped that further research incorporates a comprehensive overview of the functions of comment markers in Korean speakers of English and cross-linguistic study on the comparison to comment markers in Korea and other countries of Expanding Circle.

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APPENDIX

Transcription Symbols

(text)	-	uncertain transcription
@	-	laughter
,	-	brief pause (2-3 sec.)
.	-	longer pause (3-4 sec.)
[...]	-	speech left out in the example

Examples in: English

Applicable Language: English

Applicable Levels: Tertiary

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