

Two pragmatic functions of honorifics in Korean

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(slides)



- Canonically, honorification refers to a politeness strategy that is grammatically encoded (Brown and Levinson 1987).
- Honorific systems in Korean are built on two axes based on whom the speaker is targeting to be polite with: hearer honorifics *-eyo* and referent honorifics *-si* (Brown 2015).

(1) a. hearer (elders) \neq referent (intimates)

emeni, sala wa-ss-eyo.

mother Sarah come-PST-DECL.POL

‘Mother, Suji came (here).’

⇒ Politeness implication (mother)

[hearer honorifics]

b. hearer (intimates) \neq referent (elders)

sala-ya, emeni o-si-ess-e.

Sarah-VOC mother come-HON-PST-DECL.INT

‘Sarah, Mother came (here).’

⇒ Politeness implication (mother)

[referent honorifics]



- Hearer honorifics and referent honorifics are independent and can be marked at the same time.

(2) hearer (elders) \neq referent (elders)

swuci-ssi, emeni o-si-ess-eyo.

Suji-Ms. mother come-HON-PST-DECL.POL

'Ms. Suji, mother came (here) .'



- Previously, both honorific markers have been analyzed as face-saving strategies.
- Contra previous analyses, I argue that their non-canonical uses, as an impoliteness strategy (Culpeper 1996), suggest that they have distinct functions.
- Overview:
 2. Puzzle
 3. Impoliteness data
 4. Returning to politeness
 5. Proposal
 6. Conclusion



- A classic pragmatic approach to politeness assumes interlocutors have 'face', and honorifics are assumed to have an identical function to save either the hearer or referent's (negative) face (Brown and Levinson 1987).

(3) hearer (elders) \neq referent (elders)

swuci-ssi, emeni o-si-ess-eyo.

Suji-Ms. mother come-HON-PST-DECL.POL

'Ms. Suji, mother came (here) .'

(=(2))

- Would these markers simply be redundant in second person contexts where the two markers target the same interlocutor?



- This assumption appears to be borne out in canonical contexts.

(4) hearer = referent (elders)

cemsim tu-si-ess-eyo?

lunch eat.HON-HON-PST-INTR.POL

‘Did you eat lunch?’

[canonical]

⇒ Politeness implication

- Though there are some variations.

(5) hearer = referent (elders)

cemsim mek-ess-eyo?

lunch eat-PST-INTR.POL

‘Did you eat lunch?’

[canonical]

⇒ Politeness implication



- This variation suggests two things:
 1. Different combinations of referent honorifics *-si* and hearer honorifics *-eyo* give rise to different levels of politeness.
 2. Referent honorifics and hearer honorifics have different functions.
- I will argue for #2 based on different implications that arise from non-canonical uses of the two honorifics.
 - If both hearer and referent honorifics are the same face-saving strategies, non-canonical uses of the two honorifics will both be face-damaging.
 - I will show that this is not true.



- Non-canonical uses of honorifics generally follow Culpeper's (1996) impoliteness framework.
- These are done via two ways of being 'off expected':
 - (i) The absence of honorifics, when expected.
 - (ii) The presence of honorifics, when not expected.
- I will first show this in third person contexts.



(i) The absence of honorifics, when expected.

- (6) hearer (**elders**) \neq referent (intimates)

sala wa-ss-e?

Sarah come-PST-INTR.INT

‘Did Sarah come (home)?’ (impolite)

\Rightarrow To be not polite: impoliteness implication by withholding politeness, damaging the hearer’s negative face.

- (7) hearer (intimates) \neq referent (**elders**)

emeni wa-ss-e?

mother come-PST-INTR.INT

‘Did mother come (home)?’ (impolite)

\Rightarrow To be not polite: impoliteness implication by withholding politeness, damaging the hearer’s negative face.



(ii) The presence of honorifics, when not expected.

- (8) hearer (**intimates**) \neq referent (intimates)

emeni wa-ss-eyo?

mother come-PST-INTR.POL

‘Did mother come (home)?’ (impolite/mock)

\Rightarrow To be overly polite: impoliteness implication by being polite in an obviously insincere way.

- (9) hearer (intimates) \neq referent (**intimates**)

sala o-si-ess-e?

Sarah come-HON-PST-INTR.INT

‘Did Sarah come (home)?’ (impolite/mock)

\Rightarrow To be overly polite: impoliteness implication by being polite in an obviously insincere way.



- These patterns correspond to two impoliteness superstrategies: negative impoliteness (the absence of honorifics), and sarcasm/mock politeness (the presence of honorifics).
- Importantly, both of them are face-damaging.
- In second person contexts, I show that patterns of presence/absence are face-damaging for referent honorifics, but merely distancing for hearer honorifics, which is not face-damaging.



- When absent, only referent honorifics gives rise to a face-damaging impoliteness implication.
 - It is considered impolite even when hearer honorifics is used.

(10) hearer = referent (**elders**)

cemsim mek-ess-eyo?

lunch eat-PST-INTR.POL

‘Did you have lunch?’ (impolite)

[absence of -si]

- As long as referent honorifics is used, the absence of hearer honorifics simply reflects the speaker’s intention to show intimacy toward the interlocutor, which is non-face-damaging.

(11) hearer = referent (**elders**)

cemsim tu-si-ess-e?

lunch eat-HON-PST-INTR.INT

‘Did you have lunch?’ (intimate)

[absence of -eyo]



- When present, both honorifics follow the pattern that their unexpected presence has a sarcastic/mockling flavor.
 - They differ in that only the presence of referent honorifics is face-damaging.

(12) hearer = referent (**intimates**)

cemsim tu-si-ess-e?

lunch eat-HON-PST-INTR.INT

‘Did you have lunch?’ (impolite/sarcastic)

[presence of -si/]

- The presence of hearer honorifics shows that the speaker intends to be more intimate with the interlocutor by mocking them.

(13) hearer = referent (**intimates**)

cemsim mek-ess-eyo?

lunch eat-PST-INTR.POL

‘Did you have lunch?’ (intimate/mockling)

[presence of -eyo]



- I extend these empirical observations and propose that the two honorific markers fundamentally have two different functions, both canonically and non-canonically.

- Proposal:
 - Referent honorifics preserves the interlocutor's face, and could thus lead to face-damaging actions when used unexpectedly.
 - Conversely, hearer honorifics merely marks distance between interlocutors that the speaker intends to express, which does not lead to face-damaging actions.



- The final puzzle piece is to explain why hearer honorifics functions as a face-saving/damaging strategy when the hearer is not the referent.

(14) a. hearer (elders) \neq referent (intimates)

sala wa-ss-eyo.

Sarah come-PST-DECL.POL

‘Sarah came (home).’

\Rightarrow Politeness implication (face-saving)

[canonical]

b. hearer (**elders**) \neq referent (intimates)

sala wa-ss-e?

Sarah come-PST-INTR.INT

‘Did Sarah come (home)?’

\Rightarrow Impoliteness implication (face-damaging)

[non-canonical]



- I suggest that since referent honorifics is reserved for a referent who is not the hearer, hearer honorifics additionally functions as a face-saving strategy when needed.

| | Referent \neq hearer | | Referent = hearer |
|---------------------|------------------------|--|------------------------------------|
| | Referent | Hearer | Referent/hearer |
| Referent honorifics | -si (face) | - | -si (face) |
| Hearer honorifics | - | -eyo/-supnita (face, distance) | -eyo/-supnita (distance) |

(15)



- This explains why speakers sometimes use hearer honorifics with interlocutors with whom they would not use referent honorifics.

(16) a. Hearer (intimate), referent (Ms. Suji)

swuci-ssi ka-ss-e.

Suji-Ms. go-PST-DECL

‘Ms. Suji left.’

[-*si* is NOT used]

b. Hearer (Ms. Suji), referent (elder)

sensayng-nim ka-sy-ess-eyo.

teacher-HON go-HON-PST-DECL.POL

‘The teacher left.’

[-*eyo* is used]



- I show that referent honorifics and hearer honorifics not only differ in the target of honorification but also have different pragmatic functions.
- Only referent honorifics fits into the definition of (im)politeness strategy that relates honorification to a face-saving/damaging action.



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