

When the subject honorific brings honour to all: the expanding role of pragmatics in Korean honorification

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Honorification in Korean

- Performative vs. propositional

- (1) ku salam-i ka-ss-**sup**-ni-ta.
that person-NOM go-PST-AH-IND-DECL
'That person went.' (*Addressee honorification*)
- (2) ney-ka sensayng-nim-kkey ku-kes-ul
I-NOM teacher-DAT.HON that-thing-ACC
tuli-ess-sup-ni-ta.
give.HON-PST-AH-IND-DECL
'I gave that thing to the teacher.' (*Object honorification*)

- (3) sensayngnim-kkeyse coen-ul ha-**si**-ta.
 teacher-HON.NOM *advice*-ACC *do*-SH-DECL
 ‘The teacher gives advice.’

- Simplistic view: honours the subject of the clause.
- (Relative to speaker? Addressee?)

The standard dialect

- Long recognised that this cannot be the whole story.
- Even in the (more conservative) standard variety, the target of honorification doesn't have to be the subject.

- (4) halmeni-kkeyse pal-i apu-si-ta.
grandmother-HON.NOM *arm*-NOM *hurt*-SH-DECL
'Grandmother's arm hurts.'

- Target = Grandmother
- Inalienable possession (controller)

- (5) halmeni-kkeyse sayngkak-i coh-**usi**-ta.
grandmother-HON.NOM *thought*-NOM *good*-SH-DECL
'Grandmother's idea was good.'

- Target = Grandmother
- Inalienable possession (creator)

- (6) *halmeni-uy khep-i yeyppu-**si**-ta.
grandmother-GEN *cup*-NOM *beautiful*-SH-DECL
'Grandmother's cup is beautiful.'

- Intended target = Grandmother
- Alienable possession
- Ungrammatical in standard Korean.

Syntax or something else?

- Kim & Sells (2007): target of honorification = “maximal human referent” of subject.
- In some dialects, even broader than that.

The innovating dialect

- Predominantly characteristic of the younger generation (18–35), very generationally-specific
- Seoul, metropolitan areas of Korea

- Alienable possessor can be the target of honorification:

(7) ✓ halmeni-uy khep-i yeypu-**si**-ta.
grandmother-GEN *cup*-NOM *beautiful*-SH-DECL
'Grandmother's cup is beautiful.'

- (8) kokayknim, i os-un
customer this clothing-TOP
phwumcel-toy-s-ess-sup-ni-ta.
sold.out-become-SH-PST-AH-IND-DECL
'Customer, this article of clothing has become out of stock.'

- Target = customer (addressee)
- 'Potential possession'

Syntax or something else?

- Clearly, the target of *-si-* is not given definitively by reference to the grammatical subject.
- But neither can the target be totally unrelated to the subject.

Syntax or something else?

- The exact relation between the two is usually swept under the pragmatic rug.
- Potts & Kawahara (2004: 263): “the exact nature of [the relation in question] is not of direct concern to us here”.
- Kim & Sells (2007: 332): “exactly how the target of honorification is determined still awaits a full explanation”.

Syntax or something else?

- Our proposal: the pragmatic reasoning involved in determining the target of honorification is not a free-for-all.
- Rather, there is a well-defined, algorithmic process involved in determining the target, based on its relation to the subject.

A pragmatic hierarchy

- Target = 'closest' human to the subject (cf. Barker's 1995 notion of 'proximity').
- Hierarchy of proximity:

identity > inalienable possession

> alienable possession > potential possession

- Pragmatic relation in question = highest on the hierarchy which identifies a potential human target.

A pragmatic hierarchy

identity > inalienable possession
> alienable possession > potential possession

- Standard dialect
- Innovating dialect

- Meaning over and above syntax
- Target of honorification need not be mentioned overtly in the sentence:

- (9) i chaina-nun alumdawu-**si**-ta.
this chinaware-TOP beautiful-SH-DECL
'This chinaware (belonging to the honoured one) is beautiful.'

Predictions of the hierarchy

- identity > inalienable possession

(10) emeni-uy salinca-nun canin-ha-s-yess-ta.
mother-GEN murderer-TOP cruel-BE-SH-PST-DECL
'Mother's murderer was cruel.'

- Target = murderer
- (even though there is a more obvious target)

Predictions of the hierarchy

- inalienable possession > alienable possession
 - **Context:** Father was a lover of science, and left his body to medical research on his death. He also had a very distinctive tattoo on his finger. In my human anatomy class, where each of us has a hand to dissect, and the professor is demonstrating on a hand of his own, I say:

(11) kyoswunim-uy son-un apeci-ey son-i-s-eyo.
professor-GEN hand-TOP father-GEN hand-be-SH-POL
'The professor's hand is my father's hand.'

- Target = father
- (not professor)

Predictions of the hierarchy

- alienable possession > potential possession

- (12) A: cey cha-ka kocangna-ss-sup-ni-ta.
my car-NOM break-PST-AH-IND-DECL
'My car has broken down.'
- B: cey apeci-ey cha-nun olay-toy-s-yess-ciman,
my father-GEN car-TOP old-become-SH-PST-but
kongcca-i-s-ip-ni-ta.
free-be-SH-AH-IND-DECL
'My father's car is old, but free.'

- Target = father
- (not potential possessor, in this case the addressee)

- (13) A: cey cha-ka kocangna-ss-sup-ni-ta.
my car-NOM break-PST-AH-IND-DECL
'My car has broken down.'
- B: i cha-nun olay-toy-s-yess-ciman,
i car-TOP old-become-SH-PST-but
kongcca-i-s-ip-ni-ta.
free-be-SH-AH-IND-DECL
'This car is old, but free.'

- Target = addressee (= potential possessor)

Predictions of the hierarchy

- (14) A: apeci-ey cha-ka kocangna-ss-ta.
father-GEN car-NOM break-PST-DECL
'(My) father's car has broken down.'
- B: i cha-nun olay-toy-s-yess-ciman, kongcca-i-si-ta.
i car-TOP old-become-SH-PST-but free-be-SH-DECL
'This car is old, but free.'

- Potential possessor \neq addressee.
- Target = A's father (potential possessor).

Predictions of the hierarchy

- Predictions borne out.
- Evidence for an internal logic on the pragmatic side of things.

- Meaning associated with subject honorific marker:

(15) $\lambda x.\exists y[R(y, x) \wedge HON(y)]$

- R is given by the process described above.
- The contents of HON could be cashed out in various ways, including that developed by Potts & Kawahara (2004) for Japanese.
- Ultimately, since honorification is a type of emotive meaning (Potts 2005), this meaning should end up in the side-issue content.

- There remain some difficult cases – the relation expressed between the subject and the target seems to be very distant indeed:

(16) sayksang kyohwan piyong-un kwumayca-nim
color exchange cost-TOP buyer-HON
pwutam-i-si-pni-ta.
charge-be-SH-POL-DECL
'The expense for exchange for a different colour will be charged to the (honoured) buyer.' (Kim & Sells 2007: 319)

- Target = buyer
- Relation = potential possessor?

- (17) kunmwu kanung ciyek-un Pusan-ina Ilsan-i-**si**-pni-ta.
work possible area-TOP Pusan-or Ilsan-be-SH-AH-DECL
'The area/region where the honoured one might work is
Pusan or Ilsan.' (Kim & Sells 2007: 319)

- Target = potential worker
- Relation = ??
- Still to do with proximity; this time, purely locational.

A tail to the hierarchy?

identity > inalienable possession

(> alienable possession > potential possession)

> ...

Conclusion

- The targets of subject honorification in Korean are not determined purely by syntax.
- Nonetheless, we do not need to throw our hands up in despair as soon as pragmatics enters the scene.
- There is an internal logic in the pragmatic reasoning which is ripe for further exploration.

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