Korean Honorific Expressions: Immediate Indication of One's Social Relationship with Others

Annie Coleman  
*Boise State University*

Sam K. Navas  
*Boise State University*

Megan Ostermann  
*Boise State University*

Kyleigh Pollock  
*Boise State University*

Qurnain Rao  
*Boise State University*

*See next page for additional authors*
Korean Honorific Expressions: Immediate Indication of One’s Social Relationship with Others

Abstract
Language and communication are representative of native speaker’s cultures. Use of language for communication is largely contextual, following socio-cultural norms and linguistic rules. A notable communicative feature of Korean is its well-developed honorific patterns. Western languages, e.g. English, lack power distinctions while Korean sentences shouldn't be formed without speaker knowledge of their social relationship to the addressee in terms of age, social status, kinship, and subgroups. Complex social stratifications between speaker-addressee and speaker-third person referents are encoded within the linguistic structure of Korean.

Korean honorifics involve two dimensions: addressee-honorifics and reference-honorifics. Addressee-honorifics express the speaker’s regard for the addressee, reference-honorifics reflect the speaker’s regard for a referent.

In Elementary Korean II, students learn that a predicate’s form is dependent upon relationships, the most common reference-honorific forms are introduced, and expanding patterns of speaker-addressee honorifics are practiced. Learning multi-dimensional honorific patterns builds Korean language skills and understanding of Korean culture dynamics.

This presentation will include; (1) an overview of Korean's main features, emphasising honorific patterns; (2) how students in Elementary Korean II employ honorific patterns in their writings to introduce themselves, relations, and acquaintances, and (3) students’ reflections displaying understanding of Korean honorific patterns and social dynamics.

Authors
Annie Coleman, Sam K. Navas, Megan Ostermann, Kyleigh Pollock, Qurnain Rao, Adam Thompson, Kailee Walker, Anne Wylie, and Yookyung Lee
Korean Honorific Expressions
Immediate Indication of One’s Social Relationship with Others

Presenters: Annie Coleman, Sam Navas, Megan Ostermann, Kyleigh Pollock, Qurnain Rao, Adam Thompson, Kailee Walker, Anne Wylie Faculty advisor: Yookyung Lee (yookyunglee@boisestate.edu)

Language and Social Relationship

It is widely accepted that language and communication represent and reflect the culture and society of native speakers. Use of language for communication is largely conventional, following various socio-cultural rules and norms, as well as genre-specific rules. One of the most notable communicative features reflecting the Korean culture and society is the well-developed pattern of honorifics and their appropriate uses. While there is little power distinction in Western languages such as English, Korean sentences can hardly be uttered without the speaker’s proper knowledge of his or her social relationship with others.

Korean Honorific System
한국어의 존칭

It is important to note that honorific in Korean language involves two dimensions: the dimension of addressee-honorifics (speaker-addressee perspective) and that of reference-honorifics (speaker-reference perspective). While addressee-honorifics express the speaker’s regard for the address among situations, reference-honorifics reflect the speaker’s regard for a referent. These two dimensions are similar in the sense that they both convey ‘respect’, but they are distinct in being controlled by different factors, as presenters’ prof. show. For instance, if one is speaking about one’s grandmother to one’s teacher (for example, “my grandmother is coming”), one needs both an honorific sentence ending (for the teacher, who is the addressee) and the honorific verbal suffix –(으)ni for the grandmother, who is the referent) –halmóni-ga o-seyo-o-simnida. On the other hand, if one is uttering the sentence to one’s younger sibling, one will need to choose a non-honorific sentence ending (for the younger sibling, who is the address), but still the honorific suffix –(으)ni for the grandmother, who is the referent) –halmóni-ga o-syóni-sinda. And if one is speaking about one’s younger sibling to one’s close friend, one will need neither an honorific ending, since the addressee is one’s close friend, nor the honorific suffix –(으)ni, since the referent is one’s younger brother –tongsang-i w-alo-na. But if one is uttering the sentence to one’s teacher, one will need to choose an honorific sentence ending (for the teacher, who is the addressee), but –(으)ni is not needed (for the younger sibling, who is the referent) –tongsang-i w-ayo-o-minida.

For addressee-related honorifics, contemporary Korean has four major speech styles, such as, heavily formal honorific (~(으)ni/undo), gently formal honorific (~yo/yo), softly formal honorific (~(으)ni/undo), and non-conversational/plain casual non-honorific (~(으)ni/undo –t’a), that are distinguished from each other by different sentence endings, the choice of which depends on the person to whom one is talking. In this project, students mainly use two addressee-related honorifics, which are heavily formal honorific (~(으)ni/undo), and gently formal honorific (~yo/yo), since they consider their addressees are general public audiences.

Questions? Contact yookyunglee@boisestate.edu, Korean Program at the Department of World Languages https://www.boisestate.edu/worldlang/korean/