Results 2012

Professional Language Use for Advanced Language Learners: The Honorific Sentence Endings

Sumi Chang

University of Hawaii at Manoa
Korean Language Flagship Center (KLFC)
changhan@hawaii.edu

October 26, 2012
Korean Speech Styles

- One of the salient characteristics of the Korean language is its systematic speech levels, also referred to as registers, styles, or variations.

- In Korean, the sentence endings differentiate sentences into different speech styles. Korean speech styles can be largely divided into
  - honorific
  - non-honorific
Scholars sub-divide and label the two main groups of the **honorific** and the non-honorific styles. The labels and the number of speech levels differ among scholars, but they are mostly between four to six levels (Chang, 1983; Choy, 1961; Han, 2002; Hwang, 1975; Martin, 1964; Seng, 1985; Sohn, 1999; Suh, 1984, 1996; Wang, 1990).
In this study, I use Sohn’s (1999) six speech levels or styles (i.e., Deferential, Polite, Blunt, Familiar, Intimate, and Plain), and the most formal style of Deferential is under scrutiny.

I adopt the labels
- Formal Honorific for Deferential and
- Informal Honorific for Polite.
### Korean Speech Levels & Sentence Types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speech levels/styles</th>
<th>Declarative</th>
<th>Sentence types</th>
<th>Propositive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Interrogative</td>
<td>Imperative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal Honorifics</td>
<td>-(su)pnita</td>
<td>-(su)pnikka</td>
<td>-(u)sipsio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal Honorific</td>
<td>- eyo/ayo</td>
<td>- eyo/ayo</td>
<td>- eyo/ayo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blunt</td>
<td>-(s)o</td>
<td>-(s)o</td>
<td>- o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Familiar</td>
<td>- ney</td>
<td>- na</td>
<td>- key</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intimate</td>
<td>- e/a</td>
<td>- e/a</td>
<td>- e/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Plain                | - ([nu]n)ta | - ni/(nu)nya   | -(e)la      | -ca         | Adapted from Sohn, 1999
Importance of Honorifics

In formal settings such as professional situations, the use of the Formal Honorific style is often called for. Choosing an inappropriate lower style in speaking may result in sounding unprofessional, childish, or even offensive to the hearer. Thus, choosing the appropriate speech style is critical in professional interaction when speaking Korean.
In the past, most research has been based on descriptive studies.

Variables examined were static ones:
- age
- gender
- kinship
- social status, etc.
Usage Descriptions in Speaking

- **Formal** Honorifics
  - formal situations:
    - news reports
    - official ceremonies
    - public lectures/addresses
    - announcements
    - formal official meetings
    - job interviews

- **Informal** Honorifics
  - less formal situations:
    - conversation between adults
    - conversation at an initial encounter
Formal Honorific

The speaker, President Obama welcomes a head of a state in an official formal setting.

환영합니다 Hwanyeng-hapnita. (Welcome.)

Video clip: President Obama Welcomes South Korean President Lee Myung-bak to the White House June 16, 2009. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5iHtMG1z9ZY
Informal Honorific

The same speaker is speaking in front of a large audience, but he is addressing a younger individual.

안녕하세요? Annyeng-haseyyo?
(Hello/How are you?)

Video clip: President Obama greets a South Korean student.  
Alternation of two honorific endings

More recently, the observations of naturally occurring authentic data reveals that interlocutors do not stay with one style but alternate between speech styles with no change in the given variables or situation. Such alternation can be examined using the Indexicality Principle (Ochs, 1996).
Alternation of two honorific endings

L1 data reveals that speakers index epistemic stance of confidence and expert or professional identity via Formal Honorific sentence ending.
Alternation of two honorific endings in L2

While native speakers rarely misuse the endings, the appropriate usage can be more difficult for L2 learners of Korean.
Research Questions

1. Does the frequency of the **Formal** Honorific ending increase in correlation to the OPI proficiency level?

2. What do the speakers index by adopting the **Formal** Honorific ending?
Methods

Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI), unofficial

22 post-BA students in their mid 20s
16 female, 6 male
19 heritage, 1 half-heritage, 2 non-heritage
Methods

Entry point and exit point of two academic years from Fall 2007 to Spring 2010

19.9 hours (1194 min.) total
27.1 minute average

Tokens per 10 minutes
No. of Ss by Levels, Entry & Exit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels</th>
<th>Entry</th>
<th>Exit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IM</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AL</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AM</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AH</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sup</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results

A. Proficiency Levels
1. All
2. Entry
3. Exit

B. Improvement in OPI Levels
A-1. Formal Honorific Usage by Levels, All

Range: 0.0-29.4, Average 7.3
Unit: tokens per 10 min.

Advanced Av: 6.8
Superior Av: 8.8
A-1. Formal Honorific Usage by Levels, All
Range: 0.0-29.4, Average 7.3
Unit: tokens per 10 min.

- Average:
  - Advanced: 6.8
  - Superior: 8.8

- However, the highest usages were by the Advanced level speakers. No Superior level speaker scored above 20, while four Advanced speakers scored above 20.
A-2. Formal Honorific Usage by Levels, Entry

Range: 0.0 to 29.4, Average 4.8
Unit: tokens per 10 min.

Advanced Av: 4.8
Adv-Low Av: 7.8
Adv-Mid Av: 6.2
Adv-High Av: 2.3
A-2. Formal Honorific Usage by Levels, Entry

Range: 0.0 to 29.4, Average 4.8
Unit: tokens per 10 min.

- Average:
  - Adv-Low: 7.8
  - Adv-Mid: 6.2
  - Adv-High: 2.3

- The highest usages were by the Advanced-Low level speakers at 29.4.
A-3. Formal Honorific Usage by Levels, Exit

Range: 0.4 to 23.2, Average 9.9
Unit: tokens per 10 min.

Advanced Av: 12.3
Superior Av: 8.8
A-3. Formal Honorific Usage by Levels

Range: 0.4 to 23.2, Average 9.9
Unit: tokens per 10 min.

- Average:
  - Advanced: 12.3
  - Superior: 8.8

- However, the highest usages were by the Advanced level speakers. No Superior level speaker scored above 20, while four Advanced speakers scored above 20.
B. Formal Honorific Usage Difference, from Entry to Exit, Sub-level Dif.

Range: -24.5 to 23.2, Average 5.2

Difference

+positive: S4, S15

-negative: S17, S18
B. Formal Honorific Usage

Difference, from Entry to Exit

Range: -24.5 to 23.2, Average 5.2

- No difference: 3
- One sub-level difference: 12
- Two sub-level difference: 2
- Three sub-level difference: 5
Result 1

A. Formal Honorific ending does not necessarily increase in correlation to the OPI proficiency level,

B. or the individual improvement (sub-level) in OPI.
Result 2

- The examination of the context shows that the speakers index epistemic stance of confidence and certainty when adopting the Formal Honorific speech level.

- On the other hand, the speakers index affective stance of emotion when adopting the Informal Honorific speech level.
Student 18 (Entry)

- Advanced-Mid
- 15.7 tokens/10 min.

- Repeatedly uses the Formal Honorific ending when discussing personal matters (e.g., school, favorite past-time, sibling etc.), which is unnecessary, awkward, and mechanical.
1. T: 그리고 스티븐 씨 혹시 취미는 뭐에요?
   And by the way, what is your favorite past time?
   (Deleted)

2. S18: 그래서 아암 운동은 노력하지(기)를 좋아하지만 그중에서도 웨이트 트레이닝을 제일 좋아해요.
   So, umm in sports, I like (INFORMAL) to try hard in sports, but my favorite is weight training.
When asked about his favorite past time, Student 18 has correctly adopted the Informal ending to answer that his likes weight training the most.

By choosing the Informal ending, he indexes his affect for the sport.

However, Student 18 changes to the Formal ending in the following when discussing reading. Staying with the Informal ending would have been more appropriate to index his affect for reading.
3. T: 네. 
   n ey
   I see.

   U mm and also I like (FORMAL) reading books. I like (FORMAL) to re. reading.
Student 18 (Exit)

- Advanced-High, 1.7 tokens/10 min.
- -15 token difference compared to Entry
   Umm you know that Korea’s workplace culture is a bit different (INFORMAL), isn’t it?
   ((Deleted))

2. S18: 이런 그 조직성에 있어서는 많이 다른 것을 갈씀다. ilen ku cocikseng-ey iss ese-nun manh-i talun kes kath-supnita (Formal).
   [It is] that there is (Formal) a big difference in the organization.
Student 18 has interned at a Korean organization for two semesters, so he is familiar with Korea’s workplace culture. By speaking in the Formal Honorifics ending in line 2, Student 18 is indexing an epistemic stance of knowledge on the topic of Korean workplace.
**Conclusion**

**RQ:**

1. Does the frequency of the Formal Honorific ending use increase in correlation to the OPI proficiency level over two years?

*The results show that the use of the Formal Honorific ending does NOT increases in correlation to the OPI proficiency level.*

*The use of the Formal Honorific ending does NOT increases in correlation to the individual improvement (sub-level) in OPI over two year period either.*
Conclusion

RQ:

2. What do the speakers index by adopting the Formal Honorific ending?

*L2 speakers, like L1 speakers index epistemic stance of knowledge and authority via the Formal Honorific sentence ending. This occurs mostly at the exit point, two years after the entry.

This contrasts to the Formal Honorific used in an awkward way at the entry point is not native-like in a given situation.
Pedagogical Implication

In helping the learners choose the appropriate Korean speech level in formal and professional situations, I suggest formal grammar instruction coupled with task-based practice under a given context.
Pedagogical Implication

Immersion in a professional setting such as interning during the overseas period of study.
References


