

Rethinking Embeddability and Context Sensitivity in Honorification: Evidence from Korean *si**

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Abstract Argument and addressee honorification across languages show an embeddability asymmetry, where only argument honorification can be embedded. This aligns with a generalization that content-oriented markers are embeddable while utterance-oriented markers are not (Portner, Pak & Zanuttini 2019). While Korean shows a parallel asymmetry in its argument and addressee honorification markers, it has a non-canonical use of the argument honorification marker *si* where it functions as an addressee honorification marker while still being embeddable. These findings challenge the association between utterance sensitivity and embeddability. In order to bridge this gap, we analyze *si* as a variable-introducing honorific marker that targets an internal thematic argument of an event but maps the referent of that argument to a free variable to be fixed in the context. This analysis maintains the association between utterance sensitivity and embeddability because *si* is still content-oriented while the exceptional use as addressee honorification is derived indirectly via the coreference of some salient thematic argument of the event and the Addressee.

Keywords: honorification, embeddability, embedding asymmetry, at-issueness, utterance sensitivity, thematic arguments

1 Introduction

Honorification has been extensively studied cross-linguistically from the perspective of syntax, semantics and pragmatics, analyzed as agreement (Alok 2021; Alok & Baker 2022; Jou 2024), as grammaticalized reflexes of politeness by recruiting unmarked semantic features (Wang 2023), or as expressive meanings with a numerical relation between the speaker and the target (Potts & Kawahara 2004; Potts 2007; Kim & Sells 2007). Recently, a growing number of studies have identified embeddability distinctions between the argument and the addressee honorification within or across languages (Portner et al. 2019; Tomioka & Ishii 2022; Ishii & Cho

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2023). Specifically, it has been observed that while argument honorification can appear in embedded clauses, addressee honorification cannot. While the source of this embeddability distinction is still under discussion, Portner et al. (2019) propose a generalization that utterance-oriented markers such as addressee honorification cannot be embedded due to their non-propositional semantic type. Taking this generalization as the departure point, this paper looks at argument and addressee honorification markers in Korean, focusing on a curious case where the argument honorification *si* is used as addressee honorification and can still be embedded. We explore this non-canonical use of *si* further in this paper, highlighting why this non-canonical use of *si* initially seems to violate the generalization. Then, we show that this use of *si* is neither ‘non-canonical’ nor a violation of the generalization. We present an analysis of *si* that maintains the Portner et al. (2019)’s generalization while allowing this flexibility in use. Take (1) as a preview. In this example, *si* is used to honor the Addressee instead of the subject of the clause, and the Addressee is co-referential with the Beneficiary of the water-serving event. We propose that *si* continues to be an argument honorification, but serves as an addressee honorification through (accidental) coreference of some salient thematic argument of the event and the Addressee.

- (1) Mwul-un selpu-**si**-pni-ta
 water-TOP self.served-SI-H_{Adr}-DECL
 ‘Water is self-service.’ (Subject: water)

This paper is structured as follows: Section 2 provides a background on Korean honorification and the embeddability difference, discussing the generalization that utterance-oriented markers cannot be embedded. In Section 3, we discuss the non-canonical uses of the argument honorification marker *si* and show that *si* a) can be used as an addressee honorification and b) can be embedded in such uses. We discuss in detail the constraints and the range of this phenomenon. Section 4 presents our analysis. Section 4.1 presents the lexical denotations of *si* and *supni* based on the framework of multi-dimensional semantics and event semantics. Section 4.2 derives the addressee honorification inference of *si* through contextual coreference. Section 4.3 explains the age-variation of the non-canonical use of *si*. Section 5 concludes.

2 Korean honorification and embeddability

There are two types of honorification in Korean: argument honorification and addressee honorification (also known as propositional and performative types, Harada (1976)), with the former referring to the honorific marking on the verb/noun/case marker if some relevant argument (except the direct object) is of high status relative to the speaker, and the latter referring to a parallel phenomenon when the addressee

is of high status. The sentence in (2) illustrates a canonical use of the argument honorification *si*¹ and the sentence in (3) shows a canonical use of the addressee honorification *supni*.² In (2-a), there is no argument honorification, so the sentence does not encode any status ranking between the speaker and the subject. In (2-b), however, *si* is added to the verb, encoding that the subject, namely Prof. Kim, is of high status. Throughout this paper, we represent this ranking using $<_{\text{hon}}$, with ‘Speaker $<_{\text{hon}}$ *a*’ indicating that *a* is of high status relative to the speaker. The example in (3-a) is the same as (2-a), but (3-b) differs minimally from (3-a) in that the addressee honorification marker *supni* is added before the declarative marker. This sentence implies that the addressee of the discourse context is of high status relative to the speaker, represented as ‘Speaker $<_{\text{hon}}$ Addressee’.

- (2) Korean argument honorific marker *si*
- a. Myungsoo-ka wa-ss-ta
Myungsoo-NOM come-PST-DECL
‘Myungsoo came.’ (Subject is of non-high status)
 - b. Kim kyoswunim-i o-**si**-ess-ta
Kim professor-NOM come-SI-PST-DECL
‘Professor Kim came.’ (Speaker $<_{\text{hon}}$ Prof. Kim)
- (3) Korean addressee honorific marker *supni*
- a. Myungsoo-ka wa-ss-ta.
Myungsoo-NOM come-PST-DECL
‘Myungsoo came.’ (Addressee is of non-high status)
 - b. Myungsoo-ka wa-ss-**supni**-ta.
Myungsoo-NOM come-PST-H_{Adr}-DECL
‘Myungsoo came.’ (Speaker $<_{\text{hon}}$ Addressee)

The two can be used separately or together as shown in (4) as their functions are independent of each other. In (4), *si* indicates the speaker’s deference towards the subject while the use of *supni* indicates the speaker’s deference towards the addressee.

1 Depending on the phonological environment, *si* may be realized in various forms: *sy*, *sey*, *us*, *usey*. We gloss *si* and its phonological variants as SI to avoid presupposing an analysis.

2 Note that *supni* is not the only form in Korean for addressee honorification. It is one of the forms used in the higher registers, but there are some other sentence ending particles that mark the addressee as higher status as well. A commonly held view is that there are six: formal, polite, semiformal, familiar, intimate, and plain. For more details, please refer to Portner et al. (2019) and references therein. For the purpose of this paper, we focus on *supni* and assume that the analysis extends to other addressee honorification forms. We gloss *supni* as H_{Adr} to indicate that it is an addressee honorification marker.

- (4) Kim kyoswunim-i o-**si**-ess-**supni**-ta.
 Kim professor-NOM come-SI-PST-H_{Adr}-DECL
 ‘Professor Kim came.’
 (*si*: Speaker_{matrix} <_{hon} Prof. Kim; *supni*: Speaker_{matrix} <_{hon} Addressee)

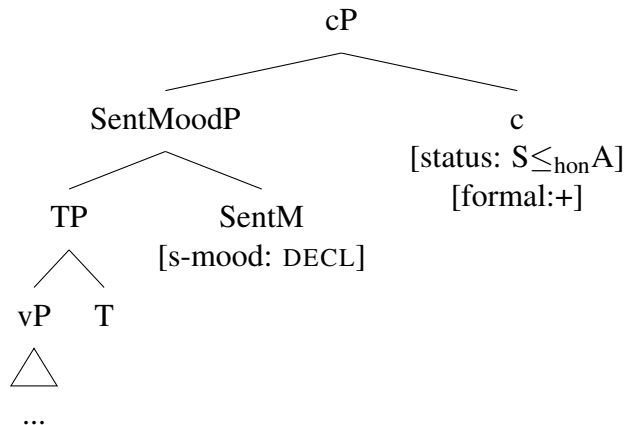
The two honorification markers show a contrast in embedding: the argument honorification marker *si* is embeddable while the addressee honorification marker *supni* is not (Portner, Pak & Zanuttini 2022). The embedding of *si* is shown in (5), where *si* attached to the embedded verb *o* ‘come’ is used to indicate that the matrix speaker honors Prof. Kim. This is not possible for *supni*: *supni* cannot attach to the embedded verb *wa* (‘come’) in (6) to indicate that the matrix speaker honors the addressee.

- (5) Jin-i [Kim kyoswunim-i o-**si**-ess-ta]-ko malha-ess-ta.
 Jin-NOM Kim professor-NOM come-SI-PST-DECL-COMP say-PST-DECL
 ‘Jin said that Professor Kim came.’ (Speaker_{matrix} <_{hon} Prof. Kim)
- (6) Jin-i [Kim kyoswunim-i wa-ss-***supni**-ta]-ko
 Jin-NOM Kim professor-NOM come-PST-H_{Adr}-DECL-COMP
 malha-ess-supni-ta.
 say-PST-H_{Adr}-DECL
 ‘Jin said that Prof. Kim came.’ (Intended: Speaker_{matrix} <_{hon} Addressee)

Observing similar patterns in other languages such as Japanese *mas* (Miyagawa 2012) and the allocutive agreement in Basque (Oyharçabal 1993), Portner et al. (2019) propose a generalization that content-oriented markers are embeddable but utterance-oriented markers are not. In particular, Portner et al. (2019) propose the existence of a functional projection, cP, which is restricted to root clauses. They argue that the head *c* serves as the syntactic locus for utterance-oriented markers and is responsible for encoding ‘politeness’ meanings, specifically those that involve the social relationship between the speaker and the addressee. In Korean, addressee honorification is realized in the *c* head of cP, the highest projection in the clausal spine. The inability of addressee honorification to be embedded follows from the type of meaning it encodes: it is not appropriate to function as the argument of a predicate. Portner et al. (2019) give the denotation of cP as an ordered pair $\langle \pi, p \rangle$ where π is the ‘politeness meaning’ and p is the propositional meaning, represented as $[[\phi]]^\pi$ and $[[\phi]]^p$ respectively. More specifically, unlike SentMoodP (or TP), which has a propositional semantic value and can be represented as an individual, *c* with performative meaning is non-propositional and thus cannot be represented as an individual, rendering it unembeddable. The structure is given in (7), where SentMoodP encodes information about the clause type, while cP is projected above it to host the feature [STATUS], which encodes the speaker–addressee relationship

and the formality of the utterance context.

(7) Korean *supni*, Portner et al. (2019)



In contrast, *si* encoding the speaker-argument, rather than the speaker-addressee relationship is within the TP domain, which can still function as an argument of the predicate. This explain the embeddability of *si* as an argument honorific marker.

3 Non-canonical use of *si*

In the last section we have seen that the argument honorification marker *si* and the addressee honorification marker *supni* in Korean display an embeddability contrast and that the generalization from Portner et al. (2019) that blocks embedding utterance-oriented markers accounts for the patterns. There are cases, however, where *si*, a content-oriented marker in Portner et al. (2019)’s terms, exhibits a non-canonical use and deviates from the predictions of this generalization.

The non-canonical use of *si* can be characterized in two ways. First, *si*, which is canonically an argument honorification, is used to indicate deference towards the addressee. For example, in (8), the subject is *mwul* (‘water’), which is inanimate and would not canonically trigger the use of the subject honorific marker *si*. However, *si* is allowed and indicates the speaker’s deference towards the addressee instead.

(8) Mwul-un selpu-**si**-pni-ta
 water-TOP self.served-SI-H_{Adr}-DECL
 ‘Water is self-service.’ (Subject: water)

This use of *si* is most commonly found in service contexts and has been discussed in works such as Brown (2015), Choo & Kwak (2008) and Kim & Findlay (2023). While generally associated with younger speakers of Korean, Korean speakers consulted note that this use is relatively widespread in modern Korean. We show

some examples adapted from Brown (2015) as in (9). In these examples, the addressee of the discourse is targeted by the honorification, not the subjects coffee and seat.

- (9) a. khephi nao-**si**-ess-supni-ta
 coffee come.out-SI-PST-H_{Adr}-DECL
 ‘Coffee is ready.’ [Brown (2015), modified]
 b. cikum-un cali-ka eps-**usi**-pni-ta
 now-TOP seat-NOM not.exist-SI-H_{Adr}-DECL
 ‘There aren’t any seats available now.’

Second, in this addressee-targeting use, *si* can be embedded. The contexts that allow *si* to be embedded is much more restricted than the embedding of argument-targeting *si* in that they must be reportative or evidential contexts. Example (10) shows that *si* in the embedded clause marks the speaker’s deference to the direct addressee.

- (10) (Context: Speaker_{Matrix} <_{hon} Addressee)
 a. [cwucha-nun mwulyo-**si**-la-ko] cenhay-tallay-yo
 parking-TOP free-SI-DECL-COMP relay-give-H_{Adr}
 ‘They wanted me to relay that parking is free.’ (Subject: parking)

Similarly in (11), the speaker is relaying information received from a third-party entity to the addressee and using *si* to mark her own deference towards the addressee.

- (11) chwulkuk-i yenkitoy-**si**-ess-ta-ko cenhay-tallay-yo
 departure-nom delay-SI-PST-DECL-COMP relay-give-H_{Adr}
 ‘They wanted me to relay that departure has been postponed.’

Even though it appears inside a relayed content, the embedded *si* is used to mark the matrix speaker’s honorification of the matrix addressee, rather than simply quoting the utterance of the individual who provided the information (the source). We can confirm this by considering contexts where the status relation to the addressee differ between the source and the speaker. For example, in (12), the original utterance by the source does not contain *si* as the source, the CEO, is ranked higher than the matrix addressee, the manager. The intern, in relaying the information to the manager, however, adds *si* in the embedded sentence.

- (12) *Context: The CEO of a company told the speaker, who is an intern of that company, that Jin, the speaker’s manager passed some evaluation. The speaker relays this information to Jin.*

hapkyekha-**si**-ess-ta-ko cenhay-tallay-yo
 pass-SI-PST-DECL-COMP relay-give-H_{Adr}

‘(The CEO) said that you passed.’

On the other hand, even if the source produced *si* on the verb to indicate deference towards the subject, the matrix speaker may drop the marker based on her own relation to the Addressee when relaying the information, as shown in (13). Here, the source, the student uses *si* when telling the speaker that Professor Jin passed the evaluation, but it would be infelicitous for the speaker of equal status as Professor Jin to produce *si* in the relayed content.

- (13) *Context: A student told the speaker that Professor Jin passed some evaluation and the speaker relays this information to Professor Jin who is of the same status relative to the speaker.*

hapkyekha(??-**si**)-ess-ta-ko cenhay-tallay
 pass(??-SI)-PST-DECL-COMP relay-give

‘(The student) said that you passed.’

Similar examples can be found in relay contexts as in (14). Here, instead of an overt verb *relay*, we see an evidential marker *lay* that marks that the speaker’s knowledge of this information comes from a third party source.

- (14) cwucha-nun mwulyoi-**si**-lay-yo
 parking-top free-SI-evidential.report-H_{Adr}
 ‘Parking is free (I heard from a different agent).’

Again, in these contexts, the utterance that contained the original information does not need to have any honorific marker. The speaker adds *si* to the embedded clause to show her own deference to the addressee regardless of the the morphological marking in the original source information.

3.1 Puzzle

The two characteristics of non-canonical *si* — that it can be used to honor the addressee and that it can be embedded in such uses — seem to challenge the association between utterance sensitivity and embeddability proposed in [Portner et al. \(2019\)](#). Specifically, the canonically argument targeting *si* in Korean can, in certain cases, function like an addressee honorific marker, which is an utterance oriented marker. However, it can be embedded, in this addressee-honoring function,

thus contributing a case where an utterance-oriented marker is embedded. In the rest of the paper, we show that the non-canonical use of *si* is not in fact a counterexample to Portner et al. (2019)’s generalization or a deviation from standard Korean grammar. Instead, we propose that *si* continues to be an argument honorification, but serves as an addressee honorification through (accidental) coreference of some salient thematic argument of the event and the Addressee. This allows for a uniform analysis of *si* and maintains the embeddability generalization.

4 Analysis

In this section we present our analysis of *si* and *supni*. We start by laying out some assumptions and the formal implementation we will use. Potts (2005) argues that honorific markers encode non-asserted and not-at-issue content. There are many ways to implement the distinction between at-issue and not-at-issue content, but we follow the notation of Gutzmann (2012) and Gutzmann & McCready (2014) to formally implement our proposal.

Gutzmann (2012) separates truth-conditional and use-conditional meanings and argues that not-at-issue expressions such as expressives only add content to the use-conditional meaning. The use-conditional content enters semantic derivations through lexical items at relevant internal constituents but do not further compose with the rest of the higher projections. Truth conditions and use conditions give rise to two independent dimensions of evaluation. For a sentence such as (15) to be true, it must be the case that the dog howled, with the denotation given in (16-a). However, this does not guarantee the felicity of (15) if the speaker does not hold any negative feelings toward the dog, which is the content of the use-conditional meaning in (16-b). Conversely, even if the truth-conditional meaning of (15) is false (i.e., the dog did not howl), the use-conditional meaning of (15) may still hold if the speaker expresses a negative attitude toward the dog. This distinction underscores how expressive content operates independently of truth-conditional content, allowing a speaker’s evaluative stance to persist regardless of the factual status of the proposition.

- (15) This damn dog howled the whole night. [Gutzmann 2012: p4]
- a. “This damn dog howled the whole night” is true if the dog howled.
 - b. “This damn dog howled the whole night” is felicitously used if the speaker feels negatively about the dog.
- (16)
- a. $\llbracket (15) \rrbracket^t = \{w: \text{the dog howled in } w\}$
 - b. $\llbracket (15) \rrbracket^u = \{c: cS \text{ feels negatively about the dog in } c_w\}$

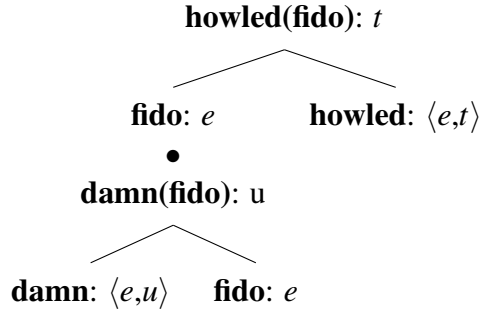
Gutzmann (2012) proposes that different from truth-conditional types that have *e*,

t , s as basic t types, use-conditional types recruit the u type. Two distinct sets of composition rules apply to the two dimensions. Truth-conditional expressions are composed via standard functional application and is restricted to truth-conditional expressions. In contrast, use-conditional composition involves applying a use-conditional function to a truth-conditional argument. The resulting use-conditional content is then isolated from further semantic computation by a bullet notation (\bullet), and subsequently collected from the parse tree by the *parse tree interpretation mechanism*. The step-by-step application is outlined as follows. First, we consider the distinction between truth-conditional and use-conditional meaning, as represented in (17) and (18). Following this, the detailed parse tree for a concrete example is provided in (19), illustrating the compositional derivation of both dimensions of meaning.

- (17) Truth-conditional application (18) Use-conditional application



- (19) $\llbracket \text{That damn dog Fido howled} \rrbracket = \langle \text{howled}(\text{fido}), \{\text{damn}(\text{fido})\} \rangle$



4.1 What *si* and *supni* encode

For the addressee honorification marker *supni*, we follow Potts (2005) and argue that it only encodes non-asserted content at the use-conditional level. Similar to Portner et al. (2019), we assume that *supni* attaches high in the tree at the TP level, taking the entire proposition as its argument. Because it only contributes non-asserted content, its contribution at the truth-conditional level is a vacuous identity function that takes

a proposition p as an argument and returns p . At the use-conditional level, *supni* encodes the relative status ranking between the speaker (cS) and the addressee (cA). The denotations at the truth-conditional and the use-conditional levels are shown in (20-a) and (20-b), respectively.

- (20) a. $\llbracket \text{supni} \rrbracket^t = \lambda p.p$
b. $\llbracket \text{supni} \rrbracket^u = \lambda p.cS <_{\text{hon}} cA$

Our analysis for the argument honorification marker *si* departs from Potts (2005) in that it has asserted, truth-conditional level meaning in addition to non-asserted, use-conditional level meaning. First, based on its surface position, we assume that *si* attaches lower than *supni*, namely adjoined to the verb. At the truth-conditional level, *si* contributes an event predicate that identifies a relevant thematic argument of the event as a free variable x_1 , as illustrated in (21-a). At the use-conditional layer, it marks x_1 as higher-ranked than the speaker, as represented in (21-b).

- (21) a. $\llbracket \text{si} \rrbracket^t = \lambda e.\Theta(e) = x_1$ (Θ : contextually-salient thematic head)
b. $\llbracket \text{si} \rrbracket^u = \lambda e.cS <_{\text{hon}} x_1$ ($<_{\text{hon}}$: status ranking)

The content of Θ is pragmatically constrained to salient primary thematic arguments such as the Agent, Theme (as in unaccusative verbs), Affectee, Beneficiary, Possessor or Experiencer. This reflects cross-linguistic tendencies where these roles often align with subjecthood. One supporting example of the correlation between Affectee and subjecthood is the passive constructions across languages, where the focus shifts to the affected participant, which typically becomes the subject (e.g., Darmasetiyawan & Ambridge 2022; Keenan & Comrie 1977). This highlights how certain roles become prominent in specific constructions. Consider the following example:

- (22) *Context: A Grandfather is playing hide-and-peek with a kid.*
halapeci-kkeyse ai-ey uyhay cap-hi-si-ess-ta.
grandfather-HON.NOM kid-to by catch-PASS-SI-PST-DECL
‘Grandfather was caught by the kid.’

In (22), x_1 corresponds to the Affectee³ of the event of being caught, namely

³ If x_1 is the Theme but not the Affectee, *si* is infelicitous, as illustrated in (i). In such cases, where x_1 functions merely as the Theme—i.e., the topic of discussion rather than a participant in the event—*si* cannot be licensed.

- (i) halapeci-kkeyse ai-ey uyhay nonuy-toy-si-ess-ta
grandfather-HON.NOM kid-to by discuss-PASS-SI-PST-DECL
‘Grandfather was discussed by the kid.’

halapeci (‘grandfather’), which serves as the theme of the event and undergoes movement to the subject position. Since x_1 denotes an individual of high status relative to the speaker, the argument honorific marker *si* is licensed.

Because x_1 is a free pronoun, we expect it to be resolved to some salient entity in the context. In default cases, the salient entity would simply be the Agent argument. If the entity identified by the relevant thematic role cannot be honored, then alternative entities may be considered, such as the addressee in the context. If no such entity is available, we expect degradedness. This requirement of a salient entity in the context is observed in at least two places. First, the non-canonical use of *si* is degraded when there is no overt addressee. For example, those speakers who accept (8) only accept it when the server is talking directly to an addressee and rejects it if it is a sign written on the wall without a clear addressee, as shown in (23). We argue that this is due to the lack of a salient entity to map the pronoun to.

- (23) *Context: A restaurant has a sign on the wall that reads as follows:*
Mwul-un selpu-(***si**)-ipni-ta
water-TOP self.served-*SI-H_{Adr}-DECL
‘Water is self-service.’

Second, *si* in negative quantificational contexts forces an anaphoric, partitive reading involving some familiar entity. Consider the two sentences in (24-a) and (24-b). In (24-a), the non-*si*-marked sentence allows for a reading where no one came to the event in question. In (24-b), which minimally differs in that *si* is added, the only possible reading is where some salient group of people is already identified and the speaker is asserting that none of those individuals came. We argue that the existence of a wide-scope pronoun derives the partitive reading in (24-b).

- (24) a. amwuto an wa-ss-ta
anyone NEG come-PAST-DECL
‘No one came’
b. amwuto an o-si-ess-ta
anyone NEG come-SI-PAST-DECL
‘None of them came’

Because x_1 is fixed as a thematic argument of the embedded verb in the truth conditional meaning in (21-a), we expect *si* to be unavailable as addressee honorification when cA is not an argument of the embedded event. This prediction is borne out: *si* cannot be added in (25) where there is no implicit thematic argument for the raining event.

- (25) [pi-ka o-***si**-ess-ta-ko] cenhay-tallay-yo
rain-TOP come-*SI-PST-DECL-COMP relay-give-H_{Adr}

‘(int.) They wanted me to relay that it rained (and the speaker honors the addressee).’

One may argue that the addressee could potentially be the Affectee of the raining event. Consider a scenario where the addressee is a person of high status and experiences knee pain whenever it rains. Even in such a context, *si* remains ungrammatical. This suggests that mere relevance to the addressee is not sufficient. The unacceptability of *si* in this case provides crucial insight into the conditions governing its distribution, which we specify as affectedness. We argue that the Affectee role in cases like (25) is not directly encoded in the event structure and thus is not entailed by the raining event itself. Instead, there exists only an indirect causal relationship between the raining event and the addressee’s knee problems. One possible diagnostic for this distinction is whether the implicit affectee can be overtly realized through a ‘for-construction’: It rained ‘for/to’ Prof. Kim is not felicitous, so we do not consider Prof. Kim as an Affectee of the raining event.⁴

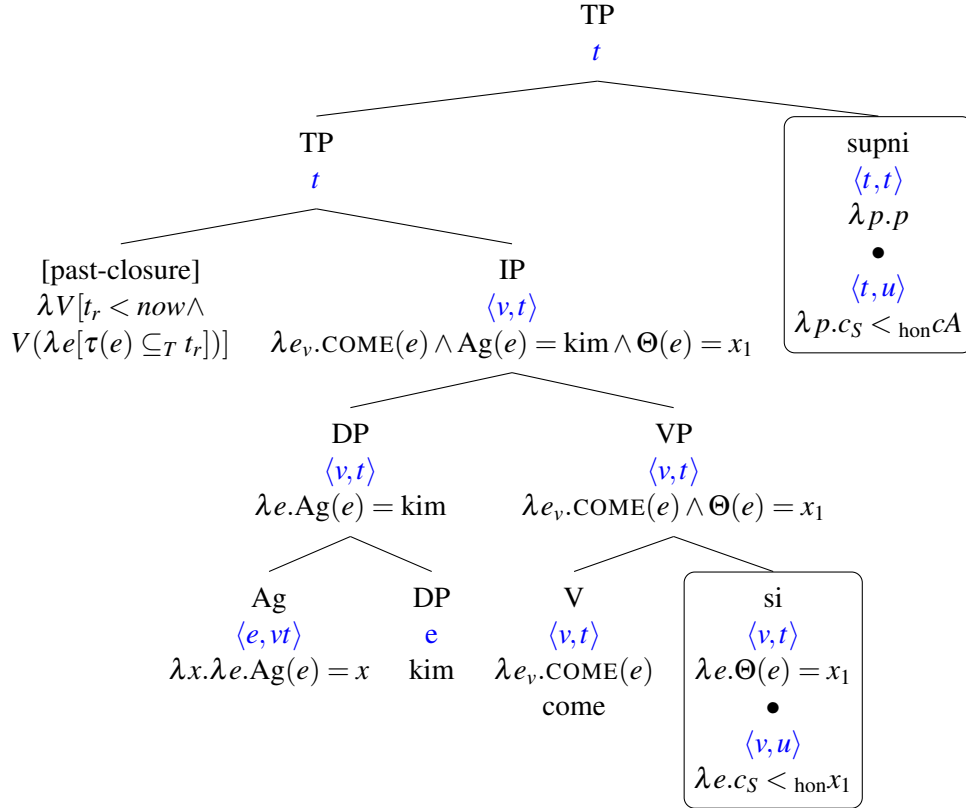
Given the denotations of *si* and *supni* that we have proposed, we demonstrate how these markers operate to derive the data observed in Section 3. In (26), *si* and *supni* are both used. Following a version of event semantics, we assume that the verb denotes a predicate of events and the thematic heads identify relevant thematic arguments of the verbs. Without *si* and *supni*, the prejacent proposition is true if and only if there exists an event of coming in some time trace preceding now such that the Agent is Kim. The addressee honorification *supni* does not add anything to the truth-conditional meaning, but *si* adds an event predicate that takes an event *e* and returns true if and only if some salient thematic argument of *e* is identical to *x*₁. We show the truth-conditional denotation of (26) in (26-a). At the use-conditional level, *supni* adds that the Addressee is higher in rank than the speaker, while *si* adds that *x*₁ is higher in rank than the speaker. This is shown in (26-b). The derivation in (27) shows that *si* composes with the verb, while *supni* composes higher at the TP level.

⁴ It is possible to characterize the raining event as someone ‘getting hit by the rain’, in which case the relevant entity becomes a direct affectee of the event. In this construction where the affectee is in the subject position, *si* is allowed to show speaker’s deference towards the affectee.

- (i) [kim kyoswunim-i pi-lul masu-si-ess-ta-ko] cenhay-tallay-yo
 Kim professor-SI-NOM rain-ACC hit-SI-PST-DECL-COMP relay-give-H_{Adr}
 ‘They wanted me to relay that it rained on Professor Kim.’
 ‘(More literally) Professor Kim was hit by the rain.’
- (ii) [pi-lul masu-si-ess-ta-ko] cenhay-tallay-yo
 rain-ACC hit-SI-PST-DECL-COMP relay-give-H_{Adr}
 ‘They wanted me to relay that it rained (on you).’

The truth-conditional meaning of *si* is included in the rest of the event predicate derivation, while the use-conditional content is collected at the top. This is indicated by the bullet operators as discussed in the previous section.

- (26) Kim kyoswunim-i o-si-ess-supni-ta.
 Kim professor-NOM come-SI-PST-H_{Adv}-DECL
 ‘Professor Kim came.’ (Speaker_{matrix} <_{hon} Prof. Kim)
- a. $\llbracket (26) \rrbracket^t = t_r < \text{now} \wedge \exists e [\text{COME}(e) \wedge [\tau(e) \subseteq_T t_r] \wedge \text{Ag}(e) = \text{kim} \wedge \Theta(e) = x_1]$
 (There exists an event of coming in some time trace preceding now such that the Agent is Kim and x_1 is some salient thematic argument)
- b. $\llbracket (26) \rrbracket^u = cS <_{\text{hon}} x_1, cS <_{\text{hon}} cA$
- (27) Derivation:



In default cases, the salient thematic argument is simply resolved to the Agent, so the resulting inference is that the Agent is higher in rank than the speaker. Because the subject of the sentence already provides the Agent argument, x_1 is identical to Prof. Kim, and we get the canonical subject honorification effect of *si*. However, in contexts where there is no Agent or the existing Agent cannot be honored due

to factors such as inanimacy, the salient thematic argument can be resolved to a different role. For example, recall that in the hide-and-seek example in (22), the context shifts the focus to the Theme of the event, and the Agent of the event is less likely to be honored given that she is described as a kid, so Θ is resolved to the Theme. In the next section, we show that this resolution of Θ accounts for the non-canonical, addressee-honoring use of *si*.

4.2 Deriving argument honorific *si* as addressee honorification

We have shown cases where *si* does not mark the speaker's deference towards the subject of the clause and instead honors the addressee. However, we show that this non-canonical use of *si* can be reduced to the canonical one when Θ is resolved to a non-Agent argument. Here we attribute the analysis to the context. We argue that this use of *si* continues to be an argument honorification, targeting some relevant thematic argument x_1 to be honored. In contexts where this relevant thematic argument coincides with the role of the addressee, it indirectly triggers addressee honorification. To illustrate this, let us revisit the example 'coffee is ready'.

- (28) *khephi nao-si-ess-supni-ta*
 coffee come.out-SI-PST-H_{Adr}-DECL
 ‘Coffee is ready.’

Both the truth-conditional and use-conditional semantics of (28) remain unchanged as indicated in (29). The sentence still entails the existence of a coffee-serving event where x_1 is a relevant thematic argument. The use of *si* continues to indicate that the speaker honors this thematic argument, x_1 . What is crucial here is that Θ cannot be resolved to the overt thematic argument, namely coffee. The remaining relevant thematic argument then is the Beneficiary or the Affectee of the event. In this particular context where coffee is served, the addressee is the beneficiary. This contextual co-reference between x_1 and the addressee ensures that the speaker's honorification towards the thematic argument x_1 indirectly results in honorification of the addressee. This relationship is formally represented in (29-d) and (29-e).

- (29) $\llbracket (28) \rrbracket = \langle \exists e. come(e) \wedge theme(e) = coffee \wedge \Theta(e) = x_1, \{cS <_{hon} x_1\} \rangle$
- a. TC: There exists a coming event of coffee and some relevant thematic argument is x_1 .
 - b. UC: $cS <_{hon} x_1$
 - c. relevant Θ : Beneficiary/Affectee
 - d. **context:** cA is the Beneficiary of this event
 - e. **implication:** $cS <_{hon} cA$

The Beneficiary of the coffee-being-ready event can also be overtly realized in the sentence, as shown in (30). In (30-a), the Beneficiary appears as a vocative, whereas in (30-b), it surfaces as a possessor. In both cases, the use of *si* is felicitous or at least marginally acceptable,⁵ showing that it is not the syntactic subject but the thematic argument that is relevant and sensitive to *si* honorification.

- (30) a. kim kyoswunim khephi nao-**si**-ess-supni-ta
Kim professor coffee come.out-SI-PST-H_{Adr}-DECL
'Professor Kim, coffee is ready.'
- b. kim kyoswunim-uy khephi nao-**si**-ess-supni-ta
Kim professor-POSS coffee come.out-SI-PST-H_{Adr}-DECL
'Coffee for Professor Kim is ready.'

Similarly, *si* used as addressee honorification in the parking example is also achieved by the coreference between x_1 and the Addressee, as shown by (31). Specifically, the truth-conditional meaning in (32-a) identifies some relevant thematic argument of the embedded state e' which is the state of parking being free. This relevant thematic argument is the Beneficiary of this state, and this thematic role corresponds to the matrix addressee. Thus, the use-conditional meaning in (32-b) in combination with this coreference of x_1 and the matrix addressee implies that the speaker honors the matrix addressee.

- (31) (Context: Speaker_{Matrix} <_{hon} Addressee)
[cwucha-nun mwulyo-**si**-la-ko] cenhay-tallay-yo
parking-TOP free-SI-DECL-COMP relay-give-H_{Adr}
'They wanted me to relay that parking is free.'
- (32) $\llbracket (31) \rrbracket = \langle \exists e.say(e) \wedge agent(e) = B \wedge recipient(e) = cS \wedge [\exists e'.free(e') \wedge theme(e) = e' \wedge theme(e') = parking \wedge \Theta(e') = x_1], \{cS <_{hon} x_1\} \rangle$
(There is a speech event (e) where B reports a state (e') to cS ; e' a state of being free; e' has parking as its theme and some salient thematic argument (affectee) x_1)
- a. TC: There exists a parking event and some relevant thematic argument is x_1 .
- b. UC: x_1 is honored by cS
- c. relevant θ : Beneficiary/Affectee
- d. context: cA is the Beneficiary of free parking

⁵ While (30-a) is accepted more generally, (30-b) received mixed responses. Two of our consultants commented that (30-b) might be syntactically odd but they would still accept it and they hear such examples frequently in cafes or restaurants. They gave (30-b) at least 2/5. One of our consultants noted that the acceptability of (30-b) is similar to that of other non-canonical uses of *si*.

- e. implication $cS <_{\text{hon}} cA$

In our analysis, *si* maps the relevant thematic argument to x_1 in the embedded clause but has the honorification implication collected at the top in a separate dimension. Thus, for all examples where *si* is embedded, we are able to capture that a) the addressee must be an affectee of the embedded event or state, and b) the addressee is honored by the matrix speaker not the embedded speaker.

4.3 Age variation

As we noted above, the use of *si* as indirect addressee honorification exhibits age-variation among speakers: while younger speakers of Korean in their twenties and below readily use *si* this way or at least are more accepting of this use, older and more conservative speakers of Korean consider it deviant and improper. What difference might exist between these two grammars, and how might we account for the grammar that is more constrained? We can maintain the analysis we proposed and argue that the difference lies in the kinds of thematic arguments allowed to resolve the Θ variable. Specifically, we have shown above that Θ can resolve to non-Agent/Theme roles such as the Affectee. This option might not be available for more conservative speakers, for whom only Agent and Theme roles can be identified as honored. In this variant, sentences that only contain inanimate Theme arguments as in (28) and (10) would be deviant, aligning with the judgments of older speakers.

Another possibility is that some kind of reanalysis is taking place in the language, where younger speakers use *si* to encode addressee honorification rather than argument honorification, at least in the formal register. While we cannot come up with a conclusive explanation at this point, we believe that affectedness is still a crucial key for the addressee-honoring use of *si*. A minimal variant of (28) where the predicate is now ‘run out’, *si* is degraded.

- (33) ?khephi teleci-si-ess-supni-ta.
 coffee run.out-SI-PAST-H_{Adr}-DECL
 (intended:) ‘Coffee is out.’

If *si* in the formal register simply encodes addressee honorification, we should not see such a difference between (28) and (33). However, our analysis based on affectedness does predict (33) to be degraded if the addressee, the customer in this case, is not affected by the state of coffee having run out.

5 Conclusion

In this paper, we present novel Korean data where the argument honorification marker *si* is used to mark deference towards the Addressee while still being embeddable. We observe that in this use, *si* exhibits sensitivity to the utterance context, including the presence of a direct addressee and the relative ranking of the speaker and addressee. This non-canonical use of *si* seems to provide a challenge to Portner et al. (2019)’s generalization that utterance-oriented content cannot be embedded while content-oriented content can.

We argue that this innovative use of *si* can be systematically reduced to its canonical counterpart, preserving the broader theoretical distinction between content-oriented and utterance-oriented markers. Specifically, we analyze *si* as a variable-introducing honorific marker that targets an internal thematic argument of an event and maps it to a free variable in its truth-conditional content. The encoding of the ranking between this argument and the speaker appears in the not-at-issue content of *si* and is interpreted independently of the truth-conditional content. The free variable is then resolved in the discourse context. In the default use, the salient thematic argument is resolved to the Agent or the Theme, which corresponds to the subject. In the non-canonical use, the possible salient thematic argument of the event extends to Beneficiary or Affectee, especially when Agent or Theme roles are unavailable for honorification. We argue that an inference of Addressee honorification arises when that salient thematic argument coincides with the role of the Addressee. Thus, the coreference between the salient thematic argument and the Addressee derives the Addressee honorification effect indirectly.

We further observe that the use of *si* as indirect addressee honorification is particularly common in service and relay contexts because these contexts make the role of the addressee more prominent, foregrounding the addressee’s relevance of being be an event participant with a thematic role. We also note that this use is accepted more by younger speakers than older speakers and argue that conservative speakers only allow the free variable to be resolved to thematic roles like the Agent or the Theme whereas younger speakers extend it to Beneficiary, Affectee or even Possessor roles.

By analyzing the Addressee honorification effect of *si* as an indirect coreference between an internal thematic argument and the matrix Addressee, we maintain the observed embedding asymmetry between argument honorification and addressee honorification as well as the association of utterance sensitivity with unembeddability.

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