On the 'subject' honorific *-si-* in Korean

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Honorification in Korean

- Korean has morphosyntactic means of indexing superior social standing, can express reverence or politeness

- Korean has markers to honor both the addressee and the subject, thus can be used for **discourse/performative** purposes as well as for **participant/propositional** purposes.

- **The focus of this research is _-si-_, which is canonically used as an honorific marker for the subject, e.g.:**

    halmeni-kkeyse   chincel-ha-si-ta.
    grandmother-HON.NOM   kind-be-SH-DECL
    'Grandmother is kind."

- **But there are some problematic cases, which are already acceptable in many varieties of Korean, e.g.:**

    halmeni-kkeyse   sayngkak-i coh-usi-ta.
    grandmother-HON.NOM   thought-NOM   good-SH-DECL
    'Grandmother has a good idea.'

Two analytical challenges

1. What does it mean to honor someone?

- A kind of **multidimensional**, **expressive** meaning (Potts & Kawahara 2004):

    (1) saym-i   (w)us-us-eyo
    Sam-NOM laugh-SH-AH
        a. 'Sam laughs.'
        b. 'The speaker honours Sam.'

- Specifically, expressing a kind of **social** meaning, denoting an interval corresponding to a **register** (McCready 2019):

    (2)   High ⊆ [.6,1)
           Mid ⊆ [.3,.7]
           Low ⊆ [0,.4]

2. How is the target of honorification identified?

- Much less clear:

    "Exactly how the target of honorification is determined still awaits a full explanation" (Kim & Sells 2007: 332)

- Anchored in grammatical relations (hence 'subject honorific') but not limited to syntax; some kind of pragmatic relation?

- ***Our goal:*** to show that the pragmatic relation in question is a very general notion of PROXIMITY, and that this makes some correct predictions (though there is interesting speaker variation).

Against a syntactic account

Common to treat honorification as a kind of agreement, but this is misguided:

1. Agreement is **lexically controlled**, but one's level of respect for individuals is not – it is a pragmatic concept that can be **context-dependent**.

2. Agreement is **all-or-nothing** (two things either agree or they do not), but honorification is a **cumulative** phenomenon: more markers of honorification result in a greater degree of respect being ascribed.

3. Failure to agree leads to **ungrammaticality**; misuse of honorifics leads to **inappropriateness**: rudeness or obsequiousness are important communicative acts that are perfectly well part of our linguistic competence.

4. Agreement is **morphosyntactic**, but honorification **need not target lexically present material**.

(3) **halmeni-kkeyse (w)us-usi-ta**
grandmother-HON.NOM laugh-SH--DECL
'Grandmother laughs."

(4) **kokayknim, alumdawu-s-eyo.**
customer beautiful.be-SH-AH
'Customer, you look beautiful.'

(5) **i chascan-un alumdawu-si-ta**
this chinaware-TOP beautiful-SH-DECL
'This chinaware (belonging to the honored one) is beautiful.'

Determining the target of *-si-*

- **What is the target of *-si-*?**

  - The subject? ***BUT:*** (6)

  - The 'maximal human referent' of the subject? (Kim & Sells 2007) ***BUT:*** (7)

- Something more general: the 'closest' human referent to the subject: see (8).

- **PROXIMITY** construed broadly/intuitively.
  - **identity** is maximal proximity
  - possession is also a form of proximity (cf. Barker 1995: 46ff.), with **inalienable** possession being 'closer' than **alienable**, etc.

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

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

(8) $\lambda x.\lambda y.$**human**(y) & **honored**(y) &
  $\forall z[$**human**(z) & $y \neq z \supset \text{PROXIMITY}(x, y) > \text{PROXIMITY}(x, z)]$

Going beyond possession

- Not just possession, but other kinds of (actual, physical) proximity too.

(9) **kunmwu kanung ciyek-un Pusan-ina Ilsan-i-si-p-ni-ta.**

work   possible area-TOP   Pusan-or   Ilsan-be-SH-AH-IND-DECL

'The area where the honoured one might work is Pusan or Ilsan.' (Kim & Sells 2007: 319)

A scale of (social) proximity

- If the subject is human, it is the target (identity = MAX(PROXIMITY)).

- Inalienable possession.

More conservative dialects

- -

More liberal dialects

- Alienable possession.

- 'Potential' possession.

(10) **emeni-uy salinca-ka   canin-ha-s-yess-ta.**
mother-GEN murderer-NOM cruel-BE-SH-PST-DECL
'Mother's murderer was cruel.'   [target = murderer]

(11) **halmeni-kkeyse pal-i   apu-si-ta**
teacher-HON.NOM   arm-NOM hurt-SH-DECL
'Grandmother's arm hurts.'   [target = grandmother]

(12) **halmeni-uy   khep-i yeyppu-si-ta.**
grandmother-GEN cup-NOM beautiful-SH-DECL
'Grandmother's cup is beautiful.'   [target = grandmother]

(13) **ttalki-khulim   olli-si-n   kheyikhu nawa-ss-sup-ni-ta**
strawberry-cream raise-SH-ADJ cake   come.out-PST-AH-IND-DECL
'The cake with the strawberry cream is ready.'   [target = addressee]

Potential possessor, not addressee

- Apparent 'addressee' targets of *-si-* are actually about potential/future possession (and so imminent proximity).
  - This is why the prototypical examples come from customer service contexts.

(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-p-ni-ta.**
    this car-TOP   old-become-SH-PST-but   free-be-AH-IND-DECL
    'This car is old, but free.'   [target = A's father (not A)]

(15) **sayksang kyohwan piyong-un kwumayca-nim pwutam-i-si-p-ni-ta.**
    color   exchange cost-TOP   buyer-HON   charge-be-SH-AH-IND-DECL
    'The expense for exchange for a different colour will be charged to the (honoured) buyer.' (Kim & Sells 2007: 319)   [target = buyer]

Competing targets

- Inalienable possession > alienable possession

- Alienable possession > potential possession

- **Ongoing survey data collection**

(16) **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]

(17) *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 kongcca-i-s-ip-ni-ta.**
      my father-GEN car-TOP   old-become-SH-PST-but   free-be-SH-AH-IND-DECL
      'My father's car is old, but free.'   [target = B's father (not A)]

Conclusion

- We propose a pragmatic approach, rather than a syntactic account, **focusing on the notion of proximity**

- What gets understood as proximity varies across dialects, **but related to closeness in some way universally**

- Some value of closeness or proximity that governs preference for what the target is, **hence some degree of predictive power**

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