

Politeness in Korean (and some gender differences)

November 9, 2016

Announcements

- We can choose dates for the group presentations.
- There will be 3 presentation slots each day:
 - Wednesday 11/30
 - Monday 12/5
 - Wednesday 12/7
 - Monday 12/12

Two topics for today

- What is politeness and how is it expressed?
- What does politeness sound like? Are certain kinds of speech by men and women perceived differently?

Polite vs. Honorific

- Korean has two main speech **registers**
 - Banmal/반말: for familiar relationships with equals and less-thans
 - Jondaemal/존댓말: for unfamiliar relationships, and superiors
- The choice of which to use depends on the relationship between the speaker and hearer, NOT on whether the speaker is trying to be polite or not
 - It doesn't matter how upset one might be, it is almost unthinkable to use banmal to a superior.
 - You can be either polite or impolite while using either register.
- Nevertheless, they interact. Things that are honorific tend to also be polite.

How is politeness defined?

- Positive politeness
 - Doing something; reaching out
 - “emphasizing connectedness and appreciation”
- Negative politeness
 - Not doing something; holding back
 - “recognizing the autonomy of others and avoiding intrusion”
- Examples?

Politeness strategies

- From Brown & Levinson (1987)
- Positive strategies
 - notice the hearer; exaggerate; use in-group identity markers; presuppose/assert common ground; give or ask for reasons
- Negative strategies
 - be conventionally indirect; question/hedge; be pessimistic; give deference; impersonalize speaker and hearer
- Some Korean examples...

Tag questions

- Two types
 - Speaker-oriented (checking information)
 - Hearer-oriented (defer, establish common ground)
- Examples:
 - “이제 그만 라디오 좀 꺼줘, 응?”
“Could you please turn off the radio, hm?”
 - “난 네가 너무 하다고 생각하는데, 안 그래?”
“I think you’ve gone too far, don’t you?”
 - “아저씨께서 잘못 하셨군요, 그렇죠?”
“You were wrong, Sir, weren’t you?”

Hedges

- A word or phrase that weakens an assertion
- Examples:
 - jom 좀; geulssae 글썸; geunyang 그냥; ama 아마
 - -lji mollayo/-을지 몰라요; -l geot gata/-을 것 같다
 - “너무 비싸” It is too expensive.
 - “너무 비싼 것 같아” It seems too expensive.
 - “좀 비싼 것 같아” It seems a bit expensive.
 - “좀 비싼 것 같지 않아?” Doesn't it seem a bit expensive?

Backchanneling

- When the hearer acknowledges what the speaker is saying without actually interrupting.
- English:
 - “yeah”, “I know” “Mm hm”, “right”
- Korean:
 - eung 응; geurae 그래; nae/yae 네/예; majayo 맞아요

Summary of research

- The research is really spotty, but for any of these features, it seems that Korean women are more polite than men.
- There is much better research investigating how politeness *sounds*, and what people perceive as polite.
 - Can something sound more or less “polite” even without any overt markers of politeness?

What sounds polite?

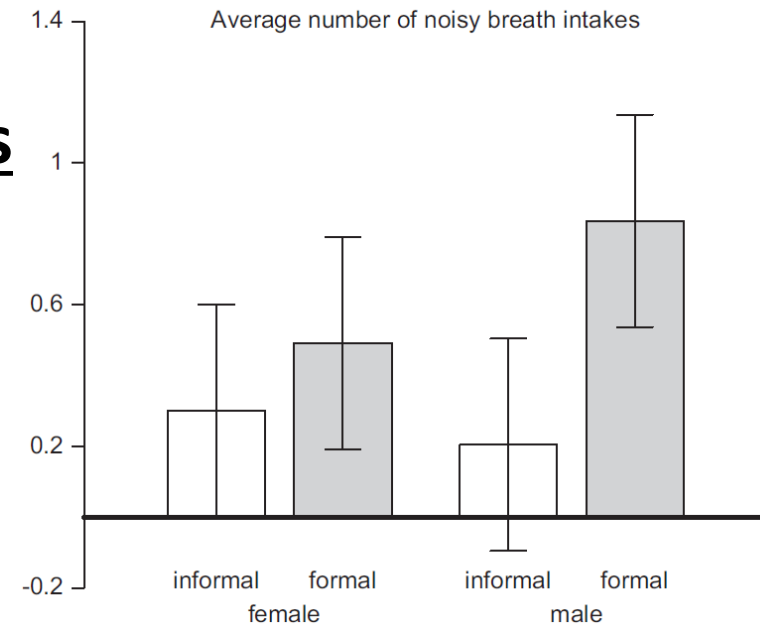
- In many languages (e.g. Japanese), polite speech is spoken with higher pitch.
- In Japanese:
 - Utterance-final pitch rises are perceived as more polite than pitch falls.
 - A medium speaking rate is perceived as more polite than a very fast or slow speaking rate.
- Could this be universal? Why would high pitch sound polite?
- Is this true in Korean as well?

Winter & Grawunder 2012

- Looked first at difference between banmal and jondaemal
- Korean speakers did a role-playing task in which they acted out a scenario that required banmal or jondaemal speech (e.g. asking a professor for a recommendation letter).

Winter & Grawunder 2012

- Jondaemal/존댓말 was characterized by:
- *Lower* pitch
- Slightly *slower* speaking rate (0.38 syllables/second)
- *More* “ah”s and “oh”s
- *Men* had *more* noisy breath intakes



Brown et al. 2014

- But can people *hear* a difference between the two?
- When there is Ω or some other marker, we know it's polite, but something could sound polite even without such markers.

Brown et al. 2014

- “교수님, 지난 번에 말씀하신 책 있잖아요. 그 책이 도서관에 없는 거 같은데 빌려주실 수 있을까요?”
 - “Professor, that book you mentioned last time doesn't seem to be at the library, so I was wondering if maybe I could borrow your copy?”
- “영희야, 지난 번에 발한 책 있잖아. 그 책이 도서관에 없는 거 같은데 빌려줄 수 있어?”
 - “Hey Younghee, that book you mentioned last time doesn't seem to be at the library, so could I borrow your copy?”

Experiment 1: The speakers

- 8 native Korean speakers read these scenarios in pairs, with one banmal and one jondaemal.
- Each text was accompanied by a picture – either an old male Korean professor or the subject's own friend.
- The experiment was run by a non-Korean speaker, so the participant wouldn't speak more polite simply because an unfamiliar Korean was doing the testing.

Experiment 1: The listeners

- 20 native Korean + 20 native English listeners.
- Listened to each “neutral” phrase
 - 8 speakers * 10 scenarios * 2 registers = 160 stimuli
 - Totally random order
- Asked to identify whether it sounded like it was said to somebody above or below the speaker: 윗사람 or 아랫사람
 - “Korean society can be very hierarchical, and people are often thought of as being ‘above’ or ‘below’ oneself. Those ‘above’ include professors, workplace superiors and elders. When talking with people who are ‘above’, you have to be respectful and speak politely.”

Experiment 1: Results

- Overall accuracy was quite low: 58.1% for Korean listeners, and 52.9% for English listeners.
- No gender differences, for speakers or listeners
- Why so low, especially for the Koreans?

Experiment 2: Procedure

- Same as experiment 1, but this time stimuli were presented in pairs: Each pair was the same scenario spoken by the same person.
- New groups of listeners
- Listeners had to choose which of the two sounded like it was spoken to a person 'above'.
- All of an individual speaker's stimuli were presented together (i.e. "blocked by speaker").

Experiment 2: Results

- Accuracy was higher: 70.0% for Korean listeners, 58.1% for English listeners.
- No gender differences, for speakers or listeners
- Conclusions:
 - For Korean listeners, it means that listeners can tell whether something is intended to be honorific even without any explicit markers.
 - For English listeners, it means that some aspects of Korean “politeness” could be perceptible to speakers of a different language, and English and Korean may have something in common.

Idemaru et al. 2015

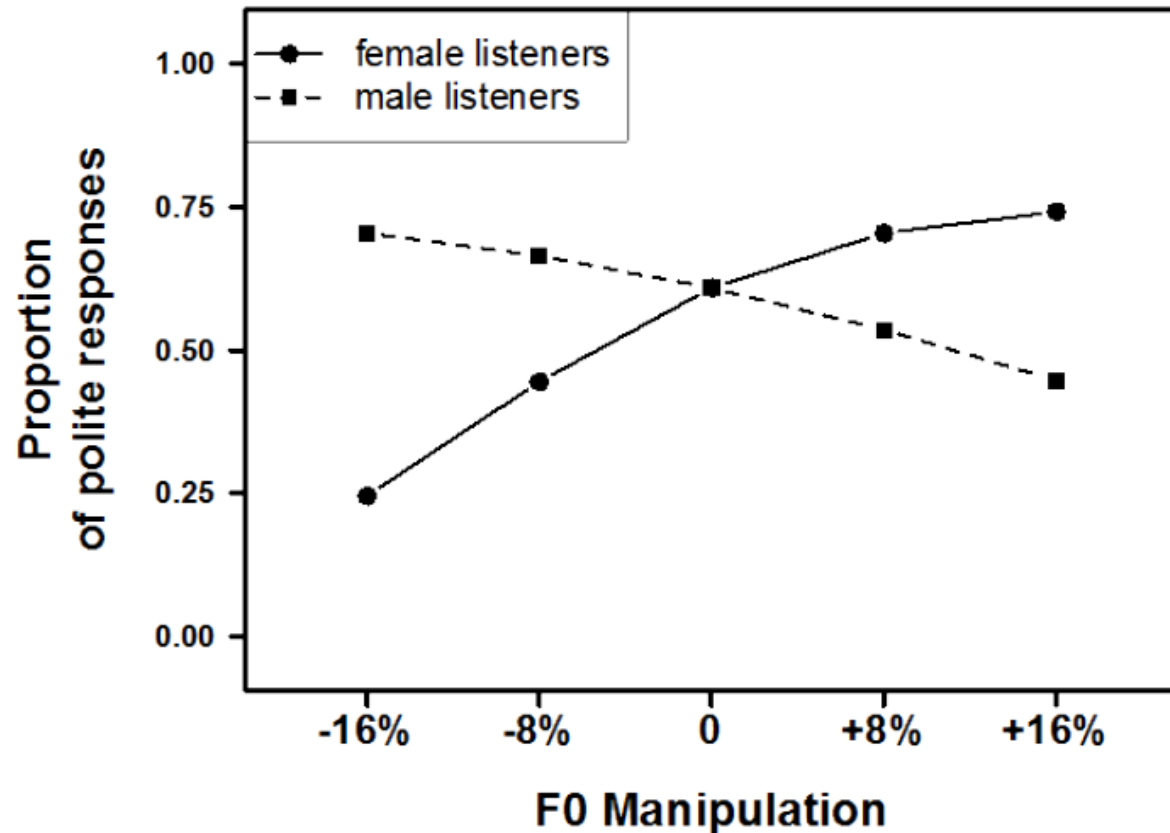
- Let's go back to the role of pitch: Korean jondaemal is spoken with a lower pitch than banmal, but is speech with lower pitch perceived as more polite?
- Are there gender differences in terms of whether high or low pitch is perceived as more polite?

Idemaru et al. 2015

- They took 8 of the scenarios from Brown et al. 2014 and used only the jondaemal versions (i.e. all of the stimuli were “polite”).
- They then used a computer to manipulate the pitch of each utterance, achieving 5 levels: 16% lower, 8% lower, the original, 8% higher, and 16% higher.
- 10 Korean listeners (6 female, 4 male) then heard all of these tokens, randomized within speaker (i.e. blocked by speaker) and judged whether it was directed toward someone ‘above’ or ‘below’.

Results: What is more polite?

- Male listeners: low pitch
- Female listeners: high pitch



WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?!?