

# Corpus-based analysis of honorifics in Korean and its pedagogical implication

Focusing on the speech level shift  
from non-honorifics to honorifics

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This study explores the speech level shifts from non-honorific to honorific situation by analyzing Korean spoken corpora of conversations between native speakers of Korean through a discourse-analytic framework. Although non-honorific styles (e.g., *panmal*) are used as frequently as honorific ones (e.g., *contaysmal*), little attention has been paid to non-honorific expressions in Korean, let alone to the speech level shift between non-honorific and honorific. Analyzing interactions between native speakers of Korean revealed that, depending on the change of their stance in response to the interlocutor's utterance, speakers dynamically switched their speech levels not only within the boundary of non-honorifics or honorifics, but also across the dichotomous categories, that is, they changed from non-honorific to honorific speech styles. In general, speakers employed the speech level elevation from non-honorific to honorific when indexing a confrontational stance toward a topic and an object, or when upgrading an epistemic stance in naturally occurring interactions. The findings of this study encourage researchers to actively construct and use corpora of authentic/naturalistic conversations to explore the dynamicity of the speech level shift and its functions, which in turn contributes to developing instruction materials that reflect the dynamicity of the Korean honorific system.

**Keywords:** honorifics, non-honorifics, speech level shift, spoken corpus

## 1. Introduction

The present study analyzes authentic Korean conversation data through a discourse-analytic perspective, which allows the discussion to the extent to

include the honorific system. Honorifics is one of the linguistic features that distinguishes Korean from other languages that do not have such a sophisticated honorific system, and its complexity often prevents learners of Korean as a foreign language (KFL) from ultimate success in the acquisition of Korean. On one side of the Korean honorific system coin, non-honorific forms, also known as *panmal* ‘half-talk’ in Korean, are normally used between those whose relationship embodies a high degree of intimacy and/or is one of equal or lower status. Compared to honorific forms, also called *contaysmal*, *nophimmal*, *kyenge*, etc. ‘honorific/respectful talk’, non-honorific styles mainly register intimacy and casualness as well as, occasionally, impoliteness.

Due to this informality, and potential impoliteness, the importance of teaching non-honorific expressions has been overshadowed by the emphasis on honorific style sentences. Brown (2010, 2011) pointed out that KFL textbooks show a tendency to neglect and underemphasize the importance of teaching non-honorific styles that can be used to index intimate relationships. This imbalanced material may lead KFL learners to have biased and narrow perspectives on the Korean honorific system. Nevertheless, the canonical teaching materials have overlooked the dynamicity of Korean honorifics, which KFL students must be aware of to be a competent Korean speaker equipped with “sociopragmatic knowledge” (Leech 2014, p.15).

Since the Korean honorific system cannot be fully explained without consideration of politeness, it is crucial for KFL learners to acquire and improve both “pragmalinguistic” and “sociopragmatic” knowledge of politeness to be a competent speaker. In regard to the linguistic manifestation of politeness, Leech divided politeness into “pragmalinguistic” and “sociopragmatic” politeness. On the one hand, the former is directly related to the knowledge of grammatical linguistic resources without the consideration of contexts, such as knowing the notion of the subject honorific suffix *-si-* and various humble expressions for addressing status superior. On the other hand, the latter refers to the knowledge of the actual, appropriate usages of the linguistic resources in accordance with different contexts, e.g., the unconventional use of the subject honorific suffix *-si-* to convey sarcasm and impoliteness in a context where its use is unnecessary (Brown 2013a). The lack of balanced knowledge in both types of politeness may lead to KFL students showing a lack of stability in using honorifics by unconsciously impolite or overpolite in interactions.

To date, many researchers have dealt with the Korean honorifics system from various perspectives and have contributed to the development of various teaching materials and methods to help KFL students enhance their pragmatic understanding. Some researchers have analyzed in what contexts and how Korean speakers shift their speech levels, especially between the honorific styles, the polite *-e/*

*ayo* style and the deferential *-(su)pnita*, and various functions of the shift (Eun and Strauss 2004, Byon 2007, Brown 2011, Park 2014a, Park 2014b). However, only a few studies touch upon non-honorific expressions in the Korean language, let alone the speech level shift between non-honorific and honorific.

The findings of this preliminary, qualitative research are expected to contribute to helping KFL practitioners to develop balanced teaching materials effectively dealing with both honorifics and non-honorifics, which can guide KFL students to appropriately choose and use a speech style. To achieve this goal, this study investigates the speech level shifts from non-honorific to honorific styles by using corpus data as an important resource for the development of teaching materials to enhance L2 learners' sociopragmatic knowledge of the Korean language, i.e., appropriate use of (non)honorifics moment by moment. Moreover, this study employs a discourse analysis approach to analyze the corpus data and therefore pays close attention to how the speaker shifts speech levels, how the hearer receives (interprets) the utterance(s) of the speaker, and how they co-construct a certain discourse. Eventually, raising KFL learners' awareness of the dynamic relationship between non-honorific and honorific styles will contribute to improving their communicative competency, which cannot be achieved without an overall understanding of the Korean honorific system (Oh 2007). Of particular import for this goal is to use naturally occurring conversation corpora, through which we can see how native speakers of Korean normatively and strategically employ various speech levels in daily communication.

The following section introduces previous studies pertaining to corpus-based investigation of Korean honorifics and speech level alternations. This section also reviews the literature of teaching honorifics in KFL settings and their limitations, as well as the approach applied in this study. Then, Section 3 outlines how the corpus data were analyzed for this study. Section 4 presents two noticeable functions of the speech level elevation from the non-honorific to honorific styles. The last section summarizes findings and discusses their pedagogical implications and limitations of the current study.

## 2. Previous studies

### 2.1 Speech levels and its dynamic shifts

The Korean honorific system consists of various linguistic elements including particles, morphemes, words, and sentence enders. Korean speakers make utterances by deliberately, and spontaneously, choosing and combining various linguistic elements depending on the situation and their relationship with the

addressee. In particular, sentence enders, which are the focus of this study, are attached to the stem of a verb or an adjective and index the relationship between interlocutors. There are six speech levels represented by different sentence enders (see Table 1 adopted from Sohn 1999: p. 355). Among the six speech levels, only four of them (non-honorific styles: plain and intimate; honorific styles: polite and deferential) are commonly used in modern Korean, while the familiar and blunt styles are historical TV dramas.

**Table 1.** Korean speech levels in Sohn (1999)

	Declarative	Interrogative	Imperative	Propositive
Plain	- <i>ta</i>	- <i>ni?</i>	- <i>la</i>	- <i>ca</i>
Intimate	- <i>e</i>	- <i>e?</i>	- <i>e</i>	- <i>e</i>
Familiar	- <i>ne-y</i>	- <i>na?</i>	- <i>ke-y</i>	- <i>se-y</i>
Blunt	-( <i>s</i> ) <i>o</i>	-( <i>s</i> ) <i>o?</i>	-( <i>u</i> ) <i>o</i>	-( <i>u</i> ) <i>p-si-ta</i>
Polite	- <i>e-yo</i>	- <i>e-yo?</i>	- <i>e-yo</i>	- <i>e-yo</i>
Deferential	-( <i>su</i> ) <i>pnita</i>	-( <i>su</i> ) <i>pnika?</i>	- <i>sipsio</i>	-( <i>u</i> ) <i>sipsita</i>

Each level is strategically chosen and used by the speaker in consideration of his or her relationship with the hearer or the referent, that is, his or her vertical/horizontal distance with the addressee. For example, when addressing someone who has a higher status and/or low intimacy, or when making a formal speech to audience, the speaker normally makes utterances that end in either the polite style *-eyo* or the deferential style *-supnita*. Contrastively, when the speaker interacts with status equals, inferiors or intimates, s/he chooses the plain style *-ta* or intimate style *-e*, by which to index closeness, intimacy, and casualness.

- (1) yenghwa-lul po-ass-eyo      / -supnita / -ta    / -e.  
movie-ACC watch-PST-POL / -DEF      / -PLN / -INT  
‘(I) watched a movie.’

However, this categorization does not mean that a speaker maintains the use of one speech style for the entirety of an interaction. Rather, adhering to one speech style most likely sounds monotonous and thereby unnatural to native speakers of Korean. Unfortunately, this tends to be frequently found in the interactions of KFL learners. Korean speakers frequently and dynamically switch their speech levels as necessary. To explicate the attributes of the dynamic speech level shift, several studies have explored the patterns and meanings of speech level alteration by using various corpus data, as in the following. For example, some researchers transcribed and analyzed easily accessible public discourse data such

as news broadcasts, English education programs, religious sermons, and radio/TV talk shows, etc. By analyzing 5.5 hours of self-established spoken corpus data of the public discourse, for example, Eun and Strauss (2004) found that the selection of either the polite style or the deferential style is influenced by the status of information with respect to interlocutors rather than by other factors such as the speakers' relative social status, gender, and the formality of the ongoing discourse. According to their analysis, speakers in public discourse tend to use the polite style ending *-eyo* to mark shared information and common-sense knowledge, while usually marking new information with the deferential ending *-(su)pnita*.

Brown (2015) problematized Eun and Strasuss' argument by pointing out that their analysis lacks the accounts of various interactional particles such as *-ci* and *-canha* that cannot be used with the deferential ending morphologically, and that actually mark shared information and common-sense knowledge no matter whether the polite style sentence ending *-e/ayo* is used. Then, from the perspective of indexicality, he analyzed a Korean talk show and reached the conclusion that the speaker in public speech, like the talk show host in his data, uses the deferential style sentence ender *-(su)pnita* to directly index "formal presentational stance," while the use of *-eyo* as the opposition to *-(su)pnita* "indirectly" indexes affective stances (p. 56). In addition, Brown emphasized the importance of analyzing how other verbal and non-verbal resources interact with the sentence enders and co-construct honorific expressions in various speech events.

Park (2014a, 2014b) also discovered a similar pattern of speech level alternation between polite and deferential styles in a different setting – a university KFL classroom. She focused on the "transition-signaling process" (2014a, p.177) conducted by the KFL teachers, in which the deferential style ending *-(u)psita* in the propositive-type sentence is employed to elicit students' awareness that one activity is over, and a new one is about to start. In her 21 hours of video- and audio-recording data collected from seven Korean classes from a university in the United, we can see that the use of the turn transition marker *-(u)psita*, whose English equivalent is *let's*, is followed by a switch back to the default pedagogical talk form *-eyo*. In her data, the teacher informs students that a new lesson has started by using the deferential style propositive ending *-(u)psita* and then switches the speech level from the deferential to the polite style, which is the default form of pedagogical talk.

Although many corpora-based studies have dealt with the speech level shift within the honorific speech styles and explored its various functions from a variety of perspectives, only a few studies have focused on the speech level alternation involving non-honorific expressions. By analyzing Korean talk shows and interviews, Lee and Cho (2015) found that the speakers shift their speech styles from honorific to non-honorific (these are referred to as "downshifts"), when express-

ing certain meanings, such as deviation from the main topic and indications of personal involvement. In contrast, “upshifts” (switching from non-honorific to honorific speech styles) contribute to increasing the seriousness of an utterance and re-establishing the relationship with the addressee. Park (2012) also revealed that KFL teachers strategically shift their speech styles from honorific to non-honorific in order to index the frame shift from instructional to intimate, casual conversation, and thereby build rapport with students.

Building on the previous studies on the alternation of speech levels, this study focuses on the social meanings constructed through dynamic speech level shifts and, more specifically, on shifts from non-honorific to honorific in authentic, daily interactions between intimate interactants. The high degree of intimacy and familiarity in these types of interaction is one of the key factors that makes it relevant for interlocutors to use non-honorific forms to address each other, which indexes casualness and solidarity, regardless of their socially predetermined hierarchical relationship, e.g., father and daughter, older sister/brother and younger sister/brother, senior and junior in school, etc. (Brown 2013b, Park 2014a). It is important to note that this intimate relationship renders the abrupt switch to honorifics a marked utterance that is unusual, irregular, and divergent.

## 2.2 Applicability of corpus data to KFL settings

There have been a number of researchers who discuss the application of corpora to the learning of KFL, with a focus on explaining the difference(s) between a pair of confusing linguistic elements of Korean. For example, Sohn (2005) used a large body of corpus data including the Sejong corpus and her own spoken corpus to examine the subtle differences between the two sentence enders *-ketun(yo)* and *-canha(yo)* and revealed their distinctive functions.

Oh (2007) examined the strategic use of the speech level shift between the polite and deferential style by analyzing the spoken corpus of two nationally-broadcasted question-and-answer sessions between the former president of South Korea Kim Dae-Jung and Korean citizens. The aim of her study was to introduce nine major principles of Korean honorifics to deepen KFL learners' understanding of the system and thereby improve their communicative competency in Korean. However, her study showed some limitations, such as the small size of analyzed data and the lack of examination of daily conversation. In addition, no non-honorific expressions were analyzed since the study focused only on the public discourse between the president and citizens, which is a similar problem that the traditional KFL teaching materials have shown.

Brown (2013b) emphasized the importance of teaching non-honorifics in KFL settings and discussed the potential of using corpus data from a Korean drama as

resources for KFL learners to enhance their understanding of pragmatic features of Korean honorifics. He pointed out the problematic tendency of the current KFL settings to marginalize non-honorifics, which has resulted in failing to equip learners with a balanced, comprehensive perspective on the Korean honorific system. As an alternative pedagogy that he called “consciousness-raising activities” (p.14), Brown suggested that teachers provide KFL learners with a series of short extracts from a Korean drama and let them find various functions of (non)honorifics by analyzing the interactions between drama characters.

Even though the previous studies briefly discussed above have contributed to the discussion on the possibilities of using corpus data in KFL settings, no research has focused on the dynamic relationship of non-honorifics and honorifics found in authentic and naturalistic conversations. Thus, this study focuses more on naturally occurring interactions in casual settings, in which two or more interlocutors’ mutual intimacy is so high that they are allowed to freely switch their speech levels in the process of having a conversation about various topics and producing various actions.

### 3. Data and methodology

#### 3.1 Corpus data

To explore the complex speech level shifts across two distinctive boundaries, we analyzed the Sejong spoken corpus, which consists of 200 spoken genre materials and amounts to 805,606 words. As this resource is publicly open to researchers, we can easily access an abundant amount of data that includes various types of discourse. The data were collected between 2001 and 2003, and the age of participants varies from 10s to 50s. For this study, data from 84 casual conversations were chosen, excluding other discourse types such as discussion, lecture, monologue, and public speech, in which it is inherently difficult to find examples of mutual, multidirectional interactions. Furthermore, those settings make it almost impossible for interlocutors to dynamically switch their speech styles. Due to the absence of any technological support for finding the speech level alternation, all the alternation tokens were searched for and found manually in a series of corpora where the participants unilaterally or mutually use non-honorific sentence enders as a default speech style.

Using the spoken corpus data was beneficial to exploring the function and implication of dynamic speech level shifts, especially including non-honorific styles, in that (1) its participants are diverse in terms of age, sex, and occupation and (2) they perform various actions in the talk about numerous topics in authen-

tic interaction. The diversity of the data in terms of participants, topics, and actions made it possible for researchers to find patterned uses of the unconventional speech level shift.

### 3.2 Procedure

In regard to the transcription conventions of this study, due to the absence of audio and video data in the Sejong corpus, this study was not able to reflect the multimodality of the Korean language such as overlapping, duration of pauses and silences, body gestures, and the gaze of interlocutors. Instead, the data were manually transcribed in a three-line format, as in the following example:

A: achim mek-ess-eyo?  
 breakfast eat-PST-**POL**(ITR)  
 ‘Did you eat breakfast?’

In the first line, the Korean utterances are romanized according to the Yale Romanization system, and the speech level shifts from non-honorifics to honorifics are shown in bold. In the next line, a morpheme-by-morpheme glossary is provided and shows a literal meaning of each morpheme (refer to the Appendix for gloss abbreviations). In the same line, the sentence type is parenthesized next to the sentence ender where deemed necessary. The abbreviations used are shown in the Appendix. The idiomatic English translations of the utterances are provided in the last line of the transcripts. Each 3-tier transcription format of an utterance is marked by Arabic numerals on the left of the excerpts, and the speech level elevation will be also marked by an arrow next to the line number.

### 3.3 Discourse analysis approach

In Korean interactions, we can find a variety of (non)honorific elements, which the speaker can intentionally or unconsciously choose and use for a particular purpose in a particular context. Even when you convey the same information, you may choose a different honorific expression to index your identity in relation to your interlocutors and to display a certain degree of formality/casualness. Among numerous linguistic phenomena related to honorifics, the present study approaches the speech level shifts employed in naturally occurring conversations. Discourse analysis examines how a speaker uses a language in a particular social and cultural setting, that is, the relationship between language and the contexts where it is used (Paltridge 2012). The analysis of Korean honorifics requires the detailed examination of both grammatical features and the contexts in which Korean speakers shift their speech styles between non-honorific and honorific.



One central focus of the DA approach is how we communicate with others in a particular social and cultural setting (Hymes 1964, Paltridge 2012). In other words, through analyzing discourses, especially naturally occurring conversations in the present study, we can examine how interlocutors co-construct interactions by reconstructing preexisting grammar patterns and other semiotic resources in order to conduct a particular action, convey meanings, and display identity. This examination requires researchers to focus on several features of communication. First, we need to look into how utterances are syntactically structured, e.g., how the interlocutors call each other, what kinds of verbs and sentence enders they use in conversation, and what is linguistically expressed or omitted.

This analysis must be followed by considering the relationship between interlocutors. This step can play a key role in distinguishing desired, preferred actions from dispreferred ones in the analysis of the Korean language. For example, Korean speakers always consider their relationship with their interlocutors and choose the most appropriate speech level to save their own face and that of others and to display his/her identity as a socially well-educated and acceptable one. Thus, focusing on the relationship between interlocutors in interaction will be an important criterion to see whether a certain expression is normative or not. Thirdly, we are required to examine the context of communication, which is intertwined with and surrounds the first two concepts. The context in which the linguistic and non-linguistic resources are used, and the relationship between interlocutors is coded can be used to (re)confirm what the speakers are doing and ultimately connotating in their spoken discourse. The following section introduces in detail what kind of data was chosen and how they were analyzed for this study.

#### 4. Speech level shift and natural interaction

By searching for utterances that end in the polite and deferential style sentence enders from the entire set of non-honorific style utterances, a total of 36 tokens of the speech level elevation in 15 corpora were found. The frequency of the shift from non-honorifics to the polite ending style was much greater than the shift from non-honorifics to the deferential ending style. Out of 36 tokens found, 26 tokens were related to the indexation of a confrontational and epistemic stance toward a topic or object. The rest of the alternation tokens is related to sarcasm or role-plays initiated by the shift of footing (see Brown 2013a for the sarcastic use of honorifics, and Park 2012 for the relationship between footing and speech level alternation). Among the various usages of the speech level alternations, this study

puts focus on the first two dominant usages, which only includes the alternation from Non-honorific sentence enders to the polite style forms.

4.1 Indexing confrontational affective stance

Honorifics is normally related to maintaining and improving the relationship between interlocutors (Sohn 2013). In other words, the use of honorifics can contribute to preventing and reducing face-threatening acts (Brown & Levinson 1987, Sohn 2013). The following excerpts illustrate that a speaker used the elevation of the speech level from non-honorific to honorific when making a dispreferred, confrontational utterance to a topic or object.

Prior to the following conversation in Table 2, the daughter asked her father to buy a new bookshelf. In their interaction, both of them used non-honorifics represented by the intimate style sentence ender *-e*, which indicates that their intimacy is high, and that this interaction occurred in a casual setting where the status superior (the father) does not problematize the daughter’s use of non-honorific styles. As the second part of an adjacency pair, the most common, expected response of request should be either to grant or refuse it. Instead, however, the father pointed out that she had not cleaned and organized her desk properly. Given that the second part of the adjacency pair immediately following the first part is relevant to the action of a prior turn (Schegloff 1968), we can interpret that the father’s response displays his understanding with regard to the request of his daughter. That is, he indirectly rejected her request by pointing out that it was possible for her to make some space on her desk, so she did not need to buy a new bookshelf for her books. Father and daughter are at odds as to the necessity of the bookshelf, and this discrepancy is continued in the following turns.

A desired (preferred) response to this rejection should be to finish this sequence by stopping further requests. However, the daughter continued to pester her father and (re)formulated the request by emphasizing that the size of the furniture is small enough to fit in her room, as in lines 4, 5 and 7 in Table 2 (see Sacks 1992 for the definition of the term ‘formulation’). Despite her recategorization of the bookshelf from ‘necessary’ to ‘small’, her father rejected the request again, as in lines 6 and 8.

Table 2. Excerpt of conversation: ‘I need a new bookshelf’

Line	ITL	Conversation
4	D:	yekita yomanha-n ccokkuma-n ke hana noa cwu-e. here this size-RLT small-RLT thing one lay give-INT

Table 2. (continued)

Line	ITL	Conversation
5		yeki no-l kongkan iss-canh-a. here lay-PRS space exist-not-INT 'Put a small one here. We have space for (a new bookshelf), don't we?'
6	F:	mwue-ya? what-PLN(ITR) 'What are you talking about?'
7	D:	ung? chaykcang hana-man noa cwu-e. yes(ITR) bookshelf one-only lay give-INT 'Please, (buy) and put a (new) bookshelf (here)!'
8	F:	yel kay katta noa-to ttokkath-a. 10 pieces bring lay-too same-INT 'It would be the same even if (you) put ten (bookshelves here).'
9	D:	hana-man noa cwu-e. one-only lay give-INT '(I need) only one here.'
10→		kukhey pissa-yo(ITR) chakcang-i? that expensive-POL bookshelf-NOM(ITR) 'Is a bookshelf that expensive?'

The daughter continued to ask her father for a new bookshelf and marked her displeasure with his rejection known by rhetorically questioning the price of a bookshelf in line 10. However, this complaint is made by shifting from the intimate style to the polite style (see Couper-Kuhlen & Selting 2018 for the linguistic accomplishment of complaining). In other words, the daughter directly questioned the validity of her father's evaluation of the need for a new bookshelf. In addition, her remark can be interpreted as questioning her father's capacity to pay for an inexpensive product for his daughter and blaming him for his excessive frugality. Even though the social hierarchy in Korean society has been significantly weakening, it is still considered a social taboo to question the authority and ability of status superiors. Considering this reality, the daughter's utterance can most likely threaten her father's face. Thus, the employment of the speech level elevation in line 10 can be viewed as a strategic use of honorifics to mitigate the aggressiveness of her utterance, while displaying a confrontational stance. In other words, by embedding her complaint in the form of honorifics, she displayed a confrontational affective stance toward her father in a way that minimizes the "weightiness of the face-threatening act (FTA)" (Leech 2014, p. 34).

Based on the father’s response to his daughter’s complaint in line 11 (Table 3), we can see that her strategical use of speech level elevation was successful. The father neither problematized her way of speaking nor made a counter-argument to her argument. In addition, the absence of denial following her complaint can be seen as his acceptance of her categorization of the bookshelf as an inexpensive product (Atkinson & Drew 1979). Instead of directly responding to her complaint, he pointed out the non-deliverability of a bookshelf and continued to reject her request, as in lines 11 through 17, which caused her to employ another speech level elevation. In line 18, she used honorifics to express doubt as to the validity of his knowledge of delivery services and which products are eligible.

**Table 3.** Excerpt of conversation: ‘Availability of delivery service’

Line	ITL	Conversation
11	F:	cha-ka iss-e mwue-ka iss-e car-NOM exist-INT what-NOM have-INT
12		ku.ke kacye-olla-myen himtu-nti. that.thing bring-come-if hard-but (‘We) don’t have a car. It’s hard to bring one (here without a car).’
13	D:	paytal hay cwu-myen paytalhay cu-canh-a. delivery do give-if deliver give-not-INT (‘Shops) offer delivery service, don’t they?’
14	F:	ku-ke-l nuka paytalhay cwu-e that-thing-ACC who-NOM deliver give-INT (‘No one will deliver that.’
15		paytallyo-ka. te pissa. delivery fee-NOM more expensive-INT (‘Delivery service is more expensive (than a bookshelf).’
16	D:	ta paytalhay cwu-e sa-myen. all deliver give-INT buy-if (‘If you buy one, (shops) will deliver everything.’
17	F:	pissan ke-na sa-myen paytalhay cu-ci. expensive thing-only buy-if deliver give-COM (‘Shops) only offer free delivery service for expensive items.’
18→	D:	ssatako paytal an hay cwun ta-yo? cheap-because delivery not do give QUT-POL(ITR) (‘Did someone say that (shops) don’t offer delivery service for cheap stuff?’
19	F:	kulum. sure (‘Of course.’

Table 3. (continued)

Line	ITL	Conversation
20	D:	kule-n-ke-y      eti-iss-e that-RL-thing-NOM where-exist-INT 'That doesn't make sense.'

Interestingly, a similar pattern in which a speaker abruptly switches to honorific styles while expressing a confrontational stance toward the topic on hand was found in a different conversation, as in the following excerpt (Table 4). In lines 1 through 7, D1 told D2 about the difficulties he had teaching his wife how to drive, while maintaining the intimate speech style. When talking about the complications of driving a manual car, however, he abruptly shifted his speech level from intimate to polite, as in line 9.

Table 4. Excerpt of conversation: 'It is difficult to drive a manual car'

Line	ITL	Conversation
1	D1:	cheumeynun kipwun coh-key sicak-ul    hay. at                    first    feelings good-ADV start-ACC do.INT
2		cheumeynun hangsang at first            always 'Whenever starting (teaching my wife how to drive), I always feel good.'
3	D2:	ung. yes 'Yes.'
4	D1:	nay-ka kaluchye cwu-kkey ile-taka I-NOM teach    give-will this-while 'I first decide myself to teach (her) how to drive.'
5	D2:	hhhhh ilen ssi hhhhhh gosh 'Oh my gosh.'
6	D1:	ha-ta    po-myen-un i-key                    sengcil tot-nunta-nikka do-while see-if-TOP    this-thing-NOM temper grow-PLN-because 'While teaching (my wife how to drive), I found myself getting angry...'
7		way? caki-n      ilehkey    kaluchye cwe-ss-nuntey punmyenghi why oneself-TOP this way teach    give-PST-CIR    definitely '...because I definitely taught (her how to do it).'

Table 4. (continued)

Line	ITL	Conversation
8		papo-twu ani-ko stupid-even not-and '(She) is not even stupid.'
9→		kuntey mak sinkyeng ssu-l-ke-n toykey manha-yo mak but badly care use-PRS-thing-TOP really many-POL badly 'Moreover, there are too many things to consider.'
10		thukhi suthik-eun khullechi palpu-myense especially gearstick-TOP clutch step on-while 'When you drive a manual car, you need to step on the clutch.'
11		kie nu-myense cwawu cwahwu cha o-na po-myense gear insert-while left.right left.rear car come-or see-while 'change the gear, check for cars coming from right, left, and rear.'
12		ku taum-ey cengcisen cikhi-myense that next-LOC stop.line follow-while 'then observe a stop line.'
13		ha-lyemyen ke toykey pokcapha-canh-a. do-if that really complicated-not.INT 'It is really complicated, isn't it?'

After sharing his own anecdote about his wife, D1 pointed out the complex process of driving a manual car, which makes it more annoying for him to teach his family, as in line 9 through 13. In line with Lee and Cho's (2015) finding that the speech level alternation, albeit downshift in their data, indicates a topic shift, D1's abrupt speech level elevation also shows a topic shift from his driving lesson with his wife to the difficulty of driving a manual car. Simultaneously, he prolonged his negative stance toward the on-going topics. This confrontational stance was first aimed at his wife's poor driving skill, as in line 6 *sengcil totnuntanika* 'I found myself angry,' and then he problematized the complexity of driving a manual car as a main factor that hinders his wife from learning how to drive.

Displaying a confrontational stance through upshifts was also discovered in other excerpts. While D1 in Table 4 expresses a negative stance toward the topic, A1 in the following conversation exhibits a negative stance toward herself.

**Table 5.** Excerpt of conversation: 'I'm so picky'

Line	ITL	Conversation
1	A2:	enni-nun kimchi tamka mek-eyo? older sister-TOP kimchi make eat-POL(ITR) 'Do you make your own kimchi?'
2	A1	na? me 'Me?'
3	A2:	um sa mek-eyo? umm buy eat-POL(ITR) 'Do you buy it?'
4	A1:	nay-ka? I-NOM 'Me?'
5	A2	um. yes 'Yes.'
6	A1	nan nan tto kimchi-to tamkwu-ci-to mos ha-nun cwucey-ey I-TOP I-TOP also kimchi-even make-even NEG do-RLT situation-LOC
7→		hhhh sa mek-nun kimchi-nun silhehay-oyo hhhh buy eat-RLT kimchi-TOP hate-POL 'Although I have no right to be picky since I can't make kimchi myself, I hate store-bought kimchi.'

In response to A2's question about A1's ability to make her own kimchi, A1 told her that she usually received homemade kimchi from her mother. Then, she made a self-deprecating utterance that she is picky about kimchi, in which she employed the polite style ending *-eyo*, as in line 7. In consideration of their asymmetric relationship, which is represented by A2's use of an honorific addressing term *enni* 'older sister' and the polite ending sentence ender *-eyo* in line 1 and 3, A1's unnecessary, unconventional speech level elevation can be read as distancing herself from the interaction. By doing so, she can make her own utterance sound as if a third-person is assessing A1's personality. That is, this strategy contributes to enhancing the objectivity of the utterance and thereby reinforcing her self-blaming stance.

4.2 Upgrading epistemic stance by distancing oneself

In the previous section, especially in Table 6, we found that speech level elevation can be used to increase the distance between the speaker and the addressee/referent, which in turn enhances the objectivity of an utterance. This study also found data in which speech level elevation plays a key role in indexing a strong epistemic stance by increasing the relational distance between the speaker and the addressee, and thereby increasing the formality and seriousness of the interaction (Cook 1999, Brown 2011, Lee & Cho 2015). In the following excerpt (Table 6), a male researcher (C1) and two younger female college instructors (C2 and C3), are having a casual conversation about living a healthy life and specifically discuss playing tennis. As they all mainly use non-honorific styles in the data, we can assume they have a close, intimate relationship. In line 1, C2 pointed out that playing tennis might be hard on the joints, and C3 aligned with her opinion by saying *kuchi* ‘right’ in the following response.

Table 6. Excerpt of conversation: ‘Playing tennis can hurt you’

Line	ITL	Conversation
1	C2:	ani kuktey theynisu-nun tto DM but tennis-TOP also
2		kwancel ccok-ey mwuli-ka o-l swu-to iss-kwu-yo joints side-LOC pressure-NOM come-may way-also exist-and-POL ‘But playing tennis might be hard on the joints...’
3	C3:	kuchi ((unclear))-ka an kochoye-ci-canh-a. right -NOM NEG fixed-become-not-INT ‘You are right.’

In responding to their argument, however, C1 neither agreed nor disagree with C2’s argument. Instead, he explained how to play tennis properly and avoid potential damages on the body.

Table 7. Excerpt of conversation: ‘You need balance’

Line	ITL	Conversation
4	C1:	ku ku kunikka:: ike-lul ce: ppaykhayntu ppaykhayntu-hako that that I.mean this-ACC DM backhand backhand-and
5		ku phohayntu-lul [cal] kolkolwu cal hay-yaci DM forehand-ACC well evenly well do-have to ‘I mean you should be proficient at both the forehand and backhand stroke.’



Table 7. (continued)

Line	ITL	Conversation
6	C3:	[um] a:: uhm oh “Umn, oh.”
7	C1:	ku[ke-to] that-also “That also means...”
8	C3:	[ppayk-i] mwuncey-ka te manhi sayngkinta kule-tay backhand-NOM problem-NOM more much appear so-QUT “I heard that the backhand shot caused more problems.”
9→	C1:	phohayntu-man ha-ko ile-myen-un hancok heli-pakk-ey an tway-yo forehand-only do-and this-if-TOP one.side back-only-LOC NEG become-POL “If you only hit a forehand, it means you use only one side of your back.”

In line 4, C1, who actually used to play tennis and thereby had a higher epistemic status, suggested that you are supposed to use both techniques evenly, forehand and backhand strokes. In doing so he indirectly made a counterargument against C2's negative comment on playing tennis. Then in line 9, he abruptly elevated his speech level by using the polite style sentence ender *-ayo* to point out that playing tennis can be hard on the body only when you stick to one technique. In deviating from the normative language use, this upshift of speech level functions displays his epistemic stance on the topic and thereby increases the formality and seriousness of his argument (Lee & Cho 2015). In their later conversation, he employed the speech level elevation again in a similar way, as in line 5 in Table 8.

Table 8. Excerpt of conversation: ‘It is important to have a regular diet’

Line	ITL	Conversation
1	C2:	na-nun kkini-lul nohchi-myen I-TOP meal-ACC miss-if
2		khetara-n mwenka-lul calmosha-n kes kath-ay. big-RLT something-ACC mistake-RLT thing like-INT ‘Whenever I skip a meal, I feel like I make a huge mistake.’
3	C3:	kulugci yecatul-i com mek-nun tey-ey tayhayse com right women-NOM little eat-REL place-LOC about little ‘Women tend to think like that.’

Table 8. (continued)

Line	ITL	Conversation
4	C1:	a kuntey kkini-lul kkopak kkopak mek-nun <b>salam-un</b> oh by the way meal-ACC regularly eat-RLT <b>people-TOP</b>
5→		canpyengchiley-lul an hay-yo. getting.sick.frequently-ACC NEG do-POL 'By the way, people who stick to a regular diet don't get sick easily.'
6		eti aphu-ta-nun soli-lul an hay. where hurt-QUT-RLT sound-ACC NEG do-INT 'They don't get sick.'
7	C3	um right 'Right.'

In this excerpt, they talked about the importance of having a regular diet for health. Prior to the above sequence, C2 and C3 had mentioned that they were strict in their efforts to keep a regular diet, and C1 sympathized with them by introducing his wife's experience. In line 1, C2 started talking about the guilty feelings she had gotten whenever skipping a meal. This utterance was immediately followed in line 3 by C3's display of alignment, as she generalizes those feelings as a women's trait. Developing the discourse from this biased generalization, in line 4 C1 observed that keeping a regular diet is important for everyone to maintain health, in which *salam* 'people' includes not only women, but also men. While conveying this common-sense, well-known information, he again ended his own utterance in the polite style ending *-eyo*, which allows the speaker to index a strong epistemic stance. To some extent, this phenomenon seems to correspond to the grammatical distinction between non-honorific and honorific in terms of formality. As briefly mentioned in the previous sections, honorifics – including the polite and deferential style – are normally used in public speech and academic settings as a default style in order to increase formality and to thereby upgrade epistemic stance.

As seen in the above excerpts, speech elevation can be employed when the speaker tries to display a high(er) degree of expertise or to remind the hearer of well-known, shared information by temporarily increasing distance from the addressee and increasing the formality and seriousness of his or her utterance. This finding of the speech level elevation complements that of the previous literature focusing on the speech level shift from the polite *-e/ayo* to the deferential *-upnita* style for indexing epistemic stance and identity as an expert of on-going topics (Chang 2014). In other words, native speakers of Korean display enhanced

epistemic stance and an identity as an expert on the topic being discussed, not only by altering the speech style from the *-e/ayo* to the *-upnita* (p.141), but also by elevating their speech level from non-honorific to honorific.

## 5. Conclusion: Implications on the use of Korean corpora for developmental research on Korean

Analyzing the Korean corpus data revealed that speech level elevation from non-honorific style-talk to honorific style-talk can be employed by the speaker when indexing varying stances toward a topic, action, or object in interaction. First, when s/he responds to a prior utterance in a dispreferred way, for example, raising a question on the ability or authority of status superiors, the speaker can strategically elevate their speech level in order to mitigate potential FTAs (Table 2 & 3). Also, this speech level elevation can be used by speakers when they make a negative evaluation that enhances the confrontational stance toward an object or addressee. By employing upshifts, speakers are able to distance themselves from the addressee or the ongoing interaction and thereby achieve instant objectiveness (Table 4 & 5).

In addition, speakers also abruptly elevate their speech level when they wish to exhibit a high(er) epistemic status vis-à-vis other interlocutors. Upgrading his or her epistemic stance toward a topic or object has a similar effect of instantly achieving objectiveness (Table 6 through 8).

### 5.1 Linguistic and pedagogical implications

Despite its potential to contribute to the development of teaching materials for KFL learners, corpus linguistics in Korean language education has been underestimated. Based on the spoken corpus data of naturally occurring interactions of Korean participants, this study has shown the importance of corpus-based investigations as a resource through which we can examine the dynamicity of the Korean honorific system and explicate various functions of speech level alternation. This corpus-based and discourse analysis approach to analyzing authentic conversations revealed: (1) speech level alternation occurs not only within the honorific or the non-honorific boundary, but also across these two distinctive systems; (2) the direction of the speech alternation is restrained by turn-by-turn negotiation of either affective and/or epistemic stance, rather than by strict grammatical rules. More specifically, while a speaker employs the non-honorific styles (intimate or plain) as the default speech level in an interaction, s/he can strategically make an upward shift to the honorific styles when they exhibit a confronta-

tional stance toward a topic or an addressee in a way that mitigates any potential face-threatening acts. In addition, this speech level elevation can be selected and used when the speaker tries to display their expertise or convey common-sense, shared knowledge, that is, when s/he displays high(er) epistemic stance toward the topic at hand.

As seen in the above sections, honorification in the Korean language is much more dynamic and exceptional than a large number of traditional KFL textbooks explain. Unfortunately, by drawing a strict distinction between honorific and non-honorific forms, traditional textbook materials have led KFL learners to believe that honorifics cannot co-exist with non-honorifics in the same utterance, which results in learners' unconditional adherence to a certain speech style. According to Brown (2010, 2011), KFL textbooks show a tendency to neglect and underemphasize the importance of non-honorifics, and only 12.4% of the dialogue sentences in three KSL textbooks published in South Korea included non-honorific expressions.

To solve this problem, it is essential to expand and deepen the discussion on honorification from various perspectives, and this study has important implications in that the findings of the corpus analysis contributed to explaining the dynamicity of the speech level shift, albeit partially. Among many other possible solutions, the current research suggests that providing KFL learners with actual corpus data or modified conversation examples that reflect the dynamicity of the actual usages of (non)honorifics can be used to enhance their understandings of both pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic knowledge of politeness. For example, KFL educators may let their students analyze the authentic conversation data by focusing on the sentence enders, each of which indexes a certain speech level, and figuring out how native speakers of Korean dynamically and strategically shift the speech level, either in the way of elevation or downshift, to convey a certain meaning. In addition to the comprehensive understanding of contexts, this kind of approach will enhance KFL students' knowledge of both sides of the honorific system, and this development will play a crucial role in turning learners into competent speakers of the Korean language.

## 5.2 Limitation and Further Research

The data analyzed for this study only consist of written transcriptions. That is, it was not possible to examine phonetic features and other multimodal resources following the speech level elevation, which might have allowed for a more detailed explanation of its meaning and functions in interactions. Therefore, for future research, it will be necessary to collect and analyze data including audio- or video-recordings of participants' interactions so that researchers can examine

their use of multimodal resources such as body gestures, overlapping, exact duration of pauses and silences, the gaze of interlocutors, and the change of voice/tone. Further analysis of the speech level elevation, accompanied by a focus on various multimodal resources used by interlocutors, will contribute to a better understanding of these dynamic linguistic phenomena, and in turn will aid in the development of a new pedagogy for KFL learners to improve their pragmatic knowledge of the Korean honorific system.

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# Abbreviations

ACC	Accusative case particle	LOC	Locative particle
ADV	Adverbializer	NOM	Nominative case particle
CIR	Circumstantial	PLN	Plain speech level suffix
COM	Committal sentence final	POL	Polite speech level suffix
DEF	Deferential speech level suffix	PRS	Prospective modal suffix
IMP	Imperative sentence-type suffix	PST	Past tense and perfect aspect suffix
INT	Intimate speech level suffix	QUT	Quotative particle
ITL	Interlocutor	RLT	Relativizer
ITR	Interrogative sentence-type	TOP	Topic-contrast particle

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