



Honorifics Use and Identity Negotiation in Korean Study Abroad

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overview

- » This presentation uses quantitative and qualitative data to explore the use of honorific language (존댓말) and non-honorific language (반말) by two male learners on a study abroad program in Seoul
- » These two cases come from a larger study of 20 learners published as:

Brown, L. (2011). *Korean Honorifics and Politeness in Second Language Learning*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.



SLA and identity

- » **Identity is increasingly becoming recognized as an important factor that influences language acquisition (Block 2007)**
- » **A learner's identity influences ...**
 - » ... opportunities for input, output, interaction
 - » ... motivation
 - » ... the kind of competence that they achieve in the language



SLA and identity

- » **Two examples of how identity influences acquisition**
- » **Norton (2000)**
- » Five immigrant women learning English in Canada
- » All professionally trained in their home countries, but could only gain unskilled work in Canada
- » At work, they were given the lowest status and most solitary jobs
- » Their coworkers were not interested in engaging with them – did not perceive them as “legitimate” speakers of English
- » Although they began with high motivation, due to their identities, they could not gain access to the social networks which would give them the opportunity to practice and become fluent in English



SLA and identity

- » **Two examples of how identity influences acquisition**
- » **Siegal (1994)**
- » Four Western women sojourning in Japan and learning Japanese
- » All four rejected (to varying degrees) the prospect of adopting a “subservient” Japanese female identity
- » They refused (to varying degrees) to replicate socio-pragmatic features of Japanese women’s language, including pronoun use, humble language/demeanor, use of high pitch
- » Ultimately, they used language in a way that would not normatively be appropriate for women in Japan, but which suited their pre-existing identities



Korean and identity

- » **Ability to use the Korean language is heavily tied up with Korean identity**
- » **Coulmas (1999: 408) notes that Korea maintains a high congruity between speech community and nation: “whoever speaks Korean, is a Korean”**
- » **Refer to Prof. Adrienne Lo’s talk yesterday**
- » Inability to use Korean in a way that is perceived as syntactically, phonetically, pragmatically proficient can result in you being positioned as not being an “authentic” or “legitimate” Korean



honorifics and identity

- » **Appropriate use of honorifics is one area of Korean that is a particularly strong marker of identity**
- » **This is evident in the way that the language use of *kyopho* or foreigners is represented in Korean TV dramas**



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honorifics in Korean study abroad

- » **The appropriate use of honorifics is recognized as an important part of sociolinguistic competence in Korean**
- » **In the Korean National Standards, the following is given as a sample progress indicator:**

Students demonstrate an awareness of the use of age-appropriate speech styles of the Korean language.

Example: 안녕하세요 vs. 안녕, 가세요 vs. 가

- » **We may expect that study abroad will represent the ideal opportunity for learners to improve their sociolinguistic competence**



honorifics in Korean study abroad

- » **However, learners who go and study abroad do not instantly use honorifics just like Korean people**
- » **Why not?**
- » Language proficiency ? > all learners in my study were advanced level
- » Lack of sensitivity to Korean culture?
- » Identity?



honorifics in Korean study abroad

- » **Factors at work**
- » As exchange students (not to mention “foreigners”), their identity is not the same as regular Korean students

Case of Hiroki (Brown 2011)

“Things would be much more clear if I’m 1 학년 or 2 학년 here, then people would just- because it’s- I think it’s one of the ways which you can- it’s like one measurement- like, oh, you- which year are you in?, I’m the second. Okay, I should use 존댓말 to you.”

- » Learners may not want to use honorifics according to native like patterns if this clashes with their pre-existing identities
- » This may particularly be the case if they are staying in Korea for a short time and do not have motivation to acculturate



participants

- » **Both on one-year study abroad program at a renowned university in Seoul**

Name	Age	Gender	Nationality	Residence	Ethnicity	Other Languages
Richard	21	M	UK	UK	White-British	English(native)
Patrick	23	M	Austria	Australia	White-Austrian	German (native) English (fluent) Japanese (adv.)



context

- » **Program of Study**
- » Attended Korean languages classes for four hours a day four days a week
- » **Accommodation**
- » University provided on-campus accommodation in foreigner-only dormitory (“외국인 기숙사”) – (cf. Siegal 1994)
- » Many students (including these three learners) moved out from 외국인 기숙사 into 하숙집, 고시원, 원룸
- » **Efforts by university to integrate exchange students**
- » Organized International Students Festival
- » Invited exchange students to large university events
- » Provided a “buddy system”



data collection

» **Four methods used:**

- » ONE: Discourse Completion Test (DCT) QUANTITATIVE
- » TWO: Recordings of Natural Interactions QUALITATIVE
- » THREE: Retrospective Interviews QUALITATIVE
- » [FOUR: Role-play activity] QUALITATIVE



DCT results

- » **Both exchange students possessed strong underlying pragmatic competence in the use of honorifics**

name	raw score	percentage
Richard	67	93.1%
Patrick	69	95.8%
Average (20 participants)	66.3	92.1%



case studies: Richard

- » **Background**
- » Actively sought relations with Korean speakers
- » Built up large group of Korean acquaintances through online chatting before arriving in Korea

- » **Majority of acquaintances were female**
- » Richard's aim was generally for these to be platonic
- » Had romantic relationship with Korean female during first term in Korea
- » Complained that this girlfriend did not understand that he had other "female friends"
- » During the second term, he formed a relationship with a Singaporean exchange student



case studies: Richard

- » **Casual encounters with female acquaintances featured quick initiation of 반말**

RICHARD

[coffee shop, just after ordering coffee, only minutes after they have first met]

- | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|-------|--|---------|---------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|-------|---|--|---|--|--|---------|---|
| 1 | Su-mi | 이 거 내 거야?
'is this one [coffee] mine- $\{e\}$?'
2 | Richard | 이 거요?
'this one?- $\{eyo\}$ '
3 | | 모르겠어
'I don't know- $\{e\}$ '
4 | Su-mi | 너 먹어 봐
'have a taste- $\{e\}$ '
5 | | 네 게 달면 이 건 내 거야
'if yours is sweet, then this one's mine- $\{e\}$ '
6 | | 조금만 먹어
'just try a little- $\{e\}$ '
7 | Richard | 맛있어 ((laughter))
'it's good- $\{e\}$ ' |
|---|-------|--|---------|---------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|-------|---|--|---|--|--|---------|---|



case studies: Richard

- » **Reasons for this:**
- » University setting
- » Richard's identity

RICHARD

“I think it's because I'm a foreigner”.

- » **Female friends perceived him as “cute”**

RICHARD

“It's stopped now, but generally when people first hear me speak in Korean, they'll comment and they'll say '귀여워' and that for a while was very annoying. It stopped for a while and then just yesterday through a text message conversation with a friend she said '귀엽다'.”



case studies: Richard

- » **Reasons for this:**
- » **Richard preferred 반말 as it suited his identity**

RICHARD

“I would much rather speak 반말 because I actually feel that there’s a lot of situations in which Koreans would also really want to speak 반말. But they feel it would be inappropriate for them to suggest it. [...] I feel Koreans would object less to me suggesting it. Yeah, and they actually seem more comfortable afterwards as well in situations where its happened.



case studies: Richard

- » **Richard reported various stories of how he had initiated 반말 use, even with acquaintances who were older than him**

RICHARD

There was this one girl who was four years older than me. We were conversing and it was obvious that we were getting quite close. So I asked her if it was okay to speak 반말. And she just said “yeah.” It would probably be fairly bad manners to do that if I was a Korean. But she didn’t have any complaints and we both just dropped down.



case studies: Richard

- » **Richard also encountered situations where he was surprised to receive honorific language**

RICHARD

My Chinese teacher of course speaks 존댓말 to the class, but 반말 to the students individually. The only exception is that she speaks 존댓말 to me. I think she is not sure how to address me more than anything else.



case studies: Richard

- » **Despite seeing his ability to initiate 반말 as an advantage, it also caused problems**

RICHARD

On Monday, I went to the OOOO [name of university broadcasting club] attendance meeting. The vice president [female; same age] came out and sat right next to me. Seeing as she is vice president and I am just a new member, I should be using 존댓말 to her. But on Monday, the first thing she asked me was if I knew how to speak 반말. I said “yeah, of course”. What all this was working up to was telling me it was ok to speak 반말 to her. Now, I use 존댓말 to everyone in OOOO except the vice president to whom I use 반말. And everyone else uses 존댓말 to her, except the other managers. And all the other seniors use 반말 to everyone, except to me.



case studies: Patrick

- » **Background**
- » Austrian national based at an Australian university
- » Had experience prior to coming to Korea working as translator on the set of the Korean TV drama Spring Waltz (봄의 왈츠).



case studies: Patrick

» Highly proficient in 반말 and 존댓말

PATRICK

- 1 In-ho Patrick-은 그러면 호주에 가서 집을 구하는 거야?
'Are you going to find a house when you go back to Australia?-{e}'
- 2 아냐면 집을 미리 구해 놓았어?
'Or have you found a house in advance?-{e}'
- 3 Patrick 예 구해 놓았어요
'Yes, I've already found one-{eyo}'
- 4 In-ho 아 구해 [놓았어?]
'Oh, you've already found one?-{e}'
- 5 Patrick [기숙사]
'dormitory'
- 6 In-ho 아 기숙사
'Oh, a dormitory'
- 7 Patrick 기숙사에 들어가기로 했어요
'I've decided to go into the dormitory-{eyo}'



case studies: Patrick

- » **Strongly rejected attempts to position him as “foreign” and treat him differently**

PATRICK

I mean if somebody doesn't use the appropriate like- appropriate- you know- honorifics to me, if they are younger than me then I actually sometimes do get upset. [...] There was a situation when a girl who was three years younger than me, she always kept talking to me using 반말, almost from the start. But if the person thinks they don't need to use honorifics to me because I'm a foreigner, then that's rude.

PATRICK

There was a conversation going on about whether people should use honorifics to foreigners between myself and three Koreans, two older and one younger than me. And one of them said that he thought you wouldn't need to use honorifics to a foreigner. At that time, I felt a bit offended.

PATRICK

There were a couple of Korean girls younger than me [...] and most of them who I was close with call me 오빠. But then there is one girl who like implied that she found it funny for those other girls to call me that. At that time, I felt that was really a rude thing to say. She was laughing about it.



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conclusion

- » **Learners were engaged in a struggle to establish the extent to which categories of honorifics usage applied to them as “foreigners”**
- » **Resolution of this struggle was dependent on individual factors:**
- » RICHARD saw the “foreigner” identity as being an advantage of sorts, which allowed him to establish more liberal use of 반말 and establish intimate relationships outside of Korean norms
- » In contrast, PATRICK was determined to show that, despite being a non-native speaker, he could use the language correctly and appropriately according to these norms



conclusion

- » **Honorifics in L2 talk is not prescribed along native speaker norms**
- » **Instead it is negotiated in relation to aspects of the learners' identities**
- » **The implication for language teaching is that it may be unrealistic (or even inappropriate) to set native speaker norms as the goal of instruction**
- » **Therefore, the role of the language classroom should not be to prescribe native speaker norms, but to educate learners regarding these local community norms and the social meanings of honorifics so that learners are in a position to make an informed choice regarding the linguistic behaviour that they adopt**



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