THE HONORIFICS SYSTEMS
OF KOREAN LANGUAGE LEARNERS

Lucien Brown

April 2008
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School of Oriental and African Studies, London
soojaybi@yahoo.com

1. Overview
The current paper analyzes the use of honorifics by speakers of Korean as a second language (L2 speakers), primarily from an interlanguage pragmatics perspective. Using a corpus of data collected from 20 advanced speakers of Korean, I analyze salient patterns of speech style, referent honorific and address term usage. I conclude by arguing that such patterns of usage result from three factors: (1) transfer of training, (2) socialization conditions and (3) ideology regarding “politeness”.

2. The Korean Honorifics System
The following TABLE 1 provides an overview of the Korean honorifics system, as defined in this paper:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>Hearer honorifics</th>
<th>Sentence-final “speech styles”</th>
<th>해라체(T)/해체(E)/하계체(N)하오체(S)/해요체(Y)/합소체(P) a</th>
<th>e.g. 눈이 온다(T)/와(E)/오네(N)/오오(S)/와요(Y)/옵니다(P)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Referent honorifics</td>
<td>Pre-final endings</td>
<td>-시- e.g.신생님이 가셨어요 / 학생이 갔어요.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Special honorific forms</td>
<td>nouns e.g. 성함, 존함, 직지, 연세, 춘추, 대, 선신등</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>verbs (subj) e.g. 잡수시다, 계시다, 주무시다</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>particles (subj) e.g. -께서</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>verbs (obj) e.g. 드리다, 모시다, 뵐다</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>particles (obj) e.g. -께</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Forms of address</td>
<td>Titles</td>
<td>e.g. 부처, 부장님</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Kinship terms</td>
<td>e.g. 아빠, 아버지, 아버님</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tekronymic term</td>
<td>e.g. 칠수 아빠, 칠수 아버지, 칠수 아버님</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Personal names</td>
<td>e.g. 김 부장님, 김민호씨, 민호씨, 민호 형, 민호야</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pronouns</td>
<td>e.g. 너, 자네, 당신, 그대, 자기</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a The use of the letters {T}, {E}, {N}, {S}, {Y} and {P} to refer to each style is adopted from Sohn Ho-min (1986). The letters correspond broadly to the opening sounds of the endings.

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It should be noted that the inclusion of hearer honorifics (“speech styles”), referent honorifics and forms of address under the one umbrella of “honorifics” represents a somewhat broader use of the term than that adopted elsewhere in the literature. Lee & Ramsey (2000) and Goddard (2005), for example, limit the term “honorifics” only to referent honorifics. More commonly, especially in Korean linguistics, forms of address are excluded from discussions of honorifics and are treated as a separate system. When viewed from a socio-pragmatic perspective, however, it soon becomes apparent that hearer honorifics, referent honorifics and forms of address serve a similar function in the language. To be precise, all three are primarily involved in the indexing of the relative positions of interlocutors/referents/bystanders. Since hearer honorifics, referent honorifics and terms of address are similar in terms of function, it appears reasonable to suggest that L2 learners experience similar challenges when it comes to developing socio-pragmatic competence in all three aspects.

Although several previous researchers have considered the difficulties that honorifics pose to the L2 learner, few have directly addressed the problem from a socio-pragmatic perspective. “Anecdotal studies” such as Hwang Juck-ryoon (1975) and Sohn Ho-min (1986) have used passed-down stories and observed incidents as evidence of the problems that honorifics cause to non-native speakers, but have lacked scientific conviction. “Error analysis studies” (Lee Ji-Young 1990, Park Sun-min 1994, Park Kyung-ja 1996 and Kim-Jung-hee 1998) have used rich quantitative data to analyze the “mistakes” made by L2 learners, but have typically relied on overtly prescriptive L1 norms as a means of comparison. “Textbook studies” such as Lee On-kyeong (2005), Kim Soo-jong (1999a, 1999b), Yeon Jaehoon (1996) and Fouser (2005) have provided some useful and insightful criticisms of the ways honorifics are presented in KSL textbooks, but have not looked at honorifics usage per se. In recent years, a new wave of “pragmatic studies” looking at the development of pragmatic competence in Korean has begun to appear. Although these studies do not take honorifics as their focus, they recognize the importance of honorifics in the development of communicative competence and appropriate application of speech acts (Andrew Byon 2000, Han Sang-mee’s 2005).

3. Data Collection

Data for the current study was collected from twenty speakers of Korean as a second language and forty native speakers of Korean during a period of fieldwork in Seoul in 2006. The twenty L2 speakers were all residing in Seoul at the time of the project and had all studied Korean to an advanced level. All had been brought up in Western countries and attended university in English-speaking countries. Ten of the participants were in Korea temporarily as exchange students (“exchange students” group) and another ten were based more long-term and were either graduate students or employed in English language related work (“professionals” group). The sample also included equal numbers of heritage and non-heritage learners.

Four kinds of data were collected from the participants. Firstly, both the L1 and L2 group filled out a DCT (Discourse Completion Test) survey assessing their use of honorifics in 24 different contexts. Secondly, I made recordings of the L2 speakers performing two role-plays.
with a native speaker partner. Thirdly, L2 participants were provided with digital sound recording devices to record their own daily interactions in Korean. Finally, I interviewed all participants regarding their performance on the DCT, role-plays and natural interactions as well as their use of honorifics in general.

4. Speech Styles
This section reviews the use of speech styles in the L2 data. Four salient patterns of usage are identified: (1) avoidance of {E} and {T} styles, (2) lack of control between {E} and {Y}, (3) strategic use of the {Y} speech style and (4) inappropriate use of constructions with –yo.

4.1 Avoidance of {E} and {T} styles
The data suggests that L2 speakers – and in particular the “professionals” group – are more cautious when it comes to using non-honorific speech styles. In extreme cases, some speakers are shown to consciously avoid the use of such forms altogether.

Looking at the DCT data first of all, FIGURE 1 (below) displays the frequency at which the L2 groups (“exchange students” and “professionals”) used honorifics styles ({Y} and {P}) according to four different age-rank relationships (professor, senpay, classmate, hupay). The graph clearly shows that, when it came to addressing age-rank equals (classmate) and subordinates (hupay), the professionals group downgraded to the non-honorific styles at a significantly lower rate than the L1 speakers (classmate: t = 2.6734, p = .01 / hupay: t = 2.6025, p = 0.1).

Closer analysis of the data shows that L2 speakers were reluctant to “downgrade” to the non-honorific styles based on power alone. Lacking a clear referent point as to when it would be acceptable to use non-honorific styles, L2 speakers tend to wait until totally intimate or, more often than not, until the other party suggested that they use the non-honorific styles. Participants

FIGURE 1:
Honorific speech style use in relations to power

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also cited a reluctance to switch down to the non-honorific styles when doing so would index their position as being older or superior rather than simply closer to the other party, as it may in the instance of the *hupay*. “I find it hard to put myself above other people”, commented MGN76012¹, “it just doesn’t seem natural”.

For some speakers, these negative associations with non-honorific speech styles resulted in a blanket use of honorific speech styles ({Y} and {P}) to all and sundry. In the following extract from the recorded interactions, participant FGN72011 is in conversation with an intimate several years younger than herself who she later referred to as her *tongsayng* (‘younger brother’). In some ways, the structure of the dialogue reflects the way that Korean native speakers may play the fictive older sibling role. FGN72011 leads the conversation, asking the *tongsayng* about his girlfriend and advising him on what he should do. However, what differs from native speaker norms is FGN72011’s continual use of the {Y} speech style.

(1)  
1. FGN72011 So.. 그 여자친구하고.. 아직, 만나요 같은 사람
2. – intimate 예 만나고 @ 있는 데 예
3. FGN72011 돼 행복하지 않아요?
4. – intimate 응::
5. FGN72011 왜 그 소리가 나오요? @@
6. – intimate 뭐
7. FGN72011 결혼할거래요? 그 여자랑
8. – intimate 아니오
9. FGN72011 아니오
10. – intimate 예
11. FGN72011 아니면.. 거짓말하고 헤어지고
12. – intimate 네
13. FGN72011 그러면 다른 여자 찾아야 되요.
14. – intimate 예
15. FGN72011 그 옛날 여자 친구하고 연락해요 요즘은?
16. – intimate 아니요 그 이제 시집 갔더라고요.
17. FGN72012

During the interview sessions, FGN72012 reported the following reasons for avoiding the non-

¹ Rather than use pseudonyms, I refer to each participant by a combination of letters and numbers. The first letter in the sequence denotes sex (M= Male; F = Female) and the second displays the person’s identity (G = Graduate Student, E = Exchange Student, W = Worker ). The next two numbers represent the year in which the participant was born. The last three numbers are a unique reference number for each subject.

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honorific speech styles (panmal):
1. She could not speak as quickly and fluently when using panmal.
2. Korean interlocutors also tended to avoid dropping into panmal when speaking to her.
3. She spoke Korean with a regional accent and this was more apparent in panmal and tended to provoke laughter from Korean interlocutors.
4. She strongly associated panmal with being “disrespectful” and “rude”.

4.2 Lack of control between {E} and {Y}
The data revealed that several participants struggled to achieve pragmatic control (Bialystok 1993) over the {E} and {Y} speech levels. In other words, when speaking panmal, occasionally the –yo ending of the {Y} speech style would slip out and, when speaking contayqmal, at times –yo would be unintentionally left off.
This lack of control over {E} and {Y} tended to occur with specific expressions, pre-final endings or grammatical constructions. In the role-play data of participant MGN76013, for example, while attempting to use {E}, this speaker consistently switched to {Y} after the pre-final endings –ney (modal ending signaling newly perceived information), -lkey (volitional ending) and –ketun (ending signaling cause or explanation).

(2) a. 20분 늦었네요
b. 좀 멀어졌어요
c. 새로 나오는 모델을 사려고 할게요

These findings confirm the observations of Park Sun-min (1994) that speaker honorific use at times reflects the endings with which they have learned particular expressions rather than social indexing.

4.3 “Strategic” use of {Y} speech style
The role-play data also reveals a fascinating tendency for some L2 speakers to use the {Y} speech style strategically to reduce the illocutionary force of their utterances and make their speech sound softer or more “polite”. For these speakers, switching to the {Y} speech style while talking in panmal did not represent a lack of pragmatic control (as in section 4.2 above), but deliberate attempts to mitigate the force of sensitive speech acts. In the following examples, we see L2 speakers using the {Y} speech style in conversation with intimates when performing the sensitive speech acts of “promise” and “apology”:

(3) a. 그거 그거는 내가 다 넣게요 [FEK86004]
b. 내가 저녁 사 줄게요 [FWK79020]
c. 아이 진짜 아 미안해요 [MEN85008]

During the interview sessions, these speakers explained such usages as deliberate attempts to be
“polite”. Comments from the interview transcripts dealing with this point include the following:

1. Especially if I’m late [reference to role-play situation], I think I would tend to use more –yo because I’d probably want to try and smooth things over, show respect or something. [MGN76012]

2. Trying to be really sincere. Like I’m really sorry hay ewulkeyyo. [FWK79020]

3. I think you want to use a higher language so they “oh he messed up so he’s respecting me now” right even though we are the same age or younger or whatever, you know. [MEN85008]

4. I was using contayqmal to try to show that I was really, really sincere. [MWK75018]

4.4 Inappropriate use of constructions with -yo

The role-play and natural interaction data reveals a tendency for speakers to overuse a range of informal and potentially impolite expressions in encounters with notable superiors. Although these expressions occur with the {Y} speech style and therefore could technically be said to be honorific, they are too casual and/or assertive for use towards elders.

(4) a. 그 때 바빴다고 그러랬어요 [FWK79020]

b. 시간은 맞춰서 오려고 했는데 근데 도둑이 저 가방 가지고 갔단간단말이에요 [FWK79020]

c. 이제부터 열심히 할게요 [FEN84005]

d. 그 다시 공부하는 거 그 지금 시작하니까 지금 어려운데요 [FEN84005]

5. Referent Honorifics

Given the fact that second language speakers err on the side of caution and “overuse” honorific speech styles, one might expect them also to employ referent honorifics at a higher rate than their L1 counterparts. However, the data suggests that the opposite is the case: L2 speakers have a tendency to omit referent honorifics.

5.1 Avoidance of referent honorifics

The tendency for L2 speakers to omit referent honorifics was attested in all three datasets. In this section I consider examples from the DCT and natural interactions.

The design of the DCT allowed for the assessment of the inclusion of the subject honorific –si– in instances where the grammatical subject was the same entity as the hearer. As shown in FIGURE 2 (next page), the usage of –si– by both of the L2 groups lagged behind the L1 baseline. Most crucially, on the professor items, both the exchange students (t = 4.0578, p = .0002) and the professionals (t = 2.7067, p = .009) used –si– at a significantly lower frequency than their L1 counterparts.
Turning to the natural interaction data, in the following extract, FGN72011 is in conversation with another student in a thalchum class that she was taking. Although they are classmates and relatively intimate, the other student is considerably older (in her 60s) and also happens to be the wife of the teacher. In such instances, the age factor should be too great to allow any slackening of referent honorifics. However, as FGN72011 quizzes the elder regarding her reasons for taking the class, note the omission of the subject “honorific” marker –si– in lines 1 and 4.

(5)

1 FGN72011 이거 언제 시작했어요?
2 elder 삼년 사년 되었나- 사년
3 사년 전에 시작했어요.
4 FGN72011 그 뭐 남편 수업이시라서 이렇게 처음에 왔어요?
5 elder 에

I consider the reasons for the “underuse” of referent honorifics by L2 speakers in section 5.3 below.

5.2 Omission of referent honorifics in dative nominal constructions

Similar to the observations made regarding speech styles in 4.2, the data suggests that L2 learners struggle to control the application of –si– in certain constructions. In particular, a strong tendency was uncovered for participants to omit –si– in dative nominal constructions, in other words, utterance units in which the “honored being” appears as the (implied) dative nominal and the actual (implied) nominative is an inanimate object.

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5.3 Overuse of +hearer honorifics/-referent honorifics “code”

The analysis both in this section and the previous one have shown that second language speakers have a tendency to “overuse” honorific speech styles on the one hand, but avoid referent honorifics on the other. The upshot is that speakers tend to use the {Y} and {P} honorific speech styles on their own, without –si–. Such combinations of honorific and non-honorific language do exist in native speaker discourse, but have rather limited applications. The hearer should generally be of similar or subordinate age/rank to the speaker but increased distance or formality factors do not (yet) allow for the use of purely non-honorific language. As shown in TABLE 2 (below), both of the L2 speaker groups used this combination of honorific and non-honorific language at a frequency roughly double to that of the L1 speakers on the DCT.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>L1 speakers (n=40)</th>
<th>Exchange Students (n=10)</th>
<th>Professionals (n=10)</th>
<th>ANOVA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F = 9.106 p = .0004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>21.7%</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>43.3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>42.9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following reasons for L2 speakers’ preference for this mixed “code” were uncovered during the interview process:

1. A tendency for this honorific/non-honorific “code” to be over represented in KSL (Korean as a Second Language) language courses and textbooks
2. KSL teachers and Korean interlocutors less likely to correct referent honorifics rather than speech styles
3. L2 speakers experience more difficulty understanding the function of referent honorifics
4. L2 speakers underestimate the importance of referent honorifics
5. L2 speakers find this mixed code to be the most “comfortable”

6. Forms of Address
Due to the low frequency of address terms in the role-play and natural interaction datasets, the current section focuses exclusively on DCT data. Items on the DCT contained a blank for the insertion of a bound form of address (pronoun or pronoun substitute). Significant differences were detected in the data as to the frequencies of different forms of address in the L1 speaker, exchange student and professionals data, as summarized in FIGURE 3 (below).

Statistical tests show that the frequencies of all these four patterns of address (titles, kinship terms, personal names and pronouns) differed significantly between the three groups, although only marginally in the case of kinship terms. In the following sections, I comment on distinct patterns of usage and attitudes towards titles, kinship terms and personal names.

6.1 Avoidance of titles
Closer analysis of the data shows that the L2 speakers did not only use titles at a lower frequency, but also used a smaller range of titles and in a narrower range of contexts. In fact, 60 of the 71 tokens for exchange students and 58 of the 68 tokens for professionals constituted use of the honorific titles kyoswunim (‘professor’-HON) and sensayngnim (‘teacher’-HON) towards the professor. Towards the senpay (‘senior student’), whereas in the L1 data the titles senpay (‘senior’) and senpaynim (‘senior-HON’) appeared 63 times (26.3%), in the L2 speakers these

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only appeared on 19 occasions (15.8%). L1 speakers also used titles such as *hakwul*hakhyeng ('classmate') towards the *classmate* as well as *hupay* ('junior') and *hupaynim* ('junior-HON') towards the *hupay* ('junior student'). None of these forms of address appeared at all in the L2 data.

In the case of the exchange students and workers, the avoidance of terms of address based on university hierarchy was hardly surprising. In a sense, these forms and the concepts behind them did not really apply to these speakers. Thus, it was perhaps only the graduate students who may have needed to use terms such as *senpay(nim)*. Amongst these speakers, however, some resistance was detected towards the use of these terms. Participant FGK78014, for example, spoke as follows:

I think maybe something in me like culturally just like shuts down. I'm like “you're one semester ahead of me, I don’t care”. [FGK78014]

Not only does FGK7814’s comment reveal a basic clash between her own egalitarian politeness ideology and the hierarchical structure of the Korean university, but a more specific aversion to indexing more marginal power differences in language. Although the vast majority of second language learners felt that it was quite reasonable to use respectful terms towards notable superiors such as professors and grandparents, many complained that marking differences of just one or two years in language appeared “illogical” to them, as FGK78014 put it.

6.2 Mixed attitudes towards kinship terms

The appearance of kinship terms in the DCT data was limited to the fictive usage of terms translating as “older brother” towards the *senpay* (‘senior student’). Although the exchange students used such terms at a similar frequency to the L1 group, the professionals were shown to all but avoid kinship terms.

The introspection sessions revealed these distinct differences between the exchange students and professionals to reflect different sets of attitudes towards kinship terms. For some speakers – including the majority of exchange students – using kinship terms in a fictive way was a part of the language that was novel, fun and that they enjoyed. “I kind of like that”, commented MEN83007, “that wasn’t too hard to get used to”. However, other speakers – and especially the professionals group – reported a more cautious or even negative attitude towards the use of kinship terms. Some of the older female participants also expressed a distaste for using *oppa* (‘older brother of a woman’) towards male interlocutors. The comments of FGN72011 and FGK78014 below show that these speakers associated *oppa* with a submissive feminine role:

1. I will use it [*oppa*] sometimes, but I am kind of prejudiced against it. It’s because of the Korean girls who whine and say “*oppa* [in whiney drawn out intonation] I don’t want to sound like that. [FGN72011]

2. It’s associated in my mind with something that’s like- like *aykyo* [‘cuteness’]. Right, like trying to seem cuter than you are and like sort of emphasizing that by using *oppa*. [FGK78014]

This avoidance of *oppa* and the negative view of how some Korean women talk is reminiscent...
in some ways of the experiences of Western women learning Japanese pragmatics reported in Seigal (1994, 1995). The clash between the Korean view of femininity and that of the Western participants, represented one more barrier in the development of competence in honorifics for the female participants in the study.

6.3 Overuse of personal names

Overuse of the NAME+ssi formula was found to be a particular feature of L2 address terms usage. The frequency in the data of this –ssi suffix, which can attach both to given names and full names, is displayed in TABLE 3 (below):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>F = 7.360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14.1%</td>
<td>27.5%</td>
<td>36.7%</td>
<td>p = .002</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Similar to the mixture of honorific speech styles but omission of referent honorifics commented upon in previous sections, NAME+ssi seems to occupy a similar balance of polite egalitarianism – or at least the perception of it. The overuse of NAME+ssi also seems to reflect the fact that this is one address formula in which second language speakers tend to be more rigorously socialized in. Due to their own unstable position in the status hierarchy, second language speakers may find that they themselves receive this form of address frequently from L1 interlocutors and thus are prone to copy such usage. In addition, the NAME+ssi format is, at least according to Lee On-kyeong (2005), the most frequently occurring address form in Korean language textbooks. This is also the form of address that Korean teachers use (quite appropriately) to address their students and encourage students to use it to each other.

7. Conclusion

The discussions in this paper have revealed a number of salient patterns regarding the use of
honorifics by speakers of Korean as a second language. To conclude the paper, I briefly summarize three of the main reasons as to why the honorifics systems of second language learners appear to differ so markedly from those of native speakers.

The first reason postulated is that the divergences from L1 norms stem from the way that honorifics are taught in the Korean language classroom, in other words, that they represent “transfer of training”. On this point, it has been noted that the honorifics pattern preferred by L2 speakers of Korean (name+ssi/no referent honorifics/{Y} speech style) is also the “code” that is most widely represented in Korean language textbooks. Furthermore, it has also been pointed out that KSL teachers – as well as Korean interlocutors in the real world – are more likely to correct instances of omission of the {Y} speech level ending rather than referent honorifics. In KSL, presenting this mixed “code” represents a convenient way to coach Korean learners into a use of honorifics that contains some level of “politeness” without getting “bogged down” in more complex discussions as to how honorifics are really used. However, the current paper suggests that this presentation of simplified honorifics in the KSL classroom may contribute to wide patterns of inappropriate honorifics use by L2 learners.

The second factor that may contribute to the honorifics systems of L2 speakers “falling short” of the L1 baseline is insufficient socialization into Korean modes of social behavior. Although all of the participants in the current study had significant experiences of living in Korea, the context in which they used Korean were generally limited in one way or another and this affected the kind of honorifics competence they developed. In the case of the exchange students, university life provided them with ample opportunities to practice casual, non-honorific Korean with Korean friends and also with exchange students from China and Japan. However, since their Korean language teacher represented the only significant status superior with whom they interacted regularly, opportunities to be socialized into modes of interaction involving status superiors and the use of honorific language were greatly limited. As for the professionals group, these speakers used Korean in an academic or professional environment and were more accustomed to using and receiving honorific rather than non-honorific language. This group of speakers was generally less successful than the exchange students in creating casual friendships with Koreans. Although the exchange students could, to a certain extent, treat other students in the university as their status equals and peers, the professionals found it more difficult to establish such relationships and develop opportunities to use non-honorific language.

However, despite the fact that these learners at times may have received insufficient instruction and socialization in the use of honorifics, these explanations can only go so far in explaining salient patterns of honorifics use by L2 speakers. The data clearly shows that not all of the uses of honorifics that strayed from L1 norms resulted from a lack of competence per se. In other words, there was a tendency for L2 speakers to misuse honorifics despite knowing that this usage may be inappropriate or even potentially offensive. To explain why this should be the case, in the current study I adopt the concept of “politeness ideology”. Put simply, speakers are less likely to converge towards native speaker norms when doing so would be in contradiction of their “native” thoughts and attitudes pertaining to what it means to behave or speak politely. On this point, participants in the current study reported a reticence to apply honorific forms that
were either overtly subservient on the one hand or overtly condescending on the other and that therefore went against their “Western” ideology of egalitarian honorifics use. Using a mixed “code” of honorific speech styles but no referent honorifics allowed speakers to strike a balance between using Korean to some degree of appropriateness, but not sacrificing their own native-language ideals regarding politeness and human interaction. On the one hand, using the honorific speech styles gave them a feeling that they were being “polite” and not condescending or disrespectful towards any of their Korean acquaintances. Then, on the other hand, by omitting referent honorifics, their speech did not sound too subservient or too involved in the perpetuation of a social system they did not necessarily aspire to become a part of.

Selected References


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