

# THE SEMANTIC AND PRAGMATIC NATURE OF HONORIFIC AGREEMENT IN KOREAN: A CONSTRAINT-BASED APPROACH

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**Park, Byung-Soo.** 1998. **The Semantic and Pragmatic Nature of Honorific Agreement in Korean: A Constraint-Based Approach.** *Language and Information* 2.1, 116-156. This paper is an HPSG approach to agreement phenomena involving the Korean honorific expressions. It is shown that the theoretical devices developed by the constraint-based theory of HPSG can be fruitfully used to capture the interactions between syntactic constraints and semantic or pragmatic factors in Korean honorific agreement. The HPSG's semantic feature 'referential index' plays a key role in describing the multiple interaction. The constraint-based theory of agreement proves successful in accounting for the phenomenon that may be called 'inconsistent' honorific agreement as well as 'consistent' regular honorific usages. However, this paper acknowledges its limit. Recognizing an important distinction between basic and 'coercive' honorific expressions, it is argued that a syntactic-semantic-pragmatic approach such as the present one can only be applied to basic honorific agreement. Being sociolinguistic in nature, coercive honorific agreement is perhaps not amenable to formal linguistic investigation. (Kyung Hee University)

## I. Introduction

This paper explores the Korean honorific systems and describes how semantic and pragmatic factors interact with overall

grammatical structures of the language.' I will argue that no grammar can account for honorific agreement properly unless it is equipped with means of connecting syntactic and semantic devices with information on things in extralinguistic context, and show that a theoretical framework for such a grammar can be developed from Sag and Pollard's Head-Driven Phrase Structure Grammar (HPSG hereafter), especially their constraint-based theory of agreement. (Pollard and Sag (1988, 1994)) However, I do not claim that one can account for all the relevant facts about honorific agreement using the HPSG framework, or any syntactic-semantic framework for that matter. There seem to be various sociolinguistic or even nonlinguistic factors in the phenomenon of honorific agreement defying formal analysis. For this reason, I propose a distinction between regular and coercive honorific agreement in Korean, and I maintain that only the former can be analyzed successfully in syntax and semantics, or

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<sup>1</sup>According to Ikeya (1985), there have been opposing views on honorific agreement among Japanese linguists: While the traditional grammarians consider it "to be quite outside the domain of grammar," the new generative grammarians "consider the phenomenon as purely grammatical." My previous position (Park 1985) and of course Ikeya's position belonged to the latter. However, my present position is in a kind of middle ground in the sense that I pursue the problem from a pragmatic perspective as well as from syntactic-semantic perspectives. This should be understood as a step toward for a better theory of honorific agreement, not merely as eclectic. I would like to point out from the outset that this paper does not attempt to suggest a complete treatment of the Korean honorific phenomenon, which is far beyond the scope of this study. It would not be possible without fully accounting for its social and psychological implications. This paper is concerned only with the most typical basic usage of the honorific expressions. See section 4 for some of their nontypical, special usages. After all, it might not be possible at all to describe all those subtle speech acts involving the honorific expressions in precise formal terms, except for certain rudimentary guidelines. In this sense, it will be realized that the traditional grammarians' cautious view on the honorific issue is something that should be reexamined in a serious manner, not something that could be disregarded as bygone trivials.

even in pragmatics.

After introducing some fundamentals of HPSG's constraint-based theory of agreement in Section 2, I discuss basic properties of regular honorific agreement and show how the constraint-based theory of agreement can deal with it in Section 3. In Section 4, I discuss how coercive honorific agreement comes about and suggest a sociolinguistic account of it.

## **2. A Declarative Approach to Grammatical Agreement: Roles of Referential Indices**

Take a simple sentence like (1) as an example and consider how subject-verb agreement in English has been treated.

- (1) The man walks.

According to the conventional analysis, in either traditional or generative grammars, the form of the main verb *walks*, which is the agreement target, is said to be determined by the agreement controller *the man*, the subject noun. Although the details of the exact way in which it is done vary from analysis to analysis, the essential part of the process involves either copying or movement of the agreement features 'third person' and 'singular' of the subject noun onto the main verb. We may call this a procedural approach to characterize its derivational nature whether it involves movement or copying.

By contrast, the constraint-based approach, which I propose to call a declarative approach to highlight its difference from the derivational approach, does not move agreement features from one place to another, nor does it inherit them from one node to

another in a tree (as in GPSG). The declarative approach views the subject-verb agreement phenomenon as a syntactic and semantic consequence of referring to the same object by means of two (or more) different linguistic expressions, for instance, the main verb *walks* and the subject noun *the man* in (1). The noun expression *man* refers to a certain man. Although the verb *walks* is not used to refer to things directly, it may also be associated with a certain man (as opposed to, say, certain people, you, or us) in the sense that it requires a third person singular noun phrase which may be used to refer to a certain man among others. Under these circumstances, the noun expression *the man* and the verb expression *walks* may be combined to make a sentence like (1) if and only if the man in question referred to by the noun phrase *the man* is in fact identical to the man referred to by the subject noun which is required by the verb *walks*. In this way, subject-verb agreement, and any kind of agreement for that matter, is understood not merely as a syntactic constraint, but as a consequence of both syntactic and semantic constraints.

In order to incorporate this line of ideas into grammar, Pollard and Sag (1988, 1994) introduce a semantic-pragmatic attribute called referential indices and take agreement features such as person, number, and gender to be values of referential indices. In HPSG, those agreement features do not simply belong to syntactic categories. Rather, they are understood as “abstract objects which function in discourse to keep track of the entities that are being talked about.” (Pollard and Sag (1994)) Thus the notion of referential index is pragmatic as well as semantic in nature.

How can it be connected with syntactic mechanisms? The key idea that makes this possible is that referential indices have internal structures. In accordance with the theory of HPSG feature structure, a referential index is an attribute and has as its

value a feature structure of type *referential-object*: (The formal notation used in this paper is directly borrowed from Pollard and Sag (1994).)

$$(2) \left[ \begin{array}{l} npro \\ \text{INDEX} \left[ \begin{array}{l} ref \\ \text{PER} \quad 3rd \\ \text{NUM} \quad sing \end{array} \right] \\ \\ \text{RESTRICTION} \left[ \begin{array}{l} \text{RELATION} \quad man \\ \text{INSTANCE} \quad \boxed{1} \end{array} \right] \end{array} \right]$$

The feature structure (2), a partial representation of the semantics for the word *man*, represents a restricted index: an index restricted to a one-place relation (or property) of being a man. Note, first of all, that the value of the INDEX attribute is just a feature structure representing the information content “third person singular”. It is crucial in the constraint-based theory of agreement that INDEX attributes have internal structures like this. (In a theory like GB, indices are merely mnemonic symbols such as *i*, *j*, *k*, etc., whose sole function is to signal reference identity or nonidentity.)

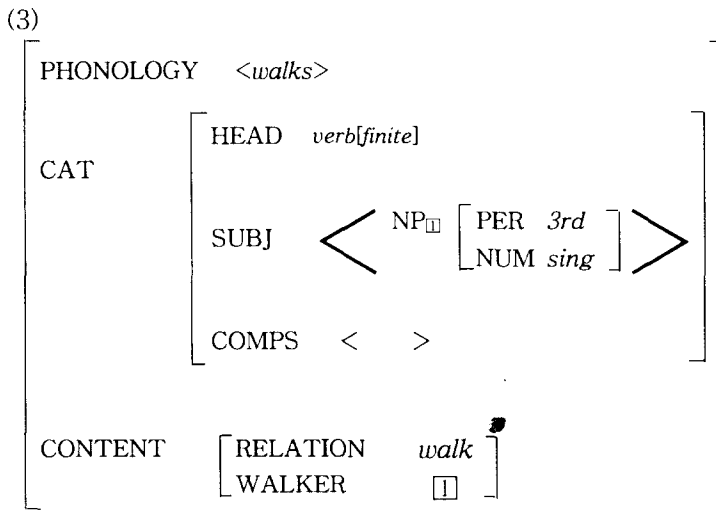
Furthermore, such INDEX values may appear in various levels of feature structures in either syntax or semantics attributes, and this is accomplished by the operation called ‘structure sharing’ or unification.’ To see how the mechanism of structure-sharing

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<sup>2</sup>In HPSG, all kinds of linguistic units, be it syntactic categories, words, phrases, semantic notions, phonological units, or what not, are represented by features. These are called feature structures. A feature structure is a set of feature specifications. A feature specification is made of a feature and its value or attribute value matrix (=AVM).

<sup>3</sup>The notion of unification is of central importance in HPSG. Suppose A and B are feature structures and they happen to describe one and the same thing in a

allows syntactic, semantic and pragmatic factors to interact with one another beyond each of the three domains as well as within it, examine the feature structure for the verb *walks* below:



The SYNSEM|LOCAL feature structure (3) represents categorial information (CAT) as well as semantic information (CONTENT): *walks* is a verb of finite form and selects for a noun phrase subject whose referential index value is 3rd person singular, and its semantic content is a walking relation in which one argument (or semantic role or thematic role) “walker”

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different way. Then we can combine A and B to obtain a new feature structure C which contains all the information A and B, but nothing else. We call C the unification of A and B. Under these circumstances, it is always the case that one or more features have identical values, or they share the same value. The sharing of a value is indicated by putting the same tags like [1], [2], or [3] in two or more different places. Grammars which employ unification as core operations are recently called “unification-based grammars” or simply “unification grammars.” Besides HPSG, Categorical Grammar, and several computer-oriented grammars like PATR II and definite clause grammar are also unification grammars. See Pollard and Sag (1994), Chapter 2 and Shieber (1986).

participates. Another crucial piece of information is that the walker must be the same individual with the one whoever is referred to by the subject noun of the verb required by the attribute SUBJ. This information is represented by the two occurrences of the tag  $\square$ , and in such cases, we say that the value of CONTENT|WALKER is unified (or structure-shared) with the value of SYNSEM|LOCAL|INDEX in the value of SUBJ. Also note that the same tag  $\square$  is located in the value of the index attribute for the *man* in (2). This means that if *the man* is used as the subject of a sentence in which the main verb is *walks* as in (1), then the man referred to by the expression *man* is in fact the walker under consideration in (3).

Due to referential index, HPSG's constraint-based analysis of agreement can deal with agreement constraints in a strictly monotonic non-derivational fashion. It describes English subject-verb agreement by checking whether identity between two referential indices introduced by a subject noun and its predicate verb is guaranteed or not. To put it more simply, it checks whether information about agreement features of one expression (e.g. a subject noun *the man* in (1)) is compatible with information about another expression (e.g. the predicate verb *walks*). No derivational processes are involved in this approach; what matters is the information that is shared by different linguistic expressions and the way it is described. This is the reason why I prefer to call Pollard and Sag's constraint-based theory of agreement a declarative approach.

Given simple cases like sentence (1), the two approaches, procedural and declarative, may appear to make little difference in theoretical value. But when we come to more complex cases, important differences emerge. In addition to computational

advantages gained from the constraint-based approach, Pollard and Sag(1988, 1994) cite abundant data from various languages (selected from Barlow(1988)) showing that a procedural approach would lead to massive redundancies or wrong predictions where a declarative approach leads to optimal solutions. Let me provide some of them that I find particularly relevant in the treatment of Korean honorific agreement.

First, let us consider the French treatment of agreement.

- (4) a. Je suis heureux. 'I am happy (masc.).'
- b. Je suis heureuse. 'I am happy (fem. singular).'
- c. Tu es heureux. 'You are happy (masc.).'
- d. Tu es heureuse. 'You are happy (fem.).'

Predicative adjectives in French agree with their subjects in gender and number: thus one must say *Il est heureux*. (He is happy (masc.)), not *\*Il est heureuse*. (He is happy (fem.)) One can say *Ils sont petis*. (They (masc.) are happy (masc. pl.)) but not *\*Elles sont petis* (They (fem.) are happy (masc. pl.)). If the subject noun is masculine, the complement adjective must be masculine, and if the subject noun is feminine, the complement adjective must also be the feminine form. Note that there is only one first person singular pronoun *je* and only one second person singular pronoun *Tu*. In this situation, adjectives agree with the natural genders of the speaker and the hearer as we see in (4). To account for this situation, a procedural approach to agreement would have to posit two different first person singular pronouns (one for masculine and the other for feminine) and two different second person singular pronouns (one for masculine and the other for feminine), so that gender information could be transferred



from subjects to complement predicative adjectives. This would be the only way of having correct forms of adjectives depending on gender.

In contrast, a declarative approach does not require such pronoun proliferation. First and second person singular pronouns are simply unspecified with respect to gender in syntax, and then semantically, it is required that they be compatible either with masculine or with feminine adjective forms.

A similar observation can be made about number agreement in Onondaga, an Iroquian language.

- (5) a. Ciha kahnya-ha?  
       dog barking-singular  
       ‘The dog is barking.’  
       b. Ciha knihnya-ha?  
       dog barking-dual  
       ‘The dogs are barking.’  
       c. Ciha kotihnya-ha?  
       dog barking-plural  
       ‘The dogs are barking.’

Note in (5) that there are three different forms for the verb ‘barking’, depending on number and that there is only one form for the noun ‘dog.’ Again, on a procedural approach, the subject noun must be specified with respect to number: it is singular, dual, or plural, and then such information must be moved to the main verb so that each of the three different verb forms may be distinguished. But again, such unrealistic redundancy can be avoided on a declarative constraint-based analysis where there is only one form for a noun which is unspecified for number, and

the constraint-based analysis requires that information from the verb and information from the subject be compatible.

Of particular interest in connection with Korean honorific agreement is the phenomenon called “reference transfer” originally discussed by Nunberg(1977).

- (6) a. The hash browns at table nine are/\*is getting cold.
- b. The hash browns at table nine is/\*are getting angry.

The subject noun phrase *the hash browns* in (6b) refers to the person who ordered the food, not the food. The referent of the noun expression has been changed metaphorically from the food to the person. Under such circumstances, the number of the noun is singular despite the inherent plural morpheme, and accordingly the singular verb form agrees with it.

Pollard and Sag(1994) provide many other similar English data to show the same point as is shown by the metaphorical reference transfers above (e.g., free relative clause constructions, collective nouns, and singular plurals). The point is that subject-verb agreement is determined by the meaning of each relevant expression rather than by the inherent syntactic (or morphological) form of the expression. We see that the subject noun *the hash browns* in (6b) is reinterpreted as denoting a person rather than a dish and therefore is interpreted as a singular noun with which the singular verb form agrees.

All the data of this kind are readily accountable in a declarative theory of agreement making use of referential indices since referential indices, which have their own internal structures representing their semantic properties, can be assigned to nouns regardless of their inherent syntactic forms, and crucially, they

can be shared by various attributes, i.e., (referential) indices for nouns or for subcategorization requirements of verbs or adjectives appearing in various levels of feature structures. Agreement depends on referential indices shared by an agreement target and its controllers, not by their inherent formal markers.<sup>4</sup>

This line of idea may be applied to Korean sentences like (7) which have long puzzled Korean linguists, since an apparent violation of a selectional restriction does not make them awkward.

- (7) na-nun ccacangmyen i-ta.  
 I-Tm Chinese noodle be-DECL  
 'I am Chinese noodle.' (meaning "I'd like Chinese noodle,"  
 when uttered in a Chinese restaurant)

The puzzling problem is: How can a person become a dish? However, we can see that this is a wrong question to ask when we approach the problem from a different perspective, i.e., in terms of referential indices. The first person singular pronoun should refer to the dish in question. Thus a declarative approach will simply say that the value of the referential indices for the inherently first person pronoun has been re-assigned, i.e., transferred from first to third person and this re-assigned value is unified with the third person value of the noun 'Chinese noodle'. In this way, whereas semantic reinterpretation of a

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<sup>4</sup>Pollard and Sag (1994) warn us against a purely semantic theory of agreement. For example consider *The ship lurched, and then she righted herself/it righted itself/\*she righted itself/\*it righted herself*. Under a purely semantic theory, there would be no way of accounting for the consistency in person and gender in the above example sentences. Once a noun is interpreted as having a particular feature in a sentence, it must preserve the feature throughout the sentence, and this kind of constraint is of syntactic nature. Not only semantic, but also syntactic factors must be taken into consideration.

linguistic expression would pose a very difficult problem for a procedural analysis, it can be naturally explained on a declarative approach.<sup>6</sup>

### 3. Honorific Agreement in Korean

#### 3.1. Subject-Verb Honorific Agreement

Now we turn to honorific agreement in Korean. First, it is important to realize that honorific agreement in Korean is not a grammatical agreement in its strict sense as noted in footnote 1. In this connection, I want to point out that former treatments of honorific agreement in the generative grammar framework, including my own analysis (Park 1985), were somewhat overstated. Observe the following sentences:

- (8) a. kim sacang-i o-ass-ta.  
kim president-SM come-PAST-DECL

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<sup>6</sup>As pointed out by an anonymous reviewer, there seems to be evidence that an example like (7) is an instance of reference transfer:

- (i) A: Kim sacangnim-i mwuess-ul cwumwunha-si-ess-ni?  
Kim president-NOM what-ACC order-HON-PAST-QUES  
B: a. Kim sacangnim-un ccacangmyon-i-ta.  
Kim president-TOP Chinese.noodle-be-DECL  
b. #Kim kyoswu-nim-un ccacangmyon-i-si-ta.  
Kim president-TOP Chinese.noodle-be-HON-DECL

To the question A, a more proper answer is (Ba) where the main verb is unmarked with the honorific. The referent of Kim sacangnim is transferred from a person to a dish. This reference transfer makes the subject un honorific and thus requires it to combine with a non honorific verb as in (Ba).

b. kim sacang-i o-si-ess-ta.

HON

c. kim sacang-nim-i o-ass-ta.

HON

d. kim sacang-nim-i o-si-ess-ta.

'President Kim has come.'

Here we have two kinds of honorific marker, *nim* for nouns and *si* for verbs. Neither *nim* nor *si* occurs in (8a), while both honorific markers occur in (8d). Hence verbs agree with subjects in terms of (non)honorificity in those two sentences, which illustrate typical instances of subject honorific agreement.<sup>6</sup> The speaker of (8d) expresses his respect for the person denoted by the subject noun 'President Kim,' while the speaker of (8a) does not.

### 3.2. Inconsistent Honorific Agreement

Problems arise in (8b) and (8c). In (8b), only the verb honorific occurs and in (8c) only the noun honorific occurs. So the question is: Should such sentences be ruled out because of honorific agreement violations? My answer is that they should not. It

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<sup>6</sup>The term "subject honorification" is widely used, but I think this is a misnomer. The term appears to be a direct English translation of the Korean term "couche condan" used in historical linguistics and traditional grammar. There seems to be no problem in the translation of the second word, but the translation of the word 'cuchey' into English 'subject' is misleading, because the notion denoted by 'cuchey' includes not only 'subject', but also 'agent' or 'topic' or 'experiencer' or 'theme' or whatever may be interpreted as a leading or central force in the action or situation described by a sentence. For this reason, I coin a term *si* honorification. I assume that there are two different kinds of *si* honorification usage: the basic and coercive usage. I treat the basic usage in this section and the coercive usage in the next section.

would be an exaggeration to say that sentences like (8b) or (8c) feel something wrong. Putting aside the question of what is wrong for the moment, they are certainly Korean sentences. There is an obvious difference between cases in which sentences violate agreement rules in French, German, or English and Korean cases in which sentences like (8b) or (8c) violate honorific agreement conventions. For example, the following sentence fragments, except for (9a,d) and (10a,d), are all simply ungrammatical:

- (9) a. Tu es ....
- b. \*Vous es ....
- c. \*Tu etes ....
- d. Vous etes ....
- (10) a. Du bist ....
- b. \*Sie bist ....
- c. \*Du sind ....
- d. Sie sind ....

In these languages, honorific subject nouns and nonhonorific verb forms (and the other way around, too) cannot co-occur for grammatical reasons.

By contrast, the Korean sentences (8b) and (8c), which violate honorific agreement rules in the same way as the French and German counterparts do, are not ungrammatical in the sense that French (9b) and (9c) and German (10b) and (10c) are. In fact the Korean sentences may be used in a variety of circumstances. It might be the case that the speaker of (8b) considers the term *Kim sacang* 'President Kim' as a sort of honorific term, honorific enough to ensure an honorific verb form. Or, it might be that the

speaker happens to take the verb form with *si* to be nonhonorific. Or it might also be the case that the speaker believes that using both the noun honorific and the verb honorific is flattering and that one is enough to express reasonable respect. Sentences like (8c) may also be used under similar circumstances. For example, to people who regard noun forms with *nim* as nonhonorific, (8c) is appropriate. Or the speaker of (8c) might habitually follow the use of *nim* as other people around him does, but he does not really respect the person denoted by the subject noun 'President Kim'.

The point is that honorific agreement is motivated by pragmatic factors, and therefore its violations do not result in ungrammatical sentences, unlike French or German where such violations bring about straightforwardly ungrammatical sentences. It seems that violations of honorific agreement can be exploited for certain pragmatic effects. In other words, inconsistent distribution of honorific signals should be understood as a way of expressing certain feelings or attitudes, not simply as violations of grammatical rules.

I think that a constraint-based theory of agreement can successfully deal with such flexible situations involving honorific agreement. As we saw above, when we discussed agreement phenomena in other languages, referential indices will play a crucial role in accounting for Korean honorific agreement. The description of the normal situations like (8a) and (8d) will be straightforward: it will be shown that the value of the referential indices appears in the subcategorization requirement of the verb.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>The Subcategorization Principle is one of the five well-formedness principles in HPSG: Head Feature Principle, Binding Principle, Adjunct Principle, and Semantics Principle. It is akin to categorial grammar's functional application in building up trees.

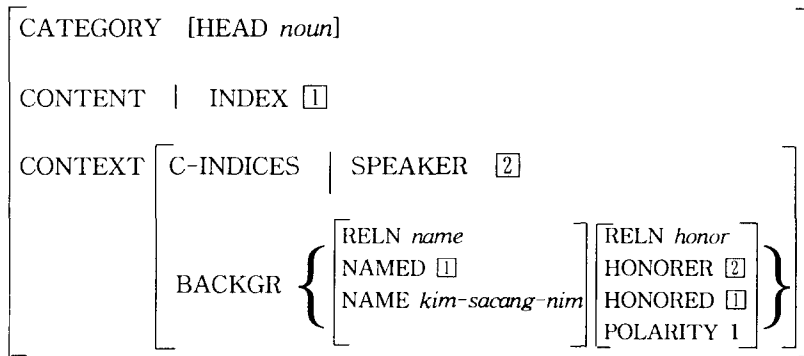
Let us call situations like these instances of typical honorific agreement. While the honorific feature will be absent in the case of (8a), it will be present in the case of (8d), both in the feature structure for the noun *President Kim* and in the feature structure representing the subcategorization requirement of the verb *came*.

Concerning (8b) and (8c), which we will call inconsistent honorific agreement, I want to suggest that the situation is similar to the situation involving reference transfers which we observed in English sentences (6) and Korean sentence (7). It is assumed that the referent of the inherently honorific *kim sacang-nim* 'President Kim' can be transferred from honorific to nonhonorific and that the referent of the inherently nonhonorific *kim-sacang* can be transferred from nonhonorific to honorific. Alternatively, it may be assumed that either noun form (i.e. *kim-sacang* or *kim-sacang-nim*) is neutral in terms of honorificity and so compatible with either honorific or nonhonorific verb forms.

First, we will examine the relevant feature structures involving typical honorific agreement, taking the sentence (8d) as an example. The SYNSEM|LOCAL value for the honorific noun *kim-sacang-nim* (kim-president-HON) may be represented as follows:



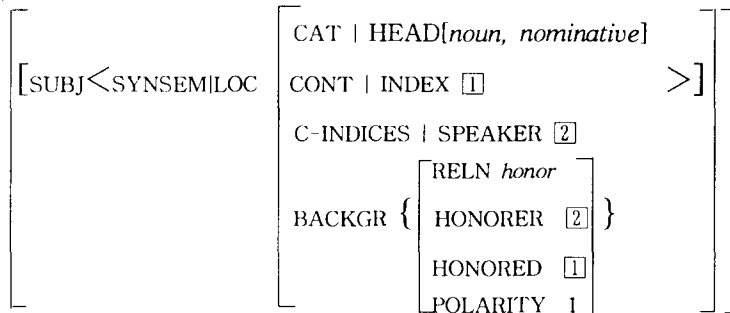
(11)



The CONTEXT attribute contains information on indexicality and pragmatic background knowledge presupposed by the particular speaker who uses a particular linguistic expression. The former is represented by the attribute C(ONTEXTUAL)-INDICES and the latter by the attribute BACKGROUND. So the information represented by the CONTEXT value in the feature structure (11) is roughly this: whoever uses the expression *kim-sacang-nim* shows respect for the person denoted by that expression (and the person who is called *kim-sacang-nim* holds the naming relationship with the name).

Next, the SUBJ(ECT) feature that the honorific verb *o-si-(ta)* 'come (HONORIFIC)' selects for will look like this:

(12)



(This type of formal notion for valence information may sometimes be abbreviated as [SUBJ < NP [nom] hon>]. (See (13) below.)

The verb *o-si-(-ta)* calls for a noun (phrase) to get saturated, i.e., to become a complete sentence, which is a syntactic requirement, and further it is required semantically and pragmatically that the speaker show respect for the person denoted by the noun subcategorized for by the verb. The way of checking whether this honorific requirement is satisfied or not (in other words, whether the feature structures (12) and (11) are compatible with each other in such a way that they meet the Subcategorization Principle) is simply to see if there is a feature structure of type *honorific* in the CONTEXT|BACKGROUND value in either structure and to check whether the polarity values are identical or not. If the polarity values match, the two feature structures may be unified. If not, they may not be unified. For the feature structure representing (8d), of course, the polarity values match positively and the verb *o-si-ess-ta* 'came' agrees with the subject noun *kim-sacang-nim* 'President Kim' with respect to honorificity.

In the case of (8a), the polarity values will match negatively and so the sentence is an instance of nonhonorific agreement. What will happen to the feature structures for (8b) and (8c)? As we discussed a few paragraphs earlier, as a result of honorific re-interpretation of the noun phrase in question, there occur reference transfers from its original values to the ones that can match the subcategorization requirement of the verb in question. Thus, despite the seemingly nonhonorific noun form *kim sacang* in (8b), its index has been transferred to honorific. By uttering (8b) in a real situation, in the speaker's presupposition, the

referential index for the noun is anchored to a person for whom he shows respect. Put it more plainly, the speaker presupposes that he respects the person denoted by the subject noun (for whatever reason it may be). It follows that the feature structure for the sentence (8b) will be the same as the feature structure for (8d), a structure resulting from unifying (11) and (12):

Next, on this view, the sentence (8c) is taken to be nonhonorific, being similar to (8a). This can be accounted for if it is assumed that the index for the seemingly honorific noun *kim-sacang-nim* 'President Kim' has been transferred from honorific to nonhonorific so that it may be anchored to a person to whom the speaker does not show particular respect. We can imagine a situation in which sentences like (8c) may be used: without really having any respect for the person denoted by the noun *kim-sacang-nim*, the speaker habitually picks up the honorific marker *nim* and puts it after *kim-sacang* because almost everybody around him calls the person that way. In any event, sentences like (8c) should not be ruled out as unacceptable or ungrammatical, and (8c) can in fact be described in the same way as (8a), a normal instance of nonhonorification, is.

Here, we turn to a procedural approach to agreement and consider how it would deal with (8b) and (8c). This syntactic approach would have to have a way of transmitting agreement features from subject nouns to predicate verbs. For this reason, inconsistent honorific agreement poses a serious problem for this

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\*As an anonymous reviewer pointed out, the term "reference transfer" should be interpreted in a much stricter sense. Unlike a true reference transfer, say, from a person to a dish, cases with honorification involves only the transfer of the polarity value from 1 to 0 or vice versa. The term "reference transfer" is used in this paper as a general term.

approach. So in (8b), the subject noun *kim-sacang* would have to be syntactically (or morphologically) specified as honorific so that it can agree with the honorific verb form. This means that we should be forced to posit two different forms on the syntactic level, one for honorific and another for nonhonorific, for exactly one and the same lexeme *kim-sacang*. In the case of (8c), the morphologically honorific noun *kim-sacang-nim* would have to be specified as nonhonorific. So in cases like this, too, we would have to have two different forms for one lexeme. Massive redundancy would result from this practice. We already observed problems of this nature in procedural analysis's attempts to account for agreement phenomena in French and Onondaga. A constraint-based declarative approach need not posit different syntactic forms for identical ambivalent expressions which can be used to refer to different things on different occasions; it only seeks to re-interpret them as is required semantically or pragmatically. Hence no such problem of redundancy arises.

### 3.3. Dative Honorification

So far we have discussed typical (like (8a) or (8d)) and atypical inconsistent (like (8b) or (8c)) honorific agreement phenomena involving the honorific verbal suffix *si*. I have shown that a constraint-based theory of agreement can cope with atypical cases as well as typical ones. This theory can be extended to other types of honorific agreement in Korean quite efficiently. We will examine dative honorification and speech levels in what follows.

Consider the following data on dative honorification:

- (13) a. na-nun kim sacang-eykey kukes-ul cu-ess-ta.  
 I-TM kim president-DAT it-ACC give-PAST-DECL  
 'I gave it to President Kim.'
- b. na-nun kim sacang-nim-eykey kukes-ul turi-ess-ta.  
 'I gave it to President Kim' give (HONORIFIC)

The nonhonorific verb *cu-ess-ta* agrees with the nonhonorific dative noun phrase *kim-sacang-eykey*, and the honorific verb *turi-ess-ta* with the honorific dative *kim-sacang-nim-eykey*.

However, dative honorification is somewhat more complex than this. It depends not just on whether the speaker honors the dative object or not, but on whether the speaker assumes that the subject respects the dative object or not. So the use of the honorific verb *turi-ta* would not be appropriate in the situation where the subject is higher than the dative in social hierarchy even though the dative is higher than the speaker. Dative honorification is appropriate only when the dative is higher than the subject from the speaker's point of view. Observe the following examples.

- (14) hoecang-nim-i kim-sacang-nim-eykey kukes-ul  
 Chairman(hon)-NOM                      DAT            ACC  
 { a. cu-(si)-ess-ta.                      }  
 { b. \*turi-(si)-ess-ta.                    }

In the situation where the speaker assumes that the subject *hoecang-nim* 'Chairman' is higher than the dative *kim-sacang-nim* 'President Kim' the use of the nonhonorific verb is bizarre as in (14b). In short, whereas subject honorification involves the hierarchical relationship between the speaker and the

subject, dative honorification involves the hierarchical relationship between the subject and the dative as is viewed from the speaker's point. Accordingly, the BACKGROUND information in the feature structure for the dative-honorific verb must include information which specifies that the subject honors the dative in the following manner:

(15)

$$\left[ \begin{array}{l} \text{PHON } \textit{turi-ta} \\ \text{CAT } \left[ \begin{array}{l} \text{SUBJ } \langle \text{NP}[\textit{nom}]_{[1]} \rangle \\ \text{COMPS } \langle \text{NP}[\textit{dat}]_{[2]}, \text{NP}[\textit{acc}] \rangle \end{array} \right] \\ \text{CONTEXT | BACKGR } \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{RELN } \textit{honor} \\ \text{HONORER } [1] \\ \text{HONORED } [2] \\ \text{POLARITY } 1 \end{array} \right\} \end{array} \right]$$

For the nonhonorific verb *cu-ta*, the polarity value would be 0.

### 3.4. Speech Levels

It is one of the well-known features in Korean that sentences end with different sentence enders depending on sentence types and speech levels. There exist four types of sentence enders: declarative, interrogative, imperative and propositive. Each sentence type has different forms depending on speech levels. Speech levels are determined by contextual factors: who speaks to whom and what is the social relationship between the speaker and the addressee, in other words, which is higher in social hierarchy. (Social hierarchy is defined in various terms: age,

family relationship, work place positions, and various other social classes.) In reality, there is an array of speech levels ranging from the highest to the lowest, but for expository convenience, we will limit ourselves to only two levels in the present discussion: high and low speech level. High speech level sentence enders are used when the speaker is lower than the hearer and low speech level ones are used when the speaker is higher than (or equal to) the hearer. All the example sentences we considered above are low speech level declarative sentences, which end with the suffix *-ta* as in (16a).

- (16) a. kim-sacang-i o-n-ta.  
 b. kim sacang-i o-pni-ta.  
 'President Kim is coming.'

Note that (16b) ends with the suffix *-pnita*, which is a high speech level declarative sentence ender. The speaker of (16a) is higher in social hierarchy than the hearer, while the speaker of (16b) is lower than the hearer.

This type of contextual information can naturally be contained in CONTEXT attributes in the attribute value matrix representation. I argue that speech level information is one of the BACKGROUND presuppositions shared by the speaker and the hearer of a given sentence. For example, the following infon' must be included in the representations of verbs used with high speech level declarative sentence enders like *-pnita*:

---

'The term "infon" is derived from situation semantics. (Barwise and Perry (1983) and Barwise (1989)) Infon is a basic unit bearing some information, usually a certain state of affairs, where a certain relation holds and one or more individuals participate in it.

(17)

CONTEXT	C-INDICES	SPEAKER [2] HEARER [3]
	BACKGR	RELN <i>honor</i> HONORER [2] HONORED [3] POLARITY 1

The only difference between this infon and that for a low speech level declarative sentence ending appearing in (16a) will lie in the value of C-INDICES: in the infon for the latter case, the value of SPEAKER and that of HEARER would be [2] and [3], respectively, so that the situation in which the hearer is lower than the speaker could be accounted for.

### 3.5. Consistent and Inconsistent Agreement in Complex Verbs

Let us now turn our attention to multiple occurrences of the honorific marker *si* in a sentence:

- (18) a. kim-sacang nim-i o-si-ci                   anh-usi-ess-ta.  
   come-HON-COMP   not-NON-PAST-DECL  
   'President Kim did not come.'
- b. kim-sacang nim-i o-si-key      toy-si-ess-ta.  
   HON-COMP   become-HON-PAST-DECL  
   'It turned out that President Kim come.'



- c. kim-sacang nim-i o-si-ko kyeysi-n-ta.  
   COMP be (HON)-PRESENT-DECL  
   'President Kim is coming.'
- d. kim-sacang nim-i ku os-ul ib-e/\*ib-usi-e po-si-ess-ta.  
   the clothes-ACC wear-COMP try  
   'President Kim tried (to wear) the clothes.'  
   [COMP=Complementizer]
- (19) kim-sacang nim-i kwantayha-si-ko chincelha-si-ko  
   generous-HON-and kind-HON-and  
   cengcikha-si-ta.  
   honest-HON-DECL  
   'President Kim is generous and kind and honest.'

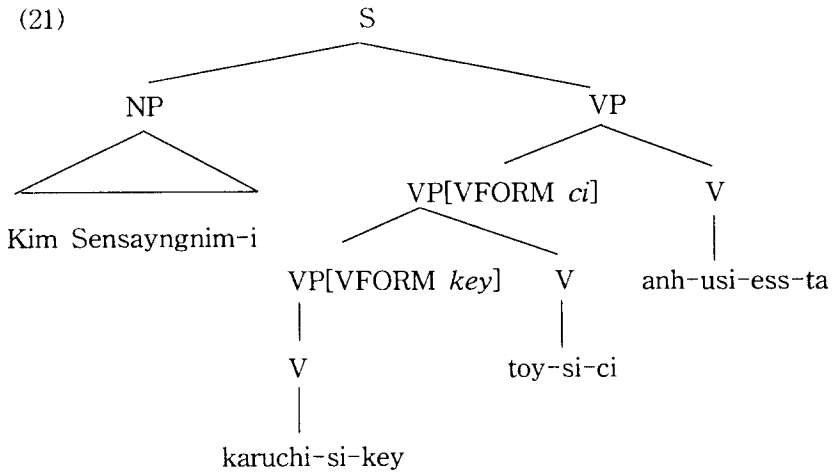
The sentences in (18) contain complement clauses, and the honorific marker *si* occurs both in complement verbs and in main verbs. In (19), all the three conjuncts contain *si*. In general, as many honorific markers may occur as there are verbs or adjectives in a sentence." For instance, if we have two complement clauses as in (20) below, we may have three occurrences of *si*, two in the complement verbs and one in the main verb.

- (20) Kim sensayngnim-i i ben hakki-ey karuchi-si-key  
           Kim teacher-NOM this time term-in teach-HON-COMP

<sup>10</sup>The only exception in this regard is (18d), where the honorific marker cannot occur in the complement verb (i.e., *\*ib-usi-e*). The reason for this is, however, purely morphological: the complementizer *-e* does not allow suffixes of any kind to come before it. For example, tense markers cannot occur with *-e*: *\*ib-ess-e po-ass-ta*. Therefore, the exception has nothing to do with honorification. Cf. *capsu-e po-si-ess-ta* (eat(HON)-VFORM try-HON-PAST-DECL) 'tried to eat' the inherently honorific verb (i.e. *capsu*) does occur before the verb form suffix *-e*.

toy-si-ci            anh-usi-ess-ta.  
 become-HON-COMP not-HON-PAST-DECL  
 'Mr. Kim did not (be)come to teach in this term.'

Assuming that verbs *anh-ta* 'be not' and *toy-ta* 'become' are main verbs, the structure of (19) may be represented schematically as follows:



Agreement between the subject noun and the main verb is as usual, and the honorific markers in the complement verbs can be explained if the following assumptions are made: complement verbs agree in honorificity with the subjects of the matrix clauses.

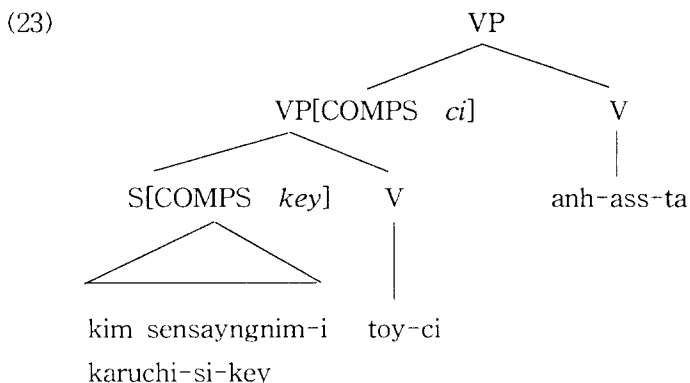
So far so good. However, problems arise in case one or two of the three honorific markers do not show up, thus resulting in inconsistent honorific agreement:

(22) a. ... karuchi-si-key toy-si-ci anh-usi-ess-ta. (=20)

- b. ... karuchi-si-key toy-si-ci anh-ass-ta.
- c. ... karuchi-si-key toy-ci anh-ass-ta.
- d. ... karuchi-key toy-si-ci anh-ass-ta.
- e. ... karuchi-key toy-ci anh-usi-ess-ta.
- f. ... karuchi-key toy-si-ci anh-usi-ess-ta.
- g. ... karuchi-si-key toy-ci anh-usi-ess-ta.

Out of the three potential positions for the honorific marker *si*, three options are available: (i) all the three positions can actually be filled with it, (ii) exactly two of the three can, or (iii) exactly one of the three can. All the sentences resulted from this are acceptable. What makes the omission of the honorific marker possible?

I offer two tentative answers to this problem: a syntactic one and a pragmatic one. First, it is possible to view the auxiliary verbs like *ahn* 'do not' and *toy* 'become' as verbs which take no subjects, unlike the verbs in (21). Under this analysis, it is a natural consequence that the honorific marker cannot occur in verbs like *ahn-ta* or *toy-ta* because there are no subjects in those sentences in which such verbs are main verbs: there are no individuals to be respected as far as the actions denoted by the verbs are concerned. The verbs without the honorific marker in (22a) (...*anh-ass-ta*), (22c)(...*toy-ci anh-ass-ta*), (22e) (...*toy-ci*...) and (22g)(...*toy-ci*...) can be accounted for. For example, the structure of (22c) can be reanalyzed as follows:

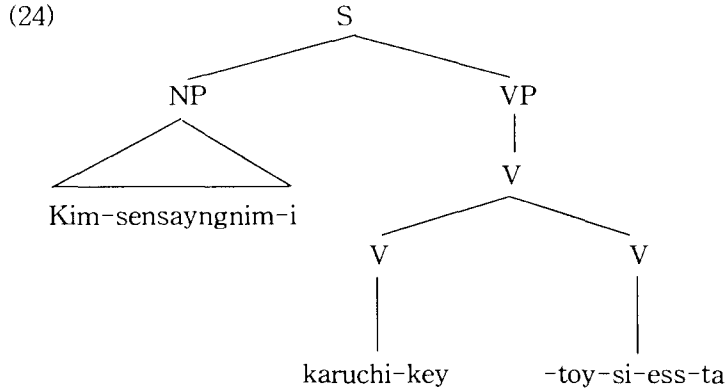


The honorific verb *karuchi-si-key* 'teaches' agree with the honorific subject *kim-sensayngnim-i* 'Mr. Kim' and the two nonhonorific verbs occur simply because there are no honorific subjects for them to agree with.

Next, how can we describe sentences like (22d) or (22f) where the embedded verb (*karuchi-ta* 'teach') is nonhonorific and the auxiliary (*toy-si-ta* 'become' or *anh-usi-ta* 'not') is honorific? For example, in (22f), there must be an honorific subject for the auxiliary verbs to agree with on the one hand, and on the other hand, whatever the subject may be, it should not be the subject of the nonhonorific main verb. For this reason, the analysis of the sort shown in (23) will not work since subjects for the auxiliary main verbs would not be available there. The type of analysis shown in (21), where all the verbs are forced to agree with the honorific subject, explicit or implicit, does not work, either.

Thus I suggest a third approach in which the notion of reanalysis is employed. What I suggest is that the combination of a nonhonorific main verb and an honorific auxiliary verb is reanalyzed as one verb (i.e. a kind of compound), at the level of morphology." Then this verb is assumed to take only one

honorific marker rather than two, because it has now become one verb, and it will agree with the honorific subject. This is shown in (24).



Note that this syntactic solution depends on an assumption that the auxiliary verbs like *toy-ta* 'become' and *anh-ta* 'not' are ambiguous syntactically and lexically: they are either interpreted as ordinary auxiliary verbs which occur with subjects, explicit or implicit, as in (21) or interpreted as subjectless verbs as in (23).<sup>14</sup>

Next, let me propose an entirely different view. My alternative solution is discourse-based. It is admitted that all the sentences in (22) have basically the same syntactic structure (21). Then it is assumed that occurrences of the honorific marker are left

<sup>14</sup>We might appeal to a type of word formation rules proposed by Kim (1988), by which an adjective *him-seyta* 'be strong' is derived lexically from a clause *him-i sey-ta* 'power is strong.' Similarly, we might draw on Cho and Sell's (1991) lexical approach to "complex" verbs. However, this is only my tentative suggestion.

<sup>15</sup>See Kim(1995) for a similar analysis. The plausibility of this solution can be enhanced if it can be shown that there is also semantic ambiguity matching the syntactic ambiguity. At the moment, however, I can not present any definite evidence to that effect. Thus the validity of the syntactic solution is left open for the moment.

entirely optional in syntax, and so for example, one, two, or three honorific markers may occur in any possible positions for the honorific markers in (22) and all the sentences resulting from such operations are equally well-formed syntactically. The question of how many honorific markers actually occur is taken to be a matter of discourse. The rule for this is simple enough: the more honorific markers, the more respect for the person denoted by the subject noun of a sentence is expressed. On this discourse-based approach, we certainly have an advantage of treating the sentences in (22) in a syntactically uniform way. However, the problem seems to remain whether the appearances of honorific markers can entirely be understood from a discourse-based perspective.

I leave it as an open question which of those alternative solutions has to be chosen. I have no convincing evidence which leads us to support either one of the two, rejecting the other. It may turn out true after all that we need both a syntactic and a discourse-based approach in order to establish an optimal theory of honorific agreement.

#### **4. Coercive Honorification: When the Hearer Comes into the Picture**

In general, the basic usage of the *si* honorification does not involve the hearer, except for the case of imperative sentences in which the basic usage will dictate the use of *si* if the hearer is higher than the speaker. However, it has been recognized in traditional Korean linguistics that there are special usages of *si* in which the hearer must be taken into consideration. I will call those special usages coercive honorification for the reason that

will be clear shortly.

There are two different coercive usages: (i) the *si* expression is prohibited in the context in which the *si* expression should be used under the basic usage and (ii) the *si* expression is permitted or recommended where it should be prohibited in the basic usage. Call the first the suppressed usage and the second encouraged (or educational) usage.

The cause of this coercion is the intervention of the contextual factor HEARER into the relationship between the speaker and the subject. In the basic usage, what matters is the hierarchical relationship between only the two: the speaker and the subject. Now, in the usage of coercive *si* honorific, whether one should use *si* or not depends on the relationship among the three participants of a discourse: the speaker and the hearer and the referent of the subject.

First, let us consider the suppressed usage. The speaker must not use the *si* expression even if the subject is higher than the speaker, just in case the hearer is higher than the subject. As an example, consider an hypothetical family of four generations with the hierarchy and ages indicated below: (Notice in particular that the son (=the husband) is higher than his wife in the conventional social hierarchy.)

(25) Grandfather (75 years old)

Mother (55)

Son (35)

Son's Wife (30)

Son's Son (9)

(26) Telephone Conversation between Son's wife and her mother-in-law

a. In English

Son's Wife: Has my husband come home?

Mother: Yes, he has.

b. In Korean

Son's Wife: *aypi*<sup>13</sup>      *cip-ey o-ass-eyo?*

my husband house-to come-PAST-INTERROGATIVE

*\*o-si-ess-eyo?*

HON

Mother: *kuray, o-ass-ta.*

yes      come-PAST-DECL

The term *aypi* literally means 'child's father', and yet it is often used to refer to one's own husband indirectly when she talks to her senior. Younger wives tend to use (*ayki*) *appa* 'child's Dad'. But wives who have no children cannot use either term, of course.

Notice in (26b) that Son's Wife uses the nonhonorific verb form despite the fact the subject is higher than her; she should have used the honorific form, *si* expression, if she had followed the basic usage, as we saw in the previous section. This usage is possible, and in fact obligatory, in this case: the hearer (=Mother, in the chart) is higher than the subject (=Son) and at the same time higher than the speaker (=Son's Wife). The speaker is conscious of the hearer's status and is forced to use the nonhonorific expression referring to the subject. It would offend

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<sup>13</sup> The term *aypi* literally means 'child's father', which is used to refer to one's own husband indirectly when she talks to her senior. Younger wives tend to use "(ayki) *appa*" 'child's Dad'. But wives who have no children cannot use either term, of course. Largely due to the lack of an appropriate term, sentences with no subject are most frequently used in such cases.



the hearer, her mother-in-law, if she used the honorific *si* expression in this case. Why would her behavior be offending to her mother-in-law? It is because the speaker is identified with the subject in terms of the honorific hierarchy. If she honored the subject, then she would come to honor herself. This would be offending to her hearer, i.e. her mother-in-law. The reason is, of course, culture-bound: such a convention is a norm only within the Korean culture. I will offer another explanation to this convention shortly.

In describing the coerced usage of the nonhonorific forms, I said that the hearer is a determining factor. But here one qualification must be made. There may be cases in which the suppressed usage must be used even if the hearer is not higher than the subject. The speaker must resort to the suppressed usage, when there is someone who is higher than the subject in the vicinity, near enough to hear what the speaker says, not to mention when the hearer is higher than the speaker.

What is going on here in the suppressed usage is, I believe, that a behavioral strategy of a very general sort in Korean society is being applied here, what I would call a “modesty convention,” which tells you that you should be humble by lowering yourself in front of your seniors. Applying the modesty convention to a situation where you decide whether you use *si* expressions or not, you will derive the following rule: “You are free to express your respect to whoever is higher than you iff there is no one who is still higher than the person who you want to show respect to in your vicinity at the time of utterance.” That is to say, if there are two or more persons who are higher than you (=the speaker) in a conversational situation, you are free to show respect only to the highest one. Otherwise (i.e., if the

one who you want to show respect to is not the highest among the group), you are required to refrain from your honoring behavior, verbal or nonverbal. You need to behave yourself by honoring no one but the highest in the group in front of the highest one. In short, you need to be humble in behavior.

How can this kind of behavior be seen as a humble behavior? The reason is this: from the speaker's point of view, the hearers are divided between the highest one and the rest of the group, i.e., one high individual and the lower rest. And you (=the speaker) are included in the lower rest. So for you not to honor any of the rest of the group is tantamount to not honoring your own group, which in turn means that you lower yourself, looking up to the highest one. Hence you are acting in a modest manner. Thus the suppressed usage of *si* may be seen to be an act of honoring the hearer or one particular member of the hearer group by lowering both the speaker and the subject.

Now, we turn to the second case of coercive honorification: encouraged or educational usage of *si*. Under this usage, the speaker is forced to use *si* expressions where the speaker should not use them under the ordinary basic usage. Thus this is diagonally the opposite situation to the suppressed usage. This usage seems to come from an educational purpose, and so I have called this usage an educational usage of *si*. Consider the following conversation between Mother and Son's Son, i.e. between Grandmother and her grandson:

- (27) a. Mother: Apeci(-ka) o-si-ess-ni?  
          father      come-HON-PAST-INTERROGATIVE  
          'Has your father come home?'

- b. Son's Son: Yey, o-si-ess-eyo.  
 Yes come-HON-PAST-DECL  
 'Yes, he has come.'

The grandmother asks her grandson if his father has come home yet. Notice that she uses the *si* expression. This is surprising from the viewpoint of the basic usage of *si*. Under a normal situation in which the speaker followed the basic usage, she should not use the *si* expression because the subject (i.e. her son) is not higher than her. Why does she use the *si* expression in this context? It seems to me that, here, the speaker is talking to her grandson from the standpoint of her grandson, not from her own ground. Thus if the grandson, who is the hearer at the moment, spoke, he should naturally use *si* expressions because the subject, who is his father, is higher than him. Therefore, the grandmother uses the honorific *si* expression despite the fact that the subject, her son, is not higher than her. Why does the grandmother switch her standpoint? One explanation is that by uttering (27a) to her grandson, she intends to teach him how to say *si* expressions, in addition to conveying the information content of the sentence. The content of her lesson might be something like this: "You will use *si* expression, just as I say, when the subject is higher than you."

Note that this usage is prohibited when the educational motivation cannot be applied. Consider the following conversation between Mother and Son's Wife, in which they talk about Son:

- (28) a. Mother (55): aypi o-ass-nunya?/\*o-si-ess-nunya?  
 your husband come-PAST-INTERROGATIVE  
 'Has your husband come?'

- b. Son's Wife (30): Yey. o-ass-eyo.  
'Yes, he has.'

According to the given social hierarchy, the speaker is higher than the subject, who is higher than the hearer. So the situation is exactly the same as in (27) above. But the speaker does not follow the coercive usage of *si*: she observes the basic usage. The *si* expression under this circumstance would have been appropriate only in a bizarre situation: the mother-in-law took her daughter-in-law of thirty years of age as a child and tried to teach how to say *si*, or the mother thought that her son was higher than herself, contradicting the social norm, or whatever bizarre situation one might imagine.

There is a crucial difference between the two situations (27) and (28): in the ages of the hearers. The hearer in (27) is a child, while the hearer in (28) is an adult. One condition for the encouraged usage of *si* is that the hearer must be considerably young—young enough for the speaker to think that it would make sense to teach the hearer how to say *si*.

In sum, under the encouraged usage, the use of *si* is encouraged or recommended where it should be disallowed under the normal basic usage, just in case the hearer is considerably young and the subject is higher than the hearer and the speaker believes it to be appropriate to teach the hearer how to say *si*. In other words, this usage may be said to be motivated educationally.

Complicated as they appear, the special usages of the honorific expression follow the rule of manners in the Korean society just as the basic usage does. What is complex and complicated is social conventions involving human relations, and this would hold

in any other society. When we discuss the honorific systems in Korean, we are dealing with human action, not just a particular linguistic phenomenon, and we will realize how difficult it would be to define human behavior in terms of precise formal categories, and we also realize that this line of ideas has been persuasively pointed out to us by the speech act advocates like John Austin several decades ago. I conclude this section by saying that it seems ill-advised, at least at the present stage of scientific development, to seek to contain such elusive phenomena as coercive honorification in Korean within a formal linguistic theory.

## 5. Concluding Remarks

I believe I can highlight two things out of what we have discussed in this paper: one thing about data on Korean honorific agreement and another thing about linguistic theory. First, as far as data are concerned, I have indicated that what I call inconsistent honorific agreement is a commonplace, rather than an exceptional, phenomenon. It is certainly misleading to label them as ungrammatical or unacceptable sentences or utterances. I have tried to answer the question of why such inconsistent agreement is brought about, from both a syntactic and a pragmatic perspective. Secondly, I think I have shown that many of the problems concerning honorific agreement are beyond the scope of sentence grammar. It has been abundantly clear that honorific agreement cannot be handled solely within the boundary of syntax. Furthermore, I have shown that what I call coercive usages of the honorific marker is beyond the scope of theoretical linguistics in many respects.

Honorificity is crucially linked to the speaker's attitude toward

particular objects being talked about and the speaker's social relationship with this hearer. Honorific agreement can be dealt with adequately only in a truly integrated theory of language accommodating interfaces among syntax, semantics and pragmatics in a flexible manner. The present paper is an effort to show that a constraint-based declarative theory of agreement couched in HPSG is a sound and solid starting ground on which we seek to establish such a truly integrated theory, particularly by virtue of its precisely defined formal devices connecting syntactic structures and semantic-pragmatic elements like referential indices.

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