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Title	The system of honorifics in the Korean language
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Citation	Wong, K. Y. (2011). The system of honorifics in the Korean language (Outstanding Academic Papers by Students (OAPS)). Retrieved from City University of Hong Kong, CityU Institutional Repository.
Issue Date	2011
URL	<a href="http://hdl.handle.net/2031/6453">http://hdl.handle.net/2031/6453</a>
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# The System of Honorifics in the Korean Language

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**Abstract**

The honorifics system in Korean language is complex and richly textured. This paper examines the grammatical function as well as discourse use of the honorific system of Korean. In Korean, the system of honorifics is undoubtedly of an important role compared with the western languages. Unlike Chinese, the honorific system in Korean does not only appear in writing but also appears in daily communication for addressing seniority or social ranks. The reason for the wide spread of honorification in Korean is based on the hierarchical culture in Korea that one should respect for people who are older, even for only a few months. In this paper, I will discuss the system of honorifics in the Korean language from words to sentences and explain the usage with various examples. First, I will look at the honorific system on lexical level and indicate the reasons for honorification; second, I will point out the verbal inflection and special parts that involve subject and object honorification; third, I will talk about the honorific system on difference speech level by using sentence enders; and lastly, I will discuss how honorification acts in real situation by using an honorific discourses analysis. The system of honorifics has always been one of the difficulties which foreign learners of Korean would encounter. I hope that this paper would help people to understand the honorific system better and overcome the difficulty.

## 1

## Introduction

There are polite forms for addressing different people of different social ranks in every language. (Iksop Lee and S. Robert Ramsey, 2000) Those polite forms and rules of use form the system of honorifics of a language, which is performed very differently according to the culture of the country.

In western languages, honorific pronouns are commonly found, for example, in French, both *tu* and *vous* mean “you”; or in German, *du* and *sie*. The latter one is the honorific form which indicates politeness; in modern English, the system of honorifics is not important anymore. The honorific pronouns no longer exist for indicating politeness but titles like “Mr” and “Miss” are used instead. In the U.S.A., generally known as the nation of freedom, one can call someone who is older by first name only even if they have met for a few hours only. (Iksop Lee and S. Robert Ramsey, 2000)

In Asian languages, on the other hand, honorification plays a more significant role. The area of the world most known for its elaborate systems of person honorifics is South and South-East Asia. (Siezierska, Anna, 2004)

In Chinese, instead of calling a person’s full name, the suffixes *xiansheng* and *xiaojie* are added to a person’s surname to indicate politeness according to gender as illustrated in (1a). It is similar to the title “Mr” and “Miss” in English only so I would not say these illustrate the system of honorifics in Chinese. The use of honorification is rather limited on speech level in Chinese but abundant in writing. There are a number of common honorific titles such as *jun* (Mr.) and *gexia* (Your Excellency) for writing but it is impossible to hear utterance such as (1b) although it is grammatical. Honorific sentence enders are absent in Chinese.

(1a) 李先生,你吃過飯了嗎?

*Li- xiansheng ni chi guo fan le ma?*

“Mr Li, did you have your meal?”

(1b) 李君,你吃過飯了嗎?

*Li- jun ni chi guo fan le ma?*

“Mr Li, did you have your meal?”

In Japanese, very similar to Korean, there is honorification on both lexical and

sentential level. In example (2a), the honorific suffix marker *-sama*, prefix *go-* and the formal sentence ender *-mashita* all indicate politeness whereas (2b) is the example of informality without honorification.

(2a) 鈴木様、ご飯を食べましたか？

*Suzuki-sama go-han wo tabe-mashita-ka?*

“Mr Suzuki, did you have your meal?”

(2b) 鈴木、飯を食べた？

*Suzuki meshi wo tabe-ta?*

“Mr Suzuki, did you have your meal?”

In Korean, the system of honorifics is undoubtedly of an important role comparing with the western languages. Even if comparing with other significant members of Asian languages, Chinese and Japanese which both influence Korean very much, still, the system of honorifics in Korean is far more complex.

Unlike Chinese, honorification in Korean does not only appear in writing but also appears in daily communication very often, it is used in addressing firstly people who are physically older, for example, a old person in the street or an older family member; and secondly people who are of higher social ranks, for example, a teacher or a boss. The reason for the wide spread of honorification in Korean is very simple: it is required by the hierarchical culture in Korea that one should respect people who are older, even for only one year.

Thanks to the hierarchical culture, the system of honorification in Korean is richly textured from word level to sentence level. Firstly, there are specific honorific forms not only for pronouns but for some nouns, verbs and particles. Secondly, subjects and objects in sentences inflect with honorification and thirdly, various sentence enders exist for different speech levels.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss how honorification performs in the Korean Language and how special it is. The system of honorifics in the Korean language from words to sentences is discussed by explaining the usage by various examples, indicating the reasons for honorification, and also pointing out the special parts which should be paid attention to. The coming section is about honorifics on lexical level, followed by subject and object honorification, with sentence enders come next and honorific discourses analysis at last.

The system of honorifics has always been one of the difficulties which foreign learners of Korean including me would encounter, it is hoped that this paper would help people get rid of it, or at least lighten the difficulty.

## 2

## Honorific Words in Korean

Korean is famous for its complicated system of honorifics. Searching the word “honorific” on the internet, probably what will come up first to the screen is something about Korean. It is necessary for Korean to have a rather complicated system of honorifics because Korean it is required by its hierarchical culture, people are required to respect senior and old people very much culturally and that women need to be respectful to men. The system of honorifics is required by Korean culture. One must be careful with the honorifics in Korean otherwise it will be very easy to offend people. In this section, honorifics of different word categories will be discussed. Various examples are shown in 4 lines with Korean alphabets come first, followed by yale romanization, English meaning of each word in Korean order and English translation.

### 2.1 Honorific Nouns

In Korean, a number of special nouns consist of both plain and honorific forms. Table 2.1 shows some examples of them.

Plain Noun	Honorific counterpart	Meaning
이름 <i>ilum</i>	성함; 존함 <i>sengham; conham</i>	Name
집 <i>cip</i>	댁 <i>tayk</i>	House
생일 <i>sayngil</i>	생신 <i>sayngsin</i>	Birthday
나이 <i>nai</i>	연세 <i>yensey</i>	Age

Table 2.1 Honorific nouns in Korean (Miho Choo, Hye-young Kwak, 2008)

It is noticed from the table that the honorific counterparts are all Sino-Korean words as in Korean culture, Chinese words indicate formality. Besides, not every noun has a specific honorific form but why are there honorific forms for a small number of nouns? It can be noticed that those nouns with honorific forms appear to be common nouns

which are related to people and would usually appear in questions like example (3a) and (3b). It complies with the purpose of honorification: to show your respect to other people. Thus, Proper nouns like *sewul* (Seoul) in (3a) would not have an honorific form of course.

(3a) 저희 집은 서울인데 선생님 댁은 어디세요?

*ce-huy cip-un sewul-i-ntey seonsayng-nim tayk-un eti-seyyo?*

My-GEN house-TOP Seoul Teacher.HON house.HON-TOP where-PRS-INT

“My place is in Seoul; where is your place?”

(3b) 아버님 존함이 어떻게 되세요?

*abe-nim conham-i ettehkey toy-seyyo?*

Father-HON name.HON-NOM how become-PRS-INT

“What is your father’s name, may I ask?”

(Miho Choo, Hye-young Kwak, 2008)

The addressee in (3a) is probably a senior to the speaker so the speaker needs to use the honorific noun *tayk* to refer to the senior’s place. In (3b), the speaker wants to know the addressee’s father name, it is necessary to use the honorific noun *conham* in order to show the respect to the addressee’s father.

This part is rather easy that foreign learners only need to remember the two forms as noun does not inflect. However, special care must be exercised in the use of some honorific nouns too. For example, *tayk* cannot refer to one’s own home, so it cannot be used to refer to your parents’ or grandparents’ residence if you live with them; age-related honorifics are usually reserved for those who can safely be considered old, it is not proper for students to ask their teacher’s *yensey* or *sayngsin* because it makes the teacher feel very old. (Miho Choo, Hye-young Kwak, 2008) Also, since honorific nouns are seldom be used alone but rather appear in questions, the corresponding honorific sentence ender, which will be discussed in the fourth section, should be used as well.

## 2.2 Honorific Verbs

There are two kinds of verb in Korean: descriptive verb and action verb. Descriptive verb is similar to adjective but it is also called as verb in Korean. Similar to nouns, a number of special verbs also consist of both plain and honorific forms. Table 2.2 shows



some examples of them.

Plain Noun	Honorific counterpart	Meaning
아프다 <i>aphuta</i>	편찮으시다 <i>phyenchanhusita</i>	Painful (descriptive)
배고프다 <i>pay.kophuta</i>	시장하시다 <i>sicanghasita</i>	Hungry (descriptive)
있다 <i>issta</i>	계시다 <i>kyeysita</i>	Be (descriptive/active)
먹다 <i>mekta</i>	드시다; 잡수시다 <i>tusita</i> or <i>capswusita</i>	Eat (Active)
자다 <i>cata</i>	주무시다 <i>cwumusita</i>	Sleep (Active)

Table 2.2 Honorific verbs in Korean (Miho Choo, Hye-young Kwak, 2008)

(4) 선생님께서 진지를 잡수십니다.

*Sensayng-nim-kkeyse cinci lul capswusi-pnita.*

Teacher-HON-NOM.HON meal.HON-ACC eat.HON-PRS-DCL

“My teacher is having a meal.”

Honorific verbs are performed in sentences such as in examples (4). Although not a large number of verbs have a specific honorific form, unlike nouns, every verb can be inflected by the honorific suffix *-(u)si*, for example, *kasita* is the honorific form of the verb *kata* “go”. In fact, the suffix *-(u)si* also exists in honorific form of the special verb shown above. More about honorific verbs will be discussed in chapter 3.

### 2.3 Honorific Particles

There are two particles in Korean that have honorific forms. The first one is *-kkeyse* as the honorific form of the nominative particle *-i* and *-ka*. The use of *-kkeyse* is highly honorific so it is normally used in formal settings, or talking with someone who are really much older. Due to the high degree of honorification, the use of *-kkeyse* is on the decline and it is optional nowadays for many people. (Miho Choo, Hye-young Kwak, 2008) It would not be impolite to replace the honorific subject particle *kkeyse* in (5) with *i*. It is totally appropriate and in fact more common nowadays for many people.

(5) (= 4) 선생님께서 진지를 잡수십니다.

*Sensayng-nim-kkeyse cinci lul capswusi-pnita.*

Teacher-HON-NOM.HON meal.HON-ACC eat.HON-PRS- DCL

“My teacher is having a meal.”

The second honorific particle is *-kkey* which is the honorific counterpart of the indirect object markers *-hanthey* and *-eykey*. Likewise, the use of *-kkey* is also on the decline since many people find that *-hanthey* generally sounds fine, regardless of whom the indirect object refers to. However, *-kkey* must always be employed in personal letter if the recipient is someone who merits deference. (Miho Choo, Hye-young Kwak, 2008)

## 2.4 Honorific Pronoun

It is mentioned in the introduction part that in French, both *tu* and *vous* mean “you”; or in German, *du* and *sie*. Plain and humble forms of pronouns can be found in many languages in the world because the role of pronouns is very important for addressing people. In Korean, there are five forms of second person pronoun. According to Iksop Lee and S. Robert Ramsey, the five forms can be ordered according to the level of politeness as *ne*, *caney*, *tangsin*, *ta-k* and *elusin* as illustrated in (6).

(6) 너 → 자네 → 당신 → 택 → 어르신

*ne caney tangsin tayk elusin*

plain → familiar → semiformal → polite or formal → formal

As the least polite one, *ne* is for teachers to address pupils; parents to call their children or friends of the same age to address one another. University professors would use *caney* instead of *ne* to address their students since they are no longer children. Although *caney* is of a level of politeness but it signals that the other person has a social rank below that of the speaker. *Tangsin* may indicate a higher social-rank than *ne* or *caney* but it must be used with great care when speaking to someone in ordinary, daily conversation because the elevation is not of a particular great degree. People who are being addressed as *tangsin* may think that they are not being respected enough and thus feel discomfort. *Tayk* is not used for addressing people with personal relation so it is usually used in advertisement and books to refer to an unspecified reader. Finally, *elusin* is usually used to address someone in their seventies or eighties to show high respect regardless of personal relationship. It is proper to use *elusin* to address someone old on the street. However, *elusin* cannot be used for any public social relation, for

example, to address school principal or the president of the Republic of Korea.

The level of politeness of second person pronoun in Korean is shown in (6) from low to high. It is clear that *elusin* is the honorific pronoun and the plain form *ne* and familiar form *caney* is not considered to be related to honorification. For the two in the middle, *tangsin* and *tayk*, it is unclear nowadays whether they should be considered as honorific pronouns because the use varies a lot. It is common to use *tangsin* when scolding someone.

For third person pronouns, the plain form *ku* represents “he” or “it”, and *kunye* represents “she”. Adding the suffix *pwun* to *ku* makes it more polite. However, *ku* used as a pronoun is not particularly common. In fact, pronouns are used far less in Korean than they are in western languages, especially for third person pronoun. It is not necessary in Korean to replace a noun used in an earlier sentence by a pronoun. In many cases it is not permissible to use a pronoun. A title or the like must be used instead. (Iksop Lee and S. Robert Ramsey, 2000)

## 2.5 Titles

Iksop Lee and S. Robert Ramsey stated that the system of honorifics in Korean is reflected greatly through the use of title. It is uncommon to call only the full name of a person except in some situation like roll call. Close friends will call each other by the given name among themselves. However, in many other situations, a title should be used to address someone. Roughly, there are four honorific suffixes of title, *-nim*, *-ssi*, *-hyeng* and *kwun*, which can be added after a name. Their level of politeness and respect is not only affected by what suffix is added but also which part of the name is being called, i.e. surname only, given name only or surname and given name together.

The first title suffix is *-nim*. It is the highest form of address and is very productive. It is commonly added to job titles and sometimes family relationships. The examples regarding job titles are *seonsayng-nim* (Respected teacher) and *kwacang-nim* (Respected Section Chief). The special title *tay-thonglyeng* (the president of the Republic of Korea) is an exception where *-nim* cannot be added. When a person’s surname is added to the title, for example, *kim-seonsayng-nim*, the level of politeness becomes lower because it means that the teacher who is being addressed is not the only respected teacher for the speaker. Therefore, it is only used for avoiding potential confusion when several people hold the same job title. The combination of surname and given name together with *nim* is not very common but it is used for some formal letters. Regarding family relationships, it is common to address elder sibling as *Hyeng-nim*

(Respected elder brother) and *nwu-nim* (Respected elder sister). It does not matter whether the sibling is actually a member of the same household. However, it is not proper to add *nim* to *oppa* and *onni* which are used by girls to address their elder siblings. Regarding the other family relationships, such as *eme-nim* (Respected mother), *ape-nim* (Respected father) and *halape-nim* (Respected grandfather) are usually used in formal letters or by a daughter-in-law to address the family members of his husband's family. However, it is not necessary for a husband to call like this to his wife's family. He can simply call his mother-in-law as *emeni*. It is one of the examples showing that Korean women need to show respect for men very much. Table 2.3 shows the common usage of *-nim*.

Use of <i>-nim</i>	Example	Meaning
Add to a job title	선생님, 과장님 <i>seonsayng-nim</i> , <i>kwacang-nim</i>	Respected teacher, Respected Section Chief
Add to a surname and job title	김선생님, 김과장님 <i>Kim.seonsayng-nim</i> , <i>Kim.kwacang-nim</i>	Respected Mr. Kim teacher, Respected Mr. Kim Section Chief
Add to family relationship	형님, 누님 <i>Hyeng-nim</i> , <i>nwu-nim</i>	Respected elder brother, Respected elder sister

Table 2.3 Usage of *-nim*

Another common honorific suffix of title is *-ssi*. It is similar to Mr. or Mrs. in English. Although its function is similar to that of *-nim* but its degree of politeness and respect is lower. It is usually being added to a person's full name or given name to address a person who is of similar age or position with the speaker. A superior would use *-ssi* to address an inferior as well. Unlike *-nim*, the degree of honorification of adding *-ssi* to a given-name is higher than that of surname. Adding *-ssi* to a person's surname only indicates that the one being addressed is of a lower social rank. Table 2.4 shows the common usage of *-ssi*.

Use of <i>-ssi</i>	Example	Meaning
--------------------	---------	---------

Add to a person's full name	김선호씨 <i>Kim.seonho-ssi</i>	Mr. Kim Seonho
Add to a person's given name	선호씨 <i>Seonho-ssi</i>	Mr. Seonho
Add to a person's surname	김씨 <i>Kim-ssi</i>	Mr. Kim

Table 2.4 Usage of -ssi

Not only family relationship, *-hyeng* is also an honorific suffix of title although it is not of a high level of honorification. It is used by a male to call male juniors with whom one has had a close relationship. There is no similar title for a female. While adding the surname only to *hyeng* indicates a lower level of address, different from *-ssi*, it does not imply a lower social rank.

Among the four, *-kwun* is the suffix that with the lowest level of respect. Its function is similar to the second person pronoun 'caney' which is the most appropriate way for a college professor to call students. It indicates that the one being called is lower in rank compared with the speaker. There is no particular difference between adding it to a surname or given name only or both together.

The various honorific words discussed above indicate that Korean people are living in a complex web of social relations. They are very sensitive to social rank, family relationship and distinction between male and female. People must be careful in choosing the appropriate words to address and talk with each another. Choosing the proper word is only the start as people would not talk by single words, more on sentence level will be discussed in the following chapters.

## 3

## Subject and Object Honorification

After the discussion of honorification in Korean on the lexical level, now let us move on to the sentence level. Subject and object honorification will be discussed in this chapter.

## 3.1 Subject honorification

As mentioned in the above section, every verb can be inflected with honorification. The suffix *-si* or *-usi* after a consonant is attached to the verbal root to show deference toward the referent of the subject. (Miho Choo, Hye-young Kwak, 2008) It can be used freely with virtually any verb stem but attention should be paid to the verbs which have specific honorific forms as shown in table 2.2. In fact, those specific honorific forms also include the suffix *-si* or *-usi*. Example (7a) shows that it is incorrect to add *-si* to the verb stem *mek* because there is a specific honorific form *tusita* for it; example (7b) shows that it is appropriate to add *-usi* to the verb stem *anc* as it does not have a specific honorific form.

(7a)\*선생님께서 진지를 먹으십니다.

*Sensayng-nim-kkeyse cincil mekusi-pnita.*

Teacher-HON-NOM.HON meal.HON-ACC eat.HON-PRS-DCL

“My teacher is having a meal.”

(7b) 선생님께서 의자에서 앉으십니다.

*Sensayng-nim-kkeyse uyca ese ancusi-pnita.*

Teacher-HON-NOM.HON chair-ACC sit.HON-PRS-DCL

“My teacher is sitting on the chair.”

In general, *-si* is used together with honorific words to indicate respect toward the referent of the subject. In example (7b), honorific title *-nim* and particle *-kkeyse* can also be observed. When using *-si*, we should pay attention to the relationship between the speaker and the addressee, or the hearer. According to Miho Choo and Hye-young Kwak, it is necessary to use *-si* if the speaker and the addressee or the hearer has a

personal relationship to the referent of the subject, such as a grandparent, boss or teacher. In example (7b), the addressee is the teacher of the speaker so it is proper to use *-si*. However, *-si* is unnecessary for other people, for example, colleagues, neighbors regardless of their age and social status unless the person is within hearing range or the setting is formal.

### 3.2 Object honorification

Not only the subject, when the referent of the direct or indirect object is someone to be honored by the speaker, certain verbs will also be replaced by other verbs to indicate special respect for the reference. Suk Jin Chang stated that object honorification is achieved by self-lowering of the speaker. Table 3.1 shows some examples of verbs used for object honorification.

Plain Noun	Honorific counterpart	Meaning
주다 <i>cwuta</i>	드리다 <i>tulita</i>	‘give’
묻다, 말하다 <i>mutta, mal-hata</i>	여쭙다 <i>yecchwupta</i>	‘ask, say’
보다 <i>pota</i>	뵙다 <i>poypta</i>	‘see, meet, visit’
데리다 <i>teylita</i>	모시다 <i>mosita</i>	‘take with, accompany’

Table 3.1 Object honorification (Iksop Lee and S. Robert Ramsey, 2000)

(8) 많은 관심 감사드립니다.

*manh-un kwansim kamsa-tuli-pnita*

Many-TOP care thank give.HON-PRS-DCL

“Thank you for all of the caring.”

Example (8) is an utterance which a film star said for thanking people who cared about him. It illustrates the use of *tulita*. The fans of the film star, as the object, are being honored.

It is illustrated in this chapter that both subject and object can be honored in Korean to show respect. When subject or object honorification takes place, the corresponding formal or polite sentence enders should also be taken into account. More will be discussed in the next chapter.

## 4

## Speech Levels

We cannot produce a sentence without knowledge of speech levels so it is rather important. According to Suk Jin Chang, there are six speech levels in Korean characterized by sentence enders. They are shown in table 4.1.

## 4.1 Sentence enders

Speech Level		Sentence Type			
		Declarative	Interrogative	Imperative	Propositive
High	Formal	(시)버니다 <i>(si)pnita</i>	(시)버니까? <i>(si)pnikka?</i>	(으)버시오 <i>(u)psio</i>	(으)버시다 <i>(u)psita</i>
	Polite	어요 <i>(e)yo</i>	어요? <i>(e)yo?</i>	어요 <i>(e)yo</i>	어요 <i>(e)yo</i>
Mid	Blunt	소 <i>so</i>	소? <i>so?</i>	소 <i>so</i>	소 <i>so</i>
	Familiar	네 <i>ney</i>	나? <i>na?</i>	게 <i>key</i>	세 <i>sey</i>
Low	Intimate	어 <i>e</i>	어? <i>e?</i>	어 <i>e</i>	어 <i>e</i>
	Plain	다 <i>ta</i>	(느)냐? <i>(nu)nya?</i>	라 <i>la</i>	자 <i>ca</i>

Table 4.1 Speech Level in Korean (Suk Jin Chang, 1996)

As shown in table 4.1, the six speech levels are firstly divided into three categories: high, mid and low level. Each level consists of two sublevels which are usually interchangeable. Both the formal and polite level is considered to be honorific speech level. When honorific words are used, the corresponding honorific sentence enders should be used as well.



(9a) 선생님께서 이 일을 좋아하십니까?

*Sensayng-nim-kkeyse i il-ul cohaha-si-pnikka?*

Teacher-HON-NOM.HON this-DES work-ACC like.HON-PRS-INT

“Teacher, do you like this work?”

(9b) ?선생님께서 이 일을 좋아해?

*Sensayng-nim-kkeyse i il-ul cohaha-hay?*

Teacher-HON-NOM.HON this-DES work-ACC like-PRS-INT

“Teacher, do you like this work?”

The addressee in both example (9a) and (9b) is a teacher so honorification is necessary. Example (9a) is appropriate with the use of formal interrogative sentence ender (*si*)*pnikka* of high formality whereas the speech level is violated in (9b) because the informal interrogative sentence ender *e* is used instead. Although (9b) is also considered to be grammatical, it is very odd to hear that and it certainly becomes a matter of inappropriateness which may make the addressee feel uneasy.

Choosing the appropriate sentence ender is very important. If an inappropriate sentence ender is used such as in (9b), it is easy to offend people or make people feel uncomfortable even though honorific words are used. More examples on sentence enders will be illustrated in the analysis of a discourse in the following chapter.

## 5

## Discourse Analysis

After discussing honorific words, subject and object honorification and honorification on speech level, now let us see how the system of honorifics in Korean performs in discourse. I have chosen a discourse named “In the taxi” from the website of KBS World, a radio company in Korea, for the analysis here. This discourse is a rather formal one which is used for the purpose of teaching Korean. The situation is in a taxi and the dialogue is done by two speakers, named Bill and the driver.

## (10) Discourse “In the taxi”

Line Speaker

- |   |        |   |
|---|--------|---|
| 1 | Driver | 어서 오세요. 어디로 가십니까?<br><i>ese os-eyyo. oti-lo kasi-pnikka?</i><br>Quickly come.HON-PRS-IMP where-DAT go.HON-PRS-INT<br>“Hello. Where are you headed?”                           |
| 2 | Bill   | 서울호텔로 가 주세요<br><i>sewulhoteyl-lo ka cwus-eyyo</i><br>Seoul Hotel-DAT go give.HON-AUX-PRS-IMP<br>“Seoul Hotel, please.”  |
| 3 |        | 시간이 얼마나 걸리죠?<br><i>sikan-i el-mana kelli-cyo?</i><br>Time-NOM how long hang-PRS-INT<br>“How long will it take?”   |
| 4 | Driver | 두 시간 정도 걸려요.<br><i>tu sikan cengto kelly-eyo</i><br>Two hour approximately hang-PRS-DCL<br>“Approximately two hours.”   |
| 5 |        | 다 왔습니다. 여기가 서울호텔입니다.<br><i>ta w-ass-supnita. yeki-ka sewulhoteyl-i-pnita.</i><br>All arrive-PST-DCL here-NOM Seoul Hotel-be-PRS-DCL<br>“Here we go. This is the Seoul Hotel.” |
| 6 | Bill   | 요금이 얼마예요?<br><i>yokum-i elma-yeyo?</i><br>Fare-NOM what price-be-PRS-INT  |

- 7 Driver “How much is it?”  
6 만 5 천 원입니다.  
*6 man 5 chen weni-pnita.*  
65000 won is-PRS-DCL  
“It is 65,000 won.”
- 8 Bill 여기 있어요. 7 만 원이요.  
*yeki iss-eyo. 7 man wen-iyo.*  
Here have-PRS-DCL 70,000 won is-PRS-DCL  
“Here you go. Here is 70,000 won.”
- 9 Driver 여기 거스름돈 5,000 원 받으세요. 안녕히 가세요.  
*yeki kesulem-ton 5,000 wen pat-useyyo. Annyeng-hi ka-seyyo.*  
Here exchange-money 5,000 won receive-PRS-IMP well go-PRS-IMP  
“Here is your 5,000 won change. Bye.”
- 10 Bill 고맙습니다.  
*komap-supnita*  
Thank-PRS-DCL  
“Thank you.”

Since Bill is the customer whom the driver needs to honor, the driver should address him by high politeness level regardless of Bill’s age. On the other hand, as a customer, Bill needs to address the driver at high level of politeness as well because it is believed that they do not know each other before. Below is the analysis regarding honorification in the discourse.

Line	Speaker	Sentence ender	Speech level
1	Driver	<i>seyyo</i>	High (polite)
1	Driver	<i>(si)pnikka?</i>	High (formal)
2	Bill	<i>seyyo</i>	High (polite)
3	Bill	<i>cyo</i>	Mid
4	Driver	<i>(e)yo</i>	High (polite)
5	Driver	<i>pnita</i>	High (formal)
6	Bill	<i>yo</i>	High (polite)
7	Driver	<i>pnita</i>	High (formal)
8	Bill	<i>yo</i>	High (polite)
9	Driver	<i>seyyo</i>	High (polite)
10	Bill	<i>pnita</i>	High (formal)

Table 5.1 Sentence enders used in the discourse “In the taxi”

In line 1, high politeness level sentence enders, which are polite imperative *seyyo* and formal interrogative *si-pnikka?* are used respectively. Both the formal and polite speech level are indicating high level of politeness and their interchange does not make a difference in this situation. As early as the opening, the driver has already shown his kindness and welcome to Bill.

The sentence ender of Bill's reply in line 2 is also the polite imperative *seyyo* but the informal ender *cyo* is used instead in line 3 when Bill was asking for the time. It will not offend the driver because Bill has used the honorific sentence ender *seyyo* in his first utterance and that Bill is the customer, it is believed that his status in the taxi is higher than the driver.

Although the sentence ender of Bill's question in line 3 is not an honorific one, it is observed that the driver's answer in line 4, still, the polite declarative *(e)yo* is used. Also in his utterance in line 5, the formal declarative ender *pnita* is used. The driver keep using honorific sentence enders to show his respect to Bill, the customer.

In Bill's utterance in line 6 and line 8, the polite interrogative and declarative *yo* is used respectively. In line 7, the driver responds to Bill's question by the formal declarative *pnita*; in line 9, after receiving Bill's payment, he asks him to receive the changes and say good-bye to him by the polite imperative *seyyo*. Finally, Bill thanks the driver by the formal declarative *pnita*.

The level of politeness of each sentence is shown in table 5.1. It is observed that the driver responses are usually of a higher level of politeness than Bill's utterances, or at least of the same level of politeness because Bill is his customer, and he needs to show respect for him. Although Bill also shows high level of politeness, he appears to lower one level compared with the driver. This proves that the status of the driver and Bill is different.

This discourse illustrates that in daily life, in a taxi for example, honorification should be taken into account carefully; otherwise it is easy to offend others. In the example above, the driver speaks at a high level of politeness to show respect to the customer, and it is easy to be understood. Some might think that Bill can speak at a low level of politeness because he has a higher status but it is not true. Although Bill is the customer, it is not appropriate for him to speak at a low level of politeness to the driver because they are not familiar with each other. Conversation of low level of politeness appears only between close friends of similar age.

## 6

## Conclusion

In this paper, it is shown that the system of honorifics is definitely playing a very significant role in Korean. Honorification is observed in many aspects in the Korean language as discussed above. It is observed not only in different word categories, but also subject and object agreement, as well as sentence enders. Various examples from the lexical level to sentence level are illustrated in the chapters above.

The hierarchical culture is the reason for the richly textured system of honorifics in Korean. It is very important to respect older people in the Korean culture. The term “older people” does not only mean the elderly but also people who are only slightly older. Honorification takes place everywhere, every day when addressing people who are physically older, or of a higher social status. Therefore, it is simply impossible for Korean speakers to ignore it, instead, honorification is part of their lives.

Honorification in Korean is important because it is easy to offend people without the proper use of it. Every learner of Korean should have a good understanding of it in order to use it properly for comfortable conversation. However, instead of specific honorific items, Cantonese or Chinese speakers only talk in a more polite tone to show respect to old people, seniors or strangers etc. So when learning Korean, the system of honorifics usually becomes a huge problem. It is hoped that this paper could help Korean learners all over the world for a deeper understanding of the system of honorifics in Korean.

Notes:

#### Abbreviation list

	Abbreviation		Abbreviation
Nominative	NOM	Declarative	DCL
Accusative	ACC	Interrogative	INT
Genitive	GEN	Imperative	IMP
Dative	DAT	Tense- present	PRS
Topic-contrast	TOP	Tense- past	PST
Demonstrative	DES	Honorific	HON
Auxiliary	AUX		

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