

LINGUISTIC STATUS MARKERS IN KOREAN

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Samuel E. Martin (1964) has provided the most recent and the most detailed study of speech levels in Korea. While engaged in a similar analysis of my own, however, I noticed a much simpler and possibly more meaningful way of ordering the data. I should like first to describe briefly Martin's analysis and then my own; finally, I shall describe an experiment in which ten Korean males were asked to make decisions regarding other males solely on the basis of certain linguistic responses.

Along the axis of address, Martin distinguishes ingroup and outgroup speech with the former containing plain (-ta), intimate (-na) and familiar (-e, -ci) levels, and the latter containing polite (-e yo, -ci yo), authoritative (-(s)o), and deferential (-(su)p.nita) levels. Thus he distinguishes eight verbal endings, six levels, and two address categories or registers. In addition, Martin distinguishes neutral (-ta) and exalted (-(u)si-) levels along an axis of reference and mentions the possibility in a few cases of choosing between a plain verb (mek- 'eat') on a neutral level or a euphemistic verb (capswu-(si-) 'eat') on an exalted level.

The use of "in-group" and "out-group" involves some difficulty. "When 'I give to you,' YOU are in the out-group; but when 'you give to him,' YOU are absorbed in my in-group as opposed to HIM, unless he is an intimate of mine. When 'he gives to him,' we have to decide from the situation which of the two--HE or HIM--is closer to ME and belongs in the in-group" (p. 409). The difficulty becomes even more transparent if Martin's verbal endings are applied to the family situation: children use out-group forms to their parents, wives use out-group forms to their husbands, while men use in-group forms to their wives and parents use in-group forms to their children.

My own analysis reveals a dimension of intimacy and a dimension of authority, with the latter having precedence. The authority dimension also involves the nonreciprocal use of forms, while the intimacy dimension involves the reciprocal use of forms. Three speech levels apply to both dimensions: honorific (including Martin's deferential and exalted), polite (yo, the particle which concludes Martin's polite), and plain (all non-honorific and all non-yo forms). My data reflect primarily the language of the home and office, which may account in part for the fact that I saw no systematic differences between address and reference (that is, the choice of forms could be accounted for on the basis of the party addressed).

My material consisted of 382 competent Korean translations of "Blondie" cartoons which appeared in the newspaper Hanguk Ilbo over a period of years extending at least until 1961. The original American speech is preserved and the free translation is added beneath each panel. The validity of the Korean versions is attested by a number of significant departures from American usage, as the use of yepo (following the notation which Martin described in his 1954 study) in place of the given names employed by Dagwood and Blondie in addressing each other.

In compiling the following chart all ambiguities relative to the identification of the person addressed have been resolved against the implicit hypothesis (to be discussed later), so that some of the percentages of plain forms are less extreme than they might otherwise be. The number of occurrences of each form corresponds approximately to what we think of as sentences in English.

<u>Speaker</u>	<u>Addressee</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Plain</u>	<u>Polite</u>	<u>Honorific</u>	<u>Percentage of Plain</u>
Husband	Wife	384	368	14	2	96
Wife	Husband	564	25	537	2	4
Adult	Child	111	107	4	-	96
Child	Adult	122	10	109	3	8
Employer	Employee	79	79	-	-	100
Employee	Employer	52	1	25	26	2
Human	--	254	253	1	-	99
Human	Animal	43	43	-	-	100
Friend	Friend	82	81	1	-	98
Tradesperson	Customer	141	14	55	72	9
Customer	Tradesperson	94	12	62	20	13

The cartoons are not limited to dyadic relationships, of course, but the frequency of nondyadic and some dyadic exchanges is insufficient to permit an analysis here. Dagwood, for example, addresses a tramp one time only, and then in the polite (yo) form, while he is addressed five times by a tramp, once in the plain form and four times in an honorific form. Dagwood is addressed once by a traffic cop in the polite form, but he does not speak in return. It would be particularly helpful to have a large sample involving mixed groups, to see if the form is determined by some particular member of the group. If, for instance, Dagwood had occasion to address simultaneously Blondie and Mr. Dithers, would he use the plain form because of Blondie or would he use the polite form because of Mr. Dithers (his boss)? We should expect the latter, but the data do contain surprises--in view of the traditional role of the Korean police with respect to the public, for example, we should hardly expect the traffic cop to employ a polite form to a traffic violator.

The chart shows clearly that the plain form (non-honorific and non-yo) is the one which is used when an individual is speaking to himself or to a party whose status need not be taken into consideration: an animal, a chum, an employee, a child, or one's wife. The use of the plain form should be regarded as a privilege which depends upon the relation of the speaker to the addressee.

Reciprocal uses of a form depend upon intimacy in the absence of a clear authority relationship. Thus female chums use the plain form reciprocally, as do children and male chums. Males and females who are not married to each other use the polite or honorific forms reciprocally, as do males who are not well acquainted and females who are not well acquainted. That is, sex, as such, does not appear to be a factor in the selection of forms.

Nonreciprocal uses depend upon authority relationships. Thus in virtually every instance Blondie uses the polite form to Dagwood, even when she tells him to "Stop jabbering and let me sleep" or is accusing him: "Oh! So you didn't love me when we were married!" Or when she comments "What a stupid suggestion!" Similarly, children use the polite form to adults with a few highly instructive exceptions. The neighborhood youngster Elmo is rather curiously attired and Dagwood inquires what he is up to. Elmo replies in the plain form that "I'm not Elmo. I'm a space creature from Mars" and adds "I'm going to fly back." Here, Elmo denied his identity as a child and did not employ the polite form that he uses elsewhere to Dagwood. Of course, as Elmo, he knows Dagwood quite well, which may account for the use of the plain form instead of the honorific or polite form that a true stranger would have used. In another exceptional case, when Dagwood recognizes his son Alexander's increasing maturity by handing him the keys to the car, Alexander responds in a series of plain forms appropriate to the change in status.

Most of the exceptions to the obvious patterns of usage can be explained by unusual circumstances, such as just described for the children, by ambiguities (as whether Blondie is addressing Dagwood, which should be polite, or making an aside, which should be plain), or by the use of certain honorific stereotyped expressions, which are used by everyone in particular circumstances.

The nonreciprocal use of polite and honorific forms by an employee to his boss, and the reciprocal use of those forms by tradespeople and customers requires further evidence if the two levels are to be clearly sorted. Especially in the latter case, where I have, perhaps too arbitrarily, lumped together the speech of the mailman, department store clerks, the butcher, door-to-door salespersons, and so forth, the samples are far too small for the individual analysis of each category. Presumably the forms are not in free variation. One of the strips offers the suggestion that multiple roles on the intimacy dimension may require different forms. An adolescent grocery store clerk named Bradley tells Dagwood in the honorific form, "Here are your groceries, Mr. Bumstead," then tells him in the polite form that he wants to date Cookie, Dagwood's daughter. So in his role of clerk, Bradley used the honorific form and in his role of suitor, he used the presumably more intimate polite form. Dagwood spoke only once, using the plain form appropriate to his adult status.

Viewing the exchanges in terms of intimacy and authority has the advantage over the in-group/out-group approach in permitting a more understandable analysis of domestic exchanges. That is, rather than having to call the (yo) forms used by wives and children "out-group" speech (Martin only lists yo with the out-group forms) while husbands and parents use "in-group" forms in return, we can state that the roles of wife and child require polite forms while the roles of husband and parent include the option of not employing polite forms.

Again, it may be that Martin's analysis is more widely applicable than the one presented here. He observes that "there is leeway to show intimacy or familiarity within the in-group, and to show authority or special deference within the out-group" (p. 409). Moreover, Martin notes a recent tendency in Seoul toward the use of the polite or deferential (my polite or honorific) in place of the authoritative (one of forms included in my plain)

by persons taking command of a situation: "policeman to traffic offender, customer to laundryman, guest to hotel-clerk, passenger to taxi-driver, etc." (p. 410). This information agrees perfectly with the results of my analysis, though in the absence of examples of older usage, I have no basis for placing these relationships on the authority dimension rather than on the intimacy dimension.

The factors that Martin suggests may be critical are out-groupness, position, sex difference, and age difference, about in that order. My authority factor includes his position and his age difference (since the only evidence I have of an age difference concerns adult versus child), and involves the nonreciprocal use of the plain form. Similarly, the only sex difference noted was on the authority dimension (wife versus husband). My intimacy factor corresponds approximately to Martin's (in-groupness/) out-groupness and involves the reciprocal use of forms at either end of the dimension (plain between intimates and polite or honorific between relative strangers). The authority relationship takes precedence over the intimacy relationship.

The foregoing concerns usage rather than preference. That is, the employer has the privilege of using the plain form, but the employee may or may not like to be addressed in the plain form by his boss. To gain an understanding of preferences and presumed usages, a questionnaire was prepared in Korean and distributed to five male students at the University of California (Berkeley) and to five male members of the Korean Methodist Church in San Francisco. The two groups were approximately matched for educational background, length of residence in the United States, competence in English, preference for the use of English (like/dislike). The questionnaire contained the following six hypothetical situations in which the subjects (informants) were to express preferences for other males within an office-world hierarchy on the basis of simple verbal responses. The responses were intended to represent three degrees of politeness¹ but they do not correspond very precisely to the forms described above. The results are nonetheless instructive.

Situation One. You are a section chief and must choose one of three equally proficient and experienced men to be your assistant. You interview each man, and during the interview you ask him how many years of experience he has had.

The first man replies: Three years (polite form)
 The second man replies: Three years (neutral form)
 The third man replies: Three years (familiar form)

Which candidate gets the job as assistant section chief? _____

Nine of the ten subjects chose the first man (polite form), while the other chose the second man (neutral form). This was the most compelling of the six situations, in that it showed the highest agreement in response. Ego was directly addressed by a subordinate.

Situation Two. You are the president of a company and must choose a new division chief from among three equally proficient and experienced section chiefs. While you are in the main office, you overhear each man ask his male clerk about a certain misplaced file.

The first section chief asks: Where are the papers?
(familiar form)

The second section chief asks: Where are the papers?
(neutral form)

The third section chief asks: Where are the papers?
(polite form)

Which candidate gets the job as division chief? _____

Six of the ten subjects chose the third man (polite form), and the other four chose the second man (neutral form). Ego was not directly addressed: his subordinate addressed a third party who was still lower in the hierarchy. I assume that a certain amount of identification takes place, however, and interpret the results to imply that the subjects themselves would tend to use either the polite or neutral form toward a man lower than themselves on the hierarchy.

Situation Three. You are a capable administrator and have been offered a responsible position by three different heads of companies. When you go in to be interviewed, the president of the company is momentarily busy.

The first president says: Please sit down (neutral form)

The second president says: Have a seat (familiar form)

The third president says: Won't you have a seat, please?
(polite form)

Which president do you want to work for? _____

Six of the ten subjects chose to work for the third man (polite form), three chose to work for the first man (neutral form), while one chose to work for the second man (familiar form). Ego was directly addressed by a person above him in the hierarchy, suggesting that most of the subjects would prefer to be addressed politely by their bosses, even though actual usage seems to differ (based on the evidence of the cartoon material).

Situation Four. You have a chance to become a section chief for one of three division chiefs. The old president of the company died recently, and the new one is holding his first staff meeting. No one present knew the new president previously. During the meeting each of the three division chiefs wonders if the old policy will continue in his own division.

The first division chief asks: Will our policy continue?
(familiar form)

The second division chief asks: Will our policy continue?
(polite form)

The third division chief asks: Will our policy continue?
(neutral form)

Which division chief do you decide to work for? _____

Seven of the ten subjects chose the second man (polite form), one chose the third man (neutral), one chose the first man (familiar), and one subject did not give a choice. Again Ego was not directly involved: his superior addressed a third party who was still more elevated in the hierarchy. This situation is like the first one in that speech is toward a person in greater authority, and in both cases the polite form is preferred.

Situation Five. You are a section chief. Your firm is sending you and one other section chief on an extended business trip. The other section chief has not been chosen yet. One day you overhear the three other section chiefs talking among themselves in the next room.

The first section chief says: Let's go out together afterward
(neutral form)

The second section chief says: Let's go out together afterward
(polite form)

The third section chief says: Let's go out together afterward
(familiar form)

Which section chief do you want for a partner on the trip? _____

This was the second most compelling situation. Eight of the ten subjects chose the second man (polite form). The other two chose the first man (neutral form). Ego was not directly involved, but he and the three others were on the same level of the hierarchy.

Situation Six. You are an office clerk. After a particularly busy week, three of the other male clerks ask you to visit them in the evening for refreshments and friendly conversation. You can only accept one of the invitations.

The first clerk says: Would you be so kind as to call on me this evening? (polite form)

The second clerk says: Come on over tonight. (familiar form)

The third clerk says: Would you like to come over tonight?
(neutral form)

Which invitation do you accept? _____

This was the least compelling situation. Four of the ten subjects chose the first invitation (polite form), two chose the third invitation (neutral form), and four chose the second invitation (familiar form). Again, all parties were on the same level of the hierarchy, but in this case Ego was directly addressed.

A number of interesting points emerged from the experiment. First, in the first four situations, which pertain to the authority dimension, subjects indicate a strong preference for the politer forms, whether they are vicariously speaking or being addressed. This is evidently at variance with the customary practice of using polite forms upward and plain forms downward in the hierarchy, but supports the previously mentioned observation by Martin that in Seoul there appears to be a tendency to employ politer forms than have been customary in the past in authority situations.

The last two situations vary along the intimacy dimension, with no particular suggestion in the fifth situation that there is a question of friendship involved in the selection of a traveling partner. Thus the politer forms are preferred. In the sixth situation the nature of the invitation does imply a question of personal friendship. It was here, for the first time, that the subjects divided in some clear way over the answers. None of the factors for which the two groups were approximately matched seemed to be relevant to the choices made in the first five situations. But age seemed to be a possible factor on the sixth situation, and in general the five older sub-

jects preferred politer forms. Four of the five chose the polite invitation in Situation Six; three of the younger subjects preferred the familiar invitation, as did the youngest of the older group; while the other two members of the young group preferred the neutral invitation. An even more striking difference appears when the student and Methodist groups are compared (which requires only the transposition of the oldest student and the youngest Methodist to arrive at the new alignment). Four Methodists chose the polite invitation and one the neutral; four students chose the familiar invitation and one the neutral.

Evidently, then, there are differences in preference for forms, particularly where intimacy is implied, depending upon broad patterns of social relationships. Both the cartoon and experimental samples upon which my analysis is based may well be more limited than the sources upon which Martin's analysis was based. Possibly the finer distinctions permitted by Martin's scheme are necessary to account for the differential choices of the student and Methodist groups. Obviously all ten subjects tended to distinguish the familiar and neutral forms which I would lump together under the "plain" form. I suspect that the principle area where Martin's analysis would prove helpful is along the intimacy dimension, which can be considered from the standpoint of in-group and out-group. But in-group and out-group are best considered as representing the poles of the intimacy relationship--not as the basic division on either side of which there are intimacy and authority distinctions. The authority dimension, having precedence over the intimacy dimension, and marked by the nonreciprocal use of forms, seems sound. And the notion that forms are used reciprocally along the intimacy dimension also appears to be sound. Fortunately, all aspects of both analyses are experimentally testable, using a design similar to that described above but with more conscious use of the specific forms upon which the decisions must be based.

NOTE

¹Two Korean graduate students, one male and one female, offered opinions which formed the basis for distinguishing three speech levels. To the latter, Dr. Young-hi Lee, I owe a particular debt of gratitude for actually writing the questionnaire in Korean and for invaluable assistance in recruiting subjects.

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