

Interaction between Korean Honorifics and Gestures in Thanking and Apologizing

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The aim of this study is to investigate how Korean honorifics interact with gestures and to propose pedagogical implications. For the study, four different Korean dramas showing verbal expressions and gestures of thanking and apologizing were chosen to conduct a multimodal analysis. Then the use of honorifics and relevant gestures was annotated using EUDICO Linguistic Annotator (Version 6.4) and categorized according to grade of honorifics (i.e., addressee-raising, addressee-lowering) and types of gestures. In addition, each category was quantified. The results suggest that Korean speakers are prone to use different gestures depending on age and status. Moreover, based on the results, several pedagogical implications were drawn in this study. Among them are the necessity of teaching Korean honorifics using multimedia materials, of selecting educational content depending on speech acts, and of conducting surveys of Korean language educators. Overall, this study contributes to research on Korean honorifics and their gestures and helps Korean language educators teach honorifics with gestures.

Introduction

While people around the globe commonly express their manners using verbal and nonverbal expressions, these expressions vary drastically across cultures. For example, when greeting in Korean, people usually bow to someone who is older or in a higher social position than the speaker, saying *annyenghaseyyo* or *annyenghasipnikka* (hello). This practice demonstrates the importance that Korean society places on applying appropriate honorifics and relevant gestures according to age, social status, and intimacy.

Because honorifics play an essential role in Korean social relationships, much research has been conducted on these honorifics in the fields of Korean linguistics and Korean language pedagogy, focusing on their morphological, syntactical, and lexical features as well as their use (Hur, 2017; T.-Y. Kim, 2000; Ko & Koo, 2008; Lee & Ramsey, 2000; National Institute of the Korean Language, 2005; Sohn, 1999; Yu et al., 2018). However, nonverbal expressions such as gestures accompanying Korean honorifics have been largely overlooked in the previous literature. Therefore, this study aims to explore how Korean speakers incorporate Korean honorifics and gestures when thanking and apologizing (Austin, 1962; Searl, 1979). In addition, I will suggest pedagogical implementation strategies aimed at Korean language learners.

Previous literature

Honorifics in the Korean language

Korean honorifics (*kyengepep*, *nophimpep*, *taywupep*, and *contaypep*) indicate that “a speaker linguistically expresses high or low to a counterpart” (Koo et al., 2019, p. 297) and represents the most systematic set of rules (Sohn, 1999). Such Korean honorifics have been studied synchronically and diachronically. Notably, most studies of the honorific system focus on grammatical and lexical features of contemporary Korean honorifics (Hur, 2017; T.-Y. Kim, 2000; Ko & Koo, 2008; Lee & Ramsey, 2000; National Institute of the Korean Language, 2005; Sohn, 1999; Yu et al., 2018). The Korean honorific system suggested by the National Institute of the Korean Language (2005; see Table 1) includes grammatical and lexical elements according to target (subject vs. addressee), grade of honorifics, and formality of grammatical elements.

Table 1. Korean honorific systems (National Institute of the Korean Language, 2005, pp. 213–232)

Category	Grammatical and lexical elements			
Subject honorifics	-(u)si-, kkeyse, kkeysenun			
Addressee honorifics	Grade		Formal style	Informal style
	Addressee-raising	Highly addressee-raising	<i>hapsyochey</i>	<i>hayyochey</i>
		Moderately addressee-raising	<i>haochey</i>	
	Addressee-lowering	Moderately addressee-lowering	<i>hakeychey</i>	<i>haychey</i>
Highly addressee-lowering		<i>haylachey</i>		
Honorifics by special vocabulary	<i>tayk</i> (house), <i>ttanim</i> (daughter), <i>malssum</i> (word), <i>pwuin</i> (wife), <i>sayngsin</i> (birthday), <i>sengham</i> (name), <i>yensey</i> (age), <i>ce</i> (I), <i>cinci</i> (meal), <i>chia</i> (tooth), <i>kyeysita</i> (be), <i>tusita</i> (eat), <i>tolakasita</i> (pass away), <i>malssumhasita</i> (say), <i>capswusita</i> (eat), <i>cwumwusita</i> (sleep), <i>phyenchanhusita</i> (sick)			

Researchers have explored Korean honorifics from the perspective of sociolinguistics because Korean honorifics involve social factors such as age, intimacy, and status (Y.-J. Cho, 2017; J.-M. Kim, 1998; J.-B. Lee, 2006). J.-M. Kim (1998) described differences in the uses of Korean honorifics according to different generations, and J.-B. Lee (2006) showed that Korean high school students are likely to use honorifics depending on distance rather than power. In the same line of thought, Y.-J. Cho (2017) found that Koreans in their 20s tend to apply four out of six speech levels (i.e., *hapsyochey*, *hayyochey*, *haychey*, *haylachey*) and change the use of *haylachey* when addressing seniors. Similarly, researchers have addressed the chronological evolution of Korean honorifics (Ahn, 2017; J.-B. Lee, 2010; Suh, 1979). Suh (1979) found that the speech levels of Korean honorifics have been simplified from six to four. J.-B. Lee (2010)

discovered that *-si-* is widely used in *hayyochey* and suggested reasons for the widespread use of *-si-*. In addition, Ahn (2017) presented new types of final endings (i.e., *-tayo*, *-hacayo*, *-hasikeyssupnita*) for Korean honorifics now in use.

Korean language learners find honorifics difficult when beginning their study of the language (J.-H. Lee, 2006; S.-J. Park, 2005), and only limited research has explored methods for teaching honorifics to Korean language learners (J.-H. Lee, 2006; Oh, 2007). For instance, J.-H. Lee (2006) suggested a lesson plan covering Korean honorifics for Japanese learners that incorporates teaching methods such as communicative activities, role-playing models, and so on. Oh (2007) provided strategies and principles for teaching Korean honorifics such as choosing a speech level for sentence-ending suffixes and using appropriate honorific words and particles.

Gestures and Korean honorifics

A few studies have addressed Korean gestures (H.-Y. Cho, 2005; Chung, 2006; Jang, 2006). For instance, H.-Y. Cho (2005) classified nonverbal behaviors into those produced with the head, eyes, hands, feet, faces, body, and more according to body parts, while Chung (2006) categorized nonverbal expressions into faces and eyes, gestures and postures, body contact, space, and environment. In addition, Jang (2006) sorted nonverbal behavioral expressions into facial expressions, eyes, hand gestures, and body contact. The categorization in the previous research is summarized below (Table 2).

Table 2. Categorization of nonverbal expressions

Research	Categorization
H.-Y. Cho (2005)	head, eyes, hands, feet, faces, body, etc.
Chung (2006)	faces and eyes, gestures and postures, body contact, space, and environment
Jang (2006)	facial expressions, eyes, hand gestures, and body contact

More recently, Brown and Winter (2018) conducted a multimodal analysis and found that Korean honorifics (involving *contaymal* and *panmal*) are used with distinct gestures according to power and intimacy. In addition, previous research has shown that multimodal resources (e.g., language, gesture, body postures, movements) are related to the organization of social action (e.g., requesting, asking; Mondada, 2018, 2019). Accordingly, the present study explores how Korean honorifics interact with gestures focusing on social action (i.e., thanking, apologizing) and suggests pedagogical implications by analyzing multimodal data.

Research data and methodology

Data

The data in this study (National Information Society Agency, 2018) is multimodal in nature and includes 21 hours of 1,943 Korean dramas. These data include video clips and scripts representing authentic use of Korean honorifics and relevant gestures, containing a large amount of “adjacency pairs” ($n = 10,961$; Schegloff & Sacks, 1973, pp. 295). Four different dramas in which speakers are well acquainted with each other but have differential status with their counterparts (i.e., high, low) were chosen to analyze the use of honorifics and relevant gestures according to addressee-raising and addressee-lowering. Additionally, clips including the expression of gratitude and apology were selected because thanking and apologizing frequently occur in daily life and are likely to capture how Korean speakers use honorifics and gestures according to age and social status. Finally, 112 adjacency pairs were used for a multimodal analysis of the honorifics and relevant gestures.

Research procedure

First, adjacency pairs of Korean expressions of gratitude, such as *komaweyo* and *kamsahayyo* (*I thank you*), were extracted, as well as Korean expressions of apologies, such as *mianhayyo* and *coysonghayyo* (*I am sorry*). Next, the Korean honorifics and gestures were annotated using the EUDICO Linguistic Annotator (ELAN) Version 6.4. The honorifics were categorized according to the grade of honorifics (i.e., addressee-raising, addressee-lowering), speech acts were also categorized (i.e., thanking, apologizing), and finally gestures were classified based on Min’s (2000) and H.-Y. Cho’s (2005) categorizations (i.e., raising head, tapping counterpart’s shoulders, grabbing one’s hands, moving mouth, moving head from side to side, tilting head, turning head, lowering head, shaking head, nodding head, blinking, gazing away, smiling or laughing, frowning, looking up and down, looking upward, looking down, looking side to side, bending over). Intra-rater reliability indicating the consistency of measurement was tested, and the value of kappa was 0.87 ($p < .001$), showing “almost perfect” agreement (Landis & Koch, 1977, p. 165). Finally, I counted the instances of each category and interpreted the results of the analysis qualitatively.¹

Results and discussion

Gestures involving gratitude

The quantitative results show that there are distributional differences in gestures according to honorific expressions when Korean speakers thank someone. In particular, Korean speakers tend to smile or laugh (38.0%), lower their heads (18.0%), and bend over (14.0%) for addressee-raising. Conversely, Korean speakers are likely to smile or laugh (48.0%), raise their heads (12.0%), and nod their heads (12.0%) for addressee-lowering. Figure 1 shows the distribution of gestures of gratitude.

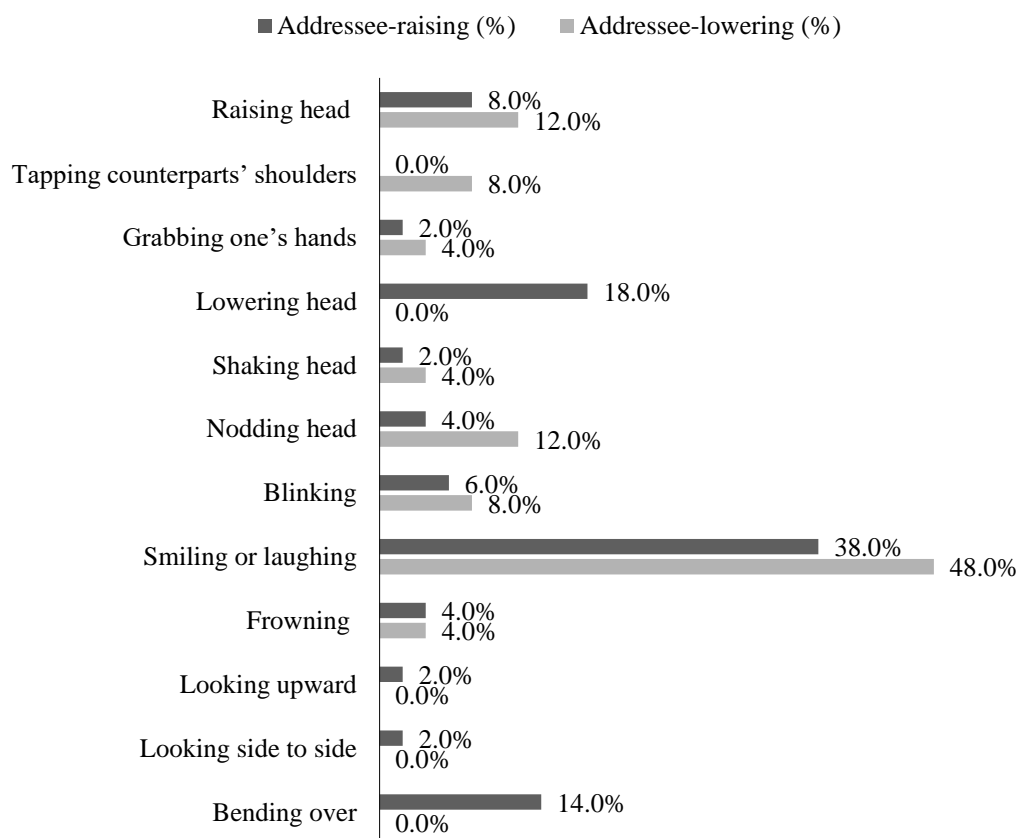


Figure 1. Frequency of gestures of gratitude (N = 75)

The collected data showed that a speaker who is lower than the counterpart in terms of age and social status tends to apply honorifics (addressee-raising) with specific gestures, such as smiling or lowering their heads, when uttering *komaweyo*, *komapsupnita*, *kamsahayyo*, or *kamsahapnita*. As seen in Excerpt 1, K is a director of an academy and has a higher status than P, who is one of the teachers at the academy. In the conversation, K helps P join the general class, and so, P expresses gratitude to K, saying *kamsahapnita* (thank you; addressee-raising) in line 10 while smiling and bowing. Gestures of appreciation are annotated in Figure 2¹.

Excerpt (1) Drinking solo (Episode 3)

- 01 K-high: 어 어 >박 교수 °박 교수.< (0.5)
E E > Pak kyoswu °Pak kyoswu.< (0.5)
ah ah surname professor surname professor
- 02
hh .hh 저기 진 교수가 .hh
hh .hh ceki cin kyoswu-ka .hh
there surname professor-NM

- 03 자기 지금 테라스에서 좀 보재:
caki cikum theylasu-eyse com po-cay:.
you now terras-on a little see-ENDER
Um um, Professor Park. Well, Professor Jin wants to see you now on the terrace.
- 04 P-low: 네? >저- 저를요?<
ney? >ce- ce-lul-yo?<
yes me me-AC-POL
Yes? Me, me?
- 05 K-high: °응. 내가 박 교수:
°ung. Nay-ka pak kyoswu:
yes I-NM surname professor
- 06 진 교수 종합반에 찌주라고
cin kyoswu conghappan-ey kkyecwu-la-ko
surname professor general class-in let in-IM-QT
- 07 간::곡히 부탁했더니, .hh ((clapping))
kan::kokhi pwuthakha-yss-teni, .hh ((clapping))
earnestly request-PST-CNJ
- 08 결국 들어 주려는 눈치야.
kyelkwuk tul-e cwu-lye-nun nwunchi-ya.
finally listen-CMP give-CMP-RL wits-ENDER
- 09 .hh 어유:: >°아 뭐해 얼른 가봐 얼른 가봐.<
.hh eyu:: >°a mweha-y ellun kapw-a ellun kapw-a.<
whew ah what do-ENDER quickly go see-ENDER quickly go see-ENDER
Yeah, I especially asked Professor Park to join you in the general class, and finally, he seems to accept it. Whew. Ah, what are you doing? Just go. Just go.
- 10 P-low: 어 어 예: 감사합니다. (Figure 2) [smiling and bowing]
e e yey: kamsaha-pnita.oh oh yes thank-ENDER
Oh, oh, yes. Thank you.



Figure 2. Gestures of appreciation in addressee-raising in Excerpt 1.

In contrast, Excerpt 2 shows how the speaker, who is older, reacts to the counterpart. In this case, P is a teacher and G is a student at the academy. When G takes care of P, P thanks G using *komawesse* (thanks; addressee-lowering) in line 7, and at the same time, P uses gestures of smiling and nodding. Gestures of appreciation in addressee-lowering are presented in Figure 3.

Excerpt (2) Drinking solo (Episode 11)

- 01 P-high: 아후:: 됐:어:: >안 그래도< 충분히 민망해.
ahwu:: twa-yss:-e:: >an kulay-to< ^chwungpwunhi minmangha-
y.
whew be done-PST-ENDER not do so-CNJ enough be embarrassed-
ENDER
- 02 오늘 (0.5) 내가 너 챙기려고 했는데::
onul (0.5) nay-ka ne chayngki-lyeko ha-yss-nuntey::
today I-NM you take care of-CMP do-PST-ENDER
- 03 하루 종일 니가 날 챙겼잖아::.
halwu congil ni-ka na-l chayngky-ess-canha::.
all day you-NM I-AC take care of-PST-ENDER
- 04 >나만 잘 먹고 잘 자고 가는 것 같아서<
>na-man cal mek-ko cal ca-ko ka-nun kes kath-ase<
I-only well eat-CNJ well sleep-CNJ go-RL thing seem-CNJ
- 05 미안하네.
mianha-ney.
sorry-ENDER
Whew, it is done. I am already embarrassed enough. I was going to take care of you, but you take care of me all day. I am sorry that I felt like eating well and sleeping well.
- 06 G-low: 에이:: 필요::.
eyi:: ^mwe-l-yo::.
oh what-AC-POL
Oh, well, no problem.
- 07 P-high: 갈게: 고맙어. (Figure 3) [smiling and nodding]
ka-lkey:. komawe-ss-e.
go-ENDER thank-PST-ENDER
I will go. Thanks.
- 08 G-low: 네.
NEY.
Yes
yes



Figure 3. Gestures of appreciation in addressee-lowering in Excerpt 2.

The distributional differences and excerpts showing expressions of thanks indicate that Korean speakers tend to smile or laugh in both addressee-raising and addressee-lowering. Conversely, Korean speakers are likely to bend over and lower their heads in addressee-raising, using *kamsahayyo* or *kamsahapnita*, and to nod and raise their heads in addressee-lowering, using *komawe*. Because gestures differ according to the addressees' age and position in thanking, differences in gestures of apologizing between addressee-raising and addressee-lowering will be further explored in the next section.

Gestures involving apology

Looking now at contexts involving apologies, Korean speakers are inclined to blink and frown in both addressee-raising and addressee-lowering expressions. Nonetheless, there were differences in other gestures. With addressee-raising, Korean speakers applied gestures such as lowering one's head (23.8%) or bending over (16.7%). Interestingly, these results overlap with results concerning gestures of gratitude. For addressee-lowering, speakers more often used gestures that involve raising their heads (12.2%) rather than those of lower age or status. Figure 4 shows the distribution of gestures of apology.

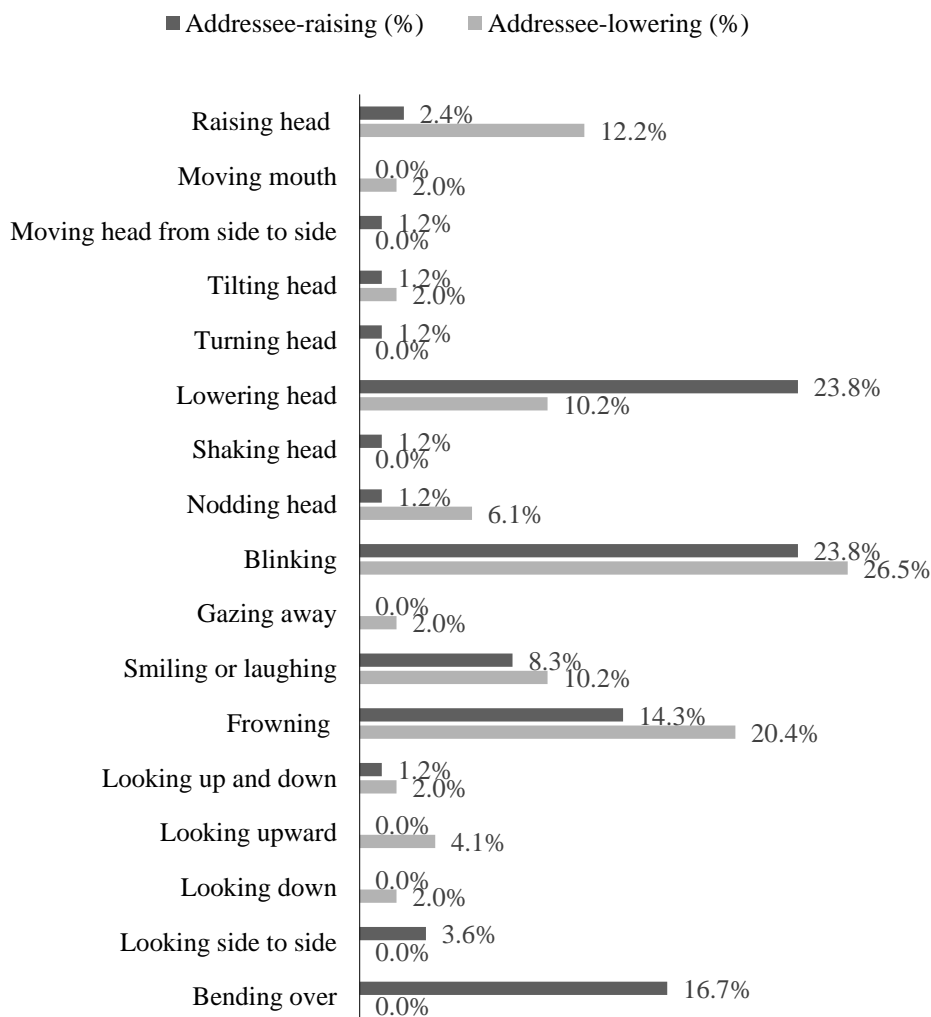


Figure 4. Frequency of gestures of apology (N = 133)

In Korean dramas, both senior and subordinate speakers are more likely to apply gestures of blinking and frowning when they offer an apology. As seen in Excerpt (3), J is a senior and has a higher status than P at the academy. In this scene, J gets in trouble due to P's misunderstanding, and thus, P apologizes to him, uttering *coysonghapnita* (I am sorry; addressee-raising) in line 2. Simultaneously, P blinks her eyes, lowers her head, and bends over. Gestures of apology in addressee-raising are shown in Figure 5.

Excerpt (3) Drinking solo (Episode 2)

01 J-high: 자 (0.5) >이제 됐죠? 노그래 씨.<
 CA (0.5) >icey twa-yss-cyo? nokulay ssi.<
 well now be done-PST-ENDER nickname Ms
Well, is it done? Ms. Kwulay No.

- 02 P-low: (네) 죄송합니다 진 교수님. (Figure 5) [blinking, lowering head, and bending over]
 (ney) *coysongha-pnita cin kyoswu-nim.*
 yes) *sorry-ENDER surname professor-HT (Yes), I am sorry, Professor Jin.*
- 03 J-high: 됐고 (.) 이로써 또 확실해졌네요, (0.5)
TWA-YSS-KO (.) ilosse tto hwaksilhaycy-ess-neyyo, (0.5)
be done-PST-ENDER with this again become certain-PST-ENDER
That is it. This makes it clear again.
- 04 내가 노그래 씨랑 종합반 할 일
nay-ka nokulay ssi-lang conghappan ha-l il
I-NM nickname HT-with general class do-RL thing
- 05 절대 없을 거란 거.
celtay eps-ul ke-la-n ke.
never not exist-RL thing-DC-RL thing
I will never work in the general class with Ms. Kwulay No.
- 06 실력도 없으면서
sillyek-to eps-umyense
ability-too not have-CNJ
- 07 >남의 뒤나 캐고 다니는 사람이랑< (0.5)
>nam-uy twi-na khay-ko tani-nun salam-ilang< (0.5)
other-GN back-or dig-CMP go-RL person-with
- 08 절대 엮이고 싶지 않습니다.
celtay yekki-ko siph-ci anh-supnita.
never be involved with-CMP want-CMP not-ENDER
I do not want to get involved with someone who is digging behind others while he or she has no ability.

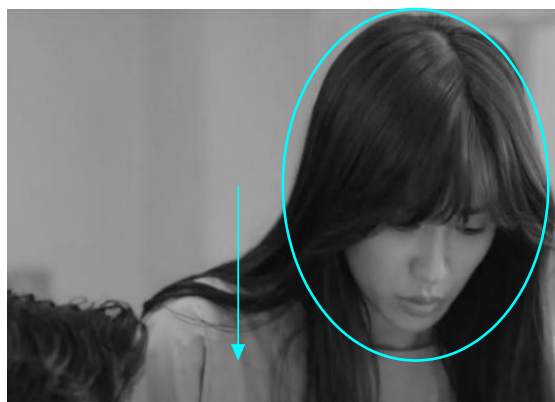


Figure 5. Gestures of apology in addressee-raising in Excerpt 3.

Conversely, Excerpt 4 shows how a superior apologizes to a subordinate using gestures.

Specifically, J has a lower status than Y, who requests that J quit his job. In line 3, Y says *mian* (sorry; addressee-lowering) and gives a reason in line 4. At the same time, Y blinks his eyes and wears a frown while nodding. Gestures of apology in addressee-lowering are annotated in Figure 6.

Excerpt (4) Drinking solo (Episode 12)

- 01 J-low: >그게 무슨 말씀이십니까 원장님?<
 >kuke-y mwusun malssum-i-si-pnikka wencang-nim?<
 that thing-NM what word-be-SH-ENDER director-HT
- 02 >이번 주를< 끝으로 학원을 관두라뇨.
 >ipen cwu-lul< kkuth-ulo hakwen-ul kwantwu-lanyo:.
 this time week-AC end-in academy-AC quit-ENDER
What does that mean, Director? You said that I should quit the academy at the end of this week.
- 03 Y-high: 미안. (0.5) (Figure 6) [blinking, frowning, and nodding]
mian. (0.5)
 sorry
Sorry.
- 04 뭐 그럴 만한 사정이 있어서 그래.
 mwe kule-l manha-n saceng-i iss-ese kulay.
 what do so-RL be worth-RL reason-NM have-CNJ be so
Well, there are reasons for it.



Figure 6. Gestures of apology in addressee-lowering in Excerpt 4.

The results above also show that Korean speakers are prone to blink and frown when apologizing while there are differences in honorifics and relevant gestures according to addressee-raising and addressee-lowering in apologizing. In particular, they are inclined to lower their heads or bend over saying *coysonghayyo* or *coysonghapnita* and raise or nod their heads saying *mian* or *mianhay* for addressee-raising and addressee-lowering respectively. Likewise, gestures in both expressions of thanking and apologizing indicate that Korean

speakers are prone to use different honorifics and gestures according to social factors such as age and status.

Discussion and implications

Based on the analyses in the previous section, the results show that Korean speakers use distinct gestures depending on the context, such as smiling or laughing in the context of thanking but blinking and frowning when apologizing. Additionally, the results indicate that Korean speakers tend to use different gestures depending on age and status. For example, Korean speakers lower their heads or bend over when they express gratitude or offer an apology to those who are older and higher in status. Conversely, Korean speakers raise or nod their heads when they thank or apologize to their counterparts who are younger and of lower status.

Given that honorifics are a salient feature of the Korean language and that relevant gestures differ among cultures (Jang, 2006), using appropriate honorific gestures and utterances is one of the key factors for learning the Korean language. Nonetheless, teaching gestures with honorifics has been largely overlooked in Korean language education. As a reflection of the current state of Korean honorific education, research into Korean textbooks showed that explanations of honorifics in conjunction with gestures are absent (E.-H. Lee, 2010; J.-S. Park, 2022; S.-J. Park, 2005). In this respect, teaching honorifics needs improvement based on the following pedagogical implications:

1) When Korean language learners study honorifics, they need to be taught the appropriate gestures as well. For instance, technology including multimedia materials can be used to show the uses of Korean honorifics and gestures simultaneously because the textbooks used in Korean classrooms insufficiently explain how Korean speakers use honorifics with gestures.

2) The educational content regarding gestures related to Korean honorific expressions should be selected depending on speech acts considering the fact that distinct gestures are frequently used in different speech acts as shown in gestures involving greeting, thanking, and apologizing.

3) It is also crucial to conduct surveys among Korean language instructors to determine whether they incorporate gestures when teaching Korean honorifics and how they do this so these techniques and pedagogical choices can be shared with other practitioners.

Conclusion

Although the use of verbal expressions and gestures differs from culture to culture, previous studies have not paid sufficient attention to investigating and teaching how Korean speakers use honorifics and gestures. Therefore, in this study, I aimed to explore how Korean honorifics interact with gestures within the speech acts of thanking and apologizing. The results showed that there were differences in the uses of gestures depending on social factors (i.e., age, status) of the speaker and their counterpart. In particular, Korean speakers tend to bend over and lower their heads for addressee-raising, whereas they will use the gesture of raising or nodding

their heads for addressee-lowering. Finally, this chapter concludes with several pedagogical implications in relation to teaching honorifics with gestures. It is important to note that a limitation of this study is that the data, although reflective of authentic data (Korean dramas), was not naturally occurring data. In future research, it is necessary to use naturally occurring data to confirm or contrast the results obtained.

Notes

1. All images annotated in the study were adapted from AI Hub (National Information Society Agency, 2018)
2. The Yale romanization, Jefferson Transcription System, and transcribing conventions (Sohn, 1999) were used to transcribe and gloss excerpts from the collected data. The conventions for morpheme-by-morpheme glosses (Sohn, 1999) are as follows: AC (Accusative particle); AD (Adverbial suffix; adverbializer); CL (Numeral classifier; counter); CMP (Complementizer suffix); CNJ (Conjunctive suffix); DC (Declarative sentence-type suffix); ENDER (Sentence/clause ender); GN (Genitive particle); HT (Honorific title); IM (Imperative sentence-type suffix); IN (Indicative mood suffix); INF (Infinitive suffix); NM (Nominative case particle); NOM (Nominalizer suffix); PL (Plural suffix or particle); POL (Polite speech level, suffix, or particle); PRS (Prospective modal suffix); PST (Past tense and perfect aspect suffix); QT (Quotative particle); RL (Adnominal modifier suffix; relativizer); RT (Retrospective mood suffix); SH (Subject honorific suffix); TC (Topic-contrastive suffix); VOC (Vocative particle).

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