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**Negotiating conflict within the constraints of  
social hierarchies in Korean American discourse**

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# **Negotiating conflict within the constraints of social hierarchies in Korean American discourse<sup>1</sup>**

## **Abstract**

This paper provides an interactional account of conflict negotiation strategies in Korean American discourse. With specific attention to the sociolinguistic phenomenon of code-switching among Korean Americans, I argue that speaking Korean at particular moments evokes ideologies of social hierarchy that serve to mitigate potential conflicts. The Korean social ideology of relative status has a major influence on how bilingual Korean Americans interact with one another, regardless of whether they are using Korean or English. The use of codeswitching, among other mitigating strategies in discourse, serves to instantiate these hierarchical relationships and introduces particular social norms that guide the observable actions used in navigating meaning and social relations. The data analyzed here show how the evocation of Korean social ideologies may serve as an identifiable characteristic of Korean American discourse.

Keywords: Conflict, code-switching , Korean American discourse, social hierarchy, kinship terms, interactional sociolinguistics

Word count: 7576 words

## **Introduction**

Research has shown that social relationships are grammaticized and lexicalized in the Korean language. Korean requires speakers to encode their relationships to their addressees using lexically, morphologically, and grammatically distinct honorific forms (Koo 1992: 27). Because of this vertical hierarchy of relationships, it is absolutely imperative to know what another person's status is in relation to one's own. This necessity of knowing one's relative age and status leads to some interesting social behaviors as well. For instance, it is not uncommon for a stranger to ask for another person's age. Ervin-Tripp, Nakamura and Guo attribute this kind of practice to the hierarchical structure of Korean and Japanese society:

This [hierarchical] system explains why the first thing that Japanese businessmen do is exchange name cards. By exchanging cards, both parties can gauge the relationship between them in terms of relative rank, locating each other within the hierarchy of their society, and why, in a similar society, Koreans who meet must also first exchange information to identify their relative age and status (Ervin-Tripp, Nakamura and Guo 1995: 63).

Relative status must first be known in order for a conversation to be conducted with the assurance that the correct demeanor and linguistic forms are adopted by each participant with respect to the other participants.

The importance of relative status in Korean culture has implications for how social interactions are conducted. In particular, situations in which potentially face-threatening actions (cf. Levinson 1983) are being performed (e.g., criticisms or disagreements) may require delicate maneuvering in terms of interactional strategies. Park (1990) describes how linguistic politeness can serve as a strategy for conflict avoidance in Korean and outlines verbal and non-verbal avoidance strategies. According to Park, avoidance is 'usually achieved through the use of some degree of verbal indirectness, which serves to prevent confrontation' (Park 1990: 119). This indirectness is done verbally, according to Park, through pronominal use of personal pronouns in honorifics and the use of hedges, which will be discussed further below. However, it is in the interaction that participants can deploy and interpret these strategies and show that they are indeed being used for negotiating potential conflict. This paper seeks to expand upon Park's discussion of conflict avoidance using local interpretations of interactional data to identify: 1) how potential conflict is dealt with in Korean English bilingual interaction, 2) the role of code-switching in these avoidance strategies, and 3) the ways in which conflict negotiation instantiates social hierarchy in Korean American discourse. The data examined here will show that code-switching, along with pronominal use of personal pronouns and hedges, serves as a mitigating strategy for the management of conflict in interaction.

One would naturally expect to find evidence of the importance of social hierarchy in the interactions of Korean speakers. What is interesting, however, is that traces of these same social hierarchies can be found in the discourse of Korean Americans who may or may not be fluent in Korean. Korean Americans engaging in talk with one another, whether speaking Korean, English, or a mixture of both, can use linguistic means of evoking social hierarchies of relative status. By doing so, speakers are able to display sensitivity to social hierarchies where such sensitivities may not be required by the grammar of the language being used. This happens in particular when the discourse is potentially face-threatening (i.e., disagreements, criticism, alternative suggestions, etc.), especially when speaking with someone who is higher in social status. In these cases, evidence can be found of the use of code-switching as a means of delicately negotiating conflict within the constraints of social hierarchy.

### **Code-switching as a mitigating strategy**

While there have been diverse approaches to bilingual code-switching, including work on syntactic constraints (e.g., Weinrich 1953, Poplack 1980) others have examined the situated contexts of code-switching to address the issue of cultural ideologies and their relevance for situated practice in bilingual conversation (e.g., Heller 1988, Milroy and Muysken 1995, Sebba & Wootton 1998, Lo 1999). Attention to situated contexts allows us understand how code-switching and other linguistic behaviors are integrated into social life. Another fruitful area of research in the field has focused particularly on the sequential

organization of talk using the methodology of Conversation Analysis (e.g., Auer 1984, 1998, Li 1995, 1998, Li and Milroy 1995). The focus of this approach has been to show that the choice of code does interactional work that occurs within sequential actions having particular consequences for the way participants interact. The sequential organization of talk implies that participants must be oriented to one another in such a way that they are able to display the relevance of their talk to one another. Building on work by Gumperz (1982), Auer (1984, 1998), for example, states that code-switching must be treated as a conversational event, one embedded in the surrounding conversational context.

Recent research in the area of code-switching has grappled with the problems of attributing motivations to code-switching. In his article, Stroud (1992) comments on the problem of assigning intention in the analysis of code-switching as 'the problem of knowing to what extent the intentions and meanings that we assign to switches can in fact be said to be intended by a speaker or apprehended by his or her interlocutors' (Stroud 1992: 131). He goes on to criticize linguistic approaches to code-switching as expressions of a Western philosophical orientation to intention and meaning and calls for more attention to the multivocalic nature of code-switching that takes into account 'local ideologies of personhood, knowledge and social interaction, and the culturally specific views on language, meaning and intention that structure and articulate these ideologies' (Stroud 1992: 127). The use of these culturally derived norms that guide participants'

production of recognizable actions calls to mind Garfinkel's (1967) notion of 'scheme of interpretation', which accounts for the local meaningfulness and orderliness of situated actions. An application of this approach to the study of bilingual encounters can be seen in Gafaranga (1999).

Acknowledging the difficulty in assigning intention and meaning to instances of code-switching, scholars have looked to and developed Gumperz' (1982) approach to contextualization as a theoretical framework for interpreting meanings in the linguistic practices of bilingual communities. Auer defines contextualization as

all the activities by participants which make relevant, maintain, revise, cancel...any aspect of context which, in turn, is responsible for the interpretation of an utterance in its particular locus of occurrence (Auer 1992:4).

The concept of contextualization involves the use of various strategies for the expression and interpretation of verbal activities. Among these various cues (e.g., prosodic, gestural, and kinesic cues), code-switching is identified as another such cue that serves to make relevant certain aspects of the context of interaction. Auer points out that 'switching is...very similar to other contextualization strategies such as lowering or heightening of pitch level, change of posture...change of speed of utterance delivery...and some others' (Auer 1984:18). Switching codes provides a resource for communicating that some social action is being accomplished in a way that allows all participants to be able to interpret one another's actions.

While code-switching serves as a contextualization cue, what it may be contextualizing is a more complex issue. The analysis of interactional data allows us to examine how the verbal strategy of code-switching is embedded within the context of a social activity, such as negotiating potential conflict. While interaction takes place, participants are performing and interpreting various social actions. I suggest for the data to be analyzed here that code-switching is used as a means of contextualizing social hierarchies that are associated with the use of a particular language: Korean. By using Korean (or not using Korean) at moments of potential conflict, speakers are able to draw upon their sensitivity to social hierarchy to inform the interpretation of utterances in interaction.

The data discussed below come from videotapes collected during fieldwork with two organizations: a Korean community center (which I will call the KAC, for 'Korean American Center') and a volunteer summer camp for Korean youth. Both organizations serve a greater Korean community in the northern California Bay Area. The members of the two groups differ in linguistic backgrounds. The KAC consists of staff members who range in degree of bilingualism, from monolingual English speakers with only a passive understanding of Korean, to fluent bilinguals. The majority of camp counselors are monolingual English speakers. Even when these participants are speaking English, however, Korean ideologies of social hierarchy are



made relevant to Korean American discourse in situations of potential conflict through the use of contextualization cues. The data suggest that participants in the Korean American organizations enact Korean interactional practices in their discourse. The next section gives an overview of the encoding of social hierarchy in the Korean language before examining the role of these hierarchies in the negotiation of potential conflict in bilingual interaction.

### **Indexing social hierarchy in Korean**

Hierarchical relationships based on power, age, and solidarity are encoded in Korean grammatically, both morphologically and lexically, and have been referred to in various ways in the sociolinguistic literature. Hwang (1990) gives a brief description of how relative status is encoded in different aspects of Korean grammar. These aspects include person deixis, speech levels, and sets of lexical pairs. For the purposes of this discussion, I will be focusing specifically on person deixis.

In terms of person deixis, reference to persons in Korean must take into account the relative status of the speaker and the hearer. In the use of first and second person pronouns, for example, one must choose between plain and humble forms in referring to oneself or to one's interlocutor. Also, the use of pronouns in Korean must be understood as having different functions than that of merely replacing full noun phrases. For example, one can refer to one's interlocutor in the third person, calling him or her by title (e.g., 'teacher') or relationship to the

speaker (e.g., 'older sister) instead of by name or second person pronoun, as a sign of respect. This is what Park refers to as 'the pronominal use of personal names, kinship terms, or titles' (Park 1990: 120), which is described as one strategy of conflict avoidance. Kinship terms in Korean can be used as a nominal substitute for second person reference (Park 1990, Koo 1992, Choi 1997), examples of which were found in the Korean American data discussed here. Because Korean lacks a second person pronoun of deference, a nominal substitute from titles and kinship terms are used instead. This substitution is a show of deference to the addressee that provides a verbal strategy for contextualizing social hierarchy in interaction.

In terms of nominal substitutes for second person pronouns, the most frequent nominals used in the data were kinship terms. Kinship terms for older siblings reflect the social category of relative status by marking relative age and gender. Table 1 illustrates the different terms.

Table 1 Here

While the lexical meaning of these terms is associated with kinship relations, according to Sohn, these terms 'have now acquired daily usage among non-kin people, frequently even among strangers' (Sohn 1981:441). Sohn further notes, 'This extension of family relationship to society appears to be an effort to maintain social stratification based on family-like intimacy or in-groupness'. Beyond the use of these terms in families, they are used among acquaintances that have

established a familiar relationship, and the use of these terms serves as a sign of intimacy as well as mark of relative status.

The ways in which linguistic practices and sociocultural identities interact in the bilingual data to be discussed here are reminiscent of Ochs' (1992) discussion of how language indexes gender roles in interaction. According to Ochs, indexicality can be described as 'a property of speech through which cultural contexts such as social identities (e.g. gender) and social activities (e.g. a gossip session) are constituted by particular stances and acts' (Ochs 1992: 335). This approach to the indexing of social relationships emphasizes the performative aspects of social conduct that are revealed in the interactional work of the participants. For the members of the organizations discussed here, the social hierarchies in Korean interactions are indexed by the use of person deixis, and the importance of these hierarchies for Korean English bilingual speakers is constructed through the practice of code-switching.

### **Code-switching and kinship terms in the KAC meetings**

Among the KAC staff, Sam, Jin, and Hyun are the members who report their native language as Korean. Jin, in particular, often used the kinship terms for older staff members, Sam ('*hyeng*') and Hyun ('*nwuna*'). Even though some of the staff members differed in age by only a year or two, the terms were often observed in use in one-to-one interactions and also in some, more informal, meeting contexts. While Sam and Jin frequently and easily switched between English and

Korean, Hyun preferred speaking in Korean, which created situations where Sam and Jin would use Korean with Hyun and switch to English periodically for the benefit of the monolingual English speakers on the staff. The wide diversity of language backgrounds among staff members created a context in which language alternation could frequently be observed, and the patterns by which the alternations occurred revealed the importance of social hierarchies in interaction. Many who know or have observed Jin, in particular, have commented on his fluent bilingual abilities and the ease with which he is able to switch from one to the other. The bilingual members present include, from oldest to youngest:

<u>Member</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Position</u>
Sam	Male	Director
Hyun	Female	Social Worker
Jin	Male	KAC member

In Excerpt 1<sup>2</sup>, the staff is discussing Jin's practice presentation, which he has just finished. Because Jin's presentation overlapped with things Sam and Hyun included in their presentations, the staff tries to come up with ideas as to how to present the information. The solution they come up with is using a chart that summarizes the common information in the three presentations.

Excerpt 1<sup>3</sup>

233 SAM: Okay.  
 234 So I think ~Sam should do the chart. ((Sam

facetiously refers to self))

235 HYUN: <@ ani @>

NEG

*Well/No*, ((indicating that Sam does not necessarily have to do the chart himself))

236 *kule-n ke-n ani-chiman,*  
like.that-ATTR thing-TOP NEG-CONCESS  
*It's not like that (I didn't mean that), but,*

237 *eccaysstun,*  
anyway  
*anyway*

238 JIN: I mean,

239 HYUN: *wuli-ka ta,*  
1.PL-SUB all  
*We all,*

240 JIN: I think it that will [be effective].

241 HYUN: [Yey].  
*yes*

242 JIN: [When you uh],

243 HYUN: [*kule-chi*].  
like.that-COMM  
*Right.*

▶ 244 JIN: *hyeng-i,*

- older.brother-SUB  
(When) *you*,
- 245 HYUN: [*ku taum-ey han-pen-*] --  
that after-LOC one-turn  
*After that, once,*
- 246 JIN: [church-based] system *yayki ha-l ttay*,  
church-based system talk do-ATTR time  
*when you talk about the church-based system,*
- 247 HYUN: Mm.
- 248 JIN: you can incorporate those.
- 249 HYUN: *ku cekedo han*,  
<that> at.least one
- 250 *kyohoy nay-ey han pallwunthie-ka nawa-se*,  
church inside-LOC one volunteer-SUB  
emerge-PRECED  
*There will be at least one volunteer from one  
church,*
- 251 *ceki training-ul pat-kwu*,  
<there> training-OBJ receive-CONN  
*(who) will receive the training,*

Hyun starts this excerpt with the first inter-turn switch from English to Korean in line 235. Since Hyun usually speaks Korean, this is a

frequent occurrence, especially during staff meetings, which are conducted in English. Therefore, the inter-turn switches may or may not have any locally significant meanings attached to them. The preference for using the same code, for example, has been noted in bilingual interaction as a means of showing alignment among speakers (Auer 1984, Li 1995, among others). Li (1995), in particular, examines how code-switching may be used to contextualize dispreferred actions. Although Hyun's turn also co-occurs with a token of disagreement with a speaker of higher relative status (Sam), this instance is not analyzed here as a case of code-switching to contextualize dispreference due to the fact that Hyun speaks Korean regardless of the language spoken by her interlocutors.

Jin, however, uses both English and Korean, and his transitions indicate some subtle interactional work. Hyun has suggested making a chart to use as a visual aid before the start of Excerpt 1. Jin expresses his approval in line 240 (in English) and tries to convince Sam (in Korean) by stating that Sam will be able to use the chart in his own presentation. Due to the somewhat turn-competitive environment, Jin may feel his use of English to be 'in competition' with Hyun's use of Korean. Switching to Korean may serve as a resource for Jin to bid for the floor. Cromdal (2001), for example, suggests that this happens in children's interactions, where bilingualism can play an important role in allowing or disallowing bids for play entry. The formulation of the opinion, however, takes some effort, starting first in line 242 and continuing starting in line 246. The point at which Jin switches from

English to Korean comes when he must address his suggestion directly to Sam using the English pronoun 'you'. After line 242, Jin switches to English and undertakes a self-initiated repair in which the English address term 'you' is repaired by the more appropriate, status-indexing equivalent in Korean (*hyeng*). This offers some indication that what is happening in these utterances is not without potential interactional 'troubles'. The awkwardness of giving advice to the director of the group, who is also older than Jin, is shown by Jin's own recognition of the inequality of his relationship to Sam. The code-switching in this excerpt, which is embedded in the social action of negotiating a potential disagreement, serves to contextualize the social hierarchy made relevant in this interaction.

Jin evokes the kinship/peer relationship and the Korean social hierarchies associated with this relationship as a means of negotiating the interaction. This calls upon not only the subordinate and respectful relationship Jin has to Sam in the organization, but also the closeness of their relationship (like a brother) that extends beyond just a work relationship. By using Korean to address Sam, Jin enlists the kind of cooperation one may expect from one's older brother and charges Sam with the responsibilities of an older sibling to a younger sibling. Jin not only mitigates the act of making a suggestion to someone of higher authority by using *hyeng*, but he also introduces the close relationship between them as a reason why Sam should take his advice. In fact, Jin returns to English in line 248, just as he finishes his suggestion, and where, if said in Korean, he would be obligated to choose a speech



level in which to finish making his suggestion. This is also the point at which the most delicacy would be required (while making his actual suggestion), which would probably require more signs of deference in his choice of sentence-final endings. Relative status and social hierarchy among participants is also marked in Korean by sentence-final particles, which distinguish different levels of deference on the part of the speaker towards the addressee. According to Wang (1990), the morphological variants of the sentence-concluding endings occupy the most important positions in Korean addressee honorifics, not only because they are more systematically distributed than the other elements, but also because they tend to be less elliptical in an actual utterance than the other elements. (Wang 1990: 26)

By switching to English, he is able not only to elide the sentence endings, but avoid the decisions altogether. He is able to make a direct statement regarding his opinion while at the same time using the term *hyeng* to show deference to Sam and perhaps 'convince' Sam that he should respond in the way of a good *hyeng*, who indulges the request of a younger sibling or peer.

This is not to say that Jin has any aversion to making suggestions or disagreeing with Sam (as we will see). What this excerpt does illustrate, however, is that the use of Korean at opportune times to introduce (or avoid) Korean social hierarchies into a bilingual interaction may allow participants to use Korean norms of social interaction as a means of mitigating potentially face-threatening

situations. It also illustrates that participants may negotiate a potential conflict differently in Korean from a European American conflict among friends, for example, in which age and status may be less relevant. Jin's lower status in relation to Sam is always present, but the explicit evocation of that relationship can be used strategically to highlight this aspect of their relationship.

### **Negotiating conflict in the camp meetings**

Part of the goals of the Korean camp was to teach campers how to behave like Koreans, which included using kinship terms for and cultivating reciprocal relationships with older Korean friends. The director announced that this was done to 'show campers how Korean people interact with one another'. However, the use of kinship terms for older peers was less frequent among the camp counselors' group. This may have to do with the fact that mostly English was used in their interactions, but some instances of kinship terms were still observed among counselors.

All campers and counselors used kinship terms at the camp itself, but it was not observed as frequently during the counselor meetings. Despite this, however, counselors quickly found out who the oldest were among the group, and these individuals were referred to and addressed as 'Anna *nwuna*' and 'Sang-oh *hyeng*' (i.e., 'First name + kinship term'). Even without the use of Korean, the pull of relative age as a social ideology is prominent. In counselor meetings, monolingual English-speaking counselors explicitly mentioned the category of age.



16 came late,  
17 and uh,  
18 A lot of **you** didn't even know who I was.  
▶ 19 Especially tha- that I was so vocal,  
20 when I first came in,  
21 and I continue to be,  
22 and uh,  
23 I know that a lot of **you** may uh,  
24 be a little set off by that,  
25 because,  
26 first of all **you** haven't seen me for like the first  
27 four weeks,  
▶ 28 and I- I'm still relatively young.  
29 And I thin--  
30 I know,  
31 It's been expressed,  
32 to Mark *hyeng*,  
33 that a lot of **you** were kind of,  
34 uh,  
35 uneasy about me,  
36 um,  
37 I just want to say a couple of things,  
38 First,  
39 you know,  
40 why I am at camp.  
41 um,  
42 To be quite blunt about it,  
43 or to be quite simple as can be,  
44 I just love kids.

Jeff's entire preface (lines 1-43) to the topic of why he is a counselor for this camp evokes ideologies that he believes have contributed to others' negative opinion of him. Among the reasons he cites include joining the group weeks after the general meetings had started, being a particularly vocal member of the group, and being relatively young.

Jeff's explanation of his actions is carefully executed to address a particularly Korean audience. The reasons why he may have offended some people are reasons (as he sees it) that would offend a Korean person with Korean ideologies about social hierarchies. The reasons he gives for this reveal that certain cultural assumptions underlie why someone may form a negative opinion about a person, especially a young person. In contrast, a European American may not be so bothered by a relatively young person being very vocal in a meeting. The potential targets of his 'speech' may be the native Korean-speaking counselors in the group. He suggests this by his body gestures toward a certain part of the room in line 8. What he says is potentially face-threatening; in fact, his very explicit mention of why others may have been 'uneasy' about him may be itself be making the others uneasy about him. The use of *hyeng* by Jeff, then, serves the function of mitigating any possible offense he may have incurred, because others may now observe him in the meeting speaking in a way that incorporates Korean ideologies of relative status. In contrast to Excerpt 1, however, Jeff does not use *hyeng* as a nominal substitute for the second person pronoun. Here it is used as a third person referent. But by using the kinship term, Jeff displays his sensitivity to Korean

ideologies of social hierarchy. The native Korean-speaking counselors, in particular, may see this in a positive light.

Jeff's attention to social hierarchy by way of the use of *hyeng* is also countered by the lack sensitivity to other aspects of social hierarchy. As discussed above, Korean lacks a second person pronoun of deference. Instead, nominal substitutes are used or the pronoun, if not necessary to determine meaning, can be dropped in Korean. Because Jeff uses English here, he does not have the same options as he would in Korean. As a result, his overt mention of the pronoun 'you' may seem very direct and jarring to Korean speakers, especially since there are eight mentions in the excerpt. According to Park, 'Japanese and Korean honorific conventions do not allow a speaker of a lower status to use any of the second person pronouns toward a higher status addressee' (Park 1990: 121). This contributes to why the Korean-speaking counselors may interpret Jeff's speech as 'rude'. Jeff does in English what would be considered rude in Korean. He also does this while not being explicit as to who the 'you' is referring to, which may also raise some questions as to how to interpret Jeff's talk. This excerpt shows that not all contextualization cues may be 'working toward the same purpose' and may, in fact, even be serving contradictory aims. The effect of Jeff's speech may be the expression of reconciliation or may be an added inducement for conflict among the group.

Regardless of the success of Jeff's negotiations, the explicit reference to age is noteworthy. This may escape the observer of these

interactions at first, but this attention to relative status stands out as a marked practice among bilingual Korean Americans, despite the fact that the dominant language of interaction is English. The value put on age is particular to this group because of the influence of Korean culture on the participants and the organization that they comprise. To varying degrees, social hierarchies inform the kinds of interactions that take place. While some (like Mark, the camp director) always use Korean kinship terms, others explicitly state that they don't believe in this practice. In Excerpt 3, one counselor (Ellen) makes a comment on the practice of using these terms.

### Excerpt 3

1        ELLEN:        I think,  
2                        Every year that we have like,  
3                        Every year that we have camp,  
4                        There's always conflict in what the  
5                        emphasis is going to be,  
6                        More Korean,  
7                        more Korean American,  
8                        more American.  
9                        You know?  
10                      And everyone comes with different  
                            ideas,  
11                      right?  
12                      and like,  
13                      right now,  
▶ 14                      I disagree with the *oppa enni*, ((older

brother older sister))

15 and I can hang with that,  
16 just,  
17 you know,  
18 whatever,  
19 and I'll still do it?  
20 but,  
21 it's like,  
22 I think we all have different ideas,  
23 you know?  
24 and like she said,  
25 no one's discussed the ideas.

Ellen makes the statement that, although she doesn't agree with the practice of using Korean kinship terms ('the *oppa enni*'), she has no problem doing it at the camp for the sake of the campers. She does make explicit, however, that not all the counselors may have the same ideas about what practices are important and what they mean to the individuals who use them. She makes reference to this practice as a way of contesting its universal acceptance among the camp counselors, thus illustrating her point that not everyone has volunteered for this camp for the same reasons.

Ellen's explicit disagreement with the use of these terms gives rise to questions as to what the use of these terms means to her and to the other counselors. She may not agree with what she sees as the superficial use of Korean kinship terms among campers and counselors whose native language is English. She may also understand that these



terms embody Korean social ideologies of relative status that she does not agree with. She may not be willing to take on the roles and responsibilities required of an *enni*, for example, and would rather cultivate a relationship of equality among the counselors and the campers. This would suggest that the very use of the terms connote complex ways of thinking about personhood and social relationships to which Korean Americans who generally speak English may be sensitive. This difference in the connotative meaning of the kinship terms for different kinds of Koreans and Korean Americans may be what she is referring to in line 22 ('I think we all have different ideas').

The practice of using kinship terms has a different status among members in the two organizations studied. For the KAC, the staff members evoke the terms to negotiate interactional work. In the camp counselors' group, the practice is taught (during Korean culture classes at the camp) and is an instituted policy at the camp itself. Spontaneous use of the terms was rarely observed in the counselors' meetings. The examples given are among the few exceptions. The differences in language practices in these two organizations show distinct differences in the character of these groups. The comparison serves the purpose of illustrating that particular linguistic practices such as code-switching may enact particular social ideologies on the part of participants who engage in these practices, and that the same practices can carry different meanings for different groups. The power of kinship terms, however, is unquestionable in both contexts, and members must

negotiate what the practice will mean when interacting with other Koreans or Korean Americans.

### **Beyond lexical switching**

Using Korean kinship terms is not the only means of infusing Korean social hierarchy in Korean American bilingual interaction. Social hierarchy is also evoked in code-switches that affect units beyond the lexeme. As was seen in Excerpt 1, Jin is a bilingual speaker who has no aversion to vocalizing his opinions in the meetings. His ability to shift back and forth between Korean and English is impressive and at times even eloquent. In Excerpt 4, Jin has finished a dry run presentation. He is concerned, however, that it was too long and offers an explanation as to why it is so long. Sam, in line 3, suggests cutting a particular part. Jin responds by disagreeing with Sam's suggestion and explaining why.

#### Excerpt 4

- 1     JIN:    so,  
2            it's going to be pretty long.
- 3     SAM:    *kule-myen post-welfare reform impact ey tayhay-se*  
          that-COND                            LOC about-CONN
- 4            *yayki-ha-ci ma-sey-yo.*  
          talk-do-NOML not-HON-POL  
          Then, don't talk about the post-welfare reform impact.
- 5     JIN:    *ku-ntey kukey--*

that-CIRCUM that

*well, actually*

6 *na-to cikum--*

1s-also now

*I also now--*

7 *akka-n kkamek-ess-ess-nuntey,*

before-TOP forget-PST-PST-CIRCUM

*I had forgotten about it earlier,*

8 I think it's very important because,

9 *..amwu-to ike-ey tayhayse-nun sahoypokci-ey tayha-n*

nobody-also this-GENabout-TOP social\_welfare-

LOC about-ATTR

10 *yayki-man-ha-ci,*

talk-only-do-COMM

*people only talk about social welfare, [but nobody talks  
about what will happen]*

11 welfare reform *toy-ss-ul ttay,*

welfare reform become-ANT-ATTR time

*when the welfare reform is passed,*

12 *ku kancepcekin* indirect *ku* victim-tul possib- potential

*that indirect* indirect *that* victim-PL possib- potential

13

victims like Korean merchants.

*the indirect- indirect, the victims possib- potential  
victims like Korean merchants.*

14

So I think [I will XX].

15

HYUN:

[*akka chelem,*

ago like

like before

Since Jin's presentation was in Korean and they share a common native language, it is understandable that Sam might use Korean even though Jin's previous utterance was in English. Sam's suggestion in lines 3-4 is made in Korean using honorific sentence endings. This is an unusual occurrence that seems to indicate that Sam is speaking in his capacity as the director of the KAC, thus requiring a more formal register. The additional use of the politeness marker *-yo* in line 4 is interesting as well, especially since Sam uses it in addressing Jin, who is younger and a staff member under his supervision. The *-yo* seems to indicate the formal nature of the exchange, since Sam is offering 'professional' advice concerning Jin's work. This suggests that politeness markers are situation-specific and not just limited to the relative status of participants with respect to one another. This further suggests that relative age and status must be seen in light of the kind of speech event that participants engage in in order to interpret how such ideologies affect interaction.

In lines 5-8, Jin disagrees with Sam's suggestion, but the way in which he conveys this disagreement indicates that he is showing respect for Sam's relative status. He does this in several ways. First, Jin responds to Sam starting in Korean, showing code alignment even though his utterance is serving to disagree with Sam. Jin uses Korean to give the reasons, and he expresses his own feelings or conclusions in English, much like he did in Excerpt 1. The two places during his turn where he does explicitly disagree, he delivers in English (lines 8 and 14). Jin's use of English to state his position and his use of Korean to account for his actions again provides a contrast that seems to contextualize a dispreferred action type as described by Li (1995).

Jin also uses false starts and structural hedges to 'soften' his disagreement and attend to the constraints of social hierarchy while engaged in the activity of disagreeing with Sam. Jin's disagreement is contextualized by his false starts in Korean (lines 5-6) and then his switch to English (line 8) at the point where he directly states his opinion. But this example also shows how a dispreferred response (such as disagreement) may provide a site to display a different orientation to a participant, which allows a speaker, for instance, to show deference to a participant of higher social status. The false starts that Jin displays in lines 5-6 has the effect of 'softening' his disagreement with the older director's suggestion, preserving the ideology of relative status in the face of potential interactional 'trouble'. Structural hedging can also be seen in the formulation of his

disagreement. His own opinion is not stated immediately, but rather, delayed as long as possible. The insertion of line 7, which does not contain an overt first person pronoun, also allows Jin to delay the assertion of his opinion. When Jin does make reference to 'I' in articulating this opinion, Jin uses English instead of facing the grammatical choice between the plain or humble form of the first person pronoun or the sentence-final endings in Korean. Consequently, Jin uses code-switching instead of grammar as a means of displaying deference.

If we compare Excerpt 4 to Excerpt 1, the kind of code-switching Jin performs is similar. He uses Korean to contextualize his utterance in the present talk and switches to English to assert his purpose or main point. While in Excerpt 1 he also uses the kinship term and evokes the sociocultural relationships associated with it, in Excerpt 4 there is no explicit reference to these cultural values. Instead, he relies on the effect of switching at opportune times to negotiate potential conflict by contextualizing social hierarchy through hedging and code-switching.

### **Implicit displays of cultural ideology**

As we have seen in Excerpt 4, the incorporation of sociocultural ideologies need not always be explicit. In these Korean American organizations, interactions reflect how cultural values are evoked and used even without explicit forms to embody them. In Excerpt 5, Sam is explaining in English that the staff will have to implement changes in the office and in ways of working; in particular, that they need to keep

track of everyone else's schedules and whereabouts since the staff will be spending more time out of the office and working in the field. This elicits a request by Hyun, who asks if they will be getting beepers (in Korean: *bipa*).

Excerpt 5

176 SAM: If ~Hyun has to have a meeting with ministers,  
177 *myech si pwute myech si kkaci* meeting,  
(('from what time to what time'))  
178 and so we know,  
179 where,  
180 even though we're not affiliated with any of  
your projects,  
181 we would still know where everybody is.  
182 And who will be in at what time.

▶ 183 HYUN: <@ *bipa an sa-cwu-e-yo?* @>  
beeper NOT buy-give-DECL-POL  
You're not going to buy us beepers?

184 JANE: @@ ((JIN also smiles))

185 SAM: Excuse me?

▶ 186 HYUN: *bipa an sa-cwu-e-yo?*  
beeper NOT buy-give-DECL-POL  
You're not going to buy us beepers?

187 SAM: uh,

188 pager--





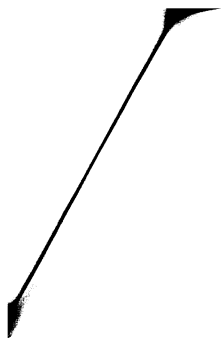
does not code-switch in her speech. However, the contrast of Korean (Hyun) and English (Sam) in the meeting context often results in the use of Korean as a linguistic resource in bilingual interaction. Here, Hyun's use of Korean in requesting beepers initiates an interesting exchange that implicitly evokes Korean social hierarchy.

Using voice quality as well as the formulation of the request as a negative statement serving as a question, Hyun makes a petition to Sam in a way that evokes the role relationship between them, that of a boss to an employee. Sam interprets Hyun's 'request' as a kind of 'charge'. Since Hyun makes this reasonable public request to a person of authority who is older and of higher status, Sam may feel obligated to accede. Hyun herself, in the soft tone of voice she uses and the indirect form of her request (complete with the negative form of her question), acknowledges that the request may be seen as bold and selfish on Hyun's part. Jane and Jin, from their laughter and smile, respectively, demonstrate that they recognize this possible interpretation of Hyun's actions. But the use of all the appropriate cues for negotiating this potentially bold request makes it a well-negotiated move on Hyun's part.

Sam aligns to Hyun's request in various ways. In line 185, Sam, on the surface, requests clarification, but at the same time accomplishes the interactional work of casting Hun's request as a 'charge'. Hyun repeats her request in line 186, to which Sam responds positively. Sam starts his turn in English in line 187, but then switches to Korean, not only

aligning code, but also aligning with the relationship that Hyun has evoked by requesting beepers from him. This is evident in his lilting intonation in line 189 as well, which is the same intonation of an older 'brother' responding reassuringly and enthusiastically to a younger sibling or peer's petition. Sam's response offers evidence of how Hyun's request has been interpreted and that relative status has played a part in this interaction. It is also interesting to note that as soon as he agrees to Hyun's request in Korean (line 189), he then returns to using English in line 190. This provides further evidence that the switch to Korean has served its purpose: Sam has accepted his role and duty as the older group member, which he has had to 'do' while speaking Korean.

There are no overt mentions of kinship terms or relative status among the participants. But there is evidence of the influence of social hierarchy in this exchange. Within a social group, relative status plays a role in the kind of responsibilities and obligations one has. For example, an older sibling or peer must provide help to the younger person. The younger person will often make requests of the older one, who may find it difficult to refuse if the request is a reasonable one. In this case, Hyun makes a petition to the older and higher status Sam in Korean and succeeds in obtaining a verbal consent. By lines 189-193, we see that a potentially adversative situation has reached a friendly resolution.



When Sam promises to grant Hyun's request, the others respond with laughter, which also indicates that something beyond what is being said is happening here. This may be a confusing kind of response for an outsider who observes this interaction. I suggest that part of the humor in this exchange is in Sam's implicit acceptance of his role as the dutiful older peer as well as the fact that Hyun evokes social hierarchy to 'get what she wants', which is what those who laugh realize. This implicit role-playing, enacted in the guise of changing office policies, presents a notable contrast that may be cause for some laughter.

### **Summary and conclusions**

The notion of social hierarchy pervades Korean culture to the extent that conceptualizing the individual without a collective is difficult to do. One's relation to another is just as, if not more, important than who one is as an individual. According to Hwang, 'Korean society has traditionally been one in which peoples' relative positions in various hierarchical social dimensions are highly recognized, and its members are identified more readily by their relative positions in the social structure than by their individuality' (Hwang 1990: 42). These forces manifest themselves in social relations as well. One does not exist alone, but rather depends upon, and is seen in relation to, others. The maintenance of this kind of ideology may be particularly difficult for a Korean person raised with the equally evocative social ideologies of individualism, freedom, and equality. As we have seen above, these

conflicting ideologies can manifest themselves in the complex negotiations that take place in potentially face-threatening situations.

The contrast in the management of potential conflict in interaction can be seen in the two Korean American organizations studied here. For members of the KAC, using Korean can evoke a way of carrying out and interpreting social interaction that may not be available through the use of English alone. One could state that the grammar and usage of Korean prevails on the speaker to take into consideration certain relevant social relationships and categories. For them, the use of Korean in a bilingual context provides a resource for negotiating conflict by instantiating hierarchical relationships in interaction. Rather than seeing the 'brought along' aspects of social status as relevant for the participants' conduct, the asymmetrical relation between the participants is 'brought about' as a resource in the ongoing conversation, in the sense of Hinnenkamp (1987). For the monolingual counselors discussed in the data, these same hierarchical relationships can also be used as a means of acknowledging the existence/importance of social hierarchy while at the same time enacting very different norms of social interaction (see Excerpt 2 above). Just because the social hierarchies are acknowledged doesn't necessarily mean they must be enacted in the discourse.

The analysis given here suggests that bilinguals may be capable of expressing multiple selves in a situated context that are guided by different, sometimes even opposing, sociocultural ideologies. The use

of Korean at specific moments allows speakers access to grammatical categories and structures that are available in Korean, for example, kinship terms. The switches discussed in this article are not limited to these situations, however. I claim that the switch itself can contextualize social values that are at play in situated interaction *even when the linguistic forms associated with these values are not used*.

The ways in which code-switching can instantiate diverse ideologies of social hierarchy provide an identifiable characteristic of bilingual Korean American discourse. Through social actions that may cause conflict, such as disagreeing, suggesting, or making a request in both English and Korean, participants use local interpretations of such actions as a means of doing interactional work. Social hierarchy in Korean culture obliges individuals to take on certain social roles and behave according to certain social norms. The use of kinship terms, hedging, and as we have seen, even code-switching, serve to perpetuate the ideology of relative status in Korean and Korean American interactions.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>I gratefully acknowledge Sandra Thompson, Patricia Clancy, John Du Bois, Adrienne Lo and an anonymous reviewer for helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper.

<sup>2</sup>All transcripts have been transcribed using the conventions of Du Bois, Schuetze-Coburn, Cumming and Paolino (1993).

<sup>3</sup> Grammatical abbreviations:

ADV	adverbial
AFF	affection
ANT	anterior
ATTR	attributive
CIRCUM	circumstantial
COMM	committal
COMP	complementizer
CONCESS	concessive
COND	conditional
CONN	connective
DCT:RE	deductive reasoning
DECL	declarative
DIR	directional
GEN	genitive
HON	honorific
IMPF	imperfect
IR	interrogative
LOC	locative
NEG	negative
NOML	nominalizer
OBJ	object marker
PERF	perfect

PL	plural
POL	polite ending
PRECED	precedence
SG	singular
SIMUL	simultaneous
SUB	subject marker
TOP	topic marker
TRANS	transferentive
UNASSIM	unassimilated knowledge

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	<b>Term for older male sibling</b>	<b>Term for older female sibling</b>
Female speaker	<i>oppa</i>	<i>enni</i>
Male speaker	<i>hyeng</i>	<i>nwuna</i>

Table 1. Kinship terms for older siblings