



“할미 마음이 아파요”: Korean Honorific Speech Level Markers as Contextualization Cues in Family Instant Messages

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Abstract Bringing together Goffman’s (1981) concept of footing, Gumperz’s (1982) notion of contextualization cues, and Tannen’s (1994, 2007) ambiguity and polysemy of power and solidarity, I investigate how the management of power and solidarity and the construction of family-related identities are signaled through Korean honorific speech level markers in family instant messages. For this study, I examine naturally occurring instant messages of three Korean families(-in-law) via KakaoTalk, a free instant messaging application. The analyzed message exchanges happen between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law, between a married couple of the same age, and between grandmothers and (virtually present) grandchildren. The family members use the deferential and polite speech level markers as 1) an egalitarian marker; 2) a face-saving marker; 3) a footing marker; and 4) an affective marker. Illuminating language use in contemporary family discourse via instant messages, the chapter demonstrates how the use of the honorific speech level markers neither always adheres to politeness nor is necessarily regulated by traditional social factors such as age, roles, and status. I therefore demonstrate how the speech level markers actually work in everyday family talk online.

Keywords Honorifics · Speech level markers · Honorific speech level markers · Footing · Power and solidarity · Identity · KakaoTalk · Contextualization cues · Family instant messages · Digital discourse

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1 Introduction

The current chapter is a part of my larger project about family group chats among Korean families(-in-law). Although the use of Korean language was not my initial focus, it came into view through close reading of data and interviews with participants. Across the family chatrooms considered in the project, I noted that Korean honorific speech level markers – deferential and polite – are not necessarily used as politeness markers. Rather, they serve to signal how family members manage family power and solidarity, while also constructing and performing their family-related identities.

In this chapter, I therefore present how the honorific speech level markers neither always adhere to politeness nor are necessarily regulated by traditional social factors such as age, roles, and status, especially in the context of family instant messages. The usage of honorific speech level markers is not fixed, but discursively deployed. I argue that honorific speech level markers are rather viable as a discursive strategy to create contextual meanings and manage family relationships and identities. The chapter demonstrates how the speech level markers actually work in everyday family talk online.

For this study, I use instant messages via KakaoTalk. KakaoTalk, also known colloquially as KaTalk, is a free instant messaging application popular in South Korea. According to the Pew Research Center's Spring 2018 Global Attitudes Survey, cited in Silver (2019), 100% of Korean adults surveyed reported that they own mobile phones and 95% of them have smartphones (N=1,007). The Economist (2019) also notes that 94 % of South Koreans use KakaoTalk. These numbers clearly show how much KaKaoTalk is central to daily communication in South Korea.

KakaoTalk has become a popular research site for analyzing a variety of aspects of Korean language use and communication in online contexts. Those studies include the exploration of listenership among Korean female friends and family instant messages that I present in Choe (2018, 2020), respectively; Shi and Jang's (2017) comparative study on writing styles between Korean generations in their 20s and 60s; Hur's (2017) examination of college students' gender-specific patterns of language; Kang and M. Kim's (2017) analysis on usage of Korean discourse markers, and Kang's (2018) honorific final endings. Some scholars study KakaoTalk discourse to explore translanguaging (e.g., H. Lee and Jang 2021); English language learning (N. Kim 2016); and Korean language learning (M. Kim and L. Brown 2014).

Keeping in line with those studies, the chapter looks into family talk via KakaoTalk. More specifically, it analyzes how Korean family(-in-law) members, in different roles and across generations, use honorific speech level markers (deferential and polite) in their family chatrooms to accomplish various communicative purposes, especially pertaining to the management of power and solidarity and the construction of family-related identities. The chapter therefore highlights the use of honorific speech level markers, which moves beyond politeness, in digital family discourse contexts.

In previous studies on Korean family discourse, scholars consider different types of Korean families including immigrant families, transnational families, and interracial/interethnic families (e.g., S. Choi 2000; E. Cho 2005; J. Choi, Y. Kim, and D. Lee 2012; Song 2012, 2019; A. Kim, J. Lee, and W. Lee 2015). However, many of them are primarily based on spoken interactions between parents and their young children (mostly prepubescent children), especially in relation to language acquisition, language socialization, and multilingualism. A few discourse studies analyze Korean family discourse in the context of mealtime (e.g., E. Cho 2005; H. Kim

2006) and regarding identity construction such as Korean immigrants (D. Kim 2013) and immigrant mothers (J. Choi, Y. Kim, and D. Lee 2012). Furthermore, many Korean family discourse studies have been conducted under the framework of Conversation Analysis (CA) – e.g., K. Yoon (2010); S. Suh (2020); and Pyun and K. Yoon (2022). Very little is understood about Korean family discourse through the lens of Interactional Sociolinguistics (IS) (Gumperz 1982). To bridge the gap with the current literature on Korean family discourse, the chapter, by having IS as the backbone of data analysis, examines family instant messages where relatively understudied familial relationships that include not only marital and parental bonds (e.g., husband-wife and [older] parent-adult child) but also in-laws and grandparent-grandchild relationships are observed.

In addition, while western family groups have received a great deal of research attention in family discourse studies, Korean family (or Asian family in general) discourse is relatively underrepresented. Related, the chapter addresses non-English language and discourse in online family contexts; while it has been more than a decade since Danet and Herring (2007) pointed out the scholarly necessity of examining languages other than English in digital discourse, there is still much to be explored in this context – exceptions include Spanish in Fernández-Amaya (2021) and Arabic in Al Rashdi (2015).

The organization of the chapter is as follows. First, I describe the Korean honorific system, with a primary focus on a variety of speech level markers and give an overview of prior studies on situated meanings of the Korean honorifics. Next, I outline theoretical frameworks that include Goffman’s (1981) notion of footing, or alignment, Gumperz’s (1982) contextualization cues, or (para-)linguistic and prosodic devices that signal what speakers intend to say, and Tannen’s (1994, 2007) theory about the ambiguity and polysemy of power and solidarity. After describing the presented data, I analyze four discursive functions of honorific speech level markers (deferential and polite): 1) an egalitarian marker; 2) a face-saving marker; 3) a footing marker; and 4) an affective marker, and how they, serving as contextualization cues, contribute to family identity work and power and solidarity management in family group chats. Finally, I conclude the chapter by highlighting how the notion of contextualization cues can be applied to understanding relatively underexamined aspects of Korean honorific speech level markers in family talk online. Showing that the honorific speech level markers are not merely politeness markers, my analysis further enriches our understanding of how the honorific speech level markers not only make and signal contextual meanings but also express and negotiate family relationships pertaining to power and solidarity dynamics.

2 Korean Honorific System: Korean Speech Levels and Honorification

Honorification is one of the distinct linguistic features of the Korean language, and one that I have found family members in my study strategically use in interaction. Korean honorifics explicitly express a speaker’s respect for an addressee (addressee honorification) and for a referent (referent honorification) (see Sung 2007; S. Yoon 2010). Addressee honorifics determine a form of sentence ending (e.g., speech level markers), whereas referent honorifics are produced with honorific suffixes and words. When the referent and the addressee are the same, the use of the referent honorific suffix *-si* usually honors the addressee.

Given that Korean follows the SOV structure (Subject-Object-Verb), the sentence ending, attached to a predicate, is considered the most important honorific feature in Korean. Among sentence final particles in Korean, speech level markers indicate different degrees or levels of

politeness and/or formality that the speaker shows to the addressee and are often interchangeably used with the term “speech style markers” (see M. Park 2012).

Scholars propose various classifications of speech level markers (see J. Hwang 1990) and different numbers of clause types in Korean ranging from five to eleven (see Pak 2008). In Table 1 below, I borrow the classification of six speech levels from S. Yoon (2010), adapted from Sohn (1999), as it clearly differentiates honorific speech levels from non-honorific ones. I also classify clauses used in my data into five types, outlined in Mun (2013), as the five-level classification is generally accepted (see Table 1).

Table 1 Korean speech levels by clause types

NOTE: DEC (Declarative), INT (Interrogative), IMV (Imperative), EXH (Exhortative), EXC (Exclamative)

Clause type		DEC	INT	IMV	EXH	EXC
Speech level						
+honorific	deferential	<i>-supnita</i>	<i>-supnikka</i>	<i>-sipsio</i>	<i>-sipsita</i>	-
	polite	<i>-a/eyol</i>				
-honorific	blunt	<i>-o, -wu</i>	<i>-o, -wu</i>	<i>-o, -wu</i>	<i>-sipsita</i>	<i>-kwulye</i>
	familiar	<i>-ney</i>	<i>-nunka</i>	<i>-key</i>	<i>-sey</i>	<i>-kwumen</i>
	intimate	<i>-e/a</i>				
	plain	<i>-ta</i>	<i>-nya, -ni</i>	<i>-ela</i>	<i>-ca</i>	<i>-kwuna, -kwun</i>

As presented in Table 1, there are six speech levels in the Korean language. They include honorific speech level markers – deferential and polite – and non-honorific speech level markers – blunt, familiar, intimate, and plain. The relationship between speakers and hearers, in general, determines which speech level ought to be used. The honorific speech level markers are usually used by the speaker when talking to those whose social position is higher or in a formal situation, and the deferential is more formal than the polite. The non-honorific speech level markers are used by those socially equal, by the speaker when talking to those lower in the social hierarchy, and/or in an informal situation. Commonly used speech levels in everyday interaction are deferential, polite, intimate, and plain whereas the use of the blunt and familiar markers is less common in contemporary Korean discourse – see M. Kim (2015) and S. Yoon (2015) for the Korean honorification system. Korean clauses can be categorized into five types: declarative, interrogative, imperative, exhortative, and exclamative. As mentioned above and as shown in the transcripts in data analysis, sentence final particles mark clause types in the Korean language. The six speech levels appear across the five clause types in different forms.

Traditionally, the use of Korean honorifics is related to the formality of a situation and is generally determined by social factors such as age, socioeconomic status, and gender (see Sohn 1999 and Sung 2007 for details). As Agha (1998:153) explains, however, honorific speech can serve to accomplish “control and domination, irony, innuendo, and masked aggression, as well as other types of socially meaningful behaviors that native ideologies of honor or respect do not describe.” For instance, J. Hwang (1990) identifies four Korean utterances that are deferential and polite, deferential but impolite, non-deferential but polite, and non-deferential but impolite. He argues that different speech level markers, coupled with sentence types such as requests and commands and a speaker’s relationship to addressees, can encode different intended messages, in interaction (48).

There has been growing scholarly attention to Korean media discourse to study various contextual meanings of Korean honorific speech level markers used in it. S. Yoon (2010), in his study on Korean media discourse, demonstrates how the polite speech level marker can index “soft affective stance” (98) expressing friendliness, intimacy, or closeness. L. Brown (2013) presents how Korean honorifics are used to indicate sarcasm in Korean TV dramas. In addition, situated meanings of Korean honorifics are often addressed in relation to the speech level shifting phenomena within and between honorific and non-honorific levels (e.g., Eun and Strauss 2004; S. Yoon 2010, 2015; L. Brown 2015; Jo 2018). Other scholars study the strategic use of Korean honorific first-person pronoun, 저(*ce*) (‘I’ in English) indicating lowering oneself, in the context of political discourse in the media (J. Kim 2018; Chen and J. Lee 2021). To elaborate further, J. Kim (2018) examines that the Former South Korean president, Moon Jae In, indexes humility and loyalty in his use of *ce* in his presidential speeches. Meanwhile, in Chen and J. Lee (2021), South Koreans metapragmatically perceive that Kim Jong Un’s use of *ce* during the South-North Korea summit contributes to managing North Korea’s threatening image, on the basis of *ce*’s stereotypical meaning of lowering oneself and elevating others.

Previous studies effectively show the strategic usage of honorific speech level markers in institutional contexts where participants negotiate different interactional dynamics. It is thus worth noting how contemporary Korean family members, via instant messaging, employ honorific speech level markers in everyday lives and what they express, especially when the markers do not bear upon politeness-related meanings. Therefore, in this chapter, I present how honorific speech level markers play a part in managing power and solidarity dynamics in family relations, thus creating family identity.

3 Theoretical Frameworks

3.1 Footing and Contextualization Cues

Interactional Sociolinguistics (IS) is an approach to qualitative discourse analysis, developed by John Gumperz, to interpret “what participants intend to convey in everyday communicative practice” (Gumperz 2015:309). Among key concepts in IS are Goffman’s notions of frames (1974) and footing (1981) and Gumperz’s (1982) contextualization cues. According to Goffman (1981), each interlocutor shows certain orientations toward the current interaction, which is what he calls footing, or alignments. Goffman (1981) notes that changing footing means “a change in the alignment we take up to ourselves and the others present as expressed in the way we manage the production or reception of an utterance” (128). Footing changes thus show the dynamics of what is presently happening in on-going interaction, or a “frame” in Goffman’s (1974) terms. What kinds of footings are taken upon by interlocutors can be signaled through what Gumperz (1982) calls “contextualization cues” that include lexical items, syntactic structure, and paralinguistic features such as tone, pitch, laughter, and non-verbal actions, and interlocutors glean meanings of current interaction through those contextualization cues. Contextualization cues indicate what a given message intends and thus how it should be interpreted in interaction. Through footing and contextualization cues, we are able to better understand that discourse is context-bound and thus that meaning resides not only in the words spoken but in every aspect of how they are spoken. Scholars have demonstrated what resources and strategies people make use of to manage and accomplish footings in various contexts such as a pediatric encounter in Tannen and Wallat (1993), family interaction in Gordon (2009), email exchanges in

Georgakopoulou (2011), and everyday conversations among friends (Sierra 2023). Such an analytical inquiry is also found in a range of Korean discourses including a foreign language classroom (Park 2016); livestreamed mukbang, or a livestream of eating (Choe 2019, 2020, 2021); TV shows (S. Yoon 2015; K. Kim and Suh 2021); code-switching between English and Korean (Shin 2010); and narratives of *kirogi* mothers, or mothers living abroad with children for their education, while fathers living alone in Korea for financial support of the family (H. Lee 2010).

3.2 Ambiguity and Polysemy of Power and Solidarity

Power and solidarity feature prominently in the context of (im)politeness (see Spencer-Oatey and Žegarac 2017). Especially, related to (in)direct speech, many consider how power and solidarity play a role in performing (im)politeness. For instance, P. Brown and Levinson (1987) note facework – whether an act is face-threatening or face-saving – is bound up with how a speaker says what they intend to say. Tamaoka, Yamaguchi, Miyaoka, and Kiyama (2010), building upon P. Brown and Levinson (1987), claim that the use of (in)directness is also gender-related. In Korean discourse, (im)politeness, in light of power and solidarity, is constructed and accomplished through the use of honorification (e.g., Sohn 1981; Hijirida and Sohn 1986; Kim-Renaud 2001; Leech 2014; S. Yoon 2015) and terms of address (e.g., S. Hwang 1991; K. Lee and Y. Cho 2013). In such language use, a range of sociocultural factors including role, status, and age is considered, thus discursively creating and managing power and solidarity dynamics among interlocutors.

As scholars note, power and solidarity cannot be simply understood in a dichotomous way. Through the lens of IS, Tannen (1994, 2007) proposes “the ambiguity and polysemy of power (hierarchy) and solidarity (connection)” in interaction. By ambiguity, she refers to meaning either power or solidarity whereas by polysemy, she refers to meaning both power and solidarity. Tannen notes that in conventional belief, power and solidarity are dichotomous in that hierarchical relationships preclude closeness and vice versa. But in real-life discourse, Tannen argues that they, in fact, are paradoxically and simultaneously exerted. In other words, power and solidarity are not mutually exclusive; each entails the other, thus creating ambiguity and polysemy. Tannen (2013) also notes such “dual, paradoxically related, dimensions of power and connection” (491) often emerge in gender-related patterns in family discourses such as with mothers (e.g., Gordon 2002, 2007; Tannen 2006) as well as with fathers (e.g., Gordon, Tannen, and Sacknovitz 2007; Marinova 2007). However, very few interactional sociolinguistic studies consider other types of family discourse such as between in-laws as well as between grandparents and grandchildren, concerning the complexity of power and solidarity relations – recent exceptions include Nguyen (2020) and Hirasawa (2023), both of which are based on face-to-face spoken interaction.

Tannen’s paradox of power and solidarity has been observed in Korean language use as well. For instance, M. Kim (2015) investigates the entwinement of power and solidarity through the use of the solidarity term, *자기* (*caki*, you in English) in a circle of Korean married women friends. M. Kim notes that the informal, affective second person pronoun, *caki*, creates and indicates solidarity and closeness, but at the same time, the use of *caki* indicates age hierarchy as it is only possible from older friends to younger ones, unless it is used between those of a same or similar age. M. Kim and Strauss (2018) claim that the widespread use of *caki* even in formal contexts, in place of the formal second person pronoun, *자네* (*caney*), suggests that solidarity is

the new power. In line with this body of literature studying the co-occurrence of power and solidarity in the usage of Korean pronouns, I consider how Korean honorific speech level markers show such ambiguous and polysemous dynamics in interaction and what discursive functions they perform in family instant messages.

4 Data Collection

In this chapter, I analyze naturally occurring KakaoTalk instant messages – among families of the married couple, Jia and Taewoo, among Sara’s family-in-law, and between the married couple, Phillip and Eunbyul. The analyzed message exchanges happen between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law, between a married couple of the same age, and between grandmothers and (virtually present) grandchildren. By virtually present grandchildren, I refer to those who are not present in family chatrooms (i.e., they are not members of the family chatrooms), but are constantly mentioned with their daily photos and videos shared by other members of the family chatrooms.

I recruited study participants in person and by posting a recruitment post on Facebook. With informed consent, approved by my then affiliation, the participants were asked to download and share with me their family KakaoTalk conversation(s) by email. When downloaded, messages are converted to a text file and each message appears with its time sent and its sender’s name. All family participants agreed to have their instant messages published, except shared photos and videos which I described in language in transcripts. Although I asked them to submit at least one month of their instant messages, I let them decide the exact length of and time range of their interaction. Jia’s family and family-in-law offered me a total of 19 months-long instant messages (December 2015-January 2017 and September 2017-January 2018); Sara’s family-in-law did 28 months (September 2014-January 2017); and Phillip and Eunbyul did 5 months (August 2017-December 2017). Any identifiable information of the participants including names, jobs, and locations are adjusted to protect their privacy, except for the cities that the participants live in.

My data collection and analysis are retrospective. I collected and analyzed instant messages that had already happened. My retrospective approach helps to minimize any possible concerns caused by “the observer’s paradox,” or the idea that the presence of a researcher or recording equipment for data collection does not allow linguists to access to “how people speak when they are not being observed” (Labov 1972:97). It was made possible by the most distinct feature of KakaoTalk, among other features, that all exchanged messages, including the name of the sender and date and time sent, are automatically stored in the database of all involved participants’ KakaoTalk accounts. The participants can access and download the entire instant message interaction anytime as long as they stay in the chatroom where those instant messages are exchanged. To learn the context of instant messages having occurred and the participants’ insights, I also conducted what Tannen (2005) calls playback interviews via email, phone call, and in person. During the interviews, the participants were asked to read their own instant messages and tell me their thoughts and background contexts at that time.

5 Data Analysis

In the context of Korean family discourse, it is no wonder that adult children(-in-law) employ honorific speech level markers, when interacting with their parents(-in-law) because the adult children(-in-law) are younger by age and lower in the family hierarchy than their parents(-in-law). However, my collected data show different usage of the honorific speech level markers among family members, regardless of their age and family role-hierarchy. The family members strategically use the honorific speech level markers, as observed in instant messages between the same-aged married couple, from grandmothers to (virtually present) grandchildren, and from mothers-in-law to daughters-in-law. I note that the honorific speech level markers do not always convey politeness-related meanings. In my data, the speech level markers serve as 1) an egalitarian marker, 2) a face-saving marker, 3) a footing marker, and 4) an affective marker, to accomplish various interactional goals, especially in relation to the management of power and solidarity and thus the construction of familial identities. I argue that the honorific speech level markers, functioning as “contextualization cues” (Gumperz 1982), signal how family members linguistically orient to the current interaction. Please note that the honorific speech level markers appear in bold in transcripts.

5.1 Egalitarian Marker

The following example is instant messages between Phillip and Eunbyul, a same-aged married couple. At the time the interaction happened, it was the wedding day of Phillip’s cousin. Although the couple was invited to the wedding to be held in Seoul, Phillip attended the wedding on behalf of Eunbyul and himself. It was because the couple was in a long-distance relationship at that time in order to gain some help from Eunbyul’s parents to take care of their newly born daughter. Eunbyul resided with the baby at her parents’ in Busan, while Phillip stayed in Seoul.

(1)

LINE	SENDER	MESSAGE
1	Phillip	November 11, 2017, 1:20PM 세시쯤 나갑니다 sey-si-ccum naka- pnita three-time-around leave-DEC. DEF 'I'm heading out at around three'
		November 11, 2017, 1:20PM 그렇군요. 정장 위에 코트입거 가요. kuleh-kwun- yo cengcang wiew khotu-ip-ke ka- yo do so-EXC.PLN-DEC. POL suit over coat-wear-and go-IMV. POL 'Okay Make sure to put on a coat over the suit'
3	Eunbyul	November 11, 2017, 1:20PM 오늘 날씨가 추워요. onul nalssi-chwuw- eyo today weather-cold-DEC. POL 'It's cold today'
		미세먼지도 안좋다니 miseymenti-to an-coh-ta-ni particulate-also not-good-DT-because 환기도 가급적 시키지 말고요. hwanki-to kakupcek sikhi-ci mal-kwu- yo-ng

ventilation-also if possible let-should not-and-IMV.POL-CUTE

'Also the level of particulate matter is pretty bad So try
not to open the window'

Discourse analysis studies on family interaction, such as by Tannen (2004) and Gordon (2009), identify patterns of language use that construct and display family identities, which is what Søndergaard (1991) and Gordon (2009) call familylect (c.f., Van Mensel's 2018 multilingual familylect). The couple's use of the polite speech level marker, I note, can be counted as what I call couplect, or a type of language between a married couple, which creates "reciprocal pairs" (Gordon 2009:61) to construct a couple-centered interactional activity (or frame in Goffman's 1974 terms) in family interaction. As addressed in Section 2, Koreans use honorific speech level markers to older or hierarchically higher acquaintances or when they just meet. It is rare for interlocutors close to each other to use those markers, especially when they are of the same age. However, as you see the speech level markers in bold in the transcript above (i.e., deferential in line 1 and polite in lines 2 and 3), the couple constantly uses the honorific speech level markers to each other and the couple's use of them is worth considering, given that they are of the same age, especially in the context of Korea's age-centered culture and language use. In the playback interviews, the couple mentioned to me that the use of the honorific speech level markers is their own interactional habit to display respectfulness toward the other as a partner. Their doing so is strategic, as it contributes to supporting the construction of the discourse of egalitarian marriage and their familial identities as marriage partners in it, thus creating a couple-centered frame in their instant messages.

Interestingly, in lines 2 ('put on a coat over the suit') and 3 ('not to open the window'), constructed is the IMV-POL structure, which is noteworthy in a sense that Eunbyul's use of the polite speech level marker constitutes her dual spousal identities, in relation to power and solidarity, through which she not only exerts her power to take care of her husband and household affairs, but also enacts as a caring spouse. This example will be further analyzed in the next section where I present honorific speech level markers as a face-saving marker.

As mentioned earlier, one of the most salient features of the Korean language is its highly developed honorific system (see Sohn 1999; S. Yoon 2015). Sentence endings including speech level markers as well as clause type markers make the most important contribution to the honorific meaning of the whole sentence (S. Yoon 2015:99). In other words, in Korea where language use is greatly determined by sociocultural factors such as age, role hierarchy, and the degree of closeness between a speaker and an addressee (or a recipient), the use of honorifics is usually designed to display respect and deference between interlocutors. However, through the untraditional practice of using honorific markers, the couple signals their equality and sameness in their family hierarchy and interaction, thus performing their spousal identities. This linguistic phenomenon, I claim, shows how honorific speech level markers, as contextualization cues, serve as an egalitarian marker.

Using the non-honorific speech level marker could suffice enough to indicate their egalitarian relationship as it is usually used between close ones, especially when they are of same age. However, it does not capture the couple's linguistic effort to make it more salient to not only construct and show equality but also perform their own family identities as a married couple. Importantly, the couple's using honorifics means more than reciprocity; it goes beyond one person using an honorific and the other doing the same in return. When I asked the couple about their motivation for using honorifics during the playback interview, Phillip and Eunbyul

mentioned to me that they have engaged in this practice since they started dating in order to display respect to one another. The couple's intentional use of the honorific speech level markers therefore not only creates linguistic reciprocity but also discursively frames the couple's marriage as an equal relationship and constructing identities.

5.2 Face-Saving Marker

The following example presents together two separate instant messages sent by Sara's mother-in-law to her family chatroom where Sara, her husband, Insung, and her brother-in-law, Inseok (Insung's younger brother) participate. Kihong is the 4-year-old son of Insung and Sara at the time the data was collected. Sara's mother-in-law often asks for photos of her grandson, Kihong, in the chatroom. Regardless of whether the mother-in-law specifies an addressee or not, when issuing a request for daily photos and videos of Kihong, it is always Sara, her daughter-in-law, who fulfills, or is expected to do, her requests. Her request messages are very different from other instant messages that she sends to the family chatroom. Her request messages are usually sent with politeness markers that include a polite speech level marker (-a/eyo) and apologetic expressions that include “미안” (*mian*: ‘sorry’ in English). Please note that the singularity/plurality of the word, photo, is intentionally omitted in English translations because it is not clear in the mother-in-law's requests.

(2)

EXAMPLE	MESSAGE
1	December 18, 2014, 6:55PM
	미안하지만 기홍 정면 사진 부탁해요
	mianha-ciman Kihong cengmyen sacin pwuthakhay- yo sorry-although Kihong front photo request-DEC. POL 'I am sorry but please send me photo of Kihong facing front'
2	October 1, 2016, 5:50PM
	며느라 기홍 사진보내줘요
	myenul-a Kihong sacin-ponay-cw- eyo daughter-in-law-AP Kihong photo-send-give-DEC. POL 'Daughter-in-law Send me photo of Kihong'

Recall the previous example where Eunbyul tells her husband to put on a coat and not to open the window. When she sends such instant messages, she uses the IMV-POL structure, which, I note, also indicates the polite speech level marker as a face-saving marker, thus creating the ambiguity and polysemy of power and solidarity. In her polite speech level marker-included imperative messages, Eunbyul minimizes her face-threatening act, while also maneuvering power to look after Phillip and household chores. But simultaneously, given the couple's intentional use of the honorific speech level markers, her use of the polite speech level markers in those IMV-POL structured instant messages can also be interpreted as solidarity as a part of the couple's couplect. This observation suggests the versatile usage of honorific speech markers in context.

In a similar vein, we can analyze how Sara's mother-in-law uses the polite speech level marker, especially when asking for photos and videos of her grandson, Kihong. By taking upon the footing of the requestor, she reduces her face-threatening acts through the use of the polite form. That is, the polite speech level marker in the mother-in-law's messages signals face-saving

acts that can function similarly to indirect speech acts in which a speaker mitigates their own self-assertion.

The requests of Sara’s mother-in-law are ambiguous and polysemous in terms of power and solidarity, especially when interpreted in light of family-role identities. The highest-ranked person in the family hierarchy is Sara’s mother-in-law, who is also the mother of Insung and Inseok and the grandmother of Kihong. She exerts power and exercises her place in the hierarchy to make requests, which is always to be accepted by her daughter-in-law. But, at the same time, she also mitigates the face-threat by strategically using the polite speech level marker (POL) in examples 1 (“기홍 정면 사진 부탁드립니다” translated as ‘please send me photo of Kihong facing front’) and 2 (“기홍 사진 보내주세요” translated as ‘Daughter-in-law please send me photo of Kihong’) and by adding an apologetic expression in example 1 (“미안하지만” translated as ‘I am sorry but’). Whether the requests are linguistically mitigated or not, all are a display of power, but they are also a display of solidarity: They show interest in and connection to Kihong and his parents.

5.3 Footing Marker

In this excerpt, examined are instant messages between Doyoon and her mother-in-law. Their interaction occurs in Jia’s family-in-law chatroom – Jia and Doyoon are sisters-in-law. In this chatroom, Doyoon, her husband, her parents-in-law, her sister-in-law (Jia), and her brother-in-law (Jia’s husband) attend. Doyoon and her husband have three children. As they are working parents, Doyoon’s parents-in-law babysit their children. Right before the following interaction, the grandparents were babysitting Haneul (5 years old at the time), the second child of Doyoon. Haneul was not feeling well, as he had contracted hand-foot-mouth disease. The grandparents took him to the park in an art gallery nearby their place, to lift his mood.

(3)

LINE	SENDER	MESSAGE
1	Mother-in-law	July 18, 2016, 6:20PM Nine photos of Haneul in front of the fountain at the Seoul Arts Center
		July 18, 2016, 6:24PM 지루하고 따분한 집을 떠나 cilwuha-ko ttapwunha-n cip-ul ttena Boring-and dull-RL house-ACC leave
		예술의 전당 나들이 다녀왔답니다. yeyswuluy centang natuli tanye-oyss- ta-pnita The Seoul Arts Center outing gO.COME-PAST- QT-DEC.DEF
2	Mother-in-law	'We went on an outing to the Seoul Arts Center to make a getaway from home.'
		수족구로 입안까지 swu-cok-kwu-lo ip-an-kkaci Hand-foot-mouth-because mouth-inside-to
		좀 헐었지만 com hel-ess-ciman a little sore-PAST-although

		열은 yel-un Fever-TOP	없는 eps-nun not exist-RT	하늘이랍니다. Haneul-i-la- pnita . Haneul-NOM- QT -DEC. DEF
		'Haneul got some cold sores in his mouth because of hand, foot, and mouth disease, but he has no fever.'		
		July 18, 2016, 6:30PM		
3	Daughter-in-law	예고 ㄸㄸ eyko Oh my god	감사합니다 ㄸㄸ kamsaha- pnita thank-DEC. DEF	
		'Oh my god ㄸㄸ Thank you ㄸㄸ'		

I notice that the mother-in-law implements honorific speech level markers, especially when reporting on how the children spent the day during babysitting. In other cases, she uses the non-honorific speech level markers in the family chatroom. In theory, the mother-in-law does not have to use such honorific speech level markers since she is older and higher status in the family chatroom. However, by doing so, the mother-in-law linguistically signals her situational footing to a babysitter. Her distinct use of the speech level markers, I suggest, can thus be conceptualized as constituting a 'babysitter register' toward parents of the child, along with a discursive act of reporting. Given that the traditional use of the deferential marker creates formality, in this example, the mother-in-law, through the use of the deferential marker, discursively as well as symbolically puts down her power as a family senior. It also means that this babysitter register, which is proper in the typical babysitter-parent relationship (where parents are those who hold power over childcare and hire the babysitter), serves as a contextualization cue to indicate her taking upon a situational alignment as a babysitter.

The mother-in-law's use of the honorific speech level markers therefore contributes to framing the current interaction as a babysitting reporting frame (from the family elder's perspective), rather than the one between in-laws. Although the mother-in-law strategically takes on and displays responsibility as a babysitter, interestingly, her daughter-in-law, Doyoon, who is the mother of Haneul, rather frames her babysitting as a face-threatening act, as an imposition she has made. In theory, Doyoon, as the mother of Haneul, has the right to enact power over her babysitter. Instead, in line 3 ('Oh my god ㄸㄸ Thank you ㄸㄸ'), she expresses gratitude to her mother-in-law with crying eyes ("ㄸㄸ"). Those crying eyes, conveying her apologetic behavior, suggest that Doyoon mitigates her face-threatening act. By doing so, she preserves and conforms to the expected power dynamics in the parent(-in-law)-child(-in-law) relationship, rather than bringing in the parent of child-babysitter relationship. The mother-in-law's use of the honorific speech level marker stands out in comparison with Doyoon's. This, I argue, highlights how meanings of the honorific speech level markers are contextually constructed, emerging from situation circumstances and interactions between interlocutors.

5.4 Affective Marker

In the following excerpt, Kihong's grandmother uses the polite speech level marker in response to a photo of Kihong that was sent by Sara, who is her daughter-in-law as well as Kihong's mother. In the photo, Kihong whines and stretches his hand to grab a phone in Sara's hand.

(4)

LINE	SENDER	MESSAGE
1	Sara	January 21, 2015 6:29PM A photo of tearful Kihong trying to grab a phone that Sara is holding
2	Kihong's grandmother	January 21, 2015 6:29PM 우리 손주가 왜 울상이고 wuli soncwu-ka way wulsang-i-ko Our grandchild-NOM why tearful face-NOM-INTER.IE 'What makes our grandson somber' 할미 마음이 아파요 halmi maum-i aph-ayo halmi heart-NOM hurt-DEC.POL 'It breaks halmi 's heart'
3	Sara	January 21, 2015 6:34PM 휴대폰 달라고 그래요 ㅎㅎ hyutayphon tal-lako kulay- yo smartphone request-QT do so-DEC.POL 'He's whining so he can get my phone ㅎㅎ'

Across the family chatrooms in my study, grandparents employ the polite speech level marker when responding to daily photos and videos of their grandchildren who are not physically present in family chatrooms. The polite speech level marker (POL) is used by both Sara (line 3) and her mother-in-law (line 2), but the purpose of their usage is different. In her message, Sara uses it to display respect and politeness toward her mother-in-law because the mother-in-law occupies a higher level in the family hierarchy and also is older than Sara. Sara's use of polite speech level marker is socio-culturally expected.

Sara's mother-in-law (Kihong's grandmother) also employs the polite speech level marker in response to the photo, sent by her daughter-in-law, in line 2 (“우리 손주가 왜 울상이고 할미 마음이 아파요,” translated as ‘what makes our grandson somber It breaks *halmi*’s heart’). Considering Sara’s reason to use of the polite speech level marker, her mother-in-law does not have to use it when interacting with Sara. However, Sara’s mother-in-law makes use of the polite speech level marker in her message. She also utilizes *halmi* in the same message. 할미 (*halmi*) is an informal variant of the word, 할머니 (*halmeni*) that refers to ‘grandmother’ in English. According to the Standard Korean Language Dictionary, published by the National Institute of Korean Language, *halmi* is used when elderly women refer to themselves when talking to their grandchildren, who are the direct addressees in interaction, to lower and humble themselves.

Both the polite speech level marker and *halmi* suggest that the recipient of Sara’s mother-in-law’s message is her grandson, Kihong, not Sara. Thus, her message is constructed as if the grandmother were directly talking to her grandchild, although Kihong is not present in the chatroom in a way his grandmother is. Referring to herself as *halmi*, Kihong’s grandmother, as the highest-ranked family member, linguistically lowers herself for her grandson, who is the lowest-ranked in the family. She uses the honorific speech level markers, as contextualization cues, to discursively strengthen solidarity and thus show her affective alignment toward Kihong. In this sense, the word, *halmi*, suffices to display her affective footing work as well as perform her identity as a grandmother. However, with the addition of the polite speech level marker, the grandmother’s emotive alignment toward Kihong becomes much stronger, while also reinforcing her empathetic understanding of tearful Kihong in the photo. In other words, these linguistic devices not only create imaginary interaction with Kihong, but also accomplish her identity work of do(t)ing grandmother.

There is more to be said about how such linguistic maneuvers show grandmotherly love and care. While conducting playback interviews, I asked (grand)parent participants in the study and other parents and grandparents in Korea about what motivates family adults to use honorifics including the honorific speech level markers, when speaking to family children. The (grand)parents said to me that they intentionally use it in spoken interaction for the educational purposes of teaching manner and respect in language use (see Sung 2007 for Korean mothers' uses of the polite speech level marker to teach kids manners). But the analyzed examples are not the cases when (grand)parents have direct (face-to-face) interaction with family children for such an educational reason. Also, both the participants and other older Koreans mentioned to me that using honorifics to family (grand)children is because they deserve respect and love. One of them said to me that as children are human beings, adults owe them the same respect and kindness offered in any other relationship. These comments suggest that the use of honorific speech level markers is a powerful linguistic device for family elders to decrease hierarchical distance to build up solidarity with their grandchildren. But at the same time, it also can be interpreted as a power maneuver in that only family elders can exert it. If younger and lower-ranked family members use non-honorifics toward older family members for the exact same interactional goals, it would likely be perceived as rather rude and disrespectful.

Importantly, the function of the affective marker may appear to be undistinguished from that of the egalitarian marker (section 5.1) as both signal, to some extent, solidarity-building in family relationship and interactions. The difference between them, however, lies in the relationship between the interlocutors. In section 5.1, the same age married couple uses the honorific speech level markers not to lower one's hierarchical status to the other's, but to strengthen their sameness and equality as partners. Meanwhile, in the imaginary interaction between the grandmother and the visually present grandson, the grandmother's linguistically putting herself down intends to show affection for her grandchild, rather than their sameness in the family hierarchy. If the current example is interpreted as the case for the egalitarian marker usage, the honorific speech level marker should perform the same function when her grandchild uses it, when talking to his grandmother – however, in such a case, the speech level markers are normally recognized as a politeness marker.

6 Conclusion

Building upon previous studies on Korean speech level markers, primarily based on Korean media discourse, the chapter demonstrates the usage of the honorific speech level markers in contemporary Korean family discourse via instant messages. By analyzing discursive functions of the honorific speech level markers in family instant messages, I have shown how the honorific speech level markers are used as contextualization cues and thus inextricably tied up with the context where they are used, performing different discursive functions that go beyond politeness: 1) an egalitarian marker, 2) a face-saving marker, 3) a footing marker, and 4) an affective marker.

Drawing from Gumperz's (1982) notion of contextualization cues, the chapter has shown how such four types, as contextualization cues, signal that family members are maneuvering power and solidarity, thus performing their family-related identities, in various family contexts made in family chatrooms. In the couple's chatroom, the honorific speech level markers are contextualization cues that highlight how the couple linguistically constructs and values equality in their interaction, thus reinforcing solidarity. In Sara's mother-in-law messages to Sara, the

honorific speech level markers, as contextualization cues, suggest how the mother-in-law skillfully maneuvers her hierarchical power in relation to her daughter-in-law to minimize her face-threatening act, when requesting photos and videos of her grandson (i.e., Sara's son). The speech level markers also function as a footing marker as a contextualization cue. The mother-in-law, through the polite speech level marker, signals her taking upon the footing as a babysitter who takes care of her grandchildren while her children(-in-law) work full time. Lastly, the polite speech level markers are contextualization cues that display the grandmother's affective alignment toward her grandson. In each situation, the honorific speech level markers are strategically employed by family members whose hierarchical status is higher, when they talk to those lower in the family hierarchy (e.g., mothers-in-law to daughters-in-law and grandmothers to grandchildren) or by those in the same hierarchy level (between the married couple). This presents how the honorific speech level markers as contextualization cues illuminate that their interactional functions can be contextualized, which is a far cry from their traditionally recognized functions as politeness markers.

Oriented toward the theme of the edited volume, specifically, the chapter closely engages in how (im)politeness is not inherently pre-given in linguistic properties of Korean honorific speech level markers but is rather a discursive and contextual construct. My analysis shows how meanings of the honorific speech level markers are discursively and situationally negotiated and constructed to meet various communicative purposes. This demonstrates how Korean honorifics, in the context of family talk online, do not exclusively and always adhere to social factors such as age, gender, and role and status. Especially when it comes to managing the complexity and nuance of power and solidarity dynamics, Korean speech level markers are deemed to be identity-constituting as well as context-specific.

What has struck me most is the ways in which the older women in the family chatrooms strategically and appropriately use the honorific speech level markers and therefore perform their family-related identities. In presented examples, one of them employs the polite speech level marker when responding to daily photos and videos of her grandson in order to linguistically construct an affective alignment toward him. But, in the babysitting situation, the honorific speech level marker is adopted as a babysitter register so that the mother-in-law (or the grandmother) enacts as a babysitter of her grandchild, especially when reporting to the working parent of the child (i.e., her daughter-in-law) on what has happened to the child during the day. In addition, the older woman uses the honorific speech level markers to save her face when making a photo/video request. These examples clearly show how, in the chatrooms where communication is primarily written with the absence of paralinguistic cues, the honorific speech level markers, as contextualization cues, play a key role in making specific and clear nuanced meanings that the senders intend to convey in their instant messages.

Moreover, the married couple's language use, shown through their instant messages and interviews, highlights how the egalitarian marriage relationship is linguistically accomplished. Also, the wife, by using the IMV-POL structure (see section 5.1), strategically maneuvers power and solidarity to perform her spousal identity, through which she displays the enactment of doing being a caring wife who takes care of her husband and household affairs, but at the same time she enacts power to do so, while also saving her face. It is, according to Tannen (2007:34), the ambiguity and polysemy of power and solidarity that “a linguistic strategy intended as a connection maneuver functions simultaneously as a power maneuver.” This dual aspect of the honorific speech level markers also means that discursive functions of the honorific speech level markers identified in this chapter are not mutually exclusive, while also emphasizing the

importance of viewing the honorific speech level markers as discursively fluid and varied, rather than constrained to the context of politeness.

Lastly, the analysis undertaken here has extended our knowledge of how language use links together online interactions and offline interactions, in terms of performing everyday family lives and identities (c.f., the blurring of online and offline interactions in Bolander and Locher 2020). In that regard, future research needs to examine more closely how the family members considered in this chapter use Korean honorific speech level markers in face-to-face spoken family interaction. Also, further work is needed to fully understand the usage of the honorific speech level markers in other types of family group chats such as between (adult) siblings as well as between a married couple with age differences. These two specific future studies will further delve into a range of discursive functions of Korean honorific speech level markers, not limited to (im)politeness, in different types of contemporary Korean family interactions.

Note

1.

Acronym	Meaning
ACC	Accusative Particle
AP	Addressing particle
CUTE	CUTE
DEC	Declarative (clause type)
DEF	Deferential (speech level)
EXC	Exclamative (clause type)
IE	Informal Ending
IMV	Imperative (clause type)
INFR	Inferential
NOM	Nominative Particle
PAST	Past Tense
PLN	Plain (speech level)
POL	Polite (speech level)
QT	Quotative Particle
RT	Relativizer Suffix
TOP	Topical Particle

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