

Korean honorification: a kind of expressive meaning

Jong-Bok Kim · Peter Sells

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Abstract Honorification in Korean recognizes the elevated social status of a participant in a clause with respect to the subject and/or the hearer. Honorific marking may be manifest as a nominal suffix, a special honorific form of a noun, an honorific case particle, an honorific marker on a verb, or a special honorific form of a verb. Previous accounts have typically proposed a honorification feature specified as [HON +], with unmarked forms being [HON –]. The key idea in this paper is that these approaches are misguided and that honorification is a privative feature, syntactically and semantically. On the syntactic side, we argue that the frequently adopted position that honorific marking in Korean is a kind of subject–verb agreement is deeply misguided. Few previous accounts succeed with regard to the full range of facts, which are of three types. First, multiple expressions of honorific marking within the same clause progressively elevate the social status of the referent: the effect is cumulative, which [HON ±] cannot describe. Second, under previous analyses, some nouns have to be given a spurious and ultimately inconsistent ambiguity with respect to their honorific properties. Third, the different expressions of “honorification” do not mean exactly the same thing, which makes an account of multiple honorification within a clause in terms of agreement implausible. On the semantic side, we, building on ideas in Potts (*The logic of conventional*

J.-B. Kim (✉)
School of English, Kyung Hee University,
1 Hoegi-dong, Dongdaemoon-gu,
Seoul 130-701, Korea
e-mail: jongbok@khu.ac.kr

P. Sells
School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London,
Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square,
London WC1H 0XG, UK
e-mail: ps58@soas.ac.uk

implicatures. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2005) and Potts and Kawahara (*Proceedings of semantics and linguistic theory*. CLC Publications, Ithaca, NY, pp. 235–254, 2004), propose that honorific forms introduce a dimension of meaning in the realm of expressive meaning. As a kind of expressive meaning, honorification is simply absent from all forms which are not positively marked for expressing it.

Keywords Honorification · Korean · Expressive meaning

1 Introduction: Morphosyntactic features versus expressive meaning

Honorification in Korean falls along two dimensions, as in Japanese. The basic example in (1a) has counterparts with an honorific subject (b), politeness to the hearer (c), and both (d):

- | | | | |
|-------|---------------------|-----------------|----------------------|
| (1)a. | ku | salam-i | ka-ss-ta |
| | that | person-Nom | go-Past-Decl |
| | ‘That person went.’ | | |
| b. | ku | pwun-i | ka-si-ess-ta |
| | that | person(Hon)-Nom | go-Hon-Past-Decl |
| c. | ku | salam-i | ka-ss-upni-ta |
| | that | person-Nom | go-Past-Pol-Decl |
| d. | ku | pwun-i | ka-si-ess-upni-ta |
| | that | person(Hon)-Nom | go-Hon-Past-Pol-Decl |

These types are sometimes known as the “performative” type (honorification to hearer) and the “propositional” type (honorification to a clause-internal argument, such as the subject), following Harada (1976). The propositional type, which is the focus of this paper, honors an argument whose referent is linguistically honored, and we henceforth refer to this as “argument honorification.” In (1) this information is encoded by the suppletive honorific noun *pwun* and by the verbal suffix (*u*)*si*, which marks honorification of the subject. Roughly speaking, honoring an argument recognizes that its referent has some social superiority in the speech context. We use the term “target” to indicate the referent of the clausal argument which is linguistically honored; exactly how the target is determined is discussed in Sect. 2. Depending on the particular expression, this may be achieved by raising the target above the speaker or hearer (honorification), or by lowering the speaker relative to the target (humilification). Looking at the grammars of the languages as a whole, both Korean and Japanese appear to have both honorific and humilific forms (see Martin (1975, 1992), among many others; we take up humilifics in Sect. 4).

Argument honorification has been commonly analyzed as an instance of agreement between a verb and the argument as a syntactic phenomenon analogous to subject–verb agreement for person and number, or other

features, familiar from Indo-European languages (Ahn (2002), Koopman (2005), Hasegawa (2005), Toribio (1990), Ura (1993); Namai (2000) offers a dissenting view). Following this analogy, these syntactic views typically assume that the subject has some honorific feature specification which the verb inherits. Harada's (1976) "object honorification" has also been treated on a par with syntactic object-agreement, and in fact has recently been argued to have an empirically verifiable syntactic component by Boeckx and Niinuma (2004) for Japanese, which has a much wider system of non-subject honorification than Korean.

A different tradition of analysis has recognized the rather non-syntactic nature of honorification and has treated it as a pragmatic phenomenon. In the generative literature, several proposals within the Head-Driven Phrase Structure Grammar (HPSG) framework in particular have analyzed honorification solely in terms of constraints on context (such as Han (1991), Park (1992), Pollard and Sag (1994), Lee (1996), Choi (2003)); the recent account of Kim and Yang (2005) treats honorification as also having a formal syntactic aspect. The HPSG analyses all specify that each honorific item introduces constraints on its referent, or the subject's referent in the case of an honorific verb, which have to unify. This also follows the standard treatment of Indo-European subject-verb agreement in terms of unification of the subject's information and the verb's information (see Pollard and Sag (1994)), though it moves the locus of agreement from the syntax or semantics to the pragmatics.

In the syntactic treatments of honorification, feature-value pairs [HON +] and [HON -] are typically introduced, if any explicit analysis is given, to characterize the elements that may enter into agreement with each other. For example, *ka-si-ta* is the [HON +] form of 'go' and *ka-ta* is the [HON -] form. The pragmatic treatments have similarly posited an opposition, in which *ka-si-ta* means that the relation of the referent of the subject being socially superior to the speaker holds in the context of utterance and *ka-ta* means that the relation does not hold. Some analyses have allowed three values for [HON], with a third "unspecified" or *any* value (e.g., Yun (1991), Kim and Yang (2005), Nariyama et al. (2005)). For example, the subject in (2a) might be treated as [HON +]; if so, the subject in (2b) is [HON *any*], and the subject in (2c) is [HON -]:

- | | | |
|-------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|
| (2)a. | <i>sensayng-nim-i</i> | <i>ka-si-ess-ta</i> |
| | teacher-Hon-Nom | go-Hon-Past-Decl |
| b. | <i>sensayng-i</i> | <i>ka-si-ess-ta</i> |
| | teacher-Nom | go-Hon-Past-Decl |
| c. | <i>koyangi-ka</i> | <i>ka-(<i>*si</i>)-ess-ta</i> |
| | cat-Nom | go-(<i>*Hon</i> -)Past-Decl |

The reasoning here is that if *sensayng-nim* in (2a) is [HON +], then the subject in (2b) should not be specified in that way, for it precisely lacks the honorific augment *nim*. Nevertheless, this bare form is compatible with the honorific verb, unlike the non-human subject *koyangi* in (2c). Hence (2b) is treated as having a [HON *any*] subject and a [HON +] verb; these specifications may unify, and the

example is well-formed. Note that, strictly speaking, there is no agreement between the subject and verb, as the subject has no value for HON to pass on to the verb.¹ This lack of verifiable agreement features on the subject is a problem facing many previous accounts, as we detail below, especially in Sect. 3.1.

In this paper we offer an outline of an analysis of honorification which treats it as a privative specification: essentially, only the positive values mentioned above exist. We argue that there should be no notions like “non-honorific form,” due in part to a consideration of the nature of honorification, which we address directly. In addition, we will present considerable evidence for the view that honorification is a phenomenon which has very little in common with canonical subject–verb agreement. In fact, the interpretations of honorific marking on a noun phrase and of subject honorific marking on a verb are different, so it would be quite surprising for there to be a grammatical condition of agreement between subject and verb.² As we will show, it is far from straightforward to provide a coherent system of syntactic feature specification for nouns and verbs which applies to the full range of data.

On the semantic side, we assume that honorification is fundamentally an expressive derivative (see Beard (1995), Volpe (2005)), part of the expressive content of an utterance, which is present in parallel to its regular proposition content (see Cruse (1986), Kaplan (1999), Potts (2005)). Potts and Kawahara (2004) present a sketch of the analysis of Japanese honorification as an “emotive” component of expressive meaning (see Sect. 5.1). Emotive meaning is continuous, and incremental, in the sense that the more of it that is presented by the speaker, the stronger effect (cf. Chang (1996) and Choe (2004) on “honorification strengthening,” rather than “honorific spreading”). If I call you *pig*, it would be ruder for me to call you *filthy pig*, possibly ruder if I use *filthy swine*, and so on. It can easily be seen that a specification like [RUDE +] on lexical items will not suffice for such examples, which are all rude, but to differing degrees.

The examples in (3)–(4), from Martin (1992, 637, 298), illustrate the forms of honorification in Korean and its incremental nature:

- (3) moksa-*nim-kkeyse* ku *malssum-ul* ha-*si-ess-upni-ta*
 pastor-Hon-Hon.Subj that word(Hon)-Acc do-Hon-Past-Pol-Decl
 ‘The pastor said that.’

¹ More specifically, the unification of non-conflicting features is a central part of the account of agreement in non-transformational approaches, as opposed to specified feature (or value) copying (a.k.a. feature valuation), most recently manifest in the notion of Agree in Minimalist syntax (e.g., Chomsky (2000)).

² With regard to the claim of Boeckx and Niinuma (2004) that non-subject honorification in Japanese is object agreement, Bobaljik and Yatsushiro (2006) offer several arguments why this is a (syntactic) miscategorization, and in fact the phenomenon has a wider range of targets than objects (see Sect. 4).

(3) is a very honorific example, which has four markers of honorification in it (in italics). The incremental aspect of honorific marking can be further observed in the following dataset:

- (4)a. coh-un sayngkak-i-pni-ta
 good-Mod idea-Cop-Pol-Decl
 b. coh-un sayngkak-i-*si*-pni-ta
 good-Mod idea-Cop-Hon-Pol-Decl
 c. coh-*usi*-n sayngkak-i-pni-ta
 good-Hon-Mod idea-Cop-Pol-Decl
 d. coh-*usi*-n sayngkak-i-*si*-pni-ta
 good-Hon-Mod idea-Cop-Hon-Pol-Decl
 ‘That’s a good idea you have there.’

In (4), the (a) example is not honorific; (b) and (c) are honorific, and (d) is very honorific. In general, the more honorific forms are used, the more honorific is the whole expression.³ The examples in (5) make a similar point of increasing honorification:

- (5)a. ka-ci anh-ass-ta
 go-Comp Neg-Past-Decl
 b. ka-si-ci anh-ass-ta
 go-Hon-Comp Neg-Past-Decl
 c. ka-ci anh-*usi*-ess-ta
 go-Comp Neg-Hon-Past-Decl
 d. ka-si-ci anh-*usi*-ess-ta
 go-Hon-Comp Neg-Hon-Past-Decl
 ‘(Someone) did not go.’

Returning to the meaning of emotive terms, their meanings are generally privative in nature. If instead of calling you *pig*, I speak to you using non-emotive terms, this does not mean that I am being deliberately non-rude [RUDE -!]; it means that I am simply not introducing that emotive component into my utterance. We feel that honorification has exactly this aspect of expressive meaning, as Potts and Kawahara suggest: it is incremental, and it is privative. Hence, while we will view *ka-si-ta* (‘go-Hon-Decl’) as an honorific form, *ka-ta* (‘go-Decl’) will simply be a form that lacks any expressive content: it is certainly not an honorific form, but it is equally certainly not a non-honorific form, any more than me calling you *person* rather than *pig* is an expression of [RUDE -].

Honorification also has a performative aspect: simply by saying it, the speaker means something and also does something (see Potts (2005, 180)). That is to say, the mere act of using an honorific form is an act of paying

³ Some speakers find the examples in (4b/d) less than fully natural, while others find all four examples natural (in the sense of having contexts in which they can be used).

respect, just like bowing, lowering one's voice, etc. More pointedly, Kaplan (1999, 27) observes "... if I am correct about parts of language being marked to *display* respect ... then the use of such language, even if thought to be insincere, is *respectful behavior*, and should produce an affective response in its own right." (See also footnote 6.) In this sense, even Harada's propositional honorifics have a performative aspect. In Korean at least, failure to use an honorific verb with (*u*)*si* when the subject is socially superior is typically perceived as rude, and it is this social pressure which strongly favors the use of honorific verbs predicated of honorifiable subjects; such examples have the appearance of exhibiting (grammatical) subject–verb agreement.

The paper is organized as follows. In the following section, we present the main expressions of honorification in Korean. In Sect. 3, we present a range of arguments against the idea that verbs and their subjects could match in some specification for a feature HON. Section 4 introduces further data involving non-subject honorific forms. Finally, in Sect. 5, we draw together our observations about what honorific marking really means and suggest the basis of a formal analysis (building directly on Potts and Kawahara (2004)) of honorification as expressive meaning.

2 Honorific forms

In this section we present the ways in which Korean provides for honorific marking on nouns, and on verbs. This leads into the discussion in Sect. 3 of the ways in which honorific marking diverges from normal expectations about subject–verb agreement.

2.1 Honorification on Nouns

Some nouns can take the suffix *nim*, which roughly means 'honorable person.' Only a certain subset of nouns, which we refer to as *status* nouns, may host this suffix. For example, *uysa* ('doctor') may host *nim*, but *salam* ('person') may not.⁴ The use of *nim* means that the speaker recognizes that the referent of the host noun is socially superior to himself/herself. It is also possible for *nim* to be suffixed to a kinship term relative to a socially superior referent as in *atu-nim* ('son-Hon') or *tta-nim* ('daughter-Hon') even if the son or daughter as such is not socially superior to the speaker.

The honorific subject marker *kkeyse* is a kind of case marker, which also means that the speaker recognizes that the referent of the host noun is socially superior to himself/herself. It typically cooccurs with honorific marking on the predicate, as (6a) shows.

⁴ Not all speakers accept *uysa-nim*, but we find it amply attested on the web.

- (6)a. ape-nim-kkeyse mence ka-*(si-)ess-ta
 father-Hon-Hon.Subj first go-*(Hon-)Past-Decl
 ‘Father went first.’
- b. ape-nim-i mence ka-(si-)ess-ta
 father-Hon-Nom first go-(Hon-)Past-Decl

Examples like these suggest that if *kkeyse* is used, (*u*)*si* must appear on the verb, but not vice versa (as observed by Yoon (2005)). Lee and Ramsey (2000) note that the use of *kkeyse* is often not strictly necessary, and except for very formal situations, it can add a sense of “overdone honorification.” They observe: “. . . rather than thinking of (*u*)*si* and *kkeyse* as linked together, it is probably closer to reality to consider occurrences of (*u*)*si* . . . as compatible with any subject particle and *kkeyse* as showing the function of showing an extreme level of deference on the speaker’s part” (242). The implication observed by Yoon shows that the extreme deference marked by *kkeyse* does not fit well with the lack of deference signaled by verb not marked by (*u*)*si*.⁵ As such, the unacceptable version of (6a) is more a matter of pragmatic infelicity rather than strict ungrammaticality. The imperative example (6c), a version of (6a), very strongly favors the honorific suffix on the verb in the presence of *kkeyse* on the subject:

- (6)c. kyoswu-nim-kkeyse mence ka-*(se-)yo!
 teacher-Hon-Hon.Subj first go-*(Hon-)Imp
 ‘Teacher, go first.’

kkeyse marks a subject, but only marks one of the subjects in a multiple subject construction (see Yoon (2005)), and it marks the subject as nominative (see Sells (1995, 2004, 2006)):

- (7)a. cheli-nun ape-nim-kkeyse pwuca-i-*(si)-ta
 cheli-Foc father-Hon-Hon.Subj rich-Cop-*(Hon)-Decl
 ‘It is Cheli whose father is rich.’
- b. kim-sensayng-nim-kkeyse twulccay atu-nim-i
 kim-teacher-Hon-Hon.Subj second son-Hon-Nom
 chencay-i-si-ta
 genius-Cop-Hon-Decl
 ‘Professor Kim’s second son is a genius.’

To a first approximation, only those NPs which are headed by a status noun may host the honorific subject marker *kkeyse*. So while *ape-nim-uy son* ‘father’s hand’ is an ‘honorific NP’ (cf. (11c) below) in one sense, for it can participate in apparent honorific agreement with the verb, it cannot host the honorific subject marker *kkeyse*, and the head noun *son* itself cannot host *nim* (informally

⁵ Specifically, an example with *kkeyse* but without (*u*)*si* would mean that the speaker elevates the subject very high with respect to the speaker but not at all with respect to the hearer. (see Sect. 5.2.)

translated as ‘honorable person’). Importantly, as one illustration of the complexity of the system, the class of NPs which participate in apparent ‘honorific agreement’ with verbs differs from the class of NPs whose heads can be overtly marked as honorific by *nim* or *kkeyse*.

However, the distribution of *kkeyse* is wider than that of *nim*. The *wh*-pronoun *nwukwu* can host *kkeyse*, as shown in (8), but not *nim*; so **nwukwu-nim* is ungrammatical. It is common for younger speakers to use *nwukwu-kkeyse* (we found many hits on Google), but some speakers prefer *enu pwun-kkeyse* (‘which person(Hon)-Hon.Subj’).

- (8) *nwukwu/enu pwun-kkeyse* *i* *kes-ul* *kecelha-si-keyss-ni?*
 who/which person(Hon)-Hon.Subj this thing-Acc reject-Hon-Fut-Q
 ‘Who/which person will reject this?’

As *kkeyse* marks a high degree of deference, an example with just the regular nominative-marked *nwukwu-ka* is a version of (8) that is respectful enough for most social settings.

Informally, we can say that the conditions in (9) characterize the use of *nim* and *kkeyse* to a first approximation (“su” and “sp” are intended to be shorthand for the referents of the subject and the speaker respectively, and > for social superiority):

- (9) if *su* > *sp*, *nim* or *kkeyse* may be used;
 if *sp* > *su*, *nim* or *kkeyse* are not used.

Sometimes the actual referent “su” is designated by only part of the grammatical subject, as we discuss immediately below.

2.2 Subject honorification on verbs

(*u*)*si* on a verb is informally characterized as subject honorification. More precisely, it elevates the social status of a human referent related to the grammatical subject of the clause, with respect to the hearer. Hence, while we can find examples where a body-part subject appears in a clause with a verb marked by (*u*)*si*, thereby honoring the human individual whose body part was mentioned, such a body-part noun cannot be marked itself by the forms mentioned above, *nim* or *kkeyse*. We refer to the target of (*u*)*si* as the ‘maximal human referent’ of the subject.

A very basic fact about (*u*)*si* indicates why it could not be agreeing in some feature specification with a noun phrase (typically) marked by *nim* or *kkeyse*: honorification on the verb does not mean the same as honorification on a noun phrase. It is clear that honorific marking on a noun phrase elevates the referent of that phrase **relative to the speaker**. However, according to Han (1991), Ihm et al. (1988) and Lee and Kuno (1995), (*u*)*si* means that the maximal human referent of the subject is socially superior **relative to the hearer**. Hence we have these conditions on (*u*)*si*, using “hr” for “hearer”:

- (10) if $su > hr$, $(u)si$ is used;
 if $hr > su$, $(u)si$ is not used.

Naturally, if the su is socially superior to both sp and hr , $(u)si$ is used, and in canonical conversational settings, the speaker intends to elevate the target above both the hearer and the speaker him- or herself, though, strictly, with no accompanying honorific marker on the subject itself, an example is compatible with sp being socially superior to su , or the two being roughly on the same level (see e.g., (19a) below). On the other hand, if the target su is not socially superior to the hearer, $(u)si$ is not used.

For a verb marked with $(u)si$, the target is actually the maximal human referent of the subject. Note that the maximal human referent is not necessarily the surface subject, and in some cases the target of honorification is unexpressed.⁶ In the following examples, all from Sohn (1999), the target is either part of the subject, or a topic, but not the subject itself:

- (11) a. ce-uy apeci-nun khi-ka khu-si-pni-ta
 I-Gen father-Top height-Nom big-Hon-Pol-Decl
 ‘My father is tall.’
 b. apeci-uy somay-ka ccalp-usey-yo
 father-Gen sleeve-Nom short-Hon-Level
 ‘The sleeves (e.g., of your shirt) are short, Dad.’
 c. apeci-uy koyangi-ka khu-(*si)-ta
 father-Gen cat-Nom big-(*Hon)-Decl
 ‘My father’s cat is big.’

We feel that the use of $(u)si$ is related to the topic as much as strictly to the subject, as Yun (1991) suggested, but perhaps where the topic is more who the utterance is relevant to, rather than strictly “about” (see also Sect. 3.2 and 5.2, for more examples where the honored one is not the referent of the subject). Often the topic is indeed the subject of the clause, and often the subject is the addressee in natural discourse. Given the fact that honorific verb forms in particular are used performatively, the relevant notion may be something like ‘person in the context understood as the initiator of the relevant action or bearer of the relevant property,’ a notion we return to in Sect. 5.2.

2.3 Irregular forms

The productive pattern for verbal honorification applies to all verbs, except for a few which have irregular subject honorific forms, shown in (12). We provide these forms for the sake of completeness, their behavior in the honorific system is the same as that of regularly inflecting verbs.

⁶ According to Sohn (1999), honorific marking is obligatory for inalienable body parts, ideas, health, etc., but optional for books, houses, business, cars, clothes, money, flowers, etc., which may be considered to be under the control of the target.

- (12)a. mek-ta ~ *mek-usi-ta ~ capswusi-ta ('eat')
 b. ca-ta ~ *ca-si-ta ~ cwumwusi-ta ('sleep')
 c. iss-ta ~ iss-usi-ta ~ kyeysi-ta ('be, exist, have')

For *mek-ta* and *ca-ta*, the honorific form supplants the regular honorific in (*u*)*si*. Interestingly, as noted by Martin (1992, 319ff.), the verb *iss-ta* splits: the regular *iss-usi-ta* means 'have(Hon)' while the suppletive *kyeysi-ta* means 'be/exist(Hon)'. The irregular honorific forms are also morphologically irregular in that they can be followed by the infinitive-like verb ending *e/a*, unlike any regular subject honorific form (see Han (1991), Sells (1995)); the honorific information is encoded as part of the verb root, as in (13a):

- (13)a. capswusi-e po-(si)-ta
 eat(Hon)-Comp try-(Hon-)Decl
 'try eating'
 b. (kong-ul) cap-(*usi)-e po-(si)-ta
 (ball-Acc) catch-(*Hon)-Comp try-(Hon-)Decl
 'try catching (a ball)'

A regular verb such as *cap-ta* cannot host both the honorific marker and the *e/a* infinitive marker, glossed here as Comp, as these two forms compete for the same morphological position.⁷

3 Honorification is not agreement

In our view, there are various reasons why even the relation between a subject and a verb, with honorification involved, should not be treated as agreement.⁸ One reason was given above in Sect. 2.2: honorific marking on a noun phrase and honorific marking on the verb do not mean the same thing; if they agreed in some feature specification, that specification would have to be interpreted (possibly differently) in each position where the agreement is manifest. As one reviewer points out, there is no technical problem here—honorific marking could interact with different nodes in different places in the syntax in different semantic ways. Hence, our position is that treating honorification as involving agreement is unlikely to be particularly insightful, at least as far as the mapping from syntax to interpretation is concerned. And certainly, by the judicious use of feature specifications and null (non-honorific) suffixes corresponding to the overt honorific ones, initially problematic data like that in (2) could be given a generative syntactic account.

Our claim is that the key to understanding honorification is to base an analysis in its expressive and privative nature. Our proposal is that the nature of

⁷ The surface form of the first verb in (13b) is *cap-a*, due to a regular rule of Korean morphophonology.

⁸ Some of our arguments in this section are anticipated in part by Chang (1973) and Choe (2004).

the honorific system is best understood from the following perspective: that rather than participating in agreement, each (positively specified) honorific form in a given example provides some information about the social status of the target relative to the speaker or the hearer, and there must be some consistency about how the speaker manages such information. In this section we present several arguments to show that there is no plausible sense in which syntactic feature specifications play a role in the analysis of honorification.

Further, a well-known fact whose theoretical significance has not been fully appreciated is that there are contexts of use which do not call for deference, as in news reporting or textbook descriptions, and in which honorific forms are not used (see the discussion below around example (48) in Sect. 5.2). Yet no other syntactic conditions or principles are suspended in such contexts.

3.1 What are the values of an HON feature, and which nouns have them?

Continuing to focus on subject honorification, the traditional idea is that the subject has some feature specifications with which the verb agrees. This idea seems to underlie all syntactic treatments of Korean subject honorification as agreement, and so such treatments assume specifications like [HON +] and [HON -] as a starting point.⁹

A few nouns in Korean are unspecified morphologically for honorific properties but nevertheless co-occur with verbs which are both honorific and non-honorific, as in (14)–(16), including the *wh*-phrase *nwu(kwu)* and the null argument *pro*:

- (14)a. *nwu(kwu)-ka o-ass-ni?*
 who-Nom come-Past-Q
 ‘Who came?’
 b. *nwu(kwu)-ka o-si-ess-ni?*
 who-Nom come-Hon-Past-Q
 ‘Who(Hon) came?’
- (15)a. *pang-ey iss-upni-kka?*
 room-Loc be-Pol-Q
 ‘Is (someone) in the room?’
 b. *pang-ey kyeyisi-pni-kka?*
 room-Loc Hon.be-Pol-Q
 ‘Is (someone(Hon)) in the room?’

⁹ Volpe (2005) offers a syntactic account of honorification wherein an expressive head Exp[Honor] is introduced into the structure, as many times as necessary to get the right overt output. There is no ‘negative’ or ‘absent’ value of this feature, and Volpe proposes that cooccurrence restrictions between a subject and an honorifically marked predicate are to handled as cases of semantic selection. This account shares many properties in spirit with our proposals here.

Similarly, a negative polarity item like *amwuto* may appear with either type of verb:

- (16)a. *amwuto eps-ess-ta*
 anyone Neg.be-Past-Decl
 ‘No one was there.’
 b. *amwuto an kyeyssi-ess-ta*
 anyone Neg be.Hon-Past-Decl
 ‘No one(Hon) was there.’

In order to generate the correct verb forms, it has to be assumed that there are two versions of *nwu(kwu)*, *amwuto*, *pro*, specified as [HON +] or [HON –]. Intuitively, they should truly be unspecified, as this is part of the point of their lexical meanings; and of course, *pro* has no overt form at all. Any account which relied on specifying [HON +] versions of these nouns would be very unnatural: these would be the only forms in Korean which are honorific in the absence of any morphological clue.

A second consideration showing how problematic many previous assumptions about honorification are involves the issue of which nouns could plausibly be marked for an HON feature. In Sect. 2.1 we introduced the honorific augment *nim*, which attaches to nouns of status, or family relation (e.g., *moksa-nim* ‘pastor’) or *eme-nim* ‘mother’). However, *nim* does not attach to all nouns which intuitively have some honorific potential. For example **elun-nim* ‘adult’ is ill-formed, though there is no semantic or pragmatic reason for this. One possible approach to this would be to specify *elun* as [HON –], so that *elun-nim* would involve a conflict of HON values. In turn, this approach would predict that **nwukwu-nim* ‘who’ should be acceptable, as *nwukwu* has a [HON +] variant (see (14b) above and (30) below). However, there is no form **nwukwu-nim*. Traditionally, the noun *taythonglyeng* ‘president’ also does not combine with *nim*, though it clearly refers to a socially superior individual; however, a recent Google search found over 300,000 hits of *taythonglyeng-nim*.

The alternative is to simply list, or otherwise characterize in terms of saliently honorifiable cultural concepts, the nouns which can host *nim*; although perhaps unexciting, this approach at least has the potential to provide empirical adequacy.

Next, we return to the examples in (2), looking carefully at the manifestation of honorific marking on the subject and on the predicate:

- (2)a. *sensayng-nim-i ka-si-ess-ta*
 teacher-Hon-Nom go-Hon-Past-Decl
 b. *sensayng-i ka-si-ess-ta*
 teacher-Nom go-Hon-Past-Decl
 c. *koyangi-ka ka-(*si-)ess-ta*
 cat-Nom go-(*Hon-)Past-Decl

The examples in (2a) and (2c) appear straightforward, but how is (2b) to be analyzed in terms of an agreement mechanism? If it is assumed that the plain noun *sensayng* is [HON +], then (17) cannot be accounted for:

- (17) *sensayng-i* *ka-ss-ta*
 teacher-Nom go-Past-Decl

This example is a problem, for if *sensayng* is [HON +], then (17) has a [HON +] subject and a [HON -] verb in violation of a putative agreement constraint. As discussed by Han (1991), Park (1992) and Pollard and Sag (1994), (2b) and (17) are unusual examples, but they are not syntactically ill-formed.¹⁰ They may even be awkward, as the social contexts which would license them might deviate from the understood social norms. On the other hand, (2a) is a canonical example.

Nevertheless, there are contexts in which the non-canonical examples such as (17) may appear, as illustrated by (18) and (19):

- (18) (*haksayng-i* *ka-ci* *anh-ko*) *sensayng-i* *ka-ss-ta*
 (student-Nom go-Comp Neg-Conj) teacher-Nom go-Past-Decl
 ‘The student didn’t go but the teacher went.’

- (19) *kim sensayng-i* *ka-ss-ta*
 Kim teacher-Nom go-Past-Decl
 ‘Teacher Kim (or just: Mr./Mrs. Kim) went.’
 (Context: Mr./Mrs./Teacher Kim is one of my colleagues; I am on the same social level as him/her.)

The correct account of these examples must involve the incremental nature of honorification: they do not involve feature clash, which a syntactic agreement account would be forced into, but rather they involve unusual combinations of the degrees of expressed social superiority involving the speaker, hearer, and referent of the subject.

The continuous and incremental nature of honorification is evident from the following examples, versions of (19), with a rough specification of the context of each example shown:

- (20) a. *kim sensayng-i* *ka-si-ess-ta*
 Kim teacher-Nom go-Hon-Past-Decl
 (Context: Teacher Kim is one of my colleagues, and I am being slightly polite to him/her, by indicating respect to him/her (primarily) relative to the hearer (cf. (19)).)
- b. *kim sensayng-kkeyse* *ka-si-ess-ta*
 Kim teacher-Hon.subj go-Hon-Past-Decl

¹⁰ In fact, these analyses effectively propose a clash of honorification values of 1 (yes) and 0 (no) in the contextual information of the mismatching examples, though Han and Park imply that this clash can have some informative value. The points about well-formedness that these authors made seem to have been misunderstood in some of the subsequent literature.

(Context: Teacher Kim is one of my colleagues, and I am being more respectful towards him/her than in the previous examples.)

- c. kim sensayng-nim-kkeyse ka-si-ess-ta
 Kim teacher-Hon-Hon.subj go-Hon-Past-Decl
 (This is the most respectful example.)

(20a) may be considered a little strange, but this is not a fact of grammar. In using an example of this form, I (the speaker) have failed to take the opportunity to elevate the teacher with respect to myself (the speaker) by not using *nim* on the subject; yet I have elevated the teacher with respect to you (the hearer), but using (*u*)*si* on the verb. Hence such an example requires a context in which it is socially acceptable for me to consider the teacher on the same level as myself, yet superior to you, the hearer.

The account sketched here follows the description in Han (1991). Han also discusses the converse type of example:

- (21) kim sensayng-nim-i o-ass-e.yo
 Kim teacher-Hon-Nom come-Past-level
 ‘Teacher Kim came.’

By using this specific expression, the speaker elevates the subject over him- or herself but not over the hearer. Han observes that this example can be used when the speaker is one of Teacher Kim’s students, and where the hearer is Teacher Kim’s father. Hence the student elevates the subject, Teacher Kim, but cannot elevate the subject over the hearer, over Teacher Kim’s father.

The following set of examples involving the noun *malssum* (the honorific form of *mal* ‘word’)) also illustrate the incremental nature of honorific marking and the different contributions to context from the subject and the predicate:

- (22)a. ku salam-uy malssum-i olh-supni-ta
 that person-Gen word(Hon)-Nom right-Pol-Decl
 (Slightly respectful.)
- b. ku pwun-uy malssum-i olh-supni-ta
 that person(Hon)-Gen word(Hon)-Nom right-Pol-Decl
 (More respectful.)
- c. ku pwun-uy malssum-i olh-usi-pni-ta
 that person(Hon)-Gen word(Hon)-Nom right-Hon-Pol-Decl
 (Most respectful.)
 ‘What that person said is right.’

Speakers may have slightly different intuitions about the appropriateness of the first two examples here, but they are all grammatical. The first example is respectful to the maximal human referent of the subject only to a slight degree, and the speaker does not elevate that target over the hearer. The speaker elevates the target more with respect to him/herself in the b example. And in the c example, the speaker elevates the target above both him/herself and the hearer. Once again, an analysis trading on [HON +] and [HON -] makes wrong

predictions, or simply misses the point: the a example is not a non-honorific example, for *malssum* is an honorific noun, yet the verb is in its [HON –] form, and *salam* is the non-honorific counterpart of *pwun*. The subjects of examples b and c are formally identical, yet only the verb in c contains the honorific (*u*)*si*. These examples clearly illustrate the futility of manipulating formal honorific features; all three examples are honorific, just to different degrees, and asking about what is agreeing with what is asking the wrong question.

A different kind of variability can be seen in examples like (23) with a coordinated subject:

- (23) a. haksayng-tul-kwa sensayng-nim-i hamkkey
 student-Plu-Conj teacher-Hon-Nom together
 kongpwu ha-(si)-ess-eyo
 study do-(Hon)-Past-Decl
 ‘Students and the teacher studied together.’

For some speakers, the presence of the honorific marker on the predicate is preferred here, but its absence can also be natural. For these speakers, it may be more important to express deference to the teacher, and hence the honorification of the students is only apparent—there **is** someone who the speaker is honoring, and this could motivate the presence of (*u*)*si*. Similarly, some speakers would prefer (23) with *kkeyse* instead of the regular nominative (and with (*u*)*si* present on the verb).

Other examples create the same kind of variability:¹¹

- (24) a. pwumo-nim-kwa ai-tul-i hamkkey
 parent-Hon-Conj child-Plu-Hon-Nom together
 chwum-ulchwu-(si)-ess-ta
 dance-(Hon)-Past-Decl
 ‘Parents and children danced together.’
 b. eli-n aitul-kwa na-i manh-usi-n
 young-Mod children-Conj age-Nom many-Hon-Mod
 sensayng-nim-i hamkkey chwukkwu-lul ha-(si)-ess-ta
 teacher-Hon-Nom together soccer-Acc do-Hon-Past-Decl
 ‘Young children and an old teacher played soccer together.’

In summary, there seems to be no consistent way to assign feature specifications like [HON +] and [HON –] to nouns and to verbs as part of a predictive system of acceptability for examples like those discussed in this subsection.

3.2 Honorification on the copula

Now let us consider again the examples in (4), which involve a subject relative clause on a noun which is the predicate of the copula. The abstract syntactic

¹¹ Some speakers find (24a) more acceptable with (*u*)*si* if the constituents within the subject are reordered to be *ai-tul-kwa pwumo-nim-i* (‘children and parents’).

structure is shown in (4a'). As far as we are aware, there is a coherent syntactic agreement analysis of the examples in (4b–d).

- (4)a'. *pro* [[*t* coh-un] sayngkak] i-pni-ta
 b. coh-un sayngkak-i-si-pni-ta
 good-Mod idea-Cop-Hon-Pol-Decl
 c. coh-usi-n sayngkak-i-pni-ta
 good-Hon-Mod idea-Cop-Pol-Decl
 d. coh-usi-n sayngkak-i-si-pni-ta
 good-Hon-Mod idea-Cop-Hon-Pol-Decl
 'That's a good idea you have there.'

In examples (4c–d), the subject of *coh-usi-* is the trace of the relativized subject *sayngkak*, which would not normally be considered to be an honorific noun; yet the predicate is honorific-marked. In the matrix clause, *sayngkak* is part of the copular predicate, whose subject is *pro*. This subject has an implicitly deictic interpretation (English 'that'), yet it may co-occur with (*u*)*si* on the predicate, as in examples (4b) and (4d). Where are the [HON +] specifications that the predicates in (4) are agreeing with (optionally)? Note that the agreement approach requires that *sayngkak* is [HON +] in (4c), in order to trigger the appearance of (*u*)*si* within the relative clause.

Intuitively, the honored one is the holder or experiencer of the idea, which must be given either directly or in context when *sayngkak* is in a non-predicative position, in order to trigger honorification on the verb, as in (25), examples referring to an idea due to a socially superior which the speaker thinks is correct:

- (25)a. ape-nim-uy sayngkak-i olh-usi-pni-ta
 father-Hon-Gen idea-Nom right-Hon-Pol-Decl
 'Father's idea is right.'
 b. ku pwun-uy sayngkak-i olh-usi-pni-ta
 that person(Hon)-Gen idea-Nom right-Hon-Pol-Decl
 'That person(Hon)'s idea is right.'
 c. ku sayngkak-i olh-usi-pni-ta
 that idea-Nom right-Hon-Pol-Decl
 'That idea is right.'

However, whatever specification we give for *sayngkak*, examples (4b–c) are “disagreeing” examples in the sense that honorification is present on one of the predicates associated with *sayngkak* yet absent on the other. And while (4d) is more consistently honorific than (4b–c), there is no sense in which those examples involve any kind of grammatical violation.

Nouns which are in the same semantic domain as *sayngkak* work similarly, such as *cilmwun* ‘question,’ *cicek* ‘point,’ *kulim* ‘painting’; other nouns, for example, *samwusil* ‘office’ or *khemphyuthe* ‘computer,’ cannot easily be used as

the predicate of a copula marked with (*u*)*si*, although there is a clear intuition that (26a) is more easily contextualized than (26b):

- (26)a. ?khempyuthe-ka cham coh-usi-ney-yo
 computer-Nom really good-Hon-Evid-Level
 ‘Your computer is really good (I see).’
 b. ??yenphil-i cham coh-usi-ney-yo
 pencil-Nom really good-Hon-Evid-Level
 ‘Your pencil is really good (I see).’

Other examples show that the connection of the socially superior target to the copular predicate is quite tenuous in syntactic terms. (27), from Lee (2006), involves predicates with the honorific (*u*)*si* even though their subjects are free relatives formed from (non-honorific) clauses:

- (27) nah-un kes-un eme-nim-i-si-ess-ciman, kil-un
 bear-Past one-Top mother-Hon-Cop-Hon-Past-but, feed-Past
 kes-un halme-nim-i-si-ess-ta
 one-Top grandmother-Hon-Cop-Hon-Past-Decl
 ‘The one who bore me is mother, but the one who fed me is
 grandmother.’

In a system with [HON ±], it would be necessary to override the [HON –] value of the free relative, due somehow either to the predicative NP, or by some contextual clue.

In (28) also, the subject/topic is an area where someone may work, and the predicate is ‘Pusan or Ilsan’, which is clearly not honored:

- (28) kunmwu kanung ciyek-un Pusan-ina Ilsan-i-si-pni-ta
 work possible area-Top Pusan-or Ilsan-be-Hon-Pol-Decl
 ‘The area/region where (the honored one) might work is Pusan or Ilsan.’

The honored target is the maximal human referent of the subject, though it does not seem very plausible (morpho-syntactically) that ‘an area where someone may work’ could itself be a noun phrase marked [HON +].

The example in (29) illustrates a similar point:

- (29) sayksang kyohwan piyong-un kwumayca-nim
 color exchange cost-Top buyer-Hon
 pwutam-i-si-pni-ta
 charge-be-Hon-Pol-Decl
 ‘The expense for exchange for a different color will be charged to the
 buyer(Hon).’

Note that ‘buyer’ is not even the syntactic topic here, but clearly the force of the statement is intended to be directed to a potential buyer.

3.3 An honorific relation between object and subject

Korean has some nouns which come in ‘honorific’ and ‘non-honorific’ pairs, such as *tayk* ~ *cip* (‘house’). A typical example involving *tayk* is given in (30):

- (30) *tayk-ey-nun* *nwu-ka* *kyeysi-pni-kka?*
 house(Hon)-Dat-Top who-Nom be.Hon-Pol-Q
 ‘Who is(Hon) at the house(Hon)?’

In this example, the subject is honored due to the specific form *kyeysi-* of the verb ‘be’, and *tayk* (‘house(Hon)’) is most naturally interpreted as the house of the hearer. Hence the example means ‘Who (honorable) is at your (honorable) house?’ Due to these properties of its meaning, it is quite straightforward to use *tayk* in an example where the subject is not honored:

- (31)a. *sensayng-nim* *tayk-ey-nun* *nwu-ka* *ka-ss-ni?*
 teacher-Hon house(Hon)-Dat-Top who-Nom go-Past-Q
 ‘Who went to the teacher’s house?’
 b. *swuni-ka* *sensayng-nim* *tayk-ul*
 Sooni-Nom teacher-Hon house(Hon)-Acc
pangmwunhay-ss-upni-kka?
 visit-Past-Pol-Q
 ‘Did Sooni visit your (the teacher’s) house?’

Here there is no (*u*)*si* on the verb in these examples, as the subject is not honored; *tayk* need not be involved in honoring the subject.

However, in some cases it is possible for such a noun to honor the subject even when the honoring noun is not the subject itself. The noun *mal* means ‘language,’ and with the verb *ha-ta* (‘do’), it means ‘speak.’ *mal* has an honorific variant, *malssum*, and so (32b) is the honorific variant of (32a).

- (32)a. *etten* *salam-i* *mal-ul* *hay-ss-ni?*
 which person-Nom word-Acc do-Past-Q
 ‘Which person spoke?’
 b. *etten* *pwun-i* *malssum-ul* *ha-si-ess-ni?*
 which person(Hon)-Nom word(Hon)-Acc do-Hon-Past-Q

In (32b), (*u*)*si* on the verb might be triggered solely by the honorable subject with the honorific noun *pwun*. However, *malssum* here is not providing some general social elevation within the example in the way we saw above with *tayk*, but is itself also providing honorification for the subject. We can see this by comparing the b and c examples in (33):

- (33)a. *nwu-ka* *mal-ul* *hay-ss-ni?*
 who-Nom word-Acc do-Past-Q
 ‘Who spoke?’

b.	<i>nwu-ka</i> who-Nom	<i>malssum-ul</i> word(Hon)-Acc	<i>ha-si-ess-ni?</i> do-Hon-Past-Q
c.	? <i>nwu-ka</i> who-Nom	<i>malssum-ul</i> word(Hon)-Acc	<i>hay-ss-ni?</i> do-Past-Q
d.	?? <i>nwu-ka</i> who-Nom	<i>mal-ul</i> word-Acc	<i>ha-si-ess-ni?</i> do-Hon-Past-Q

Functioning as the object of *ha-ta*, *malssum* has to honor the subject, as we see reflected in the need for (*u*)*si* on the verb (b vs. c).

While there is a certain kind of honorific relation between *malssum* and *ha-si-*, note that it is not anything that could be considered agreement between the verb and object, for *malssum* is not honored. Rather, both verb and object are indicating something about the status of the **subject**, with respect to the social context. In other words, *malssum* actually honors the subject of the clause, and the verbal part *ha-si-* does too. And, looking strictly at the actual forms in (33b), there is no theory-independent sense in which *nwu* has any honorific specification at all. In other words, (33b) is a subject-honorific example in which only the non-subjects express this information.

In an agreement-based account, there is no straightforward way to account for how an object can honor the subject, as the object and subject have no agreement relationship with each other. On the other hand, if we allow lexical items (or perhaps phrases) to specify properties of the clause in which they appear, then *malssum* and *ha-si-* introduce the same specification: (roughly,) the subject of the clause is honored. This would allow us to say that *nwu* is simply unspecified in (33), as its form suggests, and *nwu* is grammatical in such an example as it introduces no contradictory information.

4 Non-subject honorification

Non-subject honorification forms are used in cases where the target is the referent of a non-subject (often an object or indirect object), and the target is socially superior to the speaker or the subject of the clause. Harada (1976) introduced the term “object honorification” in a preliminary study of the phenomenon; Kuno (1987) introduced the more accurate term non-subject honorification, as not only objects may be the honorific targets. Japanese has a much wider system of non-subject honorification than Korean, subject to a variety of pragmatic conditions (see especially Hamano (1993), Mori (1993), and Matsumoto (1997)).

One way to mark non-subject honorification in Korean is with the postpositions *kkey* and *kkeyse*, which mark dative or oblique arguments as socially superior.¹² As with the other markers which are hosted by nouns,

¹² *kkeyse* can mark both honorific subjects and honorific non-subjects (see e.g., Martin (1992)).

they elevate the referent of the host noun over the speaker (see the examples below).

There are only a few non-subject honorific verb forms in modern Korean, and all are synchronically irregular. The complete list is in (34):

- (34)a. cwu-ta ~ tuli-ta ('give')
 (historically *tuli-ta* is the causative of *tu-l-* ('hold up'))
 b. teyli-ta ~ mosi-ta ('accompany')
 c. po-ta ~ poyp-ta ('see')
 d. alli-ta ('cause to know') ~ aloy-ta ('inform')
 e. mwut-ta ~ yeccwu-ta ('ask')

As can be inferred from the meanings of these verbs, some intuitively honor the direct object, and some the indirect object. Although *tuli-ta* historically has the meaning of 'give to a superior', Martin (1992) suggests treating all these honorific forms as humbling forms in actuality (humilifics).

In Japanese, the robust system of non-subject honorification is not restricted to targets of direct or indirect objects, and is often analyzed as 'lowering' of the social status of the subject relative to the target, namely, humilification (see Martin (1975), Kuno (1987), Sohn (1999), Ihm et al. (1988)). Korean non-subject honorification makes more sense when viewed as humilification of the subject, lowering the status of the subject, and possibly the speaker, relative to the non-subject. The fact that the hearer is not implicated in the meaning of non-subject honorification forms would follow if these are humbling or deferential forms, for the speaker would not normally lower the status of the hearer.

The examples in this section use the first two pairs of verbs in (34) to illustrate the use of non-subject honorification forms, marked with NSH in the glosses. Kuno and Kim (1985) observe that exactly which argument is the trigger is not fully determined for *tuli-ta*, as the examples in (35)–(36) show:¹³

- (35)a. na-nun i-sensayng-nim-kkey kanhowen-ul teyli-eta
 I-Top Lee-teacher-Hon-Hon.Dat nurse-Acc take-Comp
 cwu-ess-ta
 give-Past-Decl
 'I took a nurse to teacher Lee (for the nurse's benefit).'
- b. na-nun i-sensayng-nim-kkey kanhowen-ul teyli-eta
 I-Top Lee-teacher-Hon-Hon.Dat nurse-Acc take-Comp
 tuli-ess-ta
 give(NSH)-Past-Decl
 'I took a nurse to teacher Lee (for teacher Lee's benefit).'

¹³ The indeterminacy of the non-subject honorification target is a problem for the accounts treating it as a kind of syntactic agreement. Comparable data exists in Japanese, a problem acknowledged in Boeckx and Niinuma (2004, 456–457); see also Bobaljik and Yatsushiro (2006).

In (35a), the non-honorific lower verb means that the nurse is the one accompanied. The reasoning is as follows: ‘Teacher Lee’ cannot be understood as the goal of the non-honorific *cwu-ta*, so it must be understood as the goal of *teyli-ta*, and in that case, the goal/beneficiary of *cwu-ta* is understood as the nurse. In (35b), the non-subject honorification matrix verb indicates that its goal/beneficiary is an honorable one, namely ‘Teacher Lee.’ The humilific meaning of *tuli-ta* has the effect that the subject (‘I’) deferentially lowers him/herself with respect to Teacher Lee.

In the following examples, the embedded predicate is itself a non-subject honorification form:

- (36)a. na-nun kanhowen-eykey i-sensayng-nim-ul
 I-Top nurse-Dat Lee-teacher-Hon-Acc
 mosi-eta cwu-ess-ta
 take(NSH)-Comp give-Past-Decl
 ‘I took teacher Lee to the nurse (for the nurse’s benefit).’
- b. na-nun kanhowen-eykey i-sensayng-nim-ul
 I-Top nurse-Dat Lee-teacher-Hon-Acc
 mosi-eta tuli-ess-ta
 take(NSH)-Comp give(NSH)-Past-Decl
 ‘I took teacher Lee to the nurse (for teacher Lee’s benefit).’
- c. na-nun i-sensayng-nim-kkey uysa-sensayng-nim-ul
 I-Top Lee-teacher-Hon-Hon.Dat doctor-teacher-Hon-Acc
 mosi-eta tuli-ess-ta
 take(NSH)-Comp give(NSH)-Past-Decl
 ‘I took the doctor to teacher Lee (for the teacher’s OR the doctor’s benefit).’

In (36a–b), the honorable one with respect to the embedded predicate is ‘Teacher Lee,’ and the beneficiary of the matrix predicate is determined as in (35). These examples show the independence of the goal and the beneficiary roles. In (36b), the nurse cannot be the beneficiary of the matrix non-subject honorification predicate *tuli-ta*, so the only contextual alternative is ‘Teacher Lee’; so the same verb *tuli-ta* has different referents from its goal and beneficiary roles. If the goal of *tuli-ta* is changed to an honorable referent, such as *uysa-sensayng-nim-kkey*, the beneficiary role of *tuli-ta* is also naturally associated with this referent. In (36c), the two honorable arguments may be targeted, each by one of the predicates, or ‘the doctor’ may be understood to be the one targeted by both.

In some cases, the honored argument in the matrix clause is null, apparently controlling an argument in the embedded clause. (37a) has two embedding verbs: the matrix verb *tuli-ta* and the causative intermediate verb *hay*. The overt argument *kim-sensayngnim-ul* is the causee argument of *hay*, controlling the null subject of most embedded verb *ka-si-key*. However, the null dative argument of the matrix *tuli-ta* is also understood as coreferential with this argument, the structurally lower *kim-sensayngnim-ul*:

- (37)a. na-nun kim-sensayng-nim-ul yek-ey ka-si-key
 I-Top Kim-teacher-Hon-Acc station-Dat go-Hon-Comp
 hay tuli-ess-ta
 do.Comp give(NSH)-Past-Decl
 'I let Teacher Kim go to the station.'
- b. na-nun kim-sensayng-nim-kkeyse yek-ey
 I-Top Kim-teacher-Hon-Hon.Subj station-Dat
 ka-si-key hay tuli-ess-ta
 go-Hon-Comp do.Comp give(NSH)-Past-Decl
 'I let Teacher Kim go to the station.'

In (37b), *kim-sensayngnim-kkeyse* is apparently the subject of *ka-si-key*, the most embedded predicate. We can see this due to (38), where the only honorific predicate is the lowest one:

- (38) na-nun kim-kyoswu-nim-kkeyse hakhoy-ey
 I-Top Kim-professor-Hon-Hon.Dat conference-Dat
 ka-si-key hay cwu-ess-ta
 go-Hon-Comp do.Comp give-Past-Decl
 'I made/let Professor Kim go to the conference (for Peter's benefit/sake).'

This example can be used in the following slightly convoluted but reasonable context: Peter wants Professor Kim to come to a conference that he is organizing, for he thinks that Professor Kim would be a good commentator. However, he is not sure if he can persuade Professor Kim to come. The speaker is Professor Kim's research assistant, who is a good friend of Peter's. Knowing this situation, the assistant ('I') wanted to help Peter, and managed to persuade Professor Kim to go to the conference. In this example, there is only honorification, and no humilification.

We have included this section for two reasons: for the sake of completeness, setting out the range of data than any account of Korean honorification should be able to address; and to illustrate the interaction of the systems of honorification and humilification. Humilific forms are those in which a subject humbly does something for the benefit of a non-subject.¹⁴ As we have seen, often the beneficiary is, technically, a covert argument within its clause.

¹⁴ We can also find examples where the object is clearly not honorific itself, but the predicate is marked for non-subject honorification:

- (i) chayk-ul mosi-ko sa-l il-i iss-na? kunyang
 book-Acc look.after(NSH)-Mod reason-Nom exist-Q just
 nakse-ha-ca!
 mark-do-Propos

'Is there any reason to respect these books? Let's just draw on them!'

mosi-ko sal-ta is a verbal combination in Korean which means 'to look after something or someone you consider valuable'. Its use is appropriate here as it conveys the sense that the books might be objects to be treated with care.

5 Towards an analysis

In this section, we lay out some basic properties that an adequate analysis must have, based on the factual discussions above.

5.1 The meaning of honorification

Alongside regular compositional meaning, Potts (2005) makes a case for expressive meaning and suggests that honorifics fall into this category. Expressive meaning is an emotive aspect of meaning, paralleling but separate from regular propositional meaning. For instance, imagine the following examples spoken by a Cockney-speaking attendant working for an upper-class lady:

- (39)a. She sat down.
 b. Her ladyship sat down.
 c. Her ladyship's only gone and sat down!
 d. Her ladyship's only gone and parked her bum!

These examples all have the propositional content of (39a), but other examples have extra expressive dimensions of meaning, at least involving the speaker's attitude towards the subject, the (un)expectedness of the sitting act.

Using the notion of expressive meaning, Potts and Kawahara (2004) develop an analysis of one type of Japanese honorific, the verbal form *o-V-ni naru*, roughly corresponding to *(u)si* in Korean.¹⁵ They show how expressive meaning differs from propositional meaning—for instance, in (40), the honorific part of the meaning cannot be under the scope of negation, while other parts of the propositional meaning are:

- (40)a. amwu sensayng-nim-to anc-ci anh-usi-ess-ta
 any teacher-Hon-even sit.down-Comp Neg-Hon-Past-Decl
 'No teachers (who I honor) sat down.'
 b. #ku papo-ka anc-ci anh-usi-ess-ta
 that fool-Nom sit.down-Comp Neg-Hon-past-Decl
 (int.) 'That fool (who I do not honor) sat down.'

In the first example, the fact that teachers are honored is not negated, even though negation appears to scope semantically over the subject, which is a negative polarity item. *anh-usi-* can never mean 'is not honored,' as the unacceptability of the second example shows. This Korean form can only mean 'honorable one does not . . .'. (40b) is of course acceptable without the honorific marker *-usi-*.

¹⁵ One reviewer pointed out some subtle differences between the use and interpretation of honorification in Japanese and Korean. Naturally, we do not intend our specific claims about the meanings of morphemes to apply to Japanese, though the general style of our analysis would surely carry over.

The two key aspects of expressive meaning are its separation from propositional meaning, as just described, and its continuous and incremental nature, a property which has been featured in our discussion throughout the paper. Potts and Kawahara also stress the notion of “ineffability” (as does Kaplan (1999), who gives the example of *Ouch!*). Like other kinds of expressive meaning, honorific contributions are ineffable in the sense that it is not easy to paraphrase them faithfully.

In what follows, we base our proposal on Potts and Kawahara (2004), the work which inspired our own. It is important to note that there are alternative proposals for the semantics of expressive meanings (see for example Geurts (2007) and Schlenker (2007), response papers to Potts (2006)). The main points of contention regard how presupposition-like expressive meanings are, and how different expressive meanings are from regular meanings. Ultimately, the analysis of honorification will surely shed light on these issues, but for present purposes, we will follow Potts and Kawahara in giving an illustration of what an expressive meaning analysis of honorification might look like.

In the system developed by Potts, regular meanings (e.g., for individuals) are drawn from a domain e , while expressive meanings are drawn from a separate domain ε ; regular meanings might be things like the individual ‘Teacher Kim’ or the set of people who sit down, while expressive meanings might have emotive contents like ‘the speaker shows deference to an individual i ’ or ‘the speaker judges that sitting down was extremely unexpected’. Potts develops a type theory for meaning types in which expressive meanings can be the outputs of functional types; their information can be added (as constraints on context), but that is all:

- (41)a. e and t are regular types.
- b. ε is an expressive type.
- c. If σ and τ are regular types, $\langle \sigma, \tau \rangle$ is a regular type.
- d. If σ is a regular type, $\langle \sigma, \varepsilon \rangle$ is a regular type.
- e. Nothing else is a type.

In this way, expressive meanings do not interact with the propositional meanings, and can only be added (their privative nature).

As a kind of expressive meaning, honorific meaning is information about context, in particular, the social setting of an utterance, and is explicitly treated as contextual information in Han (1991), Park (1992) and Pollard and Sag (1994). Potts and Kawahara (2004) assume a contextual parameter for honorification, C_{HON} , in addition to the usual contextual parameters of speaker, hearer, location, etc. Every context requires a specification of at least speaker, hearer, location, and time of utterance. Potts and Kawahara propose an extra requirement, to the effect that contexts are only well-defined if they have the requisite honorification information; their main condition is given in (42):

- (42) A context is admissible only if C_{HON} (a subset of D_e) contains exactly one triple aRb (from D_e) for every contextually salient $b \in D_e$.
(Potts and Kawahara 2004, 22)

In this proposal, the triple aRb expresses a numerical relation between the speaker a and the target b , where b is a contextually salient person from D_e , the domain of entities. As R is numerical, it is potentially continuously variable. These triples themselves are drawn from D_e , the domain of expressive meanings, built up alongside the regular propositional meaning as described briefly above.¹⁶ Potts (2006) reconceptualizes the relation R as an interval \mathbf{I} between -1 and $+1$; $[-1, 1]$ represents no expressive contribution, while something like $[-1, -0.5]$ is a strongly negative expressive meaning (over to the negative side of the whole interval), and $[0, 1]$ is a somewhat positive expressive meaning. For example, if C_{HON} contains $s[0.5, 1]i$, this represents a situation where the speaker s honors i to a significant degree, where i is an individual referred to in the utterance.

Let us look at a more concrete example:

- (43) ku pwun-i ka-si-ess-ta
 that person(Hon)-Nom go-Hon-Past-Decl

Assume that the speaker is s , the hearer is h , t is a time, and that ‘that person’ picks out individual i . Then (43) has the meaning components in (44):

- (44)a. Propositional meaning: $go(t)(i) \wedge t < now$
 intuitively: “i goes at t and t is before now”
 b. Expressive meaning: defined for a context C only if C_{HON} contains $s[0, 0.5]i$
 intuitively: “the speaker is somewhat deferential to i ”
 (this is what the honorific markers convey)

What would it take to provide a compositional analysis of the honorific markers? As a first step, we propose the schematic and informal morphemic entries for $kkeyse$ and $(u)si$ in (45) and (46), based on the system outlined above. The specific values within the intervals are not themselves intended to be theoretically meaningful, but are there to illustrate the relative properties of the affixes. First, $kkeyse$:

- (45) $kkeyse$: $s[0.5, 1]i$, where i is the referent of the N which is the morphological host of $kkeyse$
 intuitively: “the speaker is very deferential to i ”

The use of $kkeyse$ conveys a strongly positive expressive honorific meaning towards the referent of the phrase containing it. The verbal suffix $(u)si$ is more complicated, as it involves the hearer as well, though, importantly, it does not convey information that the hearer is honoring the target:

¹⁶ Potts (2006) revises in part the details of the theory, compared to the earlier work we primarily cite here. Potts revises the admissibility condition in (42) to one that requires at most one triple for each salient pair of a and b , and allows for incremental contextual update if more than one expressive meaning of the same type is encountered.

- (46) $(u)si: s[0, 1]i$, where i is the maximal human referent of the target (topic, see Sect. 5.2) of the clause containing the V which is the morphological host of $(u)si$; and $s[0, 0.5]h$
intuitively: “the speaker expresses more deference to i than to h ”

If we think in terms of baselines, we can take it that the speaker and hearer are at the same level. The speaker cannot “lower” the hearer except by using explicitly rude forms (the speaker can lower him- or herself; this what humiliatics do). What $(u)si$ does is to express some positive expressive meaning towards the hearer, but more towards the target; in other words, while not “lowering” the hearer, the speaker conveys that the target is due more deference than the hearer.

Recall that not using *kkeyse* means that the target is not superior to the speaker, and not using $(u)si$ means that the target is not superior to the hearer. Under our approach, there is no need for null affixes to convey this information. As we discuss around (49), if the participant recognized that the speaker could have used honorific forms and did not, this implicates a positive decision on the part of the speaker not to be deferential. Hence, there is no need in the formal system for the speaker to have particular (null) forms for conveying negative expressive honorific meanings concerning target and hearer.

While Potts and Kawahara discuss honorification and anti-honorification, it seems to us that these are rather different phenomena, and we do not feel that there is any negative aspect to (the absence of) honorification. In other words, the interval **I** above would only have positive values, determined by any of the honorific forms we have discussed here (see the following subsection). In an utterance without any honorific form, the speaker has introduced no expressive meaning, and therefore may have failed to take an opportunity to honor a target to whom deference should be due.

5.2 The use of honorification

Above, we have presented facts which we summarize in (47) regarding the forms which indicate some kind of honorification in Korean. In this subsection we address in a little more detail what the meanings of the honorific forms are and how they are used.

- (47)a. The use of an NP-internal honorific marker recognizes the superior social status of the referent of the noun host of the marker (the target) in relation to the speaker, by elevating the target.
- b. The use of a subject-honorific verb recognizes the superior social status of the maximal human referent of the subject (the target) in relation to the hearer, by elevating the target.
- c. The use of a non-subject-honorific verb recognizes the superior social status of the referent of the noun host of the marker (the target) in relation to the referent of the subject, by lowering the referent of the subject relative to the target.

As noted in the introduction, the use of honorifics is performative, in the sense that using them is precisely the required social expression of deference.¹⁷ The use of honorifics is also dependent on the speech context: it is conditioned by normal interactions in which social conventions dictate that deference is due. For this reason, honorifics are not used in situations of textbook description or pure news reporting, even though these certainly involve language used in relatively formal settings (e.g., (48), noted by Ihm et al. (1988, 201), or, for example, in the discourse of student demonstrations (noted by Lee and Ramsey (2000, 240)).

- (48) taythonglyeng-i mikwuk-ul pangmwun ha-ta
 president-Nom U.S.-Acc visit do-Decl
 ‘The president visits the U.S.’

These observations suggest that there is a kind of politeness principle for social interaction (regulating culturally appropriate behavior):¹⁸

- (49) You must acknowledge the superior social status of any contextually salient person.

This is interpreted in the same fashion as Grice’s maxims of conversation: if the hearer recognizes that the speaker could have used an honorific form and did not, the hearer draws some inferences from that fact (in a normal context, that the speaker is being deliberately non-deferential for some reason).

Even though a relation like “superior” or “higher” is a transitive one, relations are not necessarily transitive in the usage of honorifics (discussed for Japanese in Potts and Kawahara (2004)). For example, we cannot simply assume that argument honorification expresses a relation such that an individual *i* is socially superior to the speaker. Consider a scenario which includes Professor Kim, his student from the university, and his nine-year-old son. Due to the socially recognized superior relations, the son will use honorific forms to Professor Kim’s student, and the student will honorific forms to Professor Kim. However, it is perfectly fine for the son not to use honorific forms to his father:

- (50) *pro* onul secem ka-se chayk ilk-ca!
 today bookstore go-and book read-Propos
 ‘Father, let’s go to a bookstore and read books today!’

Although honorification may usually be related to a certain level of formality, this is again driven by conditions of appropriate use. Lee and Ramsey note that the use of honorification can sometime allow the speaker to empathize with the hearer (cf. Lee and Kuno (1995)), thereby making an utterance more “familiar.”

¹⁷ Potts and Kawahara (2004) consider the use of honorifics to be a secondary speech act.

¹⁸ Cf. Kaplan (1999, 28), quoted in Potts (2005, 180) “. . . in addition to the desire to be *held* in respect, people desire to be *paid* respect, and honorifics can be the coin of that payment.”

For example, normally a child would use an honorific form to his/her father, while a third-party adult might not use an honorific form when talking about the father. Hence, an adult who is socially superior to a child's father might ask (51a) to that child. According to Lee and Ramsey, the adult could alternatively use (51b), taking the perspective that the child him/herself would take:

- (51)a. *apeci* *encey* *o-ni?*
 father when come-Q
 To the child: 'When will your father come?'
- b. *apeci* *encey* *o-si-ni?*
 father when come-Hon-Q
 To the child: 'When will your father (as you view him) come?'

Examples like these elicit variable judgments from speakers as to the contexts in which they would be most appropriate. What is most important for us is the fact that using honorification or not is a fundamentally pragmatic decision, in the broadest communicative sense, and not constrained by any inviolable grammatical principles.

From a pragmatic standpoint, we would expect all possible combinations have some potential function in the language; the subject and the predicate can be either honorific or nonhonorific, as in (52), though we do not try to characterize the force of each example here:

- (52)a. *ape-nim* *encey* *o-ni?*
 father-Hon when come-Q
- b. *ape-nim* *encey* *o-si-ni?*
 father-Hon when come-Hon-Q
- c. *appa* *encey* *o-ni?*
 father when come-Q
- d. *appa* *encey* *o-si-ni?*
 father when come-Hon-Q
 'When does your father come?'

There are also some circumstances when true over-use of honorification is apparent, and this too is interpreted in a Gricean fashion—if the hearer perceives honorific forms that do not match the social situation, the hearer will infer some kind of irony or deliberate use of over-flowery language.

It is a matter of knowing Korean to know which nouns are used for targets which should receive honor and to know which social situations call for such usage. Nouns such as *moksa* ('pastor') and *sensayng* 'teacher' reflect a certain social standing, as do kinship terms like *ape-ci* ('father') within the family context; nouns such as *sonnim* ('guest') and *kokayk* ('customer') refer to individuals in service contexts, to which the social norms of Korean dictate some honorification or politeness. On the other hand, a noun like *elun* ('adult') reflects no social status whatsoever and hence is unlikely to be used in contexts which require honorification to be expressed.

As for the use of the forms themselves, we proposed the following guidelines above:

- (9) if $su > sp$, *nim* or *kkeyse* may be used;
if $sp > su$, *nim* or *kkeyse* are not used.
- (10) if $su > hr$, (*u*)*si* is used;
if $hr > su$, (*u*)*si* is not used.

Any marker on a noun such as *nim*, *kkey* or *kkeyse* indicates that the referent of the host noun is recognized by the speaker as socially superior to the speaker. *kkeyse* imparts a high degree of social elevation to the target. It would be a reasonable approach to rule out forms like **elun-nim* ('honorable adult') by making *nim* a multiplier of the degree of relative social status (the value of *R* above); only nouns which indicate some social status could then have their referents participate in relative social status. This would also explain why **nwukwu-nim* 'who(Hon)' is bad, even though *nwukwu* may host *kkeyse* and/or appear with a verb marked with (*u*)*si*. Alternatively, for many speakers, a useful generalization is that *nim* presupposes that its N host refers to a person of social status (i.e., that *R* is constrained to have a positive value). For the younger generation, *nim* is simply a marker of (slightly) elevated social status, with a wider distribution, and on the web even the form *salam-nim* ('person-Hon') can be found.

The marker (*u*)*si* on a verb has a slightly different meaning: it makes the indication of social superiority with regard to the maximal human referent of the subject, in relation to the hearer. Hence, using *kkeyse* on the subject but failing to use (*u*)*si* on the verb (see the examples in (6), repeated here) means that the speaker elevates the target high above him/herself but fails to elevate the target with respect to the hearer. One reviewer suggested to us that while the formal status of (6a) without the (*u*)*si* is one of pragmatic infelicity, or simply only having restricted contexts of use, there may also be a prescriptive overlay of an expectation of (*u*)*si* in the context of *kkeyse*.

- (6)a. ape-nim-kkeyse mence ka-#(si-)ess-ta
father-Hon-Hon.Subj first go-#(Hon-)Past-Decl
'Father went first.'
- b. ape-nim-i mence ka-(si-)ess-ta
father-Hon-Nom first go-(Hon-)Past-Decl

The rather flexible use of (*u*)*si* is presumably related to the fact that it shows deference to the target as the topic of the clause—not so much the one who the clause 'is about' as who the clause is relevant to. This seems particularly apparent in examples like (28) and (29), repeated here:

- (28) kunmwu kanung ciyek-un Pusan-ina Ilsan-i-si-pni-ta
 work possible area-Top Pusan-or Ilsan-be-Hon-Pol-Decl
 ‘The area/region where (the honored one) might work is Pusan or Ilsan.’
- (29) sayksang kyohwan piyong-un kwumayca-nim
 color exchange cost-Top buyer-Hon
 pwutam-i-si-pni-ta
 charge-be-Hon-Pol-Decl
 ‘The expense for exchange for a different color will be charged to the
 buyer(Hon).’

Exactly how the target of honorification is determined still awaits a full explanation—above we suggested that the target of (*u*)*si* is one to whom the utterance is relevant, perhaps the ‘person in the context understood as the initiator of the relevant action or bearer of the relevant property’. In this regard, we offer a citation from Martin (1992, 298): “sometimes, especially with adjectives, [or] the copula, . . . the deference is toward the less direct subject (expressed or implied), such as the possessor or beneficiary, or toward the psychological subject (the one who feels or reacts).” This observation is followed by a long list of relevant examples.

Exactly how the various forms combine is subject to some individual variation. If we construct a series of examples like those in (53), we find that speakers vary in exactly which of the following they are willing to accept:

- (53)a. senpay-ka o-ass-eyo
 senior-Nom come-Past-Level
- b. senpay-ka o-si-ess-eyo
 senior-Nom come-Hon-Past-Level
- c. senpay-nim-i o-ass-eyo
 senior-Hon-Nom come-Past-Level
- d. senpay-nim-kkeyse o-ass-eyo
 senior-Hon-Hon.Subj come-Past-Level
- e. senpay-nim-i o-si-ess-eyo
 senior-Hon-Nom come-Hon-Past-Level
- f. senpay-nim-kkeyse o-si-ess-eyo
 senior-Hon-Hon.Subj come-Hon-Past-Level

The noun *senpay* refers to someone senior in some social or professional sense to the speaker but who may be close enough in some social aspects to the speaker that the markers relative to the subject, *nim* and *kkeyse*, may be felt to be somewhat “overdone.” While the generalizations in (9) and (10) are only useful as coarse characterizations, we feel that they should serve as the basis for a more complete analysis, formalized in terms of the pragmatic components of meaning outlined in Sect. 5.1.

Finally, the flexibility of (*u*)*si* extends to examples like those in (54), from Kim-Renaud (2000, 307):

- (54)a. mian-ha-si-ciman, ...
 sorry-do-Hon-but, ...
 ‘I am sorry, but ...’ (ordinary conversation)
- b. kkok philyoha-si-n kes-ul cwu-si-ese
 just need-Hon-Mod thing-Acc give-Hon-Conj
kamsaha-pni-ta
 thank-Pol-Decl
 ‘Thank you for giving me just what I need.’
 (receiving a gift from a teacher)

These are real examples in which the subject honorification form (underlined) is used—typically in a grammatically embedded environment—to indicate politeness to the hearer (the grammatical subject is first-person and cannot be the target of honorification). As Kim-Renaud notes, there is an interesting question as to whether such examples really involve “errors,” or rather whether they are symptomatic of an extension by the speaker of the use of (*u*)*si*, in an attempt to respond to the presence of a person of high social standing. We feel that such examples support the idea that the linguistic basis of honorification is its function as expressive meaning, from which more strictly grammatical properties such as agreement may be apparent, but only in a restricted subset of the data.¹⁹

6 Conclusion

In conclusion, we have argued that the expressive dimension of the meaning of honorification leads to the conclusion that it should be treated as a privative

¹⁹ Honorific forms can also be used in some contexts when talking about nature, and God (as the one who created nature):

- (ii) wuli halmeni-nun hangsang pi-ka o-si-ney, nwun-i
 our grandmother-Top always rain-Nom come-Hon-Decl snow-Nom
o-si-ney kule-sy-ess-ketunyo. hanul-i ha-si-nun
 come-Hon-Decl so-Hon-Past-Quot sky-Nom do-Hon-Top
il-i-la kule-si-nka kath-supni-ta
 work-Cop-Comp so-Hon-Comp seem-Pol-Decl
 ‘(lit.) Our grandmother used to say(Hon) rain comes(Hon) and snow comes(Hon). She seems to have said(Hon) so because it is the work that God does(Hon).’

Even though there is no honorific *nim* marking on the subjects *pi-ka* and *nwun-i* (and there cannot be), the honorific-marked predicate *o-si-ney* is used in the first two clauses. As observed by Lee and Ramsey (2000, 241), these honorific verb forms are possible with *o-ta* (‘come’) but not *kuchi-n-ta* (‘be about to stop’), presumably because rain coming (falling) is culturally the most important. These forms may also be considered somewhat archaic by younger speakers.

property, not one with positive and negative values. We have also argued that the nature of honorification on a subject differs from the nature of honorification on a predicate. A deeper and more precise account of honorification is still needed, but we feel that the considerations we have focused on here show that little insight could possibly be gained by any attempt to assimilate the distribution of honorific forms in a clause to purely formal agreement patterns. Rather, future research should concentrate on the contextual information introduced by each honorific form and on how these contributions add up incrementally to some overall honorific “value” for a given example. As we noted above, in addition to honorification, the analytic system must be extended to encompass humilification, which is clearly found in both Korean and Japanese. Additionally, a broader analysis would extend to anti-honorifics (see Choe (2004), Potts and Kawahara (2004)), though it is not clear to us that these are really expressing a negative kind of honorification rather than a different dimension of expressive meaning.

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