

It has long been accepted that covert referential subject pronouns and covert referential direct and indirect object pronouns in Korean are recovered from context. However, Brown (2008), *inter alia*, has suggested that the honorific system in that language may also be a factor in the incidence of covert referential pronouns. This will be confirmed with evidence by my proposed paper.

It will be shown that Korean discourse is organised on two axes, the speaker addressee axis and the speaker referent axis. The speaker addressee axis is where a choice is made between six levels of politeness with which to speak to the addressee. However, addressee related politeness morphology, which appears on the verb whether or not the addressee is present as a referent, seems not to affect whether pronouns are covert or otherwise.

The situation is different on the speaker referent axis. Here, the presence of honorific verb suffix (*u*)*si* or certain honouring verbs shows honour to a second or a third person subject. An account will be given of how this can allow a third person referential subject pronoun to be covert where it would otherwise need to be overt. Examples 1 and 2 illustrate in respect of (*u*)*si*.

1. Kyoswu₁-nun taytanhan salam i-ta. Ku₁-uy aitul-un eli-ta. Ku₁-nun professor-TOP wonderful person is-DEC. He-GEN children-TOP is.young-DEC he-TOP mayil cenyek-ul mant-un-ta. every.day dinner-ACC cook-PRES-DEC
2. Kyoswu₁-nim-un taytanhan pun i-si-ta. ku₁-uy aitul-un professor-HON-TOP wonderful person(HON) is-HON-DEC. he-GEN children-TOP eli-ta. Ø₁ mayil cenyek-ul mant-usi-n-ta are.young-DEC. (he) every.day dinner-ACC cook-HON-PRES-DEC
‘The professor is a wonderful person. His children are young. He cooks dinner every day’(1 and 2)

The pronominal subject of the verb in the 3rd sentence in example 1 must be overt, because, as confirmed by an extremely clear majority opinion in a survey, the reference of a covert pronoun would be unclear. However, that pronominal subject may be covert in parallel example 2. This is because the honorific suffix *si* in the verb *mantusinta* clearly points to the high status *kyoswu-nim* as the antecedent of that subject.

Also on the speaker referent axis in Korean, certain verbs and verb complexes humble a subject who is the speaker or someone closely associated with the speaker and co-incidentally honour a person denoted by a benefactive or direct object. This can allow an otherwise overt third person direct object or benefactive pronoun to be covert. A detailed account of this will be given, but examples 3 and 4 illustrate the most remarkable outcome of this for benefactives.

3. Minswu-ssi₁-nun tayhakkyo-uy swusek kyoswu i-ta. Nay eli-n Minswu-Mr-TOP university-GEN senior professor is-DEC. my young-PRENOM ttaltul₂-un haksayngtul i-ta. Kutul₂-un kuekey₁ senmwul-ul cwe-ss-tta. daughters-TOP students are-DEC. They-TOP him present-OB give-PAST-DEC
4. Minswu-ssi₁-nun tayhakkyo-uy swusek kyoswu i-si-ta. Nay eli-n Minsu-Mr-TOP university-GEN senior professor is-HON-DEC. My young-PRENOM ttaltul₂-un haksayngtul i-ta. Ø₂ Ø₁ senmwul-ul tuli-ess-ta daughters-TOP students are-DEC. (they) (him) present-OB give(HON)-PAST-DEC

‘Mr Minswu is a senior university professor. My young daughters are students. They gave him a present’ (for 3 and 4)

In the 3rd sentence of example 3, with plain verb *cwessta*, either its subject, *kutul*, or its indirect object, *kukey*, can be covert, but not both. If both are covert, the antecedent of neither is clear. In the 3rd sentence of parallel example 4, the subject humbling verb *tuliessta* indicates the lower status of its subject in relation to its indirect object. This pinpoints higher status *Minswu-ssi* (*the professor*) as the antecedent of the indirect object of *tuliessta*, so that the pronoun representing it can be covert. Given the context, the pronominal subject of *tuliessta* can then, by default, only have *nay elin ttaltul* as its antecedent and can also be covert.

Adopting the argument of Sells and Jong-Bok Kim (2007) that honorific verb morpheme (*u*)*si* is not subject verb agreement, and operating broadly under the aegis of Ariel (1990, 2001)'s accessibility theory, I shall take the view that the honorific morpheme (*u*)*si* and the subject honouring and humbling verbs in Korean can be seen as members of a new class of assists to the cognitive accessibility of antecedents (including subject verb agreement), which allow pronouns to be covert in circumstances where they would otherwise have to be overt.