

A Speech Act Account of Social Deixis : A Case of Honorifics

Euiyon Cho

1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to give an speech act account of honorifics, based on Cho (1988), and to show that the speech act approach to social deixis is superior to an approach, represented by Ervin-Tripp (1972), which I call 'selectional approach' in this paper (see section 2). I will first offer a sketch of the sociocultural properties of social deictic items with the data drawn from English and Korean. It will be argued that the best analysis of social deixis should not be framed directly in terms of sociolinguistic selectional rules governing the use of social deictic items as done by Ervin-Tripp (1972) and Wang (1979); rather it will be argued for an analysis made in terms of the speech act properties of social deixis on the basis of the role of 'face-saving' or 'threatening act' in the use or interpretation of honorifics.

2. Problems of the selectional approach

In this section, I will first briefly introduce what the selectional approach to social deixis is and then show the inadequacy of the approach.

Social deictic items like the English address term 'sir' and Korean honorific expressions such as 'si' and '(u)pni' have been extensively studied in terms of sociocultural properties of them. By sociocultural properties, it is meant the sociocultural contexts in which social deictic items are taken to be appropriately used. To quote the case of Poussaint mentioned in Ervin-Tripp (1972):

"what's your name, boy?" the policeman asked....

"Dr. Poussaint. I'm a physician...."

"What's your first name, boy? ..."

"Alvin"

Dr. Poussaint believes that he must not be called 'boy,' considering his social

position, being a physician, and wants the officer to take his social status. This is expressed in his first reply. However, by taking the addressee's racial status of being a black, the officer treats Dr. Poussaint only as a black, and Dr. Poussaint finally accepts the address term 'boy' uttered by the white officer.

What makes the communication possible is the sociolinguistic knowledge about the use of the address term 'boy' shared by the speech participants. That is, Dr. Poussaint and the officer know that blacks are called 'boy' regardless of their social position and adult status. In other words, the sociocultural property of the social deictic item 'boy' is that it is addressed to blacks whatever their social positions are if they are not taken into consideration when blacks are addressed. On the other hand, the term 'boy' is used when the addressee is a white/black child, youth, or medial regarded as a nonperson (cf. Ervin-Tripp 1972). To make it clear what is meant by sociocultural property of social deixis, let's consider the following Korean example, which is taken to be pragmatically inappropriate because the so-called subject referential honorific 'si' is used though the subject referent is an unhonored person:

(1) i aktang-i ku cis-ul ha-si-ess-ta.

this scoundrel-NOM that deed-ACC do-HON-past-ind

This scoundrel did that.

What makes the sentence pragmatically unacceptable, as the reader notices, lies in the usage of the social deictic item 'si' which is culturally determined: it is used when the speaker considers the subject referent socially superior to, older than him/her, or honorable. Since the linguistic context drawn from the expression 'scoundrel' informs that the referent is unhonored, native speakers of Korean find the sentence unacceptable on the basis of their knowledge concerning the appropriate use of the honorific 'si'. Thus, it could be said that the sociocultural rule of the honorific 'si' is that it is used if the subject referent is socially superior to, older than the speaker, for example, since, in Korean culture, such a person is taken to be eligible for honor in terms of linguistic expressions.

Based on such sociocultural properties of social deictic items, the selectional approach to address terms or honorifics focuses on the rules predicting the occurrence of a certain deictic expression. The rule system includes many sociocultural variables affecting the speaker's selection of social deictic items. The var-

ables include race, occupational rank, age, kinship, etc. According to the approach, the address term 'boy' is selected if a social variable for race is chosen instead of such variables as occupational rank or age when addressing black adults (see Ervin-Tripp 1972 for more examples).

In what follows, I will show the inadequacy of the selectional approach to social deixis. First, it will be shown that the selectional rules of the approach fail to predict the occurrence of social deictic items in the cases where the speaker exploits the assumed usage of them. For example, we can imagine that the address term 'boy' can be used when addressing white men for the purpose of insulting them. In the course of this argument, I shall try to show that the sociocultural properties of social deictic items on which the selectional approach is built are not the primary factors affecting the occurrence of social deictic items. It appears that the speaker's basic motive of using address terms or honorifics is in his intention to save or threaten another person's face as shown in Cho (1988): speaker uses social deixis in communicative acts because of his want to save or threaten another person's face so that it could be enhanced or humiliated; this is to be done by the speaker's measuring the power or solidarity relationship existing between the speech participants including him. That is, the so-called sociocultural properties of social deictic items are taken to be background information of the usage of social deictic items that speakers of the speech community know for their communicative act to save or threat each other's face.

Let us see some concrete cases that are indicative of the above argument. According to the selectional rules of the system of American address terms espoused in Ervin-Tripp (1972), the address term 'boy' must be addressed to blacks for insult regardless of their occupational rank or social status while being addressed to whites only if they are children or youth. Thus, if the addressee is a white man in the speech context, the selection of the address term 'boy' must be taken as a violation of the selectional rule. In other words, under the selectional approach the address term 'boy' is never selected if the social variable color (+white) is chosen. But, contrary to the selectional rule predicting the occurrence of 'boy,' when the addressee is a white man, the address term 'boy' can be used in the speech situation that the speaker wants to insult or joke him. This is the case that the speaker exploits the selectional rule to achieve his communicative intention to threaten the addressee's (positive) face¹⁾.

This kind of phenomenon is also observed in Korean. In the case of Korean

subject referential honorific 'si', unlike the sociocultural properties of it, the honorific element 'si' appears to be used although the social relationship between the speaker and the subject referent is the opposite of the sociocultural properties of the honorific. For example, when the addressee (=the subject referent) is a friend of the speaker's, the speaker can use the honorific 'si' if he wants to show his sarcastic attitude toward the subject referent, getting him humiliated (see Cho (1988) for details). This case is illustrated below:

(2) [speaker and the subject referent are friends]

Inho-ya ne ku il-ul acwu cal ha-si-ess-e.

-voc you that matter-ACC very well do-HON-past

Inho, you handled the case very well.²⁾

In this way, the selectional approach to social deictic items based on the sociocultural properties of them fails to predict the occurrences of them.

Someone in favor of the selectional approach would object the above argument, saying that if the speaker's intention to threaten the relevant person's face is incorporated in the sociolinguistic selectional rules of social deictic items, then the above mentioned cases are not genuine counterexamples against the approach. But putting the variable for 'speaker's intention' is to nullify the theoretical ground of the selectional rules because 'speaker's intention' is not the same as other sociolinguistic variables like 'age,' 'social status,' or 'occupational rank' in nature. As the reader has noticed, the variables are culture-bounded notions based on the sociocultural properties of social deictic items which are derived from the general usage of them in the speech community in question. On the other hand, contrary to such variables, 'speaker's intention' is not a notion bounded to a certain culture, nor a sociocultural entity playing a role in determining conditions on the general usage of social deictic items: 'speaker's intention' is a general property of human communication, being concerned with how speaker accomplishes his communicative goals. Thus, any selectional approach containing the notion 'speaker's intention' will lose its sociolinguistic ground based

1) Positive face is defined as "the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others" in Brown and Levinson (1987:62): "it includes the desire to be ratified, understood, approved of, liked or admired."

2) The conveyed meaning of (2) in the mentioned context is 'Inho you did not handle the case well.'

on the sociocultural properties of social deictic items. In addition, such a framework putting two characteristically different entities in one whenever they are needed will be theoretically so unconstrained that it will turn out to be too powerful.

Another type of argument against the selectional approach comes from cases in which honorifics do not occur even though relevant sociocultural factors for the appropriate use of honorifics are present in the speech context. Suppose that president of a company dismissed Inho, one of his employees, but every employee knows that president's dismissing Inho is wrongful and president is to blame for it. In this context, although the president is socially superior to his employees, it is possible for them not to use the subject referential honorific 'si' when referring to him in the utterance to express their evaluative view on their employer. This is exemplified below:

- (3) *ku il-un Kim sacang-i calmosha-ess-ta.*
 that matter-TOP president (of a company)-NOM misdeed-past-ind
 Speaking of that matter, President Kim did wrong.

Since the social variable such as occupational rank exists in the above speech context, according to the selectional rules of the honorific 'si' as expounded in Wang (1979), there must have been the honorific 'si' in (3). Thus, (3) is one of the cases where the selectional approach fails to predict the occurrence of social deictic items. Moreover, the case (3) clearly shows that sociocultural properties of social deictic items are not the sole and primary factors affecting the occurrence of them in utterance because, although the social distinction holding between the speaker and the subject referent exists in the context of (3), any honorific elements did not occur in (3).

I conjecture that such selectional approach to social deictic items is based on the following view on social deixis:³⁾

(Finally) social deixis concerns the encoding of social distinctions that are relative to participant roles, particularly aspects of the social relationship holding between speaker and addressee(s) or speaker and some referents. (Levinson 1983: 63)

3) A similar view is also expressed in Brown and Levinson (1987:179).

But, as I pointed out in Cho (1988), the above view on social deixis appears to have a serious problem. For example, if social deictic items are really linguistic encodings of the social relationship between, for example, the speaker and a person referred to in the speech event, then the absence of the referent honorific 'si' in (3) will not receive any adequate explanation concerning the social relationship between them under the above view on social deixis. That is, if honorifics grammatically encode the social relationship between speaker and addressee(s) or some referents mentioned in the utterance, then the honorific 'si' must be in the predicate of (3) because the social distinctions holding between the speaker (employee) and the subject referent (president of a company) exist in the speech context of (3). This case is taken as *prima facie* evidence against the above view on social deixis. Thus, any selectional approach to social deixis which will be and is built on the above view on social deixis is expected to face substantial problems as we have seen so far.

To summarize: although every social deictic item has its own sociocultural properties relevant to its usage, the properties do not take part in inducing the occurrence of it. What causes social deixis to occur in the speech act is the speaker's communicative intention to save or threaten the addressee's or some referents' face. (see section 3.2 for details) Therefore, as we have seen, the selection rules of social deixis fail to predict or describe the occurrences and non-occurrence of social deictic items because they are built on the sociocultural properties of them.

In the next section, we will see what the speech act properties of honorifics are among other social deictic items and give an speech act account of them.

3. The speech act approach

The speech act view of social deixis takes social deictic items as linguistic means used for the performance of an 'expressive speech act' displaying the speaker's respect, familiarity, or insult to the addressee(s) or some referents. For example, by uttering honorific expressions in a non-ironic sense, the speaker shows respect to addressee(s) or some referents since "the performance of the speech act is... an expression of the corresponding intentional state" (Searle 1983:9). Before getting into the speech act account of honorifics, a little elaboration with regard to the notion 'respect' is in order. As Searle (1983) points out, even if we utter

"I apologize for stepping on your cat," we can dissociate ourselves from the commitment of the utterance—sorrow in this case—by not feeling the emotion.

Likewise, even though use of honorifics displays respect due to the social meaning attached to the expressions, respect may not be a heartfelt one which is associated with the speaker's emotion. That is, speaker can utter honorific expressions for the performance of the speech act of honouring without having real private respect to addressee(s) or some referents. In fact, in daily life, honorifics are, I think, used to show the speaker's public respect to the addressee or some referents to abide by etiquette. Thus, we need to notice that it is possible to perform an expressive act of honouring without having real respectful mind. Therefore, it is suggested that the term respect to be used in the following must be taken in a neutral sense.

3.1. The speech act properties

In this subsection, I shall try to identify what sincerity, essential, and preparatory conditions of an act of honouring are, which should be satisfied for the performance of it. The sincerity condition to be met for the performance of an act of honouring will be that the speaker shows respect—no matter whether it is private or public. If speaker utters honorific expressions without the intention of showing respect, then the speech act would not be taken as an act of honouring, but may be as an act of insulting, depending on the speech context. For example, if one of my students did something that I could not endure, I would use the referent honorific 'si' without the intention of showing respect, but with the intention of warning. (4) illustrates this case:

- (4) [speaker=teacher and addressee=student]
 way ku—len il—ul ha—si—ess—ci?
 why that—sort work—ACC do—HON—past
 why did you do that sort of thing?

Since I uttered the referent honorific 'si' insincerely, I know that I did not intend to perform the act of honouring and that the hearer knows that I did not intend to give respect to her. In the above mentioned speech context, the hearer would recognize that the speaker uttered the honorific expression in an ironic

sense. Thus she will have no trouble in taking his use of the honorific as an insincere one. In this way, as all speech acts are intentional, for the act of honouring, the speaker should have intention to show respect.

For the essential condition to be met for the act of honouring, I propose that speaker's uttering honorific expressions counts as an expression of politeness. It has been widely recognized in the literature of politeness that one of the ways for the speaker to achieve politeness is to use honorific expressions because speaker's uttering them contributes to approving of the addressee's or some referents' want that their status, for example, is recognized by the speaker. In other words, by uttering honorific expressions, the speaker wants to produce in the recipient the effect that his uttering honorifics counts as politeness.

Finally, for the preparatory condition to be met for the speech act of honouring, I propose the following: the recipient must be in a position to receive respect. The position to receive respect would vary depending on the social value of a speech community or that of a group inside a speech community. For instance, in a society, the difference in the hierarchy of kinship would give precedence over age difference in the speech context for the act of honouring. On the other hand, in another society, the situation would be quite opposite. In general, as felicity conditions to be met for the use of honorifics, mainly sociocultural notions such as age, kinship and social status have been taken into consideration. But, we need to pay attention to the fact that any person irrespective of his or her social status or age is in the position to receive respect, depending on the speech context. Let us suppose that my 7 year-old niece did surprisingly well in a violin context so that I wanted to give her praise. I could express my emotion with an addressee honorific 'yo' or 'upni,' giving her respect to satisfy her want to be approved of; the former honorific form is informal and the latter formal in terms of formality. It shows that honorific expressions can be used even though addressee(s) or some referents are not older than or socially superior to speaker.

Thus, the preparatory condition to be met for the act of giving respect must be that the recipient must be in a position to receive respect: the position will vary from culture to culture and context to context.

Those felicity conditions to be met for the performance of an act of honouring by means of honorific expressions are summarized below:

Conditions	Honouring	Comments
propositional content ⁴⁾	None	An act of honouring is sometimes expressing one's public deferential attitude in accordance with verbal etiquette. Therefore, one's attitude for the act of honouring need not be one's true one.
preparatory	With regard to the speaker, the person to receive respect must be in a position to be honoured: e.g., older than or socially superior to the speaker	
sincerity essential	Speaker gives respect Counts as an expression of politeness	

To summarize, under the speech act view of social deixis, honorifics are taken as linguistic means used for the performance of an expressive act displaying the speaker's respect to the addressee or some referents. Under the speech act approach, the sociocultural properties of honorifics which have been the basis of selectional rules under the selectional approach become part of the preparatory conditions to be met for the act of honouring. Under the speech act approach, such sociocultural properties of social deictic items as 'the addressee is older than or superior to the speaker's are merely background of the speech act of honouring that the speakers of the speech community know.

3.2. The speech act account

My goal of this section is to show that how the speech act approach to social deixis successfully accounts for social deictic phenomena with the data of honorifics in terms of face-saving or threatening act. We will first briefly see how honorifics have been accounted for with regard to the notion 'face'.

In Brown and Levinson (1987), honorifics are taken as linguistic means em-

4) The propositional content must be understood in terms of truth conditional meaning. Meanings arising from honorific expressions such as 'speaker shows respect' and 'speaker is older than hearer' do not affect truth conditional meaning of the expression containing honorific(s).

ployed in utterances to achieve a communicative goal, being polite. They (1987:58) assume that human beings are "rational face-bearing agents" and face is defined as "the want to be unimpeded and the want to be approved of in certain respects"; the former is called negative face and the latter positive. Since face is something that could be enhanced or humiliated, people try to cooperate in maintaining each other's face for their social life. In other words, maintaining one's face requires the cooperation of others. According to Brown and Levinson, since some acts intrinsically threaten the addressee's face, the speaker wants to defuse potential face-threatening acts, as a strategy for being polite, with 'redressive action' that "counteracts the potential damage of the F(ace) T(hreatening) A(ct)" (Brown and Levinson 1987:69). In the theory of Brown and Levinson, it is face threatening-act redress that honorifics contribute to in a speech act when they are used. In other words, speaker uses honorific expressions to soften face-threatening acts when he performs such acts.

Exploiting their idea that honorifics are used face-threatening redress, in Cho (1988), I took the act of uttering honorifics as a 'face-threatening act' or as a 'face-saving act,' depending on the speech context in which honorifics are used. Although, as the term honorific itself implies, honorifics are linguistic means with which the speaker does express his respectful or polite attitude toward the addressee or some referents, we saw before that they can be used by the speaker to express such nonrespectful attitude as insult, or sarcastic one. That is, they can be used to threaten the addressee's or some referents' face by threatening her or their positive face through the speaker's insincere act of honouring; whether the expressive speech act performed with social deictic items are sincere or not will be cleared in the speech context.

Honorifics are, however, mainly used to save the addressee's or some referents' face by saving her or their positive face—want such that one's social status, for example, is recognized by the speaker—through the speaker's sincere act of honouring.

First, let us look at cases in which honorifics are used to save the addressee's or some referents' face. A typical case for it is observed where the recipient is in the position to receive respect as the preparatory condition of the speech act of honouring defines. For example, in Korean culture, such sociocultural conventions that 'respect elders' and 'respect teacher' that the Korean people know and are supposed to abide by make the speakers of Korean to show respect with

honorific expressions if the addressee or some referents are older than or socially superior to the speaker, for example. Example (5) below shows this case:

- (5) *sensayng-nim encey o-si-ess-upni-kka?*
 teacher-HON when come-HON-past-HON-Q
 Teacher, when did you come here?

From the sociocultural knowledge that elders are supposed to receive respect from the youngsters, teachers expect and want them to recognize their social status. Speaker's uttering honorific expression(s) will satisfy the addressee's such want. Thus, the addressee of (5) would feel that her face is saved by the speaker's giving respect to her by means of honorifics through his verbal behaviour. In short, in the speech context of (5), speaker's use of honorific expression will save the addressee's face by displaying respect to the addressee.

Contrary to the above case, there are cases where honorific expressions are used to threaten the addressee's or some referents' (positive) face. In a communicative context where a high school student came to school so late and is expected to be punished, if a teacher uses the referent honorific 'si' in his utterance, flouting the maxim of quality, as illustrated below,

- (6) *haksayng, acwu ilccik o-si-ess-e*
 student very early come-HON-past
 Student, you came so early.

his uttering the honorific 'si' will not be interpreted as a sincere one. From the hearer's point of view, she knows from the context that there is no reason which forces the speaker to give her respect and that what she did is disgraceful, she takes his use of the honorific expression 'si' in the sense of irony. To put it differently, the felicity conditions of the speech act of honouring were not satisfied in the speech context of (6): the speaker does not show respect; the addressee is not in a position to receive respect; speaker's use of the honorific does not count as politeness. Since the addressee of (6) knows it, she would feel teased by the speaker's use of the honorific expression 'si'. This will hurt her want to keep her (negative) face of desiring that she is not to be misidentified by the sociocultural properties of honorifics. Thus, the speaker's insincere act of hon-

ouring performed with a honorific expression will threaten the addressee's face in the speech context of (6).

4. Conclusion

In this paper, I have attempted to show that the best analysis of social deixis should not be made in terms of the selectional approach based on the sociocultural properties of it; rather it must be framed in terms of the speech act properties of social deictic items in the sense of face-saving or threatening acts. Though English address term 'boy' and Korean honorifics were provided as evidence for the speech act approach, I think it is clear that the approach is on a right track to pursue not only for other social deictic items in the two languages but also for other languages' social deictic phenomena.

References

- Brown P. and S. Levinson. 1987. *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cho, E. 1988. *Some interactions of grammar and pragmatics in Korean*. Ph. D. dissertation. University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign.
- Ervin-Tripp, S. M. 1972. On the sociolinguistic rules: Alternation and co-occurrence. *Directions in sociolinguistics: the ethnography of communication*, ed. by J.J. Gumperz and D. Hymes. New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, Inc.
- Levinson, S. 1983. *Pragmatics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Searle, J. 1969. *Speech acts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- . . . 1983. *Intentionality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sohn, H.-M. 1983. Power and solidarity in the Korean language, *Journal of the International Circle of Korean Linguistics* 3:97-122.
- Wang, H.-S. 1979. Sociolinguistic rules of Korean honorifics. *Inlywuhak Noncip* 5:91-118.