



An analysis of closure signs in Korea during the COVID-19 pandemic*

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Lee, Hye-Kyung. 2023. An analysis of closure signs in Korea during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Linguistic Research* 40(3): 533-559. This study analyzes a set of business closure signs in Korea during the COVID-19 pandemic, employing move analysis and speech act theories as analytic frameworks. In particular, as a replicated study of Ogierman and Bella (2021), it examines expressive speech acts or moves like greeting, referring, thanking, and apologizing, along with a unique Korean speech act: asking for understanding. Our findings highlight that Korean closure signs use a wider range of greetings compared to English counterparts. Referring expressions demonstrate intricate social sensitivity, indicating Korean cultural norms emphasizing politeness. Apologies in Korean signs are sometimes excessive, reflecting the importance placed on customers in Korean business culture. Repetition of thanking speech acts aims to reinforce gratitude, while the preference for sino-Korean words conveys formality and politeness. This research sheds light on the distinct linguistic and cultural features of Korean business closure signs during the pandemic, emphasizing the cultural norms governing language use. It also underscores the importance of adapting messaging strategies to cultural contexts, even in crisis situations, with potential implications for cross-cultural communication studies. (Ajou University)

Keywords closure signs, expressive speech acts, discursive moves, COVID-19, crisis communication

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on various aspects of society,

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including the closure of businesses and organizations. As closures are often communicated through signs and notices, analyzing the linguistic features of these closure notices can offer valuable insights into the societal effects of the pandemic. This study focuses on examining closure signs in Korea and provides a detailed analysis of the linguistic and cultural characteristics represented in these notices.

Specifically, this study aims to delve into intriguing aspects of communication about the COVID-19 pandemic by investigating a set of collected business closure signs in Korea during the pandemic. The discursive moves and expressive speech acts employed in these signs can serve as a unique window into the linguistic and cultural features of the Korean language and society. As a replicated study of Ogierman and Bella (O&B henceforth) (2021), this research seeks to unravel the intricacies of these communication tools, mainly drawing on the move analysis of O&B (2021) and speech act theories of Austin (1962) and Searle (1976). In particular, this study centers its focus on expressive speech acts of greeting, referring, thanking, and apologizing, prevalent in these closure signs. Moreover, it identifies a speech act unique to the Korean dataset: the act of asking for understanding. This study also examines these features of the Korean closure notices in comparison to their English counterparts, suggesting culture-dependent nuances in two compared linguistic communities.

The findings of this study hope to provide invaluable insights into the distinctive linguistic and cultural features of business closure signs in Korea during the pandemic. Furthermore, by highlighting the cultural norms and conventions governing language use in these pandemic-related communications, this study can contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of language and culture in crisis communication

2. Background

2.1 Studies on signs during the COVID-19 pandemic

Research on public signs has shown significant interest within multilingual contexts, particularly within the framework of Linguistic Landscape Studies (e.g., Gorter 2013; Shohamy and Ben-Rafael 2015). This line of inquiry has explored the representation of languages employed by diverse speech communities (e.g., Backhaus 2007). Evolving from its original emphasis on formal linguistic attributes, investigations into public signage

have undergone a transformative expansion in research scope, encompassing more qualitative methodologies, including an exploration of pragmatic aspects of public signage (e.g., Ferencik 2018; Svennevig 2021).

For example, Ferencik (2018) examined the realm of politeness as manifested in regulatory signs at a Slovakian tourism site. The study revealed that signs wielding unequivocal authority employ direct formulations, thereby reflecting conventional Slovak politeness norms. In commercial settings, signs adopt globally recognized English politeness formulas, such as *please* and *thank you*, to cater to customer dynamics. Similarly, Svennevig (2021) illustrated that the authority of sign authors to issue directives can derive from references to institutional authority, as well as be conveyed through linguistic and pictographic components such as imperatives, exclamation marks, or threats of sanctions. Furthermore, the study showcased how signs endeavor to evoke positive recipient attitudes via tactics like creating affiliation, infusing humor, and fostering poetic devices. Apart from these studies, there has been little research that investigates the pragmatic dimensions of public signs (O&B 2021; Svennevig 2021).

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has instigated a notable surge in scholarly efforts aimed at expanding the volume of research on public signage. The surge can be attributed to the integral role that public signs have assumed as one of the most efficient methods of communicating a diverse array of information relevant to the pandemic. Consequently, public signs pertaining to the pandemic have been investigated from various research perspectives (e.g., Feyaerts and Heyvaert 2021; Han 2021; O&B 2021, 2023; Bella and Ogierman 2022; Hopkyns and Hoven 2022; Isosävi 2023; Jia and Zhao 2023; Kalocsányiová, Essex, and Poulter 2023; Vallentin 2023). For example, Han (2021) explored people's changing perceptions of blunt slogans used in China's health campaign against coronavirus. These slogans, initially positively received, particularly within rural areas, subsequently became targets of intensified criticism. Han's (2021) study highlighted the importance of considering social contexts when analyzing impoliteness in public discourse. Comparing COVID-19 signs in Finland and France, Isosävi (2023) found discernible disparities in linguistic approaches. Finnish signs adopted a recipient-oriented perspective and more mitigation, while French counterparts preferred an impersonal mode of communication. Furthermore, the analysis underscored that COVID-19 signs aimed to balance attracting customers and imposing safety measures, thereby showing differences from conventional directives.

Among the extensive impacts of the pandemic, the closure of businesses or

organizations stood out as a significant outcome, often communicated through the use of closure signs. Analyzing the linguistic attributes of these closure notices can yield valuable insights into the societal repercussions of the pandemic. Consequently, there have been several research efforts to investigate pragmatic features of COVID-19 closure signs (O&B 2021, 2023; Bella and Ogierman 2022). Drawing upon business closure signs displayed in London and Athens, O&B (2021) explored the dual functions of expressive speech acts within these closure signs. Their findings revealed a pronounced utilization of relational features, reflecting the social changes instigated by the pandemic, as well as the business owner's efforts to maintain customer relationships. The analysis also highlighted culture-specific perspectives in the use of emotions and conventionalized formulas within these two cities (London and Athens). Building upon the same corpus, Bella and Ogierman (2022) demonstrated that justifications for business closures served as means of projecting identity by the authors of these signs, aimed at portraying themselves and their businesses in a favorable light. The analysis unveiled that these accounts, to varying extents, aligned with the larger discourses surrounding the pandemic and the values they encapsulate. Through an examination of advices within the same corpus, O&B (2023) contributed insights to the study of the discursive move of advice, elucidating distinctions between two distinct speech communities in terms of the extent to which these signs replicated government messages. In sum, Oierman and Bella's sequential research initiatives proffered novel perspectives on the analysis of moves and speech acts. Moreover, they offered culture-specific perspectives and norms that guide the composition of closure signs, while also illuminating the shared functions expected from such signs during the time of crisis.

2.2 Discursive moves and speech acts

The concept of discursive moves has its roots in genre analysis (Swales 1981, 1990, 2004; Bhatia 1993), which explores the interplay between a particular text type and its context. Here, genre refers to "a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purpose" (Swales 1990: 58). Genre analysis divides a text into smaller units called moves, which are discousal or rhetorical units that fulfill coherent communicative functions within a discourse (Swales 2004: 228). Originally designed to analyze introductions in research articles, Swales' framework has

predominantly been applied to investigate parts of academic research articles or theses: for example, research article introductions (e.g., Alharbi 2021), abstracts (e.g., Santos 1996; Samraj 2004), results (e.g., Basturkmen 2009), introductions and discussions (e.g., Dudley-Evans 1986), and results and conclusions (Yang and Allison 2003).

However, the concept of discursive moves has seldom been extended beyond academic and professional texts. Ogierman and Bella's sequential studies (2021, 2022, 2023) represent a rare effort to apply this concept in the analysis of business closure signs, a subject that will be elaborated further in Section 3. The analysis conducted by O&B (2021) will serve as a foundational framework for the present study.

As is widely recognized, speech act theories deal with the manner in which utterances not only convey information but also perform actions. (For a comprehensive overview of speech act theories, refer to Bach and Harnish (1979), Vanderveken and Kubo (2002), Smith (2003), Ronan (2015), Allington (2021) and references therein). The term 'speech act theory' was introduced by Austin (1962) through a series of lectures on the topics of speech acts. In these lectures, Austin (1962) paid his attention to the non-declarative uses of language, and proposed the now widely accepted concepts of locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary aspects of speech acts. In the later parts of his lectures, Austin posited that all utterances are illocutionary. In the contemporary literature, these three acts, particularly illocutionary acts, are referred to speech acts. Searle (1976) further advanced Austin's speech act theory by categorizing speech acts into five groups: representatives/assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations. The definitions are presented in (1).¹

- (1) a. Representatives/Assertives are the act of asserting the speaker's belief.
- b. Directives are the act of making someone else to do something that the speaker desires.
- c. Commissives are the act of committing to future actions.
- d. Expressives are the act of showing how the speaker feels about a situation.
- e. Declarations are the act of making the propositional content corresponds with the reality

¹ The category of expressives in Searle corresponds to behabitives in Austin (1962), which refer to "reactions to behavior and behavior towards others used to display attitudes and feelings" (Austin 1962: 83).

Among them, expressive speech acts will be used for the analysis of the present data alongside the examination of discursive moves. It is mainly because the formulation of business closure signs is guided by the sign producer's assessment of the social and interpersonal dynamics between the author and the customers. These dynamics are primarily conveyed by expressive speech acts (Taavitsainen and Jucker 2010). Expressive speech acts encompass speech acts like thanking, apologizing, and welcoming. Nevertheless, as underscored by various studies (e.g., Searle 1976; Norrick 1978; Bach and Harnish 1979), linguistic expressions deployed for expressive speech acts, such as *thank you* and *I'm sorry* in English, are not always intended to convey genuine emotions. Frequently, they serve as conventional ritual phrases or routine formulae. Additionally, distinguishing between genuine emotional expressions and more routine formulae often necessitates input from users of such expressions (Norrick 1978).

Given this backdrop, the evaluation of expressive speech acts will be contingent upon the transactional nature of the closure signs, the pandemic context, and more importantly the specific norms pertaining to Korean culture and language (O&B 2021). For example, Korean lacks direct equivalents to English sign-off formulae like *best wishes* and *warm regards*. Instead, expressions suitable for expressive speech acts, such as *thank you* and *we are sorry*, are commonly employed to fulfil this role. In such cases, these phrases will be categorized as sign-off formulae rather than as expressions of gratitude or apologies.

3. Data and methods

The data for this study were collected from a variety of online sources, including Google images, Naver images, blogs, and social networking service posts. The search terms used were 코로나 폐업문 *kholona phyeyepmwun* 'COVID-19 closure notice', 코로나 휴업안내 *kholona hyuep annay* 'COVID-19 temporary closure notice', and 코로나 휴업 공고 *kholona hyuep kongko* 'COVID-19 closure announcement'.² The collection period primarily spanned from February 2020 to August 2022, aligning with the peak

2 For the transcription of the Korean data, the Yale Romanization was used (available from <https://asaokitan.net/tools/hangul2yale/>). The abbreviations are adopted and modified from Sohn (2013), which are presented in the Appendix. Due to space limitation, morpheme-by-morpheme glossing is provided only for pertinent parts.

periods of the COVID-19 pandemic in Korea. Only closure signs explicitly linked to the pandemic were included, determined through the wording of the signs themselves or accompanying articles/posts. The dataset used in this study comprises a total of 298 closure signs, representing a wide range of businesses and organizations. Table1 provides an overview of the types of businesses and organizations included in the study, along with their respective quantities.

Table 1. Profile of the Korean closure signs

Types	No.	Types	No.
restaurants	100	events/ performances/ theaters/ museums	19
(super) markets/ department stores/ hotels/ shopping malls	42	clothes shops/ internet café/ karaoke/ photo studios/ travel agents	19
pubs/cafes/clubs	35	government offices/ banks	11
fitness centers/ sports centers/ spas	22	amusement facilities/ zoos	10
schools/ education centers	22	others	18

The dataset encompasses both independent small shops and larger chain outlets. As observed by O&B (2021), the signs of the former were shorter and less elaborate than the latter. In some cases, the former signs were hand-written on a piece of paper, while the latter frequently displayed more intricate printed signs on A4 paper or banners. The latter category also often utilized similar texts across different outlets of a chain. Out of the 298 signs collected, restaurants accounted for 100 signs, making it the largest group. The second largest group comprised (super) markets, department stores, shopping malls, pubs, and cafes. Following this group, pubs, cafes, and clubs were represented.

The data were analyzed using the discursive moves framework proposed by O&B (2021). To recapitulate, discursive moves are considered to fulfill “a coherent communicative function” (Swales 2004: 229). Furthermore, moves containing speech acts such as greeting and referring, thanking, and apologizing were examined for a comparison with their English counterparts.³ While discerning the discursive moves of the Korean data, an additional move was identified that is exclusively utilized in the Korean data, which is the speech act of asking for understanding.

³ The English data are from O&B (2021).

4. Results

Table 2 presents an overview of discursive moves and their representative examples in the Korean and English data. These moves were categorized based on the pragmatic functions exhibited by linguistic units (e.g., Bhatia 2001; Vergaro 2004; O&B 2021). Here, a linguistic unit refers to any form of language that performs a communicative function expected within a genre. Consequently, discursive moves did not always coincide with traditional syntactic units, such as sentences or phrases. Noteworthy is that some moves were assigned labels with traditional speech acts categories, such as thanks, wishes, and apologies. Speech acts or their associated linguistic expressions were often found within other moves. For instance, apologies frequently accompanied announcements of business closure, thereby serving as a form of apology. Conversely, conventional thanking formulas observed at the end of the closing sequence were categorized as sign off formulas. Furthermore, similar to O&B (2021), we investigated the referential terms addressing the viewers of these signs, as establishing or sustaining a relation is a vital aspect of closure signs. In the Korean data, these referential terms were found across various moves, including salutations.

Table 2. Discursive moves that appear in more than 10% of the signs at least one of the languages (in the order of their frequencies in the Korean data)

Discursive move	Example (Korean)	Example (English)	Korean N=298	English N=295
Announcement of closure	<i>yengep cwungtanhapnita.</i> 'We are closing for business.'	This store is currently closed.	284	239
Justification of closure	<i>sahoycek kelitwuki itankyey hayngcengmyenglyeng kosiey ttala</i> 'In accordance with the Level 2 social distancing administrative order'	As per the government guidelines	251	165
Heading	<i>imsihyuepannay</i> 'Temporary Closure Notice'	Polite notice	205	109
Closure date	<i>imsihyuepkikan 8wel 30 (il) – 9wel 6il (il)</i> 'Temporary Closure Period: August 30 (Sunday) – September 6 (Sunday)'	Closed from 24/3/20 until further notice	170	17
Signature	<i>OO atongpyengwen paysang</i> 'Respectfully presented by OO'	The team at Tenby & Penny	90	59

	Children's Hospital'			
Asking for understanding	<i>manhun yanghacypwuthaktulipnita.</i> 'Your understanding and cooperation are greatly appreciated.'		63	/
Sign off	<i>kamsahapnita.</i> 'Thank you, Best wishes'	Kind regards	54	85
Thanks	<i>salanghay cwusin kokayknimtulkey kiphun kamsauy insalul tulipnita.</i> 'We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the valued customers who have shown us love.'	Thank you for your understanding.	42	77
Wishes	<i>kokayk yelepwmuy kenkangul kiwenhapnita.</i> 'We wish good health for all our customers.'	We wish you and your loved ones good health.	42	27
Apologies	<i>chacacwusin kokayknimtulkey coysonghapnita.</i> 'We apologize to the customers who visited us.'	Sorry for any inconvenience this may cause.	40	34
Contact information	<i>mwunuysahangun OOO hompheyicilul chamcohaseyyo.</i> 'For inquiries, please refer to the OOO website.'	Please feel free to continue shopping with us at XXX.	40	204
Resumption of business	<i>saylowun mosupkwa sepisulo chaca poypkeyssupnita.</i> 'We will visit you with new looks and services.'	We look forward to being part of your daily lives again soon.	33	103
Salutation	<i>amyenghaseyyo.</i> 'Hello.'	Dear customers	16	34
Advice	<i>wisayng kwanlilul chelcehi hasiko</i> 'Please ensure thorough hygiene management.'	Stay clean, stay healthy and stay inside!	11	42
Security warning	<i>ponkyo kyocikwen oy chwulipul kumcihapnita.</i> 'Access for non-faculty staff members is prohibited.'	All money has been removed from the premises.	5	35

4.1 Salutations and address forms

Salutations or greetings, regarded as routinized speech acts, fall under expressive speech act category (Searle 1976), which serves as a means for speakers to express their feelings about themselves or the world (Searle 1976: 12). However, it has been argued that

greetings primarily fulfill the function of recognizing and acknowledging the other humans, rather than solely expressing speaker's attitudes or emotions (Duranti 1997; Weigand 2010).⁴ Bach and Harnish (1979) aptly discuss the distinction between genuine greetings and routine formulae, akin to the other expressions for expressive speech acts. Nevertheless, in the context of asynchronous and written communication like the data analyzed in the present study, such a distinction may not hold. Hence, greetings were identified primarily by means of their positions in the text, as discussed in section 2.2.

In the case of English greetings, salutations within written messages often incorporate address forms, which adhere to English-specific linguistic conventions. According to O&B (2021), English salutations in their dataset commonly take the form of *Dear X*, with the *X* representing various entities such as *customer(s)*, *clients*, *guests*, *visitors*, *all* and *friend*. Some salutations feature the inclusion of adjectives (e.g., *valued*, *awesome*, and *wonderful and amazing*), as seen in instances like *Dear Valued Customers*. Additionally, O&B (2021) noted that address terms employing the possessive pronoun *our* frequently appear in headings, exemplified by phrases like *To our Emma Claire Hair and Beauty Spa clients*.

Salutations in Korean are typically conveyed through the expression *amyeng* 'hello', often accompanied by the optional affixal sequence *-haseyyo/-hasipnikka*. In the current dataset, the majority of salutations take the form of *amyenghaseyyo* 'hello' or *amyenghasipnikka* 'hello', with one of them accompanied by the address term *kokayknim* 'dear customer'. The minor salutations include *kokayknimkkey* 'Dear customers', *kekceng manhusicyo?* 'Are you very worried?', *salanghapnita* 'We/I love you', and even *coysonghapnita* 'We're sorry'. While the latter three are rarely expected or used in public signage, they are likely employed to maintain a relationship with the viewers (O&B 2021).

Although Korean salutations usually do not contain address terms, various address terms are used in other parts of the signs to refer to customers. Table 3 provides an exhaustive list of address terms identified in the current data, along with corresponding examples in (2) through (13).

4 For an overview of the literature on expressive speech acts, refer to Ronan (2015) and references therein.

Table 3. Address terms in Korean signs

Address terms	No.	Address terms	No.
kokayk(nim) ‘customer(HT)	117	kwan(lam)kayk ‘audience’	4
motwu ‘all’	22	kwukmin ‘nation, people’	3
sonnim ‘guest’	15	kwankwangkayk ‘tourist’	2
hoiywen ‘member’	12	yeyyakca ‘reservation holder’	2
simin ‘citizen’	4	tomin ‘resident of a province	1
kacok ‘family’	4	cohapwen ‘union member’	1

- (2) **kokayk-nim**-kkey cehuy hanilkwan poncemun . . . pangyekul
customer-hon-to our hanilgwan main.branch disinfection
 wankyelhayessupnita.
 completed
 ‘To dear customers, our Hanilgwan main branch . . . has completed thorough disinfection.’ (K011)
- (3) **motwu** kenkanghasinciyo? . . . kumil tine-pwuthe . . . hyumwukikanul
all healthy today dinner-from closure.period
 kacikey toyessupnita.
 have become
 ‘Is everyone in good health? ... Starting from dinner today . . . we will be closed for a period.’ (K043)
- (4) chacawa cwusin **sonnim**-kkey pwulphyenul tulye coysonghapnita.
 visit give **guest-to** inconvenience give apologize
 ‘We apologize for any inconvenience to the guests who visited.’(K105)
- (5) **hoiywen-nim**-tul-uy manhun yanghay pwuthaktulipnita.
member-hon-PL-of much understanding ask.for
 ‘We ask for your understanding, our valued members.’ (K256)
- (6) **simin**-yelepwn-kkey allyetulipnita.
citizen-all-to inform(hon.)
 ‘We inform the citizens.’ (K112)
- (7) ancenhakey ipyang **kacokpwuntul**-kwa mannapoyпки wihay
 safely adoption **families**-with meet for
 naylin kyelceng
 make decision

- ‘A decision made to meet adoptive families in a safer manner’ (K278)
- (8) **kwukmin**-uy ancenul wihaye cehuy OO-un . . . hyuepul
people-of safety for our OO-TC . . . closure
 kyelcenghayesssupnita. (K243)
 decide
 ‘For the safety of the citizens, we at OO . . . have decided to close.’
- (9) **kwankaykwun**-tul-kkey cinsimulo kamsauy malssumul tulimye (K196)
audience-PL-to sincerely thanks words present
 ‘We sincerely thank the audience for their presence.’ (K196)
- (10) **kwankwangkayk** yelepwnuy kenkangkwa ancenul wihaye
tourist all health safety for
 ‘For the health and safety of our tourists’ (K031)
- (11) kicon **yeyyakca-nun** . . . khakhaothok mwunuy pwuthaktulipnita.
 existing **reservation.holder-TC**. . .KakaoTalk inquiry ask.for
 ‘For those with existing reservations, please inquire through KakaoTalk.’
 (K003)
- (12) tomin **yelepwn**-uy kaceng-ey kenkangkwa phyengan
 resident.of.province **all-of** home-at health peace
 katukhasikil
 may.be.full.of
 ‘May health and peace fill the homes of all residents.’ (K006)
- (13) **cohapwen**-tul-kkeyse-nun inkun cicemul iyong pwuthaktulipnita.
union.member-PL-hon-TC nearby branch use ask.for
 ‘We kindly ask union members to use nearby branches.’ (K133)

Korean possesses a vast array of address terms that exhibit significant sensitivity to social factors and the relationship between the speaker and the listener (e.g., Sohn 2013; Lee 2018, 2020a, 2020b). The address terms illustrate the intricate chemistry between the sign writer and the reader. For example, (13) is excerpted from a notice posted by a credit union near a hospital where a COVID-19 patient was identified. In this context, the credit union addresses its customers with the specific term *cohapwen* ‘union members’, rather than employing more general terms such as *customers* or *guests*. The use of these general terms would render the entire text less appropriate.

4.2 Apologies

Apologies have received significant research attention due to their multi-functional and widespread use across different languages. While the literature on apologies may vary, they are generally recognized as remedies for offences, such as “violation of social norms or failure to fulfil personal expectation” (Fraser 1981: 259). Within the literature, various classifications of apologies have been proposed, with one prominent distinction being between formulaic and substantial apologies (e.g., Goffman 1971; Fraser 1981; Blum-Kulka et al. 1989; Jucker and Taavitsaine 2008; Ogierman 2015).

O&B’ (2021) English data identified a set of apologetic expressions such as *we’re sorry*, *we apologize*, *regret* (noun), *regrettably* and *unfortunately* (adverbs), and *apologies* (noun). Many of these expressions were formulaic apologies observed towards the end of the messages, like *sorry for the inconvenience*. As for the complements of these apologizing expressions, the closure announcement was the most prominent, followed by the/any inconveniences the closure may cause. In some cases, the apologies in O&B’s data were less formulaic, expressing concern about the impact of the pandemic and portraying the closure as a measure taken to protect the community, as exemplified in (14).

- (14) **Unfortunately**, after doing our search we have decided that it is in everyone’s best interest that we remain closed these crazy times.
(O&B 2021: 10)

Most Korean apologies in the current data were conveyed by the expression *coysonghata* ‘be sorry’ with variants such as *coysonghatanun malssumtulita/ollita* ‘to express/convey apologies’, *coysonghatanun ttusul cenhata* ‘to convey the meaning of being sorry,’ and *coysonghakey sayngkakhata* ‘to feel sorry.’ There were also two minor expressions, *sakwa* ‘apologies’ and *sacoy* ‘apologies for an offences’, as shown in (15) and (16).

- (15) pwulphyenul kkichyetulye kiphun **sakwa-uy** malssumul tulimye
inconvenience cause deep **apologies-of** words give
‘We deeply apologize for any inconvenience caused.’ (K010)

- (16) *ilen kyelkwulul tulye cengmal cinsimulo sacoy-tulipnita.*
 this results give really sincerely **apologies-give**
 ‘We genuinely apologize for delivering such results.’ (K053)

Of particular significance is the use of *sacoy* as in (16), which literally translates to apologies for an offence, misdeed, or guilt. However, the closure of a business, particularly when mandated or requested due to the pandemic, does not constitute a severe offence. The use of such an overly apologetic expression may stem from a specific aspect of business culture, namely, customers are paramount (Kim 2021).

English apologies in O&B (2021) are often accompanied by adjectives like *extraordinary* and *absolute*, which serve to create emphatic and emotional effects. Similarly, Korean apologies are also frequently modified by intensifying adjectives or adverbs, such as *cengmal* ‘really’, *taytanhi* ‘very’, *cinsimulo* ‘sincerely’, and *kiphun* ‘deep’, as exemplified in (17) and (18).

- (17) *iyongey pwulphyen tulye cengmal coysongha-p-ni-ta.*
 use inconvenience give **really be.sorry-AH-IN-DC**
 ‘We are really sorry for any inconvenience while using the facilities.’ (K081)
- (18) *kayknimtul-kkey pwulphyenul tulye taytanhi coysongha-ta-nun*
 customers-to(hon.) inconvenience give(hon.) **very be.sorry-DC-RL**
malssum-tuli-mye . . (K097)
 word(hon.)-give-and
 ‘We deeply apologize to our valued customers for any inconvenience caused.’

The complements of the apologizing expressions include phrases referring to unfavorable situations, such as *pwulphyentulim* ‘causing inconvenience’, *selmyeng mos tulim* ‘not giving explanation’, *phyeyep* ‘business closure’, *ilen kyelceng/kyelkwa* (this decision/result), *phyeyepilamun pwulkaphihan senthaykham* ‘unavoidable choice of business closure’, and *kekcengkkichim* ‘causing worry’, as exemplified in (19) through (21).

- (19) taymyenhayse **selmyeng** **mos** **tulin** **cem** taytanhi
in-person **explanatio** **not** **give-RL** **fact** very
coysongha-pnita.
be.sorry
‘We sincerely apologize for not being able to provide an in-person explanation.’ (K053)
- (20) **kekcekkichye** tulye coysonghapnita.
causing.worry give(hon.) be-sorry
‘We apologize for causing you worry.’ (K115)
- (21) phyeyepilanun **pwulkaphihan** **senthaykul** **hakey** toye . . . cinsimulo
business.closure unavoidable decision do become. . . sincerely
sacoytulipnita.
apologize
‘We sincerely apologize for the unavoidable decision to close down.’ (K183)

Also as mentioned in section 4.1, expressions of apologies can function as salutations, as in Figure 1, wherein an apology appears at the beginning of the message.

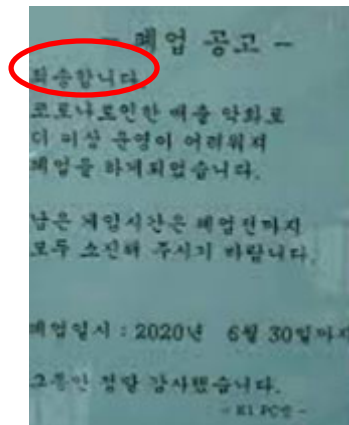


Figure 1. Sign with an apologetic expression as a salutation

Of special interest is the limited utilization of apologies in the signage of major corporations, public offices, or department stores. None of signs issued by these organizations in the current data includes any expressions of apology. Figures 2 and 3

exemplify the contrast between signs of small independent stores and those of large corporations or public offices.

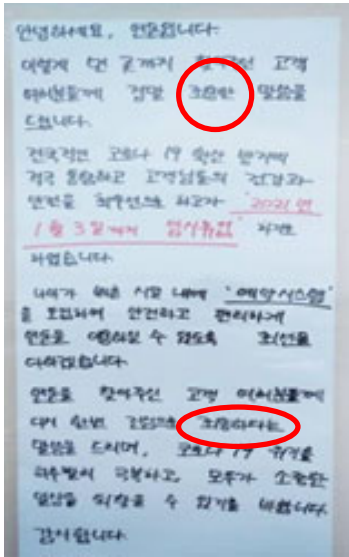


Figure 2. Sign of an independent restaurant

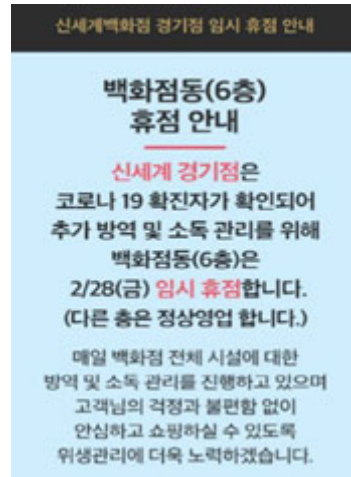


Figure 3. Sign of a department store

As discussed in Section 3, the sign in Figure 2 is handwritten, whereas the one in Figure 3, posted by a department store chain, is a printed version. Notably, the sign in Figure 3 lacks any expressions of apology, while the sign in Figure 2 incorporates two instances of the word *coysong* ‘apology’, which are circled. This observation may reflect the perspective of large corporations or public offices, which deem closure to be mandated by the relevant authorities concerned, rather than as a result of mishandling preventive measures. Furthermore, big companies already enjoy a stronger position in retaining their established customer base compared to small independent stores, which are relatively more vulnerable to the situation and, therefore, more desperate to maintain customer relationships.

Of interest is that all words used for apologizing are sino-Korean ones, while there is one common native-Korean equivalent *mian* ‘be sorry’ in Korean, which is not used at all in the current data. As will be discussed in Section 4.3, when pairs of sino-Korean words and native Korean equivalents are available, the former is dominantly favored in

public signage, primarily because they are perceived as more formal and polite (e.g., Koo and Ma 2020).

4.3 Thanks

Thanking is another expressive, retrospective, and reactive act, often addressing past or ongoing actions, similar to apologies and complaints (e.g., Searle 1969; Rubin 1983). Expressions of gratitude in closure signs can be either formulaic or substantial, with a sometimes blurry distinction, as observed in other expressive speech acts.

O&B (2021) suggested that English thanking expressions referred to the businesses' longstanding relationship with their customers and challenging circumstances, thereby establishing common ground. For example, phrases such as *thank you for your continued loyalty and support even during these uncertain times* illustrate the sentiment conveyed. The use of adjective *grateful* and the verb form *we appreciate*, intensified by *really*, demonstrates conscious efforts to connect with customers, as exemplified in (22).

(22) We're **really** grateful for your patience and understanding.

In O&B's (2021) English data, expressions of gratitude are complemented by various terms, such as (*continued*) *support*, *understanding*, *patience*, *cooperation*, (*continued*) *loyalty*, *help*, *enthusiasm*, *vigilance*, *kindness*, and *kind words of encouragement*. Notably, these complements deviate from the conventional usage observed in public signage, as they sometimes serve polite requests than mere expressions of gratitude.

In the Korean data, expressions of thanks are generally conveyed using the term *kamsa* 'gratitude' with the addition of sequences like *kamsa-haysssupnita* 'Thank you', *kamsa-tulipnita* 'Thank you', *kamsay malssumul tu(ol)lipnita* 'We offer words of gratitude', and *kamsay insahul cenhap(tulip)nita* 'We extend our thanks'. These expressions are further enriched by complements like *sengwen* 'support', *iyong/ayyong* 'use', *salang* 'love', *chacacwusim/pangmwun* 'visit', *kwansim* 'interest', *cohahaycwusim* 'liking', *chwuek mantulecwum* 'making memories', *yanghay* 'understanding', and *maumssecwusim* 'putting in effort', as shown in examples (23) and (24).

- (23) kutongan **sengwenhay** cwusyese cengmal kamsahapnita.
 tntil.now **support** give very be.thankful
 ‘Thank you very much for your support all this time.’ (K190)
- (24) **maum ssecwusin** motun pwuntul-kkey kamsatulipnita.
heart put.in all persons-to(hon.) be.thankful
 ‘We are thankful to everyone who had put in their effort.’ (K006)

Intensifier such as *cinsimulo* ‘heartily’, *kiphun* ‘deep’, *cengmal* ‘really’, and *nemwuto* ‘terribly’ are frequently employed in Korean to strengthen the sentiment, as seem examples (25) and (26).

- (25) OOO-ul salanghay-cwusi-n kokayk yelepwn-kkey
 OOO-AC love-give-RL customer all-to(hon.)
cinsimulo kamsatulipnita.
heartily be.thankful
 ‘We sincerely thank all of our customers who have loved OOO.’ (K191)
- (26) siktang-ul iyonghay cwusi-n iyongkayk yelepwuntul-uy
 restaurant-AC use give-RL user all-of
 sengwen-ey **kiphun** kamsatulipnita
 support-for **deep** be.thankful
 ‘We extend deep gratitude to all the patrons who have used the restaurant.’
 (K090)

In some instances, expressions of thanks serve also serve as sign-off formulae, as shown in Figure 4. This sign posted by an outlet of the global clothing company UNIQLO features *kamsahapnita* ‘Thank you’ as a standard sign-off phrase. This usage is common in Korean as it lacks direct equivalents to English sign-off expressions like *best wishes* or *warm regards*.

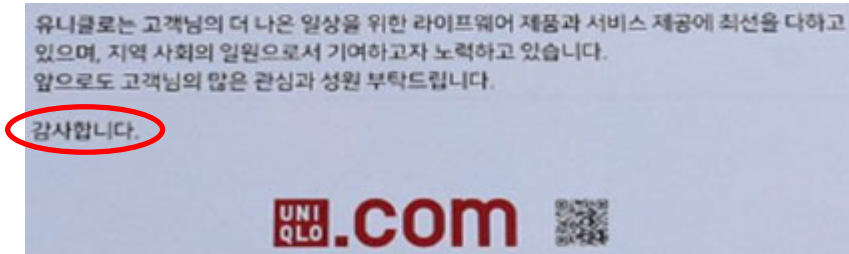


Figure 4. Sign with a thanking expression as a sign-off formula

Still, the demarcation between substantial thanking and formulaic thanking appears to be complex, primarily due to the fact that expressions of thanks can retain their literal meanings even when used for other purposes, as illustrated in Figure 4.

Some posts feature the presence of multiple thanking expressions, which serve the function of expressing gratitude, along with other communicative purposes. Figures 4 and 5 serve as examples of such cases.

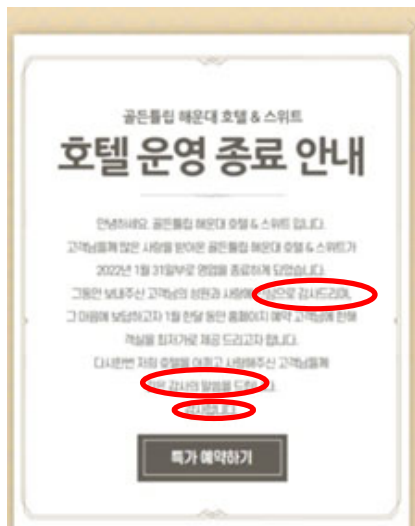


Figure 5. Sign with multiple thanks 1

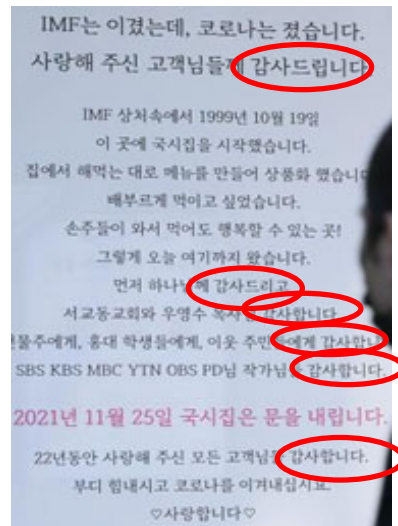


Figure 6. Sign with multiple thanks 2

Figure 5 presents three expressions of gratitude, with the first two specifically directed towards the customers, acknowledging their support and love. The repetition of

these same thanking moves or speech acts intensifies the overall sense of gratitude and effectively conveys the writer's deep appreciation (e.g., Rabab'ah and AbuSeileek 2012). The final expression of gratitude in Figure 5 functions as a sign-off formula, as discussed earlier in this section. Figure 6 stands out as exceptional due to the six occurrences of the expression of gratitude. The initial one serves as a general thank you addressed to the customers. Subsequently, the following four occurrences target specific groups, such as the lord, the people in the church, neighbors, students, and employees of a nearby broadcasting company. Through this repetition of the thanking speech act, the sign author successfully imparts a sense of individually acknowledging each group of customers. The concluding thanking expression mirrors the initiating one both literally and functionally. The strategic use of the same thanking moves or speech acts within the same sign aims to emphasize the strength of gratitude and the genuine sincerity of the sign author in recognizing each group of customers individually.

The word *kamsahata* 'be thankful', which originates from Chinese, has a native Korean counterpart *komapta* 'be thankful'. This native Korean word appears just once in the current data. To repeat, among pairs of sino- and native Korean words, the former appears to be favored in closure signs, as sino-Korean words are considered to be more formal and polite (e.g., Koo and Ma 2020).

4.4. Asking for understanding

One expressive speech act or move found exclusively in the Korean data is asking for understanding, which do not appear in O&B's English data. This speech act is mainly conveyed by the word *yanghay* 'understanding, consent' with the addition of sequences like *palata* 'wish' and *pwutakhata* 'ask for', resulting in *yanghaypalata* 'wishing understanding', and *yanghaypwutakhata* 'asking for understanding'. According to the Standard Dictionary of Korean (<https://stdict.korean.go.kr/main/main.do>) published by the National Institute of Korean Language, the definition of the word *yanghay* is as in (27).

- (27) *yanghay* NOUN. Understanding others' situations well and accept them graciously

Contrary to its literal definition, when classified using Searle's (1976) categorization

of speech acts, the speech act of asking for understanding falls between expressive and directive speech acts. There are at least two phenomena that support this claim. First, in contemporary Korean, this speech act is often used as an indirect alternative to apologizing, as it allows the speaker/writer to convey an apologetic message indirectly and from a distance by portraying the situation as something to be understood by the recipients. This is why public figures frequently begin their apologies with *yanghay* instead of *coysong* or *sakwa* when a misdeed has occurred (e.g., Ahn 2020). Otherwise, it would imply an admission of fault on their part. In addition, due to its bleached meaning, the word *yanghay* often co-occur with the expression *malssumul* ‘words’ *tulita* ‘give(hon.) ‘give words’, which has been and is still regarded as an incorrect use of this speech act (e.g., Hong 2019). According to Hong (2019), *yanghay* is something to be sought or asked for, rather than something to be proffered by the speaker. In that respect, the juxtaposition of the two words *yanghay* and *malssumtulida* is argued to be incorrect. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy this particular collocation is recurrently found in contemporary Korean.

The complements of this speech act are remarkably similar to those of apologies such as *hyuep-kyelceng/-yencang* ‘decision to close/to extend the closure’, *pyenkyeng* ‘changes’, *pwulphyen* ‘discomfort’, and *chwiso/cwungtan* ‘cancellation/discontinuation’, as shown in (28) and (29).

- (28) **imsi** **hyukwanha-oni** iyongcapwuntul-uy yanghay
temporary **close**-because users(hon.)-of understanding
pala-pnita.
ask.for
‘We ask for the understanding of our users as we temporarily close.’ (K032)
- (29) **pwulphyenul** **tulikey** **toyn** cem nekulewun maumulo
inconvenience **give** **become-RL** fact generous heart-with
yanghayhaycwusiki palapnita.
understanding(hon.) wish
‘We kindly ask for your understanding and patience regarding any
inconvenience caused.’ (K033)

For this reason, the speech act of asking for understanding is frequently juxtaposed with that of offering apologies, with differences in the extent of acknowledging the

responsibility of the situations and, hence, subtle nuances. Some examples are provided in (30) and (31), wherein apologizing and asking for understanding occur consecutively. In the Korean literature on speech acts, this speech act of asking for understanding is frequently discussed together with that of offering apologies (e.g., Noh 2020)

- (30) pwulphyenul kkichyetulye **kiphun sakwa-uy** malssum-ul tuli-mye
 inconvenience cause-because **deep apologies**-of words-of give-and
 kwankayk yelepwn-uy . . . **yanghaylul pwuthaktulikeyssupnita.**
 audience all-of **understanding ask.for**
 ‘We deeply apologize for any inconvenience caused and kindly ask for
 your generous understanding, dear audience members.’ (K010)
- (31) iyongey pwulphyenul tulye taytanhi **coysonghapnita.**
 use inconvenience give deeply **apologize**
 kokayknimuy nekulewun **yanghay pwuthaktulipnita.**
 customer(hon.) generous **understanding ask.for**
 ‘We apologize for any inconvenience you may experience while using our
 service. We sincerely ask for your understanding, valued customers.’
 (K091)

This speech act is often modified by words such as *manhun* ‘much’, *nelli* ‘widely’, *nelun* ‘generous’, and *nekulewun* ‘generous’, as shown in (32) and (33).

- (32) kenkang-kwa ancenul wihan cochi-i-ni **manhun**
 health-and safety for measure-be-because **much**
yanghay pwuthaktulipnita.
understanding ask.for
 ‘These measures are taken for health and safety reasons, so we kindly ask
 for your understanding.’ (K227)
- (33) kitalyecwusi-n motun pwuntul-kkey **nelun yanghay**
 wait(hon.)-RL all persons(hon.)-to(hon.) **generous understanding**
 pwuthaktulipnita.
 ask.for
 ‘We kindly ask for your understanding from everyone who has waited.’ (K119)

5. Discussion and conclusion

This study compiled a corpus consisting of 298 business closure signs in Korea during the COVID-19 pandemic and analyzed their discursive moves (à la O&B 2021) and expressive speech acts (à la Austin 1962; Searle 1976). In particular, to examine the communicative functions of the collected signs, this study focused on expressive speech acts such as greeting, referring, thanking, and apologizing. Additionally, it identified a speech act or move exclusively used in the Korean data, which is the act of asking for understanding.

The speech act of greeting in the Korean signs was conveyed in a wider range of expressions compared to the English counterparts. Referring expressions used in the closure signs displayed intricate sensitivity to social dynamics and the relationship between the sign writer and the recipients, reflecting an important aspect of the Korean culture where politeness between interlocutors is highly valued for effective and appropriate communication. Apologies in the Korean notices were sometimes overly expressed, involving apologies for sins or misdeeds, which may be attributed to the common aspect of Korean business culture that places customers in paramount importance. The repetition of the thanking speech act or move within the same sign stood out as a strategy to reinforce the degree of gratitude and the sincerity of the sign author. It was also found that asking for understanding frequently replaces or combines with act of apologizing. Furthermore, the preference of sino-Korean words over their native Korean counterparts demonstrated a tendency to consider the former as more formal and polite (Koo and Ma 2020).

The findings of this study aim to provide insights into the distinctive linguistic and cultural features of the business closure signs in Korea, by highlighting the cultural norms and conventions pertaining to language use in these pandemic-related communications. Some of the findings, such as the overuse of the same speech act or the preference for formal language in the form of sino-Korean words, reflect the cultural sensitivity to and emphasis on politeness in Korean. Furthermore, this study underscores the need for businesses and communicators to adapt their messaging strategies based on the cultural context, which may have implications for the studies of cross-cultural communication even during times of crisis.

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Appendix (Abbreviations)

AC	Accusative particle	AH	Addressee honorific
DC	Declarative sentence-type suffix	hon.	honorific word
IN	Indicative mood suffix	PL	Plural suffix or particle
RL	Relativiser suffix	TC	Topic-contrast particle

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