

WHAT TRIGGERS ATTRACTION EFFECT OF HONORIFIC AGREEMENTS IN KOREAN

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This research study delves into the attraction effect observed in the processing of subject-verb honorific agreement in the Korean language. Although sentence processing has extensively explored this effect, there is a noticeable gap in the literature regarding its investigation in Korean. The main objective of this research is to examine the impact of the intervening honorific affix (-si-) on the resolution of dependencies with the following questions. How does the intervening affix (-si-) affect the attraction effect? Specifically, does the intermediate activation triggered by the intervening affix (-si-) disrupt the appropriate resolution of dependencies? To answer these questions, a self-paced reading experiment was conducted utilizing the web-based platform, PCIBex Farm.

Experiment: The stimuli consisted of a main clause and an embedded adjunct clause, with the subject of the main clause and the verb in the embedded clause varying in honorific features (H: Honorific, N: Not-honorific) as in (1). In order to test the effect of the honorific marker exclusively, non-honorific nouns were used as embedded subjects. The main verbs consistently carried honorific markers (-si-) across conditions. Sixteen sets of experimental sentences (64 sentences = 16 sets X 4 conditions) were created.

- (1)
- | | | | |
|------------------------------------|---|---------------|---------------------------------|
| H | / | N | N |
| <i>{cwuim-nim-i / Cayhwuni-ka}</i> | | <i>ppalli</i> | <i>[Minho-ka</i> |
| chief-HON-NOM / Cayhwuni-NOM | | quickly | M.-NOM |
| | | | <i>sanghwangul</i> |
| | | | situation-ACC |
| <i>phaakha-(si)-key]</i> | | <i>motun</i> | <i>pokose-lul</i> |
| Figure out-(HON)-C | | all | document-ACC |
| | | | <i>nemkyecwu-si-ess-ko, ...</i> |
| | | | Hand over-HON-PAST-DEC, ... |
- *H-si: 'The chief handed over all documents to him so that M. could figure out the situation quickly and ...'
 - H-x: 'The chief handed over all documents to him so that M. could figure out the situation quickly and ...'
 - *N-si: 'Cayhwun handed over all documents to him so that M. could figure out the situation quickly and ...'
 - *N-x: 'Cayhwun handed over all documents to him so that M. could figure out the situation quickly and ...'

Results: In Korean, honorific agreement occurs within the same clause boundary. As personal names (e.g., *Cayhwun*) in the main subject lack honorific features, the presence of -si- on the main verb leads to ungrammaticality. The critical word positions were the embedded verb (region 5), with or without -si-, and the main verb (region 8), which consistently had -si-. The results from 74 native Korean speakers are summarized in Figure 1. Regardless of the presence of honorific markers on the main subjects, a significant slowdown in processing was observed when -si- appeared on the embedded verbs at Region 5. This finding indicates that honorific agreements strictly adhere to clause-mate conditions, specifically with the embedded subject having a non-honorific feature. Interestingly, we also found that the presence of -si- on the embedded verb actually reduced processing costs for the main verb (H-si vs. H-x, N-si vs. N-x), despite its ungrammaticality. We propose that the failure of honorific agreement between the embedded verb and the subject may lead parsers to inadvertently reestablish the honorific feature of the embedded subject, using pragmatic strategies. It could mistakenly imply that the subject of the embedded clause (i.e., *Minho*) has a high status, leading to the subject of the main clause (i.e., *Cayhwun*) also being perceived as having a high status, as personal names must be treated equally in terms of their pragmatic relationship.

Conclusion: In summary, this study suggests that the intermediate honorific affix (-si-) may induce a pragmatic relationship reset to resolve mismatches in Korean subject-verb honorific agreement and consequently reduces the processing difficulty of the ungrammaticality.

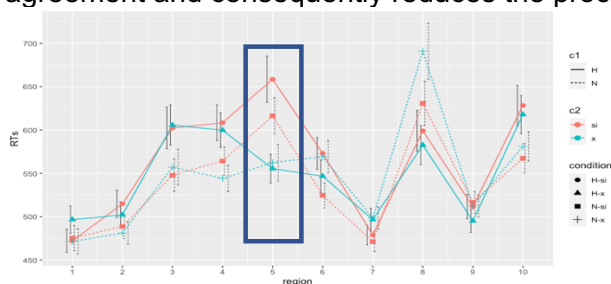


Figure 1. Average reading time by regions (ms)