The syntax-semantics interface of the addressee-honorific construction: 
the multidimensional in-situ analysis vs the copy analysis

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1. Introduction: Formal studies on honorification have developed in several ways for the last fifteen years. First, syntacticians have pursued the idea that the content-honorific construction is a special type of agreement (Niinuma 2003; Boeckx and Niinuma 2004; Boeckx 2006; Kishimoto 2010). Second, rather independently, semanti cists have played with the idea that honorification is involved with an expressive meaning, calculated in a different plane separated from the meaning associated with the root clause (Potts and Kawahara 2004; McCready 2014). Honorific constructions are, however, not monolithic. Most studies have examined the CONTENT-HONORIFIC (an honorific construction with which a person referred to by a particular argument of the predicate is respected) and the study of ADDRESSEE-HONORIFICS (an honorific construction with which the addresser shows his/her respect to the addressee in the given context) is less developed. This study, thus, zooms in the syntax-semantic interface of this addressee-honorific construction and it proposes that the expressiveness is calculated at the very last step of the semantic composition, not during the compositional semantics.

2. Multidimensional Analysis: The point of departure of our investigation is with the following data in (2) from Japanese, in which, unlike Korean or Thai but similar to Basque and Burmese, the addressee-honorific marker is in the middle of the sentence, i.e., is c-commanded by the tense marker.

(1) Affirmative sentence
   a. Present   
      \[TP[Hasir-imas]-u].
      run-HON_A-PRS
      ‘(I) run.; I respect you.’
   b. Past
      \[TP[Hasir-imas]-ita].
      run-HON_A-PST
      ‘(I) ran.; I respect you’

If the morphemes are interpreted according to the superficial structure, a standard compositional semantics would face a problem; we have to say that the scope of the addressee-honorific is lower than the scope of other operators (e.g., tense and negation). Multidimensional approaches, on the other hand, seem to overcome this issue, by placing the politeness meaning in a different plane where the meaning of the root sentence is calculated (Potts and Kawahara 2004; McCready 2014).

3. Syntax (Copy analysis): Notice that this multidimensional idea tacitly (not necessarily, though) assumes the following syntax; i.e., the element is interpreted in the position between vP and TP (this study calls this proposal to the LF syntax the IN-SITU ANALYSIS). This assumption is not, however, congenial to the data given below in (2)b. First, there are multiple addressee-honorific morphemes present within a single sentence. If the meaning is shipped to a different plane at the very point where the -imas is pronounced, we do not have to make it move, contrary to the fact. Second, the negation marker -anak sandwiched between -imas and -des becomes -en, as if the addressee-honorific feature cyclically moves through heads and changes the feature bundle of this head. This study, therefore, proposes that a series of cyclic internal merges take place which provides multiple copies pronounced in the tree and the meaning of the addressee-honorific is interpreted at the highest position of the tree (this study calls this the COPY ANALYSIS; Nunes 1995, 2004; Landau 2005).
(2) Negative sentences

a. \([\text{run-HON}_i \text{-neg}} \]

b. \([\text{run-HON}_i \text{-neg-HON}_i = \text{COP-PST}} \]

‘(I) do not run.’

‘(I) did not run.’

This study hypothesizes that the highest projection where this highest copy is located must not be available to PF; the last phase head, which ships its complement to PF, remains in the narrow syntax because there is no higher phase head available (as a consequence of the Phase Theory). The lower copies are present because of PF-requirements (P-recoverability; Landau 2005).

4. Semantics and Pragmatics: A Bayesian Update to the Discourse

The politeness meaning is involved with the way how the main proposition, the true target of the truth/false judgement, is delivered. To this end, this presentation proposes that the context tuple contains the following discourse components associated with the use of the addressee-honorific in the given way (the decision of the prior and the link function is an arbitrary choice for the simplicity sake).

(3) Conversation Context (C):

\[ C = \langle c, g, q_s, tdl, \beta, x_i \rangle \]

(4) Social Context for the \(i\)-th utterance (x):

\[ x_i = (x_{i1}, x_{i2}, ..., x_{ip}), \forall x_j \in \mathbb{R} \]

(5) Parameters for Register Generating Function (\(\beta\)):

\[ \beta = (\beta_1, \beta_2, ..., \beta_p)^T, \forall \beta_j \in \mathbb{R}, j \in \{1, ..., p\} \]

a. \(\beta_i \sim \text{Uniform}(0,1), \forall \beta_i \)

b. \(y_i \sim \text{Bernoulli}(\text{logistic}(x_i \beta)); y_i = 1\), if the \(i\)-th utterance includes the addressee-honorific marker.

The probability \text{logistic}(x_i \beta) represents the acceptability of the sentence with the addressee-honorific marker. Unlike McCready’s work, this model does not give a clear-cut dichotomy between acceptable and unexpected. Rather, every utterance may select one of the forms with a particular probability and each instance then updates the context by finding the posterior value for \(\beta\).

Reference


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1 Where \(c_g\) is a set of propositions, \(q_s\) is a set of question-denotations, \(tdl\) is a set of properties.

2 Where \(p\) is the number of predictors.

3 Where each \(\beta_i\) corresponds to the prior parameter for each social predictor (e.g., formality, social distance, and psychological distance, as McCready 2014 proposes).