Syntactic and Pragmatic Constraints on Subject-oriented Honorifics in Korean
Talk presented at the JK29 Satellite Workshop

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Subject-oriented honorifics in Korean

A language with a rich and intricate honorific system, including addressee and subject oriented honorific markers

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The starting intuitions

(1)   할아버님이 바다에 {#갔다 | 가셨다}.

halapenim-i   pata-ey {#ka-ess-ta | ka-sy-ess-ta}.
grandfather-NOM sea-DAT {#went | went.HON}.

(2)   아이가 바다에 {갔다 | #가셨다}.

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Inspired by Davis (2021)

Constraint definitions

The observed usage patterns can be modeled by complementary pragmatic constraints, as in Davis (2021)[1], simplified below:

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[1] $\mathrm{HON_{sp}}$: the characteristic function of all entities to whom the speaker is socially obliged to express respect/deference.

- $\mathrm{HON_{sp}}(x) = 1$ for any grandfather x
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- $*\textsc{UnderHonor}$

  Assign a penalty for an utterance **without** subject honorification made in a context for which $\textsc{hon}_{sp}(x)$ **does hold** ($=1$) for subject referent x.

- $*\textsc{OverHonor}$

  Assign a penalty for an utterance **with** subject honorification made in a context for which $\textsc{hon}_{sp}(x)$ **does not hold** ($=0$) for subject referent x.

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A puzzle: Mixed status plural (conjoined) subjects

Question

What happens with plural subjects whose mixed social status (age) makes conflicting demands on the use of subject-oriented honorific verb forms?

Test case: "The grandfather and the child went to the sea."

Cases like these mentioned briefly in Kim and Sells (2007)

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Our two constraints make conflicting demands:

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So how is the conflict resolved?

The landscape of variation?

Fieldwork data from Davis (2021) on test cases like:

"The grandfather and the child went to the sea."

- Cross-dialectal variation in Yaeyaman (a Ryukyuan language related to Japanese):
  - **Kohama**
    Opted to use the non-honorific form
  - **Maezato, Hatoma**
    Opted to use the honorific form
- Inter-speaker variation in Japanese: some chose the honorific form, some chose the non-honorific form, some disliked both

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Emerging questions

- What would the landscape of variation look like with more quantitatively robust, experimental data?
- How would the ordering of the conjuncts affect the pattern? (see also Kim and Sells 2007)

An experimental study

The main questions we seek to address:

1. In mixed subject cases, what is/are the honorific strategy/strategies adopted by the Korean speakers, and how do these patterns compare to the emerging picture of cross-linguistic variation?

2. In mixed subject cases, does the ordering of the conjunct affect speaker's choice of the honorific strategy? (briefly remarked on in Kim and Sells (2007))

3. In addition to the verbal honorific marker *si*, does the honorific case marker *kkeyse* modulate the strategy further? Can the latter be optional in honorification, as argued in Kim and Sells (2007)?

4. Is there any systematic inter-speaker variability in the pattern? How can this be modelled?

Experimental conditions

Target conditions: '(The) professor and Yura wrote a paper.'   **high + low**

(4)   교수님과 유라가 논문을 썼습니다.   **no honorific (0)**

kyoswunim-kwa yula-ka   nonmwun-ul ss-ess-supnita.
professor-and   yula-NOM paper-ACC   write-PAST-DEC

(5)   교수님과 유라가 논문을 쓰셨습니다.   **honorific (HON1)**

kyoswunim-kwa yula-ka   nonmwun-ul ssu-**sy**-ess-supnita.
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(6)   교수님과 유라께서 논문을 쓰셨습니다.   **honorific (HON1+2)**

kyoswunim-kwa yula-**kkeyse**   nonmwun-ul ssu-**sy**-ess-supnita.
professor-and   yula-NOM.HON paper-ACC   write-HON-PAST-DEC

Experimental conditions

Target conditions: 'Yura and the professor wrote a paper.'   **low + high**

(7)   유라와 교수님이 논문을 썼습니다.   **no honorific (0)**

yula-wa   kyoswunim-i nonmwun-ul ss-ess-supnita.
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Experimental conditions

Control conditions: '(The) professor wrote a paper.'　　　　　　**high**

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　　　　professor-NOM.HON　paper-ACC　　write-HON-PAST-DEC

Experimental conditions

Control conditions: 'Yula (a younger friend) wrote a paper.'   **<u>low</u>**

(13)   유라가 논문을 썼습니다.   **no honorific (0)**

　　　 yula-ka   nonmwun-ul ss-ess-supnita.
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　　　 yula-<u>NOM.HON</u> paper-ACC   write-<u>HON</u>-PAST-DEC

Experimental design

Conditions, items, and counterbalancing

- Presence vs. absence of honorifics (**no honorifics** vs. honorifics), and subject type/order (high, low, high+low, low+high) were tested within-subjects

- Honorific subtype (choice between **HON1** and **HON1+2**) was tested between subjects

- Each participant saw a total of 64 trials (8 conditions * 8 items), appearing in random order

- Participants: 47 Korean native speakers

Experimental design

The main task in each trial:

- The set-up: The speaker is talking about their { professor | younger friend | professor and younger friend | younger friend and professor }. They say as follows: [sentence stimulus]
    - Key Question: Given the relationship between the speaker and the people they mentioned, how natural is the sentence above? (rated on a 7-point Likert scale)
    - Optional Question: Any comments?

A brief demographic questionnaire included at the end

Overall results
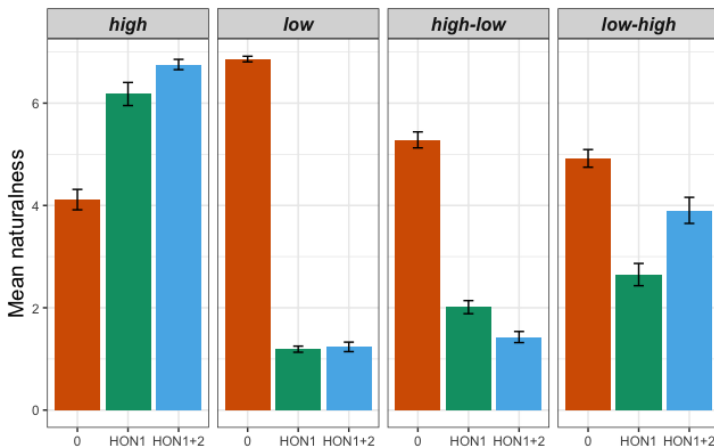
Overall patterns explained by bar plots: Mean, 95% CIs

Overall results
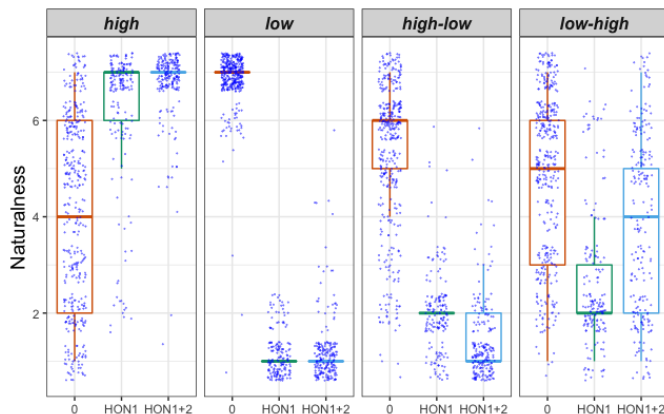
More details about the distribution explained by box plots:
Median, 25%-75% percentiles and outliers; data points overlaid in jitter

Result 1
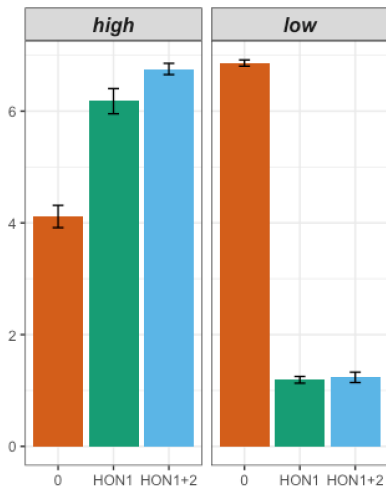
- Basic contrast between singular high status vs. singular low status subject found:
  - High: **HON1+2**, **HON1** > **0**
  - Low: **0** > **HON1**, **HON1+2**

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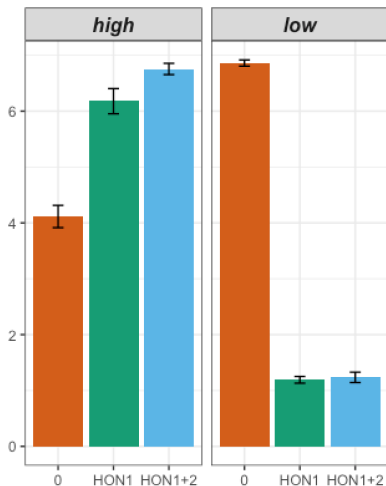
- Basic contrast between singular high status vs. singular low status subject found:
  - High: **HON1+2**, **HON1** > **0**
  - Low: **0** > **HON1**, **HON1+2**
- Basic matching requirement for honorific use verified

(Significance and effect size tested with mixed effects ordinal regression models)

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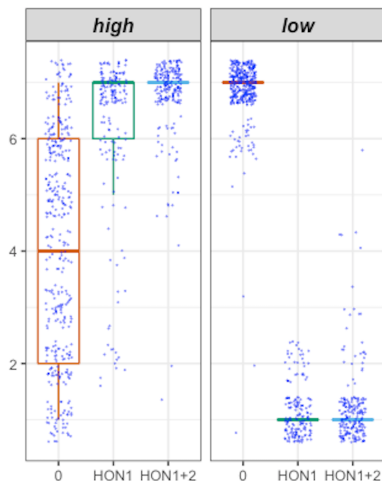
- But higher rating and more variability for non-honorific forms with high status subjects than for honorific forms with low status subjects
- Asymmetry found between over-honoring vs. under-honoring types of mismatches

Result 1

A potential explanation for the asymmetry:

- Honorific forms (case marker and verbal suffix) make a positive requirement on the status of the subject referent. Using honorific form with a low-status subject results in <u>semantic infelicity</u> (or false entailments).
  $\lambda x.\mathrm{HON_{sp}}(x) \Rightarrow$ false when applied to low status subjects!

- Non-honorific forms (plain case marker and no verbal suffix) are semantically unmarked. The combination with high status subjects is only bad by a kind of pragmatic implicature; i.e. the subject referent is the kind of person the speaker <u>ought to</u> honor, and so the failure to do so is pragmatically/socially marked or deviant.

- Note: This result may pose a challenge for syntactic agreement analyses of honorification that posit a [±HON] feature on nouns that drives agreement on the verb (e.g., Choi and Harley 2019).

Result 2
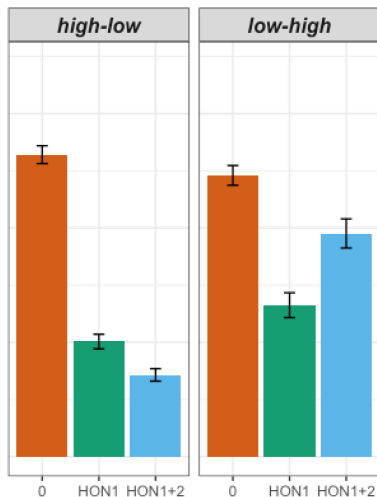
- There is an overall preference for non-honorific forms in the mixed subject conditions:
  - High-Low:
    0 > **HON1**, **HON1+2**
  - Low-High:
    0 > **HON1+2**, **HON1**

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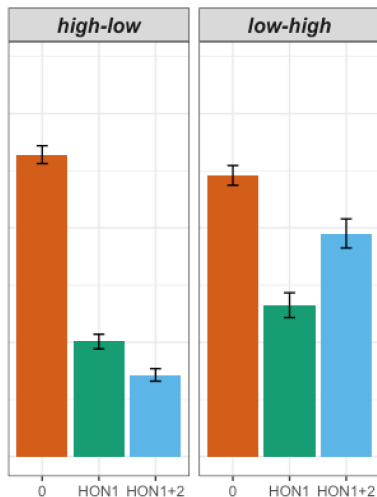
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- Does this suggest that *OVERHONOR* >> *UNDERHONOR* in Korean?

(Significance and effect size tested with mixed effects ordinal regression models)

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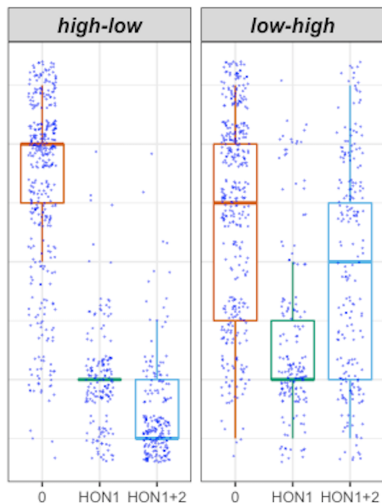
- But there is a lot of variability (cf. the low status singular subject condition)
- How to interpret this?
  - Variability across different individuals? (e.g., akin to the patterns documented in Han et al. (2016))
  - Variability or uncertainty within individuals?
- A preliminary examination of by-participant results indicate that the former is more likely (i.e., systematic inter-speaker variation)

Result 3
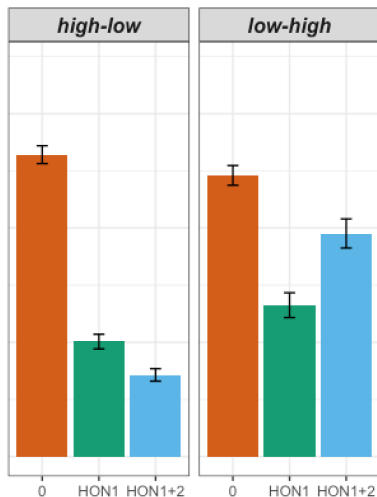
- There seems to be (something akin to) an **agree with closest conjunct** effect
- But this effect is larger in **HON1+2** than in **HON1**
- Why? At least two possibilities (thanks to Adrian Staub for discussion)

Result 3
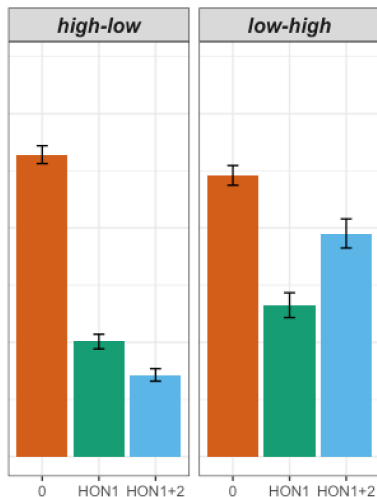
- The honorific case marker (used in strategy 2 but not strategy 1) is closer to the conjoined NP, and thus more sensitive to closest conjunct effects

- The honorific case marker, but not the verbal suffix, is sensitive to closest conjunct effects (for some mysterious reason)

Summary & Conclusion

1. Base cases: Asymmetry in two types of pressures in Korean
   - Purely symmetric account may not be adequate for Korean
   - May also pose a new type of challenge to the agreement based approach

2. Mixed subject cases: Globally, Korean speakers tend to choose the under-honoring option (i.e., *OVERHONOR can perhaps be said to rank higher)

3. This overall pattern, however, appears to be modulated by an ordering effect ('agree with the closest conjunct')

4. Furthermore, there appears to be systematic inter-speaker variation in mixed cases and in singular high subject base cases.

By participant variation I

Akin to the 3 main types of speakers that Davis (2021) found, there are. . .

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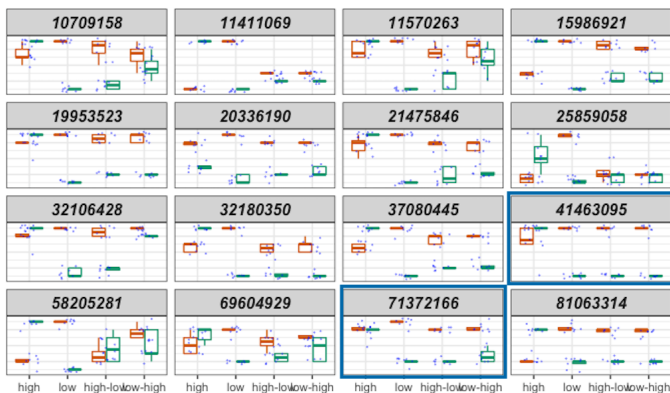
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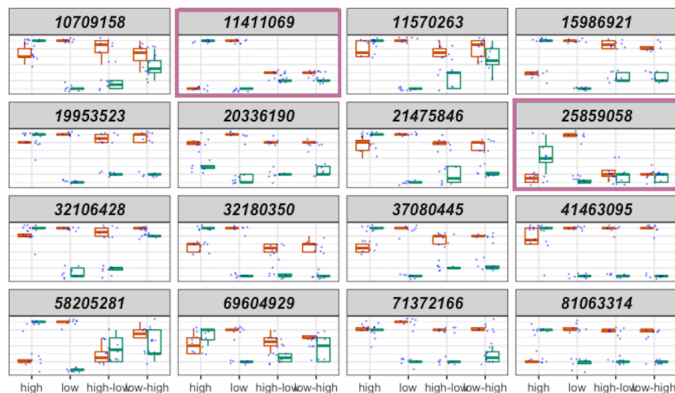
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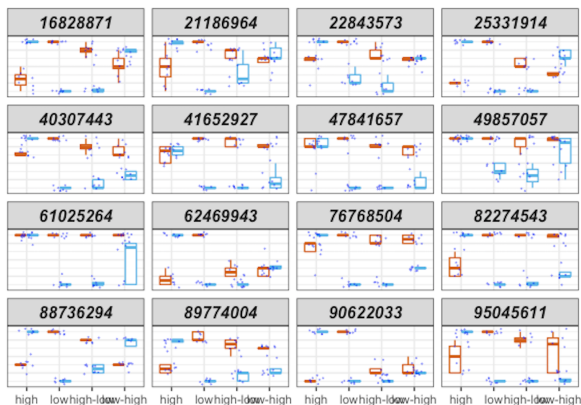- **Those who find honorifics (more) acceptable in low-high**

By participant variation I

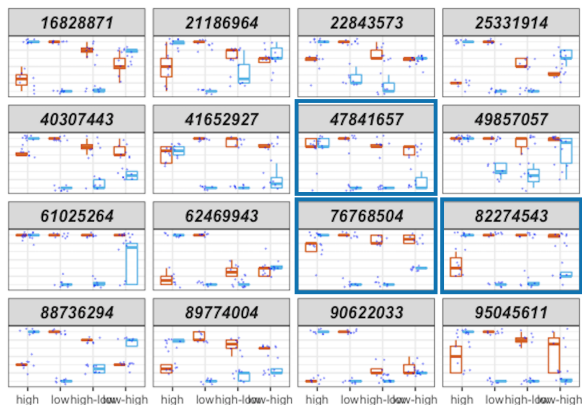Akin to the 3 main types of speakers that Davis (2021) found, there are. . .

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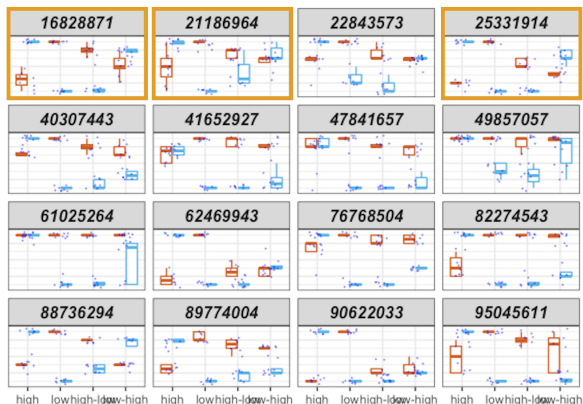
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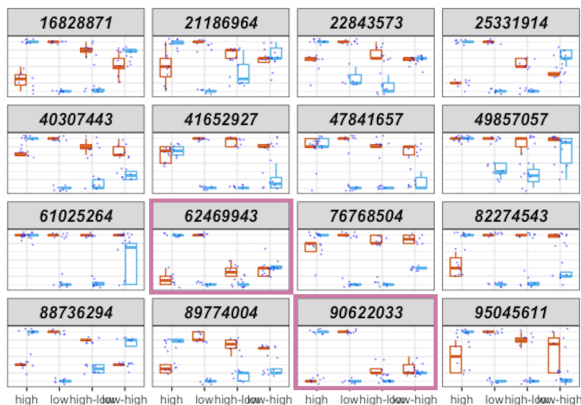- **Those who opt for honorifics in low-high**

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Thank you all for listening!
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A sample trial

화자는 자신의 지도교수님과 후배에 대해 다음과 같이 말했습니다:

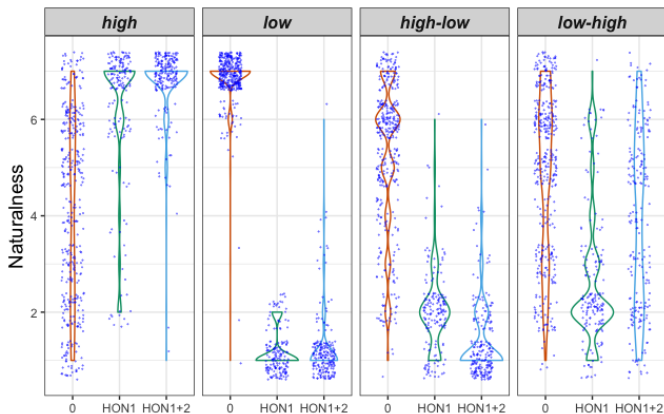## " 교수님과 유라가 논문을 썼습니다. "

Q: 화자와 화자가 언급한 사람들 간의 관계를 고려했을때, 위 발화가 얼마나 자연스럽습니까?

'1점: 전혀 자연스럽지 않음 ' 에서
'7점: 매우 자연스러움' 사이의 점수를 매겨 주십시오.

(전혀 자연스럽지 않음)							(매우 자연스러움)
1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	
○	○	○	○	○	○	○	

Bi-modality?

A violin plot of the aggregate data