

# Subject Honorification in Korean: In Defense of Agr and Head-Spec Agreement \*

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In this paper, I claim that a traditional insight that Korean subject honorification involves syntactic agreement is basically correct, contrary to Kim and Sells (2007), although I follow their position that previous accounts which are based on an [Hon] feature on a noun cannot be maintained due to numerous counterexamples. In order to capture the insight and explain the counterexamples, I propose that what is involved is agreement in terms of a [Speaker Honorification] feature under a Spec-head configuration and its interactions with some non-linguistic conventions concerning honorification. I further propose that the agreement host is not in Spec, but in head, since the feature is interpretable on *-si/ø*, while it is uninterpretable on a noun. This leads me to propose that *-si/ø* forms Agr in Korean and head-Spec agreement is involved in Korean subject honorification.

**Keywords:** subject honorification, Korean, Head-Spec agreement, Agr, speaker honorification

## 1. Introduction

Within the GB approach to Korean grammar, a traditional view of the subject honorification has been that it is analogous to English subject-verb agreement (cf. H-S Han 1987, H-S Choe 1988, M-Y Kang 1988, and D-S Ryu 1994). The examples in (1) will be used to illustrate such a view.

- (1) a.   ape-nim-kkeyse                   o-si-ess-ta.  
          father-Hon-Hon.Subj        come-Hon-Past-Decl  
          ‘My father came.’

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- |    |                     |                    |
|----|---------------------|--------------------|
| b. | * ape-nim-kkeyse    | o-ass-ta.          |
|    | father-Hon-Hon.Subj | come-Past-Decl     |
| c. | chelswu-ka          | o-ass-ta.          |
|    | Chelswu-Nom         | come-Past-Decl     |
|    | ‘Chelswu came.’     |                    |
| d. | ?*chelswu-ka        | o-si-ess-ta.       |
|    |                     | come-Hon-Past-Decl |

On one hand, the contrast between (1a) and (1b) shows that when a subject noun refers to a person to be honored, which is linguistically encoded by an honorific suffix *-nim* and an honorific nominative case marker *-kkeyse*, a predicate should take an honorific verbal suffix *-si*. On the other hand, the contrast between (1c) and (1d) shows that when a subject noun refers to a person not to be honored,<sup>1</sup> a predicate cannot take *-si*.<sup>2</sup> In other words, (1) intuitively shows that there is agreement between the grammatical subject and the predicate with respect to honorification and this intuition might be captured formally in terms of an [Hon(rific)] feature (cf. D-S Ryu 1994). For example, (1b) and (1d) are supposed to be ungrammatical due to a mismatch in the value of [Hon] between the subject and the predicate.

However, there have been numerous objections to this view since the early days of GB and such objections have led to the rejection of the idea that Korean subject honorification is a kind of **syntactic** agreement analogous to English subject-verb agreement.

The main goal of this paper is to show that despite all the objections raised to the traditional view, the idea that Korean subject honorification involves syntactic agreement can be maintained when we adopt a different approach to the honorification manifested in subject nouns and predicates. Specifically, assuming that a feature involved in the subject honorification is not [Hon], but [Sp(eaker)-Hon], which has the interpretation of speakers' intention to show honor or respect, I claim that Head-Spec agreement is involved in Korean subject honorification although pragmatic or discourse factors are also involved.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In Korean, when a person is referred to by his or her first name, he or she is not intended to be honored regardless of his or her age or social status.

<sup>2</sup> However, there is a subtle difference in the nature of acceptability between (1b) and (1d). Thus, in any situation, (1b) cannot be acceptable, while in some situations, (1d) might be acceptable, typically with a metaphoric effect. I will discuss this difference later.

<sup>3</sup> Note that instead of Spec-head agreement, head-Spec agreement is adopted. This is because it is proposed in this article that the agreement host which bears an interpretable feature in Korean is Agr. Note also that, according to this view, Korean subject honorification is both like and unlike English subject-verb agreement. They are alike in that they involve a Spec-head configuration, but are not alike in that, in English, the agreement host is the subject which is in a Spec position, while in Korean, it is the honorific suffix *-si/∅* which is assumed to be Agr in this paper.

The organization of the paper is as follows. In section 2, I first introduce a traditional GB or a minimalist style analysis of Korean subject honorification and then summarize the major objections raised to this analysis in previous studies, such as H-P Im (1985), Y-j Kim (1992), J-M Yoon (1998), N-S Lee (1998), D-H Im (2000), J-W Choe (2004), and Kim & Sells (2007). In section 3, I examine and discuss the alternative analysis suggested in these studies, especially focusing on Kim & Sells (2007). I point out that their observations on the functions of *-si*, *-nim* and *-kkeyse* are seriously misleading, although I agree in part with some of their claims, such as that “it [honorification] should be treated as a privative property” (p. 333)<sup>4</sup> and that “the nature of honorification on a subject differs from the nature of honorification on a predicate” (p. 334). Then, I offer a Head-Spec analysis of Korean subject honorification in terms of a [Sp-Hon] feature and show that all the objections to the traditional view dissolve in the suggested analysis. Finally, in section 4, with a brief summary of the discussion, I speculate implications of the analysis on the multiple case phenomena in Korean and a parametric difference between Korean and English.

## 2. The Traditional View of Korean Subject Honorification and Arguments against It

In section 1, I pointed out that in a GB or a minimalist analysis, the pattern in (1) has been implicitly or explicitly formalized in terms of a formal feature, [Hon]. Below, I introduce more specifics of this analysis because knowing the specifics are crucial in understanding the objections raised against the view.

First, note that [Hon] is parallel to phi-features in English. This means that [Hon] is assumed to be a sort of inherent feature of a nominal expression. To put it in terms of a minimalist framework, [Hon] on a nominal expression is assumed to be interpretable, while the same feature on a verbal complex is assumed to be uninterpretable. So, if we adopt Chomsky’s (2000, 2001a, b) view of feature valuation instead of feature checking as in Chomsky (1995), a nominal expression is specified either as [+Hon] or [-Hon] in the lexicon,<sup>5</sup> while a verbal complex is unspecified as [Hon].

<sup>4</sup> Kim and Sells (2007: 303) claim that “honorification is a privative feature, syntactically and semantically.” Although I agree with their semantic characterization of honorification, I do not agree with their syntactic characterization, because an [Hon] feature is not postulated in my analysis. In fact, I claim that some aspects of the subject honorification in Korean should be captured in terms of a non-privative, i.e., binary [Sp Hon] feature. See section 3 for further details.

<sup>5</sup> Regarding the issue of which nominal is considered to be honorific, a general idea is that a nominal which refers to a person who is socially superior is honorific. Also, a nominal to which *-nim* and/or *-kkeyse* is attached is always regarded as [+Hon].

Next, an [Hon] feature on a verbal complex gets its value from a subject which comes in SPEC, AgrP or TP/IP in terms of Spec-head agreement (cf. Chomsky 1995). After its value is determined as either [+] or [-], it is deleted, satisfying the Principle of Full Interpretation and, as a result, the derivation converges. However, on a PF side, the feature is phonetically realized depending on its value. So, when the value is [+], it is phonologically realized as *-si*, and, when it is [-], it is realized as null. However, if the feature remains unspecified or there is a mismatch in the value of [Hon] between a subject and a verbal complex, the derivation would crash since the feature in the latter is uninterpretable. In short, the traditional view can be summarized as follows:

- (2) a. *-si/∅* on a verbal complex involves agreement in terms of [Hon].  
 b. *-si/∅* agrees with an expression which comes in Spec, AgrP or Spec, TP/IP.<sup>6</sup>

Each point in (2) has been disputed in the previous literature. (2a) has been disputed in studies, such as D-H Im (2000), J-W Choe (2004), and Kim and Sells (2007), where it is claimed that the honorification in terms of *-si/∅* does not involve feature agreement, but is discourse-sensitive. (2b) has been disputed in studies, such as H-P Im (1985), Y-j Kim (1992), J-M Yoon (1998), and N-S Lee (1998), which show that expressions other than the grammatical subject can be honored via the use of *-si*. Below, I summarize the arguments raised against (2).

### 2.1. Arguments against (2a)

The first argument against (2a) questions the assumption that [Hon] is an inherent feature of a nominal expression. According to this assumption, a noun is supposed to be either [+Hon] or [-Hon] inherently. However, this assumption runs into a problem with the following sentences where the honorific marker *-si* is optional.

- (3) a. oppa-ka            o-ass-ni?  
       brother-Nom    come-Past-Q  
       ‘Did your brother come?’  
 b. oppa-ka            o-si-ess-ni?  
                               come-Hon-Past-Q  
       ‘Did your brother come?’

<sup>6</sup> Whether *-si/∅* forms an independent head Agr or not has been a hotly debated issue in Korean syntax. See K. Choi (2003a, b) for empirical evidence in favor of *-si/∅* as Agr in Korean and the related discussions on this topic.

Suppose that *oppa* in (3) has a [+Hon] feature inherently. Then (3a) is supposed to be ungrammatical, while (3b) is grammatical. On the other hand, supposing the opposite, (3b) is supposed to be ungrammatical, while (3a) is grammatical. The problem is that both sentences in (3) are acceptable with a different implication with respect to the honorification of *oppa*, which is determined by using *-si* or not. So, in (3b) a person referred to by *oppa* is intended to be honored by a speaker, while in (3a) the speaker is neutral in showing respect to *oppa*. In other words, (3) shows that honorification of a noun is not determined inherently.

The second argument concerns the fact that there is a degree of honorification. So, as J-W Choe (2004: 554) indicates, “the more honorific terms are used in a sentence, the more deferential the sentence sounds.” (see D-H Im 2000: 88 and Kim & Sells 2007: 316 also) This incremental nature of honorification is shown below.

- |        |                           |                  |                  |
|--------|---------------------------|------------------|------------------|
| (4) a. | kim sensayng-i            | ka-ss-ta.        | plain            |
|        | Kim teacher-Nom           | go-Past-Decl     |                  |
|        | ‘Mr. (teacher) Kim went.’ |                  |                  |
| b.     | kim sensayng-i            | ka-si-ess-ta.    | deferential      |
|        |                           | go-Hon-Past-Decl |                  |
| c.     | kim sensayng-nim-i        | ka-si-ess-ta.    | more deferential |
|        | HON-Nom                   |                  |                  |
| d.     | kim sensayng-nim-kkeyse   | ka-si-ess-ta.    | most deferential |
|        | Hon-Hon.Subj              |                  |                  |

However, it seems that the incremental nature of honorification is not properly captured in (2), since there would be only two types of acceptable sentences with respect to honorification: one with [+Hon] in both the subject and the verbal complex and the other with [-Hon] in both. But as seen in (4), the degree of honorification varies among the sentences belonging to the former type.

The final argument concerns a feature mismatch or clash. If (2a) is correct, then we would expect that the agreement pattern in Korean is exactly the same as the subject-verb agreement pattern in English, in which the mismatch in the value of phi-features between the subject and the verbal complex leads to ungrammaticality, as shown in (5).

- (5) a. I am/\*are/\*is happy.  
 b. You \*am/are/\*is happy.  
 c. He \*am/\*are/is happy.

However, as J-W Choe (2004) and Kim and Sells (2007) correctly pointed out, there are many cases where such an expectation is not fulfilled, as shown in

(6–8).<sup>7</sup>

- |        |  |                |                             |
|--------|--|----------------|-----------------------------|
|        | [+Hon]                                   |                | [+Hon]                      |
| (6) a. | kim sensayng-nim-i                       |                | o-si-ess-ta.                |
|        | Kim teacher-Hon-Nom                      |                | come-Hon-Past-Decl          |
|        | 'Mr. (teacher) Kim came.'                |                |                             |
|        | [+Hon]                                   |                | [-Hon]                      |
| b.     | kim sensayng-nim-i                       |                | o-ess-ta.                   |
|        |  |                | come-Past-Decl              |
|        | [+Hon]                                   |                | [+Hon]                      |
| (7) a. | malssumha-si-n                           | kes-ul         | ha-si-eyo.                  |
|        | say-Hon-Comp                             | thing-Acc      | do-Hon-Request              |
|        | 'Do what you said.'                      |                |                             |
|        | [-Hon]                                   |                | [+Hon]                      |
| b.     | malssumha-n                              | kes-ul         | ha-si-eyo.                  |
|        | say-Comp                                 |                |                             |
|        | [+Hon]                                   | [-Hon]         | [+Hon]                      |
| (8) a. | sensayng-nim-kwa                         | etten ai-ka    | hamkkey o-si-ess-e.         |
|        | Teacher-Hon-Conj                         | some child-Nom | together come-Hon-Past-Decl |
|        | 'The teacher and a child came together.' |                |                             |
|        | [+Hon]                                   | [-Hon]         | [-Hon]                      |
| b.     | sensayng-nim-kwa                         | etten ai-ka    | hamkkey o-ass-e.            |
|        |  |                |                             |

The first case involves the optionality of *-si*, which is shown in (6). Note that (6b) differs from (1b) in that what follows *-nim* is not *-kkeyse*, but a regular nominative case marker *-i*. But unlike (1b), (6b) is acceptable to most Korean speakers.<sup>8</sup> This is unexpected under (2a), because there is a mismatch between the [+Hon] subject to which *-nim* is attached (see note 5) and the [-Hon] verbal form in which *-si* is not realized.

The second case involves “a complex or compound sentence where there are more than two predicates with the same (presumably) honorific NP serving as their subject.” (J-W Choe 2004: 550) Note that both sentences in (7) are acceptable to the almost same degree. The problem is that the acceptability of

<sup>7</sup> All the examples below, except (6b), come from J-W Choe (2004: 546-553). Features with their specific values are added for the clarification of the problem in this paper. See J-W Choe (2004: 552) for more cases of feature clash.

<sup>8</sup> As J-W Choe (2004: note 6) indicates, there is some disagreement on this judgment. It is true that if *-si* appears after *o-*, the sentence would become more appropriate. However, in my judgment, (6b) is much better than (1b). This difference will be discussed later.

(7b) is unexpected under (2a). The reason is as follows. In (7), the matrix verbal form has *-si*. Then, according to (2), the null matrix subjects of both sentences in (7) would have an [+Hon] feature. In contrast, the value of [Hon] on the null embedded subject of (7a) differs from that on the embedded subject of (7b), as shown in (7). This is because there is *-si* after *malssumha-* in (7a), while there is not in (7b). One thing to notice in (7) is that the null matrix subject and the embedded subject refer to the same person. This would not yield any problem in (7a) since both subjects share the same value. However, the mismatch in [Hon] between the embedded subject and the matrix subject in (7b) should yield it unacceptable, which is not the case. In short, contrary to the expectation according to (2a), there is no difference in acceptability between (7a) and (7b).<sup>9</sup>

The third case is shown by (8), in which the subject is a conjoined NP and the value of [Hon] on each conjunct differs. This runs into a problem regardless of whether the predicate has *-si* or not. Note that in (8), one conjunct NP is specified with [+Hon], while the other is specified with [-Hon]. Suppose that the value of [Hon] for a whole conjoined NP is determined to be [+]. Then (8b) should be unacceptable, while (8a) is acceptable. Now, supposing the opposite, (8a) should be unacceptable, while (8b) is acceptable. In other words, (8a) and (8b) are expected to be different in acceptability, which is not the case. Both are judged either acceptable (cf. J-W Choe 2004: 552) or unacceptable (H-P Im, personal communication).<sup>10</sup>

## 2.2. Arguments against (2b)

As described in (2b), an “honorification as syntactic agreement (hereafter HSA)” hypothesis claims that *-si/∅* agrees with an expression which appears in Spec, AgrP or Spec, TP/IP. Given that such a position has been traditionally considered a position for a grammatical subject, (2b) predicts that only a grammatical subject can be honored by *-si*. However, it is well-known that there exist many counterexamples to that prediction. Previous studies, such as H-P Im (1985), Y-j Kim (1992), D-H Im (2000), and Kim and Sells (2007) point out that various elements, such as topic/focus, a predicate nominal, a genitive-marked NP within a grammatical subject, or even a hearer can be honored by *-si*. The following examples illustrate each case (A bold-faced expression is intended to be honored).

<sup>9</sup> See J-W Choe (2004: 550-551) for more examples.

<sup>10</sup> An anonymous reviewer also points out that the examples in (8) are degraded. Note that the issue here is not the variation in judgment of (8), but no difference in judgment between (8a) and (8b), which is unexpected in (2a). For a tentative account of the variation in the judgment and no difference in the judgment, see section 3.3.

- (9) **halme-nim-uy** sayngay-eyse-nun samsiptay-ka kajang  
 grandmother-Hon.Gen lifetime-Loc-Top thirties-Nom most  
 hayngpokha-si-ess-ta.  
 happy-Hon-Past-Decl  
 ‘My grandmother was the happiest in her thirties.’
- (10) a. **eje** taymwun-ul twutuli-n kes-un  
 yesterday gate-Acc knock-Comp thing-Top  
**ape-nim-i-si-ess-ta.**  
 father-Hon-Cop-Hon-Past-Decl  
 ‘It was my father who knocked the gate yesterday.’
- b. **ikes-i** **ape-nim-uy** yuen-i-si-e.  
 this-Nom father-Hon-Gen will-Cop-Hon-Decl  
 ‘This is my father’s will.’
- c. **nah-un** kes-un **eme-nim-i-si-ess-jiman,**  
 give birth to-Comp thing-Top mother-Hon-Cop-Hon-but  
**kil-un** kes-un **halme-nim-i-si-ess-ta.**  
 breed-Comp thing-Top grandmother-Hon-Cop-Hon-Past-Decl  
 ‘my mother was who gave birth to me, but my grandmother was who raised me.’
- (11) a. **ape-nim-uyson-i** ttelli-si-nta.  
 father-Hon-Gen hand-Nom shake-Hon-Decl  
 ‘My father’s hands are shaking.’
- b. **samo-nim-uy** kothong-i khu-si-keyss-e-yo.  
 madam-Hon-Gen pain-Nom big-Hon-Fut-Decl-Level  
 ‘The pain that the Mrs. suffers must be great.’
- c. **apeci-uy** somay-ka jjalp-usi-e-yo.  
 father-Gen sleeve-Nom short-Hon-Decl-Level  
 ‘Your sleeves are short, Dad.’
- (12) a. **?\*hanpok-un** hanpok-i-si-ntey,  
 Korean costume-Top Korean-costume-Cop-Hon-but  
**saykkal-i** cham thukiha-ney- yo.  
 color-Nom truly unique-Decl-Level  
 ‘The color of the Korean costume you are wearing is truly unique.’

- b. \*kakeyk-i                    elma-si-e-yo.  
     price-Nom                    how much-Hon-Decl-Level  
     ‘What is the price?’
- c. ?\*kunmwu kanung    jiyek-un    pusan-ina    ilsan-i-si-pnita.  
     duty            possibility region-Top    Busan-or    Ilsan-Cop-Hon-Decl  
     ‘Where you can work is Busan or Ilsan.’

Facing numerous problems and counterexamples, the HSA hypothesis seems unable to be maintained as described in (2). Various alternative views, thus, have been suggested in the previously-mentioned studies. However, those alternatives, except the one by Kim and Sells (2007), don’t seem to be complete due to their failure to address all of the above-mentioned problems. For example, dealing with only the problems in 2.2, H-P Im (1985) proposed a concept of “experiencer” in an attempt to unify the type of expression honored by *-si*. Addressing the problems in 2.1, J-W Choe (2004: 556) suggested honorification “as part of the selectional restrictions between the predicate and its arguments.”<sup>11</sup> Moreover each alternative has its own shortcomings. For example, it is not clear what the person honored by *-si* experiences in all the examples, and given that the notion of selectional restriction holds for not only subjects but also objects, it is not clear why the honorification by means of *-si* does not hold for objects. Also it is not clear how to capture the observation pointed out in 2.2 using the notion of selectional restriction.

In contrast, the view advocated by Kim and Sells (2007) has some merits that deserve careful consideration. In fact, as mentioned earlier, I basically agree with their two insights on the subject honorification, which are (a) that “it [honorification] should be treated as a privative property” (p. 333) and (b) that “the nature of honorification on a subject differs from the nature of honorification on a predicate” (p. 334). However, their totally ignoring “the apparent subject-orientedness of the *si*-marked predicate as the target of the honorification” (J-W Choe 2004: 556) seems counterintuitive or unnatural. Furthermore, their observations on the functions of *-si*, *-nim* and *-kkeyse* are seriously misleading. In what follows, carefully examining their observations, I propose that Korean subject honorification involves both syntactic and pragmatic factors and that its syntax involves Head-Spec agreement in terms of a [Sp(eaker)-Hon] feature. I will show that my proposal accounts for all three of the above-mentioned properties.

<sup>11</sup> See D-H Im (2000) for a theory based on social indexicals. He tries to capture the function of *-si* from the viewpoint of social indexicals, claiming that “*-si* is a mean to refer to a state (an event or a status) that is recognized related to such an individual [judged having a superior status over a speaker]” (p. 92). However, it is not clear what it means by *-si* referring to a state.

### 3. Toward a Head-Spec Analysis of Korean Subject Honorification

#### 3.1. A [Sp-Hon] Feature on *-si/∅*

The first point Kim and Sells (2007) make is that *-si* is an honorific form, while a null form is neither an honorific nor a non-honorific form. As mentioned earlier, I agree with this view on the difference between *-si* and a null form. However, at this point, one might raise a question: why does a null form have such a property? Is that interpretation inherently given to a null form? In other words, given that *-si* and a null form exhibit a paradigm of honorification, what remains curious is why a null form does not have a non-honorific interpretation, which means that it is somewhat misleading to try to capture the function or usage of *-si/∅* solely in terms of honorification.

In my view, the correct description of *-si/∅* further involves a speaker's intention to express honor. In this view, with *-si*, a speaker intends to express honor, while with a null form, he or she does not have such an intention. Note, however, that a speaker's lack of having such an intention does not mean that a target would not be honored. Without showing such an intention, he or she remains neutral on whether a target would actually be honored or not. In fact, this view is not entirely new, and a similar view has been suggested by a traditional approach called "jwuchey jontaysel" (cf. W Huh 1962 and I-S Lee & W Chae 1999).

In short, I claim that the so-called privative nature of subject honorification<sup>12</sup> is not an inherent property of *-si/∅*. Instead, it is derived from the interaction between some non-linguistic conventions concerning honorification and a speaker's intention to honor a certain person, which is an inherent property of *-si/∅*. Now I further propose such a property as a formal feature of *-si/∅*, which is represented as [Sp Hon] in this article; *-si* is a phonological realization of [+Sp Hon], while the null form is that of [-Sp Hon]. In turn, given that *-si/∅* apparently involves agreement, I propose that in Korean, it forms a functional category Agr. In fact, this has been a popular view since it was first suggested in H-S Choe (1988) and H-S Han (1993), although there have been numerous objections to it. It has been implicitly or explicitly suggested that Agr cannot be postulated as an independent head in Korean, following Chomsky's (2000, 2001a, b) position that phi-features on a verb cannot form a functional category Agr in English, since those features contribute nothing to the interpretation of a sentence. However, agreement-related properties are different in Korean. Note that *-si/∅* has nothing to do with phi-features.<sup>13</sup> Thus, a minimalist

<sup>12</sup> In this respect, it is important to keep in mind that this characterization still assumes that [Hon] is a basic formal feature involved in the subject honorification.

<sup>13</sup> It is also not clear whether phi-features play some syntactic or formal roles in Korean syntax.

concern about English Agr does not directly carry over to Korean Agr. Further note that if the view presented above on the meaning of *-si/ø* is correct, *-si/ø* has its own inherent meaning, and a minimalist perspective should lead us to propose that, in Korean, it forms an independent head Agr. In other words, the [Sp Hon] feature which *-si/ø* bears is interpretable. Note that this assumption crucially differs from (2a), where it is assumed that *-si/ø* bears an uninterpretable [Hon] feature.

Now consider Kim and Sells' (2007) view on when *-si* or a null form is used. Regarding this issue, they claim that a target is considered in relation to a hearer, but not a speaker.

- (13) a. The use of a subject-honorific verb recognizes the superior social status of the maximal human referent of the subject (target) in relation to the hearer, by elevating the target.

Kim & Sells (2007: (47b))

- b. if  $su > hr$ ,  $(u)si$  is used;  
if  $hr > su$ ,  $(u)si$  is not used.

Kim & Sells (2007: (10))

This observation is incorrect. In order to see this, consider the situation in which the hearers are the speaker's parents-in-law and the speaker is talking about his or her own father. In this situation, the following sentences are acceptable regardless of the relative social status between the subject (the speaker's father) and the hearers (the speaker's parents-in-law).

- (14) a. *apeji-ka*                                    *o-si-ess-supnita.*  
father-Nom                                    come-Hon-Past-Decl  
'My father came.'

- b. *apeji-kkeyse*                                    *o-si-ess-supnita.*  
father-Hon.Subj                                    come-Hon-Past-Dec.

In contrast, Kim and Sells predicts that the examples in (14) are acceptable only when the subject is socially superior to the hearers, which is not true. Even worse, they predict that when the hearer is socially superior to the subject, the speaker cannot use *-si* even in the situation where he/she is referring to his/her own father. However, *-si* is not used in such a way.

The following sentence is also problematic for the claim made in (13).

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I adopt the position that phi-features are not available as a formal feature in Korean syntax. Two pieces of evidence can be given for this position: there is no morphological marking of phi-features in a Korean verbal form and the anaphor agreement effect in Korean is absent (cf. D-W Yang 1983, Rizzi 1990, and Woolford 1999).

- (15) *sensayng-nim-uy twuljjay tta-nim-i cham*  
 teacher-Hon-Gen second daughter-Hon-Nom really  
*kowu-si-ney-yo.*  
 beautiful-Hon-Decl-Level

‘Teacher, your second daughter is really beautiful.’

In (15), the hearer is the speaker’s teacher and the subject is the hearer’s own daughter. It is normal that a father is always socially superior to his own daughter regardless of her own social status. If so, Kim and Sells predict that (15) is unacceptable. However, in my judgment, (15) is acceptable although it seems a bit overdone in honorification.

No serious problems occur under my proposal. In (14), by using *-si*, a speaker intends to show his/her respect to his/her own father, which is quite normal. In (15), a speaker intends to show his/her respect to his/her teacher’s daughter who is probably younger than him/her. Expressing such an intention does not yield a violation of any linguistic principle and it seems to me that such an intention deserves to be encouraged in Korean society because the subject is not anyone’s daughter but a daughter of the person who is normally socially superior to the speaker. This intention is in conflict with the norm that a younger person is not supposed to be honored relative to an older person. However, the norm is not a grammatical principle, but a social convention. So the conflict does not yield ungrammaticality in (15). Finally, to avoid the conflict, it is also possible for a speaker not to show his/her intention. That is, in the same situation where (15) is uttered, the sentence would be fine without *-si*, which is shown below.

- (16) *sensayng-nim-uy twuljjay tta-nim-i cham*  
 teacher-Hon-Gen second daughter-Hon-Nom really  
*kop-ne-yo.*  
 beautiful-Decl-Level

‘Teacher, your second daughter is really beautiful.’

### 3.2. Differences between *-nim* and *-kkeyse*

Let us now consider the honorification on nominals. Note that one of the objections against (2) was that a value of [Hon] on nominals is not determined inherently. To avoid the objection to (2), one might suggest that the value is determined later in the discourse (see, for example, J-W Choe 2004: 553), holding that [Hon] is still a formal feature in Korean syntax.

However, that is not a viable option, since it amounts to saying that a value



- d. kim sensayng-nim-uy kapang  
Kim teacher-Hon-Gen bag  
'Mr. (teacher) Kim's bag'
- e. yengmi-ka kim sensayng-nim-kkey chayk-ul tuli-ess-ta.  
Yengmi-Nom Kim teacher-Hon-Hon.Dat book-Acc give-Past-Decl  
'Yengmi gave a book to Mr. (teacher) Kim.'

On the other hand, *-kkeyse* can appear only in a subject position, as pointed out in Sells (1995: note 21) and H-S Yoon (2005). In other words, it is not that a nominative maker *-i/ka* can be always replaced by *-kkeyse* when a nominal preceding the nominative marker is to be honored, but that only the nominative marker in the subject position can be replaced. This is shown in the examples below.

- (19) a. na-nun kim sensayng-nim-i jeyil manna-ko siph-ta.  
I-Top Kim teacher-Hon-Nom first meet-want-Decl  
'I want to meet Mr. (teacher) Kim the most.'
- b. \*na-nun kim sensayng-nim-kkeyse jeyil manna-ko siph-ta.  
I-Top Kim teacher-Hon-Hon.Subj first meet-want-Decl
- (20) a. yengmi-nun park sensayng-nim-i joh-unka po-ta.  
Yengmi-Top Park teacher-Hon-Nom like-seem-Decl  
'Yengmi seems to like Mr. (teacher) Park.'
- b. \*yengmi-nun park sensayng-nim-kkeyse joh-unka po-ta.  
Yengmi-Top Park teacher-Hon-Hon.Subk like-seem-Decl

This suggests that *-nim* and *-kkeyse* should be treated differently. The question is how. For *-nim*, I suggest that it has the interpretation that the target referred to by a *-nim* nominal is to be honored regardless of where the nominal appears in a sentence.<sup>14</sup> For *-kkeyse*, based on the distributional fact observed above, I suggest the following:

- (21) a. A Korean nominal which refers to a human being can have a formal feature [Sp Hon].<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Some lexical items, such as personal pronouns, *phyeha* 'Majesty', *kakha* 'Excellency', and *taythongryeng* 'president' resist the attachment of *-nim* for some reason which is not clear to me. What is interesting here is that *-kkeyse* can follow *phyeha*, *kakha*, and *taythongryeng*. This also suggests that *-nim* and *-kkeyse* should be treated differently.

<sup>15</sup> A nominal which is either inanimate or animate but not human cannot have [Sp Hon]. This reflects the fact that the subject nominals in (9–12), such as *-kes* 'thing', *kakeyk* 'price', *son* 'hand', *kothong* 'pain', *somay* 'sleeve', *hanpok* 'Korean costume', *saykkekal* 'color', *jyeyok* 'region' cannot take *-kkeyse*.

- b. A [Sp Hon] feature on a nominal is uninterpretable.
- c. [Sp Hon] on a nominal receives a value from the [Sp Hon] feature on Agr in terms of Head-Spec agreement. That is, when Agr is *-si*, which is a realization of [+Sp Hon], the value of [Sp Hon] on a nominal is determined to be [+]. When Agr is a null form, which is a realization of [-Sp Hon], the value is determined to be [-].
- d. *-kkeyse* is a phonological realization of [+Sp Hon] on a nominal.

Notwithstanding the question one might have concerning its validity, the assumption (21b) is, in fact, reasonable given that a speaker's intention has nothing to do with the general interpretation of nominals. Note that all the proposals in (21) are partially parallel to the treatment of English subject-verb agreement. First, there is a formal feature whose interpretability changes with whether or not it contributes a certain meaning to the element that carries it. In English, phi-features on a nominal are interpretable because they contribute a certain meaning to a nominal, while those on a verb are uninterpretable because they don't. In Korean, [Sp Hon] on a nominal is uninterpretable, since it makes no interpretational contribution to a nominal, while the feature on Agr is interpretable as discussed earlier. The only difference between Korean and English is the position of the agreement host. According to Chomsky (2000, 2001a, b), an element which bears an interpretable feature is the agreement host. In English, the agreement host is a nominal, which appears in Spec, while in Korean, it is Agr.

Next, given (21), the distribution of *-kkeyse*, which remains a mystery in previous studies including Kim and Sells (2007), can be straightforwardly accounted for. According to (21a), any nominal referring to a human being can optionally have a [Sp Hon] feature. However, since it is uninterpretable, the derivation of a sentence which has such a nominal would crash if the feature is not checked or deleted after valuation. (21c) claims that checking or deletion after valuation is possible only under a Spec-head configuration. This accounts for the ungrammaticality of (19b) and (20b). In (19b) and (20b), the nominal bearing *-kkeyse* is the complement of the predicate. Then, [Sp, Hon] on the nominal cannot be deleted, causing the derivation of the sentences to crash. According to (21c), only *-kkeyse* which appears in Spec, AgrP can be deleted after valuation. This accounts for the above-mentioned distribution of *-kkeyse*.

Finally, one might question the validity of (21d), since it claims that *-kkeyse* is not a nominative marker, contrary to the standard claim that *-kkeyse* is an honorific nominative marker. However, it should be pointed out that the distributional differences between *-i/ka* and *-kkeyse* can be satisfactorily explained under assumption (21b), while it is not the case under the standard claim, as we saw a moment ago. Moreover, there is independent evidence for the claim that *-kkeyse* is not a nominative marker. Note that *-i/ka* cannot precede a delimiter -



Before moving on to the second problem caused by the incremental nature of honorification, we need to consider the optionality of *-si* in detail, since unlike (3), the sentences in (1) tell us that *-si* is not always optional. In fact, the contrast between (1a) and (1b) tells us that *-si* is obligatory in a certain case. Specifically speaking, (1a, b) and (22) suggest that *-kkeyse* requires *-si*, but not vice versa, as noted in H-S Yoon (2005) and Kim and Sells (2007).<sup>17</sup> In this respect, it is important to note that although the contrast between (1c) and (1d) basically suggests the optionality of *-si*, (1c) and (1d) differ from (22) in that (1d) has a certain sarcastic effect, while (22b) doesn't. While there has been no satisfactory account for this fact, a straightforward account is available under my proposals. To see it, I repeat the sentences in (1) below as (23), together with appropriate features with their values specified:

(23) a.	ape-nim-kkeyse	o-si-ess-ta.
	[+Sp Hon]	[+Sp Hon]
b.	*ape-nim-kkeyse	o-ass-ta.
	[+Sp Hon]	[-Sp Hon]
c.	chelswu-ka	o-ass-ta.
		[-Sp Hon]
d.	?*chelswu-ka	o-si-ess-ta.
		[+Sp Hon]

First, let us consider the contrast between (23a) and (23b). Both sentences involve agreement. However, only (23a) converges, since there is no mismatch in the value of a [Sp Hon] feature. (23b) crashes due to mismatch in the value of [Sp Hon], or to put it in different terms, uninterpretable *-kkeyse* remains undeleted, causing the derivation to crash. Thus, the account of the observation that *-kkeyse* requires *-si*, but not vice versa, is straightforward. On one hand, *-kkeyse*, which is uninterpretable, requires an element which would check off and delete its [Sp Hon], and *-si* does exactly that. On the other hand, while *-si* can check off and delete an uninterpretable [Sp Hon] feature on a nominal if it has to, it is not always required to do so, because the [Sp Hon] feature on *-si* does not need to be checked off, since it is interpretable.

Unlike (23a, b), (23c, d) does not involve agreement. In this respect, (23c, d) is the same as (22). The account of (23c) is analogous to that of (22a). Then, the question is why (23d) is sometimes unacceptable or acceptable only with a

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'Did your brother come?'

<sup>17</sup> An anonymous reviewer questions this observation, pointing out that there are numerous counterexamples, where *-kkeyse* is used without *-si*. However, it seems to me that merely presenting counterexamples is not enough. The point here is that there is a subtle but clear difference in acceptability between a sentence as in (23b) and one as in (25b).

sarcastic implication.<sup>18</sup> I claim that (23d) converges as (22b) does and that its unacceptability or sarcastic implications is due to a certain non-linguistic norm regarding how proper nouns are treated in honorification. As mentioned in note 1, the norm in question is such that a person that is referred to by his or her own first name is not to be honored in Korean, regardless of his or her social superiority or age. Thus, in (23d), there is a contradiction in honoring the person to whom the subject refers between the non-linguistic norm and the linguistic formal feature, which normally results in unacceptability. However, since (23d) itself does not crash, the contradiction can make a certain sarcastic implication in a certain context. Suppose that Chelswu, the speaker, and the third party are friends. It is a norm that friends are not to be honored in private. However, when Chelswu is socially superior to the other friends and is acting as such in private, (23d) is acceptable with the implication that Chelswu's action is inappropriate. Note that there is no such metaphoric or sarcastic implication in (22b). This is because the subject in (22b) is older than the speaker. Since it is a norm that an older person is to be honored, there is no contradiction in honorification in this case.

To complete the discussion, let us look at the following examples.

- |         |                  |              |
|---------|------------------|--------------|
| (24) a. | *chelswu-kkeyse  | o-ass-ta.    |
|         | [+Sp Hon]        | [-Sp Hon]    |
| b.      | ??chelswu-kkeyse | o-si-ess-ta. |
|         | [+Sp Hon]        | [+Sp Hon]    |

(24a) crashes due to a mismatch in the value of [Sp Hon]. Then why is (24b) unacceptable? I claim that (24b) converges as (23d) does, but, the same contradiction as in (23d) arises here as well.

Now let us move on to the second problem, the incremental nature of honorification. This phenomenon can also be straightforwardly accounted for. Note that in my proposals, the honorification by *-nim* and that by *-si* are independent from each other, unlike the proposals in (2). Thus, when those two elements appears together, effects of honorification add up and the effect would reach its maximum when *-kkeyse* replaces a nominative marker.

Next, consider the problem raised by the examples in (6–8). The original problem was that a feature clash or a mismatch does not lead to ungrammaticality. Under my proposal, there is no feature clash or mismatch in all the examples in (6–8). That is, they all converge, with neither [Sp Hon] nor [Hon] on the subject nominals. This is shown below.

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<sup>18</sup> See J-W Choe (2004: 556-557) for other cases of metaphoric effects.



honor the subject? The answer might vary, since there is no determined non-linguistic norm applicable to this issue.<sup>19</sup>

In short, since no agreement is involved under my proposal, no problem of feature mismatch or clash arises in (6–8), and the degree of acceptability is not a matter of a grammatical principle, but that of a non-linguistic norm.

Finally, consider the problem raised against (2b). The problem was that the honorification by *-si* cannot be described as Spec-head agreement, since elements other than the subject might be the target of the honorification. However, such a problem does not arise in my proposal, since all the problematic cases in (9–12) involve no agreement, because all the subjects in those examples have no [Sp Hon] feature. In other words, they all converge. One remaining topic is the contrast between the acceptability of (9–11)<sup>20</sup> and the unacceptability of (23d, 24b). Note that under my proposal, they all converge, the subjects having no [Sp Hon] feature. Then why do they differ in acceptability? I propose that the difference lies in whether the entity referred to by the subject can be the target of honorification. Note that in this respect, all the grammatical subjects in (9–11) are inanimate objects, while the subjects in (23d) and (24b) are human beings, more specifically, first names. As mentioned earlier, there is a non-linguistic norm regarding the honorification of a first name. In contrast, it seems that there is no non-linguistic norm that prohibits the honorification of inanimate objects, although inanimate objects are not likely to be honored. What is crucial here is that all the subjects in (9–11) are somehow connected to the expressions that are honored in one way or another in the sentences, that is, either by using *-nim* or by the convention that parents be honored. Thus, unlike in (23d) and (24b), in (9–11), no contradiction arises since the subjects are connected to the honored person.

Now consider (12). As mentioned in note 20, unlike (9–10), the examples in (12) seem to be very awkward, (12b) being the most awkward. What is interesting here is that the target to be honored in (12) is the hearer. In fact, we quite often hear such utterances, in which the target to be honored by using *-si* is the hearer, especially in a situation where the hearer is a customer. However, it is true that when we hear such utterances, we don't feel comfortable with them.

I propose that the awkwardness of (12) comes from unnecessary overlapping of the two different systems of honorification in Korean. So far, we have seen the system in which the grammatical subject is honored by a verbal suffix *-si*. As is well-known, Korean has another honorification system in which the hearer is the target to be honored in relation to the speaker. This system is ex-

<sup>19</sup> In my opinion, both sentences in (27) are acceptable. However, it seems that not to show the intention is more appropriate or safer, since it is not contradictory to using *-nim* for the first conjunct while to do so is contradictory to the non-linguistic norm that *-ai* is not supposed to be honored.

<sup>20</sup> In my judgment, the examples in (12) are worse than those in (9–11). I discuss this point soon.

pressed by the so-called final endings which come at the end of a verbal form. *-yo* in (12a, b) and *-pnitta* in (12c) are such elements with which the speaker shows that the hearer is the target to be honored. Given that the hearer is respected already in its own system, it would be unnecessary to honor the hearer again via the subject honorification, although it is available grammatically.<sup>21</sup> In fact, all the sentences in (12) become more natural when *-si* is deleted.

#### 4. Conclusion and Some Implications on Multiple Case Phenomena in Korean

As mentioned earlier, there is some truth to the observation that the honorification by *-si* is oriented to the subject, although there are numerous counterexamples. This state of affairs has not received a satisfactory account so far. On one hand, the traditional GB approach as in (2) fails to account for the counterexamples successfully. On the other hand, the recent approaches, such as D-H Im (2000) and Kim and Sells (2007) fail to capture the intuition that the honorification by *-si* is oriented to the subject. In this paper, I showed that there is a way in which the intuition might be successfully captured without confronting serious counterexamples. The key ideas in the solution are that the honorification on a nominal has nothing to do with a formal feature and that the honorification expressed by *-si/∅* is related to a formal feature [Sp Hon], which has the interpretation of “a speaker’s intention to honor.” If a speaker has such an intention, *-si* is used. Otherwise, a null form is used. I suggested that [Sp Hon] on *-si/∅* is interpretable. Based on this, I further suggested that *-si/∅* forms an independent head Agr and this head agrees with an element which appears in Spec, AgrP. This analysis successfully captures the forementioned intuition. As for the counterexamples, noting that they arise due to the assumption that the honorification by *-si* involves an [Hon] feature, I suggested a [Sp Hon] feature, which is interpretable on Agr, while it is uninterpretable on a nominal. Since the feature is optional on a nominal, all the counterexamples disappear. In short, the honorification by *-si* does not always involve syntactic agreement. Syntactic agreement arises only when [Sp Hon] is on a subject nominal.

This shows that syntax is involved in honorification with *-si*, but I also claimed that non-linguistic norms about honorification are involved. In other words, honorification with *-si* involves interactions between a syntactic princi-

<sup>21</sup> I suggested that (12b) is the most awkward in comparison to (12a, c). I propose that such a difference is due to the degree of naturalness in connecting the subject to the hearer. In (12a, c), it is relatively natural to connect the subject *hanpok* in (12a) and *jyeeok* in (12c) to the hearer. That is, *hanpok* in (12a) is what the hearer is wearing and *jyeeok* in (12c) is the place in which the hearer is supposed to work. However, in (12b), it is unnatural to connect *kakyeok* to the hearer.

ple (Head-Spec agreement) and certain non-linguistic norms. If this conclusion is correct, it tells us that the previous studies which deny the role of syntax in the honorification by *-si/ø* (especially Kim & Sells 2007) are on the wrong track.

Finally, I conclude the paper by mentioning some interesting implications that the current analysis might have on the multiple Case phenomena in Korean. According to Agree in Chomsky (2000, 2001a, b), structural Case on a nominal is licensed by T or v bearing complete phi-features. When Case is licensed or deleted with its value determined, the phi-features on T or v are also deleted. Once Case is licensed, there would be no further application of Agree, since there are no phi-features on T or v. While this mechanism can account for non-existence of multiple Case phenomena in English, it cannot account for the possibility of multiple Case in Korean.

Several proposals have been made to solve this problem in previous studies, such as D-W Yang (1996, 2000) and Hiraiwa (2001), though unsatisfactorily to a certain extent because they all need an extra mechanism to license multiple Case. However, no extra mechanism is necessary under my proposal.

I follow Chomsky's (1995, 2000, 2001a, b) suggestion that phi-features do not form an independent head in English. However, aspects of agreement-related features are different in Korean. First, I claimed that unlike in English, phi-features are not available as a formal feature on a verbal in Korean. Second, I suggested that an agreement-related feature in Korean is not [Hon], but [Sp Hon]. Finally, I further suggested that *-si/ø* forms an independent head Agr, since [Sp Hon] on *-si/ø* is interpretable. With all these suggestions combined, Case licensing in Korean would differ in two aspects. First, phi-features would not be involved in Case licensing. Second, Case licensers, such as Agr for nominative Case and v for accusative Case, would be interpretable. Note that these differences, when combined, could lead to multiple Case licensing, since the Case licensers would not delete in Korean. However before this solution is finally adopted, there remain many questions to be answered, such as the defective intervention constraint (cf. Chomsky 2000, Hiraiwa 2001), the Case minimality effect (cf. J-S Lee 1994, K Choi 2005, 2006), and the Case licensing mechanism itself.<sup>22</sup> I will leave these topics for future research.

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<sup>22</sup> As one anonymous reviewer points out, Agree, as formalized in Chomsky (2000, 2001a, b), especially its "activation" provision, cannot be adopted in my account of Korean Case licensing. It seems to me that Agree needs a revision in this respect. I will leave this issue for future research.

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