

Greeting in Korean culture

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1. Introduction

Greetings are viewed as one common way of being polite in social encounters. Literature on greeting behavior (Agyekum 2008, Ferguson 1976, Sherzer 1999) shows that speech behavior varies according to customs and cultures and is likely to be realized in diverse ways. From a western point of view, a greeting is likely to convey affective meaning (i.e., focusing on social function) rather than informative one (i.e., focusing on content). Questions violate expectations that greetings are likely to lack semantic content and be a type of phatic (i.e. referring to the function of speech to establish relations rather than content) communion (Malinowski 1923). Asking an information seeking question can be imposition on the hearer (Brown and Levinson 1985). Particularly, non western languages involving Japanese and Korean are known to have questions which are not formulaic but informative (Duranti 2001).

As Korean appears to use ritualized both greeting expressions and a

variety of information seeking expressions (Suh 1996), it can serve as a particularly informative case study concerning the functions of greetings in maintaining social relationships. This study examines what is appropriate when two people enter each other's sight from a Korean's point of view. In what follows, we will catalog the types of greetings found in Korean and look at greetings from structural and social perspectives.

2. Literature review

2.1. Politeness theory

Politeness is described as communicative behavior that aims at achieving a balance between the addressee's face and the speaker's face by confirming each other's face wants. Human interactions have social purposes and achieving satisfactory social interactions is a central goal. In order to reach satisfactory goals, people know that respecting, protecting and valuing the other's face are a requirement. But at the same time, people have personal bonds to their own face and want to protect and value their own face (Watts et al. 1992).

Brown and Levinson's work (1987) on politeness is based on the Goffmanian concept of face - the positive social value a person effectively claims for him - or herself (Goffman 1971). Politeness Theory identifies two aspects of individual face, namely their positive and negative face needs. Positive face needs include individuals' need to be approved of and liked by others, and to have their wishes and desires shared and respected. Negative face needs refer to an individuals' need for privacy and distance from others, and to have their autonomy and independence respected.

According to Brown and Levinson's theory, many interactive acts constitute a potential threat to face and the speaker tries to reinforce or

mitigate a face threatening act. When the negative face of the addressee or hearer is threatened, the speaker will make use of such negative politeness strategies such as being indirect, adopting hedging devices, or apologizing. Positive politeness strategies, on the other hand, involves the use of in group identity markers, address forms, jargon and slang, which emphasize friendliness towards and solidarity with the speaker. Recognizing and entering one's personal space can be threatening if a greeting is not appropriately carried out (e.g., remaining silent or avoiding eye contact) from politeness view. A greeting, on the other hand, can attenuate the force of a threat by expressing wish to establish a relationship, if performed correctly, with appropriate word, tone of voice and body language, one can attenuate face threat.

2.2. Defining a greeting

Greetings are classified as "expressives" in Searle (1969) which "express the psychological state" Bach and Harnish (1979: 51-2) termed acknowledgements and interpreted the act of greeting as an action expression of "pleasure at seeing" someone.

Structurally, a greeting belongs to the first part of an adjacency pair (Schegloff 1968; 1979, Schegloff and Sacks 1973) which is an organizational pattern recurrent in conversation. It consists of two utterances, which are produced by different speakers, and are related to each other in such a way that they form a pair type. Utterances are related to form pair types so that a particular first utterance will set up the expectation of a particular second pair part. Greetings are typically followed by a response, likely to be another greeting.

The most comprehensive definition of greetings is found in Duranti (2001) consisting of six features: (1) near boundary occurrences (greetings occur at the beginning of a social encounter) (2) establishment of a shared

perceptual field (people engaged in greeting recognize each other's presence in the same conceptual field) (3) adjacency pair format (greetings are typically part of one or more sets of adjacency pairs, i.e., two part sequences in which the first part is uttered by one party and the second is a reply by another) (4) relative predictability of form and content (5) implicit establishment of a spatio-temporal unit of interaction (greetings occur only once in an interaction), and (6) identification of the interlocutor as a distinct being worth recognizing based on semantic, structural, and social aspects of greetings.

Many studies on Korean speech acts are active in the area of cross-cultural pragmatics focusing on acts such as requests (Byon 2004; Han 2005; Kim 1995) and apologies (Ahn 2005; Jung 1999; Lee 2000; Yang 2002). Studies on greetings appear in those associated with a particular genre, i.e., telephone conversations and their openings (Lee 2006) and in L2 pragmatics (Jung and Yun 2004). Telephone studies focus on cross-cultural differences in telephone conversation openings. Lee (2006) analyzed the opening of telephone conversations from the conversation analysis perspective. L2 pragmatic studies lack of native Korean data since Korean learners participated as the second language learner of English and their performance is carried out in English. These L2 studies indicate speech behavior is influenced by cultural differences. For instance, Jung and Yun (2004) investigate the performance of Korean learners of English for greetings in English. 193 university students learning American English participated in oral and written tests. According to Jung & Yun, Korean learners have pragmatic failure in speaking like a native speaker of English showing lack of linguistic diversity.

The second type of studies examines greetings to support the cultural concept as one of phatic expressions (Park 2006; Suh 1996). Park (2006) analyzed greetings among several phatic expressions and identified cultural meanings. Suh (1996) examined several speech behaviors in relation with

the concept of *cheng* ‘affection.’ One feature in Korean greetings is the frequency of interrogative forms. Many forms of greetings are realized by interrogatives to ask the well being of the other. Interrogative forms of greetings are interpreted as the dimension of the cultural notion *chung* coming from interests in the other. Greetings are discussed in relation with the cultural concept *chung* ‘affection, attachment.’

3. Data collection

The data used for this paper is comprised of naturally occurring speech as collected by a team of researchers, the students in a sociolinguistics course at a major university in Seoul, Korea, taught by the author. When elicitation methods such as discourse completion task (DCT) or role play are limited in understanding language use, collecting data by some researchers at once is one preferred in sociolinguistics (Herbert 1985; Holmes 1990).

Data were collected in social domains such as the campus, neighborhood, and home. A greeting is identified according to Duranti’s (2001) definition consisting of six features (see Section 2.2). There are universal properties to characterize a greeting such as at the beginning of an encounter or the first word exchanged between two speakers. Besides, non verbal behavior can be taken as a greeting since it represents the recognition of the speaker. Students were asked to write down examples as immediately as they noted the target speech. They were also instructed to record contextual information such as the assumed age, socioeconomic status, and gender of the speech event’s participants, and any responses to the greetings in the exchange.

4. Greeting types

A total 115 examples were collected through assistance of student researchers. Among them, nine examples are excluded from the corpus of greetings since they involve other speech acts than greetings such as apologizing, reprimanding and taking leave. First, apologizing and reprimanding seem to be recorded as they occur at the beginning of an encounter despite their distinct semantic content. A person starts with apologies if the speaker causes the offense or he/she reprimands if the speaker is offended. They violate the feature of "establishment of a shared perceptual field" and there is no moment that "recognizing each other's presence"(Duranti 2001: 212). Taking leave is another act excluded from the corpus as they occur at the end of an encounter.

Table1: Data analysis

Data	Occurrences	%
Greetings	106	92%
Non-greetings	9	7.8%
Total	115	100%

Overall, greetings are realized in six categories. Greetings are realized in two ways: verbally and non verbally. Without words, some gestures serve as a recognition of others. For body gestures, waving a hand is the case. For verbal examples, five categories include (1) greeting expressions (2) other oriented (3) neutral (4) self oriented and (5) exclamation.

Table2: Greeting types

Greeting types	Occurrences	%
Greeting expressions	37	34%
Other-oriented	46	42%
Neutral	18	17%
Self-oriented	5	4.5%
Non-verbal behavior	2	1.8%
Exclamation	1	0.9%
Total	109	100%

For verbal examples, the most explicit way of greeting is to use the routine expression *annyenghaseyyo* ‘how are you’ and its variants. Then, the three categories (i.e., other oriented, neutral, self oriented) are those classified according to what is said based on Laver (1981)¹.

4.1. Using routine expressions

Naturally, one manner of extending a greeting is to use *annyenghaseyyo* ‘How are you?’ and its variants, which is the second common category occurring at 34%. In this study, the *annyeng* greeting appears in three forms according to Korean speech levels: *annyeng*, *annyenghaseyyo*, *annyenghasipnikka*. For meaning, the *annyeng* greeting can be translated as either ‘hi’ or ‘Are you fine?’ as its meaning is sensitive to Korean social structure. It consists of two morphemes *an* ‘safety’ + *nyeng* ‘care

1) Laver (1981) analyzed American English greetings depending on whether the issue is related to the speaker, hearer, and the third. Other oriented greetings speak of factors specific to the hearer (e.g., That looks like hard work). Self oriented greetings involve something relevant to the speaker (e.g., I do like a breath of fresh air). When initial remarks include factors neither to the speaker nor to the hearer, it is classified as neutral greetings (e.g., Nice day).

free' and is used regardless of the hearer's condition.

(1) In the morning, two people come across.

A: annyeng-ha-sey-yo?

good-be-SH²)-Q

B: yey annyeng-ha-sey-yo?

yes good-be-SH-Q

A: How are you?

B: Yeah, how are you?

4.2. Other-oriented greetings

Other oriented greetings are the most common occurring at 42% in the data. Recognizing the other is the core social function of greeting behavior (Duranti 2001), and this function is highly enhanced in Korean. Both questions about the hearer and comments on the hearer's state fulfill this role. Recent events or important news, such as a hospitalization or passing an exam, can be topics of the questions. Concern for the other is realized in two ways: 1) using questions, and 2) commenting on the other. Topics about the hearer include a person is likely to speak of the other in the form of questions. Greeting questions can be either yes no questions or *wh* questions and are related to the hearer: meals, work, sleep, appearance, health, or condition.

(2) A friend speaks to her friend at school.

2) Abbreviations for grammatical glosses include AC(Accusative case particle), AHAddressee honorifics), DC(Declarative sentence type suffix), DEF(Deferential speech level), EX(Exclamation), EXS(Exclamation suffix), HS(Honorifics), NM(Nominal case particles), PLN(Plain speech level suffix), POL(Polite speech level suffix), PST(Past tense suffix), Q(Question marker), SH(Subject honorifics), TC(Topic contrast particle), VS(Verbal suffix).

A: mwe-ha-y nwukuw-kitaly-e?

what-do-Q who wait-Q

B: chinkwu ne-n eti-ka?

friend you-TC where-go

A: What are you doing? Who are you waiting for?

B: Friend. Where are you going?

One way of expressing concern toward the other is to talk about appearance. This usage is particularly notable among female speakers. Paying attention to the other's appearance is a clear way to express notice of their presence. A person greets by speaking of the speaker's feelings or thoughts. As a way of speaking of appearance, changes in appearance are also included. Complimenting the other is one way. Female examples include recognizing the other these examples are shown to start a conversation by commenting on the other's appearance.

(3) Two friends greet each other in the campus.

A: yeppecye-ss-ney.

pretty-PST-EXS

B: ung komaw-e.

yes thank-DC

A: You have become prettier.

B: Thanks.

Other oriented greetings may not be necessarily a question. When a question is not used, expressing concern toward the other is an important strategy. Non question type greetings include recognizing the presence of the other is another way of related to the other which can be used as a greeting and can be translated into "There you are" or sometimes just the simple "Welcome."

(4) A neighbor greets another neighbor in the street.

A: ilccik nao-sy-ess-ney-yo.

early come-SH-PST-VS-POL

B: ney icey ka-si-na-pwa-yo.

yes now leave-SH-VS-seem-POL

A: You are out early.

B: Yes, You seem to be heading out.

4.3. Self-oriented greetings

Speaking of oneself is another way of greeting. Self-oriented greetings can be distinguished from other greetings for grammatical factor since they start with the first person pronoun *I*.

(5) A daughter (D) returns home and greets to her father (F)

D: apeci ce wa-ss-eyo

father I come-PST-POL

F: onya ese onna

yes quickly come-EXS

D: Dad, I'm here.

F: Welcome come here.

4.4. Neutral greetings

Some greetings are directly about neither the speaker nor the hearer, and would be classified as neutral greetings under Laver's (1981) scheme. A person may greet by talking about objects such as time, transportation, and weather. For example, a person exaggerates the passing of time since the last meeting. This is similar to "Long time no see" and "It's been years." The use of the "Long time no see" greeting is very common. Starting

with a talk with talking about traffic can be more common than ever.

(6) Two acquaintances meet in a while.

A: olayn-man-ey poyp-sup-nita
 long-since-at see-AH-DEF

B: ney chungmal olayn-man-ey poyp-ney-yo
 yes really long-since-at see-VS-POL

A: It's been a long time.

B: Yes, it's been a really long time.

4.5. Exclamation

Using exclamations is recorded from interaction among close female friends. Using exclamations includes sounds like *ya* 'wow' or *kkyā~* making funny sound to express "pleasure" at seeing (Bach & Harnish 1979). They do not say a word; these speakers make gestures and funny sound.

5. Structure of greeting exchanges

A greeting is one type of speech behavior that is likely to be met by another act. For this reason, greetings are often discussed under the notion of adjacency pairs (Schegloff 1972; Schegloff and Sacks 1973). Depending on how a greeting is replied, greeting exchanges are classified as three patterns: assimilation, elicitation, and non elicitation. Assimilation structure consists of identical utterances. A reply is likely to be identical or similar to the greeting. Use of a routine expression (e.g., *annyeonghaseyyo*) belongs to this structure. Elicitation refers to a pair of question and answer. An interrogative form of greeting (e.g., other oriented greetings) occurs in the first part and elicits an answer. The third pattern is non elicitation in which the first part is a statement and it is likely to be met by another

statement. If the word is a non question, the person comments on it in a positive way.

- a. Assimilation structure (i.e., identical form - identical form)
- b. Elicitation structure (i.e., question - answer)
- c. Non elicitation structure (i.e., statement - statement)

5.1. Assimilation structure

Assimilation structure has been noted in American English and other languages (Ferguson 1976). Anglo American greetings are used to create social equality. Identical or slightly modified returns and acknowledgements indicate social balance. For greeting exchanges, similarity is one universal motivation. Greeting items are likely to be met by a similar one. Replies are likely to be identical or similar to the greeting. One common pattern relating to the *annyeng* form is the reply of the identical form creating a symmetrical structure (i.e., consisting of two identical utterances). The second speaker is likely to agree with the first speaker in a similar form. Example (7) (cited as Example (1) on p. 9) illustrates the use of the greeting item and is replied to with the same expression.

- (7) In the morning, two people come across.
- A: annyeng-ha-sey-yo?
good-be-SH-Q
- B: yey annyeng-ha-sey-yo?
yes good-be-SH-Q
- A: How are you?
- B: Yeah, how are you?

Here, *yey* in B's response to A's greeting is simply an acknowledgement of the speaker's greeting. It is close to English "yeah".

Assimilation structure is mainly true of greetings involving the *annyeng* greeting since it is usually replied by the identical expression. However, greeting structure may vary according to the type of social relationships. Social status between two interlocutors is found to affect the interactional aspect of verbal exchanges. In an unequal interaction, a person lower in social status or younger in age is likely to greet first and the reply is unlikely to be identical. Here, the greeting routine *annyenghaseyyo* is taken as a question about the other's health rather than a routine. Elicitation structure appears instead as the following:

(8) A student greets his professor.

Student: *annyeng-ha-sey-yo?* kyoswu-nim.

good-be-SH-Q professor-HS

Professor: e kula-y.

EX right-DC

Student: Are you all right? Professor.

Professor: Ah, yes.

Example (8) shows the avoidance of assimilation structure in an unequal relationship. In a situation in which a person lower in social status greets one higher in status, the greeting acts more as a question literally meaning "Are you fine?" A person higher in social status will reply by an acceptance instead, such as a simple "Yes."

5.2. Elicitation structure

Elicitation structure involves interrogative form of greetings in the first part and answers in the second part. There are *yes-no* questions and *wh*-questions occurring in the first part of an exchange. Question type greetings are likely to be replied by their corresponding answers. Replies to yes no questions (e.g., "Have you slept well" or "Have you finished

work well") are likely to be an acknowledgement such as "Yes." *Wh*-question types classified as information-seeking questions (Duranti 2001) are illustrated in (9) and are replied by their related answers.

(9) A male college (M) student starts to speak to a female student (F) as he sees her.

M: ah annyeng-ha-sey-yo eti ka-sey-yo?

EX good-be-SH-Q where go-SH-Q

F: yey cemsim meku-le nakaye-ku-yo.

yes lunch eat-VS go-VS-POL

M: How are you? Where are you going?

F: Yeah, I'm going out to eat lunch.

Answers to a *wh* question are usually conveyed in the form of 'to do something' formula. When a person asks a question, the recipient can be specific with the answer by saying such 'to meet a friend' or 'running an errand.' From a politeness view, asking a *wh* question is seen as face threatening (Brown and Levinson 1987) because it puts imposition on the hearer. Being ambiguous is another way of responding to a *wh* question. Example (10) illustrates the avoidance of a specific answer to a question.

(10) A woman (W) comes across her neighbor (N) in the market.

W: mwe sa-le nao-sy-ess-na-pwa-yo.

what buy-VS come-SH-PST-VS-seem-POL

N: ney mwe com sa-le-yo

yes what little buy-VS-POL

W: You seem to come to buy something.

N: Yes I'm here to buy something.

To the woman's question, the neighbor replies *mwe com saleyo* by using a non-referent noun *mwe*. As indicated in Example (10), a question is not a real question when it is used (Bach & Harnish 1979; Searle 1976) and the person engaged in greeting behavior sees no obligation to be faithful to the question.

5.3 Non elicitation structure

Non-elicitation structure involves statements such as talking about neutral topics or commenting on the other in the first place of an exchange and its agreement in the second place. Good intention can be read by the receiver. The greeting receiver is likely to support the first speaker by acknowledging and the receiver is likely to agree with what is said. Example (11) illustrates the use of time passing expression and its agreement.

(11) Two male college students see each other in a while.

- A: ya ikey elma-man-i-nya?
 hey this how-much-since-is-EX
- B: wa cincca ipaek-nyen man-i-ta.
 EX really 200-year since-is-DC
- A: Hey, how long has it been so far?
 B: Wow, it's been really 200 years.

6. Conclusion

This study aimed to analyze use of language in the greeting behavior by using observational data. According to this study, Korean is characterized by universal and culture-specific features. First, greeting exchanges are grouped into three main structures: assimilation, elicitation, and non-elicitation. Among others, assimilation structure is one the universal

patterns since a reply is to be assimilated to the first part of an exchange. Tendency to be similar is noted as one universal motivation.

Similarly to what Laver (1981) proposed for American English greetings, Korean greetings are also classified into three categories: self-oriented, other-oriented, and neutral-oriented. For Korean, other-oriented greetings are the most common among others. In Korean, the function of recognition of the other is noted. In Korean, one important function from a Korean's perspective is to express concern toward the other. This can be supported by the number of questions particularly asking about the other and the use *wh*-questions. It is notable that *wh*-questions are not always taken as imposition. A greeting receiver can be non-specific to the question.

Culture-specific features influence Korean, on the other hand. Social factors are found to play a role in the choice of greeting exchanges. The Korean typical greeting expression is used in two ways according to types of social relationships. The literal meaning of the greeting expression is used in unequal relationship while the greeting expression is reciprocally used in equal relationship. The use of greeting items is associated with assimilation structure in equal relationships while it is used as a question and associated with elicitation structure in unequal relationships.

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❖ ABSTRACT

Greeting in Korean culture

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Greeting in Korean culture. Cultural diversity is reflected in speech activities. This study highlights greetings in Korean culture to explore issues such as what is said and how a greeting is replied during the beginning of a social encounter. As one type of linguistic politeness, greetings are analyzed in relation with two aspects: greeting types and exchange structure. For types, three categories are identified depending on what is said within Laver (1981)'s framework: self-oriented, other-oriented, and neutral category. Among others, other-oriented category is the most preferred as being motivated to express concern toward the other. Recognition of the other is primary in Korean. For structure, this study reveals the interface between exchange structure and social factors. Deeper understanding of language use is not simply limited to utterances; it needs to be considered from discourse level. The choice of replies indicates types of social relationships between the two speakers. For methodology, greetings are viewed as naturally-occurring in diverse aspects of context. Observational data contribute to reflect the contemporary use of language.

Key Words

예의, 인사, 한국어, 사회적 지위, 문화
 politeness, greetings, Korean, social status, culture

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