



KOREAN SPEECH LEVELS AND HONORIFIC STYLES

Makhmatkulova Yayra Quدراتovna

(Phd Researcher)

Lecturer, Korean teacher, Uzbek State University of World Languages

Ziyayeva Sevara Anvarovna

Scientific advisor: (Prof. DsC)

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.12187750>

Abstract. There are seven verb paradigms or speech levels in Korean, and each level has its own unique set of verb endings which are used to indicate the level of formality of a situation. Unlike honorifics – which are used to show respect towards someone mentioned in a sentence – speech levels are used to show respect towards a speaker's or writer's audience, or reflect the formality or informality of the situation. They represent a system of honorifics in the linguistic use of the term as a grammar system, distinct from honorific titles.

Key words: admonitive, honorific, non-honorific, hasoseochae, haeyoche, Formality, neutral, politeness

Korean has two types of honorifics such as, argument honorifics and addressee honorifics. As part of the addressee honorific system, Korean distinguishes grammatically six levels of politeness, often referred to as speech styles: formal, semiformal, polite, familiar, intimate, and plain. A seventh level, “super-polite”, used for addressing kings and queens; it is now considered archaic, and is used mostly in prayers (Paul Kroeger, 2024). The choice of speech style marking depends on “the *relationship* between speaker and addressee (e.g., intimacy, politeness), and the *formality* of the situation”. The uses of these styles, as described by Pak (2008: 120).

Speech style marked grammatically by a verbal suffix referred to as the “sentence ender”. Since Korean is an SOV language, the main clause verb typically occurs at the end of the sentence and hosts the sentence ender. The sentence ender is actually a portmanteau suffix which encodes three distinct grammatical features: (a) speech style (i.e. politeness); (b) “special mood” (not discussed here); and (c) sentence type (i.e. speech act; this corresponds to the major mood category in other languages). Korean has an unusually rich inventory of speech act markers. The exact number is a topic of controversy; Sohn (1999) lists four major sentence types (declarative, interrogative, imperative, and “propositive” or hortative); plus several minor types including admonitive (warning), promissive, exclamatory, and apperceptive (new or currently perceived information?). Combinations of four of the speech styles with two sentence types (declarative and imperative).

The names of the seven levels are derived from the non-honorific imperative form of the verb *hada* (하다; “to do”) in each level, plus the suffix *che* (체), which means “style”. Each Korean speech level can be combined with honorific or non-honorific noun and verb forms. Taken together, there are 14 combinations.

Some of these speech levels are disappearing from the majority of Korean speech. *Hasoseoche* is now used mainly in movies or dramas set in the Joseon era and in religious speech.

Hage-che is nowadays limited to some modern male speech, whilst Hao-che is now found more commonly in the Jeolla dialect and P Higher levels

Hasoseo-che

(하소서체)

Traditionally used when addressing a king, queen, or high official.

When the infix op / saop , jaop (옵; after a vowel / 사옵 , 자옵; after a consonant) or sap / jap (삽 / 잡) or sao / jao (사오 / 자오) is inserted, the politeness level also becomes very high. hanaida (하나이다) becomes haomnaida (하옵나이다; non-honorific present declarative very formally very polite), hasinaida (하시나이다) becomes hasiomnaida (하시옵나이다; honorific present declarative very formally very polite). The imperative form hasoseo (하소서) also becomes haopsoseo (하옵소서; non-honorific imperative very formally very polite) and hasiopsoseo (하시옵소서; honorific imperative very formally very polite). It is used now: yongan dialect than in the Seoul dialect.

- in historical dramas
- in religious texts such as the Bible, Buddhist scriptures, etc.
- to address royalty

Formally polite

This conversational style is generally called either the "formal" or the "formal polite". Another name for this is *hapsyo-che* or 합쇼체. This is a common style of speaking. A conversation with a stranger will generally start out in this style and gradually fade into more and more frequent *haeyo-che*. It is used

- between strangers at the start of a conversation
- among colleagues in more formal settings; example work meetings
- by TV announcers
- to customers
- in certain fixed expressions like 만나서 반갑습니다 *mannaseo bangapseumnida* "Pleased to meet you"

Present Honorific Present 1st Person 2nd Person

| | | | |
|---------|-----------|-----|----------------------------|
| hamnida | hasimnida | jeo | a title, e.g. seonsaengnim |
| (합니다) | (하십니다) | (저) | (선생님) |

Middle levels

The middle levels are used when there is some conflict or uncertainty about the social status of one or both participants in a conversation. The *hage-che* and *hao-che* are being replaced by or merging with *haeyo-che*.

Haeyo-che

(해요체)

Casually polite

This speech style is called the "polite" style in English. Like the 해체 *Hae-che*, it exhibits no inflection for most expected forms. Unlike other speech styles, basic conjugations for the declarative, interrogative and imperative forms are identical, depending on intonation and context or other additional suffixes. Most Korean phrasebooks for foreigners follow this speech style due to its simplicity and proper politeness. Second person pronouns are generally omitted in the polite speech styles. (See Korean pronouns.) It is used:

- In Korean phrasebooks for foreigners.
- Between strangers, especially those older or of equal age.
- Between colleagues
- By younger speakers as a less old-fashioned alternative to the *hao-che*.
- By men and women in Seoul as a less formal alternative to the *hasipsio-che*.

Hao-che

(하오체)

Formally neither polite nor impolite

This conversational style is called the "semi-formal", "middle", "formal lateral", or "authoritarian" style in English. In Seoul, the 쇼 -syo ending is frequently pronounced 수 *su*. It is similar to the 하십시오체 *Hasipsio-che*, but does not lower oneself to show humility. It basically implies "My status is as high as you so I won't be humble, but I still respect your status and don't want to make you feel offended" so it's still supposed to be polite yet never willing to lower one's head to please the listener. (e.g. In the medieval times, if two kings from different countries have a meeting, they both would use this speech style. A king can use this speech style to his courtiers to show a minimum level of courtesy, and the courtiers will think the king is using a refined language.) It was originally a refined, poetic style that people resorted to in ambiguous social situations. Until the end of the nineteenth century, it was used widely in the ways the polite style is used now; but with the emergence of the polite style, the range of the semiformal style narrowed, and it became a style used only with inferiors.^[2] Further, due to its over-use by authority figures during Korea's period of dictatorship, it became associated with power and bureaucracy and gained a negative connotation. Consequently, this style has almost completely fallen out of use in modern South Korea, and the generation of Koreans who came of age after democratization also conspicuously avoid using it. In North Korean standard Korean (*munhwaŏ*) it is still used when talking to equals who may be addressed by 동무 *dongmu* ("comrade"). It is used:

- Occasionally among the older generation, by civil servants, police officers, middle management, middle-aged people, and other people of intermediate social rank who have temporary authority over what would normally be considered their superiors
- Used in written language such as signs and public notices, in which case the imperative form is used.

- In historical dramas, where it gives the dialogue a more old-fashioned sound.
- In the North Korean standard language
- In the spoken form of certain dialects, such as the Hamgyŏng dialect.

Hage-che**(하계체)**

Neither formal nor casual, neither polite nor impolite

This conversational style is called the "familiar." It is intermediate in politeness between *haeyo-che* and *hae-che*. It is not used to address children, and is never used to address blood relatives. It is used only:

- By some older people when addressing younger people or especially in-laws in a friendly manner.
- Used for those under one's authority: by professors toward their students, by bosses toward their employees etc.
- Between adult male friends, occasionally.
- In novels

Lower levels

The *hae-che* and *haera-che* styles are frequently mixed together in the same conversation, so much so that it can be hard to tell what verb endings belong to which style. Endings that may be used in either style are:

- Question: -ㄴ|?/-ㄴ|?/-ㄴ|?
- Proposition: -ㅈ|. (this is roughly equivalent to "let's" in English)
- Casual statement: -ㅈ|. (this is roughly equivalent to "I suppose")
- Casual question: -ㅈ|?. (this is roughly equivalent to "I wonder if" in English)
- Exclamation: -구나! -다!

Haera-che**(해라체)****Formally****impolite**

This conversational style is generally called the "plain" style. In writing and quoting, the plain style is the equivalent of the third person. Any other written style would feel like a first-person account (that is, anything else would seem to be told in the main character's own voice). It is used:

- To close friends or relatives of similar age, and by adults to children.
- In impersonal writing (books, newspapers, and magazines) and indirect quotations ("She said that...").
- In grammar books, to give examples.
- In some exclamations.

Hae-che**(해체)****Casually impolite**

This conversational style is called the "intimate" in English. Like the 해요체 *Haeyo-che*, it exhibits no inflection for most expected forms. Basic conjugations for the declarative, interrogative and imperative forms are identical, depending on intonation and context or other additional suffixes. It is used:

- Between close friends and relatives.
- When talking to children.

Korean speech style, honorific system is complex and richly textured. Unlike another languages Korean speech style and honorific system does not only appear in writing but also appears in daily communication for addressing seniority or social ranks (Wong Kit Ying, 2011). The reason for the wide spread of honorification in Korean is based on the hierarchical culture in Korea. To understand Korean speech style, honorific system it is required background information about how it act in real situation.

References:

1. "Ms포토조윤서 '사랑을 받아주시옵소서~'". MHN스포츠 (in Korean). 2022-10-18. Retrieved 2022-10-23.
2. Lee, Iksop; Ramsey, S. Robert (2000). The Korean Language. State University of New York Press. ISBN 0-7914-4831-2.
3. 안진명; 선은희 (2013). Korean grammar in use: Advanced (in Korean). Darakwon. p. 334. ISBN 978-89-277-3116-0.
4. 안진명; 선은희 (2013). Korean grammar in use: Advanced (in Korean). Darakwon. p. 338. ISBN 978-89-277-3116-0.

External links:

- "문체법 (국어국문학자료사전)". 한국사전연구사. 1998.