A study of the Korean sentence-ender -(u)psita: Implementing activity transitions in the KFL classroom

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Abstract

This study explores how Korean as a foreign language (KFL) teachers implement activity transitions in classrooms by shifting their speech style to the -(u)psita form. The data are derived from twelve hours of audio- and/or video-recorded interactions between teachers and their students in four upper-level KFL classrooms at an American university. Drawing on microanalytic qualitative analysis methods, I present a detailed analysis of six examples of teacher-initiated activity transitions. By using the -(u)psita form to begin an activity, teachers draw students' attention and collectively move them onto the next item on the agenda as a unified party. The teachers' right to control the structure of activities and to impose activity boundaries reinforces their authority within the interactional event. Smooth transitions are consequential for teaching and learning because they help students properly follow instructions and prepare them to be involved in the next activity. The findings of this study confirm the importance of examining how transition-signaling processes are accomplished during a lesson, and reveal how utilizing effective transitions makes significant contributions to teaching.
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Keywords: Classroom interaction; Transition; Speech style; Sentence-enders; Style-shifting; Korean

1. Introduction

Building on recent studies on the situated meanings of Korean speech styles (Eun and Strauss, 2004; Kim, 2010; Kim and Suh, 2007; Lee, 2000; Park, 2008; Strauss and Eun, 2005; Yoon, 2010; Yun, 2000), this study examines teachers' use of the semi-formal style[1] in a Korean as a Foreign Language (KFL) classroom setting to understand how teachers systematically implement transitions both within and between activities through the use of a particular linguistic form. The analysis focuses on the -(u)psita form, which is the propositive form of the semi-formal speech style in Korean. The English equivalent of the Korean -(u)psita is 'let's'. Teacher talk is crucial to language teaching because it serves as the vehicle for teachers to carry out the teaching plan and as the primary source of linguistic input in the target language (Nunan, 1991). It also plays an important role in socializing students into the norms and values of the target language society (Byon, 2003; Ohta, 1994; Poole, 1992). For this reason, second and foreign language researchers could

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   [1] Speech styles are often labeled based on their corresponding metapragmatic meaning (*e.g.*, 'intimate', 'blunt', 'polite', 'deferential'). The degree of deference and formality is the main criterion for this labeling. These labels represent the stereotypical belief that a single meaning exists for each speech style while overlooking other potential meanings that are contextually derived. Therefore, in this paper, to avoid predetermining any particular metapragmatic meaning of the -(u)psita form, a specific label is not applied to this form.

usefully direct more attention to communication in the classroom. However, as Hall and Smotrova (2013, p. 75) have pointed out, research on classroom discourse has mainly focused on "official forms of instructional talk" while overlooking the organizational aspects of classroom discourse. Furthermore, there are very few microanalytic studies on how classroom activity transitions are negotiated by teachers and students (Jacknick, 2011).

This research examines how activity transitions are made in KFL classroom settings through teachers' use of the *-(u)psita* form. Specifically, the study addresses the following questions: (1) In what contexts do teachers employ the *-(u)psita* form in KFL classrooms? and (2) What kind of role do teachers construct while performing transitions using the *-(u)psita* form? In this study, by analyzing specific moments of teacher–student interactions in classroom settings, I demonstrate that teachers adopt the *-(u)psita* form to signal to students that a new activity will start. By using the form to index the beginning of an activity, teachers collectively move the students onto the next item on the agenda as a unified party. Teachers' use of the *-(u)psita* form also reinforces their right to establish the agenda for students and to make transitions between different activities. In this sense, the form is a means of enforcing power and authority within the interactional event. The goal of this research is to uncover how this transition-signaling process is accomplished through the use of the *-(u)psita* form.

2. Previous studies

2.1. Definition of the *-(u)psita form*

In Korean, there are six speech styles, which are commonly referred to as plain, intimate, familiar, semi-formal, polite, and deferential (Lee and Ramsey, 2000; Rue and Zhang, 2008; Sohn, 1999). The different styles entail distinctive suffixes that are attached to the stem of a verb or an adjective at the end of a sentence. These are often called 'sentence enders' or 'sentence final particles'. These suffixes are determined by an utterance's speech style and sentence type. Table 1 illustrates the different sentence enders for various sentence types: declarative, interrogative, imperative, and propositive.

The *-(u)psita* form is the propositive form of the semi-formal style, which is used in very limited contexts. The meaning of the *-(u)psita* form is equivalent to the English expression 'let's' (Sohn, 1999). Syntactically, it consists of three morphemes: the addressee honorific *-(u)p*, the requestive *-si*, and the propositive marker *-ta* (Sohn, 1999). The power-laden semi-formal style has almost disappeared from current colloquial Korean due to the transformation of social structures (Sohn, 1983, 1999), but the *-(u)psita* form[2] still occurs in a few uses. It can be used to invite an individual, usually of lower or equal status, to participate in a joint action. Close adult friends, especially if they are middle-aged or older, may use this form to suggest doing something together. In addition, the *-(u)psita* form can be used to address a group of people. For example, when a group stages a protest, they can use this form to show the members' solidarity as equals. The next section provides a brief review of previous studies that look at the use of different Korean speech styles within classroom settings.

2.2. Research on Korean speech style use in classrooms

Korean speech style use within interaction is a relatively new area of research (Strauss and Eun, 2005). While several studies have examined the use of different speech styles both in casual and public speech (*e.g.*, Eun and Strauss, 2004; Kim, 2010; Lee, 2000; Park, 2008; Strauss and Eun, 2005; Yun, 2000), teachers' speech style use in the context of the classroom has not received much attention. Research on teachers' use of Korean speech styles in a classroom setting highlights the process of socializing the students and functions of speech styles used in teacher speech.

Byon (2003) examines the socialization effects of teachers' speech style usage in Korean as a Heritage Language (KHL) classrooms. His study especially looks at the teachers' use of the polite style ending *yo*, illustrating how the *yo* form socializes students into the use of the polite style and underlying values of Korean politeness. Byon (2003) claims that a classroom is the primary place of socialization for KHL learners.

Kim and Suh (2007) and Park (2012) illustrate the interpersonal functions associated with different speech styles used in teacher speech. Kim and Suh (2007) explain that, while the polite style is used as the dominant style of teacher talk in elementary school classrooms, the intimate style is used to manage the classroom and for actions such as disciplining, warning, or advising. Based on the analysis of teacher–student interactions in a university classroom setting, Park (2012) claims that teachers occasionally shift to the intimate style during discussions of personal topics in order to express

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[2] Pragmatically, it is not appropriate for a person of lower status to use the form to a person of higher status because it lacks politeness and respect (Lee, 1985; Lee and Ramsey, 2000). Lee (1985) claims that this impolite impression arises from the lower status speaker's attempt to include the higher status listener in the proposed action as an equal. In contrast, to direct a polite proposal to a higher status person, a speaker would use the polite style with an interrogative or a more indirect expression (Han, 2004).