

## How Adessive Becomes Nominative in the System of Korean Honorifics? ---- Metaphor of De-agentivizing Superior

### ABSTRACT

1. Korean has a special set of case markers which are exclusively assigned to arguments of a participant whose social status is superior to the speaker, i.e. *kkeyse* for the Nominative case and *kkey* for the Dative case. Recently, based on a large body of Korean corpus data, Sohn (2002) explores the properties of these two honorific case markers, which have been largely neglected in the linguistic field of Korean.
2. The main arguments of Sohn's study may be summarized as follows: (i) The original etymological base of Dative *kkey* is assumed to be as /-s + kuey/, i.e. the Genitive and a noun 'the place.' The coalesced /-s-kuey/ eventually changed to the target form *kkey*. The presence of the Genitive -s 'superior person's' allows the dative *kkey* to acquire the honorific feature. The semantic change of the positional noun to the Dative case marker is ascribed to metonymy, the path of which is widely observed cross-linguistically (Anderson 1971, Lyons 1971, and Heine et al. 1991.) (ii) The Nominative *kkeyse*, on the other hand, is derived from a morphological base consisting of /-s-kuey/ ('superior's place') and /-se/ a derivative of the verb *isi-ta* 'to exist.' Despite the *s.kuey* identical to the base of Dative *kkey*, the semantic shift involved in deriving the Nominative takes a three-stage path critically different from the former, namely, Stage I [x exists at Y's place] > Stage II [x is from Y's place] > Stage III [Y instigates X]. (iii) Diachronically, the honorific Nominative *kkeyse* first appears in the 17<sup>th</sup> C. long after the emergence of the honorific Dative *kkey* in the 15<sup>th</sup> C., as the corpus data attest. The development of the honorific Nominative is attributed to the external factor, namely, the prevailing ideological influence of the Neo-Confucian orthodox doctrine in the Middle Korean society.
3. Significant though in tapping the long neglected area of grammar-pragmatics interfaces in Korean, Sohn's study raises some critical questions. First, Sohn's claim of the late development of the Nominative *skueyse* (it took two hundred years after the appearance of Dative *skuey* in the 15<sup>th</sup> C.) is less convincing. The corpus data of early Middle Korean are skewed in distribution because of the nature and time of *Hangul* documentation, which makes accurate dating of the grammaticalization process difficult particularly due to the virtual absence of discourse material. Furthermore, if the emergence of the Nominative *skuey* is influenced by Neo-Confucianism, it is expected to appear much earlier, because the new doctrine was firmly established by the 14<sup>th</sup> C. and had been full-blown by the 16<sup>th</sup> C as the leading ideological doctrine of the Chosŏn Dynasty. Second, one must not overlook the existence of *kkey-opse* (*P'yojungkukŏ Taesajŏn* 1999:990) a variant of the honorific Nominative *kkeyse*, where the first morpheme *kkey* appears to function as a Locative incorporating with *opse* (*opsye* in the older form). The locative *kkey*, partially involved in the nominative marker *kkey-opse* must be distinguished from the genuine Dative *kkey*. Thirdly, Sohn argues emphatically the grammatical paths of Dative *skuey* and Nominative *skueyse* were not at all similar because of different triggers, i.e. metonymy for the former and the "instigation" of *se* as a derivative of the existential verb *isi-ta*. It is peculiar, though, to see how the two case markers with common features took courses so different from each other. However, we have no viable explanation to this question.
4. In this paper, we propose an alternative to that in Sohn's study: the honorific case markers *kkeyse* and *kkey* are both evolved from the common non-honorific *skuey/kkuey*, which has the meaning of 'around the time x' or 'in the vicinity of a place x.' We regard it tentatively as an instance of Adessive Case marker commonly observed in Uralic languages such as Finnish, Estonian and Hungarian. Modern and Middle Korean Adessive *skuey* examples (1) and (2) below are quoted from Martin et al. (1992:635), and (3) from Nam (1977:963).
  - (1) a. *kumum-kkey*: about (towards) the end of the month
  - b. *choswun-/cwungswun-/haswun-kkey*: around the first/second/last third of the month

- (2) a. *Namtaemun-kkey*: in the vicinity of South Gate
- b. *Conglo-nay-keli-kkey*: in the neighborhood of Bell Street Cross
- (3) a. *tyecwum-skuey* (First Edition of *Tusi.Ōnhay* 24:27. 1481)
- b. *polum-skuey* (*Pak Thongsa Ōnhay*1:41. 1677)

In Korean honorifics, a superior in discourse is conceived metaphorically as an entity so important that such a person does not come or go, or, for that matter, does not ‘work’ nor ‘do anything’ but simply ‘emerges’ effortlessly. Such a state of affairs is referred to as de-agentivization of a superior in this paper. Furthermore, a superior is not subject to be touched, pointed, or even seen directly. For short, a superior is a figurative entity of *taboo*. In this mental system, a superior is not present at a specific ‘meager’ location but an area with ‘aurora,’ which can only be referred to in approximation. If a superior is understood as an entity metaphorically being de-agentivized, then for such an entity, i.e. a taboo entity, the speaker will naturally exploit case markers of Adessive such as those in (1)-(3) in order to express actions, states, and locations of such an entity. Thus, a sentence like ‘emperor eats’ may be represented as a figurative event, namely ‘an honorable action of eating takes place effortlessly at the locus where the emperor is present.’ (Ikegami 1981:199) Likewise, an emperor as a recipient of a letter must be addressed as *imkum kkey(-lo)* ‘to King’s place’ as a non-specific area of approximation. The metaphorization of this sort is seen in English expressions such as ‘your/his/her Highness’ as address terms for members of the royal family. Ikegami (ibid:200) characterizes this sort of figurative conversions via the honorific Nominative case marker *okase.rare.te (.wa)* in Japanese as *bashoka* ‘localization.’ Careful examination spots a highly suspicious pair of the honorific Nominative case markers, namely, Korean *kkeyse* and *okase*, the first segment of the Japanese honorific Nominative case marker, which is worth of future scrutiny.

5. In this analysis, then, we may spare notions we owe to Sohn (2002) and Sohn & Strauss (1998), such as ‘metonymy’ for derivation of Dative case marker *kkey* and ‘instigation’ of an existential verb for the honorific feature of Nominative marker *kkeyse*. Alternatively, the present metaphor-based approach offers a single principled explanation for how those two honorific case markers have evolved in the Korean honorific system.

## References

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