



“Call me by my name”: Names, address, and the subjectivization of Korean women

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ABSTRACT

Personal names in South Korea are subject to avoidance and restrictions in use grounded in the asymmetric relations of power and age that constitute the sociolinguistic ideologies of the country. At the same time, as lexical items which are inherently and conventionally referential, names have the unique reformatational power to change normative social practice. The affordances provided by the dual status of names allow speakers to (re) negotiate relational parameters and reposition themselves as subjects in the wider spatiotemporal setting. The focus on female speakers reveals internal tensions between names and restricted forms of address in familial settings, where the selection and usage of names is interpreted as movement of Korean women towards subject positions on both micro-interactional and macro-social scales.

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1. Introduction

In the episode entitled “People are saying my name” (*saramul nae ireumul bullo*) of the South Korean 2019 hit drama “Romance is a Bonus Book” (*romaenseuneun byeolchaekburok*), Kang Dani reveals to her love interest, Cha Eunho, that what she likes most about being back at work after eleven years as a housewife is that people are using her name again. “What do you mean by that?”, Eunho asks while in the background a chorus of voices calls out to Dani: “*dongseo* (sister-in-law, used by husband’s brother’s wife), *jaehee eomma* (Jaehee’s mom), *yeobo* (dear), *jesu-ssi* (sister-in-law, used by husband’s older brother), *eomma* (mom)”. Dani, tearing up, says: “For all these years, no one called me by my name. Kang Dani. I am a person with a name too, you know. No one called me that. But now, people say my name. [...] That really feels odd. Getting called by my name”.

Being called by name is, indeed, an unusual occurrence in South Korea, where the system of honorific language imposes strict sociopragmatic constraints on the choice of address. On the most basic level, these constraints take on the form of a “simple pragmatic alternation” between names and other forms of address” (Fleming, 2011), which is conditioned by the relative age and status of speakers and addressee-referents, and which dictates that in any culture “where kin terms alternate with names in address, kin terms are always used for senior kin and names for junior kin” (Fleming and Slotta, 2018:375). In the case of Korea, the usage of names as part of this alternation indexes greater symbolic proximity to the referent, which in interaction variously translates into relations of intimacy, equality, or subordination. If Dani is, for example, addressed in the vocative form as Dani-ya, the name usage, alongside the informal suffix -a/-ya, would index equal status and/or intimacy between same-aged interlocutors, but lower status if invoked by an older or socially higher-ranked speaker.

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Such nonreferential elaborations of the indexical function of names, which introduce vertical relations in interaction and make the speakers more vulnerable to power asymmetries, make name-calling a high-risk address strategy. At the same time, the breadth of sociocultural positionalities which names index, such as “gender, generation, ethnicity, religion, region, class, kinship, and more” (Bucholtz, 2016:274), make them a valuable resource in the process of construing a social subject. As a result, in settings where access to names is limited, the subjectivization afforded by names makes name-calling a high-reward address strategy, as well.

This risk and reward dialectic is nowadays particularly relevant in Korea’s institutional settings, where the pragmatic alternation is limited by systems of address derived from various sociohistorical and cultural sources. Across economic institutions, such systems are becoming more open to name-usage. In the Korean workplace, for example, names are increasingly used to establish a more egalitarian or “flat” social structure (Prentice, 2017), and to humanize corporate roles and identities hitherto marked by forms of noun address derived from job titles. Alternatively, some institutions, such as language schools, are resorting to techniques of indexical bleaching (Bucholtz, 2016), including giving students “English names” in an attempt to circumvent the constraints of the Korean system of address.

However, within social institutions, such as the family, extant systems of address prove more resistant to change, both in a language and in practice. Kang Dani’s dramatized experience of losing her nominal identity as a fulltime housewife reflects the reality of many Korean women, who are, as daughters, wives, and mothers, reduced to fixed terms of address and accompanying social roles and identities. More broadly, within Korean families, the limited access to names results in the indexical erasure of women as the nominal subject in interaction, and as a social subject in the wider spatiotemporal setting of the country. Since this form of erasure occurs as part of the “naturalized” practice (Agha, 2007) of name dropping or avoidance in Korean – which in itself is not gender-specific – the sociocultural and historical processes which produce positionally asymmetric access to names and make women’s names disproportionately more affected by name-dropping, are rendered invisible.

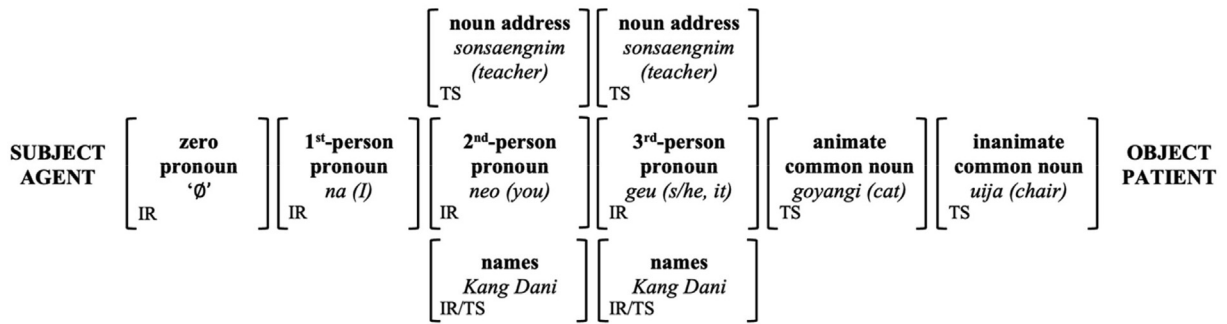
At the same time, the increased economic liberty and social mobility of women in Korea, and the ongoing shifts in gender ideologies spearheaded by radical and moderate feminist groups in the country, have increased the collective awareness – both in the local academia and among the general population – of the power of language to guide and perpetuate institutional behavior and roles (Yu, 2019). This study argues that such increased awareness has produced a particular gendered framework of emancipatory modernity whose aim is to re-institutionalize social institutions such as the family through gradual changes in the underlying system of language, and especially in the forms of address and reference that govern it.

Names emerge as a useful tool in this process since the affordances provided by the unique status of names in the Korean referential hierarchy allow speakers to (re)negotiate parameters of a relationship and reposition themselves in the wider spatiotemporal setting through performance on the smaller scale of interaction. Negotiation of this sort, however, is at odds with the process by which Korean women are linguistically socialized (Duff, 2010) into extant systems of address emblematic of social institutions and central to liminal life events, such as adulthood, marriage, and motherhood. The preference for names over other available and approved alternatives is therefore interpreted as movement of Korean women toward subject-positions in both microscale interactions and macrosocial spatiotemporal settings and institutions.

This phenomenon is explored through interviews and observation of thirty Korean women from different social and regional background, as they navigate the thin line between normative social propriety and personal identity performance and maintenance within the spatiotemporal setting of Korea’s compressed modernity (Chang, 2010). The study findings suggest that the practice of name-calling is undergoing transgenerational change to reflect the equally changing position of women in the country, simultaneously affecting the internal structure of the Korean system of address. Although the study traverses the intersection of gender and power relations, its ultimate focus is sociolinguistic in nature, aiming to circumscribe a complex linguistic phenomenon unfolding within an equally complex social setting.

2. Scaling names and address

The high-risk, high-reward nature of name usage in Korean is a result of the position and mobility of names as lexical items within the Korean referential hierarchy. Referential hierarchies (Silverstein, 1976) order noun-phrase types “in terms of the degree to which [they] inherently index their object” (Fleming, 2011:144) and are therefore likely to assume agentive roles and subject positions within an utterance. The continuum of referential hierarchies can be broadly divided into items which inherently reference the speaker by virtue of deixis, such as pronouns, and items which have a constant and conventional symbolic referent, such as kinterms and other forms of noun address. Since names share features of both categories, in that they inherently and conventionally reference a single individual, they assume a medial position in the Korean referential hierarchy as both inherent referentials (IR) and true symbols (TS), as shown in Fig. 1:



The usage of pronouns in Korean is severely restricted, which motivates movement of other lexical items within the referential hierarchy. As a pro-drop language, Korean favors the zero pronoun, which serves as a common null argument substitute for all other items in the hierarchy (Han, 2004a), including the 1st-person pronoun, which otherwise can be used in the humble form *jeo* or the familiar form *na*. 2nd-person pronouns exhibit a T/V variant (Brown and Gilman, 1960), where the *vos*-form is variously replaced with either the zero pronoun, names, or forms of noun address, among other strategies, while the *tu*-forms, *neo* and *dangsin*, remain severely restricted in use. Finally, 3rd-person pronouns are relatively unstable in that they rely on the unisex determiner *geu*, equivalent to the English *that*, and are therefore often replaced by the same set of strategies as 2nd-person pronouns. It is this need to fill in for an unstable 3rd-person pronoun system and augment the pragmatically restricted 2nd-person pronoun system that ultimately gives rise to the pragmatic alternation between names and forms of noun address, which occupy a single placeholder in the referential hierarchy.

This flat constituency does not translate into performance, however, since the sociopragmatic constraints on selection and alternation formulate a separate hierarchy which directs the spatiotemporally situated practice of honorification – or choosing what to “call someone” (Harkness, 2015). In other words, in addition to the horizontal movement of lexical items along the subject-object axis, the items also move vertically in line with relevant sociopragmatic parameters. In the case of Korean forms of address, the vertical axis is, among others, projected based on the relative proximity or intimacy and deference or distance between the interlocutors (Fig. 2).

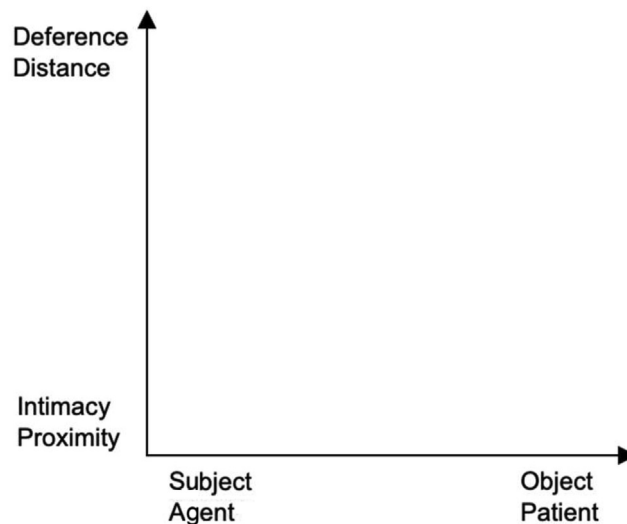


Fig. 2. Vertical and horizontal scaling of forms of address.

As such, the process of deciding what to call someone unfolds at scalar intersections of intimacy and status, positioning users along relative sociolinguistic coordinates. On the surface, such positioning reveals the nature of the relationship and the relative statuses of the interlocutors involved in the speech event. On a deeper level, however, positioning constitutes a negotiatory act in which the interlocutors' personal interactive goals variously collide, compete, or collaborate with the normative practice encoded in the external spatiotemporal setting which frames the speech event. While on the microscale of personal interactions such choices might appear inconsequential beyond changes in individual relationships, the repeated

use of norm-altering forms results in macroscale changes in practice, and by extension, in the ideological make-up of the normative structure. Put simply, what people are called in Korean affects not only them, but also their immediate and wider sociocultural setting.

This phenomenon is not restricted to Korean alone. As Sidnell and Shohet (2013:618) point out in their study of Vietnamese, “in many languages, selection of a word corresponding to the English second-person singular pronoun *you* in any act of address inevitably indexes something about the social relationship between speaker and addressee”. Unlike Vietnamese, however, where the usage of names among peers codes a lack of significant social bonds, in Korean, names *by default* index the presence of a relationship of some sort, whose precise qualities can be better determined by paying attention to other accompanying elements of address, such as suffixes, name forms (\pm family name), titles, or kinterms.

At the same time, naked name usage alone also indexes values differentially determined by their dual status: as inherent referentials, they are subject to avoidance and exclusion from the system, while as true symbols, they can be used as a substitute or a supplement for other referential items. On the microscale of interaction, this feature grants names particular reformative power since they can transition between categories of address and position speakers along a wide range of coordinates. At the same time, within the macrosocial dimension, names circulate as markers of identification and subjectivity, be it in purely legislative terms as symbols of a legal subject, or in the sociopsychological sense, where they assist in personal and social identification and enable maintenance of a conceptualized continuous “self” (Aldrin, 2016; Finch, 2008). The consistency of reference provided by names anchors individuals within the spatiotemporal setting of their lived experience, simultaneously allowing synchronic identification as a subject in the here-and-now, and diachronic linking across generations, as part of a particular kin group or community.

However, in the realities of situated practice in Korea, names become a restricted resource. In settings marked by pre-existing systems of address names rarely appear as a possible alternative, primarily because their usage would disrupt the uniform and relational nature of the system in which social roles and identities are predetermined. A prime example of this is the Korean family unit, which boasts the most complex system of address in Korean (King, 2006; Lee and Kim, 1973). The social and gender roles encoded in familial systems of address indexically confine group members to preset relational identities, barring access to individuated subject positions. Due to a number of social, historical, economic, and cultural factors, women are disproportionately more likely to undergo such forms of indexical erasure and lose access to their own names.

This study aims to show how the increased awareness of the naturalized asymmetries in address has contributed to generational changes in name-calling practices within closed institutional settings, marked further by outright avoidance of such settings, particularly among younger generations of Korean women. These findings align with those from other recent studies which show how by renegotiating the limits of extant systems of address, Korean speakers actively negotiate social relationships (Lee and Yu Cho, 2015; Brown, 2011; Straus and Eun, 2005; Kim 2004), challenge normative sociolinguistic practices (Brown, 2016; Harkness, 2015), and construct selves and identities (Kim and Strauss, 2018; Brown, 2015; Yoon, 2015), indicating that although the sociopragmatic boundaries of the Korean system of address are not readily permeable, they are also not impenetrable.

3. Women's place in South Korea

Testing the boundaries of interlocutors, however, is not a practice Korean speakers easily engage in. In part, this is because the process of selecting an appropriate form of address in Korean is already complicated enough. While the negotiation of terms of address usually requires only a few brief exchanges, the entanglements of power, status, intimacy, and expectations which transpire within those moments require high social cognizance, cultural sensitivity, and personal awareness that take years to be socialized into. The tenor that is set in the early stages of an interaction often persists long into the relationship, and some speakers may continue using the initially selected terms despite possible changes in status over time. Renegotiating the terms carries significant social risks, particularly since the system of address overtly indexes the relationship not just to the interlocutors, but to all “hearers, overhearers, and referents” present during the interaction (Kim and Strauss, 2018:19). This collective aspect of addressing limits the roles and identities individual speakers can assume within speech event frames.

This is particularly true for Korean women, whose position in Korea is marked by centuries of gender inequality. With the arrival of neo-Confucianism to the peninsula, women were confined to “inside” spaces, assuming domestic roles of family and household caretakers in line with prescribed gender ideologies (Han, 2004b). Name erasure became a standard practice during the Joseon Dynasty, particularly following marriage, when women were socialized into a restricted set of terms of address which situated them into relational and non-negotiable social roles. Such systems of address remain current in modern Korea, as well. While the more overtly discriminatory terms of address – such as “*anae*” or “*an saram*” (lit. ‘inside’ and ‘inside person’) in reference to one’s wife – are slowly disappearing from use, the remainder of the system is slow to change, particularly in more rural settings, where many women “do not use personal names even among close female friends” which results in local married women not being “addressed by their personal names throughout their life” (Kim, 2001:220).

Such isolated communities are not uncommon in Korea, where the benefits of rapid industrialization were spread unevenly and often haphazardly. Major cities such as Seoul, which were centers of governmental development efforts, nowadays promote a modern, progressive, liberal, and globalized image of Korea, which often does not extend beyond the city borders. However, even within these urban areas, issues of gender inequality persist and are through community involvement further magnified. The attempts on the part of the Korean government to bridge the highest gender-gap among all OECD countries (*Global Gender Gap Report, 2020*) have had little to no success so far, and the “gender wars” in the country continue (*Jeong and Lee, 2018*).

Taken together, however, the shifting gender ideologies in the country and the improvements in the socioeconomic mobility of Korean women have drastically altered the position of women across all aspects of the Korean society, except the family. Traditional conceptions of maidenhood, marriage, and motherhood encoded in kinship terminology continue to define the female role within the Korean family (*Kim, 2015; Lee and Park, 2001*). The expectations of women to conform to such roles have contributed to the continuously later age of first marriage, which in the period of three decades, from 1981 to 2011, rose from 23 to 29 years (*Kim et al., 2016*). The trend is unlikely to change, since many modern Korean women equate marriage with the loss of a personal identity, since for many women it implies assuming ‘inside’ roles of wives and mothers (*Lee and Pat, 1999*). A respondent in *Kim et al.’s (2016:350)* study on marriage and independence, for example, reports that she is afraid to quit a job she dislikes and get married “because I am afraid to lose myself by not working [...] I still want to work”. While the fear of losing one’s personal identity following marriage and motherhood is not a phenomenon unique to Korea (*Boxer and Gritsenko, 2005*), the way this phenomenon manifests and is perpetuated through language in Korea is highly particular.

Within this broader context, the shift towards names in the referential hierarchy of Korean carries significant real-world implications for how social roles and the “deep-rooted ideologies naturalized in everyday language” (*Yu, 2019:146*) are negotiated and subverted. The ability of names to lexically, indexically, and socially subjectivize a person, make them a powerful resource for renegotiating sociopragmatic frames of closed, relational address systems, since no matter what form name-calling takes on (vocative, nominal-address amalgam) or what else it indexes (hierarchy, equality, intimacy), it invariably does so while indexing a singular and specific individual. In this sense, the preference for name-calling and for settings which allow name usage among Korean women, implies a shift towards greater subjectivity and agency across the microscopes of interactions and within the larger sociohistorical frame of the country.

At the same time, this shift should not be understood as an attempt to move away from being a “subject to a set of relationships”, or a move toward assuming greater power as the “subject of a set of relationships” (*Norton, 2010:350*). Rather, it is a move toward subjectivity itself, with Korean women seeking greater visibility and positions of subjects in a set of relationships. In other words, the reorientation toward names for Korean women is only marginally a question of power, since the roles of daughters, mothers, and wives are often inextricable from their personal identity, and is rather a question of maintaining a personal named self amidst all the roles and identities they assume in the society.

4. Thirty women, three regions

To collect comprehensive and varied data, I observed and interviewed thirty Korean women in northern, central, and southern regions of Korea. I selected women with whom I had established a personal connection, either directly or through an acquaintance, since this enabled me easier access to their daily lives and made continuous and prolonged contact convenient. While the selection as such was reliant on snowball sampling, I aimed to select participants from vastly different socioeconomic backgrounds, ranging from students through full-time housewives to business owners. The sample is also varied in terms of age, marriage status, children, and religious beliefs, all of which I believe were important in comprising a representative sample of Korean women.

The primary data was collected through open ethnographic observation (OEO) in 3-h increments for a period of five days, for a total of 15 h of observation per person. The observation was scheduled at different times of day, and in different settings with different participants to further diversify the data. As such, in addition to the thirty central participants, in the course of the data analysis I refer to a number of other peripheral participants, as well. The names of all participants were changed to ensure anonymity. Throughout the observation period, I took field notes from which I formulated informal interview (labeled “II”) questions that I would ask either during the observation or immediately after. Following the prolonged observation, I conducted a formal semi-structured interview (labeled “FI”) to gain insights into the motivations and attitudes of the participants and compare to what extent they aligned with their actual behavior during observations. The interviews were conducted in Korean, with the assistance of a Korean colleague in case more culturally or regionally specific concepts or ideas needed to be discussed. The interviews were audio recorded, and then manually transcribed in Korean. Parts relevant to this study were Romanized following the “Revised Romanization of Korean” system, and then translated into English.

Given the asymmetric socioeconomic development of rural areas and the reported difference in social practices in urban centers, I expected that regional differences will have a significant influence on the women’s sociolinguistic performance. As such, I conducted the study with women from Seoul, as the capital in the northern Gyeonggi province, Nonsan and Daejeon, cities in the central South Chungcheong province, and Busan and Ulsan, cities in the South Gyeongsang province. Although not all participants are individually mentioned in the analysis section, *Table 1* provides a short description of all thirty women. Following the period of observation and the formal interviews, a draft of the findings was sent to the participants to ensure that their statements have been correctly interpreted and presented.

Table 1

List of participants with brief descriptions.

	Name	Age	Description	Location
1	Daeun	24	student, single	Seoul
2	Minjung	24	student, single	Seoul
3	Soomin	26	student, single	Seoul
4	Myungok	27	office worker, single	Seoul
5	Sunhee	30	hairstylist, married	Seoul
6	Jangmi	37	housewife, married, 1 daughter	Seoul
7	Sooyoung	39	housewife, married, 1 son	Seoul
8	Hwayoung	42	professor, married, 1 daughter and son	Seoul
9	Yoonsuh	57	housewife, married, 2 sons	Seoul
10	Hayun	65	restaurant owner, divorced, 1 son	Seoul
11	Junghwan	22	student, single	Busan
12	Juwon	27	student, single	Busan
13	Taeyang	29	receptionist, married	Busan
14	Minseo	34	pilates instructor, single	Busan
15	Yuri	47	company owner, married, 2 daughters	Busan
16	Jiyoung	57	housewife, married, 2 sons	Busan
17	Eunjung	82	housewife, married, 2 sons 2 daughters	Busan
18	Jahui	27	designer, single	Ulsan
19	Hyejeong	31	office worker, married	Ulsan
20	Miseon	31	office worker, single	Ulsan
21	Eunju	23	student, single	Nonsan
22	Jiho	28	teacher, single	Nonsan
23	Hyeona	30	assistant, single	Nonsan
24	Yujun	36	housewife, married, 1 son	Nonsan
25	Seulgi	41	teacher, married, 2 daughters	Nonsan
26	Chayeong	52	temple worker, married, 1 son and daughter	Nonsan
27	Jihyeon	25	student, single	Daejeon
28	Chohee	25	student, single	Daejeon
29	Seojun	29	office worker, single	Daejeon
30	Juwon	37	doctor, married, 1 daughter	Daejeon

This study relies on linguistic ethnography (LE) as the main methodological framework. The data was collected and interpreted in reference to the tenets of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln and Guba, 1986), as well as reflexivity in interviews and interaction analysis (Copland and Creese, 2017).

I found the latter particularly important, since as an outsider in the Korean culture, I am aware of my limited access to certain cultural and social concepts and values. At the same time, the status of a local foreigner¹ has given me a unique access point which allows me to make the familiar strange and thus highlight the nature and changes in sociolinguistic practices which local speakers might take for granted or otherwise consider unimportant. The focus of this study is a product of my outsider status, since it allowed me to notice patterns of change in naming and addressing in my interaction with the local community. As a language learner, I was particularly sensitive to such changes, since they often deviated from the formal content I was taught and could not be interpreted as part of any framework I was presented with. On a more personal note, this research was motivated by difficulties in identifying and connecting with people in my vicinity. Not knowing the names of people I ate, worked, and spent time with, made it difficult to perceive and connect to them individually, while also causing considerable (meta)pragmatic issues. In the Buddhist temple I volunteered in, for example, I would have to resort to tropic kin terms and descriptions such as “the *imonim* (aunt, honorific) who brings us bread” or “the *imonim* who works in the kitchen” to differentiate between the older women working in the temple. This made it both difficult to convey information and it reduced the individual to an associated activity or location, which I had difficulties conceptualizing as a sign of respect. Once I realized that there was resistance against this sort of addressing among younger Koreans, and particularly women, I began the formal examination of the phenomenon. In the process, I have sought to ameliorate potential biases through continuous interaction and co-construction of findings with the participants and local sociolinguists.

5. What's in a name?

Early on in the research, it became apparent that there is a discrepancy between what the participants reported in interviews and what they did in situated practice. For the most part this was to be expected. While personal orientations did motivate deviations from normative behavior in a number of cases discussed below, many of the attitudes toward name usage reported in the course of the observation could not be feasibly realized in practice without severe social ramifications. This is particularly true for older participants, for whom the social expectations of age meshed with the expectations of gender,

¹ I define “local foreigners” as individuals whose linguistic abilities have allowed them entry into the Korean culture.

simultaneously granting them access to more social power while binding them with further sociopragmatic restrictions. For younger women, and particularly students, the discrepancy was less apparent, particularly in the social spaces where I observed their behavior. Within institutional settings, be it that of a workplace or the affined family, norms of address were rarely challenged, even though multiple participants reported a desire for change. The rigidity of these institutional structures also appears to have alienated a large group of the younger participants, who collectively reported little interest in getting married or starting a family.

To ground this discrepancy in situated linguistic practice, I interpret it in terms of the continuum of the Korean referential hierarchy. The extremes of the continuum – the subject/agent and the object/patient – are here adopted in their socially conventional sense, rather than just as lexical arguments. In situated practice, they signify a move toward inherent reference on the side, and symbolic marking on the other, with names often formulating the middle-ground used for negotiating a change in the tenor of the interaction. The findings reveal complex oscillations between the two extremes, and point toward age, marriage status, and regional affiliation as the main variables which determine the degree to which names can be used in practice.

5.1. From subjects to objects

The deployment of names is bidirectional. On the one hand, names move away from the speaker, as a form of self-reference, while on the other they center in on the speaker whenever they are identified as a named individual entity by others. This movement produces the notion of referential subjectivity, where an individual habitually forms personal attachment and responsiveness to a particular yet arbitrary string of sounds.

When Minseo (34) states that, “[...] when someone calls my name, I can feel my ego² (ca’a) [...] it’s much more powerful” (FI), she illustrates how the bidirectional motion of names intersects to situate and anchor an individual within a certain spatiotemporal setting and its affiliated social network. Minseo owns a pilates studio in Seoul, where she has lived for the past 8 years. A native of Busan in Kyeongsang Province, Minseo grew up in a strict patriarchal family headed by her father and grandfather, with most of the attention and resources devoted to her two older brothers. Having left home at 18, Minseo moved to Netherlands, pursuing a certificate in yoga and pilates instruction, and teaching her way through college. She believes that her attitude toward language and identity was fundamentally affected by her time abroad, since she now struggles to find value in the strict system of address in Korean. In her studio, Minseo cultivates an atmosphere of focused egalitarian presence, encouraging all her students to call her by name, and addressing them in the same manner, regardless of age. She believes that the usage of names “grounds” individuals, which not only improves their performance and focus in class, but also reinforces their sense of personhood, which she considers particularly important “since [Koreans] usually do not get to hear [their] names in everyday life” (II).

At the same time, Minseo is aware that beyond her studio environment, the practice of naming is not as easily accessible. Even during class, I noted that Minseo’s students were often hesitant to call on her, and a few older students repeatedly addressed her as ‘teacher’ (*seonsaengnim*), which Minseo did not attempt to correct. This was somewhat counterintuitive, since in the vertical order of address, the allowances provided by age come second only to those provided by social status. As such, even though in a teacher-student relationship Minseo would assume a higher relative status, outside of those bounds, the older students could address her by name by virtue of their age. However, as the second oldest participant, Hayun (65), points out, “my generation almost never used names [...] and now that we can, we don’t know how” (II). At the same time, Hayun is attempting to change the way she addresses the people in her surroundings, believing that names play an important role in affirming the presence and existence of an individual:

I think it is very important to say my name or the name of another person, because by that you acknowledge the existence of that person. If you do not do that, the person does not really matter [...] The name is the person. Maybe this is not true all the time, but without a name you do not know the person. (FI)

Hayun runs a restaurant in Seoul with a majority female staff. Her usage of names is intentional and motivated by an awareness of society-internal gender asymmetries which she identifies as the primary reason for her divorce. Hayun collects feeling “suffocated” and “lost” (FI) in her marriage, and communicates a desire to create a work environment in which her employees are able to “get out of the house [...] to be called just by their name” (II). Much like Minseo, Hayun believes that names ground an individual in time and space, making them the focal subject in the interaction and acknowledging their personal identity within the wider context. This is in contrast with the indexical nature of noun address, which prioritizes the role over the actor and submerges an individual into a relational system of normative social practice. The usage of names then, indicates a desire to assume and maintain the role of a subject independently and as part of other symbolic social roles and identities. In other words, the choice of nominal address over other available alternatives indicates that individuals seek to fulfill a role, rather than become the role itself.

However, choice alone is not enough. Name usage in Korea is subject to the complex system of address-engendered social practice, which occurs at the intersection of referential and non-referential indexicality. Terms of address simultaneously

² I chose “ego” despite the possible psychoanalytic implications for the reason that it is the label most frequently used to denote the center while calculating kinship relations.

index a person and index information about the person in relation to other interactants, thus informing and reflecting the setting in which the interaction occurs.

In workplace settings, for example, this interplay is linked to specific spaces in which addressing is performed. In contrast to Minseo, Seulgi (41), a Korean language teacher in Nonsan, believes her title as a teacher (*seonsaengnim*), and the accompanying institutional order it encodes and perpetuates, is necessary to maintain the internal hierarchy of the academic context. During the OEO of Seulgi's and her colleague and participant Jiho's (28) workday, however, restrictions on name usage were in place only in front of students and older employees, whose presence enforced adherence to normative address. When alone in the office, or during lunchtime, Seulgi and Jiho used names and tropic kinterms to address each other, signaling a close relationship despite their age gap. Seulgi admits that an important aspect of her workplace satisfaction is the ability to socialize with other teachers, and feel acknowledged for more than her familial roles. Although she supports the idea that supervised systems of address are necessary in the Korean workplace (Hong, 2013) she relays her difficulties adapting to the rigid system of address in the institutional setting of the family: "When I was a new daughter-in-law (*myeoneuri*) I was always careful around my in-laws, but now we talk more freely [...] I now call my sister-in-law (*hyeongnim*) *eonni*, and she calls me by my name" (FI).

Seulgi's example highlights the spatiotemporal restrictions imposed on addressing, where there is a 'right place and a right time' for each form of address. The example also illustrates that the usage of names can be negotiated, albeit to a limited degree. This option is nevertheless important, because it allows an individual to remain an individual subject within settings delineated by social relationships. The usage of names defines the coordinates of spatial, temporal, and social presence of an individual, and effectively anchors them in fluid spaces of social practice. This is possible because, in Korea, much like in other settings where names compete with alternative forms of address (Ervin-Tripp, 1986), name usage indexes non-referential and (unlike terms of address) non-deictic information about the social relationship of the interactants.

However, name and subject anchoring within familial contexts, even of the limited sort Seulgi negotiated with her sister-in-law, is possible only within settings less marked by traditional gender divisions and roles. This is implicitly caused by the fact that an individual becomes socialized into their own name through continuous external reference, which, particularly in early stages of life, makes personal names more available to others. In Korea, children's names are liberally used, often evading all the standard restrictions of practice. This, of course, is due to the fact that children are generally exempt from requirements of the honorific register, since their socialization is seen as ongoing, and their linguistic deviations pose no challenge to the established system. However, from a certain age, parents are expected to start correcting their children's selection of address and other aspects of the honorific register and align them with the accepted norms of interaction. Inevitably, the scope and rigidity of the instruction depends on the underlying sets of ideologies the parents hold regarding what constitutes proper behavior for the child, particularly in reference to gender and age. It is at this point that the pendulum swings toward the more symbolic extreme of the Korean referential hierarchy, linking maturation with the process of assuming institutional roles and responsibilities, both in language and in practice. The transition to kinship terms is thus conflated with a transition to adulthood, where centralized and inherent reference is abandoned in favor of collective and symbolic roles and relationships. Put simply, to grow up, means to abandon one's name.

For many women, this occurs following marriage (see next section), but the delinking of young girls from their position of a named subject, and more importantly, a named subject within the wider spatiotemporal setting, often begins much earlier. In a series of interviews with Daeun (24), a graduate student from Seoul, we discussed the Korean practice of "making names" for newborns. This practice is a reflection of the sociocultural view of names as emblems of affiliation. Affiliation here is used in two senses: one, in which names affiliate individuals with specific characteristics, and the other, in which names affiliate individuals through genealogical and orthographic markers. The first one is motivated by *Saju* (lit. four pillars of destiny) – the naming practice conducted by local onomancers who divine an auspicious name for an individual based on their time and date of birth. *Saju* does not contribute much to a sociolinguistic interpretation of names beyond further supporting the claim that names are of central importance in the Korean culture. However, when looking at the orthographic restrictions on characters which can be used to "make a name", gender ideologies become apparent.

A vital element in "name building" is the so-called 'generational character' (*dollim-ja*) which is used as one of the two Sino-Korean or Pure-Korean characters that comprise the Korean first name. The *dollim-ja* indicates generational affiliation beyond the last name, often going back centuries into the family genealogy. Although historically reserved only for male members of the family, the *dollim-ja* is increasingly used for making female names, as well (Kim, 2012). However, during our formal interview, Daeun described finding out that her name did not contain a *dollim-ja*:

The *dollim-ja* in my family is *Sang*, so my older brother is Sangeun and my little brother is Sangmin [...] before my younger brother was born it was only me and my older brother, and we had the Sangeun Daeun, and I liked it, but then my brother came along and it turns out the *dollim-ja* was not *Eun* but *Sang*. I hated it, why do I have to be different. (FI)

Daeun also acknowledges her strenuous relationship with her father, who she reports addresses and refers to her almost exclusively as "daughter" (*ddal*). Interestingly, Daeun claims that she prefers this manner of address, since she believes it helps maintain distance between them, in a relationship that is "businesslike" (FI). This conception of names as property not readily available to others is at the core of name avoidance practices in cultures around the world. In Daeun's case, however, the practice is reified as a paradoxical strategy for disaffiliating from a parent by precisely employing the terms which formally encode their kinship. Although such internally motivated deployment of terms of address exemplifies how individuals may subvert and repurpose the system designed to exclude them, to interlocutors in the wider context such changes remain

invisible. Daeun remains the “daughter” in her family, who is expected to soon become a “wife”, “mother” and “mother-of”, and “daughter-in-law”, and so on.

Although as per Korean customs, women retain their patrilineal last name after marriage, and thus a symbolic connection to their kin, in practice, the transition to another household further disaffiliates them from the diachronic communal and temporal “we” identities of their own families (Pilcher, 2017), since their primary responsibility shifts toward the new affined family. At the same time, the non-negotiability of last name usage disaffiliates women from the genealogical matrix of their affined family, as well, since their last name differs from the rest of the family, including any potential children, who until 2008 were not legally allowed to carry maternal last names even in the case of a divorce (Tudor, 2012). Jiyoung (57), a Kyeongsang Province native whose family actively follows Confucian practices, exemplified this form of disaffiliation during an observation of the Confucian rites which her family organizes several times a year. Following the bowing ritual in front of the ancestral table reserved for the men of the family, Jiyoung’s husband offered Jiyoung and his niece to also bow to the ancestors. While Jiyoung refused, the 19-year-old niece accepted. When I asked her for the reason, Jiyoung revealed that she does not feel part of the Lee family: “I am not a Lee-ssi. This is the Lee-ssi ancestral table, and I am happy to just prepare it.”³ [The niece] is a Lee, so I think it is right for her to bow [...] I am part of my family [meaning husband and sons], but not of the Lee-ssi family” (II). It is worth noting that Jiyoung’s family maintains most traditional forms of address in the family, with her mother Eunjung (82) still referring to her husband as *bakkatyangban* (lit. outside gentleman), while he in turn refers to her as *urijibsaram* (lit. the person of our house) or *jibansaram* (person inside the house).

The difference in last names between married women and other members of family, places women in a limbo of non-affiliation, where they no longer belong to their biological family, but are also not fully incorporated into their affined family. Last name restrictions give rise to the paradox of marital non-affinity, which reflects the greater paradox of married women as ‘inside outsiders’, with a system of address which confines them to prescribed symbolic roles while simultaneously marginalizing their personal identities and preventing them from attaining the status of a subject in a set of familial relationships. However, patterns of change that are affecting the Korean honorific language as whole, are affecting the internal structure of familial address, as well. While these changes are both generationally and regionally dependent, the comparative analysis presented in the following section indicates that women in Korea increasingly assume a central role in the negotiation of their positionality within normative systems of social practice.

5.2. Inside outsiders

The position of women in Korea began changing in the aftermaths of the Korean War when, as a rapidly industrializing nation, Korea was forced to build an expansive and cheap labor force, which resulted in increased mobilization of female workers. Within decades, Korean women attained economic independence and social liberties on par with other highly developed nations, but their social roles within the family, and the forms of address used to encode them, remained the same.

In traditional forms of marriage in Korea, a married woman adopts the role of a *myeoneuri* (daughter-in-law) who is expected to assimilate into her husband’s family and prioritize them over her birth family. Much of the assimilation occurs through language socialization, as “the lifelong process by which individuals—typically novices—are inducted into specific domains of knowledge, beliefs, affect, roles, identities, and social representations, which they access and construct through language practices and social interaction.” (Duff, 1995:508). The system of kinship address, as the largest and most widely used category of address in Korean, plays a central role in the language socialization of a *myeoneuri*, as it determines her relative status and identity in relation to all other members of the family. The system is highly complex, comprising individual terms of address (*ho’ching*) and reference (*chi’ching*) for both paternal, maternal, and affinal relatives. With over forty different terms of address (Lee and Kim, 1973), a *myeoneuri* should learn to address all members of the family in accordance with their relative status to her and her husband, while the son-in-law should learn a comparative eleven terms for his wife’s family.

Although there are indications that the Korean family unit is increasingly becoming nuclear (Lee and Park, 2001), a *myeoneuri* is most often assimilated into the extended family of her husband where her induction is monitored and guided by older members the family. In terms of language socialization, interactions between husbands and wives are often overseen by the parents-in-law. Yujun (36), a fulltime housewife who has been married for 8 years, reports how in the beginning of her marriage, she and her husband were often reproached by her father-in-law for using each other’s names. The Korean repertoire of endearments is limited to several words, including “*yeobo*” (darling) and “*jagi*” (my own), which Yujun disliked,⁴ and which could similarly be frowned upon if used in front of older interlocutors. Ultimately, once she gave birth, Yujun resorted to using teknonymy—the practice of referring to parents by the names of their children—in front of her father-in-law.

Teknonymy in Korean has been given little attention beyond a purely descriptive analysis (King, 2006; Lee and Kim, 1973). As a practice, it illustrates the liminal nature of Korean marriage and parenthood which transfers the center of subjectivity in address and reference from the parents to the child. Capitalizing on the fact that children’s names are not subject to social

³ The main task of women during ancestral rites is the preparation of the ceremonial table. The work is arduous and usually done a few days in advance. Traditionally, women prepare the table alone, since men are not allowed into the kitchen under the superstition that if they spend too much time in the kitchen “their penis will fall off”, reflecting the perceived emasculation in men doing housework.

⁴ Kim (2015) notes that the term “*jagi*” is increasingly being used by married Korean women as a show of solidarity, in lieu of teknonymy.

restrictions, the practice makes the named child the central subject in the family, serving as the collective “origo of reckoning” (Agha, 2007:39) for all members of the immediate and extended social circle. At the same time, teknonymy is still primarily reserved for mothers, who are addressed in the form “[name of the child]’s mother”. In the case of housewives, whose acquaintances are mediated through their children or in-laws, this can lead to the formulation of close social groups in which address is exclusively teknonymic and where women know each other only by the form of address “[child’s name]’s *eomma*” (mother) (Kim, 2015). For Jiyoung, who as a full-time housewife mainly socializes with other mothers she met through their children’s playdates, this practice is a natural aspect of becoming a mother:

[...] there are many people who do not like it [teknonymy], who say they have their own name. ‘Now that I have a child, where did I go’, they say. But I do not mind it a lot. My generation does not mind it a lot, but younger people hate it. So I call them by their name a lot. (FI)

Jiyoung admits to not knowing the names of most of her close female friends she met via her children, despite knowing some of them for almost a decade. The names she did learn were often made available indirectly, through local social media services such as KakaoTalk. Since her relationship with the other women is grounded in their maternal roles, Jiyoung does not feel the need to establish deeper personal bonds within the community. At the same time, prompted by the interview questions, Jiyoung began wondering how widely known her name is within her affined family:

Until marriage my name was a big part of who I am, but then I got married and gave birth, and my name was gradually forgotten, and now people call me in different ways. [...] Younger members in my family probably do not know my name. My sister’s children only know me as *Busan-imo* [the aunt in Busan]. People my age might know my name, but younger family members do not. I did not think about this, but now that you ask me, I wonder if people have forgotten my name. Will it be forgotten now? (FI)

In addition to teknonymy, Jiyoung’s name is further elided through geonymy (Lee and Kim, 1973), the practice of identifying individuals by their geographical location. Put together, all the strategies of name avoidance ensure that a married woman’s name in particular, remains unknown in the wider spatiotemporal frame of the family institution. This is not the case for most male members, whose names are diachronically circulated and preserved both in text and through direct instruction within family circles. Jiyoung reports teaching her children the names of their paternal grandparents⁵ while other participants, such as Yuri (47), recollect being explicitly taught the names of their paternal grandparents, and others, like Soomin (26), report remembering having to learn only the names of paternal grandfathers. The exclusive maintenance of patrilineal names in Korea shows that name avoidance, although often presented as a nongendered practice within honorific speech (Hwang, 1990), carries a distinct gendered nuance, which excludes women’s names from genealogical memory. Rather, under the guise of naturalized practice, the avoidance of names on the microscale of interactions leads to a macro-historical erasure of Korean women’s names and identities.

This, of course, is not to say that name erasure alone has engendered the structural subordination of women in Korea, or that names, by default, hold reformatory power. However, for a transgenerational community of contemporary Korean women, names *have* attained such a value, framed by forms of linguistic ideologies which link names and subject positions and identities, in line with the cultural influences from the West. I recognize my contribution in perpetuating this ideology, as well. For women like Jiyoung, who do not subscribe to this name-based linguistic ideology, it was my line of questioning that brought forth the realizations regarding naturalized address practices which may lead to her establishing links between names and social identities and subject positions. This is the flipside of the ‘making the familiar strange’ task, which makes it difficult to leave the ‘familiar’ familiar once it has undergone overt examination, and has been marked by some form of the researcher’s bias.

At the same time, as evidenced by the OEO, there is a distinct gendered quality to name avoidance, as in instances of teknonymic address being used beyond familial contexts. While such form of address would be highly uncommon for men, it occurred multiple times in the case of my participants. During an observation of Hayun’s workday, for example, I noticed several of her employees address her as “Jisu’s *eomma*” [mom], after her son’s name. When asked about the practice, Hayun explained that the workers who address her in this manner have been working with her for over two decades, and in addition to their professional relationship, they built a familial and personal connection, as well. However, Hayun does admit that she dislikes being addressed in this manner, particularly in the workplace, but finds it difficult to negotiate a new set of terms. In part, this is due to the pragmatic timing of teknonymic address – the workers mostly addressed her in this manner only when there were no guests or junior employees in hearing proximity, opting alternatively for the more official term “*sajangnim*” [boss] – which does not interfere with the work atmosphere. Additionally, Hayun herself encouraged the use of other forms of intimate address, including name-kinterm forms, such as “Hayun-eonni” [older sister], in private spaces of the kitchen and hallways. As such, she finds it difficult to isolate the teknonymic form, which despite decentralizing her in address, still hinges on a close connection to her offspring. In this sense, Hayun cannot negate the identity of motherhood in the workplace, since the alternative would communicate not only normative impoliteness, but also contempt for a socially valorized role.

⁵ Names are often taught as individual syllables, since pronouncing the whole name of an ancestor could be considered insulting. The name Park Chanwoo, for example, is taught as “Park Cha” (Park letter), “Chan Cha” (Chan letter), “Woo Cha” (Woo letter).

The extent to which maternal roles are prioritized becomes apparent even beyond the workplace, often taking on unusual forms. Jahui (27), a graphic designer from Ulsan, also part of Gyeongsang Province, described her difficulties in negotiating alternative terms of address with her neighbors who use teknonymy in reference to her dog. Although Jahui introduced herself to her neighbors by name, they continue to refer to her as *Duri's* (dog's name)'s *eomma*, despite her attempts to correct them: "I do not like it because I'm not a mother [...] I told them, if you have to, call me *Duri's nuna* [older sister] instead. I do not care but [...] first I corrected them, but now it is too annoying to explain" (FI). Jahui explains that this form of public address only adds to the internal pressure she feels from her family to get married and have a child. Although she has built a career as a designer for one of the biggest local companies, Jahui believes her family will not think of her as successful until she has a family of her own, which she states is unlikely to happen in the near future, if at all. Such instances illustrate the centrality of address forms to the forms of social relationships interlocutors negotiate, and give some clues as to why names would become the ideologically salient linguistic resource for institutional reformations.

As initially stated, negative attitudes toward marriage and motherhood are prevalent among younger generations of Korean women. Although participants like Jiyoung identify the difference in name preference as generational, it is necessary to point out that a lack of performance does not mean a lack of preference. While some older Korean women might dislike the practice of name avoidance, the stricter traditional norms emblematic of their generation make it more difficult to alter social practices, particularly since social practice functions as a product of spacetime which in turn perpetuates spacetime. The rapid modernization of Korea, which changed the spatiotemporal setting of the country, also allowed younger generations of Korean women greater flexibility in negotiating their positionality within spaces of social practice. Since familial institutions are the slowest changing space – both in terms of practice and language – younger women are increasingly hesitant to get married and start a family, being more likely to pursue socioeconomic independence following marriage as well. Borrowing from an earlier quote, I refer to this new generation of Korean women as the "call-me-by-my-name" generation.

5.3. The "Call-me-by-my-name" generation

While most countries around the world have a nickname for the generation of people born in the late 80s and early 90s, widely known as 'millennials', the closest Korean equivalent is "90liners", taken from Lim Hong-Tek's 2018 book "90-liners are coming" (*90nyeonsengi onda*)⁶. While "90liners" does not carry the pejorative implications of the Japanese "people who are always doing two things at once", or the Chinese "generation that eats the old" (Lyons, 2016), it does point to a generational gap with members of the older generation, for whom there is a pejorative term in Korean – *kkondae*⁷ (similar to the English 'boomer'). For some of my participants, like the 26-year-old Soomin, an English language graduate student from Seoul, *kkondae* are people who follow and enforce "traditional norms", while she and her alike are labeled as "free souls" (*jayuroeun yeonghon*):

I think we are like 'bohemians' [pronounced in English], people say we're free souls (*jayuroeun yeonghon*), we do what we want and what we think we should do, but some people stick with the values their society gives them, their parents give them, the peer pressure, they do everything even if they do not like it. And they reproach you if you do something they do not like [...] we call them *kkondae*. (FI)

Soomin's primary social circle consists of same-age peers, which translates to fewer restrictions in address. In everyday conversation, Soomin uses second-person pronouns, tropical kinship terms, as well as names to address her friends and acquaintances. With her closest friends, Soomin has developed a system of terms of endearment (*e'ching*) based on names, which contains elements of *aegyo* – intentional performance of cuteness (Epstein and Turnbull, 2014). The terms are based on forms of nominal address with the vocative ending -a/-ya, which communicate intimacy. Using the name Tae-yong as an example, the initial-syllable consonant is replaced with its 'tense' form which softens the letter and makes it 'cute', and then merged with the second syllable to produce the single syllable *Ttyong*, to which the vocative marker -a is added to form the nominal term of endearment *Ttyonga*. Interestingly, Soomin uses this form of address to distinguish intimacy in relationships, believing that names alone communicate distance. Although she expresses doubts that she will get married, believing that marriage demands too many personal sacrifices, Soomin states that she would like to develop a unique set of terms of endearment with her husband, which includes personal names. She further states that her parents support her independence, which she claims is increasingly more common for people of her generation.

Similarly, Minseo believes her personal development takes precedence over societal expectations, stating that even if she were to get married, she would continue working to maintain her economic independence and nominal identity. In her current and previous relationships, Minseo appreciated that her boyfriend used her name in lieu of pronouns or terms of address:

My ex-boyfriend always used my name [...] he never used *neo* [2nd person pronoun, informal], or the other terms of address. I loved that part, and now [current boyfriend] is the same. He does not say '*nanuen niga*' [I to you] but '*nanuen Minseo-ga*' [I to Minseo]. It is so warm and sweet. (FI)

⁶ The book was considered highly accurate in the description of the generational gap in Korea, to the extent that President Moon Jae-In bought the book to all employees of the Blue House. He is cited as saying "you have to get to know the new generation to prepare for the future".

⁷ The term *kkondae* refers to any individual who enforces traditional values and behavior on others, from greetings, forms of bowing, to linguistic practices.

Such nominal forms of address, while common in pre-marital relationships, are generally supplanted by more formal terms post-marriage. While Minseo recognizes this tendency, she believes sociolinguistic practices in Korea are slowly evolving, citing how much has changed since her mother's generation: "The sad thing is, we have no role model for happiness [...] our mothers, my age people, we see our mothers' life [...] it is soulless, like they are not real people" (F1). On the path to greater individuation within the society, young Korean women like Minseo, are altering linguistic and social practices, resorting to names as inherent and conventional personal indexes which assist them in assuming and performing social roles while maintaining a stable, subjective self. This phenomenon is, however, not restricted to women alone, but is representative of the entire new generation of Koreans, who are seen as moving from systems of "formal hierarchy toward casual solidarity" (Kim, 2015). Traditional roles coded in terms of address are increasingly giving way to names and nominal address as the preferred alternative, simultaneously reflecting the younger Koreans' preference for a flatter system of social practice. The agency with which younger Koreans strategically negotiate and transform the use of terms of address, and the central role of names in this process, point to changes in situated practice, and by extension, to the Korean referential hierarchy, as well.

6. Conclusion

While this study draws on extensive ethnographic data collected in three different provinces over a period of nine months, it manages to capture only one aspect of the complex system of name usage within the Korean system of address. The patterns of change in social practices surrounding addressing are motivated by large scale changes in the continuously developing Korean society. For some Korean women, this change is linguistically notable in terms of the increased usage of personal names, and the unwillingness to conform to settings which utilize systems of address to perpetuate restricted gender roles and identities.

Such changes in social practice correlate with the distribution of names as lexical items in the referential hierarchy of Korean. The dual role of names as both inherent referentials and true symbols allows for greater mobility across the hierarchy, which in turn widens their scope and manner of use, enabling new strategies for negotiating social relationships. At the same time, there are several paradoxes which must be noted in terms of how names move both within the system of reference and in actualized practice.

For one, although names as lexical items can be used to renegotiate gendered kinship relations, they are also indexically linked to both gender and kin. As items generally "built" by older, often male, members of the family, names establish genealogical links to a particular kin group, even if they are not as apparent as a *dollim-ja*. Additionally, since names, in addition to gender, tend to convey both the naming preferences of a particular generation, and indicate certain expectations of the newborn, they impose a set of markers on the child from the moment of birth. This is why, in later life, many individuals undergo the process of consciously delinking names and preset gender and kin roles.⁸

The dual status of names in the referential hierarchy gives rise to a further set of paradoxes which manifest in situated practice. Depending on which aspect of their indexical capacity is deployed, names can be used to variously denote intimacy or distance, power symmetry or asymmetry, and affiliation or disaffiliation. Their application is ultimately predicated on the interactional goals of the speaker, as well as the wider spatiotemporal setting, making them highly mobile and fluid resources. At the same time, despite the variety of indexical values names can take on, their referential value remains constant, inherent, and conventional – a quality which makes names a stable lexical anchor when renegotiating social positioning and relationships.

This brings us to the final paradox which concerns the shifting of lexical items in the referential hierarchy of Korean. With the displacement of alternative forms of address, including both true symbols such as kinterms, and inherent referents such as pronouns, names are increasingly assuming an egalitarian function in the Korean system of address. This function, fulfilled by 2nd-person pronouns in T/V models across other languages, is predicated on the flattening of vertical status distinctions by providing a single form of reference for speakers. While in the case of names complete uniformity is impossible, the egalitarian function is fulfilled when providing equal access to forms of reference that cross-contextually concretize the speaker as a subject in interaction, while at the same time indexing other information about the nature of the relationship between interlocutors via noun address and other suffixes. In this sense, name-noun address pairs maintain the verticality in relationships, while also flattening the interactive ground by marking individual interlocutors as equal subjects.

The increased usage of names, restricted as it is, might not appear as a major development in the process of democratizing the forms of address in the Korean system of reference. However, transgenerational insights into the practice show how significant such changes are on the level of social relationships, as well as in terms of self-recognition and maintenance of a personal, individuated identity. On a wider scale, the usage of names points toward an increased desire for the construction of egalitarian interactive fields. While this desire is here explored through the lens of name usage practices, it is important to highlight that names are just one among many possible linguistic strategies for reifying or reforming social ideologies. Additionally, there are certain kinds of intimacy, aspiration, or recognition, which are simply not satisfied by first-name usage, and which require other forms of linguistic intervention. At the same time, what is made clear by the participants in this study is that the ways in which we call, address, and refer to people do matter, since they help us negotiate our space and place in the ever-changing world of today.

⁸ This is the case with a number of participants in this study, who even went as far as changing their name in the hopes of changing their personal circumstances. Additionally, name-feature delinking is common among individuals who do not associate with their assigned gender.

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