

A Sociopragmatic Analysis of Selected Korean hedges in Spoken Discourse

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Although hedges are effective and crucial communicative resources in Korean spoken discourse as conventionalized illocution-mitigating devices in terms of politeness, there is little systematic and comprehensive analysis of Korean hedges. Thus, this study aims to analyze Korean hedges empirically in terms of a correlation between hedge use and sociopragmatic factors. In this study, I view the term *hedge* as a communicative strategy for politeness and mitigation from the pragmatic perspective in Korean spoken discourse. Hence, I define a *hedge* as a linguistic device that softens/mitigates the illocutionary force of proposition as well as expresses the speaker's concern for the addressee's feeling, and as an interactive strategy to protect face for self and/or others as well as to facilitate the success of interactions between interlocutors, enhance interpersonal rapport, and establish solidarity.

This study analyzed the frequency of two selected lexical hedges in Korean spoken discourse in terms of sociopragmatics. They are two interactive sentence enders, which are *-canha(yo)* 'as you know, you know that', *-ketun(yo)* 'you see'. The reason for selecting these two items among lexical hedge items is that they share similar hedge functions such as enhancing interpersonal rapport, establishing solidarity, seeking agreement, and so forth. In order to analyze the meaning of hedge use in relation to sociopragmatic variables empirically, the statistical methods such as t-test, ANOVA, and post-hoc comparison were employed. The sociopragmatic variables are divided into social structural factors and social situational factors based on the social factors and language use. For this study the social structural factors include five variables such as gender (female vs. male), gender composition of conversations (same-gender vs. mixed-gender), age (teens, 20s-30s, over 40s), occupation (housewife, office worker, student), and region (metropolitan area vs. non-metropolitan area). On the other hand, social situational factors include four variables such as the number of speakers in conversation (two-party conversations vs. multiple-party conversations), topic of conversations (personal topic vs. impersonal topic), social power relations between interlocutors, and social distance relations between interlocutors.

An indispensable requirement of this study was the collection of authentic conversations within natural speech settings in daily life since hedges are more likely to occur in spoken contexts than in written contexts. Thus, the data collected for this study were unplanned, spontaneous, and face to face naturally occurring conversations. The total of 100 sets of conversation (approximately 1,000 minutes) in this study are all informal, and two-party or multiple-party (three or four) conversations. In order to analyze the frequency of each hedge item in my data I employed the search engine called '*hanmalwu*' provided by 2007 *Seycong* corpus. The frequency of each hedge used by each interlocutor was counted and statistical methods such as a t-test and an ANOVA (Analysis of variance) were implemented in order to analyze the correlation of social structural variables such as age, gender, region and occupation as well as social situational variables such as power relations, distance relations, topic, and the number of speakers in conversation.

The results of statistical analysis reveal that (i) more hedges are used in two-party conversations than in multiple-party (three or four participants) conversations in Korean spoken discourse, (ii) more hedges are used in conversations with personal topics than with impersonal topics in Korean spoken discourse, and (iii) hedges in Korean spoken discourse are employed as a positive politeness strategy as well as a negative politeness strategy although hedges have been viewed traditionally as a form of negative politeness.

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