

**OFFERING SHIFTS TO CASUAL
LANGUAGE ('BAN-MAL')
IN THE KOREAN TV SHOW
“WE GOT MARRIED”¹**

YOUNGRAN BAŠTANOVÁ KWAK, M.A.

Palacký University
Křížkovského 511/8, 771 47 Olomouc, Czech Republic
youngran.kwak@upol.cz

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6938-8571>

Abstract: This research focuses on the topic of Korean speech style shifts from polite to casual between men and women in romantic relationships. This study used data from the Korean reality TV show “We Got Married”, which was broadcast in Korea for 9 years. After reviewing the system of Korean speech styles and manners of shifts, the study explores who is the first one to offer a shift, what they say, and how an offer is given. According to the analysis, older

¹ This paper has further developed an analysis of the reality TV show that is first introduced in a research poster, “Korean Speech Style Shifts from Polite to Casual: Focused on New Couples” by Baštanová Kwak (2019). It has been presented at the 13th Annual Conference on Asian Studies, Palacký University Olomouc in Czech Republic (22 – 23.11.2019), and both this paper and the poster are supported by the Internal Grant Agency of Palacký University in Olomouc (IGA_FF_2019_035).

people were more likely to offer shifts first in the case of romantic relationships. In the TV show, older women tended to offer first a little more through indirect means, while older men offered rather directly. As for expressions used in the offers, the phrase ‘drop the honorifics’ and ‘talk comfortably’ were the most frequently used. They might offer in either polite or casual language, with sudden shifts. However, it was more common for speakers to offer shifts while talking in polite language. During conversations, two types of offers were observed: symmetrical shifts and asymmetrical shifts. In the first type, one speaker suggests shifts from both sides. The second type has more variations: one speaker requests the other’s permission to use casual language, allows the other to use casual language, or shows the speaker’s decision to use casual language. In the samples, symmetrical shifts occurred more often.

Key words: speech style shifts; speech style; Korean honorifics; *ban-mal*; *jon-daes-mal*.

한국 프로그램 <우리 결혼했어요> 속의 반말 제안 형태 연구

개략: 본 연구는 연인 관계의 남녀가 말을 놓는 현상을 주제로 삼고 있으며 연구 대상은 한국에서 9년 동안 방영한 리얼리티 TV 프로그램, <우리 결혼했어요>이다. 본 연구는 한국어 경어 체계와 반말을 제안하는 방법에 대해 살펴본 뒤 누가 먼저 반말을 제안하는지, 무슨 말을 하는지, 어떤 제안을 하는지에 대해 서술하고자 한다. 분석 결과에 따르면, 연인 관계에서는 성별을 가리지 않고 연장자가 먼저 제안하는 경우가 많았다. 해당 TV 프로그램에서는 연상의 여자인 경우 간접적으로 반말을 제안하는 경우가 남자보다 조금 더 많았다. 반말 제안 표현에서는 ‘말을 놓다’와 ‘말을 편하게 하다’라는 표현이 제일 자주 사용되었다. 이때 제안은 존댓말을 하면서 할 수도 있고 반말을 하면서 할 수도 있으나 존댓말을 하면서 하는 경우가 더 많았다. 유형적 측면에서 반말 제안은 쌍방향 전환과 일방향 전환이라는 두 유형이 관찰되었다. 쌍방향 전환은 두 화자가 함께 말을 놓자는 제안을 나타내는데 반면, 일방향 전환은 그 양상이 조금 더 다양하다. 화자는 상대방에게 반말 사용에 대한 허락을 구할 수도 있고 반대로 상대가 화자에게 반말을 사용해도 된다고 허락할 수도 있다. 또는 화자가 상대방에게 반말을 사용할 것임을 알리는 방식일 수도 있다. 해당 프로그램에서는 쌍방향 전환을 제안하는 말이 더 많이 사용되었다.

핵심어: 말 단계 전환; 경어제; 반말; 존댓말; 한국어 경어법.

PROPOZYCJE PRZEJŚCIA NA SWOBODNY STYL WYPOWIEDZI (‘BAN-MAL’) W KOREAŃSKIM PROGRAMIE TELEWIZYJNYM „WE GOT MARRIED”

Abstrakt: Niniejszy artykuł skupia się na przekształceniach koreańskiego stylu wypowiedzi z uprzejmego na swobodny pomiędzy kobietami i mężczyznami znajdującymi się w związkach romantycznych. W badaniu wykorzystano dane z koreańskiego reality show „We Got Married”, nadawanego w Korei przez okres 9 lat. Po wprowadzeniu zagadnienia systemu koreańskich stylów mowy i sposobu ich zmiany, Autorka analizuje stanowisko osoby inicjującej styl mowy oraz sposób i konwencję zmiany. Z analizy wynika, że w przypadku związków o charakterze romantycznym to starsze osoby częściej występowały z propozycją zmiany stylu mowy. W programie telewizyjnym starsze kobiety wykazywały tendencję do okazywania chęci wprowadzenia tej zmiany za pomocą środków pośrednich, podczas gdy starsi mężczyźni stosowali środki bezpośrednie. Propozycje, najczęściej wyrażone zwrotami: ‘porzućmy zwroty grzecznościowe’ i ‘mów swobodnie’, mogą być zakomunikowane w sposób uprzejmy lub swobodny, z nagłą zmianą stylu. Podczas rozmów zaobserwowano dwa rodzaje sugestii zmiany: zmianę symetryczną i zmianę asymetryczną. W pierwszym przypadku jeden z mówców sugeruje zmianę stylu mowy dla obu stron. Drugi rodzaj ma więcej odmian: jeden mówca prosi drugiego o przyzwolenie na używanie swobodnego języka, zezwala drugiemu na jego używanie, lub też to jeden z mówców decyduje o użyciu swobodnego języka. W grupie kontrolnej częściej występowały zmiany symetryczne.

Słowa kluczowe: zmiana stylu wypowiedzi; styl wypowiedzi; koreański język grzecznościowy; *ban-mal*; *jon-daes-mal*.

1. Introduction

When two adult strangers come across one another on the street and they are about to engage in small talk, they will attempt to talk politely to give a nice impression without causing any conflicts. There are many ways to convey politeness in speech here, but one thing that must be considered is the speech styles of Koreans if they are Korean. Unless a significant age gap exists between the two people, they will first begin to use a polite speech style (존댓말 *jon-daes-mal*) with each other. However, when they get to know each other and become closer, the

moment of a shift in the speech style inevitably occurs in many cases. Nevertheless, there has been minimal research regarding speech style shifts, especially from a polite speech style (존댓말 *jon-daes-mal*) to a casual speech style (반말 *ban-mal*). Therefore, this paper studies how Koreans offer shifts to casual language by observing couples on a Korean reality TV show. After reviewing the Korean system of polite speech styles and Korean manners of offering shifts, Chapter 5.1 shows who makes the first offer to shift speech styles between a couple based on the Korean reality TV show *We Got Married*. Chapter 5.2 illustrates the interlocutors' actual utterances spoken in their offers, and Chapter 5.3 analyzes their offers, focusing on symmetrical and asymmetrical shifts.

2. Background research

The study of shifts in speech styles began in the 1990s, including the contributions of Yoo Song-young 유송영 (1994) and Lee Jeong-bok 이정복 (1996). However, these primarily focused on shifts in styles at a polite level. There are few studies on shifts in speech from a polite to a casual style, such as Park Young-soon's 박영순 (2007) book on Korean pragmatics and a textbook on cultural tips for students learning Korean as a foreign language. However, the subject was discussed very briefly and was not the main concern of these texts; in fact, there are very few studies whose main focus is on such shifts in speech styles from polite to casual. Yoon Sang-seok 윤상석 (2015) and Kim Myeong-hee (2016) are two such examples, as they concentrated on how people shift from a polite to a casual speech style, with a focus on naturally occurring shifts, rather than those occurring through an interlocutor. On the other hand, Kiaer et al. (2019) conducted a large-scale questionnaire to determine whether Koreans prefer shifts after negotiation (hereby referred to as 'offer') or not, who will initiate such a shift, and whether shifts tend to be mutual or one-sided. However, the focus was on the effects of age (in conversations between people with an age gap), gender (in conversations between two female or two male speakers), and setting (at school or workplace) when deciding on shifts, with or without an offer. Studies on the general custom of offering shifts in the conversation between men and women remain rare. Therefore,

this paper investigates the customs by analyzing a TV show to determine which person usually offered shifts and examining the type of shifts.

3. Korean speech styles

3.1. The Korean speech style system

There are a few ways to encode politeness in the Korean language, but one certain way is to use different ending styles of verbs and adjectives depending on who the listener is from the speaker’s point of view. This is called a hearer honorific, but it is generally referred to as a speech style or speech level. There are a total of six styles: (a) 합쇼체 *hap-syo-che* (하십시오체 *ha-sip-si-o-che*), (b) 해요체 *hae-yo-che*, (c) 하오체 *ha-o-che*, (d) 하게체 *ha-ge-che*, (e) 해체 *hae-che*, and (f) 해라체 *hae-la-che*. As Sohn (1999) describes, these can be referred to in English as follows: (a) deferential, (b) polite, (c) blunt, (d) familiar, (e) intimate, and (f) plain style.

Table 1. Korean speech styles and examples

Speech style	Example (meaning: Answer the question.)
(a) 합쇼체 <i>Hab-syo-che</i>	질문에 답을 하십시오 <i>Jil-mun-e dab-eul ha-sib-si-o.</i>
(b) 해요체 <i>Hae-yo-che</i>	질문에 답을 해요 <i>Jil-mun-e dab-eul hae-yo.</i>
(c) 하오체 <i>Ha-o-che</i>	질문에 답을 하오 <i>Jil-mun-e dab-eul ha-o.</i>
(d) 하게체 <i>Ha-ge-che</i>	질문에 답을 하게 <i>Jil-mun-e dab-eul ha-ge.</i>
(e) 해체 <i>Hae-che</i>	질문에 답을 해 <i>Jil-mun-e dab-eul hae.</i>
(f) 해라체 <i>Hae-la-che</i>	질문에 답을 해라 <i>Jil-mun-e dab-eul hae-la.</i>

Source: speech styles by Sohn (1999), examples by the Author

This terminology of six styles was created by using the verb ‘to do (하다 *ha-da*)’ in the imperative form of a sentence and adding the word ‘a style (체 *che*)’. For example, “Answer the question” is “*Jil-mun-e*

dab-eul hae-la” in the style of (f) *hae-la-che*. In this example, ‘*hae-la*’ at the end of the sentence is the reason it is called ‘*hae-la-che*’.

3.2. Polite speech style and casual speech style

The six Korean speech styles, which are introduced in Table 1, can be divided into two categories, as follows.

Table 2. Korean speech styles and their implication of respect

Speech style	Showing respect to the listener
(a) <i>Hab-syo-che</i>	O
(b) <i>Hae-yo-che</i>	
(c) <i>Ha-o-che</i>	
(d) <i>Ha-ge-che</i>	X
(e) <i>Hae-che</i>	
(f) <i>Hae-la-che</i>	

Source: cf. Suh Cheong-soo 서정수 (1984: 39)

This influences the concept of the aforementioned polite speech style and casual speech style. This binary classification is more familiar to native speakers of Korean as well as foreigners learning Korean. This polite speech style is called ‘*jon-daes-mal*’², while the casual speech style is ‘*ban-mal*’.³ In English terminology, the polite speech style is sometimes introduced as an honorific style or formal speech. On the other hand, the casual speech style is sometimes described as a non-honorific style, informal speech, or ‘half-talk’⁴. In this paper, these two styles are referred to as polite and casual speech styles, respectively.

² According to different Romanization rules, it can be transcribed as *jon-daes-mal* or *contaysmal*. This paper applies the rule called Revised Romanization of Korean (국어의 로마자 표기법 *gugeo-ui romaja pyogi-beob*) issued by the Republic of Korea’s Ministry of Culture and Tourism (문화관광부 *Munhwa Gwangwang-Bu*) in 2000, especially for linguistic academic purposes.

³ This can be also transcribed as *banmal* or *panmal*.

⁴ It is based on the meaning of the word, *ban-mal*: *ban* means ‘half’ and *mal* means ‘language’.

This approach aims to emphasize that *jon-daes-mal* is used to convey politeness and that *ban-mal* is used for a casual mode of talking.

Based on Table 2, the polite speech style refers to the first two of the six styles: (a) *hap-syo-che* and (b) *hae-yo-che*. On the other hand, the casual speech style indicates the last two of the six styles: (e) *hae-che* and (f) *hae-la-che*. (c) *ha-o-che* and (d) *ha-ge-che* are exempted because they are used significantly less when compared to the other styles.

In fact, the casual speech style *ban-mal* cannot be simply defined. First, (e) *hae-che* has been referred to as *ban-mal* when it comes to introducing polite Korean speech styles (cf. Lee Ik-seop 이익섭 1974; Suh Cheong-soo 서정수 1984). Therefore, there is no objection to taking this speech style as *ban-mal*. However, this seems to be from a rather narrow sense. Since both (e) *hae-che* and (f) *hae-la-che* are in the category of non-polite styles, people often mix them in casual discourse. According to Park Ji-soon 박지순 (2016: 150), Koreans do not tend to perceive a significant difference between the two styles of (e) *hae-che* and (f) *hae-la-che*.

Second, the *ban-mal* is first originated by neutralizing speech styles (Lee 2012: 73). When speakers find it difficult to choose one specific speech style, the ending part of their sentence, which decides the speech style, is omitted, or it makes it ambiguous to identify. Due to this origin, Lee Jeong-bok 이정복 (2012: 73) states that this should be theoretically distinguished from one speech style, (e) *hae-che*.

During conversation, the concept of this casual speech style seems to include all perspectives. As this paper aims to observe people's general perception of shifts in speech styles, it adopts two styles: (e) *hae-che* and (f) *hae-la-che*, but also non-completed endings of sentences as one casual speech style for the purpose of this research.

4. Korean ways to offer shifts to a casual speech style

In daily life, people easily encounter moments of offering shifts when they are getting to know each other and want to get closer. For this, social position used to play an important role, but age is also an important factor (Lee Jeong-bok 이정복 2012: 42). As Kiaer et al. (2019) show, however, that the way people shift speech styles differs

depending on settings and gender. For example, when there is no conflict between age and social status at school, people expect that one person will shift speech styles after negotiation, which makes up the largest percentage in the school setting. Negotiating is the second highest proportion in the work setting, the highest being non-shifts and maintaining a polite speech style (Kiaer et al. 2019: 294). As for gender, shifts for women and for men differ. Women at work who are older than 40 prefer not to shift styles to their younger female colleagues (Kiaer et al. 2019: 304). However, it has not yet been studied whether the other person being a different gender affects the speaker when offering shifts in speech styles, which will be studied in Chapter 5.

Park Young-soon 박영순 (2007) points out the subordinate offer of using casual language first, an approach that can also be found in a Korean textbook for foreign students. *Active Korean 3* (Language Education Institute of Seoul National University, 2008), a Korean language book for foreign students, states that younger people usually offer casual language use first. However, an important thing here is that this implies that only the superior/older person may use casual speech toward the subordinate/younger person during that first moment but not vice versa. For example, the younger person will say that the other can use casual speech in addressing them, but they themselves would not. In this situation, fixed phrases may also be used, such as ‘You can talk to me comfortably’ (말 편하게 하셔도 돼요 *Mal pyeon-ha-ge ha-syeodo dwae-yo*). Following this, the younger person is allowed to shift their speech style if the older person will permit this in their answer. If not, one would use a casual speech style, while the other would continue to use a polite speech style for the remainder of their exchange. Considering that there are many cases of two interlocutors who do not hold the same speech style of politeness in Korea, it is not surprising that this offer implies that non-mutual shifts are commonly given between interlocutors. This happens mainly due to age or social status. For this, Park Young-soon 박영순 (1995: 567) claims that solidarity cannot dominate power.

By talking about shifts in casual language from the younger person first in this way, the older person is not required to think about how shifts should be made or how to search for a chance to make such a shift. Considering the concept of negative politeness (Brown & Levinson 1987), it is considered a polite gesture. However, when observing people who are offering shifts of polite speech styles in

reality, different rules seem to prevail in people's minds. This will be further described in Chapter 5.

5. Korean speech style shifts offered in a TV show

5.1. The person who offers shifts first

For the purpose of observing people who offer shifts in speech styles, a Korean reality TV show, *We Got Married*, was analyzed in this research. This TV show has been broadcast for 9 years and first aired in 2008 on the TV channel MBC. The premise pairs two celebrities on a blind date, and then they pretend to be married for a certain period. They are mostly Korean singers or actors, but some are pianists, models, or comedians. As the producer hoped that some of the blind dates would result in actual marriage, the characters were expected to take the show as seriously as possible to better mimic reality. The TV show mostly consists of watching the couples interact with one another, but small tasks are also assigned, such as shooting wedding photos together, having a private wedding ceremony, decorating their matrimonial home, visiting each other's parents, going to the gym together, and cooking for each other. Press conferences and individual interviews with staff and cast members on various channels support that there were no specific instructions or guidelines for how they should act, as it was supposed to reflect the couples' lives in a natural way.

In the TV show, 50 couples were cast in total. For the purpose of this research, however, only 20 couples were selected for analysis in accordance with the following conditions:

- 1) Both are native Korean speakers.
- 2) They became acquainted with each other through this program.
- 3) They both started with a polite speech style followed by a casual speech style with an offer (no one shifts speech styles without an offer on purpose).
- 4) First offers can be indirect.

The first condition is required because there is a high possibility that foreign cast members on the TV show are affected by the rules in their home countries. As for the second condition, it is necessary to fulfill this because people go through the process of shifting speech styles from polite to casual language when they start off as strangers and become familiar. They might not be complete strangers because they might bump into each other at a broadcasting station because most cast members are actors and singers in Korea. In this case, the first reaction is regarded as important. If they talk awkwardly when seeing each other, it is counted as a valid case. When it comes to the third condition, although most people preferred to offer shifts first and negotiate which style they could use, there are a few cases of people who shifted naturally without any signs. This third condition exempts the one who drops the honorifics without asking because they think they can do so due to their older age, for example. Since this paper aims to study who first offers shifts and how they do it, shifts without the negotiation process are exempted. Lastly, interlocutors can deliver their message in several ways, even without mentioning the word directly. Therefore, for example, although the one who clearly mentions, ‘Shall we drop the honorifics?’ is the man, if it was a reaction to the woman giving him an implicit message indirectly, the woman is considered the one who offered a shift first.

Once the subjects were sorted, the 20 couples selected were divided into two groups: 10 couples with an older man and a younger woman and 10 couples with a younger man and an older woman. The cast members were in their 20s or 30s, and their age gaps ranged from one to seven years. Few couples who were the same age were excluded when we applied the four conditions mentioned above.

According to analysis from the TV show, older people tended to offer shifts first in a romantic relationship (in other words, in the relationship of cast members on the TV show).

Table 3. Person who offered shifts first in romantic relationships

Person	Couple type	
	Older man and younger woman	Younger man and older woman
Male speaker	60%	30%
Female speaker	40%	70%

Source: research results by the Author

As shown in Table 3, 60% of people who offered shifts were older men in the couples. In the case of a younger man–older woman couple, the older woman offered shifts more frequently than her partner (70%). This is indicative of the fact that people consider the age of interlocutors to be more important than their gender when offering such shifts.

In Table 3, while older women have the highest proportion, 30% of them offered shifts first and did it very indirectly by saying that it was awkward or uncomfortable to use a polite speech style. Therefore, although more older women offered it first more often than older men did, the way older women offered it differed.

As a result, analysis from the TV data shows that age plays an important role for interlocutors of the opposite sex when offering shifts.

5.2. Expressions when offering shifts

As briefly introduced in Chapter 4, there are a few words and phrases frequently used during conversation to shift speech styles. To study this further, all verbal offers made for shifts were collected while ignoring the third condition established in Chapter 5.1. The primary focus of this chapter is to observe actual references implying shifts explicitly or implicitly. Supposedly, a man shifted speech styles without an offer first, and then his partner offered shifts in speech styles to him. These cases are not counted in Table 3, but their utterances are counted in Table 4.

Table 4. Expressions used for shifts to casual Korean language

Korean expression (with an infinitive form of the verb)	Meaning in English	Number of examples
말을 놓다 <i>Mal-eul noh-da</i>	drop the honorific	17
말을 편하게 하다 <i>Mal-eul pyeon-ha-ge ha-da</i>	talk comfortably	8
반말하다 <i>Ban-mal-ha-da</i>	speak <i>ban-mal</i>	1
불편하다 <i>Bul-pyeon-ha-da</i>	uncomfortable	1
존댓말하다 <i>Jon-daes-mal-ha-da</i>	speak <i>jon-daes-mal</i>	2
말을 어렵게 하다 <i>Mal-eul eo-lyeob-ge ha-da</i>	do (talk) in a difficult way	1

Source: research results by the Author

Table 4 shows a total of 30 examples, which is more than the number of observed couples. The reason is that some speakers repeated their offer because they did not shift speech styles immediately even after one's offer.

People can offer shifts to the other by saying that they would like to talk casually by using the expressions ‘drop the honorifics’, ‘talk comfortably’, and ‘speak *ban-mal*’. However, people can also use words related to a polite speech style by saying that they do not want to ‘speak *jon-daes-mal*’. On the other hand, their intention can be communicated even more indirectly to show their feeling about using a polite way of speaking by saying ‘uncomfortable’ or ‘do in a difficult way’.

Among them, *말을 놓다 mal-eul noh-da* is the most frequently used word for shifts. In the TV show, this verb was used in some utterances as follows:

- (1) 말 놓을까요?
Mal *noh-eul-lae-yo?*
 Language drop-suggestive-polite ending
 “Shall we drop the honorific?”

- (2) 언제 말 놓을 거예요?
Eon-je *mal* *noh-eul geo-ye-yo?*
 When language drop-future-polite ending
 “When will you drop the honorific?”

- (3) 먼저 말 놓으세요.
Meon-jeo mal noh-eu-se-yo.
 First language drop-imperative-polite ending
 “Please drop the honorific first.”

The second most frequently used one is the phrase combining an adverb, *pyeon-ha-ge* (comfortably), and a verb, *ha-da* (do). For instance, this phrase is used as follows in the TV show.

- (4) 말 편하게 할게요.
Mal pyeon-ha-ge hal-ge-yo.
 Language comfortably do-future determination-polite ending
 “I will talk comfortably.”
- (5) 말 편하게 하셔도 돼요.
Mal pyeon-ha-ge ha-syeo-do dwae-yo.
 Language comfortably do-honorific infix-permissive, polite ending
 “You can talk comfortably.”
- (6) 말 편하게 하고 싶어요.
Mal pyeon-ha-ge ha-go sip-eo-yo
 Language comfortably Want to do-polite ending
 “I want to talk comfortably.”

While the six examples above are given in a polite speech style, there are also different cases where a speaker offers shifts in a casual speech style. Among the 30 lines in Table 4, 8 lines are about asking for shifts while already using a casual speech style. By shifting styles in advance, two people can be pushed into a more casual mode, and it also shows a speaker’s stronger will toward shifting styles and changing the relationship. However, it can also offend the interlocutor from a politeness standpoint. The reactions would differ depending on the relationship of the communicators, their personalities, and various other factors.

In some conversations of the TV show that were analyzed, this is also connected to the phenomenon that people change speech styles from a polite to a casual one, back and forth. For example, in one episode, a younger man shifts a few times during his turn.

Youngran BAŠTANOVÁ KWAK: Offering Shifts to Casual...

(Situation: A 29-year-old man and a 31-year-old woman became a couple. The man is cooking for her in a kitchen while having a conversation with her.)⁵

Woman: (a) 저 된장찌개 되게 잘해요.
Jeo doen-jang-ggi-gae doe-ge jal-hae-yo (polite)
“I am good at soybean paste stew.”

Man: (b) 나중에 만들어 주세요요.
Na-jung-e man-deul-eo ju-se-yo (polite).
“Please cook one for me later.”

(c) 윤한표 갓 채배한 채소로 만든...
Yun-han-pyo gas jae-bae-han chae-so-lo man-deun...
(omission)
“This is from freshly picked vegetable by Yunhan...”

Woman: (d) 푹푹 나오네요.
Ttuk-ttak na-o-ne-yo (polite).
“It’s just popping out.”

Man: (e) 아 근테 호칭을 자기야라고 하기로 했으니까, 자기야.
A geun-de ho-ching-eul ja-gi-ya-ra-go ha-gi-ro haess-eu-ni-kka, ja-gi-ya (casual)
“Oh, by the way, since we have decided to call each other honey, honey.”

Woman: (f) ‘자기야’ 하고 존댓말하면 이상하잖..., 더 어색하잖아요.
‘Ja-gi-ya’-ha-go jon-daes-mal-ha-myeon i-sang-ha-janh..., deo eo-saek-ha-janh-a-yo (polite).
“You know, using honorifics when calling each other ‘honey’ is weird, more awkward.”

Man: (g) 그런가.
Geu-leon-ga (casual)
“I see.”

⁵ Episode 188, broadcasted on September 21, 2013.

(h) 그럼 우리 말 놓을까?
geu-leom u-li mal noh-eul-kka? (casual)
 “Shall we drop honorifics then?”

Woman: (i) 응.
Eung. (casual)
 “Yes.”

In this dialogue, the man is already talking casually in (c), (e), (g), and (h) but not consistently because he uses a polite speech style in (b). Then, he clearly offers to shift speech styles in (h) after getting a hint from the woman. As in this case, when two people do not officially negotiate how to deal with their speech style yet, speech styles can be changed even a few times to formulate both a polite and casual atmosphere.

Park Young-soon 박영순 (1995) also states that Korean speakers do not strictly hold one style when they speak, and they frequently change terms of addressing and speech styles. There will be various reasons for this depending on the situation, but some of Lee Jeong-bok’s 이정복 (2012: 70) analysis shows that this can happen as a part of strategy of showing their status while being nice, and it can also happen to act aggressively toward the other. This shifting can also show that they want to be closer and adjust their distance.

5.3. Types of shifts

Couples offering shifts in speech styles used two types of shifts: (1) shifts from both sides and (2) shifts from one side (speaker or listener). Depending on the type, the offering happened differently, as follows.

Table 5. Types of shifts

Symmetrical shifts	Asymmetrical shifts
Suggestion explicitly mentioning ‘we’ (“Shall we drop the honorifics?”)	Asking permission (“Can I drop the honorifics?”)
	Giving permission (“You can talk to me comfortably”)
	Asserting one party’s decision

	(‘I will talk comfortably’)
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Source: research results by the Author

Symmetrical shifts used sentences like ‘Shall we drop the honorifics?’ and ‘Let’s drop the honorifics’, with one party essentially asking the other’s agreement to shift speech styles together, and these shifts almost always used the pronoun ‘we’ explicitly or implicitly. Conversely, in asymmetrical shifts, one party asks for or gives permission or asserts a unilateral decision. For example, the speaker might say, ‘Can I drop the honorifics?’ and wait for the other’s reaction. This offer itself does not presume that both parties will speak casually; the speaker will, but the other party may choose not to. In another variation of this type of offer, the speaker might give the other party permission to be more casual. An offer that says, ‘You can talk to me comfortably’ offers a shift from the listener side but does not commit the speaker to a change in speech style. We found that in this case, the speakers usually continue using a polite speech style until the listener said something like, ‘You can do that, too’. However, when the offer said, ‘I will talk comfortably’, that signaled a shift from the speaker’s side, and what the listener would do remained to be seen.

Among 20 couples in the TV program, 12 showed symmetrical shifts, and 8 showed asymmetrical shifts. As all the couples were romantic in the TV show, however, only rarely did anyone insist on using a polite speech style until the end. The couples’ offers nearly always involved a gradual but mutual shifting of speech styles by the time the TV show ended. As it is difficult to generalize this phenomenon with such a small sample, further studies are needed.

6. Conclusion

To study who offers shifts to a casual speech style first and how they offer between a couple, this paper analyzed Korean couples in a Korean reality TV show. This type of ‘reality’ show is supposed to present more natural situations than movies or scripted programs. Therefore, although the show had a small cast and did not involve situations between people of the same age, the study was able to gain insights into people’s practice of shifting speech styles.

The results suggest that when Korean couples shift speech styles, age plays an important role in the relationship. Although some people think that the younger person should bring up this offer first, in our sample, the older people usually offered the shifts first, regardless of gender. However, the results showed that both approaches coexisted. Table 3 shows that older women accounted for the largest percentage of those offering to speak casually, but the numbers include indirect offers that incline the men to shift their responses; conversely, older men were more likely to offer shifts explicitly.

The most common expressions used in the offers were the following: ‘drop the honorific (말을 놓다 *mal-eul noh-da*)’ and ‘talk comfortably (말을 편하게 하다 *mal-eul pyeon-ha-ge ha-da*)’. Using these words, speakers could offer shifts with either a polite or casual speech style. It was not common for speakers to begin speaking in a casual speech style before asking their listeners to do so; it was more common for speakers to offer shifts while talking in polite language. Shifts occasionally occurred during conversations. In these cases, the speakers’ and listeners’ reactions varied, depending on the parties’ intentions. For example, older parties sometimes offered shifts as a way of claiming their status, and they sometimes used the implicit position of power to show their desire to be closer and change the depth of the relationship as soon as possible.

Sentences offering a shift can signal symmetrical or asymmetrical shifts. Mutual shifts from both sides generally used phrases for suggestion such as ‘Shall we drop the honorifics?’. However, asymmetrical shifts often involved requesting permission (e.g., ‘Can I drop the honorifics?’) or giving permission (e.g., ‘You can talk to me comfortably’) or asserting the speaker’s own decision (e.g., ‘I will talk comfortably’). Asymmetrical shifts show only what one side will do, not both. In the TV program, more couples used symmetrical shifts in their first offer, but most reached that point eventually.

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