Summary

Politeness and Addressee Honorifics in Bible Translation

This study deals with the difficulties of translating the Bible into languages with honorifics—a problem that Bible translators inevitably face in some languages. The Greek NT employs a few honorific titles, but it does not include the addressee honorifics such as the honorific second person pronouns and the honorific verb ending forms, which are part of the multi-leveled honorific systems utilized by some languages.

Honorific languages have a special class of words or grammatical morphemes, whose functions are to indicate social-deixis among the interlocutors in the communicative events. As there is no socially neutral form in honorific languages, the speaker must always choose between deferential or non-deferential forms and will thereby always convey information about the speaker-hearer relationship, the context of communication and the current cultural expectations. Accordingly, a translation into inadequate honorific forms not only leads to a misunderstanding of the implicit meaning of the source text, but also distorts the style of the translated texts.

Accordingly, the principal aim of this study is to propose the proper criteria and a theoretical framework for solving problems related to the use of honorifics in Bible translation. In order to find a solution, we first examine the phenomena, function and social factors of Korean addressee honorifics (AH). Korean is one of the most complex languages in terms of honorifics, both formally and functionally (Ch. 1). Second, we establish criteria and a framework for the evaluation of politeness and the selection of AH in chapter 2 and, in chapter 3, criteria and a framework for translating into AH. Next, we observe the AH phenomena of Mark 14:58-65 in Korean translations (Ch. 4), and finally evaluate the politeness of the dialogues in Mark 14:58-65 and suggest the possible AH for the church Bible translation through the analysis of the proposed criteria and framework (Ch. 5).

Chapter 1 elaborates the complex system of modern Korean addressee honorifics along the synchronic survey of honorific systems and the diachronic overview of modern honorific phenomena. The social factors
influencing the choice of addressee honorifics are relative age, relative status, relative-gender, degree of familiarity, and formality of situation. Through the analyses of the function of the Korean honorific second person pronoun and honorific verb ending and its co-occurrence relationship rule, a new system has been proposed as follows: (1) the formal deferential forms (yeoreobun, tangsin, keudae + -pnita [P]), (2) the formal limited non-deferential forms (tangsin, keudae + -o [O]), (3) the formal general non-deferential forms (noh + -ta [T]), (4) the informal deferential forms (tangsin, keudae + -yo [Y]), (5) the informal limited non-deferential forms (keudae, chane + -ne [N]), and (6) the informal general non-deferential forms (noh + -e [E]).

The deferential forms are generally used toward +respect addressee(s) and the non-deferential forms toward −respect addressee(s) with the exception of stranger(s) and formal situations. On the other hand, the use of the deferential forms toward −respect addressee(s) is implicitly awkward, mocking, flattery, insincere, or sarcastic except toward younger/lower or same age/status addressee(s) of higher, opposite gender, or strangers or in a formal situation. In contrast, the use of non-deferential forms toward +respect addressee(s) is considered as rude except in cases of intimate relationships between interlocutors in informal situations. The choice of AH is always flexible, but translator must be not only aware of the grammatical paradigm of the honorifics but also the relevant syntactic-semantic and pragmatic explanations.

In terms of the pragmatic usage of AH, chapter 2 examines the politeness concepts and parameters of R. Brown & A. Gilman, R. T. Lakoff, P. Brown and S. C. Levinson and G. N. Leech—all of which are representative models of the politeness theories. By examining the politeness theories and recent studies, we propose the following set of criteria as common denominators for the variety of politeness concepts and parameters for the evaluation of politeness in dialogues and the selection of AH: (1) situations of dialogue; (2) social factors of the interlocutors; (3) cultural expectations; (4) the speaker’s assumption toward the addressee(s); and (5) paralinguistic politeness. Particularly, the speaker’s assumption toward addressee(s) as a criterion for the evaluation of politeness and the selection of AH are captured by the power and solidarity factors of Brown & Gilman, the distance of Lakoff’s rules, and the variables of FTAs Brown and Levinson suggested. Based on the criteria, we establish the framework for the evaluation of politeness in dialogue and the selection of AH.

Chapter 3 deals with the existing translation theories, i.e. literal
translation, dynamic equivalence approach, functional equivalence approach, literary functional equivalence, and the skopos theory. Since the selection of AH cannot be determined by the lexical and grammatical data, syntax, or semantics of the source text, the literal translation approach or the equivalence approach is not appropriate to establish the framework for translating into the proper AH.

If translator follows the strict literal translation approach, the target text would consist of one single uniform AH which makes the sentence awkward and flat and it would lose the sparkle, variety and charm of the original text. The model of dynamic equivalence also presents problems: (1) the translation elements - the source, message and receptor - are not enough to determine the proper AH of honorific languages; (2) the translator alone cannot take total responsibility of determining the AH without specific information and the requirements of the ‘final receptor’; and (3) the source text of non-honorific language cannot be the theoretical starting point for the translation. Nevertheless, it provides the significant three stages—analysis, transfer, and restructuring—for translating into AH.

The functional equivalence approach influenced by socio-semiotics extends syntax and semantics to sociolinguistics in the field of Bible translation and emphasizes the rhetorical structure of text. It is useful in being aware of the overall structure of the discourse in terms of the sociolinguistics. However, since de Waard and Nida simply classify the linguistic problem related to the honorifics into formal and informal levels, their approach does not provide the sufficient framework for translating into the proper AH. Along the lines of the previous equivalence approaches, a literary functional equivalence approach integrates form, content and function, and furthermore relies on various modern translation theories. However, this approach focuses on the literary characteristics of translation and is thus limited in providing a sufficient framework for translation.

The skopos theory, which emphasizes the pragmatic aspect, suggests a suitable framework for translating into AH. Based on the skopos theory, we formulate the following translation elements: (1) requirements of reader, (2) role of commissioner, (3) function of translator, (4) analysis of source text, and (5) function of target text. The translator must get as much information as possible about the requirements and needs of the readers and establish translation principles with the commissioner. In addition, the translator pragmatically analyzes the social situation, the relationship of the interlocutors and the cultural expectations of the biblical text by the
framework for the evaluation of politeness and the selection of AH. The result of the analysis helps the translator perceive the speaker’s assumption and intention toward the addressee(s) and select the appropriate AH in the target text.

Chapter 4 diachronically reviews how major Korean translations have dealt with AH in their respective historical and social contexts in which they functioned. The focus is to assess from a skopos perspective the extent to which each Korean translation was appropriate, acceptable and understandable for Korean audiences given the linguistic changes that took place in the use of AH in the sample text, Mark 14:53-65.

Since there is no theoretical framework or specific elements for translating into the proper AH even in the modern translations, the adoption of modern honorific systems for Jesus’ speech is an issue that still remains unresolved in Korean translations. Future translations must not retain the archaic mood and ought to keep up with the changes of contemporary Korean society. Even if the old language translation must be revised, the AH should be translated according to the theoretical framework.

In chapter 5, each dialogue between Jesus and the High Priest and Sanhedrin (Mk 14:58-65) is analyzed in a translation framework for the selection of AH, and specifically proposed the possible AH. In this pericope, translators can evaluate the politeness of a speaker to the addressee(s). Although source text does not give enough information about age, status, and gender of witnesses (v. 58a) and the audience of Jesus in the false testimonies (v. 58b), translators can assume social variables such as power, rank, distance between interlocutors and the intention of a speaker in each dialogue. Most of all, the intention of the speaker influences politeness and is determined by exegetical analyses and cultural expectations.

In terms of pragmatics, there are dialogues in which a speaker shares information with the addressee(s) and the readers and some dialogues in which a speaker shares information only with the readers. In Jesus’ speech in the false testimonies (v. 58b) and his declaration toward the high priest and all the Sanhedrin (v. 62b), the real message of Jesus and his true identity is not shared with his addressees but only with the readers who have read Mark’s gospel. On the contrary, the testimonies of some witnesses (v. 58a) and the speech of the high priest (vv. 63b-64a) are shared with all the Sanhedrin and accepted as polite by their addressees but function to intensify the conspiracy against Jesus. The queries of the high priest to Jesus (v. 60bc-61a, 61b) and the following jeering (v. 65b) are also impolite and stress the
tragic suffering of Jesus and speakers’ misunderstanding about his real identity. Thus, politeness in dialogues is perceived by translators who apply the criteria for politeness but the selection of AH is not equivalent to politeness.

The AH depends on the expectation of readers’ community according to the translation skopos. The pronominal choices of T-V variants for the queries of the high priest to Jesus (vv. 60b-61a, 61b) in some Indo-European languages’ translations show this phenomenon: the choice of the T form in the VUL, NVUL, KJV, YLT, ASV, DRB, TOB, BFC, LUT, etc. shows that the high priest treats Jesus as an inferior with hostility and contempt and the V form in the Dutch translations such as NB, GNB reflect the Dutch culture in which everyone in court is obliged to use the V form. The Korean AH also always has to be selected from six or eight possibilities including the noun instead of the pronoun and the omission of the SPP.

We propose the formal deferential P form for the testimonies of the false witnesses (v. 58a) and the high priest’s speech to the members of the Sanhedrin (vv. 63b-64a), which are evaluated as polite expressions. This is important since the form is the only way to express the authority of Sanhedrin’s members as the judges in the formal trial situation. Concerning the other impolite dialogues, there are two forms of AH: the formal general non-deferential T form for both Jesus’ speech in the false testimonies (v. 58b) and the jeer of Jesus’ abusers (v. 63b-64a) and the formal limited non-deferential tangsin and O forms for the queries of the high priest (vv. 60b-61a, 61b) and Jesus’ reply (v. 62b).

While the formal general non-deferential T verb ending form of Jesus’ speech in the false testimonies expresses defiance and arrogance in the indirect quotation (v. 58b), in the mocking and jeering, the form expresses the tragic suffering of Jesus (v. 65b). However, since a judge or prosecutor cannot use the form toward participants of the court including the accused, they are not appropriate for the high priest’s queries or Jesus’ response. The formal limited non-deferential tangsin and O forms are not frequently used in the court, but they express the insult of the high priest to Jesus, Jesus’ authoritative and powerful declaration before him and his colleagues of the Sanhedrin and the tension of the trial. Most of all, the consistent selection of the forms shows coherence between the first and second queries of the high priest and keeps the balance of the speech styles between the high priest as a present judge and Jesus as the future judge.

In sum, we try to propose the most appropriate AH for the intermediate
church translation, which restructures the source text’s information in the natural expressions of target text as pragmatically as possible. Certainly, whenever translators select AH, the information from the source text will always be transformed because of the linguistic difference between NT Greek, which is a non-honorific language, and any target text with honorifics. The proper AH conveys to readers information such as the insincerity of the participants of Jesus’ trial, the confrontation between Jesus and his adversaries and the pugnacity of his mockers. Accordingly, the framework for translating into the proper AH should contribute to the application for the proper selection of AH in the biblical dialogues.