Negative politeness and the preference for nominalization strategies in Japanese:

A contrastive study with Korean

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Brown and Levinson (1987) point out that nominalization can be strategically employed to convey negative politeness. Crucially, they note that the increase in the degree of 'nouniness' (Ross 1973) has the negative politeness effect of making the speaker's evaluation of the addressee's performance sound less face-threatening.

Inspired by Ethnosyntactic approaches to language and culture (e.g. Enfield 2002), this paper examines the extent to which nominalization strategies are employed for politeness effect in Japanese through a comparison with Korean. Both languages have elaborate grammaticalized honorification systems and apparently similar socio-cultural norms of respecting seniors.

Crucially, both Japanese and Korean have rich inventories of nominalization constructions, e.g. Japanese *n(o)(-da), mon(o) (-da)* and Korean *ke(s) (-ita)*, consisting of a nominalizer and the copula, that convey variable pragmatic nuances. However, the degree to which nominalizations are employed for politeness effect, and the types of politeness meaning encoded therein, can vary even between these two languages that have remarkable similarities in grammatical structures and socio-cultural norms. Specifically, a nominalization constructions in Japanese can convey negative politeness effect more readily than its Korean counterpart (see (1a) vs. (1b)):

(1a, Japanese) Onegai-ga   aru-*n desu*   ga.

              request-NOM   exist-NMLZ-COP:POL but

(1b, Korean) *Pwuthak tuli-l   il-i   iss-nun   *kes-i*-ntey-yo

           request give-ATTR thing-NOM exist-ATTR NMLZ-COP-CON-POL

           'I have a big favor to ask of you...'

The extensive use of nominalizations for varying politeness effects in Japanese may arguably help shape culture-specific ways of maintaining social relationships. It is yet another facet of its rich system of "engagement", e.g. final particles *yo* (speaker-oriented) and *ne* (addressee-oriented), "grammaticalized means for encoding the relative mental directness of speaker and addressee toward an entity or state of affairs" (Evans et al. 2018: 110). From the perspective of Ethnosyntax, this paper will address the question why nominalizations fail to convey similar politeness effects in Korean and how such effects are achieved therein.

Selected References

Evans, N., Bergqvist, H., and Roque, L.S. 2018. The grammar of engagement I: Framework and initial exemplification. *Language and Cognition* 10, 110-140.