

# *The Culture Difference in English and Korean Address System*

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**Abstract:** The culture difference between English and Korea leads to the distinctness of address system. Language is the way to inherit culture. Address system is not only a part of language, but also a part of culture. By comparison and analysis, this article discusses the address system to explore the culture connotations of these two kinds of language, and to seek the different value tropism. It can prevent misunderstanding in the intercultural communication and improve the quality of communication.

## 1. Introduction

The address system is the signal and the bridge of interpersonal communication, and is also a language representation of the mutual relationship between the people. Different address term can reflect the age, gender, close relationship, social status, role identities and even speaking situations[1]. Hence the address term is a linguistic phenomenon, as well as a cultural phenomenon. Through the comparison of English and Korean address systems, this paper discusses the different cultural connotations behind the two languages and provides a way to avoid misunderstandings in cross-cultural communication.

## 2. A Comparison of English and Korean Address System

### 2.1 The Comparison of Kinship Terms

Kinship terms can reveal the relationship of family. Family must be linked by blood, marriage and legalism. To select some representative kinship terms for comparison as shown below.

*Table 1 the Comparison Of English and Korean Kinship Terms*

Korean Item	English Item
아버님 / 아버지	Father
어머니 / 엄마	Mother

할아버지 father's father 외할아버지 mother's father	Grandfather
할머니 father's mother 외할머니 mother's mother	Grandmother
아들, 딸	Son, Daughter
형 older brother (male speaking) 오빠 older brother of girl (female speaking) 남동생 younger brother	Brother
누나 older sister (male speaking) 언니 older sister (female speaking) 여동생 younger sister	Sister
남편, 아내	Husband, Wife
큰아버지 father's older brother 삼촌 father's younger brother 고모부 the husband of father's sister 이모부 the husband of mother's sister 외숙 mother's brother Uncle	Uncle
큰어머니 the wife of father's older brother 숙모 the wife of father's younger brother 고모 father's sister 이모 mother's sister 외숙모 the wife of mother's brother	Aunt

As shown in the table 2.1, most of English kinship term corresponds to at least two terms in Korean. It also shows that brother not only means older brother, and also means younger brother. It reveals that English do not have the habit to announce ages to other people [2]. If needing to distinguish, it names older brother or younger brother. However, due to the different age and gender of the kinship term user, the Korean kinship term of the brother has three kinds of terms. If male speaking, the older brother will be called as “형”. If female speaking ,the older brother will be called as “오빠”. But for the younger brother, there is no difference, it will be called as “남동생”. Hence according to the age and gender, Korean kinship terms have the different term for different members of the family[3]. Even for calling parents, because of the intimacy and respect degree between parents and children, there are also different ways of Korean kinship term.

## 2.2 The Difference of Social Terms

In social communication, the correct social appellation makes people be polite. Nobody likes impolite language and behavior. However, because of different cultural backgrounds, the differences of English-Korean in public address system are more significant.

### 2.2.1 In Korean Public Address System

### 2.2.1.1 Surname + Job

E.g. 김 선생님(teacher)

김 간호사 (nurse)

### 2.2.1.2 Surname + Duty

E.g. 김 원장(president of a hospital)

### 2.2.1.3 Surname + Job Title

E.g. 김 교수 (professor)

## 2.2.2 In English Public Address System

### 2.2.2.1 Mr. (Mrs., Miss., Ms.) +Surname

E.g. Mr. Wang

### 2.2.2.2 Mr. + Official Title

E.g. Mr. President

Mr. Manager

### 2.2.2.3 Academic Title,Job Title + Surname

E.g. Queen Elizabeth

## 2.3 The Address for Courtesy and Modesty

In Korean, because of different age, personality, social status, occupation and relatives, the words formed the honorific and modesty language.

### 2.3.1 Appellation of Relative Addressing +님

형 (older brother) - 형님 (older brother)

어머니/오마 (mother) - 어머니님 (mother)

아버지/아빠 (father) - 아버지님 (father)

딸 (daughter) - 딸님 (daughter)

아들 (son) - 아드님 (son)

### 2.3.2 Appellation of Public Addressing +님

과장 (supervisor) - 과장님 (supervisor)

부장 (minister) - 부장님 (minister)

선생 (teacher) - 선생님 (teacher)

### 2.3.3 Name + 씨

서비아 (Sophia) - 서비아씨 (Miss Sophia)

#### 2.3.3.4 Modesty

나 (I) - 저 (I)

우리 (we) - 저희 (we)

In Korean, the children can call their parents in a comfortable way, such as “어머니” and “아빠”. And they can call father as “아버님” to express their respect as well. Korean pays attention to the sense of distance in communication. They can not call themselves as “나” to the people who meet for the first time or are not familiar with. And if they do, it is impolite. Korean should themselves as “저” to show politeness. Furthermore, Korean also focuses on age[4]. Even if the brother is just older than one day, the Korean can not call themselves as “나” when they talk to brother. If they do, it means that the younger brother is impolite.

## 3. The Underlying Culture Difference between English and Korean

The address system will express in different language and word because of the different countries and nations. It reflects the background and custom of a country as well and expresses the history and culture of diverse nations[5].

### 3.1 Hierarchy and Equality

Hierarchy influences the language of Korean so much. And for western society, equality is more important. Korea has an extremely long feudal society. It makes Korean formed a kinship system, which is based on a blood relationship and the basic unit of the society, which is formed by the clan. Thereby in Korea, the people use words, which can show the blood relationship, to call family members.

Western people have a very weak concept of blood relationship. On one hand, the family members live much more decentralized. Therefore, the liquidity is quite large. Especially the children are willing to be independent and live by themselves as soon as they grow up. On the other hand, because of emphasizing on the independence and individualism in western society, a person is the basic unit of society, not the family[6]. In western society, there is no strong ancestral idea and they have a simple family structure, so it results in small quantities of relative address system in western family and the appellation is broad as well as not clear.

Politeness is an integral part of the civilization, and performance of the human progress. The politeness of a nation can be reflected in the characteristics of its language. In South Korea, except for friends and staff of the same level, other people cannot call each other's names directly. Even if naming a child, Korean people should pay attention not to have the same words or pronunciation as the elders in the family. In other words, when Korean people address each other, they have to consider the hierarchy and equality relationship between the two sides. If it is hierarchy relationship, that is, the two sides have the different social status or the two sides meet first time, both of them will adopt an unequal way to call each other. In this case, the appellation will undoubtedly be a sign of hierarchy.

### 3.2 Collectivism and Individualism

Industrialization and urbanization made the western society be more utilitarian. Society generally emphasizes individual self-discipline. Everything starts from personal interests. People should be responsible for their own behaviors. Hence individualism is one of the most important characteristics of the western culture. People in western countries tend to decide for themselves and express their opinions without hesitation.

On the contrary, Korean people have always been centered on collective family life. They put the benchmark of their behaviors on community or the people around them, rather than on individuals.

Korean particularly are willing to use the word “우리”(our) instead of “나의”(my). They prefer to call our school(우리 학교), not my school(나의 학교). Even if people live by self, they also call home as “우리 집”(our home). Korean is not self-centered. They trend to be treated as a group with interdependent values. However, western people rarely use “our/we”. They often use “my/I” because they are independent individuals. It is easy to be realized when writing the name. Korean people call surname in front of given name. Western people call given name first, then surname.

### 3.3 Self- Modesty and Self-Confidence

In Korean, people are influenced by the Confucianism, and succeed the thought of respecting the old and cherishing the young. The feudal society has made a great impact on Korean. Then people severely obey to the level system and attach importance to the politeness[7]. In order to express that they are well educated, the people always show their modesty,even self-abasement. Then it becomes the honorific language when their self-abasement reflects in language. When the people express their modesty to the others, they can get a good impression. It can satisfy people's self-esteem and can help smooth communication. And western countries are deeply influenced by Christianity. They advocate the individual and self-confidence. People call each other's names directly, even if a grandchild to his grandparents. It makes people feel close, no matter of their age and social status. They can be more confident while communicating as well.

## 4. Conclusion

The address system is an essential tool in the social communication and occupy an important position to establish the interpersonal relationships. When an address to use to communicate, it should be taken into account whether meet different language and cultural habits or not. Sapir, the American linguist, points that language has an environment of background; it cannot be existed without the culture and cannot be divorced from the traditions and beliefs of society inherited [8]. Hence, the relationship of language and culture is interdependent. It is impossible to learn a foreign language well if you only pay attention to the form without the culture.

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