



Korean Ladder Study Note

압존법

When to Lower Honorifics in Front of a Higher Superior

Level	Topic	Focus
C1 · Advanced TOPIK 5	Honorifics Subject Honorifics	압존법 When to Lower Honorifics in Front of a Higher Superior

Study Links

Open this lesson on Korean Ladder

<https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-C1-HON-SUB-001>

Watch the full video on YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xqfL7oi3RA0>

Visit Korean Ladder for all free lessons

<https://www.koreanladder.com>

Core Idea

Okay, real question. I learned to ALWAYS add honorifics for elders. So why did my Korean friend say '아버지 왔어요' — no honorific — about her dad, to her grandfather?

좋은 질문이에요. That's not a mistake — that's a real rule called 압존법. In English, it's 'honorific suppression.'

압존법 means: when you speak to the HIGHEST person, you lower the honorifics for a middle person — even an elder. 가장 높은 사람 앞에서는 중간 사람을 낮춰요.

왜 중요할까요? Because if you over-honor, it can sound like you're putting the middle person ABOVE your listener. 서열이 분명해야 해요.

Conversation Snapshot

Speaker	Korean	Meaning
Junho	왔니? 아버지는? —	You're here? And your father?



Speaker	Korean	Meaning
Hana	할아버지, 아버지가 방금 왔어요. —	Grandpa, Dad just came.
Junho	그래, 밥은 먹었고? —	Good — have you eaten?
Hana	아직요. 아버지랑 같이 먹을게요. —	Not yet. I'll eat with Dad.

Vocabulary & Useful Expressions

Word	Meaning	Example
압존법 apjonbeop	suppressing honorifics for a middle-ranked person	좋은 질문이에요. That's not a mistake — that's a real rule called 압존법. In English, it's 'honorific suppression.'
높은 분 앞 → 중간 분 낮춤 nopeun bun ap → junggan bun natchum	In front of the highest, lower the middle	압존법 means: when you speak to the HIGHEST person, you lower the honorifics for a middle person — even an elder. 가장 높은 사람 앞에서는 중간 사람을 낮춰요.
서열을 분명하게 seoyeoreul bunmyeonghage	keep the ranking clear	왜 중요할까요? Because if you over-honor, it can sound like you're putting the middle person ABOVE your listener. 서열이 분명해야 해요.
오셨어요 → 왔어요 osyeosseoyo → wasseyoyo	'came (hon.)' → 'came (plain)'	보세요. 평소엔 '오셨어요' — 높임이에요. 그런데 할아버지 앞에서는 '왔어요'. The -시- honorific just disappears.
할아버지 > 아버지 harabeoji > abeoji	Grandpa outranks Dad	이름도 마찬가지로요. To Grandpa, your dad is just 아빠 — 낮춤말. 할아버지가 가장 높으니까요.
기준은 '듣는 사람' gijuneun 'deutneun saram'	the listener sets the standard	맞아요. In English: you match the honorifics to your LISTENER, not just to the person you're talking about. 듣는 사람이 기준이에요.
상황: 손녀 → 할아버지 sanghwang: sonnyeo → harabeoji	Scene: granddaughter speaking to grandfather	작은 대화로 들어 볼게요. 손녀가 할아버지한테 아빠 얘기를 해요. Listen for the lowered verb.
듣는 사람 = 할아버지 → 있어요 deutneun saram = harabeoji → isseyoyo	listener is Grandpa, so plain form	좋아요. 듣는 사람이 할아버지니까 '있어요'. 정확해요.



Grammar / Structure Notes

압존법

압존법 — suppressing honorifics for a middle-ranked person

lit. 'pressing-down honorifics'

높은 분 앞 → 중간 분 낮춤

높은 분 앞 → 중간 분 낮춤 — In front of the highest, lower the middle

압존법 means: when you speak to the HIGHEST person, you lower the honorifics for a middle person — even an elder. 가장 높은 사람 앞에서는 중간 사람을 낮춰요.

서열을 분명하게

서열을 분명하게 — keep the ranking clear

over-honoring confuses who is senior

할아버지, 아버지가 왔어요.

할아버지, + 아버지가 + 왔어요 + . — Grandpa, Dad has come.

들어 볼게요. 할아버지 앞에서 아빠 얘기를 해요. We say 할아버지, 아버지가 왔어요. Not 오셨어요.

오셨어요 → 왔어요

오셨어요 + → + 왔어요 — 'came (hon.)' → 'came (plain)'

보세요. 평소엔 '오셨어요' — 높임이에요. 그런데 할아버지 앞에서는 '왔어요'. The -시- honorific just disappears.

Pronunciation Loop

Phrase	How to practice
할아버지, 아버지가 방에 있어요.	harabeoji, abeojiga bange isseoyo.
할아버지, 아버지가 방에 계세요.	harabeoji, abeojiga bange gyeseyo.
있어요, not 계세요	isseoyo (gyeseyo)

Self-Check

- 1 Say 압존법 three times: slow, natural, then inside a short sentence.
- 2 Write one original sentence that was not in the video.
- 3 Rewatch the YouTube lesson and pause when the same pattern appears.

Related / Subsequent Studies



Lesson	Why study it next	Link
-(으)시- Adding the Honorific Infix to Any Verb	B1 Honorifics: compare -(으)시- with this lesson so the boundary becomes clearer.	Open lesson https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-B1-HON-SUB-002
Korean Honorifics 세요 and 께서	A2 Honorifics: compare Korean Honorifics with this lesson so the boundary becomes clearer.	Open lesson https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A2-HON-SUB-001
계시다 / 드시다 / 주무시다 / 연세 / 진지 Special Honorific Words	B1 Honorifics: compare 계시다 / 드시다 / 주무시다 / 연세 / 진지 with this lesson so the boundary becomes clearer.	Open lesson https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-B1-HON-SUB-001
모시다 / 올리다 / 말씀 올리다 Elevated Humble Vocabulary	C1 Honorifics: compare 모시다 / 올리다 / 말씀 올리다 with this lesson so the boundary becomes clearer.	Open lesson https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-C1-HON-HUM-001

My Notes

Free Korean lessons, one rung at a time. This PDF, the website, and the video lessons are free for personal study.