Dynamic Identity Shifts through Code-switching Strategies in Multilayered Online Interactions of Korean

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1 Introduction

This research aims to examine the multi-layered online interactions between online gaming streamers and their viewers, wherein Korean online interlocutors dynamically shift and display their identity through various code-switching strategies. Specifically, this study focuses on one distinctive code-switching practice: speech level elevation from non-honorifics to honorifics, as observed in video live-streaming platforms. In offline or face-to-face interactions, social norms, contexts, and the relationship between interlocutors typically confine the use of a specific speech style, namely

either non-honorific *panmal* or honorific *contaysmal* style. However, online communication platforms provide a unique space where participants actively change their speech styles across speech levels, depending on the identity they want to construct and display moment-by-moment.

Analysis of online gaming interactions reveals that speakers can construct various identities, including (1) an obsequious and submissive player, (2) an official commander who displays knowledge and authority, and (3) a skilled player, by abruptly elevating their speech level from *panmal* to *contaysmal*. These code-switching practices as contextualization cues (Gumperz 1982) signal a shift in frame and footing during interaction, enabling the interlocutors to dynamically change their interactional roles.

2 Methodology and Data

Drawing on Bucholtz and Hall's sociocultural linguistics framework (2005), which perceives identity as a discursive construction within social interaction rather than a pre-existing, fixed concept of self or others, this study investigates how online interlocutors dynamically transform their interactional identities through various code-switching strategies. To achieve this objective, the research adopts Goffman's concepts of "frame" and "footing" (1981). The term "frame" pertains to the definition of a speech event, while "footing" represents the participant's orientation towards the ongoing interaction, reflecting how interaction participants express their alignments towards other interactants or referents (Goffman 1981; Choe 2020).

The data analyzed for this proceeding consists of eighty videos uploaded by six popular gaming YouTubers on the video-sharing/streaming platforms YouTube and Twitch. The length of each video varies from ten to thirty minutes. The interaction between streamers and their audience was transcribed using a three-line format. The Korean utterances are romanized in the first line according to the Yale Romanization system. Spoken utterances are marked in italics, while typed chats are transcribed in regular font. A morpheme-by-morpheme glossary is provided in the following line, where the speech level will be marked in bold. The third line of the transcripts provides idiomatic English translations of the utterances.

3 Analysis

A close examination of the video data through the lens of sociocultural linguistics framework shows when and how online interlocutors employ speech level elevation in order to change footing and frame, in which to display various identities. The following three excerpts illustrate three representative identities indexed by the speech level shift practice.

3.1 Submissiveness of a Vulnerable Player

Online gaming interlocutors frequently use non-honorific expressions when addressing opponent players, who cannot technically hear the utterance, in gameplay. However, when discovering that their opponents in the game are well-equipped and likely overpower him, online users tend to index this unlevel power relationship with opponent players through the speech level elevation. The following excerpt illustrates how online interlocutors adjust their footings and frames to display the submissiveness of a weak player.

Prior to the following excerpt, the streamer MI announced the start of his gameplay, stating that he will enjoy the game using the deferential style -*(su)nita*, as in *onul chapwunha-key kyengcayng han pen culkye-po-torok ha-keyss-supnita* 'I'm going to calmly enjoy the competition today.' While controlling his avatar to land in a secluded area for safety, MI shifts the screen and notices another opponent player landing right next to him, targeting the same area. In lines 1 and 2, MI informs the player about a motorcycle located in a building and then asks if the player will leave without engaging in combat, both expressed in non-honorific plain style sentence enders. It is important to note that the opponent player, whom MI addresses as a ratified hearer, cannot hear the streamer's utterance or respond to it. Despite the player's inability to hear MI's words, MI encourages him to leave the site to avoid potential conflict by posing a rhetorical question in line 2.

Excerpt 1 Mercy

1	MI:	*an-ey*	*odopai*	*iss-ta.*		
		in-LOC	motorcycle	exist-PLN		
		There is a motorcycle in the building.				

2		*ya*	*ne*	*ku-ke*	*tha-ko*	*ka-l*	*ke-ci?*
		hey	you	that-thing	ride-and	go-will	thing-COM
		Hey, you're gonna take that and leave, aren't you?					

3	V1:	hay-po-ca-ko?	
		try-do-PRP.PLN-QUT	
		Do you wanna fight?	

4	MI:	*>o*	*i*	*saykki*	*chong*	*mek-ess-ta.*	*ssipa<*
		gosh	this	pun	gun	eat-PST-PLN	damn
		Damn, this punk picked up a gun.					

6　V3:　　*hh　coci-s-ta* ((*Gyeongsang* province dialect))　　*hh*
　　　　　　screw-PST-PLN
　　　　　　lol　you got screwed　lol

7　MI:　　*sallye-cu-**sey**-**yo***　　　ahahahahaha
　　　　　　save-give-**SH-POL**　　((crying))
　　　　　　Please show me some mercy.

8　　　　　*>o　camkkanman　ua<　aigo　a　>thaimtatatata<*
　　　　　　gosh　wait　　　gee　gosh　oh　　time
　　　　　　Gee, give me a second!

After both players land in the same area, they quickly enter different buildings to search for weapons and eliminate each other. Once MI equips his avatar with a crowbar, he begins searching for the player and chasing him, in which to establish a confrontational frame. This shift to a confrontational frame is supported by one of MI's viewers, who further provokes a fight with the opponent player, as seen in line 3, "Do you wanna fight?" It is evident that this viewer cannot directly control the avatar, and the opponent player cannot read or respond to the viewer's chat. Nonetheless, the viewer aligns with the confrontational frame established by MI and demonstrates his footing shift by duplicating MI's non-honorific style utterance to threaten the opponent player. This confrontational frame continues until the streamer spots the player and briefly reports on the status of the player, using the Korean derogatory address term *saykki* (lit. young animal) to call him/her and a Korean vulgar interjection *ssipa* 'damn', as in line 4. However, as soon as MI and his viewers encounter the enemy behind the door, who is already equipped with more powerful weapons than MI's crowbar, they abruptly shift their footing.

　　Subsequently, MI makes the decision to flee from the player, closes the door, and returns to the building where he initially found his weapon in order to search for another one. Meanwhile, the opponent player starts chasing MI's avatar, prompting MI to scream and plead for mercy, utilizing speech level elevation to the honorific style with the subject honorific suffix *-(u)si* and the *-a/eyo* form, as seen in line 7. By employing the honorific speech level, which includes the use of the subject honorific suffix *-(u)si* and the polite sentence ender, MI adjusts his footing towards the dominant enemy and reframes the interaction as one of desperation. Furthermore, MI's exaggerated facial expression contributes to the dramatization of the begging frame, making the interaction more entertaining. This is followed by several viewers expressing their amusement with laughter tokens such as *khkhkhkh* 'lol' in the subsequent lines.

3.2 Authority of an Official Commander

Online interlocutors often engage in constructing pretend play frames, allowing them to assume various identities. Prior to the following conversation, a viewer assigned a challenging task called *misyen* 'mission' to the streamer MI. In order to receive a significant amount of money promised by the viewer, MI and his friend must play the game as a team and win a round. Although they succeeded in winning the first round and received the prize from the viewer/donator, MI expressed dissatisfaction with the outcome. This was because his avatar was killed early in the round and had little contribution to their victory. Subsequently, the same viewer suggested another mission where MI takes on the role of a commander, and SK follows his orders to achieve another victory.

Excerpt 2 Airplane

1 MI: *chinku-ya   ka-ca.   khameysukhi.*
                friend-VOC go-PLN.PRP.   ((NAME))
                Bro, let's go to Kameshki.

2   *Wonseka >cha thala-ing   ppali.<*
                ((NAME)) car   ride-PLN.IMP.NAS quickly
                Wonsek, get in the car. Hurry.

3 SK: *ung.*
                okay
                Okay

4 SK: *eti-lo   ka-yo?*
                where-to   go-POL
                Where should we go?

5 MI: *pihayngki   chac-ulo ka-lkey-**yo**. khameysukh wi-ey*
                airplane   find-to   go-will-**POL** ((NAME))   above-LOC
                We will go find an airplane.

6   *e   pihayngki   hana   nao-nta-pnita.*
                um airplane   one   appear-QUT-**DEF**
                Someone said we can find one in the northern area of Kameshki.

7   SK: *yey.*
           yes
           Yes, sir.

In lines 1 through 3, both MI and SK discursively establish a joint operation and index intimacy. MI suggests their course of action (line 1) and orders SK to get in his car quickly in the non-honorific style. In response, SK confirms MI's directive in the same non-honorific style. MI addresses his fellow player as *chinkwu* 'friend' in line 1 and even uses his real name, *Wonsek*, in line 2. These choices contribute to indexing their casual relationship. Furthermore, MI adds nasality -*ing* to his plain style imperative sentence ending –*la*, enhancing the casualness of his utterance. In response, SK aligns with MI's casual imperative utterances by providing a non-honorific style response, using *ung* 'yes' in line 3. Thus, these two friends establish an intimate and casual frame, where the emphasis is on their equal relationship between the streamer MI and co-player SK, rather than a commander and follower dynamic.

However, the initially established intimate frame transitions into a hierarchical operation frame as SK reminds MI of their assigned roles as a commander and follower, as suggested by the viewer/mission giver. SK positions himself as a follower, indicating low authority and dependence in decision-making within the operation. To convey his subordination, SK employs the polite style sentence ending -*yo* (line 4) and poses an interrogative utterance *edi-lo ka-yo* 'where are we going?', which further reinforces his submissive position.

In response to SK's frame shift through the speech level elevation, MI also elevates his speech style from non-honorific to honorific. This elevation serves to index authority and enhanced epistemic stance (Chang 2014; Kim 2022) as he provides a briefing on his operation plan. The plan involves finding an airplane to quickly move to the battlefield where other players are engaged in combat (line 5). Furthermore, MI enhances his authoritative identity by sharing new information obtained from one of the viewers. He presents this information in a deferential style (line 6), indicating "newness" (Strauss and Eun 2004) and formality.

3.3 Expertise of a Skilled Player

In the following excerpt, we observe how online interlocutors establish or switch frames by utilizing the speech level elevation strategy to position themselves as experts or teachers, demonstrating a high epistemic stance. The interaction involves the streamer GP and her viewers.

Prior to this interaction, GP showcased her exceptional skills by defeating nine other players in the game. Impressed by her gameplay, a

viewer V1 requests GP to provide a lesson on how to play the game well (line 1). In response to this request, another viewer, V2, compliments GP's streaming as a valuable resource for improving gaming skills. Following this exchange, V1 poses a question to V2 regarding whether GP ever streams her gameplay in an educational manner, teaching viewers how to enhance their gaming skills (lines 5 and 6). Upon reading V1's question as a request, the streamer GP positions herself as a teacher and aligns with the teacher-and-learner frame introduced by the viewer from line 8.

Excerpt 3 Educational Channel

1   V1:   kelppo-nim   payku   com allya-cwu-sey-yo
                ((NAME))-HON ((NAME))   little inform-give-SH-POL
                Please teach me how to play this game well.

3   V1:   kulay-yo?
                right-POL
                Really?

5   kyoywuk   pangsong-sik-ulo-to   ha-nayo?
                education   broadcasting-style-as-also do-Q.POL
                Does she also teach like an educational broadcasting channel?

6   sensayngnim   khenseyp
                teacher   concept
                Just like a teacher.

7   GP: *kyokywuk   pangsong-ulo   hay-tal-lako?*
                education   broadcasting-as   do-give-QUT
                Do you want me to teach, like an educational channel?

8   *ca i chinkwu kath-un kyengwu-nun*
                so this friend   same-RL case-TOP
                So, for this guy,

9   *etteh-key   cap-**usi**-myen toynya-myen*
                how-ADV catch-**SH**-if   become-if
                if you want to kill him,

10   *iltan-un   akka cap-un sichey-lul   han ip ha-**si**-ko*
                first-TOP   ago   catch-RL corpse-ACC one bite do-**SH**-and
                First, loot some items from the death crate of the player I killed a while ago,

11		*ttukpayki-to pakkwu-**si**-ko*
		helmet-also change-**SH**-and
		and get a new helmet,

12		*an-ulo kenmwul-lo tuleo-**sye**-kaciku*
		in-to building-to enter-**SH**-and
		and get into the building,

13	V1:	khkhkhkhkhkhkhkhkh ney ney
		((laughter)) yes yes
		lol. I see.

14	GP:	*palsoli-lul tule po-**pnita**. an tulli-ney-**yo**-ng.*
		footstep-ACC hear try-**DEF** not heard-RM-**POL**-ng
		and try catching the footstep of the enemy. Nothing heard.

In line 8, the streamer adjusts her orientation towards the viewers, signaling a shift in the frame. This shift is marked by the speech level elevation from non-honorific to honorific style. She does not complete her utterances with the use of the honorific style sentence enders, *-a/eyo* or *-(su)pnita*, up until line 12. Instead, she positions her viewers as students by using the subject honorific suffix *-(u)si* (lines 9, 10, 11, and 12) while providing detailed explanations on how to defeat an enemy hiding in a building. The construction patterns of this frame exhibit similarities to other discourses such as classroom interactions, where teachers utilize honorific speech styles, particularly the *-a/eyo* and *-(su)pnita* forms, to convey their formal role as educators (Park 2015: 84). Additionally, this framing resembles TV interview programs, in which hosts employ the honorific style to indicate formality between themselves and their guests (Chang 2014).

While maintaining the informative teaching frame, the streamer GP "laminates" frames (Choe 2020; Goffman 1974), in which seriousness/formality and casualness coexist. In line 14, GP provides instructions to her viewers on how to detect the footsteps of an enemy when entering a building, employing the deferential *-(su)pnita* style. This style enhances the seriousness and formality of her instruction, emphasizing the importance of the information she is conveying.

However, GP then abruptly shifts her physical gesture by putting her right hand next to her ear and enacting her avatar in the game. This action conveys a sense of casualness and playfulness, as she pretends to listen for the sound of footsteps made by the opponent player. In addition, the use of the polite style sentence ender *-a/eyo* and the subject honorific suffix *-(u)si*

followed by the nasal sound *ng* (token of *aykyo*[1] 'winsomeness' or baby talk) signals the lamination of the teaching frame with the play frame, in which the streamer takes up the ambivalent position of an informative teacher and cute young girl, as in line 14. This oxymoronic footing and frame lamination, in which the streamer GP enacts an authoritative teacher using the baby-talk speech style, contributes to making the interaction more layered and ironic and thereby more entertaining.

4   Discussion and Conclusion

This study presents three excerpts where online interlocutors in Korean online gaming interactions employ code-switching strategies, particularly speech level elevation, to shift and display their identity. Analyzing the video data shows that the actual usage of the honorific system transcends the traditional boundary between non-honorifics *panmal* and honorifics *contaysmal*. In the first excerpt, the sudden transition to the honorific style can be utilized to convey submissiveness toward an enemy, allowing the speaker to assume the role of a vulnerable, subordinate player. Conversely, the same strategy can be employed by the interlocutor to assert authority and take up the role of an authoritative figure, as in Excerpt 2. Furthermore, this code-switching mechanism can also serve to highlight the speaker's elevated epistemic stance, thereby enabling the interlocutor to position themselves as a skilled player, as in the last excerpt.

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[1] Puzar and Hong (2018) identified that one of the functions of *aykyo* 'winsomeness' is to "soften the atmosphere of certain situations."

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