

Imposter Pronouns In Javanese, Indonesian, and Korean

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Abstract

It is well-known that in certain languages, some more so than others, speakers may choose to refer to a speech act participant with a descriptive noun phrase rather than a pronoun. The reasons they do so are varied, but frequently have to do with politeness dictates in the languages. Indonesian (Connors et al. 2016, Helmbrecht 2005) Korean (Brown 2011), and Javanese (Connors 2015) are three such languages that frequently employ this strategy. Recently, the use of seemingly third person DPs used to refer to speech act participants has been analyzed syntactically as a case of "imposter" syntax (Collins and Postal 2008, 2012). This proposed syntax posits a shell DP with a null head with the features of the referent, and with a child DP that has as its head the actual third person DP. Kaufman (2014) argues for Indonesian that the source of this seeming denotation-reference mismatch is in the morphology/lexicon rather than the syntax; the imposter DPs are actually not third person, but specified for first or second person. We show that, contra Kim (2015) and Choi (2016), the morphology approach to imposters is a better approach for Javanese and Korean as well as Indonesia. In general, Javanese patterns with Indonesian, though there are some distinctions. The data from Korean, however, is like neither English nor Indonesian/Javanese. Not only does Korean not employ the shell DP syntax argued to exist for English, it also does not specify its imposters with features of the referent in the way that Indonesian does, contrary to a claim made for Korean (Zanuttini et al). We explore the possibility that imposters are un- or under-specified for certain features, to account for the surface facts from binding, genitive pronouns, and certain person-marked verbal constructions. Ultimately, we argue that imposters in Javanese do not form a lexical class distinct from other DPs. Rather, like Indonesian, Javanese and Korean imposters have the same syntax as standard DPs. However, we argue that imposters in Korean do in fact form a distinct lexical class that is underspecified for person features. This account goes against Zanuttini et al., who claim that all lexical nouns are underspecified for person, and third person features are received as a default, following Baker (2008) and Sigurðsson (2010). Counter to such claims, we show that it must be the case that some lexical nouns have no person features at all in Korean, receiving them neither by specification/computation nor by default.