

New study uncovers the complex dynamics of self-deprecating remarks in Korean entertainment

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The Complexity of Self-Deprecation in Korean Reality TV Shows

Self-deprecation, a negative self-assessment used in social interaction, is common in Korean reality TV shows

How is self-deprecation used to achieve different interactional goals and what are its resulting dynamics and responses?

Excerpts from Korean reality TV shows:

- Infinite Challenge
- I Am Solo

Analysed how self-deprecation acts:

- Were used for interactional goals
- Influenced the interaction

Varied uses of self-deprecation

- Defending
- Self-blaming
- Reprimanding
- Accusing

Influence of self-deprecation on interaction

- Prone to misalignment
- Communication breakdown
- Relational tension
- Unmet expectations

Self-deprecation was used strategically within specific interactional contexts

Misaligned response to self-deprecation could lead to conflict

Understanding self-deprecation in Korean reality TV shows reveals its dynamic, contextual role in social interactions and communication practices

Data Sources: Transcriptions and TELOPs (subtitles, images and special effects)

The Complexity of Acts with Self-Deprecation in Korean Reality TV Shows
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By analyzing interactions from Korean reality TV shows researchers highlights the diverse functions of self-deprecation and its complex interpretive dynamics. Their findings reveal that self-deprecation can lead to varied responses, emphasizing the need for sensitivity and context-awareness in interpreting such interactions. Credit: Eunseok Ro from Pusan National University and Josephine Mijin Lee from Ewha Womans University

Self-deprecation, a negative self-assessment used in social interaction, is prevalent in Korean reality TV shows. Traditionally, psychology views self-deprecation as indicative of low self-esteem or related psychological disorders, such as depression or eating disorders.

In a recent study by Professors Eunseok Ro from Pusan National University and Josephine Mijin Lee from Ewha Womans University, the focus shifts from a pathological view to an interactional one, revealing the complex dynamics of self-deprecation in social interactions. Their study, [published online](#) in the *Journal of Pragmatics*, suggests that self-deprecating remarks often serve broader interactional purposes.

"Existing research has primarily analyzed data where self-deprecation is the central topic of the conversation. The present study contributes to an endogenous understanding of acts with self-deprecation by examining interactional episodes where the relevance of self-deprecation is momentarily suspended until other interactional exigencies are resolved," explain Profs. Ro and Lee.

The researchers analyzed three excerpts from Korean TV shows, Infinite Challenge and I Am Solo. Through detailed conversation analysis, they examined the participants' self-deprecating actions, the responses they elicited, and the interactional consequences.

In Infinite Challenge, self-deprecation was used as a defense against a false accusation, leading to a humorous interaction. The excerpt analyzed highlights how participants created humor by breaching [social norms](#) around minimizing agreement with self-criticism. Conversely, in I Am Solo, self-deprecation was used to self-blame, reprimand, and accuse to solicit an apology.

Further, the excerpts from I Am Solo demonstrated how misinterpreting self-deprecation can lead to unmet expectations, communication

breakdowns, and relational tension. These examples underscore the complexity of self-deprecation in social interactions, where its meaning can vary widely depending on context. For instance, in *I Am Solo*, Gwangsu misinterpreted Yeongsook's self-deprecation as self-aggrandizement.

When Yeongsook intended her [self-criticism](#) as an accusation, Gwangsu responded with consolation rather than an apology. Such misunderstandings can lead to [emotional reactions](#), as seen in Yeongsook's tears. Therefore, self-deprecation should be handled carefully to avoid negative outcomes, as these examples reveal.

"Our findings reveal that self-deprecation can serve different interactional goals, such as defense, reprimand, and accusation, depending on the context. Responses to self-deprecation vary widely and can lead to misalignments, misunderstandings, and relational tension," observes Profs. Ro and Lee.

Sensitivity to self-deprecating remarks is crucial to avoid unfortunate consequences. Sensitivity to self-deprecating remarks is crucial to avoid negative outcomes, as responses depend on the specific context and participants' goals.

In conclusion, the study illustrates the complexity of self-deprecation within conversational contexts. Self-deprecation is not merely a negative self-assessment but a strategic tool for achieving various interactional goals. The findings emphasize the importance of understanding the specific context and underlying expectations behind self-deprecating remarks to navigate interactions effectively and empathetically.

By developing a sequentially sensitive approach to self-deprecation, this study deepens our understanding of this practice in [social interaction](#).

More information: Ro et al, The complexity of acts with self-deprecation in Korean reality TV shows, *Journal of Pragmatics* (2024).
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