

TRANSNATIONAL MASCULINITIES: THE DISTRIBUTIVE PERFORMATIVITY OF
GENDER IN KOREAN BOY BANDS

by

JOSEPH (BAZIL) MANIETTA

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written by Joseph (Bazil) Manietta
has been approved for the Department of Linguistics

(Dr. Barbara Fox)

(Dr. Andrew Cowell)

(Dr. Sangbok Kim)

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Abstract

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Transnational Masculinities: The Distributive Performativity of Gender in Korean Boy Bands

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South Korea enjoys much success with the exportation of popular media, including music, movies, and TV shows. One underlying component of this success seems to be Korea's powerful and precise media manufacturing system. For Korean boy bands, Jung (2011) claims that constructing a "transnational" identity that relies on the production of a "manufactured versatile masculinity" allows idol boy groups to appeal transculturally to fans across borders with their flexible masculine identities. This hybrid masculinity is "multi-layered, culturally mixed, simultaneously contradictory, and most of all strategically manufactured". Consistent with the performative nature of gender (Butler 1990), this multi-faceted masculinity is constructed through performances in different outlets such as music programs, reality TV, and game shows.

In the past, Kpop idol groups largely focused on the pretty-boy, soft-masculine image. In the last decade, though, more "tough, manly, and beast-like" groups have emerged, combining their hyper-masculine image with "soft masculinity" performances (Jung 2011). According to Jung's analysis, each of the members in these idol groups is capable of producing a variety of masculinities *individually*. However, I argue that some boy bands adopt a strategy by which their group's *collective* hybrid masculine image is constructed cooperatively through discourse, *distributing* the gender-work across its members. This effort, what I call **distributed masculinity**, depends on the discursive work done by all participants involved, including band members and TV hosts. By looking at the interaction that takes place in "Aegyo Contests," a common segment on Korean variety TV, I show how each group member's masculinity is negotiated and defined vis-à-vis requested performances of *aegyo*. Aegyo is a concept that is shaped largely by culturally shared ideas of cuteness in South Korea. One aspect of aegyo is a *speech style* that is strongly associated with women and femininity (cf. Moon under review, Abelman 2003).

This collective expression of hybrid gender shows that gender's performative nature allows for creative expressions of femininity and masculinity beyond that of just an individual. The process suggests how groups can express collective gender identity and how that identity is molded interactionally.

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1. Introduction

South Korea is a nation that enjoys overwhelming success with the exportation of media products, including music, movies, TV shows and more. This increase in Korean pop culture since the late 90's is often called "The Korean Wave"¹ and academics, media critics, and the general populace cite many reasons for its success, but one underlying component seems to be Korea's powerful and precise media manufacturing system. For Korean boy bands, Jung (2011) claims there has been a recent trend toward constructing a "transnational" identity that relies largely on the performance of a hybrid "manufactured versatile masculinity" (Jung 2011:165) that is culturally "transformable" and easily "crosses" borders (Jung 2010). Consistent with the performative nature of gender (Butler 1990), this multi-faceted masculinity is constructed through performances in different media outlets such as TV, music programs, reality shows, and game shows, and closely managed by management companies and the boy bands themselves. Among the different facets of this hybrid masculinity is something that Jung refers to as a "soft South Korean masculinity" (2011:28). There are many ways that bands and band members are able to index their "soft masculinity," but one newly emerging way is through the use of *aegyo*, a concept that is shaped largely by culturally shared ideas of cuteness in South Korea. Despite the prevalence of *aegyo* in daily life and in the media, there has been very little written about its use discursively or linguistically. Through this study I will first show how linguistic forms of *aegyo* as a speech style has become commodified (Heller 2010) as strongly indexing femininity in the media and how boy bands orient to its use vis-à-vis the masculinities they embody in their "idol star personas" (Jung 2011:169). In doing so, I will demonstrate the complex ways in which boy

¹ Or, *Hallyu* (한류, 韓流), which is a term used both in Korean and English

bands can achieve a hybrid “manufactured versatile masculinity” as a collective effort of distributed gender work.

Though aegyo can be expressed in a number of ways (e.g. visually, in fashion, through gesture), one aspect of aegyo is a speech style that is ideologically associated with women and femininity (cf. Abelmann 2003, Han 2014, Harkness 2012, Jung 2011, Moon 2010, Moon under review, Strong 2013). Several features are ideologically associated with aegyo as a linguistic style, including nasality (particularly of segments that are ordinarily non-nasal), rising-falling intonation (LHL%), lexical terms such as *oppa* (“older brother”²), and “infantile sounds” such as “short tongue sound” (*hyeo jjalbeun sori*, 혀 짧은 소리)³, and cute gestures that embody “smallness”. Moreover, there is a great deal of metalinguistic discourse about aegyo, including its linguistic features, its users, and its production. This subsection of aegyo in particular has become an object of linguistic commodification in South Korean media, being built as something that women can do and should be able to do, and can benefit economically by conforming to such expectations. “Aegyo Contests,” where female celebrities are pitted against each other to do the “best” aegyo and then rewarded for successful performances, are a well-known segment on a wide variety of variety shows and music programming in which we can see quite directly how aegyo has been commodified as a female style. This overt commodification in the public spotlight and its easily identifiable features have allowed aegyo to become an easily accessible resource for these boy bands to use as an index of soft masculinity because of its strong ties to femininity.

² *Oppa* is a kinship term used only by women to refer to older men, whether familially related or not.

³ These features are described by Moon (under review), though I agree that these are the features most ideologically tied to aegyo.

In recent years, this “Aegyo Contest” genre has been extended to boy bands⁴ and other male celebrities as well, partly as a response to fans’ requests for such aegyo performances. Interactions between boy bands and the hosts during these Aegyo Contests on a Korean variety show will be the focal point of this study. Though research on aegyo is extremely scarce, especially considering its prominence in the media and everyday interaction, this research does not come from a vacuum in terms of work on Korea or Korean. There is extensive research on Korea, language, & the media (cf. Lo & Kim 2011, McHugh & Abelman 2005, Park 2010), Korean, transnationalism, & globalization (cf. Lo & Kim 2012, Park & Lo 2012), and gender in Korea (cf. Abelman 2003, Chong 2006, Harkness 2013, Kim & Choi 2012, Kim & Lowry 2005), though there is still lack of poststructuralist gender research on Korean from a linguistic perspective. Additionally, the Korean Wave itself has been researched extensively from a number of perspectives (cf. Cho 2005, Chua & Iwabuchi 2008, Huang 2011, Shim 2008). This thesis aims to contribute to poststructuralist gender research on Korean with interaction as its primary data while also looking more concretely at the linguistic mechanisms involved in constructing transnational cultural products that are attributed to the Korean Wave’s success.

In Section 2, I will introduce how gender performativity (Butler 1990) and linguistic commodification (Heller 2010) play a role in the Kpop industry. I will also provide relevant background information about the Kpop industry and its structure, outlying Jung’s (2011) claims about South Korean hybrid masculinity as a factor in the Korean Wave’s transnational success. Section 3 will outline the discourse analytic frame, which integrates features of Conversation Analysis (CA), under which I am analyzing my data, including an introduction of the relevant interactional linguistics research. Section 4 will begin with an analysis showing how aegyo has

⁴ In this paper, I use “boy bands” and “idol groups” interchangeably

become a linguistic commodity (Heller 2010) that is indexical of femininity in popular Korean media by examining the interaction that takes place in a male Aegyo Contest on a Korean television show. By doing so, I will also reveal how members of the boy bands involved position themselves and each other discursively in terms of masculinity vis-à-vis individual performances of aegyo. In Section 5, I then use another Aegyo Contest from a different episode of the same show to argue that boy bands are able to use aegyo's commodified status as a feminine index as one component in sculpting and constructing their "idol star personas" and the masculine images that are associated with each. In Section 6, I argue that balancing its use with expectations of masculinity imposed by the individual member's role in the band contributes to the collective production of a hybridized *group masculinity*; a process motivated by the desires of their fans and the need to create a transnationally valuable image. The interaction between the unique characters each member must construct for the band and the feminine indexes of aegyo work to manage and produce individual masculinities. I argue that, unlike the boy bands described by Jung (2011) in which each member of the group must be able to perform several varieties of masculinity, there are boy bands that *distribute* the task of indexing certain kinds of masculinity to specific members of the band in order to create their *collective*, hybrid masculine image. I show that the individual roles of band members implicitly provide expectations of specific masculine roles and how those masculinities are ratified performatively through the use of aegyo. By doing so, I will posit that this process of *distributed masculinity* is a strategy by which a hybrid masculine image can be achieved for the entire band.

2. Performativity, hybrid masculinity, and linguistic commodification in the Kpop Industry

In this paper, I describe gender, masculinity, and femininity as *performative* (Butler 1990) in nature. That is, gender, masculinity, and femininity are not something we are born with or possess, but rather they are something that we *do*, or *perform*. Perform and performance, in this sense, is not to say that doing gender is theatrical or somehow “fake”. Rather, this term has its roots in Austin’s (1962) speech acts and the emergence of speech act theory wherein words *perform actions* that can affect the world rather than simply describe the state of the world.

Gender does not exist as prediscursive constructs, but is emergent through discourse and interaction when people perform gendered acts, thusly doing gender (Bucholtz & Hall 2004, Garfinkel 1967, Morrish & Sauntson 2007, Motschenbacher 2010, West & Zimmerman 1987).

This poststructuralist approach to gender, then, focuses more on “the speech event itself, requiring us to examine how speakers manipulate ideologies of feminine and masculine speech in the ongoing production of gendered selves” (Hall 1999; also see , Barrett 1999, Cameron 1997, Livia & Hall 1997). The production of gender is a constant process that arises in discourses and has an effect across discourses as a social construction. It is not a starting point from which action is taken, but rather the actions themselves accomplish gender. The question, then, is not “What do men/women say?” but rather “What does saying something produce in terms of gender identity”?

In other words, gender is the set of practices through which one can construct identity, and these practices are entirely a social construct. The gender categories in a society only exist by virtue of the constant production of gendered acts and gendering behavior in social practice. Through the *stylized repetition of acts* (Butler 1990) marked socially for gender, we not only produce individual gender identities in real time, but we also reproduce the existing gender order

in the society or community where they are structured. It is important to note, though, that performance alone does not constitute identity or gender; performances must be “decoded and co-produced by the recipient side in order to be meaningful” (Motschenbacher 2010:25). Linguistic evocation of gender identities is possible because of the history of gendered indexes that linguistic forms carry with them and develop through constant production and reproduction (Butler 1990, 1993). However, if enough people perform gender in a way that does not conform to the normative, socially structured gender order then the social structure can also undergo change, thus leading to change in gender practice as well. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2013) explain that “because structure and practice are in this dynamic and dialectical relation, there is always the possibility for change” (36). The gender order is in constant change, fluid and dynamic, as individuals construct their own gender identities. Therefore masculinity and femininity, too, exist fluidly, not in a fixed binary but as parts of a continuum on which individual expression is varied; no one is simply “male” or “female” and in such an approach “stable”, dominant macro-social categories are called into question. Moreover, in this constant production and reproduction of gender, individuals do not just express their own gender identity, but also “ratify or challenge others’ identities, and in various ways support or challenge systems of gender relations and privilege and the ideologies in which they figure” (ibid. 41).

Although gender unfolds in social practice as such across a wide variety of communities and societies, the finite details of gender identity and performativity vary greatly: gender roles, categories, and forms of expression, being a social construct, are not the same in all societies and cultures. When studying gender, then, one must situate the analysis in some local setting and consider the social and cultural details that follow. Jung (2011) provides a thorough analysis of how South Korean masculinity in media has become hybridized locally and reconstructed in

several ways as a process of producing cultural products specifically tailored for international consumption. “Hybridization” here means that several different ideologies of masculinity, including locally Korean concepts as well as global concepts of masculinity, are combined in order to produce a “hybrid” masculine image. Building off of Korean scholarly work on gender (see Geum 2000, Kim Eun-Shil 2000, Moon Seung-Sook 2002), Jung conceptualizes three main stereotypical images of Korean masculinity: patriarchal authoritarian, *seonbi* (*wen*), and violent (Jung 2011:26). The concept of violent masculinity does not play a role in the analysis of these Kpop performances, and so I will focus primarily on how patriarchal authoritarian and *seonbi* masculinities play a role in modern Korean construction of masculine images.

Jung emphasizes the heterogeneity of Korean masculinity in her discussion of these masculinities (for a detail explanation of the historical basis for each, see Jung 2011:1-33) and herself works from a Butlerian framework of gender. Indeed, poststructuralist approaches to gender take as a basic assumption that a number of different masculinities and femininities can be performed linguistically (Motschenbacher 2010). These masculinities come to be and are transformed by their particular sociocultural context over time. The concept of patriarchal authoritarian masculinity, for example, stems from the household structure of the aristocracy in the Joseon Dynasty⁵ (1392-1910) in which men were considered the heads of the family and primary providers. This Confucian patriarchal ideology created a “gendered division of labor”: the realm of the home and household work was relegated to women, and men were expected to work outside of the home (Jung 2011:26). As this system of Confucian patriarchy became industrialized patriarchy in the second half of the 20th century, “the normative gender constructs of the male-as-provider and the female-as-dependent-housewife persisted” (ibid.:26). This was

⁵ In Korean it is known as the yangban (양반)

further reinforced in the modernization era when “South Korea built a new value structure based on *gendered binaries* such as masculine/feminine, material/spiritual, modern/traditional, and Western/Eastern” (Jung 2011: 26, citing Kim Eun-Shil 2000; italics added). The result is a modern Korea in which traditional patriarchy and industrialization have interacted to produce a stereotype of masculinity that is associated with authoritarian power, control, production, and economic power, while being strongly and diametrically opposed to femininity and its associated features (the domestic, subordinate, non-productive realm) (Jung 2011:26). In fact, Moon (2002) argues that because men are expected to be income earners outside of the home and women are to perform household chores, performing any of these domestic duties is “unmanly or emasculating” (99). This is just one example of how the value system and gender-role expectations in South Korea have become very polarized.

Jung (2011) claims that *seonbi* is another Joseon Dynasty ideology rooted in Confucianism that emphasizes the distance of men from the domestic, but for different reasons that manifest differently in modern Korean masculinity. *Seonbi* refers to a Confucian scholar-official who studies “wisdom”, or Chinese *wen*⁶ (Jung 2011:27). *Seonbi* scholars, during this time of study, are not supposed to engage in physical labor or economic activity, thus focusing on “mental attainment rather than physical performance” (ibid.). As with authoritarian patriarchal masculinity, this works to separate men from domestic labor. Though there have been many recent media portrayals that attempt to deconstruct this stereotype of masculinity (i.e. the 1999 movie *Happy End* (*해피엔드*) and shows like *Dad! Where are we going?* (*아빠! 어디가?*)),

⁶ The Confucian concepts of *wen* (“the mental or civil”) and *wu* (“the physical or martial”) played a large role in the conception of an “ideal man” in Chinese history. The ideal man should strike a balance between these two things, but typically the *wen* was considered a more “elite masculine form”. South Korea’s long history with China and Chinese Confucianism has had a large influence on Korean *seonbi*. See Louie 2002 for a detail discussion of *wen*, *wu*, and “*wen Chinese Masculinity*”.

Seonbi masculinity is still considered valuable by some scholars because of its ties to politeness, integrity, faithfulness, loyalty, and cultural-scholarly attainment (Geum 2000:59-92).

Furthermore, Jung claims that the domestic popularity of South Korean stars that display *seonbi* masculinity is evidence that it is still considered desirable (Jung 2011:27-28). This *seonbi* masculinity, when combined with other masculine images both global and local, contributes to what she calls “soft South Korean masculinity” (ibid.:28). What is special about this soft masculinity is that it has been reconstructed with some feminine *aspects*, but it has not been *feminized* (Jung 2011:48). Though soft South Korean masculinity has certain features that are often associated with femininity, such as tenderness, politeness, and gentleness, the overall impression is that of masculinity. This is not unlike “metrosexual” masculinity, which includes features such as interest in fashion and grooming—features often associated with women—yet it is still ideologically a construct of “masculinity”. This is possible because ideological constructs of gender do not depend on a single property or index. Rather, masculinities and femininities are collections of properties and indexes that amalgamate to create an overall masculine or feminine effect. I will argue that the feminine aspects associated with South Korean soft masculinity allow idol group members who are associated with this variety of masculinity to perform *aegyo* more successfully than those who present other kinds of masculinity (i.e. global “cool” masculinity or “tough” masculinity; this will be explained in detail in my analysis).

These Korean masculine images combine with other global concepts of masculinity that Jung describes to produce characters and entertainers with hybrid masculinities that have “non-nationality” characteristics, what she calls *mugukjeok*⁷. This concept is adapted from Iwabuchi’s (2001) concept of *mukokuseki* that describes “culturally odorless” aspects of Japanese products

⁷ 무국적 in Korean.

as one of the main reasons for their global success. However, Jung makes it clear that her theorization does not completely culturally neutralize popular media products of South Korea.

Jung (2011) explains that:

I use the concept of *mugukjeok* here within the paradigm of transcultural hybridity, to refer to how popular cultural flows enable the mixing of particular cultural elements (national, traditional, and specific) with globally popular elements, which then causes those particular cultural elements to become less culturally specific. Thus, the concept of *mugukjeok* in this book does not mean complete odorlessness or *non*-nationality; rather, *mugukjeok* implies the transcultural hybridity of popular culture, which is not only influenced by odorless global elements, but also by traditional (national) elements. (3)

Viewing the Korean Wave⁸ through this *mugukjeok* paradigm, Korean masculinities like those mentioned above (local resources) are combined with global concepts of masculinity such as metrosexual, cute (Japanese *kawaii*), and postmodern “cool” masculinities to form new hybrid forms of South Korean masculinity. Performers and characters such as Bae Yong-joon of *Winter Sonata*, Rain of *Full House*, and Dae-soo of *Old Boy* use these global and local images of masculinity to construct new forms of hybrid Korean masculinity that “can cross cultural boundaries through disjunctive media cultural flows” (Jung 2011:3), producing *mugukjeok* traits and ultimately contributing to their global popularity (particularly their popularity in Asia). Jung argues that the local specificity of South Korean cultural products is essential to the construction of *mugukjeok* hybrid masculinities because of the sociocultural history rooted in Confucianism that is shared throughout East Asia. Specifically, the patriarchal authoritarian and *seonbi* masculinities native to South Korea share many traits with other images of masculinity from countries that have historically been influenced by Confucianism such as Japan, Taiwan, and Singapore (Jung 2011:30). The blend hybrid of “soft masculinity, global masculinity, and

⁸ The Korean Wave (also known as Hallyu) is the name given to the widespread popularity of Korean media across Asia, and more recently in other parts of the world, since the 1990’s. Korea has enjoyed international popularity in several industries including TV, music, and film.

postmodern masculinity” is embraced differently by audiences in different regions as Korean masculinity is “reconstructed and re-identified based on the ambivalent desires of audiences who mobilize mixed cultural practices arising from *mugukjeok* and the local specificities of each region” (ibid.:30). As the hybrid Korean masculinities produce *mugukjeok* traits that cross borders, it creates a reciprocal relationship of transcultural flows between each region, modifying Korean hybrid masculinities in the process.

When analyzing Kpop specifically in the Korean Wave, however, Jung proposes a new framework of *chogukjeok*⁹, or transnationality. Jung (2011) defines *chogukjeok* as “the tendency to retain national specificity while deploying it as part of a transborder and multinational cultural figuration” (163). This emphasizes not only the cultural odorlessness that comes from *mugukjeok*, but also the “culturally transformable” (ibid.):

I choose *chogukjeok* because it not only refers to how popular cultural flows enable the ‘mixing’ of various cultural elements (both specific and global),... but it also implies how hybridity and non-nationality enable such products to be culturally ‘transformable’ and to easily ‘cross’ national borders. (Jung 2011:167; a detailed analysis of *chogukjeok* can be found in Jung 2010)

Chogukjeok, then, describes “the transcultural production and consumption of the hybridized Korean popular culture signified by idol boy bands” (ibid.).

Indeed, in the Korean Wave Kpop music has enjoyed great international success both regionally in East Asia and South Asia, as well as in Europe and the Americas. Korean music and music television produced in South Korea (often entirely in Korean) is consumed internationally thanks largely to widespread distribution on YouTube (Oh 2013) and to communities that work independently to write subtitles for Korean pop media products.

⁹ 초국적 in Korean.

Recently, in the “second Korean Wave”, Kpop has gained more popularity outside of Asia (Lee SY 2012:448). The #1 most viewed YouTube video, in fact, is a Kpop music video: Psy’s *Gangnam Style*, first uploaded 15 July 2012 has over 2.2 billion views, with the #2 video by Justin Bieber only having half as many views at 1.1 billion. Psy’s *Gentleman* also holds the #9 spot with 818 million views, and his success lead to a collaboration with American rapper Snoop Dogg in 2014 to create the song *Hangover*, the music video for which has been view more than 192 million times. The two idol groups studied in this paper, EXO and Beast, both have several videos with over 30 million views¹⁰, though Kpop’s success is not limited to YouTube. In 2014, Taeyang of the idol group BIGBANG release a solo LP entirely in Korean that reached No. 112 on the Billboard 200 chart, and No. 1 on both Billboard’s World Albums chart and Heatseekers Albums chart¹¹ (Benjamin 2014, June 12). The group 2NE1’s album *Crush* became the first K-pop entry to make Billboard’s year-end World Albums chart, placing No. 11, and also making Rolling Stone's 20 Best Pop Albums of 2014 and Fuse's 40 Best Albums of 2014 lists after having reached No. 61 on the Billboard 200 earlier that year (Benjamin 2014, December 22)¹².

Jung (2011) claims that a manufactured versatile masculinity plays a key role in the Korean Wave’s transnational success, as idol groups are able to appeal transculturally to fans across borders with their flexible masculine identities. Jung defines the concept “manufactured versatile masculinity” as being “multi-layered, culturally mixed, simultaneously contradictory,

¹⁰ EXO has several videos with over 50 million views as well. One video released 30 March 2015 had already been viewed 8 million times as of 4 April 2015.

¹¹ BIGBANG previously hit No. 150 on Billboard 200 as a group in 2012, and the group’s leader G-Dragon has had two EPs reach the Billboard 200 as well (No. 161 in 2012, No. 182 in 2013).

¹² Benjamin (2014, December 22) also points out 2NE1’s other achievements in the U.S. in 2014: “This included their Korean single ‘I Am the Best’ garnering U.S. radio play, topping Billboard's World Digital Songs chart, a sync in a Microsoft commercial, a feature in NYLON magazine, appearances on The Bachelor and America's Next Top Model, plus ranking as one of two acts representing K-pop's best showing yet on the year-end World Albums Artists chart.”

and most of all *strategically manufactured*” (2011:165, italics added). It involves a more intentional mixing of Korean and “global masculinities” (ibid.:31), including traditional concepts of Korean masculinity, “soft masculinity”, *kawaii*¹³ (i.e. “cute” masculinity), and metropolitan “cool” masculinity as part of the processes that Korean media industries use to develop an idol group’s “transcultural” image (ibid.:165).

All aspects of the idol group’s “star personas” are manufactured through calculated marketing moves made by the idols’ management company (Jung 2011:169), and this includes their hybrid masculine image. The K-pop industry in South Korea has a very demanding training system that micromanages every aspect of stars-to-be. The three major management companies, SM Entertainment, YG Entertainment, and JYP Entertainment, begin recruiting as young as 12-years-old¹⁴ (Ho 2012:479) and contracts usually last between 10-15 years (Ho 2012:480). This includes training even before *debuting* that can last as long as 5 years (Ho 2012:480, Lee SY 2012:357). During this training, star personas are developed through lessons in “singing, dancing, mock commercials, personal grooming, body weight (and shape) management, foreign language lessons and at times even cosmetic surgery” (Ho 2012:480) which can consume as much as 100 hours per week (Lee SY 2012:357). Even after debuting, the entertainment companies exert tremendous control over idol’s schedules and lives for the duration of the contract, even though the stars themselves receive the lowest percentage of profits earned, with most of it going to the management company (Oh & Park 2012:380). This demanding lifestyle with little pay leads many idols to drop out of the industry or break contract due to unfair

¹³ This is term that originates in Japan and is widely recognized throughout Asia to represent a variety of Japanese cuteness. It is commonly used in discussions of Japanese pop culture (i.e. Kinsella 1995, Rehn 2008), and can be used to describe non-Japanese images that display this kind of cute.

¹⁴ With recent increase in competition, many Korean parents will begin sending their children from as early as 6-years-old to academies that train the skills required to be recruited by these entertainment companies (Ho 2012:473)

treatment. In fact, two of the members of EXO, a group featured in this paper, have filed lawsuits to terminate their contracts with SM Entertainment. One of the members, Kris, claimed that he was overworked and that SM Entertainment disregarded his basic human rights (Herman 2015). Entertainment companies often justify their behavior and the lack of pay by citing the excessive investment that it takes to produce such idol groups (Oh & Park 2012:380). In 2011, SM Entertainment representative Kim Young Min stated that it costs an average of \$2.5-5 million (US dollars) to train stars for their potential debuts, including cost of living and housing expenses as well as the hiring of choreographers, trainers, voice coaches, dance teachers, and language tutors (Leung 2012:28). The Kpop music industry invests greatly into its recruits, and minimizes risk by carefully controlling the manufacturing of their stars.

The management companies rely on the use of various media outlets, like “idol real variety shows” and music programming, as platforms where star personas and manufactured versatile masculinity can be constructed through performances of different kinds of masculinity. These performances contribute to the masculine identities of individual members as well as, I argue, the group’s *collective masculine identity*. In the past, Kpop idol groups have focused on the pretty-boy, soft-masculine image almost exclusively (Lee SH 2010, Jung 2011), but in the last decade more “tough, manly, and beast-like” groups, such as 2PM, have begun to emerge (Jung 2011:164). Jung describes these more “tough” masculine groups as supplementing their hyper-masculine image with “soft masculinity” performances such as cross-dressing for skits on variety shows or covering popular girl group songs in a comical way (ibid.:165), thus hybridizing their masculine image.

The film Producer Hwang Jeong-Hyeon criticizes “idol real variety shows” claiming that they are “nothing but the easily consumable manufactured products created by a factory called

the ‘South Korean media industry’” (Hwang 2010). Jung (2011) makes the observation that these variety shows are “a site where the manufactured idol characters empowered by the capitalist desires of major entertainment companies meet the individual desires of the general public, plus the practical and economic needs of the cable television industry” (p. 169). “Idol real variety shows” require a variety of “characters” to showcase in order to produce entertaining programming and meet the fans’ desires, and idol groups are able to provide exactly this; each member in an idol group occupies a unique role in the group with an individual “idol star persona” that has “missions” to achieve based on this “manufactured character” (Hwang 2010, also see Epstein 2015:48). These manufactured identities, though motivated (and restricted) by underlying “idol star personas”, are constructed in and emergent from the discourse and interactions (cf. Bucholtz & Hall 2005) that take place on these show, not entirely unlike performing gender. The shows provide a space for these characters to achieve their performative goals as characters and in return the idol groups provide the show with entertaining and varied material.

Motschenbacher (2010) crucially points out, though, that “[t]he contextual fluidity of identity work is generally restricted in [media] contexts” (26). It is common for heteronormativity to surface in linguistic practices in the media “where identity constructions are more carefully planned in advance compared to naturally occurring talk” (ibid.:26-27) and Kpop idol personas are very intentionally planned characters. As a result, gendered character construction are quite often highly stereotypical in nature, deviating considerably from the actual, everyday practices of social groups. This interacts with the strongly diametrical relationship between concepts and value systems of masculinity and femininity in South Korea

(Kim ES 2000) to produce an exaggerated gap between what is masculine behavior and what is feminine behavior.

Language and linguistic forms are not left out of these processes of commercialization and commodification of persona. Commodification of linguistic resources is a complex process by which communicative performances are produced as “skills that are marketable commodities rather than [as] expressions of true selves or of relatively good or poor accomplishments of socially located personae (whether within broad categories such as gender, class, or race or within kinship, institutional, political, religious, or other structures, such as femininity, or fatherhood, or adolescence, etc.)” (Heller 2010). The commodification of linguistic resources often focuses on the increased value that language has been afforded in a new globalized economy, particularly in industries such as tourism, marketing, language teaching, translation, communications, and performance art (Heller 2003, Heller 2010). The commercial space that is created by “idol real variety shows” is a locus for economic activity in which language use can undergo commodification. This is large due to the highly performative nature of the Kpop industry and its dependence on the manufacturing of popular star identities; in performing their “idol star personas”, Kpop idol groups generate trends in fashion, food, gesture, and, most importantly to this topic, language. This is not just the coining of popular phrases or perpetuation of slang use, but rather the use of language in a commercial space reifies linguistic styles and repertoires as having economic value and power. At the same time, this commodification is set in a media space that can produce a commodified form of the linguistic style that does not reflect actual use in everyday interaction. This can therefore lead to a commodified style that has developed exaggerated (or altogether different) indexes when compared to its naturally occurring counterpart (i.e. the use of the linguistic style in natural interaction as a resource for constructing

identity, rather than as a “skill”). Specifically, we shall see that aegyo as a speech style has gained economic value for idol groups in the context of an Aegyo Contest based on the desires of their fans. In the analysis that follows, I will show how aegyo has been commodified as a linguistic object that can be taken up and used to reach an economic goal, rather than being a natural linguistic component in the construction of the identity of the speaker. In doing so, the structures that attempt to control and manage this linguistic style and its valuation, however superficial, will be revealed, though it will not be focused on in this analysis.

3. Analyzing the Aegyo Contest

The data for this paper comes from two different episodes of the weekly Korean television show “Weekly Idol”, a variety show that runs 60 minutes per episode and features different Kpop artists and groups each week. The segment analyzed in Section 4 comes from Episode 108, featuring the group EXO, which aired August, 14, 2013. The segment used in Section 5, featuring the group BEAST, is from the following week, airing August 21, 2013.

In Korea, “idol real variety shows” such as this are a genre of television programming that features Kpop idol guests in a setting that puts their “manufactured” characters (Jung 2011) at center stage and gives the audience a different perspective on these stars in a variety of settings. The genre affords great success because these idols are able to display several different “images” in their appearances (Lee 2010); rather than relying on their looks and singing alone as pop stars of the past have, modern Korean pop stars are trained to have a number of talents at their disposal when performing: singing, dancing, acrobatics, and rapping, to name a few. Some talk-show style programming focuses on discussing hot topics, rumors, and scandals related to these pop stars’ lives. Others play more strongly on the multi-talented abilities of these stars and create “missions” or some other form of entertaining task that pit idols against each other in a

competitive setting. “Idol Weekly” taps into several of these entertainment styles to give a detailed look into the individual personas of each band member.

Appearing on reality shows such as this is crucial to developing a strong fan base for idols, as many fans claim to have become fans of particular Kpop performers after “seeing the stars’ true personalities” (Jung 2011:168). Clearly, then, idols who participate in these variety shows do so at least in part because of the commercial benefit that such appearances impart, which is important to keep in mind when discussing commodification.

The segments transcribed and presented here are from a now popular segment in the show: the Aegyo Contest. Though Aegyo Contests got their start on other programming featuring female celebrities, the Aegyo Contests featuring boy bands is now a regular sight on Weekly Idol. Because of the focus on aegyo performances in these contests, we can see how aegyo interacts with the identities and roles of each performer as they unfold in the discourse and see what kind of indexes of aegyo are oriented to in interaction in the media. The two aegyo contests presented here span across several minutes of the program and they have been transcribed in detail using notation common in CA transcription, roughly based on the convention that has been developed from Jefferson (2004). These transcripts include detail such as pause duration, gaze and gesture, overlap, and other extralinguistic information like laughter. Detailed transcription conventions can be found in the appendix.

The discursive moves that work to produce masculinity in the discourse are the focus of my analysis. I look primarily at the discourse that takes place leading up to and after aegyo performances in the aegyo contest. These are key places where “idol star personas” and their embodied masculinities are co-constructed and negotiated. As we shall see, any aegyo performance in the media is necessarily gender-charged, as the style is strongly associated with

women and femininity (Abelmann 2003, Han 2014, Harkness 2012, Jung 2011, Moon 2010, Moon under review, Strong 2013). Though real life practices differ from those in the media, the performative history of aegyo in South Korean society carries ideological associations of femininity with it¹⁵. As such, any masculine performer must resolve these feminine associations in regards to the masculinity that they are producing in the discourse, and there are several strategies that are used by performers and observers to do so. I include the other participants here because the masculinity that any given member is producing here does not happen as an independent process of one individual, but through the intersubjective discourse between all participants that takes place before, during, and after aegyo is done. Indeed, the *identities* of each member in terms of their “idol star persona” and the *masculine image* that goes along with it are not fixed; these are all aspects of each individual that emerge from the discourse as members position themselves and each other in relation to identity roles, expectations of masculinity, and performances of aegyo. This approach to identity comes from Bucholtz and Hall’s (2005) sociocultural linguistic conception of identity and interaction.

Considering that gender, sexuality, and identity are all constituted as localized practice in discourse, it makes sense that research focusing on social practice in interaction would be informative in such an analysis. There has been much recent research in language and gender that attempts to balance an ethnomethodology- and/or Conversation Analysis-based analysis with ethnography or other social analysis (see Kitzinger 2005, Land & Kitzinger 2005, Benwell 2011, Kiesling 2011). In this thesis, I will use Conversation Analysis (CA) research to inform the

¹⁵ Although I believe that in natural interaction aegyo does not exclusively index femininity, the sociocultural and ideological complexity of aegyo is beyond the reach of this study. Media representations of aegyo, however, tend to be strongly associated with women and femininity. Apart from the research cited here, there is evidence of this ideology in online discussions about aegyo as a style. This will be address more in more detail in the conclusion.

analysis of the interaction taking place in Aegyo Contests. This will include research on requests, preference structure, laughter, and Korean CA.

Though other CA work will be referenced and explained throughout the analysis as it becomes relevant, work on laughter plays a special role in this research and thus deserves some background explanation. Early research across several fields conceptualized laughter as an uncontrollable response to some stimulus (e.g. humor), as a social nicety, or as a means to insult (see Glen 2003 for a detailed discussion). However, recent research on interaction has found that laughing and laughter is much more than just an emotional response beyond our control or some social reflex; it is a conversational resource that can do actions. One tradition of research in CA theorizes laughter as “intentional social action” (Glenn 2003). That is, laughter is a strongly social phenomenon that is used in socially structured ways to perform specific social actions. The social actions that laughter can perform vary greatly, including affiliating or disaffiliating with other participants, establishing boundaries for social groups (Glenn 2003), constructing identity (Clift 2013, Liebscher & Dailey-O’Cain 2013), and out-grouping or in-grouping in terms of social group or community of practice. Of particular interest for this study is how laughter is used in interaction to affiliate with other participants and the social actions that can be made through laughing as a group. Summarizing Hertzler (1970), Glenn (2003) explains that shared laughter has some very important functions socially. Namely, shared laughter can create group unity or awareness or may be used to display group togetherness. At the same time, shared laughter “allows for the expression and maintenance of group values and standards, via the subjects and situations to which is refers” (Glenn, 2003: 30).

Crucially, laughter also plays a part in identity work and the construction of identity. Identity here is understood as emergent in the interaction between the self and other as an

intersubjective process by which interlocutors position themselves and each other in relation to “macro-level demographic categories, temporary and interactionally specific stances and participant roles, and local, ethnographically emergent cultural positions” (see Bucholtz & Hall 2005). In this interactional process laughter can be a resource by which much identity work can be accomplished. As with speech acts or performative utterances, actions *doing* identity work are performed when people laugh (Liebscher & Dailey-O’Cain 2013: 240). The specific identity work being done by laughter depends on a number of variables including who laughs first (self- or other-initiated), whether it is solo or shared, and what kinds of activities follow the laughter (Glenn 2013). These social functions of laughter play a big part in describing how participants and observers of the Aegyo Contests evaluate each aegyo performance in relation to the group, individuals, and the identities in the interaction.

Finally, this analysis is also ethnographic in nature: as a participant observer in Korean society when these episodes aired, I am able to make informed sociocultural observations about the Kpop groups and their members. This includes having first-hand knowledge of the groups featured in each episode, the individual roles that fans associate with each member, and other details about the Kpop industry. This background allows me to properly contextualize the interactions in a meaningful way that accounts for as much relevant sociocultural information as possible. All translations (and any errors) are my own.

4. The commodification of aegyo as indexing femininity

The data I present in this section comes from Episode 108 of “Weekly Idol”, featuring EXO, an idol group that is enjoying great popularity. The goal of this section is three fold: 1) to show how doing aegyo in the context of a contest on an “idol real variety show” commodifies aegyo, 2) to argue that the commodified version of aegyo present in this setting is specifically

indexical of femininity, and 3) to describe how individual “idol star personas” are actively constructed interactionally with aegyo as the focal point for this observation.

The idol group featured, EXO, was formed in 2011 by S.M Entertainment and consists of 12 members¹⁶ that make up two different sub-groups, EXO-K and EXO-M, which produce music in Korean and Mandarin, respectively. It is not unusual for an idol group to have so many members and to be fragmented for the purpose of specific performance goals. It is a common strategy for Kpop producers to form groups with so many members so as to increase the potential number of fans to which they appeal by having each member construct their “idol star persona” in a unique way. The makeup of this group itself shows the orientation toward manufacturing a group that relies on hybridity for its successful presentation to a fan base. Indeed, EXO follows the trend toward creating a transnational, hybrid idol group by including several members of non-Korean nationality: three of the EXO-M group are Chinese nationals and one is a citizen of Canada. Korean production companies are aware of the benefits of having multi-lingual members as well, and it is one of the strategies that they use to appeal more to foreign audiences (Jung 2011:78, 168).

The composition of this group promotes the potential for specialization in individual roles that the band members fill, and this overtly includes international aspects of each role as well. The fact that the group itself is split for the purpose of appealing to more specific fan bases is evidence of the intentional manufacturing processes of the Kpop industry and suggests that certain members have different roles in the group. In some cases, the roles are explicitly stated by the production company. For example Kris is the official “leader” of the EXO-M group.

¹⁶ As of October 2014, two of the band members have filed lawsuits to terminate their contracts and EXO officially only includes 10 members.

Other members are also given “positions” such as lead vocalist, lead dancer, or lead rapper, though Kpop entertainers are usually expected to be proficient in a number of skills, including different kinds of dancing, acrobatics, and vocal abilities (Jung 2011:164, Lee SH 2010). The recent tendency to apply nicknames labeling different types of groups (Jung 2011:164) has extended to nicknaming and labeling individual members as well—both by fans and by the management companies themselves (Leung 2012:29-30). Fan sites of idol groups in Korea often display these names and roles in the member profiles¹⁷.

The structure of the aegyo contest also has a very important effect on the interaction that unfolds here and in the data in the following sections: each of the member’s “turns” to do aegyo is essentially produced in response to a *request*. The basic structure of the contest is a request by the hosts for each member to do aegyo, even if the request is not overtly stated; it is implied in the way that the contest is structured with each participant being expected to do aegyo on their given turn, going in order and cued by the hosts. Though these requests are done and pursued directly by the hosts and the structure of the contest, there is an indirect force from the fans behind these requests that the hosts constantly attend to (in this example, it is evidenced in lines 5-6 below. Similar reference to the fans will be seen in examples to follow). In other words, even when the fans are not involved directly in the interaction, the requests being made by the hosts in this data are always framed as being the “for the fans” or as something the fans want to see.

¹⁷ For examples from EXO, see:
<http://www.exodicted.net/p/exo-profile.html>
<https://kpopcolorcodedlyrics.wordpress.com/exo-members-and-profiles/>

Requests as a first pair part (FPP) make relevant two different types of second pair part (SPP), namely granting or rejecting¹⁸ (Davidson 1984, Schegloff 2007: 59, Wootton 1981). For requests, grantings are typically preferred responses and rejections are dispreferred (Davidson 1984, Goodwin & Heritage 1990, Wootton 1981), and exhibit the characteristics of dispreferred responses. Namely, dispreferred responses, like the rejection of a request, involve delay whereas preferred responses (grantings in this case) are delivered immediately, without delay (Davidson 1984, Goodwin & Heritage 1990, Pomerantz 1984, Sidnell 2011).

Though granting and rejecting differ in terms of their preference status, they also differ in that they “embody different alignments toward the project undertaken in the first pair part” (Schegloff 2007: 59). At this point it is important to distinguish *alignment* from *affiliation*. Stivers (2008) defines alignment as having to do with the activity in progress whereas affiliation has to do with agreeing or disagreeing with the stance taken by some speaker. Aligning with some action means to allow it to proceed without impediment, and affiliation does not deal with the completion of a given action, but rather the evaluative stance of the given action. It has been shown that, like preferred and dispreferred responses, affiliative and aligning actions happen immediately but disaligning and disaffiliative actions are usually accompanied by delay and mitigation (Goodwin & Heritage 1990). Therefore *disaffiliative* and *disaligning* actions can have overlapping characteristics in interaction, though one can disaffiliate without disaligning, and vice versa.

However, the setting in this genre of aegyo contest places certain restrictions on the types of responses that participants can use in the face of the aegyo request. After all, the request happens

¹⁸ Although Wootton (1981: 85) points out that there can certainly be more types of SPP available in a request sequence (i.e. nongrantings, refusals, and rejections), this analysis does not necessitate such a fine-grain distinction between rejection types.

on a talk show that is for the fans, in a contest where the importance of the fans is emphasized by the hosts (as we shall see), with participants who are actively part of a system that manufactures personas for the sole purpose of gaining more fans. The pressure placed on the group members to do aegyo by the hosts, the fans, the contest, and the program as a whole makes it almost impossible for them to reject or refuse the request. Therefore, it becomes important to distinguish alignment from affiliation, because the group members who are asked to do aegyo use this fine line to carefully navigate the construction of their individual personas. The way that each member is positioned discursively with regard to aegyo depends largely on the kind of masculinity associated with and constructed for their star persona. The interactional strategies used in negotiation of each persona's masculinity, be it soft, cool, tough, or otherwise, with regard to feminine aegyo performances relies on the distinction between alignment and association.

The segment of the show featuring an Aegyo Contest begins with EXO seated single-file across an all-white stage—the filming location for all “Weekly Idol” episodes—with the two hosts, Deafconn and Jeong Hyeong-don, situated between them.



Figure 4.1: The opening set-up for EXO's Aegyo Contest

The contest begins with Host Jeong Hyeong-don setting the scene for the contest:

HD = Host Jeong Hyeong-don, **DC** = Host Defconn

- 1 HD *sasir-↑eun nam:ja bo:igeurub¹⁹-i () igeo eoryeop-seupnida=*
Actually-TOP male boy.groups-NOM this difficult-FOR
"Actually () this is difficult for boy groups"
- 2 DC = *eoreop-j-yo?*
 Difficult-SUP-POL
"It's difficult, isn't it?"
- 3 HD *eoryeowo-yo*
 difficult-POL
"It is difficult."

Before the contest even begins, the Host Jeong Hyeong-don frames doing aegyo as being difficult for "boy groups", and Host Defconn agrees with this assessment, which is again followed by Jeong Hyeong-don once more restating that "it's difficult". Because this assessment of aegyo performances is made before any of the group members have done aegyo, the hosts show that they are speaking as "experts", having seen numerous aegyo contests as a segment of the show. Through their assessment they display an orientation toward an ideology about aegyo. Describing aegyo as difficult for "boy groups" (line 1) highlights the gender of the group members and displays an attitude about aegyo that clashes with it. As mentioned before, the representation and construction of gendered characters in the media is very often highly stereotypical (Motschenbacher 2010:26-27) and stereotypes of gendered language based on ideology is no exception. I argue that the line drawn between aegyo and "boy groups" indicates that the hosts are orienting toward the feminine associations of aegyo as a gendered style; an ideology of that has been observed by numerous scholars (Abelmann 2003, Han 2014, Harkness

¹⁹ This use of English for "boy group" has become very popular in the Kpop industry, though it is not unusual for English loan words to become commonly used like this, especially in specialized fields like media. It is, however, further evidence of Korea's orientation toward globalization and hybridity in the media industry.

2012, Jung 2011, Moon 2010, Moon under review, Strong 2013) and is extremely common in everyday metalinguistic discourse about aegyo.

Looking at the next exchange will help illuminate how the group members themselves orient towards aegyo. Furthermore, we find evidence of aegyo’s status as a linguistic commodity in the media. Sitting on the far left (**Figure 4.1**), the group member D.O. is first to go in the aegyo contest, being introduced by the hosts:

HD = Host Jeong Hyeong-don, **DC** = Host Defconn, **DO** = D.O., **CH** = Chen, **CY** = Chanyeol, **LH** = Luhan, **GM** = Group members

4 DC a: *D.O.: aegyo ha-myeon tto D.O.-j-yo*
 ah D.O. aegyo do-if again D.O.-SUP-POL
 “Ah, if we’re talking aegyo, it’s D.O.”

5 HD *fen yeoreobun-deul-hante (.) ye (0.5) ↑ (mesiji >hana)<*
 fan everyone-PL-DAT yes message one
 6 ↓ *jinjja gwiyeopge*
 really cutely
 7 (0.3)
 “(Give a message) to all of your fans, very cutely”



4.2

8 DO ((Throwing head back, eyes closed) Ah:::

9 HD ((in English)) five, [six, seven, eight

10 DF [six, seven, eight

11 DO ((in aegyo voice)) *>annyeonghaseyo EXO D.O.-i-mnida<*
 Hello EXO D.O-is-FOR
 “Hello this is D.O. from EXO”

12 ((doing V sign over one eye)) *nGHAHAHA*

13 DO ((now doing double-V over eyes)) *Nyah:HAhaha*
 14 ((braces self on knees, hangs head, and directs gaze toward
 15 the ground))
 16 (0.5)



4.3

17 ALL ((simultaneous laughing and clapping))

18 CHEN [((leans over and hugs DO))

19 DC *[igeo- igeo jinjja an ha-neun saram-eu:n jeoldae*
 this this really not do-PNM people-TOP absolutely

personalities” (Jung 2011:168). Clearly, then, idols who participate in these variety shows do so at least in part because of the commercial benefit that such appearances impart. These contests act as an arena in which aegyo can gain economic capital as a linguistic commodity for idol groups whose careers depend on accumulating and maintaining a fanbase.

That is not to say that performing aegyo does not play a part in constructing identity for these contestants. Although aegyo might be performed by some members of the band as simply a commodity by which economic power is gained, there are indexical properties clearly associated with aegyo as a speech style that work dynamically in the discourse to do identity work. Of particular interest is a pattern of resistance though disaffiliation and initial disalignment with aegyo performance requests and grantings that is used by boy band members in aegyo contests. I will unravel these indexes and strategies by first looking at how D.O.’s performance plays out, and then follow up with another band member’s execution of aegyo.

Starting with line 8, we see D.O.’s hesitation to take his turn, though he does not outright refuse or make argument. As mentioned above, in terms of responding to a request this is a clear sign of disalignment, disaffiliation, and forecasts a potential dispreferred response. When the hosts count off in anticipation of his performance (lines 9-10), D.O. goes through with his performance, integrating aegyo vocal qualities and gesture, though it is immediately followed by his own laughter in line 12, another aegyo gesture, and then more laughter. This laughter is significant because laughter is always *indexical* (Glenn 2003: 48). That is, there is always a referent *laughable*, which can be anything that motivates the use of laughter, and laughter is typically placed concurrently with or adjacent to the laughable. When the speaker, D.O., laughs during his turn in lines 11-12, he is extending an invitation to begin shared laughter (ibid.). The other participants, having the option to laugh or not, all disattend the laughter in both cases. In

this interaction, it makes sense that they would not join in laughing, as the laughable to which D.O.'s laughter refers is not transparent. Indeed, because of D.O.'s outward display of resistance in line 8—closing his eyes, throwing his head back, and saying “ah”—it seems more likely that D.O.'s laughter is not due to a preexisting laughable, but is instead an attempt to evoke a frame of play or humor to mitigate his (rather, his persona's) own negative stance toward the performance of aegyo. Glenn (2003) explains that something framed as play or humor is perceived as less serious, and conversational acts within such a frame therein carry less serious “consequences” (137). Joining in with laughter shows the mutual ratification of a given frame, which could be humorous or ludic (ibid. 54). If D.O. could ratify the situation as a “laughable” one, and those co-present orient toward it and join in the laughter, it could produce an effect of laughing *with* D.O., rather than at him. That is, the situation could be determined to be laughable and D.O.'s laughter would invite others to appreciate the situation. Glenn describes this kind of interaction as being different from laughing *at* someone, which has a very different set of interactional features.

When the other participants do begin to laugh, it is after a noticeable pause (line 16) which is preceded by another embodied display of disaffiliation by D.O.: he braces himself against his legs, directs his gaze down, and goes silent (line 14-16; also see figure 4.3); the sequential structure (particularly the delay after D.O.'s invitation in line 13 and immediate display of stance) indicates that the hosts and other group members' laughter is not following D.O.'s invitation, but rather it is oriented toward a different laughable altogether. That is, the laughter appears to be in reaction to D.O.'s own stance taking on his aegyo performance (lines 14-16). In fact, D.O. assumes this embodied evaluation so quickly after his performance that others do not even have time to offer an opinion about his aegyo before he displays his own stance. The

invitation for laughter, though, could have been accepted and produced in overlap with D.O.'s physical stance taking, such that it could be noticeably absent during the 0.5 second pause after D.O.'s laughter and change in posture. The reason for his apparent discomfort and display of negative stance taking is retroactively accounted for by his coparticipants in the discourse that follows.

After the laughter subsides, Defconn offers an account for D.O., saying that aegyo is difficult for people who don't usually do it, which receives uptake from one of the group members. This is followed by Hyeong-don commenting about how D.O. "seems to have a kind of manly style" in line 22. One group member agrees with this with a "Yeah" and offers an account by saying that D.O. is "very manly²⁰." The sequence of aegyo performance → it is difficult to do if you are in a boy group/don't usually do it → to commentary about D.O.'s masculinity, despite having no prior relevance, highlights that aegyo is in direct opposition with someone who is "manly". This is further evidence that the commodified form of aegyo present in the media and these contests is rooted in the ideology that aegyo is associated with femininity. This harks back to line 1 when Hyeong-don introduces the aegyo contest as being "difficult for boy groups." Because of the media's tendency to exaggerate stereotypes (Motschenbacher 2010) and Korea's extremely polar concepts of masculinity and femininity (Kim ES 2000), the aegyo style that is commodified here is one that is strongly feminine, even if in everyday interaction aegyo as a style does not carry such strong feminine indexes. In the interactions that follow, we shall see how the hosts and group members orient toward this ideology of aegyo.

²⁰ The word in Korean does not mean "man-like", but rather that someone typifies the essence of masculinity. This is a distinction that is very clearly drawn in Korea. For example, one could refer to a woman as being "man-like", but to say she is "manly" would be generally considered quite bizarre.

Moreover, we shall see a continued pattern of disaffiliation and initial disalignment by those members whose personas' do not fit with the production of aegyo. In line 8 when D.O. displays discomfort/stress, he disaligns and disaffiliates with granting the request by delaying the action, forecasting a dispreferred response (i.e. not granting the request). However, as I have pointed out there is a great deal of pressure on the members to grant the request coming from the hosts and the fans. To not grant the request would result in potential economic loss by not complying with the wants of the fans (as articulated by the show). But, as D.O.'s persona is "very manly", to grant the aegyo request completely willingly could undermine the masculinity associated with his persona because of the feminine associations with the style. One strategy that occurs across interactions to deal with this is disaffiliation and initial disalignment toward the request that shows resistance toward the aegyo performance, but always ends in granting the request. Thus, D.O. can maintain a disaffiliative stance towards doing aegyo—that it is not something he should do—while still eventually moving the sequence forward by completing the granting. This allows D.O. to attend to the desires of the fans while also maintaining his persona's stance toward the feminized aegyo present in these contests. We will see examples of this strategy in following sections.

The construction of identity and performance of masculinity can be explicated at the group level by considering an interaction that takes place during EXO member Sehun's turn in the same contest just two turns later. This interaction will offer a first look at how these idol groups negotiate the masculinities of their "idol star personas" collectively through discourse and how this commodified aegyo style provides an opportunity to index "soft" or *kawaii* masculinity. This interaction begins when Hyeong-don transitions from the end of another member's turn to initiating Sehun's aegyo performance:

“Like this.”

In line 27, Hyeong-don describes Sehun as “having a lot of aegyo”, which is confirmed by two of the group members in lines 28-29. Hyeong-don elaborates further, claiming that Sehun is apparently known to do aegyo to his “Older Brothers”, which includes everyone in the band because Sehun is actually the youngest member²⁴. Without Sehun saying or doing anything to contribute to this sequence, several important aspects of his identity (or that of his “idol star persona”) have been negotiated between the host and his fellow band members. Sehun continues the conversation in lines 31-32 where he suggests that he sing the ‘Cutie Song’, a suggestion which Hyeong-don accepts. Sehun then begins not to *sing* the song, but rather to just perform the iconic aegyo gestures that go with the viral video that made the song popular while his band members sing the lyrics.

Already this interaction differs from that of D.O.’s in that Sehun does not display any disalignment or disaffiliation in regard to the request. In fact, he goes so far as to suggest using the ‘Cutie Song’ which is well known as being a very aegyo-y performance. His lack of delay and immediate cooperation with granting the request—and upgrading of it—display his willingness to do aegyo. Thus far, Sehun(’s persona) does not display any reservations with doing aegyo, and we shall see that it is practically expected of him to have a certain competence with aegyo.

The lines during the song have been omitted, but in the fragment below we pick back up when Hyeong-don interrupts Sehun for a lackluster performance. Hyeong-don goes into a

²⁴ The youngest member of a group—be it an idol group or a group of friends—holds a special position in the group called “Mangnae”, which means “youngest child (i.e. in a family)”. There are ideologies that surround the behavior of a Mangnae and how they should be treated.

lengthy description of how to do the ‘Cutie Song’ in a more aegyo-y way and then questions

Sehun’s role as the youngest in the group:

HD = Host Jeong Hyeong-don, **SH** = Sehu, **BH** = Baekhyun

38 HD *ireon geo haejwo-ya dwae-yo:~ (Sehun:~)*
this.kind thing do.for-COMP must-POL Sehun
“You have to do this kind of thing, Sehun”

39 =((pointing at Sehun)) *mangnae ani-mnikka?*
youngest.child not-FOR.INT
“Are you not the Mangnae?”

40 (?) *maja-yo=*
Right-POL
“Right.”

41 SH = *maj-seumnida* ((not looking at HD))
Right-FOR
“Correct.”

42 HD <*mangnae-dau-n*> (.) >*mangnae-seureowo= yaegi hanbeon*
Youngest.child-like-PNM Youngest.child-like speak once
43 *butakdeuri-lge-yo*<
request.HON-PRM-POL
“Mangnae-like... I’ll ask you do to it once more, please--like a Mangnae”

44 SH ((averts gaze and rubs neck))

45 HD *wollae jom (.) sangnamja-i-mnikka?*
originally a.bit tough.guy-is-FOR.INT
“Are you originally more like a tough guy²⁵?”
46 (0.9)



4.3

47 SH *an[i-*
no
“No-.”

48 BH [*ani-yo aegyo manha-yo*
no-POL aegyo a.lot-POL
“No, he has lots of aegyo.”

49 GM ((several members speaking at once))=

50 (?) =*aegyo manha-yo*

²⁵ This “tough guy” is also a certain kind of guy that is an ideologically known type of person in Korean society. This “tough guy” is hypermasculine, a “man’s man”, with hints of a “bad boy”.

aegyo a.lot-POL
 "(He has) lots of aegyo."

51 HD *gwiyomi*:[five six seven eight,
 cutie five six seven eight
 "Cutie (song) five, six, seven, eight."

52 [*dasi norae bulleo-juseyo*
 again song sing-please.HON.POL
 "Sing (it) again one more time, please."

 ((Song lines omitted))

53 SH ((upon completing the song)) *gwiyomi*:: ((begins applauding))
 Cutie
 "Cutie"

54 ((Sehun's applause followed immediately by all other band
 55 members))

After explaining to Sehun how to properly do an aegyo-y rendition of the ‘Cutie Song’, Hyeong-don calls Sehun’s status as “Mangnae” into question—an act that both questions his performance as the Mangnae and names him as the Mangnae, a title that has not been brought up before. “Mangnae” means “the youngest child in a family”, though it is also used to describe the youngest member of any social group. This could be a group of friends, classmates, or, in this case, the youngest member of an idol group. In the Kpop industry, Mangnae has become one of the labels used by management companies and fans to label certain kinds of group members in an idol group. There are many stereotypes and characteristics associated with being the Mangnae that are the result of Korean social structure’s emphasis on age in terms of determining relative social rank and, accordingly, social behavior. Mangnae are likely to display the highest level of politeness and deference in a group because of the expectations of behavior by younger people to their seniors. These are also properties associated with *seonbi* masculinity, which Jung (2011) takes as the basis for South Korean soft masculinity. Moreover, Mangnae are also assumed to be

the most childish of the group and in the Kpop industry this also equates directly to cuteness; the Mangnae is the role “whose responsibility is to be the ‘cute,’ lovable band member” (Leung 2012:30). Being the youngest in the group automatically makes Sehun the “Mangnae”, and this is an essential part of—if not his entire—“idol star persona”. The masculinity associated with and expected from this role has several of the components of Jung’s (2011) South Korean soft masculinity. Having a role that is an open subject in the discourse highlights his identity for negotiation, especially because his status as the Mangnae has been brought into question. This role is thus negotiated not only by Sehun, but by the discourse that describes him.

When Hyeong-don questions him in line 39, Sehun answers, but not before another group member does for him. In lines 42-43, Hyeong-don asks Sehun to try again, but a little more “like a Mangnae”. When Sehun delays his response by rubbing his neck, Hyeong-don follows up by asking if he is actually more of a “tough guy”, effectively giving him a way out of doing the performance and again juxtaposing aegyo and manliness. This also shows that Hyeong-don seems to have interpreted this neck rub and averted gaze as being an act of disalignment or disaffiliation toward doing aegyo; indeed, speakers of a first pair part can anticipate an upcoming dispreferred response based on features such as delay and take actions to prevent it from being produced (Davidson 1984:102, Sidnell 2011:80). Almost as soon as Sehun answers by denying that he is a “tough guy”, though, he is overlapped by his group members, who all attest to him having plenty of aegyo. Indeed, Sehun goes on to do his aegyo performance without further delay after Hyeong-don counts off (line 51) and he shows a positive self-appraisal by initiating applause (line 53), which all of the other group members align to and affiliate with by orienting their gaze toward Sehun and joining in the applause immediately (lines 54-55).

As was the case with D.O., members that resist doing aegyo display hesitation through physically showing delay and disaffiliation. Unlike D.O., however, Sehun does not display this kind of resistance until his attempted performance is called into question by the host. In fact, prior to taking his turn, Sehun himself proposes doing the ‘Cutie Song’ and displays eagerness—or at least willingness—to perform aegyo. His neck rub in line 44, then, can be interpreted not as disaligning with the request to do aegyo itself, but rather as disaligning and disaffiliating with the second request after an attempt judged to be less than satisfactory. Recall that, upon completion of his, turn D.O. displayed a negative stance toward his own performance by averting his gaze, hanging his head, and bracing against his legs. In the case of Sehun’s second attempt, in contrast, he immediately follows his performance with a self-initiated applause that is followed by his band members, exhibiting a very different and overall more positive assessment of the aegyo performance. In any case, we see again that that the roles and “idol star personas” are negotiated cooperatively by others and by the individual being described.

The construction of both D.O.’s and Sehun’s “idol star personas” were framed in relation to aegyo and expressions of their individual masculinities. Whereas D.O. was unable to and not expected to successfully perform aegyo because of his role in the group as being “very manly” (lines 22-26), Sehun was treated quite differently because of the special status he holds as Mangnae. The Mangnae role, as well as Sehun’s individual Mangnae persona, were constructed in the discourse in such a way as to allow—and almost insist—that he do aegyo and do it with a certain level of proficiency. The Mangnae role and its soft masculinity allows for more flexibility in regard to doing aegyo. Jung (2011) points out that South Korean soft masculinity can have feminine aspects without being *feminized*, and I believe this to be the key to Sehun’s ability to do aegyo successfully. Because his soft masculinity is not feminine or indexical of femininity (it

still gives an overall impression of masculinity) but still contains feminine aspects (i.e. politeness, innocence, purity), Sehun is able integrate other feminine features into his persona's construction, inducing aegyo. In this one contest, EXO is able to present their "idol start personas", negotiate in real time the emerging details of those identities in relation to a feminized aegyo style, and successfully produce several different components that collectively manifest as their hybrid masculine image.

5. The performance of masculinities through the interaction of aegyo and band roles

In Section 4, I presented an analysis demonstrating how performances of the commodified, feminine aegyo speech style are negotiated in terms of the individual roles in EXO and their expressions of masculinity. In this section, I will show how aegyo provides opportunities for the expression of diverse and hybrid masculinities without overt linguistic reference to gender in the interaction. For example, unlike the EXO interaction, participants in the following aegyo contest featuring the band Beast do not speak of "manliness" in the discourse, but still orient to the individual idol personas and their associated masculinities vis-à-vis aegyo performances. The data for this section from the episode "Weekly Idol" immediately following that in Section 4 (Episode 109, August 21, 2013).

This episode of "Weekly Idol" features the idol group Beast, a Kpop band consisting of 6 members. Beast, like EXO, is a Kpop group that is invested in the international market place, having released entire songs in Japanese as well. As with other Kpop groups, their international success relies on their transnationality, and in turn the construction of a hybrid masculine image.

The segment that I will be analyzing is a regular part of the show called the "DoniConi Idol Call Center" which features a fan-recorded telephone message that is prepared prior to

filming the show. In this particular episode, a fan calls in requesting that two of the members—Jang Hyun-seung and Yong Jun-hyung—have an aegyo contest. The members of Beast sit with the two hosts, Hyeong-don and Defconn, in the same all-white studio.



Figure 5.1: The opening set-up for Beast's Aegyo Contest
Left -to-right: Defconn, Hyeong-don, GM1, GM2, Hyun-seung, Jun-hyung, GM3, GM3

The scene begins by playing the fan-recorded message requesting the aegyo contest and the group's initial reactions:

HOST = Host, **HD** = Host Jeong Hyeong-don, **DC** = Host Defconn, **JH** = Jun-hyung, **HS**= Hyun-seung, **FAN** = call-in fan, **GM#** = group member (from L-to-R)

1 FAN *Jun-hyungi oppa-rang Hyun-seung-i oppa* (1.0)
Jun-hyung-DIM older.brother-and Hyun-seung-DIM older.brother
2 *aegyo-daegyeol [hanbeon-man hae-ju-se-yo*
aegyo-contest once-only do-please-HON-POL
"Jun-hyung brother and Hyun-seung brother please have an aegyo contest."

3 HOST [↑ oh?

4 JH ((Hanging his head, gaze fixed on ground))

5 GM1 *aegyo eomn-neun du chingu*
aegyo without-PNM two friend
"Two guys without aegyo."



5.2

6 DC *ya:: Jun-hyung-i oppa: jigeum yeogi-kkaji [konsaep-teu*
hey Junhyung-DIM older.brother now here-up.to concept
7 *da gatgo wa-nn-neunde (.)yeogi-seo jikjeop aegyo-ro(.*
all bring-PST-CON here-LOC directly aegyo-INS
8 *hwak (()) ha-ge doe-neunya*
MIM do-COMP become-INT

“Hey, he brought his concept all this way, let’s see if he (())²⁶ through aegyo.”

9 GMS

[huhahahahaha

10 JH ((Hanging his head, gaze fixed on ground)) →

11 HS *jeo-neun guji sasil i bunwigi*
1S.HUM-TOP at.all actually this atmosphere
12 *sog-eseo-neun mwo=*
inside-LOC-TOP like



5.3

“I mean, really, in this atmosphere, like...”

13 HD =*ai Hyun-seung hanbeon hae-jwo-yo~* (.) *faen yeorobun faen-i eopsi*
ai Hyunseung once do-please-POL fan everyone fan-NOM without
14 *Biseuteu-ga eops-eul su* ((unintelligible)) *kka?*
Beast-NOM without-can INT

“Oh Hyun-seung just do it once~ all the fan-- without the fans Beast could not be ((unintelligible))?”

15 HS *i jilmun maeu manha-tt-dae-yo*
this question very a.lot-PST-HR-POL

“They say this question was very frequent.”

16 DC *arass-seum[nida:]*
I.understand-FOR

“Alright.”

17 HD [*aratt-j-yo* (.) *eomcheong manha-tt-dae-yo=*
I.understand-SUP-POL very a.lot-PST-HR-POL

“Right. Extremely frequent.”

18 DC =*geureoh-chi:*
like.that-SUP

“Isn’t that right?”

There are two things that are important to notice here. First, as we see in line 1-2, this is not just another aegyo contest, but specifically a *fan requested* aegyo contest; this immediately sets the scene as one in which aegyo will be treated as a commodity, as we have seen in the previous contest. In this contest, though, there is a much more direct link to the fans as a source of the request, whereas in the EXO contest the fans desires were primarily articulated by the hosts.

²⁶ The unintelligible word here is being modified by the polysemous mimetic “hwak”. “Hwak” can adverbially express the suddenness in a change of state or happening of an action (i.e. with verbs like “collapse” or “change”). This seems like the most likely meaning here, and can help with understanding what the unheard word might be.

Upon hearing the entire message, GM1 notes in line 5 that neither of these members “have aegyo”, prefacing potential interactional trouble as the scene unfolds. Jun-hyung hangs his head, disengaging from the interaction, while Host Defconn highlights Jun-hyung’s “concept” (line 6), which is a Konglish word that essentially refers to Jun-hyung’s “idol star persona”, the image that he presents as a member of Beast. While Jun-hyung shows physical resistance throughout this introduction (cf. line 10), Hyun-seung shows resistance through his speech, questioning the relevance of doing aegyo in this “atmosphere” (lines 11-12), attempting to make an account for not granting. Both the embodied resistance and spoken resistance here exhibit the same characteristics of D.O.’s disaffiliation and disalignment strategy from the previous section. Having already been described as members without aegyo, this affiliates both Hyun-seung and Jun-hyung with GM1’s evaluation that neither member has aegyo. At the same time, it disaligns from the completion of the request.

These actions all act as indicators of an upcoming dispreferred response which, as mentioned before, can be anticipated by the producer of the first pair part. In the example from EXO’s Sehun, the requester Hyeong-don provided an account for Sehun to not be comfortable with aegyo when Sehun projected a potential dispreferred response. However, “rather than withdraw the action in the face of a projected dispreferred response, the speaker can add further talk in an effort to make it more appealing or easier to accept” (Sidnell 2011:80). In lines 13-14 Hyeong-don does just this by pursuing the granting with an upgrade, reminding Hyun-seung that Beast would not exist if it were not for the fans. Not only does this re-emphasize again the economic pressures behind the request, but it also shows that Hyeong-don aligns and affiliates with the fan request, and takes on some authority to pursue it (we will see continued pursuit such as this by both of the hosts in following interactions).

20 HD ((in aegyo voice)) *jeohui biθeuteu-neun faen yeoreobun-deur-i*
 1PL.HUM Beast-TOP fan everyone-PL-NOM

21 *itt-gi ttaemune itt-da-mni↑da:*
 to.be-NML because to.be-DEC-FOR

“(in aegyo voice) We, Beath, exist because of you fans.”

22 HD ((no longer in aegyo voice) > *yogeon-man butakdeuri-lge-yo:* <
 this-only request.HON-PRM-POL

“(no longer in aegyo voice) We’ll ask for just this.”

23 GM °*swipda=swipda*^o
 easy easy
 “Easy, easy.”

24 HD *swip-janha-yo:*
 easy-SUP-POL
 “It’s that easy.”



25 DC *Yong Baewoo beolsseo jigeum gamjeong-eul [jap-go itt-janha-yo::*
 Yong Baewoo already now emotion-ACC catch-PROG-SUP-POL

“Yong Baewoo is already trying to get a handle on his emotions.”

26 JH [((gaze directed at
 27 ground, away from host))

28 JH [((gaze directed upward breathing out))

29 HD [*ja Hyun-seung-buteo ha-lge-yo:*
 DM Hyun-seung-from do-PRM-POL

“Okay, we’ll start with Hyun-seung.”



30 HS \$*jeo-neu- nareum- jeo-do nareum [kariseuma damdang-inde\$*
 1S.HUM-TOP in.my.way 1S.HUM-too in.my.way ‘charisma’ leader-CON

“\$I mean, I- I’m kind of the charisma leader.\$”

31 HOST [↑ye↓::
 yes
 “Yeah.”

32 HD: *au AN ha-si-myeon AN ha-syeo-do dwae-yo. faen yeoreobun-deul*
 au not do-HUM-if not do-HUM-be.okay-POL fan everyone-PL

33 *butakha-neun geo*
 request-PNM thing

“OH, if you DON’T want to do it, you DON’T have to. It’s your FAN’S request-.”

34 GM1 ((covering face with shirt)) *mot bo-l geo gat[ae::*
 Can’t look-seem

“I don’t think I can watch.”

In this aegyo contest, unlike the EXO contest, the aegyo to be performed is directly modeled by Host Hyeong-don in his set-up of the aegyo performance that is expected of Jun-hung and Hyun-seung (lines 19-21). Additionally, in lines 20-21, Hyeong-don directly connects the importance of the fans to this group, saying “We, Be@t, exist because of you fans,” strengthening the economic investment in the contest. By pre-performing the aegyo act and emphasizing the fan’s relationship to the band, Hyeong-don underscores that the contest is focusing on a skillful reproduction of *a type* of aegyo that produces some economic benefit (e.g. pleasing the fans), thus reinforcing the commodified status of the speech style.

More importantly, though, this interaction pushes the discursive construction of Hyun-seung and Jun-hyung’s roles in the group and how they relate to aegyo. In line 25, Defconn again draws attention to Jun-Hyung, this time commenting on how he appears to be struggling emotionally as they approach his turn to perform aegyo. In image 5.4 above, Jun-hyung is still disengaged from the interaction and Defconn described this as being some emotional struggle. At the same time, Hyun-seung (directly to the left of Jun-hyung) is smiling, gaze fixed on the hosts. The embodied expressions of their alignment toward the unfolding interaction continues along with the development of the discourse. For example, though Hyun-seung initially showed resistance, after being selected to go first by Hyeong-don in line 30 he invokes his role in the group as the “charisma leader” using smile-voice.

This claim works synergistically with the “idol star persona” that Hyun-seung is assumed to have: he is the bright, light-hearted, sometimes child-like main vocalist for the group, and emphasizing his role as the charisma leader highlights and reproduces specific aspects of his persona. It is crucial to note that this utterance claiming the role of “charisma leader” ends with the connective *-inde*. This connective has been described as a contrastive marker (H.

Choi 1965, J. Choi 1990), as indicating background information or establishing a situation (H. Lee 1991), and as a “background builder” with specific pragmatic functions (K. Lee 1980, 1993) that connects a subordinate clause to the main clause of an utterance. However, Park (1999) demonstrates that this connective can be used utterance-finally in conversation without a main clause to invite the interlocutor to infer what the main clause would be, given the “background” info marked with the connective *-nuntey*²⁹. This use also allows the speaker to “achieve ‘being indirect’” (Park 1999:216) and “can frame interactionally delicate actions such as requests, disagreements and denials and allow the speakers to avoid explicitly stating their intentions” (ibid: 191). Hyun-seung’s use of *-inde* in line 30 provides background for the hosts to use in inferring the main clause: he leaves it up to the hosts to arrive at the conclusion that being the “charisma leader” is relevant here, without stating overtly that this makes him more able to do aegyo. By doing so in such an indirect way, he maintains a certain distance from aegyo by not outright claiming the ability to do aegyo while also making his role relevant in the interaction.

This subtle discursive move repositions him from being one of the “two boys without aegyo” (line 5) to being someone that might qualify as being allowed to aegyo, not unlike the Mangnae role we saw with EXO’s Sehun. At the same time, the indirectness of this move allows Hyun-seung to sidestep the responsibility of naming himself as aegyo-compatible, thus giving himself more leeway in the interaction to carefully negotiate his “idol star persona” without being too committal.

²⁹ In Park’s (1999) paper, she transcribes the connective as *-nuntey*, but the same connective seen in the data presented in line 30 is transcribed with different Romanization conventions. Furthermore, it is the copular + connective, resulting in a different form, but with an identical function.

The discursive positioning of themselves and each other actively reproduces the identities of their “idol star personas”. That is, Hyun-seung is moving himself closer to being an aegyo-able persona, and the hosts are moving Jun-hyung further away. However, Hyun-seung has not yet been completely evaluated as someone who can do aegyo. Group Member 1 further shapes the emerging roles by taking a stance toward the imminent performance in line 34, disaffiliating and disaligning from Hyun-seung’s upcoming aegyo performance by hiding his face and saying that he can’t watch. However, as we will see in the following segment, Hyun-seung is, in the end, able to reconcile his persona as being compatible with doing aegyo. This is only clear in the turns that follow his final performance of aegyo as those co-present respond to it.

In this section of data, Hyun-seung does two separate aegyo performances according to Hyeong-don’s instructions. The way in which his fellow band members and the hosts react to each performance is quite different, and it is precisely these reactions that will shape how Hyun-seung’s persona is shaped with regard to aegyo:

35 DC =geureonikka paen [yeoreobun-deur-i <an bo-n geo-leul>
so fan everyone-PL-NOM not see-PNM thing-ACC
36 bo-go sipeoha-neun geo geuge paen-ui yokgu-ye-yo::
see-want-PNM thing that fan-GEN request-is-POL
“Exactly, the fans want to see something they’ve not seen before. That’s your fan’s request.”

37 HS [(HS head falls into his lap; JH
38 breathing deeply; GM1 still hiding face; two members
39 gazing at floor; one member looking at hosts)] →

40 HS ((looking back up to ceiling again))

41 HD ((in English)) \$five, [six, seven, eight
42 DC [six, seven, eight



43 HS ((poking his own cheeks with index fingers³⁰; using aegyo
44 voice))hanu jom ju-s[e-yo
Korean.beef bit give-HON-POL

³⁰ This is a gesture called “ppuingppuing” that was typified as being aegyo gesture when it was made popular by a famous drama actor. It has since become a readily recognizable gesture that carries much cultural information.

"Give me Hanwoo, please."

45 ??

[HUHUUHU



46 HS

((instant replay lines 41-42))

47 HS

((looking to hosts, claps hands together & smiling

48

largely))Huhehe^ohehehe^o

49

((GM1 gets out of his chair to turn his back from JS; other four members all looking at the floor; one member plugging his ears; one member covering his own face))

52 HD

((grabbing GM1)) *ajik nam- ajik nama itt-janha-yo*
still left still left PERF-SUP-POL

"There's still more left."

53 HD

((aegyo voice)) *uri bi θ euteu- (.) uri- uri bi θ euteu=*
1PL.PN Beast 3PL.PN 3PL.PN Beast

54

=<*bi θ euteu-neun-yo*>

Beast-TOP-POL

"((in aegyo voice)) We, Bea θ t- We- We Bea θ t- Bea θ t."

55

((resuming nonaegyo voice)) *ireohke ha-neun geo*
Like.this do-PNM thing

"((in non-aegyo voice)) Doing it like this"

56

((GM1 completely turned around in seat away from HS; GM2 head hung with gaze on floor; JH still gazing at floor; G3 looking opposite direction from HS; GM4 gazing at floor covering face))

60 HS

((in aegyo voice)) *uri bi θ euteu[-neun-yo*
3PL.PN Beast-TOP-POL

"We, Bea θ t."

61

((instant replay; in aegyo voice))

62 HS

((pointing at camera then poking cheeks again))

63

paen yeoreobun-deur-i itt-gi-e <inn-neun
fan everyone-PL-NOM to.be-NML-LOC to.be-PNM

64

geo-ra-mnida:>

thing-DEC-FOR

"We are here because of all you fans."

65 HS

((laughs first and starts clapping))

66 HOSTS

[((Hosts clap))



5.8

67 GM1

[((turns back around laughing and clapping, looking toward HS))

68

69 GM4

[((looks up from floor, briefly glances toward HS, then

70 looks forward clapping) Whoo::

71 GM2 ((looks up from floor, nodding, smiling and clapping))

72 JH ((looks up from floor smiling and clapping, then looks back
73 down again))

74 GM2 ((looks up laughing and clapping))

75 GM3 ((still gazing at floor, but rocking forward then back
76 laughing))

77 GM? *gwiyeowo= gwiyeowo*
 cute cute
 "Cute, cute."

78 JH ((head hanging low, gaze fixed at floor again))

Defconn furthers the hosts' point about the fans (lines 35-36) and both Hyun-seung and Junhyung continue to show resistance through their body language, but when the hosts count off for Hyun-seung (lines 41-42), Hyun-seung begins his performance immediately. The important parts here are not how Hyun-seung performs aegyo, but rather the actions that take place immediately afterward.

Before Hyun-seung finishes his performance, laughter from one of the other members is heard. Usually in multi-party interactions it is not the speaker who laughs first when producing a laughable (Glenn 2003: 88) and when someone else laughs first it can indicate that the speaker produced something unintentionally laughable (ibid.: 86). However, in this exchange, only one group member laughs (line 45), with no one else engaging in shared laughter, including Hyun-seung, who laughs after completing his performance (line 47-48); Hyun-seung does not engage with the laughing group member, instead fixing his gaze on the hosts which indicates that Hyun-seung and the one group member are laughing for different reasons. Laughter can be used to make evaluations (Liebscher & Dailey-O'Cain 2013). Hyun-seung's facial expression and self-applause suggest that his laughter is a positive self-appraisal and that he has oriented positively

to performing aegyo and looks to the hosts for affirmation, completely disattending to the group member who initially laughed (image 5.7). With this positive self-appraisal, Hyun-seung displays himself as being satisfied with his own aegyo performance. Though the persona of each member is negotiated collectively, Hyun-seung still is the primary portrayer of his own given persona. Following his comment about being the “charisma leader”, he has been working toward constructing his persona in this interaction as being “allowed” to aegyo, and this positive self-evaluation further solidifies his own persona as being not completely in opposition to aegyo and the feminine indexes it carries. Though this is not ratified by anyone else joining in on the laughter in this exchange, we will see that the remaining band members do positively orient toward his production of aegyo.

What is most striking about this interaction is the change in how the group members react between the two aegyo performances given by Hyun-seung as they begin to orient toward the work he has done to become more compatible with aegyo. Leading up to the performance, we see the group members very clearly disengaging from the interaction (see image 5.6); most of the members have their gaze fixed on the ground, and group member one has even covered his face with his shirt. Even after Hyun-seung’s performance the other group members disalign from (and disaffiliate with) his aegyo, with group member 1 walking away, GM 3 plugging his ears, and group member 4 covering his face. However, after Hyun-seung completes his final aegyo performance in line 62-65, again smiling at the hosts, the other band members react differently (lines 67-76). All but GM 3 begin to applaud and realign their gaze and bodies toward Hyun-seung. Additionally, in line 77 one of the group members even calls his performance “cute”, which endorses this act as an expression of “soft” or *kawaii* masculinity. This realignment and

applause ratifies the overall aegyo performances as acceptable to the group and acceptable for Hyun-seung to have done.

Despite Beast’s overall idol image as a being “tough”, Hyun-seung’s role in the group still has several properties of South Korean soft masculinity. The contrast between how Hyun-seung and Jun-hyung have been treated up to this point in the interaction, with Jun-hyung being teased for potentially ruining his “concept”, makes Hyun-seung’s soft masculinity stand out even more by comparison. In the interaction leading up to and through Hyun-seung’s aegyo performance, his persona as the main vocalist and “charisma leader” has been constructed as having enough soft masculinity features to be perceived as someone who can do aegyo, even receiving praise in the end.

The acceptance of Hyun-seung’s performance is in stark contrast with the way that Jun-hung’s aegyo performance is treated. As with Hyun-seung’s turn, the hosts set up Jun-hyung’s turn, again highlighting Jun-hyung’s role:

- 79 HD *aegyo-ui* (.) [*<daemyeongsa>*
aegyo-GEN byword
“The definition of aegyo.”
- 80 GM1 ((pointing at JH inaudibly laughing))
- 81 HD *aegyo-ui* (.) *sinseong*
aegyo-GEN holiness
“The holiness of aegyo.”
- 82 HD *sara* [*itt-neun* (.) *aegyojaengi*
live PERF.to.be-PNM ‘aegyo-er’
“Living, breathing aegyo-er.”
- 83 JH [Thhu
- 84 GM1 ((covers face with shirt))
- 85 HD *gijonui* (.) *aegyo-neun* (.) *Yong Jun-hyeong jeon hu-ro* (*nanwi-nda*)
existing aegyo-TOP Yong Junhyeong before after-INS divide-DEC
“The existing ((?)) aegyo will change everything for Yong Jun-hyeong.”

86 DC *ae:gyo*
aegyo
"Aegyo."

87 HD ()

88 DC *ye*
yes
"Yeah."

89 HD ((in English)) five, six, seven, eight

90 GM2 ((looking away from JH))

91 HS ((looking away from JH))

92 GM1 ((covers face with shirt))

93 GM3 ((looks at floor and covers ears))

94 GM4 ((looking at JH, then looking away))

95 JH .hh ((in aegyo voice, pulling hands into chest))

96 \$hanu \$jom ppal(h)li-
Korean.beef bit quickly
"Some Korean beef please-"

97 JH ((instant replay)) \$hanu \$jom ppal(h)li ju(hh)-se-
Korean.beef bit quickly give-HON
"Please give me some Korean beef-"

98 ((holds face in hands on folds body over, laughing))=
99 GM? =huhuHUHUhu

100 ((Camera zooms out to show DC standing, laughing hard; GM1
101 clapping, laughing, and running around the stage; GM2
102 clapping, laughing, and walking around stage; HS sitting,
103 laughing and clapping hand against the adjacent seat; GM3
104 still covering his ears laughing; GM4 rolling around on the
105 floor laughing; JH hands on hips walking toward the back of
106 the stage))



5.1

As Hyeong-don sets up Jun-hyung's turn, he strongly positions Jun-hyung and his "idol star persona" as being contrary to aegyo. In lines 79-82, Hyeong-don sarcastically describes Jun-hyun as "the definition of aegyo, the holiness or aegyo, a living, breathing aegyo-er", which is essentially the *opposite* of Jun-hyung's concept as discussed before. He goes on to say in line 85 that this aegyo will "change everything for Yong Jun-hyung", using a phrase in Korean that is usually used to describe a monumental turning point in history, such as a war or a revolution (*jeon hu-lo nanwi-nda*). This is further endorsed as sarcastic teasing in line 80 when GM1 points and laughs at Jun-hyung who is again showing resistance in his floor-directed gaze. In this set up, we see Jun-hyung orient to an unknown laughable when some laughter slips through his resistant presentation (line 83).

In the actual performance and the other participant's reaction to it, it is crucial to pay attention to the laughter, what kind it is, its sequential structure, and how it interacts with other activities. In the aegyo performance in lines 95-98, Jun-hyung begins laughing and is unable to properly complete the act as the turn dissolves into laughter. This laughter acts as a way for Jun-hyung to negotiate the cool guy masculinity associated with his "concept", its incongruence with aegyo as a feminized linguistic commodity, and the pressure to perform for the fans. It is a further extension of the strategy used by D.O. and Hyun-seung whereby resistance and disaffiliation are enacted to distance oneself from aegyo despite eventually granting the request. To see how this is accomplished, laughter in this interaction must be carefully examined.

Glenn (2003) explains that laughter can act as a strategy to *resist* some activity in an interaction, including teasing. In acts of teasing, the teased has a range of response options that fall between "going along" (encouraging more or contributing to teasing) and rejection (completely disattending or shutting it down) (Glenn 2003: 122). Laughter can act as a "middle-

range response” by showing “a willingness to acknowledge humorous elements, even if taking the substance of the tease seriously” (ibid.: 123). Glenn, summarizing Drew (1987), explains that laughing as a victim of teasing “neither absolutely rejects nor co-implicates in the teasing, but may be part of either” (127). This interactional flexibility of laughter gives Jun-hyung the perfect out as he is forced to negotiate his persona in the face of this feminized aegyo. If Jun-hyung were to reject the aegyo performance, he would suffer potential economic loss by disappointing fans (this is, after all, a commodified linguistic style in an arena that ratifies its value). If he were to go along with the aegyo performance willingly, then it would undermine the masculine image expected of his “idol star performance”. Laughter, then, provides Jun-hyung with a way to maintain his “idol star persona” and masculine image while still fulfilling his role as an entertainer that must appease the fans to be successful. In order to do so, this laughter must still be balanced with some other level of resistance, which he has done and will continue to do.

Immediately following Jun-hyung’s aegyo performance, all of the group members and the two hosts engage in an over-the-top display of teasing as they all erupt into laughter. This is most easily visualized in image **5.10** where several participants can be seen rolling on the floor, running around the studio, and folding over in laughter. In total, this laughter last 37 seconds, an exceedingly long time, especially for a television show. Length of laughter is important because longer laughs can signal something as being unusually funny (Glenn 2003: 74). The excessive laughter here works as an evaluation of Jun-hyung’s performance, which he was not even able to complete, and is very different from the response to Hyun-seung’s performance which elicited almost no laughter. Though Jun-hyung resolves the situation in which he must do aegyo, his performance is not approved of by his peers and this interaction works to sculpt the group’s expectations of masculinity as well as Jun-hyung’s persona and its masculinity.

It is at this point where Jun-hyung, having laughed at his own performance, again takes a resistant stance toward the situation and the act of teasing. While the entire studio is engaged in the extended laughter, Jun-hyung outwardly shows complete rejection of the teasing activities in his facial expressions and posture:



In image 5.11, we can see how Jun-hyung immediately resumes a resistant stance. He slowly begins to walk back to his seat, gaze constantly fixed on the floor and hands braced on his hips. This a necessary discourse move in order to reinforce that although he produced laughter during part of his aegyo performance, he (or at least the “idol star persona” he is performing) is still overall against the act. The laughter he produced was not of appreciation, but is something more similar to the laughter in D.O.’s aegyo performance seen previously. That is, it is done as laughter that arises as part of dealing with an embarrassing, uncomfortable, or difficult situation.

There is evidence that suggests that this eruption is an extension of the teasing that has persisted throughout the interaction, and not just an “appreciation” of the ridiculousness of the juxtaposition of Jun-hyung’s “idol star persona” with aegyo. The overall mood of teasing Jun-hyung starts from the very beginning of the segment with Defconn repeatedly emphasizing Jun-hyung’s outwardly projected struggling and discomfort, making comments about Jun-hyung’s “concept” and emotional state. There are also several comments made about how his “concept” is in danger from doing aegyo. This is further stressed by Hyeong-don’s over-the-top, sarcastic

“Hurry up”

- 113 JH ((Preparing to speak, then laughing hard))
114
115 JH \$jeohui bi(h)seuteu-hehehehehehe=
1PL.HUM Beast
“\$We Bea(h)st- hehehehehehe”
- 116 JH ((head falls in lap laughing, looks up seriously))
117 .h fen \$\$yeo(h)reobun(h)\$\$-deul \$\$deoge (.h) \$\$inn-neun
Fan everyone-PL thanks.to to.be-PNM
118 \$\$geo-ra-mnida:hahahaha
thing-DEC-FOR
“(We) \$are \$here (h) \$thanks to (h) all you \$fans-hahahah.”
- 119 JH ((immediately holds head in hands and laughs hard))
- 120 ((Both hosts laughing; DC stands up laughing; GM1 starts walking
121 around claping and laughing; GM2 stands in place clapping and
122 laughing; HS laughs and claps; GM3 covers face laughing; GM4
123 kicks legs laughing hard))



The interaction and the resulting laughter almost perfectly mirrors the first aegyo performance: in line 107 GM4 continues to tease, Jun-hyung laughs during this performance, then all of the other participants erupt in laughter (image 5.12), and finally Jun-hyung repositions himself as resisting the teasing, gaze fixed on the ground and not laughing (image 5.13).



5.13

The fan-made request is not a request that he can easily deny outright, as his success as a star depends on appealing to fans, and the setting where this all takes place is one that emphasizes this fact (i.e. on a television show that is designed to showcase their “idol star personas” *for* the fans). With the almost unavoidable pressure to grant the aegyo request, Jun-hyung must figure out how to do the granting while maintaining the masculine image that his persona has in the face of this commodified aegyo and its ties to femininity. This strategy of first showing resistance to doing aegyo before the performance, laughing during the production of aegyo, and then resisting joining the laughter that evaluates and teases his performance, Jun-hyung is successfully able to mediate this interaction that could potentially threaten the status of his “idol star persona”. The result is a completed granting that displays his negative stance toward doing aegyo, which is enhanced by the response of the other participants, and ultimately leaves his persona as being one that cannot do aegyo. Were he to “successfully” perform aegyo and have it be well-received by his fellow group members, Jun-hyung would sacrifice his “concept” because the discourse has framed it as being incompatible with aegyo. His complex ‘performance’ of resistance, then, constructs a positive outcome for Jun-hyung: he satisfies the desires of the fans without sacrificing the masculinity that his individual role is expected to maintain.

6. Distributed masculinity and the construction of a collective masculine image

In this study I have shown through aegyo contests several linguistic, ideological, and interactional processes and products. I have provided evidence of the commodification of aegyo as a speech style by looking at the way idol boy groups and hosts on a Korean entertainment program attend to the desires of fan-requested performances. The “contest” setting contributes to the fact that aegyo is being treated as a product or a tool that can be “used” rather than as a genuine, naturally-occurring aspect of someone’s linguistic and stylistic repertoire. Direct economic incentive valorizes the aegyo style as fans request performances—directly by calling in and indirectly by the show’s hosts—and furthers its status as a commodity. Further, I have argued that the commodified form of aegyo analyzed here has its ideological ties to women and femininity enhanced by its portrayal in the media. The ideology in South Korea that aegyo is predominantly a behavior associated with women allows for the commodified aegyo to take on stronger feminine indexes in the media, where gender construction is often heteronormatively exaggerated.

Moreover, I have shown how members of idol groups and hosts on “idol real variety shows” orient to the “idol star personas” that are represented by each member. Through descriptions and labeling (Mangnae, “charisma leader”, “tough guy”, Jun-hyun’s “concept”), it is clear that the individual roles of idol boy groups that are manufactured by the management and production companies in the Kpop industry are made relevant by participants in these interactions. In the data, each individual persona brings with it expectations that affect how the individual is treated by other participants. By using aegyo contests as a site to examine these personas, we have seen that there are also specific masculine images associated with a given persona, and these masculinities have a variety of features including hybrid South Korean soft

masculinity, more traditional “tough” masculinity, and postmodern “cool” masculinities. In the data we see that the masculinity of group members is evoked and discursively constructed, specifically in direct relation to the performance of aegyo. This shows the significance not only of each member’s star persona, but also that of the masculine image associated with it. It serves as evidence that the expectations of each persona based on its associated masculinity are interactionally significant.

By paying close attention to interactional detail, it is possible to see how these expectations manifest and influence the local intersubjective construction of each persona and its masculine image. One particular interactional tactic illustrated in this study is the strategic use of resistance by members who do not present as aegyo do-ers. As we saw with D.O., Jun-hyung, and to a lesser degree Hyung-seung, members who take a non-aegyo stance can use resistance to navigate the conflict between aegyo’s feminine indexes and their own masculinity while still granting the fan-based requests. By disaffiliating and disaligning with the requests, through speech and embodied moves, these members are able to display a stance of not wanting to do aegyo. Although each member does eventually grant the aegyo request, taking such a stance shows that they are distancing themselves from aegyo and its feminine associations. Balancing grantings with this stance-taking is important because rejecting the request could lose the group fans, but displaying too much eagerness to perform aegyo could undermine the persona that a member is presenting—an outcome that could also have negative results because of the importance of the “idol star persona” in the Kpop industry. This strategy, which balances the preservation of their masculine images with appeasing the fans, appears to be quite useful in a genre where a strong focus is placed on the desires of the fans, making it difficult to reject such requests. This strategy is only made clear through close CA-informed analysis and it supports the

idea that sociocultural linguistics and linguistic anthropology work can be enhanced by paying such attention to interactional details. Though theoretical approaches in sociocultural linguistics or linguistic anthropology conflict with some aspects of CA theory and methods, I believe that there is much to be gained by successfully bridging these fields.

Jung (2011) showed that over time Kpop idol groups have shifted from projecting *only* a “soft” masculine image to constructing a culturally transformable hybrid masculine image (167). In this shift it has become necessary for all band members to express multi-faceted, “manufactured versatile masculinity”. Jung cites 2PM as an example of a group whose members are all flexible with their masculinities, expressing physical “beast-like” manliness while also being able to project cuteness and South Korean soft masculinity. This hybrid, flexible masculinity, she claims, is the driving force behind Kpop boy bands’ success internationally because it produces *chogukjeok* properties that make it easier for their products to cross borders.

While I agree with Jung’s (2011) claim that the international success of contemporary boy groups in South Korea is largely due to the transcultural hybridity that is achieved through “manufactured versatile masculinity” (166), I believe that this research demonstrates that hybrid, manufactured South Korean masculinity can be created in more ways than she describes with 2PM. I have shown that not all bands produce this image by requiring each member to have flexible masculinities, but that certain components of the hybrid masculinity she describes can be attributed to the individual roles that band members assume. For example, while the “Mangnae” might be a role through which South Korean soft masculinity is achieved, personas like Jun-hyung’s “cool” rapper take on other global, postmodern masculine images. My argument, then, is that there are groups who are able to discursively and performatively *distribute* the work of producing varied masculinities to individual members. By

jointly constructing individual “idol star personas” discursively on “idol real variety shows” like the one seen in this thesis, the bands are able to create “manufactured versatile masculinity” image through a collective effort. This effort, which I call *distributed masculinity*, depends on the discursive work done by all participants involved, including band members and TV hosts. Through discourse, the “idol star personas” emerge, their individual masculine images are defined, refined, and ratified, and the entire group’s masculine image is constructed. This combination of distributed masculinities coalesces to give an impression of hybridized masculinity that represents the group as a whole, resulting in a group that characterizes *chogukjeok* features.

One way that distributed masculinity can be advantageous is by allowing for a greater range of masculine expression. For groups in which each member is supposed to be proficient in producing several kinds of masculine image, there are potentially restrictions on how extreme these expressions of masculinity can be. In a distributed system, the spectrum for expressions of masculinity has the potential to be much wider. A member whose “star idol persona” embodies South Korean soft masculinity, for example, can focus on producing such an image while the “cool” guy maximizes those aspects of his own masculine image. This could allow for more extreme expressions, different kinds of hybridizing, and stronger forms of branding. If nothing else, it can allow for a larger variety of masculine images and manufactured personas. This is advantageous because, as Lee SH (2010) points out, the abundance and variety of idols and their personas is one of the reasons for the Korean Wave’s prolonged success.

Furthermore, it can enhance our understanding of how gender is discursively constructed and negotiated by and for groups. This thesis has explored how idol boy groups who work cooperatively to construct their “idol star personas” also produce a *collective* hybrid

masculine image. When people form a group centered on shared beliefs, goals, or endeavors, such as Korean idol groups, it is possible that their identity work collectively unites to create a gendered image for the group. Though the concepts differ greatly, at a very basic level the idea of distributed gender work is not entirely unlike Edwin Hutchins' "Distributed Cognition" whereby cognition is described as being "distributed" across human and non-human actors to achieve tasks (see Hutchins 1995a, 1995b, Hutchins & Klausen 1996, Hutchins & Norman 1988). Though poststructuralists already take gender as an intersubjective construct between people, this concept of distributed masculinity suggests that it is not only the gender of *individuals* that is achieved this way, but rather that *groups* can also produce a collective gender image by distributing certain aspects of the image to specific individuals. This thesis has only touched on what implications this concept might have in understanding gender, and it has only done so in media representations. Entertainment industries and media genres may be precisely the areas in which a concept of distributed gender work could be useful. Nonetheless, research that looks at how distributing gender work or constructing a collective gender in more naturalistic interaction would be of great interest.

Though these last two points are speculative, I believe that distributed masculinity is a viable way to describe the construction of "manufactured versatile masculinity" in idol groups like EXO and Beast. Not all idol groups subscribe to this method of achieving hybrid masculinity, but groups that focus on creating unique personas and roles (and in turn, masculinities) for each member are exceedingly popular in South Korea. Describing the co-constructed, collective masculine image of these groups as such can be useful in understanding how the South Korean media industry produces successful pop culture products. Furthermore, it

can enhance our understanding of how gender is discursively constructed and negotiated by and for groups.

7. Conclusion

This thesis has asked many questions about gender construction and presentation in the media, and how it fits into a modern Korea striving to globalize. There are many questions left unanswered and many potential threads for future research. The themes addressed here—gender, performativity, transnationalism and globalization, media industries, linguistic commodification—are complex and interact with each other in even more complex ways than can be addressed here.

One question that I did not address, but believe deserves a closer look, is what role the hosts play not only in commodifying aegyo, but even in deciding what aegyo *is*. Hyeong-don constantly models and critiques aegyo performances in the data presented, including in turns in the interactions that were not included in the analysis here. This behavior is not limited to Hyeong-don nor to these episodes³¹; hosts on entertainment TV will often request that celebrities “show their aegyo” and then make comments about the quality of the performance, sometimes following up with a second request that integrates their suggestions. Host-requested aegyo displays are directed overwhelmingly towards women and girl groups, often comparing the aegyo of members in a group though not explicitly in a “contest” setting. In preliminary research on this topic, I found that the expectations of aegyo skills are markedly different between male and female celebrities, with women almost being expected to have a certain level of aegyo proficiency by virtue of being female. These expectations, however, are all articulated by TV

³¹ On one episode of “Weekly Idol”, Hyeong-don even “bestows” one “aegyo move” that he “invented” to an idol boy group to use as their own, thus displaying his own aegyo expertise.

hosts who seem to have very specific ideas about what aegyo is and should be, although the details of what is “good aegyo” differ in each interaction. A close examination of the hosts’ micro-management of aegyo displays on TV could reveal much about linguistic commodification, the relationship between language and media, and the mechanisms behind pop culture iconization in South Korea, as well as the ideological underpinnings of aegyo in Korean society that are attended to by these shows.

Aegyo itself has received very little attention in academic research despite its pervasiveness in everyday interaction and in the media. Aegyo has only minimally been described in any robust fashion (Moon 2010, Moon under review), and even then only through media representations and interviews. While this gives a picture of what aegyo means ideologically, there has been no thorough research on aegyo and what role it plays in everyday, naturalistic interaction where it could have the most sociocultural significance. At best, aegyo has been only mentioned in passing in work primarily focused on other topics (Abelmann 2003, Han 2014, Harkness 2012, Jung 2011). There is a tremendous amount of metalinguistic discourse that surrounds aegyo, both in face-to-face conversation and through Computer Mediated Discourse, which evidences aegyo’s cultural and linguistic significance in South Korea. People are described as “having aegyo” (or *too much* aegyo), “being good at aegyo”, “lacking aegyo”, or “wishing they had more aegyo/could do aegyo better”. Searching “aegyo” on Korean internet spaces such as Naver³² results in hundreds of thousands of results, including such things as “how to do aegyo”, “aegyo that men like”, “my boyfriend is asking for aegyo”, and more recently results like “male aegyo”, “aegyo that women like”, and so on. Some of the discussions online of

³² Naver is South Korea’s leading search engine company, and could be compared to Google.

aegyo include pleas for help in improving one's aegyo in order to be "more feminine" or appeal to the desires of men in general or at the request of a significant other, because the poster doesn't have enough aegyo or "can't" do it. And these posts are met by replies on extremely specific ways for doing aegyo, including linguistic instructions such as "speak more nasally" or "with a short-tongue" sound. Aegyo guides are all over the internet and also include recommendations for behavior that will appeal to men (such things as acting weak, physically and mentally, "to evoke the natural protective instinct of men"³³). Again, these are predominately guides designed for women seeking to improve their aegyo. Although only anecdotal evidence from my own experiences, it seems that everyone has an opinion about aegyo, whether good or bad, and what constitutes successful aegyo-doing.

What is most interesting is the way that aegyo has been changing in the several decades. Though aegyo was predominately only done by young women and children, the demographics that use aegyo style have grown and morphed greatly. Older women ("mother aegyo") and men (mostly young men) not only use aegyo, but in entertainment industries we see an increased desire for boy celebrities to do aegyo. Moreover, there has been an increase in women who denounce aegyo, rather than embracing it as a key component of femininity. I believe that the change in attitudes towards aegyo and who can/should do aegyo is indication of greater sociocultural shifts in South Korea, particularly with regard to gender and sex differences. Improvements in the socioeconomic position of women, continued pressure for globalization, and the interaction between popular culture and ideology are but a few factors that I believe may be at the base of these changes.

³³ <http://babidi.tistory.com/85> is such an example

So far, I have (quite intentionally) avoided defining what aegyo is, and have dodged clearly defining what indexes it has in everyday interaction. In this thesis, I relied on the participants in each interaction to demark what an aegyo performance is. Though Moon (under review) has identified prominent features of aegyo, such as rising-falling intonation (%LHL), nasality, lexical terms like *oppa*, and “short tongue sounds”, these are identified based on ideology, perception, or performances in the media, though she basis her decisions on ethnography as well. There has been no study on what features of aegyo arise in everyday interaction, which features are most prominent, how grammar or honorifics interact with the style, and so on. Nor has aegyo been looked at in terms of what relationship it might have with interactional actions, another endeavor that could be facilitated through a CA framework.

More importantly, I believe that the indexes of aegyo need to be more carefully scrutinized. Moon (under review), I believe, correctly points out that aegyo has very many infantile and childish linguistic and semiotic characteristics that have been “enregistered” as “childish aegyo”. “Short tongue sound” itself comes from a term used to describe children still acquiring language and not yet fully capable of native adult-like pronunciation³⁴. Other aspects of aegyo style such as “cute” expressions or gestural minimization of body size also strongly index childishness (see figure 7.1). The term *oppa*, which is associated strongly with aegyo, also indexes age and social position in a special way: *oppa* means “older brother” and is a kinship term used refer to an older male by a younger woman. That is, the term is used only by female speakers and it refers only to older, male referents. Kinship terms like this are not limited to the family and are used in everyday interaction to refer to unrelated persons as well, including one’s

³⁴ It is also used to describe adults whose pronunciation is markedly non-standard for physiological reasons, but I am not sure that it is actually due to a “short tongue”. It could very well be a folk analysis of the pronunciation associated described as “short tongue sound”.

boyfriend or girlfriend, especially as a device to decrease social distance. Using a term like this, then, indexes the speaker's and addressee's age, sex, and relative social position to each other. Age is a very important factor in interaction in Korea that all people attend to very carefully as it is a determining factor in how interlocutors speak to each other, including which grammatical honorific forms to use. As such, using *oppa* (or other similar kinship terms) effectively puts the speaker in a lower position socially with regard to the addressee and indexes themselves as being younger.



7.1

An aegyo gesture example from a Korean television drama.
Retrieved from <http://blog.naver.com/kks0700?Redirect=Log&logNo=110133649154>

I think that the childish aspects of aegyo say a lot about the very nature of aegyo. I believe that aegyo's association with femininity is quite complex and all too often taken for granted. Though modern aegyo ideology conceives of it as being feminine, to truly understand its social implications we must critically examine the process by which aegyo came to be associated with women and indexical of femininity. Childishness shares many features traditionally associated with femininity in South Korea, namely purity, weakness, helplessness, smallness, nonproductivity (economically), and deference, reflecting the sociohistorical position of women in Korean society as one in which they are subordinate to men and considered nonproductive economically (Kim Eun-Shil 2000). This overlap makes childishness an accessible mode through which women can express cuteness. Through the repeated performance by women of linguistic

forms that index childishness, these forms can take on new indexes of femininity. The amalgamation of certain interconnected forms then produce a more stable style, such as aegyo. Though this is only a speculative example, it illustrates that the lack of critical research on the actual indexical properties of aegyo could mean that there is much that could be misunderstood about the style.

There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that aegyo is secondarily indexical of femininity, and that features such as childishness, subordination, deference, or lower social rank are also strongly oriented to in the production of aegyo. Whereas *oppa* is commonly associated with female aegyo performance, I have found that male performances of aegyo will often replace *oppa* for *nuna*³⁵, a term that means “older sister” and is used by younger boys to older girls. Thus, they index their own social position as being deferent relative to the female addressee. Moreover, there are examples in which boys who do aegyo to older boys will use the term *hyeong* (“older brother”, younger male to older male). In fact, prior to D.O.’s turn in the data above, one of his group members, Luhan, does his aegyo performance to his “manager *hyeong*”, asking for him to buy the group dinner. In such cases, there are overt linguistic moves that place the speaker on a lower social position: the use of *oppa/nuna* and the use of addressee honorifics in making a request. Furthermore, that aegyo is often used in requests may be evidence that there is some relationship between the requester and requestee in such that the requester is dependent on the requestee, and would therefore benefit from displaying deference. These kinds of aegyo performances (male to female, and male to male), however, are less common and though they may indicate a developing change in attitudes toward aegyo, they must be examined carefully to

³⁵ An example of such can be seen here:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qVmX_cRO1cU

truly understand what they mean. Further research on this topic could reveal much about Korean society, linguistic indexicality, and how complicated social hierarchy interacts with language.

This final section has addressed some questions, but critically it raises more than it answers. Aegyo, gender, sexuality, and social change in Korea is still much understudied from a linguistic perspective, and the research available in English is scarce. Additional research on aegyo in interaction and careful examination of the sociohistorical underpinnings of aegyo would be valuable in this time of rapid social change in South Korea for women, and other social minorities as well.

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Appendix

1. Abbreviations used in the interlinear gloss

ADV	Adverbial marker	LOC	Locative
ACC	Accusative	NML	Nominalizer
COMP	Complementizer	MIM	Mimetic
CON	Connective	PL	Plural
DAT	Dative	PN	Plain form
DEC	Declarative	PNM	Prenominal Modifier
DM	Discourse marker	POL	Polite ending
FOR	Formal ending	PRM	Promissive
FUT	Future tense	PROG	Progressive aspect
GEN	Genitive	PST	Past tense
HON	Honorific	NOM	Nominative
HUM	Humble form	SUP	Suppositive mood
HR	Hearsay	TOP	Topic marker
INS	Instrumental		
INT	Interrogative		

2. Transcription symbols

[overlapping speech
h	out-breath
.h	in-breath
(h)	laughter within a word
(.)	micro-pause
(0.0)	pause in seconds
↑↓	intonation
°	quieter speech
~	%LHL phrasal intonation
?	rising intonation
.	falling intonation
::	lengthened syllable
=	latched utterances
\$	smile voice
<word>	slower speech
>word<	faster speech
<u>u</u>	stressed speech (relatively high pitch)
b	louder speech
()	unclear speech
(())	Transcriber comment

3. Romanization Conventions

The data in this thesis has been transcribed according to the official Revised Romanization of Korean as issued by the South Korean Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism. This system was chosen because it most closely reflects the pronunciation and phonology of spoken Korean.

A detailed description of the transcription conventions can be found at http://www.korean.go.kr/front_eng/roman/roman_01.do.