

The Department of Linguistics
is pleased to present

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speaking on

Honor and Plurality in Hindi-Urdu

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1:20 - 3:00 PM

in HUM 1 - 202

Abstract:

Basic contrast In Hindi-Urdu, the honorific marker *ji*: can be added to a third person nominal to signal honorification of the nominal referent. As shown in (1/2), the use of *ji*: triggers plural agreement, despite the nominal itself being singular.

(1) Ra:m yahā: hē
Ram.M here be.PRS.3sg
'Ram is here.'

(2) Ra:m-ji: yahā: hē
Ram.M-hon yahā: be.PRS.3pl
'Ram, who I respect, is here.'

ji: expresses the morpheme HON, attaching to an NP and signaling the speaker's respect toward the NP referent. HON in turn brings in a PL feature which triggers PL agreement. This PL feature does not signal semantic plurality, but instead marks honorification of the subject.

Proposal The formative that carries the semantics of plurality (PL) and the formative that carries the semantics of honorification (hon) occupy the same syntactic position, which we identify as Num. The formatives have the same formal features, which correspond to the features responsible for what is called plural agreement and make the same selectional demand of their complement, namely that it appear in the oblique form. However the formatives have distinct realizations and distinct semantics. Both can have zero realization or overt realization; for honorification the overt realization can be at least *-ji:*, *sa:b*, *mahoday*, *sir*, *ma'am*, and for pluralization *--a:*, *--o*. The two formatives are in complementary distribution; *hon* blocks *PL* and vice-versa; this means that the complement of *hon* has no choice but to stay singular.

(3) a. laṛki: lambi: hē
girl.F.sg tall.F be.PRS.3.sg
'The girl is tall.'

b. laṛkiyā: lambi: hē
girl.F.pl tall.F be.PRS.3.pl
'The girls are tall.'

(4) a. laṛki:-ji: lambi: hē
girl.F.sg-hon tall.F be.PRS.3.pl
'The girl, who I respect, is tall.'

b. *laṛkiyā:-ji: lambi: hē
girls.F.pl-hon tall.F be.PRS.3.pl
'The girls, who I respect, are tall.'

An aspect of our analysis is that we treat plural forms as derived in the syntax and semantics. Nominal heads are born denoting atomic entities and require *PL* to be pluralized (Schwarzschild 2022). We situate the Hindi-Urdu facts within a broader typology of grammatical honorification focusing on Korean, Japanese and Javanese. We ask what the operation underlying a given case of grammatical honorification is and whether or not it involves agreement. We extend our proposal to cover second person honorification in Hindi-Urdu, which involves both person and number.