

The source of plural agreement with honorific nouns

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Languages often employ plural pronouns to refer to a singular honorific individual. For instance, French uses *vous*, Turkish uses *siz*, German uses *sie* and so on.

- (1) a. Avez vous le stylo?
have.PRS.2PL 2PL the pen
'Do you (hon)/you (pl) have the pen?'

By contrast, nouns usually occur in the singular form when used for an honorific referent (Comrie 1975). Consider the following example from a Polish variety - unlike the plural form of the 3rd person pronoun, the singular form of the noun is employed, albeit with plural agreement, to refer to a singular, honorific individual.

- (2) oni/dziadek widzq
3PL/grandfather.SG see.PL
'He (hon)/grandfather(hon) sees.'
(modified from Comrie 1975: ex.45, 412)

This paper explores the morphosyntax of nouns used to refer to a singular honorific individual (henceforth HON nouns) in Punjabi, with a focus on two puzzles:

Puzzle I: While some nouns, when used honorifically, occur in their singular form (as in Polish), other honorific nouns occur in the plural form. Regardless of the (singular/plural) form of the HON noun, the verb always appears with plural agreement.

- (3) a. **caacca** aayaa b. caacce aaye c. **caacca** aaye
uncle.SG come.PFV.M.SG uncle.PL come.PFV.M.PL uncle come.PFV.M.PL
'The uncle came.' 'The uncles came.' 'The uncle (hon) came.'
- (4) a. pàtijaa aayaa b. **pàtiije** aaye c. **pàtiije** aaye
nephew.SG come.PFV.M.SG nephew.PL come.PFV.M.PL nephew come.PFV.M.PL
'The nephew came.' 'The nephews came.' 'The nephew (hon) came.'

Puzzle II: Feminine nouns used honorifically also occur with plural agreement on the verb. However, this plural agreement is gender syncretic in that it is MPL and not FPL.

- (5) caacci aaye/*aayiyaaN
aunt come.PFV.M.PL/come.PFV.F.PL
'The aunt (hon) came.'

Question: What is the locus of MPL agreement with HON nouns, even when they appear as singular (and are feminine)? I claim that the locus of this MPL agreement is a dedicated Honorific Projection within the nominal structure. Assuming contextual allosemy (Wood and Marantz 2017; Saab and Lo Guercio 2020; Dali 2020) and the separation of feature interpretability from valuation, I propose that the featural make-up of Hon is as follows:

- Hon hosts an interpretable and valued PL feature. Given its occurrence on Hon as opposed to Num, the PL feature is interpreted as honorific and not as a marker of individuation (in line with Bhatt and Davis 2021 for HU). [This gives rise to plural agreement.]
- Hon also hosts an uninterpretable and valued m feature: this feature is purely formal. It is not interpreted as honorific, nor does it regulate the semantic gender of the noun, which is determined by the gender specification on n (Lowenstamm 2008; Acquaviva 2009; Kramer 2015). [This gives rise to masculine plural agreement]