The morphosyntax of plurals-of-politeness

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Languages often use plural morphology to signal honorification and/or politeness towards a singular referent – we'll refer to such constructions as plurals-of-politeness or PoPs. In many languages, PoPs trigger plural/PL agreement on all agreement targets. Take the pronominal PoP *vi* in Serbian which triggers PL agreement on both the auxiliary and the participial verb. However, in some languages, PoPs can trigger singular/SG agreement on some agreement targets. For instance, the French pronominal PoP *vous* controls PL agreement on the auxiliary but SG agreement on the participle. Given the plural morphology on PoPs and their ability to trigger PL agreement on auxiliaries, it is usually agreed that they host a PL feature in syntax. However, there is no consensus with regard to whether or not PoPs contain an additional SG feature in their syntax. In this talk, we provide novel data from nominal PoPs that weighs on this debate to claim that PoPs host both a SG and a PL feature in syntax, in keeping with accounts that argue for a dual specification of number in PoPs (Despić 2017; Puškar 2019; Bhatt and Davis 2021; Kaur 2023; Sinha 2023). However, we differ from these existing accounts in two crucial ways: first, we claim that the SG and the PL number features in a PoP do not vary by (formal/semantic) 'feature-type' but rather by their height within PoP syntax (*pace* Despić 2017). Secondly, we argue that the SG feature is structurally higher than the PL feature in PoPs (*pace* Puškar 2019; Bhatt and Davis 2021; Kaur 2023; Sinha 2023). Our proposed structure, as given in (1), can derive (i) the morphosyntactic behavior of both pronominal and nominal PoPs, (ii) the restrictions on co-occurring SG and PL agreement with PoPs (Comrie 1975), which to our knowledge, have not been *fully* explained so far, and (iii) certain attested gender-number interactions in PoP agreement, which previous accounts predict to be impossible.

(1) [$_{\text{DP}}$ D [$_{\text{NumP}}$ SG [$_{\text{GenP}}$ MASC/FEM [$_{\text{nP}}$ 2/3 PL]]]]