

Re-visiting honorification in Hindi and the discourse particle *jii*

OJASWEE BHALLA, *Indian Institute of Technology, New Delhi*

DEEPAK ALOK, *Indian Institute of Technology, New Delhi*

ABSTRACT

The ungrammaticality of the honorific particle *jii* following a plural suffix in Hindi nominals has previously motivated a formal analysis that structurally posits complementarity between semantic plurality and honorification in the language. We propose an alternative analysis that maintains distinct structural positions for discourse particle *jii* and a separate Hon(orific) Phrase (that is relevant for the verbal agreement system and other nominal modifiers) in Hindi, each with its own semantic import to the nominal meaning. This is supported by empirical evidence like honorific mismatch scenario and data where various pluralizing strategies can be adopted based on the presence or absence of discourse particle *jii*. We also propose that this discourse particle has its own idiosyncratic restriction of selecting a specific and a maximal nominal complement, that controls the environment within which it can occur. The core idea that this paper presents is that along with co-opting of plural morphology to express honorification in Hindi, this system is sensitive to the presence of honour-lending discourse marker *jii* and the variable valuation of Hon – that directly impacts the interpretation and may lead to extra semantic effects.

1 Introduction: Honorification cues in Hindi

Honorification is a linguistically instantiated strategy of conveying the speaker’s mental attitudinal state of respect (or lack of it) for a discourse referent – such as an argument or the addressee. This respect or honour is associated with an array of factors like the speaker’s age, gender, kinship or any other social relation (with various degrees of intimacy or formality) with the discourse referent, their relative social standing (owing to professional stature) and the nature of the discourse context itself within which the utterance is located. This section discusses the honorification cues employed by Hindi (Indo-Aryan; SOV) speakers.

In the Hindi nominal domain, there are morphological and lexical cues for honorification whereas in the verbal domain – the verb’s agreement with the argument reflects honorification status, when available.¹ The 2nd person (2P) pronominal form is morphologically distinct for a non-honorific (NH) referent (1a) in contrast to an honorific (H) referent (1b).^{2,3} The demonstratives in their oblique form also cue the honorification

¹ Some of these points have also been noted in recent formal analyses of honorification in Hindi like Bhatt and Davis (2023) and Sinha (2023).

² The *tu/tum* form distinction for an NH 2P referent is due to an intimacy distinction between them, briefly discussed in section 5.2.

³ Glossing is according to Leipzig glossing rules. Broad transcription adopted – where retroflexes are capitalized, nasalization is conveyed by N and long vowels are marked by two instances of the said vowel.

status of the nominal, with the regular singular oblique demonstrative *us* cuing the NH status (2a) and the plural oblique demonstrative *un* cuing H status (2b) for a semantically singular referent.⁴ For the possessive in (3), the oblique form (homonymous with the plural form) cues the H status of the nominal whereas the direct form (homonymous with the singular form) cues the NH status. Hindi has a discourse particle *jii* which when marked on a nominal (4) indicates the speaker’s respect for that discourse referent. Besides these, the standalone lexical words like *saab* ‘sir/mister’ or *mam* ‘mam’ can also follow a nominal to cue honour for them (5).

- (1) a. tu/tum
2P.NH
b. aap
2P.H
‘you’

- (2) a. us neta
3P.OBL.NH politician
b. un neta
3P.OBL.H politician
‘that politician’

- (3) a. mera daamaad
my.NH son-in-law
b. mere daamaad
my.H son-in-law
‘my son-in-law’

- (4) Ravi-jii
ravi-JI

- (5) Ravi-saab
ravi-SAAB

At the sentence level, Hindi speakers can infer the honorification status of a referent based on the verbal agreement pattern – with or without any honorification cue being made available in nominal domain. For the unmarked argument ‘Ravi’ in (6), the verbal agreement in (6a) cues NH status whereas the one in (6b) indicates the H status for Ravi vis-à-vis the speaker. While the verb in (6a) has the default agreement with a 3P singular argument, the verb in (6b) shows agreement with a 3P plural subject, even though the subject argument is semantically and formally singular. Because verbal agreement with an honorific (singular) subject parallels the verb agreement with a plural subject (7a) –

⁴ Bhatt and Davis (2023) observe that the direct forms of the Hindi demonstrative *vo/ve* do not make a complementary distinction between taking singular versus plural referents (with *ve* being plural and *vo* being number neutral) and this leads to both of them co-occurring with honorific nominals.

honorific agreement has been termed as ‘plural agreement’ in the literature (Bhatt and Davis 2023, Sinha 2023). We agree with them on the claim that Hindi co-opts plural morphology to convey honorification.

- (6) a. Ravi aaya hai
 Ravi come.PFV.MSG be.PRS.3SG
 ‘Ravi has come.’
 b. Ravi aaye haiN
 Ravi come.PFV.MPL be.PRS.3PL
 ‘Ravi has come.’ (speaker respects Ravi)
- (7) a. Bachche aaye haiN
 child.PL come.PFV.MPL be.PRS.3PL
 ‘Children have come.’
 b. Bachcha aaya hai
 child.SG come.PFV.MSG be.PRS.3SG
 ‘Child has come.’

The next section discusses the interaction of honorification with pluralizing strategies and outlines Bhatt and Davis’ formal analysis of Hindi honorification based on a key empirical observation.

2 Honorification and Plurality

2.1 Interaction of Plural Suffix and Discourse Particle *jii*

Bhatt and Davis (2023) observe that Hindi does not permit the co-occurrence of its plural suffix *-aN* or *-e* (their oblique form *-oN*) and the discourse particle *jii* on a nominal, as highlighted by the data in (8).

- (8) * maasTar-oN-jii aaye haiN
 teacher-PL-JI come.PFV.MPL be.PRS.3PL
 ‘(Respected) teachers have come.’

This language-specific pattern is contradicted in a neighboring Indo-Aryan language – Magahi – where the homonymous honorific discourse particle *jii* can co-mark a nominal with its pluralizing suffix *-an* (Alok and Bhalla 2024). Sentences (9a-b) provides an example of this robust Magahi pattern.⁵ In addition to *jii*, Magahi has another discourse particle *-waa*, which has been previously analyzed as a familiarity or an intimacy marker for the language (Alok 2012, 2014). In Magahi, the auxiliary verb reflects the honorification status of the subject as well as the addressee. The morpheme *-au* in (9a) expresses a non-honorific subject (and a non-honorific addressee) and thus, the sentence

⁵ Glosses specific for Magahi data: NHS- Non-Honorific Subject; HS- Honorific Subject; NHA – Non-Honorific Addressee; WA – discourse particle *-waa*.

coveys a meaning where the speaker does not respect the subject ‘teachers’. On the other hand, the morpheme *–(a)thun* in (9b) marks speaker’s respect for the subject ‘teachers’ (as well as NH attitude for the addressee).

- (9) a. maasTar-jii-wa-an aavit hau
 teacher-JI-WA-PL coming be.AUX.NHS.NHA
 ‘The teachers are coming.’

Intended: Teachers are not respected by the speaker (i.e. the student’s parents, who are angry with the teachers)

- b. maasTar-jii-wa-an aavit hathun
 teacher-JI-WA-PL coming be.AUX.HS.NHA
 ‘The teachers are coming.’

Intended: Teachers are respected by the speaker and they are in a close relationship

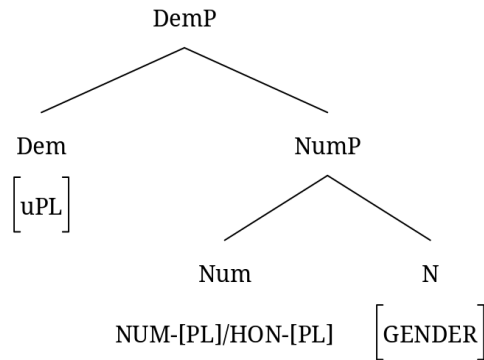
The key takeaways from this sub-section are that contrary to Hindi, in a Magahi DP, the honorificity markers and plural morphemes can come together and thus, they are not in complimentary distribution. Magahi allows different honorific markers to co-occur in the same DP and there could also be a potential honorific mismatch in the nominal and the verbal domain, leading to extra semantic effects. The *prima facie* complementarity between Hindi plural suffix and honorification cue *jii*, as in the case of (8), underlies the formal theoretical analysis proposed by Bhatt and Davis (2023). This is discussed in the next section.

2.2 Bhatt and Davis (2023)

Bhatt and Davis, motivated by data like (6b) and (8), interlink plurality and honorification in the derivational apparatus. They propose that the formative that contributes the semantics of plurality and the formative that contributes the semantics of honorification occupy the same syntactic position in the nominal spine – the Num(ber) head. They use ‘*’ and ‘Hon’ as the labels for the two formatives respectively. The Num head, when it is occupied by *, gets a semantic plurality feature – the NUM-[PL]. This semantic plurality feature of the nominal is responsible for triggering the regular plural agreement on the verb. When the Num head is occupied by the Hon formative, it gets associated with a formal, non-semantic plurality feature – the HON-[PL]. This feature is responsible for triggering non-semantic plural agreement for singular honorified nominals (like in the case of 6b). The structure proposed by them is sketched in (10).

(10) Labelled Bracketing⁶

⁶ [DemP
 [Dem #uPL]



A direct outcome of this structure is that Hon and * are in complementary distribution. As a corollary, Num occupied by Hon can only take morphologically and semantically singular nominal complements. Bhatt and Davis analyze the ungrammatical N-PL-JI structures (like in example 8) by assuming particle *jii* to be an overt instantiation of Hon – which would rule out co-occurrence of both *jii* and the plural suffix *-oN* as they both occupy the same Num head position.

Bhatt and Davis’ proposal provides an explanatorily adequate account of some empirical facts about honorification in Hindi. However, we present some data in the next section that cannot be accounted for within the syntax laid out by them – which motivates a re-investigation of the formal architecture.

2.3 Various pluralizing strategies and honorification – the broader picture

The structure proposed by Bhatt and Davis comes with an implicit consequence – as Hon can only select for singular nominals as complements, therefore Hindi does not permit honorification of plural referents. However, honorification and plurality are orthogonal notions and conceptually, should not be in a complimentary distribution. This line of thought gains traction once the full paradigm of honorification with various pluralizing strategies is observed in Hindi.

Example (11) exhibits singularity (of the nominal) – honorification interaction. The context in example (11) elicits sentences where a singular subject nominal gets overtly marked by *jii* (11c-d) or does not get marked by *jii* (11a-b), with each pair differing with respect to verbal agreement cuing honorification or not. This data shows that the verbal cue is sufficient criteria to express honorification for a discourse referent and the presence of particle *jii* is optional. For the sentence in (11c), we note a variable judgement with the sentence being partially acceptable for eastern Hindi variety speakers

[NumP
 [Num NUM-[PL]/HON-[PL]]
 [N #GENDER]
]
]

(subject to contextual considerations) and being unacceptable for western Hindi variety speakers.

(11) Context: In the meeting of a village panchayat, the head of the panchayat observes the absence of female attendees and asks the male members where someone's wife is. To this, he hears the response:

- a. *devi ghar pe hai*
lady.SG home LOC be.PRS.3SG
'The lady is at home.'
- b. *devi ghar pe haiN*
lady.SG home LOC be.PRS.3PL
'The (respected) lady is at home.'
- c. ?/* *devi-jii ghar pe hai*
lady.SG-JI home LOC be.PRS.3SG
'The (respected) lady is at home.'
- d. *devi-jii ghar pe haiN*
lady.SG-JI home LOC be.PRS.3PL
'The (respected) lady is at home.'

In contrast to (11), its minimal pair in (12) explores plurality-honorification interaction. Grammaticality of non-*jii* marked plural nominals in (12a-c) exhibits that plural nominals can be honorified in Hindi. As for *jii*-marked plural nominals in (12d-f), the ungrammaticality of (12d-e) shows that N-aN-JI is not a permissible structure in Hindi. The grammatical sentence in (12f) shows that a *jii* marked nominal can be pluralized using a universal quantifier *sab* 'all' in Hindi.

(12) Context: In the meeting of a village panchayat, the head of the panchayat observes the absence of female attendees and asks the male members where all their wives are. To this, he hears the response:

- a. *devi-aN ghar pe haiN*
lady-PL home LOC be.PRS.3PL
'The ladies are at home.'
- b. *sab devi-aN ghar pe haiN*
all lady-PL home LOC be.PRS.3PL
- c. *sab devi ghar pe haiN*
all lady home LOC be.PRS.3PL
'All the ladies are at home.'
- d. * *devi-aN-jii ghar pe haiN*
lady-PL-JI home LOC be.PRS.3PL
'The (respected) ladies are at home.'
- e. * *sab devi-aN-jii ghar pe haiN*
all lady-PL-JI home LOC be.PRS.3PL
- f. *sab devi-jii ghar pe haiN*
all lady-JI home LOC be.PRS.3PL
'All the (respected) ladies are at home.'

We observed (post-FASAL) that particle *jii* marked nominal can be pluralized using two more strategies – using *log* ‘people’ after the N-*jii* complex (like example (13)) and for some, adding the plural suffix *-oN* to the N-*jii* unit is also acceptable (like in example (14)). We would like to note a judgement difference here – younger Hindi speakers find (14) more acceptable than elder Hindi speakers. These data points were raised in our SICOGG-27 conference paper (Bhalla and Alok 2025) and we direct the interested reader to the proceedings paper (published online).

(13) neta-jii-log baRhija kaam kar rahe haiN
 politician-JI-people good work do.INF stay.PROG.MPL be.PRS.3PL
 ‘Politicians are doing a good job.’

(14) maataa-jii-oN-ne khaana khaa liya
 mother-JI-PL-ERG food eat.INF take.PFV.MSG
 ‘The mothers ate the food.’

Interim summary:

The data above exhibits that singular referents, whether *jii* marked or not, can get honorific interpretation. For plural referents, the presence of *jii* particle appears to control the type of plurality indicating cue that nominal can get marked by. The non-*jii* marked plural nominals get honorific interpretation by virtue of the verbal agreement pattern. Additionally, the distributional pattern of particle *jii* is such that:

- (i) Discourse particle *jii* cannot mark a nominal that has been marked by the plural suffix *-aN*.
- (ii) *Jii*-marked nominal can be pluralized using a universal quantifier like *sab* ‘all’.

Based on (i) and (ii), we propose that discourse particle *jii* controls for the pluralizing strategy that can be employed for a nominal it marks and that this particle cannot follow the regular plural suffix in a Hindi nominal.

3 Some other Issues

The structure proposed by Bhatt and Davis, repeated here as (15), stipulates that once the Num head is occupied by HON, the higher NP layer also gets valued (formally) as plural because of the formal [PL] feature of the Hon. Thus, data like (16) cannot be accounted for in their system where we have an honorified nominal (since *jii* is an overt instantiation of Hon for Bhatt and Davis) co-occurring with a formally singular demonstrative *us* ‘that’.

(15) [Dem[uPL] [[Hon[PL] [[Num[SG] [N[GENDER]]]]]]]]

(16) Context: A teacher has been caught by a police officer for some alleged crime. He asks the constable to bring her in his office for interrogation and says:

us maasTarni-jii ko andar bhejo
 that.OBL.SG teacher.F-JI DAT inside send.IMP.2
 ‘Send that teacher inside.’

Intended: Lack of respect for the (by-default respected) teacher

The utterance of (16) in the given discourse context has some extra semantic-pragmatic effects besides what is strictly entailed by that sentence. This sentence expresses the speaker’s (the police officer’s) manipulation of the social relation that exists between them and the marked nominal (teacher). The speaker bleaches or weakens the respect (cued by demonstrative *us*) that a teacher is otherwise assumed to have in the default social setting (owing to their profession, cued by the discourse particle *jii* following the nominal), possibly due to their anger or frustration at them/the situation. This type of honorific mismatch resulting in extra semantic effects was evidenced for Magahi in (9a) too.

Another potential issue with Bhatt and Davis’ proposal is that they take the Hindi agreement system to be “oblivious to honorificity”. For them, “there are no phi-features specifically associated with honorificity and we do not need to adjust the agreement algorithm to handle honorificity” (Bhatt and Davis 2023 pp:30). Keeping discourse-sensitive notions, like honorificity, out of the verbal agreement pattern complicates the analysis of data like (17) – where we have the honorific 2P pronominal *aap* ‘you’ co-indexed with *jii*-marked nominals in both parts of the minimal pair but the verbal ending distinctly co-vary.⁷

(17) a. sasur-jii aap khaana khaiye
 father-in-law-JI you.HON food eat.IMP
 ‘Father-in-law, please eat the food.’

b. papa-jii aap khaana khaao
 father-JI you.HON food eat.IMP
 ‘Father, please eat the food.’

Since the subject pronominal in both (15a) and (15b) have the same 2P honorific features, the formal machinery can account for the verb variation if we decompose the discourse-sensitive features at play that distinguish the speaker-father social relation from the speaker-father-in-law relation. This is attempted in section 5.2.

In the next section, we propose an alternative analysis to account for the honorification mechanism underlying the Hindi data discussed so far.

4 Our Proposal

⁷ We thank an anonymous reviewer for bringing up the relevance of this distinction for the discussion at hand.

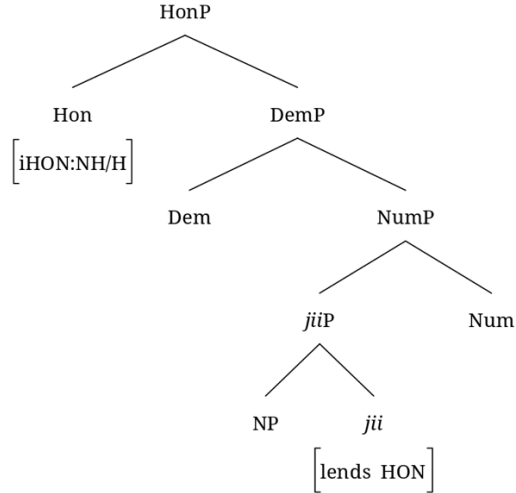
We adopt Alok (2020), who builds upon Portner *et al.*'s (2019) proposal, in assuming an Hon(orific) Phrase above all DPs in Hindi. The Hon head has an interpretable honorific feature – [iHON] – that establishes the honorification relation between the speaker and the referent of that specific DP. Assuming the syntactic instantiation of the speaker (and the addressee) in the higher left periphery of the clause, the [iHON] specifies either an H (honorific) relation or an NH (non-honorific) relation between a variable bound by the speaker co-ordinate in the left periphery and the denotation of the nominal complement it takes. The interpretation function applied to [iHON] when it is valued for the NH relation is specified in (18).

(18) $[[iHON]] = \lambda x.S_i < x$, where $<$ represents the hierarchical honorific relation

[iHON] is semantically interpretable for the nominal and is also the relevant formal feature that gets accessed by the verbal domain for the agreement operation. Thus, contrary to the existing analysis, we propose that the Hindi verbal domain is sensitive to both the phi features and the [iHON] value of the argument that it agrees with. We also propose that discourse particle *jii* is not the overt instantiation of Hon (even though it also has an honorificity-oriented meaning to contribute) and instead projects a distinct phrase of its own above the N. This structure is sketched in (19).

(19) Labelled bracketing⁸

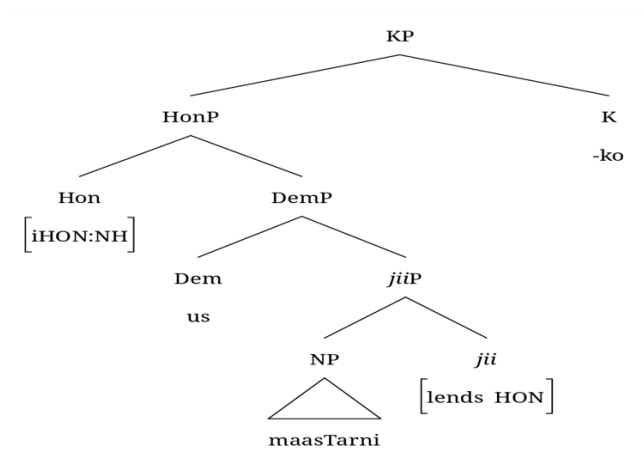
⁸ [HonP
 [Hon #iHON\::NH\H]
 [DemP
 [Dem]
 [NumP
 [*jii*P
 [NP]
 [*jii* #lends HON]
]
 [Num]
]
]
]



jii is a discourse particle that does not contribute to the truth-conditional meaning dimension but it has an honorification lending meaning core encoded in it that contributes to the expressive dimension. This particle does not have the formal feature that the agreement system is sensitive to. A noun that gets marked by particle *jii* conveys the default setting of respect being accorded to the marked nominal in that discourse context. However, it is not the sole contributor of honorification meaning since the value of Hon is also relevant. A nominal marked by *jii* with its [iHON] valued H represents the typical situation – where the honorification-oriented meaning contributed by both align. A nominal marked by *jii* with its [iHON] valued NH represents the honorific mismatch situation that leads to extra semantic effects – as was the case in (16) (see Porter *et al.* 2019, Alok 2020 for a detailed discussion of the dynamic property of honorification/politeness). The value of [iHON] conditions the morphological realization of other non-nominal elements in the NP. Since Hindi co-opts plural morphology for honorification, the H value of [iHON] selects for the plural form of Dem whereas the NH value of [iHON] selects for the singular form of Dem. We propose that the total interpretative import of a nominal is a composite of the honorification-oriented meaning by lexical items like *jii* and the formal [iHON] feature (cued by the form of nominal modifiers or the verbal agreement).

The derivation of data in (16) proceeds as follows: [iHON] gets valued NH – which then selects for the *us* form over the *un* form of the demonstrative; particle *jii* contributes its own meaning – lends honor to the nominal it marks (the default respect setting). This mismatch becomes acceptable when the speaker weakens the by-default respect conferred by *jii* because of some specific socio-pragmatic reason (like anger). The structure for this derivation is given in (20). Note that we put the KP (case layer) above HonP because case-marked nominals are not available for subject honorification in Hindi.

(20) Labelled bracketing⁹



An aside:

For non-case marked nominals, the direct forms of both the demonstratives *vo/ve* can co-occur with an honorific nominal (see footnote 4). In a non-honorific context, the number neutral *vo* can modify the nominal. We observe that for data like (21a) there is an acceptability difference. This sentence is not acceptable for the co-author who is a western Hindi variety speaker but is acceptable for the author who is an eastern Hindi variety speaker. The non-honorific interpretation becomes more easily available once we have an overt indication of the honorific mismatch in the DP – with the demonstrative *vo* that is ambiguous between NH/H marking. (21b) exhibits this. We think that this could be because of the influence of honorification paradigm in a speaker’s other acquired languages. For the speakers whose other languages robustly exhibit honorification mismatches (like Magahi), they require fewer overt cues of mismatches.

- (21) a. maiDam-jii aa rahi hai
 madam-JI come stay.PROG.F be.PRS.3SG
 ‘The teacher is coming.’

⁹ [KP
 [HonP
 [Hon #iHON\ :NH]
 [DemP
 [Dem us]
 [*jii*P
 [NP ^maasTarni]
 [*jii* #lends HON]
]
]
]
 [K \-ko]
]

- b. vo maiDam-jii aa rahi hai
 that madam-JI come stay.PROG.F be.PRS.3SG
 ‘The teacher is coming.’ (*intended-less respected*)

The next section deals with explaining the plurality-honorification interaction and the case for making Hindi agreement system not oblivious to discourse-sensitive information.

5 Resolving the other Open Issues

5.1 The case of Honorific Plural nominals

We agree with Bhatt and Davis (2023) and Sinha (2023) that Hindi does co-opt plural morphology to convey honorification. This aligns well with Wang’s (2023) typological observations about honorification expression across world’s languages.¹⁰ However, she notes that plurality is one amongst the three features (indefiniteness and third person being the other two) that are the systems recycled by languages to express honorification (for a detailed discussion see section 6). By extension, honorification should not have a one-on-one mapping with plurality and our proposal outlined in the preceding section, where we dissociate an HonP and a *jii*P projection from the NumP projection for a Hindi DP, is in line with it. Such an analysis allows for both the singular and plural referents to be either honorific (with or without *jii* particle) or non-honorific (with or without *jii* particle) in the language. Table 1 gives an example for all these combinatorial possibilities.

<i>jii</i> P	NumP	HonP	Example
-	SG	NH	Ravi aaya hai ravi come.PFV.MSG be.PRS.3SG ‘Ravi has come.’
-	PL	NH	Bachche aaye haiN child.PL come.PFV.MPL be.PRS.3PL ‘Children have come.’
-	SG	H	Ravi aaye haiN ravi come.PFV.MPL be.PRS.3PL ‘Ravi has come.’
-	PL	H	maataa-eN aayiN haiN mother-PL come.PFV.FPL be.PRS.3PL ‘Mothers have come.’
+	SG	NH	us maasTarni-jii ko bolo that.OBL.SG teacher-JI DAT say.IMP ‘Tell that teacher’
+	PL	NH	* us maasTarni-jii-logo-N ko bolo that.OBL.SG teacher-JI-people-PL DAT say.IMP ‘Tell that teachers that’

¹⁰ We thank Rajesh Bhatt for bringing Wang’s work to our attention.

			*us maataa-jii-oN ko bolo that.OBL.SG mother-JI-PL DAT say.IMP 'Tell that mothers that'
+	SG	H	Ravi-jii aaye haiN ravi-JI come.PFV.MPL be.PRS.3PL 'Ravi has come.'
+	PL	H	un maasTarnii-jii-log-oN ko bolo that.OBL.PL teacher-JI-people-PL DAT say.IMP 'Tell those teachers that' un maataa-jii-oN ko bolo that.OBL.PL mother-JI-PL DAT say.IMP 'Tell those mothers that'

Table 1: Number-Honorification Landscape in Hindi

The empirical observation about particle *jii* not occurring with a plural suffix (-aN) marked nominal (discussed in section 2.3, relevant data from (12) repeated below as (22)) still warrants an explanation.

- (22) a. *devi-aN ghar pe haiN*
lady-PL home LOC be.PRS.3PL
'The (respected) ladies are at home.'
- b. **devi-aN-jii ghar pe haiN*
lady-PL-JI home LOC be.PRS.3PL
'The (respected) ladies are at home.'
- b. *sab devi-jii ghar pe haiN*
all lady-JI home LOC be.PRS.3PL
'All the (respected) ladies are at home.'

What is the difference between *devi-aN-jii* and *sab devi-jii*? The bare plural *devi-aN* in (22a) gets a definite interpretation in Hindi, like the definite plural DP 'the ladies' in English. Brisson (2003), building up on previous literature that stated that quantification associated with definite plurals is somehow weaker than universal quantification, had proposed that definite plurals are 'non-maximal' in nature because the predication with them is evaluated as true even if most of the people and not all of the referents in the denotation set were part of the predication set (This was semantically derived based on an ill-fitting, context-dependent domain selection variable 'cover' in the restriction of the D operator). The quantifier 'all' has a 'maximizing' effect since it requires a good-fitting cover and thus rules out non-maximality as a domain-of-quantification effect.

We propose that *jii* can mark a nominal only if it is 'maximal' in nature. Singular referents (by default) and *sab* 'all' marked nominals both receive a maximal interpretation and thus, can be marked by *jii*. Bare plurals that are marked by the plural suffix -aN are non-maximal in nature, and thus not compatible with the particle *jii*. Other

pluralizing strategy (like adding *log* ‘people’- discusses in section 2.3 example (13)) operates over the [N-jii] complex, once the selectional requirements of particle *jii* are met.

Along with maximality, this particle also looks for a specific reference of the nominal it attaches to. This can be gleaned from the data in (23) – it is acceptable with a 2P pronoun (specific for a discourse context), proper nouns, relational nouns like *daamaad* ‘son-in-law’ (that are specific owing to being defined from the speaker’s perspective) but not okay with common nouns like ‘boy’ (23d) (but we note that this seems to be okay for Bhatt and Davis), since common nouns do not single out some individual in the world as their referent and need further informational support to receive a specific reference.

- (23) a. *aap-jii*
b. *Ravi-jii*
c. *daamaad-jii*
d. * *larke-jii*
 boy-JI

The fact that discourse particles have their own idiosyncratic properties that restrict the felicitous environment in which they can occur has been previously noted in Bhalla (2022) for Hindi discourse particle *-to*. Therefore, it is not surprising that discourse particle *jii* also imposes its requirement on its complement and selects for a maximal and specific nominal.¹¹

5.2 Difference between father and father-in-law for the verb

Another issue raised in section-3 highlighted the relevance of discourse-sensitive notions for the verbal domain. Hindi has three pronominal forms in second person *tu/tum/aap* that have been discussed much in the literature. Our take is that these pronouns encode an honorific distinction (respect based on social factors like age) and an intimacy distinction – whether the person is close to the speaker (i.e. in an intimate relation with them) or a non-intimate relation. We propose the featural composition of these pronouns in (24). And the varied verb ending for imperatives in (25) exhibit that both these features have a role to play in the syntax. Thus, Hindi verbs are sensitive to both honorification and intimacy information of the speaker and the nominal referents. The minimal pair in example (17) instantiated the two feature combinations available for *aap* – with father being honorific and intimate for the speaker (usual case but need not be the norm) and father-in-law being the honorific and non-intimate counterpart for the speaker.

¹¹ In our post-FASAL work, we have modified the analysis about requirement of particle *jii* – from selecting a ‘maximal’ nominal complement to selecting an ‘atomic’ one. We refer the interested reader to Bhalla and Alok (2025).

- (24) a. Tu [-HON], [+INTIM]
b. Tum [-HON], [-INTIM]
c. Aap [+HON],[+INTIM]
d. Aap [+HON],[-INTIM]

- (25) a. Tu khaa
b. Tum khaao
c. Aap khaao
d. Aap khaiye
'You eat'

The next section concludes and locates the findings of this paper across the broader discussion happening around honorification across languages.

6 Conclusion and Ending Comments

This paper has motivated an empirically-driven, theoretical account for honorification in Hindi that pushes for an HonP for every nominal and a *jii*P above an NP to host discourse particle *jii*, when available. The formal feature of [iHON] is semantically interpretable for the nominal and formally relevant for the verbal agreement system. The H/NH value of [iHON] selects for the form of the nominal dependents and honorification (and thus, H value of [iHON]) co-opts plural morphology in the language. The discourse particle *jii* imposes its idiosyncratic requirement of selecting a specific and maximal nominal complement. It also controls for the plurality-indicating cue that can co-occur with it, allows *sab* but not *-aN*. And interpretation-wise, honorification is a composite build-up of values of the formal, interpretable [iHON] feature and any honorification lending lexical items in the DP – match of values gives regular semantics whereas mismatch gives extra semantics.

One support for our alternative analysis comes from the recent typological work by Wang (2023). She shows that the languages of the world recycle a specific set of values from a finite feature repository to morpho-syntactically express honorification. Specifically, [3rd Person] feature or [indefinite] feature or a [plural] feature is the only choice that a language ever makes when selecting a system to co-opt for honorification. She proposes that in contexts requiring respect, speakers adhere to a socio-pragmatic maxim of Taboo of Directness, by virtue of which they avoid specific and direct reference to the respected person. The common core underlying [3P], [Plural] and [indefinite] is that they are semantically unmarked choices in their respective feature sets and thus ideal candidates to express honorification, since they are all relative vague and less specific. Thus, Hindi makes a language-specific decision to recruit plurality for honorification while a language like Italian employs person mismatch feature to convey deference to someone in a context. Our proposal is in-line with this over-arching picture

of honorification since it establishes that in Hindi, an H valued [iHon] selects for plural morphology on the nominal dependents to convey the honorific status of the nominal (irrespective of the fact whether the referent of the nominal is singular or plural) and the verbal agreement also reverts to plural paradigm when it sees an H valued [iHON]. This language specific choice becomes visible at the time of vocabulary insertion. This proposal is thus, perspective-wise different from an approach that assumes a non-semantic [PL] feature to be the core of HON and views honorification itself as plural agreement, rather than a language-specific decision that Hindi makes.

And lastly, to wrap-up our discussion of honorification and plurality, there are other Indo-Aryan languages that keep the two distinct – Magahi and Assamese. Magahi data was discussed in (9a-b). The facts of that language are more complicated (we observed that Magahi *jii* co-occurs with the plural *-an* but we note that the plural marker comes with *-waa* but not alone with *jii*) but we kept the discussion brief in this paper. Assamese data is cited from Ali (2025) – work presented in FASAL-15 conference (see Ali, this volume, for a detailed discussion). Assamese has separate plural morphemes *-hət* and *-lək* – that are specified for the honorific status of the pronoun they can attach to. The pattern for 2P and 3P non-honorific and honorific pronouns is given in (26).

- (26) a. $t\acute{o}i \rightarrow t\acute{o}h\acute{o}t$
 2P.NH 2P.NH.PL
 b. $t\acute{o}mi \rightarrow t\acute{o}mal\acute{o}k$
 2P.H 2P.H.PL

Thus, across languages of the same language family, while Hindi does not permit the honorificity lending cue *jii* to co-occur with plural suffix *-aN*, Magahi is more flexible in permitting co-occurrence of *jii* with its plural suffix and Assamese has a systematic paradigm of plurality markers that are relativized to the honorific status of the nominal referent. Therefore, cross-linguistically also we receive independent evidence to push for an honorification account that is not contingent on a non-semantic [PL] feature that is in complementary distribution with [PL] feature, but rather for an account that is sensitive to the language-specific expression of honorification.

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