

Number morphology on honorific nouns

Introduction: Nouns with singular honorific reference (SG.HON nouns) trigger plural agreement in Hindi. The number morphology on the noun itself poses a puzzle. Most plural noun inflection does not appear on SG.HON nouns, even though these nouns trigger plural agreement. However, there is one plural affix -e – that is found on masculine nouns of a particular declension class – that does appear on SG.HON nouns too. In this abstract, I provided an analysis for this puzzling state of affairs where different pieces of plural morphology behave differently with respect to whether they occur on SG.HON nouns or not. My analysis is couched within the framework of Distributed Morphology (Halle & Marantz 1993, 1994).

I propose that -e realizes a different morphosyntactic node than other plural affixes in the language. While -e realizes n, the latter affixes realize Num. The Num-realizing affixes are sensitive to the number feature on Num, while the n-realizing -e is sensitive to the number feature on D because n lacks its own number features. For non-honorific and plural nouns, these number features on Num and D are the same, but for SG.HON nouns, the two differ. I adopt Bhatt & Davis’ (2021) structure for SG.HON nouns to explain why this is the case.

Data: Nouns in Hindi inflect for number (SG vs. PL) and case (direct (DIR) and oblique (OBL)). Nouns appear in oblique case when followed by postpositions, and otherwise, in the direct case. Noun inflection also depends on gender (MASC vs. FEM) and declension class (I vs. II). Class I nouns are characterized by a gender-dependent ending in the SG.DIR (-a for masculines, -i for feminines), absent in Class II nouns. The noun inflection paradigm for Hindi is in (2).

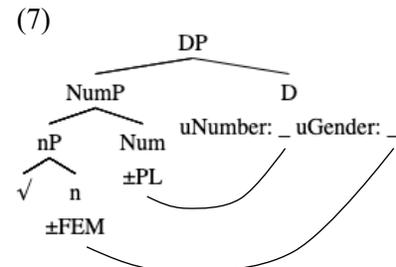
(2) Noun inflection				
Gender	MASC		FEM	
Class	I	II	I	II
SG.DIR	-a	-	-i	-
PL.DIR	-e	-	-iyā	-ē
SG.OBL	-e	-	-i	-
PL.OBL	-ō	-ō	-iyō	-ō

Generally, SG.HON nouns lack plural marking, despite triggering plural agreement. (3) shows this for a Class I feminine noun in the direct case – analogous facts hold for Class II feminines too. (4) shows this for a Class II masculine noun in the oblique case. Analogous facts hold for all nouns in the oblique case. The plural form of the noun in (3) and (4) is obviously grammatical, but can only be used if multiple people are being referred to.

(3) dad-i/(#iyā) grandmother(F)-SG.DIR/(#PL.DIR) ‘Grandmother (hon) came.’	a-ī come.PFV-F.PL
(4) ōn DIST.PL.OBL ‘from that gentleman (hon)’	səjjān(#-ō) gentleman(M).SG.OBL(#PL.OBL) se from
(5) mer-e my-M.PL.DIR ‘My nephew (hon)/ nephews came.’	bhətij-e/(*-a) nephew(M)-PL.DIR/(*SG.DIR) a-e come.PFV-M.PL
(6) bhətij-e/(*-ō) nephew(M)-SG.OBL/(*PL.OBL) ‘from the nephew (hon/non-hon)	se from

However, Class I masculines in the direct case anomalously appear with plural morphology when SG.HON. They take the PL.DIR affix -e instead of the SG.DIR -a, as shown in (5). This anomalous behavior is limited to the direct case of these nouns: in the oblique case, they take the SG.OBL affix -e when SG.HON, instead of the PL.OBL -ō, as shown in (6).

Analysis: Following the DM literature, I assume that nouns have an extended projection as in (7). A noun is an nP, and contains an acategorial root merged with a nominalizing head n. Gender features are introduced on n, and number features are introduced on a Num head which merges with the nP. Finally, D has probes for gender and number, that it values via downwards Agree. D also carries a ±OBL feature depending on the case of the DP. A



crucial point to note is that *n* lacks a number feature, Num lacks a gender feature, and both of these heads lack a case feature. In contrast, *D* has all three types of features.

I propose that the characteristic gender ending of Class I nouns (-*a* for masculines and -*i* for feminines) is the realization of *n*. For Class I feminines, this -*i* occurs in all case and number combinations, but this *i* → *iy* before the plural affixes -*ā* (PL.DIR) and -*ō* (PL.OBL), due to a regular phonological process that affects *i* before non-front vowels (Elizarenkova 1988). For Class I masculines, *n* is realized as -*a* only in the SG.DIR. It is realized as -*e* in all other case/number combinations (PL.DIR, SG.OBL and PL.OBL). This is trivially true for the PL.DIR and SG.OBL, where -*e* replaces -*a*, as shown in (1). For the PL.OBL, we do not see any -*e*. Nonetheless, following Sinha (2018), I propose that the underlying form of the PL.OBL inflection for Class I masculines is -*eō* instead of the surface -*ō*, and that there is a phonological process that deletes *e* before round vowels. See Sinha (2018) for evidence that the PL.OBL of Class I masculines is indeed underlyingly -*eō*, and that there is a phonological process in Hindi that deletes *e* before round vowels. For Class II nouns, *n* is always realized as null. The Vocabulary Items in (8)-(11) can account for the various exponents of *n*. One fact to note is that the realization of *n* is sensitive not only to the gender features on *n*, but also to case and number features because of (8). Since *n* lacks number and case features, and Num lacks case features, I propose that this sensitivity is due to allomorphy triggered on *n* by features on *D*. Therefore, under the current account, the -*a*/-*e* contrast in the direct case of Class I masculines is sensitive to the number features on *D*, and not those on Num.

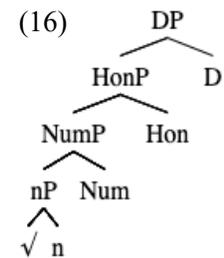
- (8) [n -FEM] ↔ a/Class I _[-PL -OBL]
 (9) [n -FEM] ↔ e/Class I _
 (10) [n +FEM] ↔ i/Class I _
 (11) [n] ↔ null/Class II _

Once we factor out the exponents of *n*, we are left with the following affixes: -*ā* (Class I feminine PL.DIR), -*ē* (Class II feminine PL.DIR) and -*ō* (all obliques). I propose that these are the realizations of Num. In singulars and the direct case of masculine nouns, Num is realized as null. The Vocabulary Items for Num are in (12)-(15). These are sensitive to the number features on Num itself, and their gender/case-sensitivity is again due to allomorphy triggered by *D*.

- (12) [Num +PL] ↔ ā/Class I _[+FEM -OBL]
 (13) [Num + PL] ↔ ē/Class II _[+FEM -OBL]
 (14) [Num + PL] ↔ ō/_[+OBL]
 (15) [Num] ↔ NULL

We now have a syntactic asymmetry between the plural affixes that do and do not appear on SG.HON nouns. Those that do not (-*ā*/-*ē*/-*ō*) realize Num and are sensitive to the number feature on Num. In contrast, the DIR.PL -*e* that does appear on SG.HON nouns realizes *n* and is sensitive to the number feature on *D*. More specifically, it is sensitive to the absence of the singular (-PL) feature on *D*, because if the singular feature were present, we would get -*a* in the direct case, per (8).

To exploit this asymmetry, I adopt Bhatt & Davis' (2021) proposal that SG.HON nouns have a Num head with a singular feature embedded under an Hon head with a plural feature (that is not interpreted as semantic number). The structure of SG.HONs is as in (16). The singular feature on Num explains why SG.HONS do not take any of the plural exponents of Num (-*ā*/-*ē*/-*ō*). Hon intervenes between Num and *D*, and so *D* values its number probe via the plural feature on Hon. Therefore, any node whose realization depends on the number feature on *D* will appear with the plural rather than the singular exponent. This explains why Class I masculine SG.HON nouns do not take -*a* even in the direct case.



Conclusion: I have argued for a syntactic explanation for why certain plural affixes appear on SG.HONN nouns, when most others do. This analysis assumes an elaborated structure in the nominal projection. For future development, I intend to study other Western Indo-Aryan languages (Marathi, Punjabi and Gujarati), where SG.HON nouns also trigger plural agreement. Preliminary data collection indicates that these languages also show a similar pattern, where some plural affixes do not appear on SG.HON nouns, while others do. It would be worthwhile to investigate if such an analysis can be extended to these languages.

References

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