

THE MORPHOSYNTAX OF FORMALITY: A TYPOLOGY AND INCORPORATION IN FEATURE GEOMETRY

Ben Macaulay (bmacaulay@gc.cuny.edu)

CUNY Graduate Center

Formality is usually not considered a ϕ -feature on the level of person, number and gender. However, in many languages formality enters agreement relations. This can happen in one of three ways, (i) by using the plural marker, (ii) by using a third-person substitution for second person (often adapted from a lexical item like “your honor”) or (iii) by using a completely separate marker. Formality is not limited to second person, and languages often use combinations of methods (i-iii), as shown in (1).

While often dismissed as “discourse-external” (Harley & Ritter, 2002a), formality must be licensed by languages for each person. French cannot use 3p as a formal third person, while Hindi can. A mismatch in level of formality results in an ungrammatical sentence (shown in (2), from Bengali). Languages with a formal third person maintain the level of formality when switching between 2nd/3rd person (shown in (3), from Hindi).

As the typology in (1) shows, there are certain cross-linguistic tendencies regarding formality paradigms. There is a maximum of three levels of formality (L/M/H in the examples), and no language marks first- or third-person formality without second-person formality. In all cases in (1) the 3rd person substitutions (marked as S) are more formal than plurality/separate markings (P/M) when they coexist within 2nd/3rd person. However, any combination of the three is possible within a formality paradigm.

In order to incorporate formality into a morphosyntactic ϕ -feature geometry (as proposed by Harley and Ritter), we must first find the commonality between these formality-evoking discourse situations. The most extensive cases of formality are Lyélé with two levels of formality in all three persons, and Nepali with three levels of formality for second and third person, as shown in (4). Assuming that the M levels denote a speaker and subject on equal footing, these paradigms can be condensed into the situations in (5), where a speaker of higher status is denoted in Lyélé by a first person formal but by 2/3L in Nepali.

The information in (5) can be represented in the feature geometry by a single feature, I propose [\pm STATUS]. [+STATUS] will denote situations where the speaker is of higher standing, [-STATUS] for situations where the speaker is of lower standing and the feature will not be specified for the M levels.

The feature [\pm STATUS] makes certain predictions about formality marking in languages. First, languages can have at most three levels of formality (the data support this). Second, that syncretism is possible for either [+STATUS] (demonstrated in Lyélé) or [-STATUS] (this is common to many Indo-Aryan verb-marking paradigms where 2H and 3H share a single marking, *-en* in Bengali and *-ē* in Hindi). Third, languages that mark second and third persons for formality in different ways (plural, 2 \rightarrow 3, separate marking) retain formality over a change between 2nd/3rd person even when it affects other ϕ -features. In (3a), the 3H is marked via the plural while in (3b) the same subject, now 2H, is marked via 2 \rightarrow 3 substitution.

If [\pm STATUS] exists as proposed, it would be the only binary feature currently in Harley and Ritter’s system. I must note that this feature could also be expressed as unary [HIGH] and [LOW] features under a new node, which simply do not occur in combination. However, unlike other such pairs (for example, SUPERIOR/OBLIQUE under the CASE node), the values of [\pm STATUS] do fit on a continuum, and I will maintain that they be collapsed into one feature.

In order to place [\pm STATUS] within Harley and Ritter’s feature geometry, we must look at the interaction between formality and the other ϕ -features in marking paradigms. The most bare-bones case is Bengali, which marks for person and formality but not number/gender (1, 2L, 2M, 3M, 2/3H). Formality marking can exist with or without number and gender marking. Japanese and Korean appear to mark verbs for formality and have pronouns at different levels of formality, however a mismatch of these does not yield an ungrammatical result; formality marking seems to require person marking. Therefore, [\pm STATUS] must be closer to the PARTICIPANT node that dominates person features than the INDIVIDUATION node that dominates number and gender. Nevins (2007) has explored third person as the lack of person features as opposed to its own feature, and as formality marking is widely found on third person, a feature geometry that marks third person as a lack of person must hold [\pm STATUS] on a node *above* PARTICIPANT.

As shown in languages like Danish (6) and Italian (7), formality marking doesn’t necessarily interfere with other agreement relationships like gender/number on adjectives (Danish *De* is plural and Italian *Lei* is a substituted feminine lexical item). I propose that there exists a node under RE that dominates [\pm STATUS] and PARTICIPANT in order for person and formality features to be able to bundle together to the exclusion of number/gender/case. This node I will call DYNAMIC. The complete geometry is shown in (8).

In conclusion, while formality has not generally been considered a ϕ -feature at the level of person, number and gender, I will present cross-linguistic evidence of ϕ -feature formality, predictions of the incorporation of a feature [\pm STATUS] into the feature geometry and how formality fits in with current frameworks of morphosyntax.

Illustrations and Examples:

(1)	1	2	3	Language
	P	P	M	Lyélé (Niger-Congo)
		M	M	Xerente (Macro-Jê)
		M	P	Amharic (Semitic)
		P	M	Tamil (Dravidian), Bench (Omotic)
		M+S	M	Bengali (Indo-Aryan)
		P+S	P+S	Nepali (Indo-Aryan)
		P+S	P	Hindi (Indo-Aryan)
		P+S		Basque, old German (Germanic)
		S		modern German, Italian, Hungarian
		P		French, Turkish

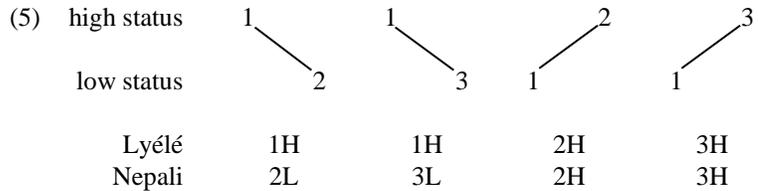
Legend:
 P – formal = plural
 S – formal 2 = 3
 M – separate marking
 + – multiple forms for different levels of formality

- (2) a. tui boi pɔɾ-ij/*pɔɾ-o/*pɔɾ-en
 2.L book read-PRES.2.L/*M/*H
 You (L) read a book.
 b. ě-ra boi pɔɾ-en/*e
 3.H.COMM book read-PRES.3.H/*M
 They (H) read a book.

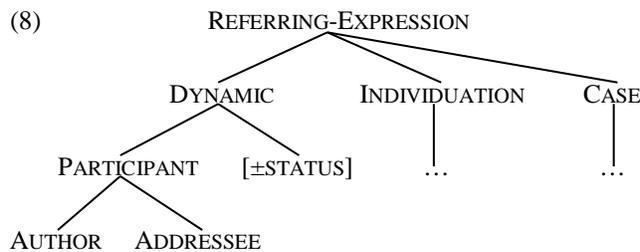
- (3) a. riŋi-ji kahã hẽ
 Rishi-HON where be.3.pl/H
 Where is Rishi? (H)
 b. riŋi-ji āp/*tum kɛse hẽ/*ho
 Rishi-HON 2H/*2M how.pl/H be.3.pl/H/*2.pl/M
 Rishi, how are you? (H/*M)

(4)

	Lyélé	Nepali
1 – second level	✓	
2 – second level	✓	✓
2 – third level		✓
3 – second level	✓	✓
3 – third level		✓



- (6) a. De_i er sɔd-Ø
 2H COP sweet-sg
 b. De_j er sɔd-e
 2H COP sweet-pl
 You (H) are sweet.
- (7) Lei_m è stanc-o?
 2H COP tired-m
 Lei_n è stanc-a?
 2H COP tired-f
 Are you (H) tired?



Selected References: Caha, P. “The Nanosyntax of Case.” 2009. Diss. University of Tromsø.; Harley, H. and Elizabeth Ritter. 2002a. “A feature-geometric analysis of person and number,” *Language* 78.3, pp. 482-526.; Harley, H. and Elizabeth Ritter. 2002b. “Structuring the Bundle: A Universal Morphosyntactic Feature Geometry.” In *Pronouns: Features and Representations*, ed. by Horst Simon and Heike Weise, 23-39. Amsterdam: John Benjamin.; Nevins, A. 2007. “The representation of third person and its consequences for person-case effects.” Springer.; Preminger, O. “Agreement and its failures.” To appear in *Linguistic Inquiry Monographs* series. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.; Wiesemann, U. 1986. “Pronominal Systems.” Tübingen.