CASTE AND SOCIAL DIFFERENTIATION OF SPEECH IN BIHAR

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ABSTRACT

Many early surveys have reported differences between Brahmin and non-Brahmin castes such as in Bloch (1910), Aiyer (1932), Andronov (1962), Bright and Ramanujan (1964), Pillai (1965, 1966, 1968) and McCormack, (1960) among others. On the other hand, sociolinguistic surveys have suggested that caste cannot be understood in isolation. The present work is a first attempt to revisit the caste-based differentiation in the speech by drawing data from Maithili, spoken in Bihar. The variable under investigation is **Variation in person marking**: the alternation between honorific and non-honorific forms (honorific [ainh] ~non-honorific [-ai] forms). The findings suggest that though caste turned out to be significant, it cannot be interpreted in isolation; it interacts with other social factors.

KEYWORDS: Caste, honorificity, social stratification, caste-based hierarchy, social change, linguistic change.

INTRODUCTION

The present study falls within the area of Variationist Sociolinguistics, called Language Variation and Change. The study investigates the social differentiation of speech using caste hierarchy in a Maithili-speaking region of rural North Bihar. Caste has been a contentious issue in Indian sociolinguistics dating from the pioneering essays by Gumperz (1958) and Pandit (1969) in north and western India and many more studies that appeared in Southern India. Bihar provides an important test case given its elaborate caste-based social stratification, its linkages with the agrarian society, and a strong history of peasant uprisings culminating in the Dalit political movement. Further, Bihar's long history of caste-based subordination and oppression is rooted in the land revenue systems of the Mughal period and got only worst during the colonial period despite the reforms (1822-1835) as those did not trickle down to the bottom of the hierarchy. Though caste is not akin to social class, some correlation between socio-economic status and the caste hierarchy has been reported (Socio-Economic Demographic Composition, n.d.).

The existing studies of sociolinguistic stratification have demonstrated a relationship between language and society e.g., (Labov, 1966, 1980, 1990; Cedergren 1973; Trudgill 1974b; Kroch 1978; Sankoff and Laberge 1978; Milroy 1980; Horvath 1985; Eckert, 1991; Haeri 1999; and others).

However, these studies have come essentially from western societies and are rooted in a different sociolinguistic system entangled with strong national languages, power and prestige (Satyanath, 2021a,b). Further, like social class, caste cannot be understood in isolation as it interacts with other social and demographic variables (Kumar, 2021a, Sunny, 2013). Despite, positive transformations, the landed caste hierarchy is still alive in rural Bihar. Against this background, the study investigates the indexical relationship between the landed caste structure and language in Bihar.

The study addresses a number of related questions as listed below:

1. A broader question is: How does language index social structure based on caste hierarchy?

2. A rather contentious question is: Are there caste-based dialects?

3. Considering the strong possibility of other factors, the study asks: What other locally relevant factors does caste interact with?

4. The study further probes the question: Is caste salient by itself?

5. As most past studies are based on phonological variation, it is important to ask whether phonological variables show greater sensitivity to caste-based differentiation than morpho-syntactic variables.

6. Finally, implications of the study for Sociolinguistics in general and in South Asia and parts of Southeast Asia in particular.

CASTE

Caste is the most contentious category and also the most misunderstood category. There are divergent views among scholars on caste as a social system, how it functioned across time, and how it changed from being a reciprocal system of exchange of goods and services to a source of discrimination and oppression.

With the collapse of the Jajmani system (which involved a symbiotic relationship between service providers and patrons), its newly acquired associations with agrarian and landed systems during the period of Islamic contact (Mughal period, for instance), and especially during the British period the caste system got distorted and so did its understanding.

The British undertook mapping of castes, races and tribes in India in the mid19[th] century and in that process also created a hierarchy mixing up race, religion, castes, and tribes (Forbes and Kaye eds. 1968, Vol 3) with Brahmins at the top followed by the Kshatriya and others. (Also Wise, 1883 on race, castes and trades of Eastern Bengal; Census of India, 1901, Chapter xi. Caste, tribe and race).

Eventually, caste came to be seen as a source of social discrimination and exploitation at the hands of the revenue collectors. The privatization of land and excessive extortion of revenue from individuals instead of a village or a community gave rise to the newly landed and dominant castes and landless peasants.

With time we find a shift in discourses from ritual hierarchy and social discrimination to caste being utilized as a means to mobilize people for political and economic gain. This is evident in the rise of Dalit politics, and the rise of new political parties from below in the 1990s.

WHAT DOES CASTE MEAN TODAY?

It is an endogamous unit which has its utility for ritualistic purposes, particularly those relating to death and marriages. It has weakened but hasn't disappeared. Historically, it could be seen as knowledge-based subsystems, but flexible and India has seen enough social mobility among castes, tribes and religions. Gumperz reports that a village easily accommodates new incoming groups as other castes. Likewise, we find that the Rajvanshis of Bengal are the descendants of the Koch (A Tibeto-Burman group); likewise, Bishnupriyas all write Singh to their names, thus claiming a Kshatriya status. During the British times, many Brahmins became traders due to the collapse of the Jajmani system which supported them.

Throughout history, there have been Kshatriya kings, Brahmin kings, Vaishya kings and also Shudra kings who spoke one or more languages such as Sanskrit, Prakrits, Apabhramsa and local vernaculars. If we talk about the lists of castes, it will be a long list involving Brahmin castes, trading castes, warrior castes, artisan castes, pastoralists and hunters, agrarian castes and so on. Eastern India and Bihar in particular is a great case to study caste and social stratification because of its peculiar history of caste-based political movements.

Any caste-based discrimination is banned under the law of India and many affirmative actions are in place in educational institutions and jobs. The terms used in the Indian constitutions are not low and high castes but socio-economically backwards or forward castes.

Caste is not akin to social class, though we find the residential structure of many villages organized along castes in the broader sense.

CASTE-BASED SURVEYS IN INDIA

The earliest caste Surveys were reported in the 1930s by Bloch (1910, 1932) and Aiyer (1932). These studies are located in south India. The studies pointed out lexical and phonological differences in the speech of Brahmin and non-Brahmins. There are also other surveys like Sen (1955).

Bloch (1910) notes that there exists a Brahman vs. non-Brahman vs. Lower caste distinction in social dialects in the Tamil of Kumbakonam and Chidambaram. The findings suggest that (1) Brahmans are more phonologically conservative than other groups; (2) morphological variation shows language stratification. Overall the study shows a caste-based stratification of language varieties in Tamil. While the upper and lower strata of the caste pattern are stable, the middle castes tend to be flexible primarily because of upward social mobility in these groups.

According to Aiyar (1932), the Brahmin dialect displays more lexical borrowings from Sanskrit than does the non-Brahmin dialect, although both agree on having loans from Prakrit, Pali, and Kannada. The differences between Brahmin and non-Brahmin Tulu are largely because of the 'cultural aloofness' of the Brahmin community.

Pillai (1965) provides a statistical index of caste isolation with reference to the use of particular variants of kinship terms. Except for the Tamil of Muslim groups, the greatest number of non-shared kinship terms is in the Brahmin dialect, with groups descending in caste ranking having increasingly less deviation from the shared core of terms.

However, the first noteworthy study that drew the attention of sociolinguists towards caste stratification and paved the way for caste-based studies on language is Gumperz (1958). Gumperz noticed the village society being stratified along caste lines, which made him believe that it might serve as an important source for social differentiation of speech as well. However, he (1969) later revised his understanding following Pandit:

"caste per se is not sufficient to explain the facts of language distribution, ……Frequency of contact also fails as an explanation since the most divergent groups, the sweepers, work in the upper caste homes from sun up to sun down and serve as carriers of gossip from one household to another. Only detailed analysis of social interaction provides an answer" (Gumperz quoted in Pandit, 1975, p. 95).

Following Gumperz, we find a renewed interest in language and caste in Southern India in the 1960s resulting in a series of studies on Kannada, Tulu and Tamil. Some of the names include Bright (1960), McCormack (1960, 1968), Ramanujan (1968), Bright and Ramanujan (1962), Bhat (1967–1968), and so on.

A majority of these studies suggested the presence of lexical, phonological and morphological differences in the speech of some of the Brahmin and non-Brahmin dialects that were studied. They found that the Brahmins' speech was more oriented towards Sanskrit whereas the non-Brahmin castes generally drew on the native Dravidian resources. Further, the Brahmins innovate by borrowing from Sanskrit whereas non-Brahmin speech shows changes from below making use of native Dravidian resources (Bright & Ramanujan, 1962).

However, Ramanujan (1966/1968) also rightly reported that this is not a strict divide as features of non-Brahmin dialects form part of the daily casual interaction in Brahmin homes. A similar point emerges in McCormac (1960) on the presence of non-Brahmin traits in the speech of the Brahmins and vice versa, though the study works on the premise of caste-based differentiation.

McCormack (1960) finds that the motivation for the existence of caste dialects is because of the awareness of the social status aspects of the caste hierarchy. The main findings of the paper are that the Indian speech community are conscious of caste dialects, and linguistic forms diffuse more rapidly among people of lower strata of society than that of higher strata.

In another study, one of a dialect of Kanyakumari fisherman, Pillai (1968) employs statistical methods to determine whether the dialect of Kanyakumari fisherman bears resemblance to Brahmin, non-Brahmin, or lower non-Brahmin dialects. The study suggests that the speech of Kanyakumari fishermen cannot be said to be closer to any one particular caste dialect.

A majority of such caste surveys in general did not follow the speech community approach nor did they project a complete picture of the presence of various castes.

Pandit (1969) is his first major sociolinguistic study on the social differentiation of speech based on spoken data. Pandit studied variation in Gujarati (spoken in Ahmadabad) with respect to three phonological variables drawing on a large sample of 150 speakers representing education, gender, caste, and rural-urban. His findings suggest that speech variation is conditioned by a number of parameters such as education, gender, age, rural–urban divide and so on, and there is no evidence of a simple correlation between caste ranking and speech or the simplistic assumption that caste dialects exist. The same findings are echoed in Sunny (2013) who undertook a study of a stratified sample along caste, religion and gender involving matrilineal and patrilineal groups. Her findings also underscore interaction among social factors as neither gender nor caste tested was significant in isolation.

There is a long history of research on caste and language. Annotated bibliography of some of them is given below. Some of the salient findings are reviewed in Satyanath (2021b).

Satyanath (2021a,b) has indicated that Variationist Sociolinguistics has so far confined itself to Western contexts and English. A majority of the Western settings according to Satyanath represent monolingual and monocultural settings which are very different from the Indian settings and other settings in Asia-Pacific which are more multilingual and multicultural and present their own dynamics. Various studies on Indian speech communities present factors that are locally relevant and many of these are unique to India.

Sunny (2013) has shown the interaction of caste and gender in Cherrukuunam village (Kerala) where matrilineal and patrilineal groups, as well as a large number of caste groups and Christian sects reside.

THE PRESENT STUDY

Caste is not akin to social class though some correlation might exist. Caste, like other social factors, interacts with other external factors. Caste has been a contentious issue in India primarily because of the misreading of caste by the British who equated it with race (Hutton, 2020; Kaul, 1912) and which was not only responsible for the divide between Aryan and Dravidian on the one hand but also for the subsequent anti-Brahminical movement in South (also see Berntsen, 1973). This drew the attention of subsequent anthropologists and linguists alike to caste. This was largely responsible for the caste-based surveys depicting differences between the Brahmin and non-Brahmin speeches that followed in the 1960s and onwards in the South.

Against this background, we decided to further test caste and language by drawing data from Bihar where caste has been an important social and political issue.
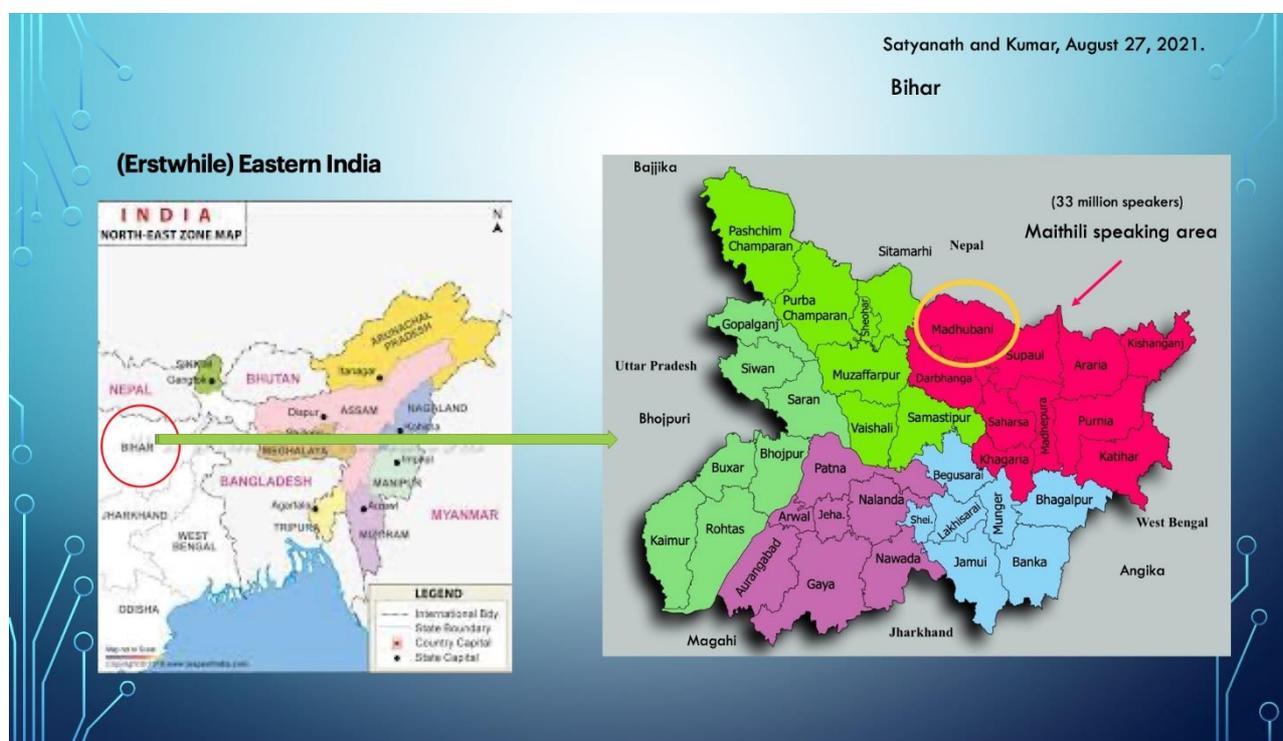
This map shows the five linguistic regions of Bihar and the one in pink is the Maithili-speaking area with as many as 33 million speakers nationwide. Bihar is one of the eastern states of India. There are five principal languages, spoken here as shown on the map. The area in pink is the Maithili-speaking area with as many as 33 million speakers. Other languages are also colour-coded and marked on the map. The study is based on the Madhubani district.

1. Linguistic Map of Bihar (2021)
AGREEMENT PATTERNS IN MAITHILI
Maithili is unique and complex in terms of agreement and person marking. Gender is not marked on the verb. Number is also not marked on the verb. The verb in Maithili copies tense, aspect, person and honorificity. There are two agreement patterns:

(1) Agr Pattern: The verb agrees with the subject and variably with the direct object which gives us two possibilities: (a) The verb agrees with the subject, and the object and (b) The verb agrees only with the subject.

(a) Ham   okra   bolae-l-i-ai   aiTham
1.NOM.S   3NH-DAT/ACC.O   call-PST-1.S-3NH.O   here
'I called him here.'

(b) Ham okra bad samjhai-l-i-(null marking on object. 1.NOM.S   3NH-DAT/ACC.O much   convince-PST-1.S
'I convinced him much.'

In (a) 'I called him here' both the subject *I* and the object *him* are marked morphologically on the verb by their respective markers -*i* and -*ai*. On the other hand in example (b) the subject *I* is marked by -*i* but the object *him* remains unmarked. It remains morphologically null. We have a second Agr pattern. In the case of ditransitive/double object constructions, the object with the higher status (usually the indirect object) will receive variable marking which gives us two kinds of possibilities : (a) Both subject and object are marked and (b) Subject alone is marked.

(a) apne   hunka   kahio sach   nai   bat-ai-l-i-ainh. 2HH.NOM.S   3HH-DAT.IO
ever   truth(3NH.DO)   neg   tell-PST-2H.S-3H.IO
'You never told him the truth.'
(b) (b) ahan   hunka   jamin   kharid-del-i-(Null marking on object) 2HH.NOM.S
3HH-DAT.IO   land (3NH.DO)   buy-PST-2H.S 'You bought him land.'

In 2 (a) 'you never told him the truth' The subject you and the honorific indirect object him get marked on the verb by the markers -i and -ainh. In 2 (b) 'you bought him land' the subject you get marked by -i, but the honorific indirect object him remains unmarked. The constraints on the marking are more complicated and honorificity also comes into play. To be discussed later : (The prominence of an NP depends upon three interrelated factors (I) the extent to which the speakers want to emphasise that NP (2) The honorific grade of that NP (3) The animacy of the referent of that NP.)

MORPHO-SYNTACTIC VARIATION IN HONORIFICITY MARKING OF THE OBJECT
Honorific objects are variably marked: There is an alternation between honorific and non-honorific forms (honorific [nh] ~non-honorific [-ai] forms) as shown by the following examples:
(1) Ham-sab   Sitaji- ke   puj-ai-chh-i-**ai.**
1-PL.NOM.S   respected Sita-DAT/ACC.O   worship-IMPERF-AUX.PRES-1.S-3H.O
'We all worship respected Sita.'
(2) Ham-sab   Sitaji- ke   puj-ai-chh-i-**ainh**.
1-PL.NOM.S   respected Sita-DAT/ACC.O   worship-IMPERF-AUX.PRES-1.S-3H.O
'We all worship respected Sita.'

All the subject-object combinations that are subject to variation are listed in the following table:

SUBJECT+OBJECT		VARIABLE MARKING
1	3HH	i-ainh~i-ai
1	2HH	i-ainh~i-ai
2HH	3HH	i-ainh~i-ai
2NH	3HH	ahi-nh~ahi
2MH	3HH	ahu-nh~ahu
3NH	3HH	k-ainh~k-ai (trans.+pst) ainh~ai (all clauses+all tenses)
3NH	2HH	k-ainh~k-ai (trans.+pst) ainh~ai (all clauses+all tenses)

Table 1. Variable Object Marking

It is evident from Table 1 that the language has a naturalisation process in person marking: 1st person and 2HH subjects are marked in the same way. They both are marked by -i. 2HH objects and 3HH objects are marked in the same way. They both are marked by -ainh. Kainh~kai variation is restricted to the past tense and transitive clause while -ainh~ai is not restricted by tense and transitivity. They occur in all tenses and clause types.

DATA, SAMPLE, METHODOLOGY
This study is based on sociolinguistic group interviews conducted in Benipatti Village of Madhubani district, Bihar. The Benipatti village has a population of 16,
103 with 3,105 households (Population Census 2011). The organisation of the village is based on caste-tola (caste locality) where each tola is named after the caste of the residents. Though they live in their own localities, the caste hierarchy is not strict. There is no caste-based isolation as members from each caste group are in frequent contact with each other for various works, festivals, occupations and daily activities.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY
This is a pilot study. We selected four castes representing various levels of caste ranking and from each caste, we drew speakers based on caste, profession, age, gender, education and mobility. Brahmins and Bhumihars are upper castes;

Yadavas are the middle caste group and the Rams are at the lower end of the caste hierarchy. We have not coded for the lower caste students and teachers as we don't have data. Moreover, the sample is not balanced. Workers' data is limited to Yadavas and Rams. Shopkeeper's data is limited to Brahmins and Yadavas. There is no data from (12-13) age groups from the Rams. Regardless of all these gaps, the study is an attempt to revisit caste in Bihar where it is a very important marker of identity. The sample is presented below:

Serial No.	Speaker	Caste	Caste ranking	Profession	Age	Gender	Education	Migration
1	SN	BR	UC	T	30	F	C	Y
2	RJ	BR	UC	T	30	M	C	Y
3	MJ	BR	UC	T	60	F	C	N
4	RJ	BR	UC	T	60	M	C	Y
5	SJ	BR	UC	P	60	M	C	N
6	RM	BR	UC	S	13	M	S	N
7	SK	BR	UC	S	12	F	S	N
8	ST	BH	UC	S	28	F	C	Y
9	LM	BH	UC	S	27	M	C	N
10	DM	BH	UC	S	12	M	S	N
11	LMI	BH	UC	S	13	F	S	N
12	KT	BH	UC	T	60	F	C	N
13	ND	YD	MC	M	30	M	S	Y
14	MR	YD	MC	SK	30	M	S	Y
15	LR	YD	MC	SK	60	M	S	N
16	DR	YD	MC	T	30	M	C	N
17	SY	YD	MC	T	60	M	C	N
18	DD	YD	MC	L	30	F	N	N
19	SD	YD	MC	L	60	F	N	N
20	RY	YD	MC	S	12	M	S	N
21	MK	YD	MC	S	14	F	S	N
22	MR	RM	LC	L	30	M	N	N
23	FD	RM	LC	L	30	F	N	N
24	JR	RM	LC	L	60	M	N	N
25	PD	RM	LC	L	60	F	N	N

Table 2: Participants of the study

RESULTS: THE MULTIVARIATE ANALYSIS
We coded data for four linguistic factors and seven extra-linguistic including social factors. The details are given below:

Linguistic Factors
(1) **Clause type**: We coded for mainly three types of clauses : (1) Assertive sentences (2) Interrogative sentences and (3) Negative sentences.

(2) **Subject-object hierarchy**: The subject-object combinations that have been coded are discussed in detail in Table 1 (see Table 1, p. 7).
(3) **Tense:** We coded for three tenses: present, past and future.
(4) **Emphasis/Focus**: We coded for whether the speaker wants to focus on the addressee/referent.

Extra-linguistic/Social Factors
(6) **Caste**: We coded for four castes: Brahmins and Bhumihars- upper castes, Yadavas- the middle caste group and Rams -the lower caste group.
(7) **Object/ Reference**: We coded for references where we expected honorific markings such as father, teacher, gods, priests, writers, politicians, mother, elder sister, elder brother, upper castes and farmers.
(8) **Age Group**: we coded for three age groups: old, young adults and teenagers.
(9) Gender: We have coded for male and female.
(10) **Mobility**: Mobility is coded as speakers having some sort of mobility history or no mobility history at all.
(11) **Profession**: We have coded for (1) Priests, teachers, labourers, milkmen, shopkeepers and students.
(12) **Education**: Education has been coded as (1) no formal education (2) College education (3) School education

Factor groups that have been eliminated while stepping down are-
(1) Tense
(2) Gender
(3) Education

Factors that have stood significant are-
(1) Clause type
(2) Subject-object hierarchy
(3) Emphasis/Focus
(4) Caste
(5) Object/ Reference
(6) Age Group
(7) Mobility
(8) Profession

Honorificity Marking: Linguistic Factors

Factors	Factor Weight	Tokens
Sentence Type		
Interrogative	0.62	169/292
Assertive	0.51	828/2565
Negative	0.31	94/490
Range : 0.31		
Subject-Object Combination		
S-3NH & O-2HH	0.73	198/443
S-1 & O-2HH	0.63	94/247
S-2MH & O-3HH	0.62	82/221
S-2NH & O-3HH	0.51	102/363
S-2HH & O-3HH	0.47	225/872
S-1 & O-3HH	0.39	170/651
S-3NH & O-3HH	0.37	220/719
Range : 0.36		
Focus on the object		
Focus on the object	0.60	582/1418
No focus on the object	0.42	509/2098

Range : 0.18

Table 3: Multivariate Analysis: Linguistic Factors

As evident from the preceding table, among the linguistic factors subject-object combination has a higher range followed by sentence-types. Objects in interrogative sentences have a higher probability of getting marked for honorificity followed by assertives and negatives. One important pragmatic explanation is that in interrogatives, the focus is more on the object as it is directly referred to. Some types of questions are addressed and thus the speaker is expected to emphasize the addressee. On the other hand, negatives have lower factor weight and this may be because of the fact that in negatives there is some kind of negation that gives rise to disagreement between the speaker and the addressee. The next factor group Focus on the object consolidates this hypothesis and it is found that when the object is emphasized there is more probability of honorificity marking than when it is not overtly emphasized. However, we need a better semantic explanation in future. The subject-object combination provides very important information:

1. Certain subject-object combinations carry more honorificity marking such as (a) where the subject is 1st person and object is 2HH followed by (m) where the subject is 2NH and object is 3HH and (p) where the subject is 2MH and object is 3HH.
2. So the presence of 2nd person object (direct referee or the hearer) increases the frequency of honorificity marking.
3. In the rest of the sub-obj combination, comparatively nonhonorific forms are much more frequent.

Honorificity Marking: Social Factors

Factors	Factor Weight	Tokens
Caste		
Brahmin (UC)	0.76	515/1126
Yadavas (MC)	0.42	339/1186
Bhumihars (UC)	0.35	161/794
Rams (LC)	0.21	76/410
Range 0.55		
Profession		
Priests	0.94	186/215
Teachers	0.72	432/853
Shopkeepers	0.50	61/285
Labourers	0.47	245/844
Milkmen	0.46	76/349
Students	0.20	91/970
Range 0.74		
Object/Reference		
Priests	0.87	213/298
God	0.87	170/238
Father	0.86	207/332
Teacher	0.84	75/118
Poets and writer	0.72	90/169
Mother	0.55	109/402
Edlder brother	0.49	60/256
Farmers	0.43	43/272
Elder sister	0.34	35/260

Upper castes	0.25	48/431
Politicians	0.13	41/750
Range 0.74		
Age-group		
Old generation (55-60)	0.71	617/1226
Young Adults (25-30)	0.65	445/1655
Teenagers (12-13)	0.03	29/635
Range 0.68		
Mobility		
- Mobility history	0.62	800/2342
+ Mobility history	0.27	291/1174
Range 0.35		

Table 4: Multivariate Analysis: Social Factors

All the social factors except for gender have stood significant. Caste is significant. We can clearly see a caste-based stratification. Brahmins (0.76) lead in honorificity marking. Yadavas (0.42) unexpectedly surpasses the other uper the Bhumihars (0.35). The Rams stand at the lower end. So there is a cross-over effect seen as we have seen in the case of Western societies where the second highest group try to overpass the highest group. But this case is slightly different. In the sociolinguistic interviews, Bhumihars have been commented by speakers of other castes to be bringing linguistic changes in the community and corrupting the languages. This may be an overstatement but it seems to be somewhat true as we find that Bhumihars score lower in marking honorificity. Other factors why Bhumihars score low are the fact that they are the landed castes and mobile castes. Outward mobility might have influenced their speech and so they are less likely to follow the typical Mathil norms.

More than caste it's the profession/occupation that has a higher range as can be seen in Table 4. There is a hierarchy based on professions. Priests are the group who mark honorificity more than the teachers and teachers mark honorificity more than shopkeepers. The answer lies in the fact that Priests are much more attached to traditions and rituals and traditionally have to show respect to their patrons. Among teachers, the difference between the use of honorific and non-honorific forms is smaller. Shopkeepers follow the teachers in the higher marking of honorificity as they are the ones who have to deal with customers politely.

There is no further shift among the young labourers as the pattern they are following is already in conformity with the current broader pattern of the speech community. They have higher scores and this is related to the fact that most of the labourers work in the households or fields of the upper castes Brahmins. Due to their daily-basis interaction with the Brahmins, their speech becomes more like Brahmin's speech. Milkmen are important as they are from a particular caste groups-Yadavs. We have seen that Yadavs follow Brahmins in marking honorificity but the fact that Yadavas Milkmen score one of the lowest indicates that caste alone is difficult to interpret. Caste interacts with the profession. Students score the lowest. Given the fact that students are in youg aged groups, there is a strong indication of change.

The referent has even more range than caste. Given that Maithili is a traditional and cultural community, it is really important to ask 'Who deserves respect?'. Priests though weaker in economics have higher social status due to hereditary Indian tradition and so priests and gods are equally eligible to get honorificity marking. Father is the most important male member in the family and so the father deserves respect. Teachers too deserve respect. So there is a hierarchy starting from Priests gods>Father>Teacher>Writers>Mother>Elder Brother>Farmers>Elder Sister>Upper Castes>Politicians.
Priests, gods, teachers, and father score higher in honorificity while Castes and politicians score the lowest. Though politicians have greater socio-economic status, they are not considered by Maithili speakers to be candidates deserving honorificity. The next important point is that though caste is important, there is no overt prestige associated with upper castes.
Being a Brahmin or a Bhumihar doesn't fetch respect linguistically as shown by lower honorific scores on upper caste. But being a priest (generally Brahmins) fetches much respect and admiration as shown by the result- an indication of the preference for occupational status over caste-based status.

The next significant factor group is age. Age has more higher range than caste and slightly less than profession and reference. This data is significant to show a change in progress. The old generation (0.71) and the young adults (0.65) more or less mark honorificity to a great extent. But there is a sharp and significant decline in honorificity marking in the

youngest age group (0.03). It indicates that the set rules, hierarchy and traditions of Mithilanchal are shrinking down in the young generation. They no longer follow the hierarchy. They believe much more in casualness.
The important pattern is summarised below:

(1) The highest use of the honorific forms is more restricted to the older generation as can be seen by their higher score. But the non-honorific pattern is also robust among the older generation as well, giving an indication of a language change.
(2) The young adults slightly depart from their older counterparts as evidenced by their lower use of honorific forms and preference for nonhonorific forms.
(3) The third age groups- the children depart significantly from the other two groups' pattern most significantly and almost categorically prefer the nonhonorific forms. This is a very **important evidence of language change**. The children don't follow the hierarchy based on status and believe more in familiarity and casualness.

Mobility is an important factor in conditioning variation. People who are mobile (0.27) have lower scores for the honorific form than those who are immobile (0.62) and have never migrated out of the community. Living within the community works like inhibiting the innovations and staying out of the community and then going back is like bringing new socio-cultural dogmas at the cost of the native ones.

Summarising this section we can say that both linguistic and social factors are at play and there has been an indication of interaction among certain factor groups such as caste-profession. To make sense of the results caste has been cross-tabulated with other factors.

INTERACTION BETWEEN CASTE AND OTHER SOCIAL FACTORS
CROSS-TABULATION OF CASTE AND AGE GROUPS

Caste Age-Groups	Marking of object	Brahmins (%)	Yadavas (%)	Bhumihars(%)	Rams (%)
Old age-group (55-60)	Honorific	72%	37%	50%	14%
	Non-honorific	28%	63%	50%	86%
	Total	**484**	**411**	**195**	**136**
Young Adults (25-30)	Honorific	37%	28%	19%	21%
	Non-honorific	63%	72%	81%	79%
	Total tokens	**373**	**673**	**335**	**274**
Teens (25-30)	Honorific	10%	0	0	-
	Non-honorific	90%	100%	100%	-
	Total tokens	**269**	**102**	**264**	**-**

Overall Brahmins use more honorific forms compared to any other group. We also notice that the shift among the younger generation towards greater use of non-honorific forms has affected all castes including the Brahmins. If we look at the old generation we find a caste-based stratification- Brahmins and Bhumihars the upper caste marking honorificity more than Yadavas and the Rams-the middle and lower castes respectively. Different caste groups have responded to the variation differently. In Brahmins and Bhumihars we see a great distinction between the older generation and the younger generation. The younger ones use the non-honorific form more than the older ones. In Yadavas the change seems to be more or less stable as there is not much difference between the older and the younger ones, but more or less their pattern is somewhat similar to the first two groups. Why does the Rams or lower caste reverse the pattern? The younger ones seem to be using honorific forms more than the older ones. The explanations can be multiple. One important factor may be the social change- the upward socio-economic mobility of the lower castes. As a result, the young adults from the lower castes get much more social exposure than the older ones in terms of higher education and jobs and overall greater mobility. Lastly, the teenagers' data is very insightful and shows that this age-groups behaves differently from the rest of the two. Brahmin teens show some honorificity marking and that is obvious because of their upbringing and instructions given by elders at home. But the other caste [No data is available from Rams, but we expect a similar pattern from them too] teens all follow the same pattern- the nonhonorific marking of honorific objects. This shows that a change is in progress. Obviously, there is an interaction between caste and age groups with the older age groups having higher scores for honorificity, young adults having lower scores and the youngest groups very minimal or nill. We find a pattern shift in Rams - the lower caste where we find the young adults outperform the older generation. This is because of the exposure to education and opportunities that these lower-caste adults are getting.

CROSS-TABULATION OF CASTE AND REFERENCE

Caste Reference	Marking of object	Brahmins (%)	Yadavas (%)	Bhumihars(%)	Rams (%)
Priest	Honorific	93%	62%	61%	61%
	Non-honorific	7%	38%	39%	39%
	Total tokens	**96**	**123**	**51**	**28**
Gods	Honorific	73%	73%	69%	64%
	Non-honorific	27%	27%	31%	36%
	Total tokens	**111**	**64**	**35**	**28**
Father	Honorific	72%	66%	61%	41%
	Non-honorific	28%	34%	39%	59%
	Total tokens	**110**	**116**	**59**	**37**
Teacher	Honorific	82%	67%	44%	43%
	Non-honorific	18%	33%	56%	57%
	Total tokens	**38**	**39**	**27**	**14**
Poets/writers	Honorific	86%	25%	39%	21%
	Non-honorific	14%	75%	61%	79%
	Total tokens	**76**	**51**	**18**	**24**
Mother	Honorific	59%	15%	12%	6%
	Non-honorific	41%	85%	88%	94%
	Total tokens	**125**	**143**	**81**	**63**
Elder Brother	Honorific	24%	30%	14%	19%
	Non-honorific	76%	70%	86%	81%
	Total tokens	**75**	**92**	**63**	**26**
Farmers	Honorific	18%	18%	17%	5%
	Non-honorific	82%	82%	83%	95%
	Total tokens	**79**	**93**	**59**	**41**
Elder Sister	Honorific	40%	10%	12%	2%
	Non-honorific	60%	90%	88%	98%
	Total tokens	**35**	**126**	**57**	**42**
Upper castes	Honorific	21%	9%	6%	3%
	Non-honorific	79%	91%	94%	97%
	Total tokens	**129**	**138**	**105**	**59**
Politicians	Honorific	9%	3%	4%	3%
	Non-honorific	91%	97%	94%	97%
	Total tokens	**252**	**201**	**239**	**58**

Some general patterns emerging from the data are the following :

(1) If the object reference is a politician, then he/she is marginally marked with honorificity; this is consistent across the caste groups.

(2) Upper castes may have social dominance in the society but when it comes to language they are marked with non-honorific terms. It hints at the changing scenario of the state of Bihar where caste at one time was a very sensitive issue but that caste-based hierarchy is shrinking day by day because of the rise of education and equal opportunities for all.

(3) Poets and writers are marked for honorificity maximally in the Brahmin's speech than in any other caste group.

(4) Kinships such as mother and elder sister are marked with honorificity significantly more in the Brahmins than in any other caste group. Brahmins still mark more honorificty with mother and for other castes mother is frequently marked with non-honorificity.

(5) Every caste group show respect to teacher and father with a fine stratification-Brahmins at the top, Yadavas and Bhumihars at the middle and Rams at the bottom.

(6) Priests are shown respect across all caste groups: and the reason behind it is that there is a mandatory presence of a priest in any of Hindi rituals, i.e., festivals, marriages, deaths etc…

(7) All the caste groups more or less behave the same; they mark honorificity with gods; this is because of the cultural tradition that there is a special place given to gods in Hindu mythology and day-to-day practices.

By looking at the data more closely we find the following pattern that indicates that the honorificity-based hierarchy has shrunk over the years. It is less evident in Brahmins who are the most conservative castes, decently evident in the Bhumihars and Yadavas who are the most mobile castes and crystal clear in the Rams, the lower caste which has shrunk in honorificity range the most:

Categories receiving respect across caste
Brahmins: **9** : (Priests, teachers, father, gods, mother, elder brother, elder sister, poets, upper castes)
Yadavas: **6**: (Priests, teachers, father, gods, elder brother and poets)
Bhumihars: **6**: (Priests, teachers, father, gods, elder brother and poets)
Rams: 4 (Priests, teachers, father and gods)

Brahmins have a higher honorificity range while other castes have a lower honorificity range; this is because of the fact that Brahmins are more associated with education, learning, literature, art and culture in comparison with other castes. Yadavas and Bhumihars are landed castes and are more in economy-growing sectors. Rams are at the lowest rank and they are more into the labour industry like agriculture and so on. It looks like that Profession is very important and to test the possibility we have cross-tabulated caste with the profession and the results are great:

CROSS-TABULATION OF CASTE AND PROFESSION
Note: There are lots of gaps in the data. The sample doesn't look like balanced profession-based but the trend it indicates is worth reporting.

Caste Profession	Marking of object	Brahmins (%)	Yadavas (%)	Bhumihars(%)	Rams (%)
Priest	Honorific	87%	-	-	-
	Non-honorific	13%	-	-	-
	Total tokens	**215**	**-**	**-**	**-**
Teacher	Honorific	51%	50%	50%	-
	Non-honorific	49%	50%	50%	-
	Total tokens	**502**	**156**	**195**	**-**
Labourers	Honorific	-	39%	-	19%
	Non-honorific	-	61%	-	81%
	Total tokens	**-**	**434**	**-**	**410**
Shopkeepers	Honorific	32%	11%	-	-
	Non-honorific	68%	89%	-	-
	Total tokens	**140**	**145**	**-**	**-**
Milkmen	Honorific	-	22%	-	-
	Non-honorific	-	78%	-	-
	Total tokens	**-**	**349**	**-**	**-**
Students	Honorific	10%	0	11%	-
	Non-honorific	90%	100%	89%	-
	Total tokens	**269**	**102**	**599**	**-**

It is evident that there is an interaction between caste and profession. Not all Brahmins speak the same way: Priests are at the top of honorificity marking, followed by teachers, shopkeepers and students. Similarly among Yadavas too Teachers are at the top followed by labourers and milkmen. Among Bhumihars we find a huge difference between the teachers and the students. We don't have a good profession-based sample from the Rams in particular. Priests are the group who mark honorificity more than the teachers and teachers mark honorificity more than shopkeepers. Why so? The answer lies in the fact that Priests are much more attached to traditions and rituals and traditionally have to show respect to their patrons. Teachers are in the mid; their speech is a mixed one, and they have preserved some conservative traits while they also participate in the change -the trend is nonhonorific marking of honorific objects. The result shows that caste interacts with the profession and is not an independent category.

Overall students are the group who mark the honorificity the least and this gives rise to the possibility that age may be a very important factor. To test this possibility we have cross-tabulated age with profession.

CROSS-TABULATION OF AGE AND PROFESSION

Age Profession	Marking of object	Old age groups (55-60)	Young Adults (25-30)	Teens (12-13)
Priest	Honorific	87%	-	-
	Non-honorific	13%	-	-
	Total tokens	**215**	-	-
Teacher	Honorific	66%	41%	-
	Non-honorific	34%	59%	-
	Total tokens	**333**	**520**	-
Labourers	Honorific	31%	27%	-
	Non-honorific	69%	73%	-
	Total tokens	**371**	**473**	-
Shopkeepers	Honorific	32%	11%	-
	Non-honorific	68%	89%	-
	Total tokens	**140**	**145**	-
Milkmen	Honorific	29%	15%	-
	Non-honorific	71%	85%	-
	Total tokens	**167**	**182**	-
Students	Honorific	-	19%	5%
	Non-honorific	-	81%	95%
	Total tokens	-	**335**	**635**

Age-related shifts have affected the younger age group in every profession (though we don't have data from the younger priest). There is no further shift among the young labourers as the pattern they are following is already in conformity with the current broader pattern of the speech community. Another possibility is that both young and old labourers work in the field or households of upper castes and so the interaction among the two age groups is much more with each other. Because of this contact, their speech seems to be similar and doesn't show any age-based difference. However, A better explanation needs to be explored.

The summary of the findings is stated below:

(1) The older teachers use more honorific forms than the younger teachers.
(2) The older milkmen use more honorific forms than the younger milkmen.
(3) The younger shopkeeper uses more honorific forms than the younger shopkeeper.
(4) The adult students use more honorific forms than the younger students.
(5) The old labourers use more honorific forms than the younger labourers.

The final verdict is that age interacts with the profession and just like caste profession too can be interpreted in relation to other factors. This interaction between caste and profession further opens a possibility that is it possible that honorificity hierarchy has too shrunk in the speech of the youngest age groups. To test this possibility we have cross-tabulated age with honorificity hierarchy based on object reference.

CROSS TABULATION OF AGE WITH HONORIFICITY HIERARCHY

Caste Reference	Marking of object	Old age groups (55-60)	Young Adults (25-30)	Teens (12-13)
Priest	Honorific	87%	64%	9%
	Non-honorific	13%	36%	91%
	Total tokens	**151**	**136**	**11**
Gods	Honorific	80%	68%	27%
	Non-honorific	20%	32%	73%
	Total tokens	**116**	**107**	**15**
Father	Honorific	79%	61%	23%
	Non-honorific	21%	39%	77%
	Total tokens	**126**	**165**	**31**
Teacher	Honorific	79%	52%	20%
	Non-honorific	21%	48%	80%
	Total tokens	**57**	**56**	**5**
Poets/writers	Honorific	65%	32%	100%
	Non-honorific	35%	68%	0%
	Total tokens	**88**	**71**	**10**
Mother	Honorific	51%	20%	3%
	Non-honorific	49%	80%	97%
	Total tokens	**134**	**189**	**79**
Elder Brother	Honorific	40%	23%	2%
	Non-honorific	60%	77%	98%
	Total tokens	**73**	**128**	**55**
Farmers	Honorific	24%	18%	0%
	Non-honorific	76%	82%	100%
	Total tokens	**71**	**142**	**59**
Elder Sister	Honorific	27%	6%	0%
	Non-honorific	73%	94%	100%
	Total tokens	**99**	**145**	**16**
Upper castes	Honorific	19%	9%	3%
	Non-honorific	81%	91%	97%
	Total tokens	**134**	**222**	**55**
Politicians	Honorific	16%	4%	0%
	Non-honorific	84%	96%	100%
	Total tokens	**177**	**294**	**279**

The older generation has a range of recipients who are eligible for getting honorificity marked. We can see a decline in the honorificity marking of these categories in the other two groups:

Older Generation: 9 (Priests, teachers, father, gods, mother, elder brother, elder sister & poets)
**Young Adults**: 7 (Priests, teachers, father, gods, mother, poets &elder brother)
Teenagers: 4 (god, father, poets/writers and teacher)

The three important patterns that arise from the data are the following:
• Older generation speech corresponds to Brahmanic speech in terms of honorificity range.
• Young adults' speech corresponds to other upper-caste and middle-caste speech.
• And Rams' speech corresponds to teenagers' speech in terms of honorificity range.

This is a very important indicator of a change in the pattern rather a reversal of the pattern. The honorificity hierarchy is constrained by age groups. The highest age group -the old generation speech is the most conservative, though their speech is also being affected by the ongoing change. The young adults are like the middle state of the change where they have retained most of the honorificity range but at the same time depart from the conservative pattern. The youngest age group consisting of teenagers are the specimens of change. They are the specimens of the most vernacular speech as well. They don't follow the prescriptive traditional rules and categorization. Due to modernization and modern education, they believe more in intimacy rather than formality.

Lastly, we'll consider the overall role of mobility in honorificity marking. The results are presented in the following graph:
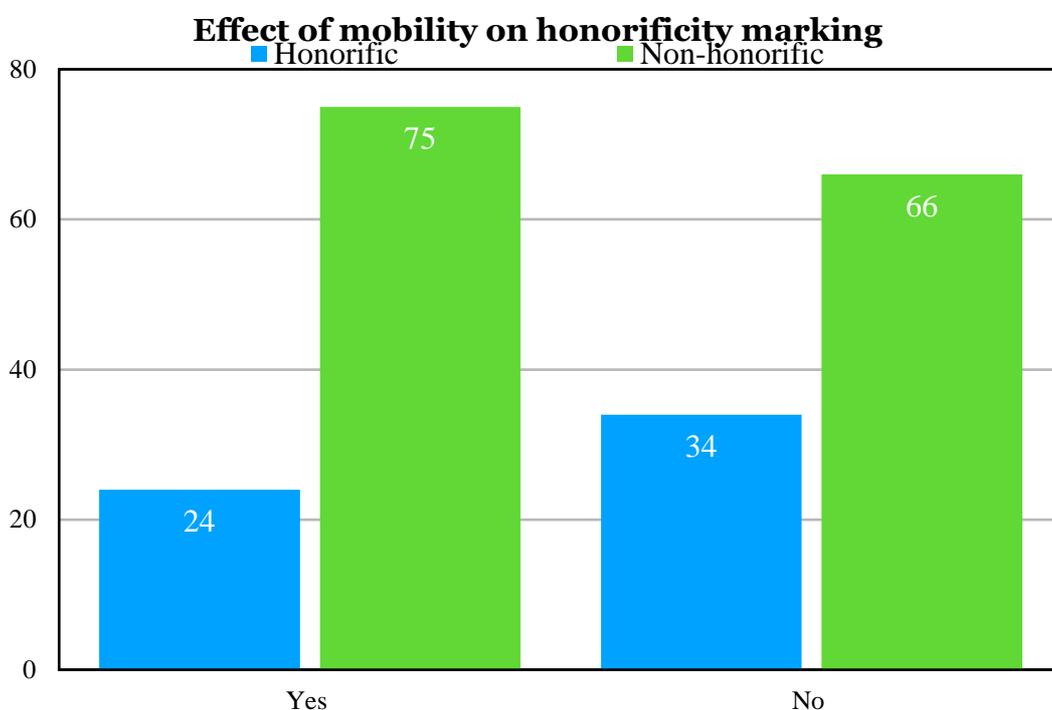
Chart: Mobility and Honorificity

Overall the nonhonorific forms are greater but mobility is an important factor in conditioning the variable. People who are mobile have lower scores for the honorific form than those who are immobile and have never migrated out of the community. Most of the people of Mithila migrate to Hindi language regions like Patna, Varanasi, Delhi etc…So it is plausible to think that their sociolinguistic etiquette gets influenced by that of others. It is important to note that Hindi doesn't have the double marking/agr pattern that is found in Maithili and other Bihari languages. So it is possible that the speakers who migrate get influenced by the Hindi norms and Hindi culture. They create a sort of broad network outside of the community and are in contact with people from multilingual and multicultural backgrounds. Gradually they have weak social ties with their own Maithili community and it is well-known in sociolinguistic literature that weak ties invite innovations. But these people also maintain the Maithili norms as there is considerable honorificity marked in their speech. In a way, they show solidarity with the Maithili community as well.

People who stay in their community have close-knit networks particularly dense local networks. They are less influenced by innovations coming from outer sources. But yes they too follow the broader speech pattern of the community. The whole language community is undergoing a sociolinguistic change. The change is driven towards nonhonorific marking.

DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH
The study has certain gaps as indicated at many places, especially in the sample, but regardless of that, the paper is one of the very first attempts to describe what is happening in a caste-based speech community of Maithili from a variationist

point of view and the major findings are that caste alone cant's be explained unless it is studied in relation to other factors. We have found that for variation in Person marking [NH~H], caste interacts with profession and age. Brahmin priests and teachers have a higher score for honorificity marking than shopkeepers. Bhumihar teachers have higher scores than Bhumihar students. Similarly, Yadava teachers have higher scores than Yadava milkmen and labourers. And labourers exceed the milkmen because of their frequent contact with higher caste groups.

The other explanation can be that honorificity has more to do with people connected with traditions, rituals (priests) and education (teachers). These are people generally from upper castes. Labourers show high scores because of their contact with higher caste groups. Age has certainly proved to be significant for all the groups except the lower castes. The general trend is that the younger ones use more non-honorific forms than their older counterparts. Gender has been selected as insignificant while stepping down but we could see some gender effects in all the non-Brahmin caste groups, slight differences in Bhumihars and Rams and maximum differences in Yadav women.

Caste is generally explained in terms of education but here we don't find so much correlation between honorificity and education. What we have found is that labourers have no formal education, but their profession brings them closer to upper castes' homes and fields and so they have a relatively high score for honorificity marking.

Overall, the older generation has higher scores of honorificity marking than the younger ones - an indication that a change might be in progress. This needs to be tested further by expanding the sample to include even further youngest speakers.

So far as the linguistic factors are concerned, they have stood significant. The maximum honorificity marking is in the interrogative sentences. This is because of the fact that in interrogative sentences the speaker's focus is more on the addressee as some sort of question is asked directly. Secondly, the simple assertive sentences too have a good number of honorificity markings. The negative clause is the one where we find that honorificity marking is the least.

It has been found that if the participant is present in the speech act, they are more likely to be marked for honorificity. Certain subject-object combinations carry more honorificity marking such as (a) where the subject is 3NH and object is 2HH followed by (b) where the subject is 1st Person and object is 2HH than other combinations.

Social factors have a higher range and higher factor weights. It shows that the variation is more conditioned by social factors.

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