

HINDI

“Unnatural” gender in Hindi*

Kira Hall

University of Colorado at Boulder, USA

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1. Introduction

Hindi (*hindī*), adopted by the Indian constitution as a national-official language, is an Indo-Aryan language that is claimed as a mother tongue by roughly 40% of the Indian population.¹ Boasting over 450 million first- and second-language speakers worldwide, Hindi is one of the three most widely spoken languages in the world today, along with English and Mandarin Chinese. When speakers of Urdu are included in this estimate, a language that shares the same basic syntax as Hindi but in certain registers draws much of its vocabulary from Perso-Arabic sources as opposed to Sanskritic, this number is even greater. Hindi has also been designated the official language of several states, among them Bihar, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Delhi; the central government has endorsed its use along with English (identified

as the “associate official language”) in administrative functions. But these facts obscure the complex internal politics regarding the position of Hindi in the Indian social landscape, where several sectors of the population oppose its ascendancy in politics and government, particularly in southern India where the Dravidian languages Tamil and Telugu are dominant. Opposition to Hindi has also steadily increased among Urdu speakers in response to nationalist embracements of a *śuddh* or ‘pure’ Sanskritic Hindi by various Hindu fundamentalist groups, whose leaders reject Perso-Arabic influences on the language as part of an anti-Muslim political platform. The linguistic correlate, according to some scholars, has been an ever-increasing divergence between Hindi on the one hand and Urdu on the other, with noncomprehensibility sometimes existing between radical versions of each (see Shapiro & Schiffman 1983, King 1999).

Modern grammars of the many dialects now grouped together under the label “Hindi” grew out of 18th and 19th century attempts to link Sanskrit to the known classical and vernacular languages of Europe. Beames’ *Comparative grammar of the modern Aryan languages of India* (1872–79) offers the first taxonomy of Indo-Aryan languages and the position of Hindi therein, followed by Kellogg’s *A grammar of the Hindi language* (1875) and Grierson’s highly influential *Linguistic survey of India* (1903–28). Since the publication of these early surveys, there has been constant debate regarding the appropriate taxonomy of the languages and dialects of Indo-Aryan, a debate that points to the impossibility of defining the difference between “language” and “dialect” in purely linguistic terms (see Shapiro & Schiffman 1983 for an engaging summary of this debate in the Indian context). For the state of Uttar Pradesh, where I conducted my fieldwork, contemporary scholars generally categorize dialects of Hindi as belonging to either Eastern Hindi or Western Hindi. The eastern group includes the dialects of Avadhi, Bagheli, Bhojpuri, and Chattisgarhi, and the western group Braj, Bundeli, Kanauji, and Bangru. Standard Hindi is based on a Western Hindi dialect referred to by academics as *kharī bolī*, though only a small percentage of Hindi speakers can be said to have spoken this variety as a mothertongue. In addition to these dialects, there are also several local varieties of Hindi that have developed as lingua francas or pidgins, most notably *bambaiyā hindī* in Bombay (Chernyshev 1971, Apte 1974) and *bāzārū hindī* in Calcutta (Chatterji 1931). For traditional grammars of regional dialects of Hindi and their classification see Guru (1920), Vajpeyi (1967, 1968) and Sharma (1958); for more contemporary descriptions of Hindi written in English see McGregor (1972), Mohanan (1994), Shapiro (1989), and Srivastava (1969).²

Although India has been an important center of sociolinguistic research since the 1950s, fostering insightful debate on the complex relationship between language and social identity, discussions of gender are largely absent in the literature. This has less to do with scholarly neglect than it does with the way in which sociolinguistics has developed on the Indian subcontinent, where caste was established early on as the central variable of concern for the study of linguistic variation. Following Bloch's pioneering study "Castes et dialectes en Tamoul" at the beginning of the 20th century (Bloch 1910), much of the early scholarship on social stratification focused on Dravidian languages, particularly Tamil, Tulu, and Kannada. But sociolinguistic research on Hindi also helped to further the preoccupation with caste, when prominent linguistic anthropologists like Gumperz (1958) called our attention to caste influences on Hindi with his important article "Dialect differences and social stratification in a North Indian village". Gumperz's work stands out from many of the studies that preceded it in that he argues for the consideration of other variables in addition to caste, among them place of residence, religion, informal friendship contacts, and occupation. Most critically, he brings the notion of "context" into the sociolinguistic literature when he stresses the importance of studying patterns of individual and group interaction.

But gender takes the backseat in Gumperz's study, as it does in the majority of variationist studies that followed, even when sociolinguistic scholarship on South Asian languages broadened its focus to include variables like urbanization, education, economic status, literacy, and age. While we might want to blame this gap on the intellectual climate at the time – after all, the field of language and gender did not really emerge until after the publication of Lakoff's "Language and Woman's Place" in 1973 – it should be noted that Bloch himself considered the role of gender in language use as early as 1910. He notes, for example, that Tamil-speaking women exerted conservative influences on the social dialects of their time, attributing this to their comparative lack of education. In fact, Bloch points to the speech of women and men in early Sanskrit theatre as evidence for a long history of dialect stratification in South Asia, which often represents men of high *varṇas* (e.g. Brāhmaṇa and Kṣhatriya) as speaking Sanskrit and men of low *varṇas*, servants, and women as speaking Prakrit. Nevertheless, few articles to date have explored gender differentiation with respect to language choice, with the notable exception of Simon's recent work (1993, 1996) on gendered attitudes toward the use of Hindi vs. Banarsi Bhojpuri in Banaras.³

Certainly the sociolinguistic literature on Hindi has involved much more than variationist studies, especially in the past two decades where we find a boom of research on topics ranging from code-switching and bilingualism to language and nationalism. When we consider these other areas of inquiry, among them the feminist analysis of sexist language (e.g. Valentine 1987) and the pragmatic analysis of terms of address, pronoun choice, greetings, and kinship terminology (e.g. Jain 1969, 1973; Khubchandani 1978; Mehrotra 1977, 1985a, 1985b; Vatuk 1969a, 1969b; Misra 1977), we do find a few discussions of gender as a grammatical and as a social category. The study of address terminology is noteworthy in this respect, particularly as its emphasis on language in context has taken Hindi sociolinguistics in more dynamic directions. The fact that Hindi has three second-person pronouns, for instance, whose employment is dependent on a complex array of social considerations, disallows descriptions of language that rely on a static conception of social role or identity. The choice of address forms in Hindi, as the authors named above all illustrate, is not simply a function of the social positions of addresser and addressee, predetermined by the gender, marital status, and age of the conversational participants. It is also dependent on how these social positions interact with the context of the speech event, where the topic of discourse, intention of the speaker, degree of intimacy and solidarity between interlocutors, emotional attitudes, and linguistic creativity all play a role.

The study of address terminology, then, moves us squarely into the field of discourse analysis. Yet even with this shift in research direction, there has been little subsequent scholarship on how gender materializes in conversational practice. Valentine's work in the mid-1980s (1985, 1986) remains one of the few attempts to apply contemporary interactional sociolinguistics to the Indian context, though the bulk of her data comes from contemporary Hindi novels, plays, and short stories. Paralleling research results for middle-class speakers of English in the United States, Valentine finds, for example, that male speakers of Hindi successfully initiate more conversational topics while female speakers do more of the conversational maintenance work. But her appropriation of a two-cultures model of gender to explain the discursive practices of communication in mixed groups won her sharp criticism from Singh & Lele (1990), who disagree with the way she conceptualizes power in structural-functional rather than hierarchical terms.⁴

I offer this description of the speech patterns of Hindi-speaking hijras as an example of how discourse analysis, when applied to a particular community of practice, can reveal profound insights about the workings of gender in society.

Given that the speech patterns of women and men have been so little studied in Hindi sociolinguistics, some may disagree with my choice to focus on a group of speakers who themselves identify as *na mard na aurat* 'neither man nor woman'. Often discussed as a "third gender" by anthropologists, most hijras were raised as boys before taking up residence in one of India's many hijra communities and adopting the feminine dress, speech, and mannerisms associated with membership. Yet the gendered liminality of these speakers is precisely what provoked my initial interest in their language habits, since the hijras alternate between feminine and masculine linguistic reference in ways that reflect both local and dominant ideologies regarding the position of women and men in north Indian society. Since 1993 I have been visiting and researching a variety of hijra communities in northern India. Most of the data are taken from my fieldwork in the city of Banaras, where I conducted extensive interviews with hijras from four different communities and recorded their everyday conversations. Constrained by a linguistic system which allows for only two morphological genders, i.e., feminine and masculine, Banaras hijras must gender themselves and fellow community members as either feminine/female or masculine/male. Because nouns, verbs, adjectives, and postpositions in Hindi are marked for feminine and masculine gender, with verbs being marked in all three persons, the hijras' attempts at alternating constructions of female and male selves becomes apparent in quite basic choices of feminine and masculine forms.

In this chapter I explore how we might go about analyzing these alternations, particularly given the traditional linguistic distinction between "grammatical gender" on the one hand and "natural gender" on the other. In the first kind of system, according to conventional linguistic thought, gender is an arbitrary grammatical category that has syntactic consequences throughout the grammar; in the second, gender is a "natural" category that merely reflects the "biological sex" of the referent. Feminist linguists since the 1970s (early articles include Bodine 1975; Martyna 1980a, 1980b) have argued against the first of these classifications, illustrating, sometimes quite convincingly, that grammatical gender is not a purely arbitrary phenomenon. Others have argued against the second of these classifications, suggesting that no classification system is purely "natural".⁵ English, for instance, while often discussed as a language exhibiting natural gender, not only allows the usage of male generics for female referents, it also permits the assignment of metaphorical gender to inanimates, as when a ship, boat, or car is referred to as *she*. But I want to move beyond these arguments in order to challenge the very assumption implicit in the term

“natural gender”, i.e. that gender is a fixed phenomenon, rooted in biology and therefore free of ideological influences. What happens to a language’s classification system in instances when the referent’s gender can no longer be assumed as either male or female? And what might these instances of “unnatural gender” tell us about the relationship between gender in language and gender in society?

2. Gender in the Hindi language system

2.1 Grammatical gender: Assignment and agreement

Any discussion of the workings of gender in the Hindi language system requires a few disclaimers. While a two-way gender system of masculine and feminine is present in all dialects (with the exception of lingua franca or pidginized varieties where grammatical gender is often lost altogether), the specifics of the system materialize differently. Instantiations of grammatical gender for inanimate nouns vary from dialect to dialect, with nouns treated as feminine in one sometimes appearing as masculine in another, and vice versa (see Nespital 1990: 8–9 for several examples). The noun *dahī* ‘yogurt’, for example, is often marked as masculine in eastern dialects and feminine in western ones, a difference most likely caused by a western reinterpretation of the final vowel *-ī* as a feminine morphological marker. And in many of the Hindi dialects emerging in urban areas as a result of contact with other languages, only animate nouns referring to female individuals are treated as feminine. Originally feminine nouns such as *hindī* ‘Hindi’, *nadī* ‘river’, and *śādī* ‘marriage’ are classified as masculine, a phenomenon Bhatia (1992: 174) attributes to a “weakening of grammatical gender and the preference for the natural gender”. In other words, nouns in these dialects are normally not feminine unless they specifically reference female persons.

Moreover, while speakers of Hindi in the *kharī bolī* area⁶ most closely produce the kind of gender agreement outlined in instructional grammars, speakers of certain eastern varieties often perceive this same gender agreement as stylistically marked when employed across syntactic distance. Because Hindi is a kind of “communication amalgam” (Khubchandani 1991: 273), speakers generally exhibit neutral attitudes toward variations in speech, grammatical gender notwithstanding. But the gender variability described above leads Simon (ms.) to make the interesting claim that the employment or non-employment of standard gender agreement sometimes serves as a register marker, indexing

the speaker's gender, linguistic proficiency, education level, and/or insider/outsider status. Thus in the western Hindi area, according to Simon, elite speakers of standard Hindi will often perceive a speaker who uses non-standard gender agreement as *purbi* (a person from eastern Uttar Pradesh) or *dehātī* (a villager, a rural illiterate). But in Banaras, where the local dialect of Banarsi Bhojpuri is spoken along with standard Hindi, it is the use of standard gender agreement that is sometimes deemed suspect. Simon offers evidence that this is particularly the case among uneducated female speakers of the local dialect, who frequently perceive speakers who maintain the strict gender agreement of standard Hindi as either foreign or over-educated.

Simon's observations regarding Banarsi Bhojpuri cannot easily be applied to the Banaras hijra community, however, since its members rarely come from the city. Hijras are notorious travelers, moving from state to state, city to city, and community to community for years before they settle in any one place. Indeed, their life narratives are constructed around movement: Because so many of them were forced out of their homes at an early age for exhibiting behavior deemed to be "hijra-like" or effeminate, their stories reveal an ongoing state of homelessness and displacement. Those hijras that eventually come to settle in Banaras, then, are rarely native speakers of Banarsi Bhojpuri, and its employment in the community is usually quite marked. What we find instead is a kind of lingua franca loosely based on standard Hindi, which facilitates communication among speakers from a variety of regional and linguistic backgrounds. The hijras' language, which they call *hijrā bolī* in Banaras,⁷ most closely parallels those varieties of Hindi designated by some Hindi speakers as *khicrī* or *milijhulī* (see, for example, Sachdeva 1982), terms which translate roughly as 'mixed'. Such varieties, among them the Panjabi-ized Hindustani spoken around Delhi, usually develop on the borders of language or dialect areas and reflect features from the divergent bordering varieties. In this context, Hijra Boli might best be thought of as a kind of *sadhukkarī*, a term coined by the medieval mystical poet Kabir for the 'mixed' language of travelers (literally, the language of *sādhus* or religious mendicants).⁸ This term is especially fitting for the hijras' language, given the hijras' traditional religious role at birth and wedding celebrations, where their blessing is thought to secure a long and fruitful lineage of sons for the recipient.

But where Hijra Boli differs from the lingua francas or pidgins reported for, say, the streets of Bombay and Calcutta is in the use of grammatical gender. In contrast to those varieties, which exhibit a loss of grammatical gender, the variety of Hindi adopted by the hijras tends to overemphasize gender, using

masculine and feminine gender in places where it would normally not appear in *kharī bolī*, or treating nouns that are masculine in standard Hindi as feminine and vice versa. To give one illuminating example: The word *hijrā* is grammatically masculine in standard Hindi, but the hijras frequently treat the noun as feminine through verbal agreement when it acts as the subject of a sentence. As I argue here, this usage reflects a kind of gender overcompensation or even hypercorrection. Upon entering the community, Banaras hijras work to distance themselves from masculine representations, with many of them even choosing to undergo a ritualized penectomy and castration operation. The fact that the term *hijrā* is grammatically masculine sometimes gets in the way of this communal distancing, so hijras will mark the noun as feminine as part and parcel of “doing gender”. The two-gender system exhibited in standard Hindi, then, is quite relevant to a discussion of the language practices of this community, since grammatical gender is most often overemphasized, not underemphasized, in the hijras’ constructions of a more feminine self.

The alternation between feminine and masculine reference in standard Hindi is quite easy to discern linguistically, since many nouns, verbs, postpositions, and adjectival modifiers inflect for gender. Nominals, for instance, exhibit both a two-way gender system of masculine and feminine as well as a two-way number system of singular and plural. While the gender of animate nouns to a certain extent corresponds to the referent’s gender (i.e. exhibiting “natural gender”), gender designation in inanimate nouns is comparatively arbitrary (though see Valentine 1987 for a discussion of the sexist basis of some of these designations, and Börner-Westphal 1989 for a discussion of lexical gaps in the gender system). Hindi nominal forms are classified as either direct (nominative) or oblique (non-nominative), with the latter normally signaled by the presence of a postposition. For the majority of nouns in the direct case, the *-a* ending signals masculine singular, *-e* masculine plural, *-ī* feminine singular, and *-iyā̃* feminine plural; in the oblique case these endings become *-e*, *-ō*, *-ī*, and *-iyō*, respectively. Not all adjectival modifiers exhibit inflection, but those that do agree with their head noun in gender, number, and case. Masculine forms of inflecting adjectives end in *-ā* in the singular direct and *-e* in the plural direct, singular oblique, and plural oblique cases; the feminine forms always end in *-ī*, whether singular or plural, direct or oblique. Examples illustrating gender agreement in nominals are given in (1) and (2):

(1) Masculine agreement

- a. *acchā* *laṛkā*
 good.NOM.MASC.SG boy.NOM.MASC.SG
 'good boy'
- b. *acche* *laṛke*
 good.NOM.MASC.PL boy.NOM.MASC.PL
 'good boys'
- c. *acche* *laṛke* *ko*
 good.OBL.MASC.SG boy.OBL.MASC.SG to
 'to the good boy'
- d. *acche* *laṛkō* *ko*
 good.OBL.MASC.PL boy.OBL.MASC.PL to
 'to the good boys'

(2) Feminine agreement

- a. *acchī* *laṛkī*
 good.NOM.FEM.SG girl.NOM.FEM.SG
 'good girl'
- b. *acchī* *laṛkiyā*
 good.NOM.FEM.PL girl.NOM.FEM.PL
 'good girls'
- c. *acchī* *laṛkī* *ko*
 good.OBL.FEM.SG girl.OBL.FEM.SG to
 'to the good girl'
- d. *acchī* *laṛkiyō* *ko*
 good.OBL.FEM.PL girl.OBL.FEM.PL to
 'to the good girls'

The genitive postposition also agrees with the gender of the head noun, appearing as *kā* when modifying a singular masculine noun, *ke* when modifying a plural masculine noun, and *kī* when modifying a singular or plural feminine noun. For concentrated discussions of grammatical gender in Hindi nominals, see Pathak (1976) and Gosvāmī (1979).

Verbals in standard Hindi also show gender agreement, agreeing with the subject in gender, number, and person if it is in the nominative case. If the subject is in an oblique case – i.e. ergative, dative, instrumental, locative, or genitive – the verb agrees with the object when it is nominative.⁹ In general, the appearance of one of the vowels *-ā*, *-e*, *-ī*, or *-ī̄* on the verb signals number and gender, with *-ā* used for masculine singular, *-e* for masculine plural, *-ī* for feminine singular, and *-ī̄* for feminine plural. For example, the intransitive verb

honā ‘to be’ is realized as *thā* with masculine singular controllers, *the* with masculine plural controllers, *thī* with feminine singular controllers, and *thī̃* with feminine plural controllers, as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Past tense forms of *honā* ‘to be’

		Masculine	Feminine	English Translation
SG	1	<i>maī thā</i>	<i>maī thī</i>	I was
	2	<i>tū thā</i>	<i>tū thī</i>	you (intimate) were
	3	<i>vah thā</i>	<i>vah thī</i>	he was/she was
PL	1	<i>ham the</i>	<i>ham thī̃</i>	we were
	2	<i>tum the</i>	<i>tum thī̃</i>	you (familiar) were
	3	<i>ve/ap the</i>	<i>ve/ap thī̃</i>	they/you (polite) were

I should add that many speakers of standard Hindi do not employ the feminine plural ending *-ī̃* with any regularity, particularly when the subject of the sentence is in the oblique case and the verb therefore agrees with the object, as in the sentence reproduced in example (3):

(3) a. **Standard Hindi**

āp-ne kitnī kitābē
 YOU.POL-ERG how.many.NOM.FEM book.NOM.FEM.PL
parh-ī̃?
 read.PF-FEM.PL
 ‘How many books did you read?’

b. **Colloquial Hindi**

āp-ne kitnī kitāb
 YOU.POL-ERG how.many.NOM.FEM book.NOM.FEM.SG
parh-ī/parh-ī̃?
 read.PF-FEM.SG/PL
 ‘How many books did you read?’

Here, where the second person subject is in the ergative case, even standard Hindi speakers will frequently say ‘book’ (*kitāb*) instead of ‘books’ (*kitābē*) and employ the singular feminine verbal ending in agreement, as in (3b). Again, examples like this point to the fact that when it comes to conversational practice, there is no singular way to explain “gender in Hindi”.

I can only hint at the complexity of the Hindi verbal system, since auxiliaries and modals combine in various ways with either the verb root or its inflected

forms to yield numerous distinctions of tense, aspect, mood, and voice. In the imperfective, continuous, and perfective verb forms, aspect is indicated through the addition of explicit markers of various kinds to the stem while tense is indicated through the presence of one of the basic forms of *honā* ‘to be’ (i.e. present, past, presumptive, subjunctive). Here, too, the appearance of one of the vowels *-ā*, *-e*, *-ī*, or *-ī̃* will signal the gender and number of the NP with which the verb agrees, and each element in the complex that is not in the root form will reflect these agreement features. First-person feminine and masculine agreement for several tenses of the verb *jānā* ‘to go’ are illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2. Selected examples of first person verbal marking with *jānā* ‘to go’

Verb Tense	1st Person Masculine	1st Person Feminine	English Translation
Future	<i>maī jāūgā</i>	<i>maī jāūgī</i>	I will go
Past	<i>maī gayā</i>	<i>maī gayī</i>	I went (definite)
General Present	<i>maī jātā hū</i>	<i>maī jātī hū</i>	I go
Imperfective Past	<i>maī jātā thā</i>	<i>maī jātī thī</i>	I went (indefinite)
Continuous Present	<i>maī jā rahā hū</i>	<i>maī jā rahī hū</i>	I am going
Continuous Past	<i>maī jā rahā thā</i>	<i>maī jā rahī thī</i>	I was going
Perfective Present	<i>maī gayā hū</i>	<i>maī gayī hū</i>	I have gone
Perfective Past	<i>maī gayā thā</i>	<i>maī gayī thī</i>	I had gone

The import of this kind of verbal morphology for the hijras, of course, is that even when pronouncing simple first-person statements like ‘I am going’, hijras must gender themselves as either feminine or masculine.

2.2 Generic masculines

The hijras’ alternating uses of feminine and masculine morphological forms for the same referent appears in very limited contexts in non-hijra Hindi-speaking communities. With perhaps the exception of second language learners unfamiliar with the gender system, Hindi speakers rarely, if ever, betray their “natural” gender when referring to themselves. Likewise, they generally respect the gender of the referent or addressee in question – except, of course, when the generic masculine is used as inclusive of both female and male persons, as in the nouns reproduced in (4):

- (4) *dost* 'friend (male or female)'
sāthī 'companion (male or female)'
mitra 'friend, ally (male or female)'
yātrī 'traveler (male or female)'
ghuṛsavār 'rider (male or female)'

Feminine counterparts to many of the masculine nouns in (4) exist, such as *sahelī* for 'female friend', but these terms are never used generically; rather, their usage expresses specific reference to a female individual. Most females will use *sahelī* for their female friends, for instance, and will rarely call a female friend *dost*. The same is true with respect to verbal agreement with a pronoun like *koī* 'someone'. As the two sentences in (5) illustrate, masculine verbal agreement with *koī* could point to either a male or female subject, but feminine verbal agreement will always denote a female subject.

- (5) a. *koī āyā hai*
 someone come.PF.MASC.SG be.PRES
 'Someone (male or female) has come.'
 b. *koī ayī hai*
 someone come.PF.FEM.SG be.PRES
 'Someone (female) has come.'

And so it is that we find the generic masculine in proverbs such as those reproduced in (6):

- (6) a. *sab ādmī barābar hai*
 all man.MASC.PL equal be.PRES
 'All men are equal (i.e. all people are equal).'
 b. *har manuṣya kā dharm hai*
 every man.OBL.MASC.SG GEN.MASC.SG
 duty.NOM.MASC be.PRES
 'Every man has his duty (i.e. every person has his/her duty).'
 c. *jo boyegā so kaṭegā*
 who sow.FUT.MASC.SG he reap.FUT.MASC.SG
 'He who sows will reap.'

There is a limited set of feminine epicene terms in standard Hindi, among them the term *savārī* (f) 'passenger' which is used for both male and female referents, but this is comparatively rare, cf. (7):

- (7) *savārī* *āyī*
 passenger.FEM.SG come.PF.FEM.SG
 ‘The passenger came.’

As with many of the languages discussed in *Gender across Languages*, such examples point to an asymmetry in the grammatical gender system of Hindi, a point Valentine (1987) made over a decade ago from a feminist perspective. This asymmetry is also reflected in the verbal agreement in sentences with a complex subject that includes both a masculine and a feminine animate noun; in such cases, the masculine form is always used. When the complex subject involves inanimate objects of different genders, however, the verb will normally agree with the noun nearest to it in word order.

2.3 Gender reversal: Terms of endearment and insult

Outside of these uses of the generic masculine, however, speakers generally match morphological gender with referential gender. But there are a few notable exceptions. One of these is the occasional use of the masculine term *beṭā* (m) ‘boy’ instead of the feminine *beṭī* (f) ‘girl’ in direct address to a younger woman or daughter. When used in this way, particularly by parents to their children, the term becomes a term of endearment and best translates as ‘dear’. One might argue that this gender reversal works as endearment because of the traditional value given to sons, as opposed to daughters, in Indian culture. When masculine terms are used for female persons, then, they tend to elevate the status of the referent.¹⁰ So when women use the term *bhāī* (m) ‘brother’ for one another, as often happens between intimates, it signals equality and informality (cf. also Tobin, vol. I for gender switch in Hebrew).¹¹ A parallel might be drawn here with the honorific masculine term *sāhab* (m) ‘sir’, which is frequently used in reference to women, as in *memsāhab* (m) ‘lady’, *dāktar sāhab* (m) ‘doctor’, and *profesar sāhab* (m) ‘professor’ (see Valentine 1987 for further discussion). These masculine address terms are highly respectful when used for women, underscoring the recipient’s social status. When Indian journalists referred to Mrs. Gandhi as “the only man in the cabinet”, they were highlighting her ability to run the affairs of the state (and the inability of male cabinet members to do so).¹²

But male persons are rarely addressed or referenced in the feminine gender. There are a number of insult terms which “imply” effeminacy and act as an insult to the recipient’s masculinity, among them the term *hijrā* when used by

non-hijra men. The term, which literally means ‘impotent’, is frequently employed either in joking or anger to indicate the ineffectiveness of the referent in question. Other masculine terms of insult that connote effeminacy are included in (8). The hijras I knew in Banaras all, with much grief, reported having been called several of these names as young children (see Hall 1997).

(8) Selected masculine insult terms used for males

<i>hijrā</i>	‘eunuch, impotent’
<i>nacaniyā</i>	‘little dancer’
<i>bhosrī vālā</i>	‘vagina-owner’
<i>chakkā</i>	‘a set of six, effeminate man’
<i>chah nambar</i>	‘number six, effeminate man’
<i>gāndū</i>	‘passive partner in sodomy’
<i>jankhā</i>	‘effeminate man’

These terms are all grammatically masculine, and this again points to an asymmetry in the Hindi gender system. While the use of masculine terms for female persons does occur and tends to carry positive implications, the use of feminine terms for male persons is virtually non-existent,¹³ and when femininity (or effeminacy) is implied, as in the terms listed in (8) above, the connotations are extremely negative.

It is much less common for a male speaker to make use of the first-person feminine or a female speaker to employ the first-person masculine. There are infrequent accounts of young girls who, as a result of spending their formative years playing in predominantly male environments, speak in the masculine until taught to do otherwise in the Indian school system. But it is much rarer to find a boy speaking as a girl, particularly when there is such stigma attached to doing so. This might explain why the Hindi speakers in Banaras who reviewed my transcripts of hijra conversations were shocked at the hijras’ use of feminine forms for themselves and other community members. Although the hijras produce an exaggerated feminine ideal in their mannerisms and dress, most non-hijras nevertheless consider them male and normally refer to them in the masculine gender (see Hall & O’Donovan 1996). The idea that hijras use feminine self-reference comes as a complete surprise to many Hindi speakers, who see the claiming of feminine morphology by speakers they identify as male (albeit “inadequately” male) as highly abnormal.¹⁴ As I argue in the subsequent two sections, the hijras’ varied uses of feminine and masculine first, second, and third person verbal forms reflects a unique dual-gender position in a society that views them as neither fully female nor fully male.

3. Uses of the gender system by Hindi-speaking hijras

When a hijra joins a Banaras hijra community, she quickly learns a variety of ways to distance herself from the masculine semiotics in which she was raised: She begins to wear traditional feminine dress (e.g. saris, jewelry, make-up), adopt hijra gestures (such as their distinctive flat-handed clap), sing and dance like a hijra, and most critically for this article, speak in a more feminine manner. Language is a critical component of this second gender socialization process, so much so that the hijras readily distinguish between what they refer to as *mardānā bolī* ‘masculine speech’ on the one hand and *zanānā bolī* ‘feminine speech’ on the other, with the latter variety accepted as the preferred way of speaking. The precise definition of these two terms varies among the hijra communities I worked with in Banaras, but members generally agree that *mardānā bolī* involves direct speech, “stronger” curses, and masculine first person verb forms, while *zanānā bolī* entails indirect speech (and is therefore deemed more polite), “weaker” curses, and feminine first-person verb forms. Whether or not these qualities play out in the ordinary speech of non-hijra men and women has not yet been studied, but the hijras are no doubt identifying stereotypical perceptions of masculine and feminine behaviors in dominant north Indian culture (which, incidentally, are not altogether different from those identified for many middle-class European-American communities). But the hijras accept these distinctions as fact, and use them to instruct each other on how to build a “less masculine” gender presentation.

3.1 Language in hijra socialization

The hijras’ discussions of their socialization into the community is extensive in my data, but I offer typical excerpts from these discussions here so as to give some indication of the importance of language to this process. The first is taken from Rupa,¹⁵ a Banaras hijra who came to the community at the comparatively late age of 18 and found the change from *mardānā* to *zanānā bolī* particularly difficult. Raised in a prestigious Brahman family, Rupa spent all of her boyhood conforming to masculine roles and representations. But she never felt comfortable with her gender and ultimately decided to join the hijra community, undergo a castration operation, and take on the religious role of *pūjārī* (Hindu priest). As she describes in the following passage (9), the acquisition of “feminine speech” was an especially long and laborious process. (The transcription symbols used here are identified in the Appendix.)

(9) "Changing that takes time" Rupa 1993

- Rupa: ghar mē, to –
 mardānā rahate^m the^m,
 to mardānā bolī bolte-bolte^m haī.
 jab hijre ko jānā paṛtā hai
 to parivartan karnā paṛtā hai. ...
 vahī to bolā, na betā? –
 jab ghar se cale^m, –
 jab ghar se āye^m,
 to ghar kī bolī mardānā to mē,
 to mardānā bolī bolā^m. (3.0)
- R: At home –
 they were^m living^m in a *mardānā* way,
 so they're always speaking^m *mardānā bolī*.
 When a hijra has to leave,
 then a change has to be made. ...
 That's exactly what I told you, right dear? –
 When I left^m home, –
 when I came^m from home,
 the speech at home was *mardānā* so I,
 so I spoke^m *mardānā bolī*.
- Kira: laṛkō kī tarah se āpas mē vyavhār karte the? K: You behaved like boys with each other?
 Rupa: hā. bhaīyā^m ko "bhaīyā^m" bol rahe^m haī, – R: Yes, they're calling^m brothers^m "brothers^m".
 cācā^m ko "cācā^m" bol rahe^m haī, – They're calling^m their uncle^m "uncle^m".
 aise bol rahe^m haī. (2.0) They're speaking^m like that.
 to usko parivartan karne mē So changing that
 to ṭāim lagta hī hai. (2.0) just takes time.
 to usko parivartan karne mē Changing that
 ṭāim lagta hai. – takes time.
 bolte-bolte bolte-bolte, But gradually after speaking continuously,
 ādat ho gayī (1.5) it became a habit
 sāt-chah mahīne mē. in about six or seven months.

Here, Rupa is in part illustrating the same-sex nature of socializing in her home village, where men associate with men (e.g. brothers and uncles) and women with women. Her entry into the hijra community involved a shift in play-group, so to speak, as she suddenly found her primary companions identifying as feminine and shunning masculine self-reference altogether. Rupa's transition from masculine to feminine speech, then, was a highly conscious process, one that required several months of practice. In Rupa's own words, it was only after *bolte-bolte bolte-bolte* 'speaking and speaking, speaking and speaking' before it *ādat ho gayī* 'became a habit'.

What is even more interesting in the hijras' discussions of this socialization process, however, is their frequent conflation of *zanānā bolī* with intimacy and solidarity and *mardānā bolī* with social distance. In their discussions with me, the hijras often offered examples of how they talk with one another, listing a host of feminine-marked first and second person verb forms. But in many of these discussions, the hijras also point to the use of the intimate second person pronoun *tū* as an example of *zanānā bolī*, a juxtaposition that suggests an association of feminine speech with intimacy. In excerpt (10), for example,

Megha lists both kinds of phrases as examples of what she calls *auratō kī bolī*, literally the ‘speech of women’:

(10) “We always speak women’s speech” Megha 1993

<p>Megha: hā, hameśā auratō kī bolī boltī^f haī kabhī bhī ādmī ke jaisā nahī boltī^f haī, – jaise, “maī jā rahī^f hū jī”, “jā rahī^f bahan”, “tū^{intimate} khā le”, “tū^{intimate} pakā le”, “maī abhī ā rahī^f hū”.</p>	<p>M: Yes, we always speak^f women’s speech. We never ever speak^f like a man. It’s like, “I’m going^f sir/mam”, “Sister is going^f”, “You (intimate) eat!” “You (intimate) cook!” “I’m coming^f now”.</p>
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Unlike Rupa, who lives in a house with an Indian family and dresses like a man in her “off-hours”, Megha lives with a community of hijras and sees any admission of masculinity as a threat to her already marginalized status as a hijra (hence the strength of her assertion “we always speak women’s speech; we never speak like men”). The very fact that Rupa in excerpt (9) refers to both herself and fellow community members in the masculine undermines Megha’s claim, and points to divergent embracements of feminine self-reference by community members. Although speaking *zanānā bolī* is clearly the norm for hijras living in the four Banaras communities I researched (even Rupa uses feminine self-reference when discussing her activities with the community), members do not always use feminine forms for themselves and others, as Megha claims here. When a speaker wishes to express social distance between herself and another community member, whether it be out of respect (as for her guru) or disgust (as for an estranged hijra), she will often refer to that member in the masculine. Moreover, the hijras will sometimes use the first-person masculine for reasons of emphasis – for example, when angry or upset, when stressing a particular point, or when referring to their pre-hijra selves.

This again reminds us of the care we must take with folk-linguistic observations, as perceived speech patterns rarely match actual language use. But the hijras’ perceptions of their language habits are nevertheless worthy of study, for the ideologies of gender uncovered therein influence their discursive interactions in important ways. In excerpt (11), for instance, we find Sulekha erroneously claiming that she speaks like a woman when speaking with a woman and like a man when speaking with a man:

(11) “I do the same speech of the person I meet” Sulekha 1993

<p>Sulekha: mujh ko koī bāt nahī̄ rahatā hai, māī aurat jaisī bolī^f hū, – ādmī se ādmī jaisā bāt kartī^f hū, – jo jaisā miltā hai us se bāt kartī^f hū, ... jaise ab ham- hai na? - ab- ab- auratō mē hai, (0.5) to – aurat ā gayī to aurat vālā hī bolūgī^f, “dīdī bahan” kahūgī^f. – ādmī ā jātā hai to ((softly)) “kyā khāte hai^{polite}. (1.0) kyā bāt hai āpko^{polite}. (1.0) kyā kām hai”.</p>	<p>S: It’s just not a big deal to me. [Normally] I speak^f like a woman, [but] with a man I speak^f like a man. I do^f the same speech of the person I meet. ... For example, take my case, okay? If I’m socializing with women and a woman comes by I’ll just speak^f like a woman. I’ll say^f, “Dīdī! Bahan!” If a man comes by [I’ll say] ((softly)), “What are you (polite) eating? What’s the matter, sir (polite)? What brings you here?”</p>
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By the end of the passage it becomes clear that what Sulekha means is that she makes her speech correspond to the social distance she perceives as existing between herself and her addressee. Women, for Sulekha, appear to represent intimacy and informality, and so she quotes herself as using familiar terms of address like *dīdī* and *bahan* when speaking with them, both of which translate as ‘sister’ (the first suggesting respect and intimacy, the second equality and informality). In contrast, men appear to represent distance and formality, hence Sulekha’s repeated uses of the polite second person plural *āp* when reproducing her conversations with them. This short passage, even though it reveals little (if anything) about Sulekha’s actual language use, does suggest that Sulekha, like Megha, associates feminine speech with intimacy and masculine speech with social distance.

It is this association that governs the choice of feminine or masculine forms among community members. Because hijras are considered “neither men nor women”, they have at their disposal an added resource for marking social relations – that of grammatical gender. Indeed, their use of the gender system in many respects parallels the use of second person pronouns in the general population, where the choice of intimate *tū*, familiar *tum*, or polite *āp* indicates the respective social positions of addresser and addressee, as well as a host of other social attitudes and dimensions dependent on the context of the speech event. The pronoun *tū*, for example, is used in cases of heightened intimacy, e.g. to address a god, to address a close friend of equal status, to call a small child, to express anger or disgust. On the opposite end of the relational scale, the pronoun *āp* is used in situations involving any degree of formality, particularly in situations of social inequality when the speaker wishes to signal

respect for the addressee – e.g. for a guru, an elder, a parent, an employer. Between these two extremes we find the pronoun *tum*, a form most often used in informal situations by friends and colleagues but also in situations of social inequality; for example, when an individual addresses someone of lesser status. Gender also plays an important role in pronominal choice: A classic example comes from the traditional Hindu family, where the husband will use the intimate *tū* or *tum* when addressing his wife while she will use the formal *āp* when addressing him. As this brief discussion suggests, the social rules governing the varying employments of these three pronouns are terribly complex, and speakers create social relations with pronominal choice as much as they affirm them. The same is true with the hijras' choice of feminine or masculine reference for members of their own community. Equipped with an extra linguistic resource, the hijras have developed their own system for marking social relations, one that has gender at its center.

3.2 The exploitation of grammatical gender in everyday hijra conversation

In the next few pages, I offer selected examples of how the hijras exploit the grammatical gender system in their everyday conversations. Since feminine reference is expected within the community (the hijras even take on female names when initiated), I focus on those conversational excerpts which diverge from this expectation – that is, when the hijras use masculine reference for themselves and for one another. The hijras regularly use feminine reference to express solidarity with the referent in question, in the same manner that the familiar pronoun *tum* is used among good friends. Fellow *celā*'s 'disciples' quickly learn to use feminine reference for one another after joining the community; they will also use feminine reference for a superior or inferior when wishing to show affection. But when status is a point of emphasis, masculine reference is favored. The hijra community relies upon elaborate familial structures which delegate various feminine roles to different members of the group, among them *dādi* 'paternal grandmother', *nāni* 'maternal grandmother', *mausi* 'mother's sister', *cāci* 'uncle's wife', and *bahin* 'sister'. But these designations are also extremely hierarchical, with elders enjoying the respect of newcomers and both young and old members deferring to the community guru. The guru-chela relationship is fundamental to the hijra kinship system, and in any given group one will find a guru surrounded by a hierarchy of chelas, grand-chelas, great grand-chelas, and great great grand-chelas. While chelas will

normally use feminine forms when addressing a superior directly, they will often use masculine reference when talking about her in the third person so as to mark their respect for her position. Conversely, hijras will frequently refer to newer chelas in the masculine, first to differentiate them as inferiors and second to indicate that they are still in the learning stages of hijrahood. This use of masculine reference, then, could be said to parallel the use of the intimate second person pronoun *tū* in the larger population, which can be used to address both a god and a servant. What we have here, then, is a neat linguistic pattern whereby feminine forms are used for hijras considered social equals and masculine forms are used for hijras of either higher or lower status.

Because the hijras associate the masculine with both hierarchy and social distance, they also employ it to express their dissatisfaction with other hijras. This kind of masculine reference can readily be seen in their uses of the hijra naming system. When a new member enters the hijra community, she is given a woman's name to replace the name of her former, more male self. The hijras are discouraged from referring to each other with these remnants of their previous lives, yet tellingly, they often employ them in disputes. If a hijra is in a fierce argument with another member of her community, one of the most incisive insults she can give is to question her addressee's femininity by using her male name. Likewise, in example (12), we see Sulekha insulting Muslim hijras by referring to them in the third-person masculine. Although Muslims and Hindu hijras often live together harmoniously in the same communities – an arrangement rarely found in mainstream Banaras where the tension between Muslims and Hindus is quite pervasive – Sulekha, raised Hindu, feels somewhat threatened by Muslim hijras, as they hold powerful positions within the Banaras hijra network, and indeed, throughout all of northern India. The distance Sulekha feels towards Muslim hijras is reflected in her use of third person masculine verb forms when Muslim hijras act as subjects, as in the following exchange between her and my research assistant Vinita:

(12) "I'd be a small mouth with big talk" Sulekha 1993

<p>Sulekha: bazarđihā mē jo channū hai, to vah bhī ādmī^m hai. hijrā to hai nahī. ... vo buzurg hai. vah sab se mālik^m vahī hai. (1.0) sab se mālik^m vahī hai. bazarđihā kā^m. - ye vo channū iske sab ādmī^m haī, sab āte^m haī jāte^m haī. kurtā lungī pahan lete^m haī, nācne samay sārī pahan lete^m haī, - sabhī jānte^m haī, (2.0) maī hamko kahne se kyā?</p> <p>Vinita: lekin vo sab āpreśan karāye hue haī?</p> <p>Sulekha: nahī</p> <p>Vinita: kuch nahī <hai?></p> <p>Sulekha: <nahī.></p> <p>Vinita: tabhī aisī <hai?></p> <p>Sulekha: <hā.></p> <p>Vinita: o::h. (1.0) acchā?</p> <p>Sulekha: usko- unko maī kaise kahū? usko kahūgī^f to merā bāt kāṭ dēge^m. ... maī kah dūgī^f (0.5) to ((softly)) maī choṭe mūh baṛī bāt, hamko isī mē rahnā hai. (0.5) sab māregā^m pīṭegā^m bāl kāṭ degā^m.</p>	<p>S: That Channu who lives in Bazarđihā is a man^m. He's not a hijra. ... He's very old. He's the chief master^m over there, the chief master^m over there. Of^m Bazarđihā. All of the ones under Channu are men^m, all of them who come^m and go^m over there. They wear^m <i>kurtās</i> and <i>lungīs</i>, but when they dance they wear^m sarees. Everybody knows^m it so what's the use of my saying so?</p> <p>V: But haven't they all had operations?</p> <p>S: No.</p> <p>V: Nothing at all?</p> <p>S: No.</p> <p>V: So they're just that way?</p> <p>S: Yes.</p> <p>V: O::h. Really?</p> <p>S: How can I say anything about them? If I'd say^f anything, they'd just contradict^m me anyway. If I'd give^f anything away then ((softly)) I'[d be] a small mouth with big talk. I have to live in this [community], after all. They'd all hit^m me, beat^m me up, cut^m my hair.</p>
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Sulekha's use of the third-person masculine to describe the 78-year-old Channu stands in stark contrast to her repeated use of feminine forms for herself and fellow community members in other conversations. But Sulekha appears to view Muslims as below her on the social hierarchy, evidenced in her insistence throughout her interviews with us that Hindu hijras existed long before Muslim hijras, and moreover, that it is only hijras from low caste backgrounds who convert to Islam and eat meat. Displeased with her own "smallness" relative to these Muslim hijras, Sulekha refuses to grant the entire community any acknowledgement of femininity, whether it be linguistic or anatomical.¹⁶

A comparable instance of such distancing can be found in Megha's references to Sulekha. After a fairly serious argument with Megha, Sulekha left Megha's community in Banaras and went to live with a male partner in a neighboring village outside the city. In a manner consistent with her claims in (10), Megha almost always uses feminine forms when referring to other hijras;

yet when she refers to Sulekha, who apparently insulted her authority as *mālkin* (f) ‘chief’ of her community, Megha uses the masculine. Two examples of this employment are reproduced in excerpt (13):

(13) “Now he left” Megha 1993

<p>Megha: bacpan se yahī kā^m hai, – ab jākar [place name] mē rah rahā^m hai, – merā jajmānī hai, to maī un logō ko de detī^f hū.</p>	<p>M: He belonged^m to this household since childhood, now he left and is living^m in [place name]. I had clients there, but I transferred^f those people to him.</p>
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Through the use of masculine postpositions like *kā* (m) ‘of (m)’ and masculine verb forms like *rah rahā* (m) *hai* ‘he is living (m)’, Megha signals that Sulekha is estranged from her.

3.3 The use of masculine self-reference

Even more interesting than the above uses of the third-person masculine is the hijras’ use of the first-person masculine. While this rarely surfaces in conversation, there are at least three situations in which the Banaras hijras do use it. The first of these is perhaps the most predictable: The hijras will regularly use the first-person masculine when referring to themselves as boys or telling of their childhoods. This linguistic shift follows from the fact that many hijras have what might be called a discontinuous gender identity which gradually changes from male to non-male after arrival in the hijra community. It is perhaps for this reason that the hijras sometimes refer to fellow hijras as masculine when referring to them in a pre-hijra state, such as when they tell of each other’s childhoods. Here masculine marking will often perform as a tense marker, suggesting a time period prior to the hijra’s entry into the community. Nanda (1990: xviii) alludes to similar linguistic shifts in the preface to her ethnography of the hijras when she explains her translation techniques, pointing out that she translates pronouns which refer to the hijras as feminine, unless “referring to the hijra in the past, when he considered himself a male”. A hijra’s use of the masculine in such instances seems to reflect her own distancing from a previous self, a self that continuously provides an unpleasant reminder that her femininity is appropriated instead of genuine.

A second kind of masculine self-reference occurs when hijras wish to add emphasis to a particular conversational statement. A beautiful example of this is reproduced in excerpt (14), when Sulekha wants to express her disagreement

with Megha's portrayal of the hijra community. As I mentioned earlier, Megha is very protective of her community's reputation, and as a result, she painted for us a rather conservative portrait of the hijra lifestyle. Many hijras supplement their income through sex-work, particularly now that their traditional role as the blessers of newborns has become suspect in some segments of the general population. Many educated middle-class Indians, for instance, no longer believe in the hijras' power over procreation, and refuse to pay them money for their song and dance performances at birth celebrations. But Megha nevertheless denied any community involvement with prostitution, and insisted throughout her conversations with us that hijras were nothing but respected religious ascetics. In the excerpt below, Sulekha contradicts Megha's claims, punctuating her opposition with the first-person masculine singular:

(14) "No, I don't tell lies!" Sulekha 1993

<p>Vinita: kaise kah rahī thī "ham log ko dukh hotā hai, ham log kā parivār nahī rahtā, ham log kā sambandh nahī rahtā, ham log bhī sote uṭhte baiṭhte".</p> <p>Sulekha: nahī. ye galat bāt hai. – galat bāt hai. māi isko nahī māntā^m. – galat bāt hai. admī ke sāth kartā hai sab. – jaise aurat *mard sambandh hota hai, – usī tarah *hijre mard ke sāth sambandh hotā hai. kitne *hijre- kitne hijre rakh lete hāi admī ko, – kitnā peśāvar hotā hai, (1.0) peśā kartī, tab (1.0) *sau, pacās, do sau, cār sau, *sabkā peśā kartī hāi. – māi jhūṭh kahtā^m hū? nahī kahtā^m hū.</p>	<p>V: Then why was [Megha] saying, "We have a lot of sadness. We no longer have a family. We no longer have relationships. All we do is sleep, get up, sit around"?</p> <p>S: No, that's wrong. That's wrong. I don't believe^m that. That's wrong. They all have relationships with men. *Hijras have relationships with men just like women have relationships with *men. So many *hijras- So many hijras keep men. So many are professionals. Those who do it as a profession charge *100, 50, 200, 400, *anything they can get. Do I tell^m lies? No, I don't tell^m lies.</p>
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Here, Sulekha also repeatedly employs the infamous hijra flat-palmed clap, indicated in my transcription system by an asterisk. Clapping five times in this short passage (and the hijras' clap, incidentally, is extremely sharp and loud), Sulekha denies everything Megha has told us: "Yes, we have relationships with men; yes, we work as prostitutes; yes, we charge anything we can get." Use of the first-person masculine helps to bring her point home, and as this is highly

uncharacteristic for Sulekha, she commands our attention: “maī jhūṭh kahtā (m) hū? nahī kahtā (m) hū!” ‘Do I tell (m) lies? No, I don’t tell (m) lies!’

A final example of the hijras’ use of the first-person masculine comes from a hijra community on the outskirts of the city. The four hijras who make up this comparatively isolated community, all born into Hindu families who ostracized them, have now adopted the religious practices of the Muslim families they live beside – families who in many ways suffer a similar marginalization as residents of a city that is thought of throughout northern India as the “holy Hindu city”. The 80 year old Shashi is the guru of the group, and after 69 years of speaking like a woman (she became a hijra when she was eleven years old), we rarely heard her use masculine self-reference. But during one visit we accidentally instigated a family dispute that disrupted this small community. We often gave gifts to the hijras the first few times we met with them, so as to express our gratitude for the time they spent with us and show respect for their profession. On this day, however, we decided to give a gift of 101 rupees to Shashi’s chela Mohan, since we had given Shashi a colorful saree on our previous visit. But this is not how the hijra hierarchy works: Only the guru is allowed to accept gifts, and the guru then distributes the group’s earnings among her chelas. By giving Mohan a gift, we inadvertently (and regrettably) upset the community balance. After we left that day, Mohan apparently refused to hand over the rupees to her guru, and when confronted with Shashi’s rage, she fled back to her home village outside of Delhi.

When we returned a week later, we immediately sensed that something was wrong. The hijras’ house was deserted except for Shashi, who we found sitting on a small cot, slumped against a wall. She was devastated by Mohan’s departure, and was grieving for the loss of her favorite chela. No apology we gave could remedy the situation or sufficiently express our regret, so we sat with her nervously and listened to what she had to say. Wailing *merā betā, merā betā* ‘my son, my son’ and clapping in anger, Shashi screamed about what had happened, venting her anger entirely through use of the masculine first- and third- person. It would seem that for Shashi, anger is an emotion best expressed in the masculine. Perhaps rage is a gut-level reaction that recalls the masculine forms she produced prior to her entry into the community, or perhaps rage requires the kind of emphatic masculinity used by Sulekha in the previous passage. Whatever the case, Shashi’s use of masculine self-reference became a dramatic and forceful tool for venting this rage, and it remains with me as a painful reminder of the inherent imbalance between a researcher and her subject.

4. Conclusions

But what has this discussion of what we might call “unnatural” gender by Hindi-speaking hijras told us about gender in non-hijra Hindi-speaking communities? Although the morphological shifting exhibited here is perhaps unique to the hijra community, I suggest that the conversations of women and men are also subject to comparable kinds of “gendered negotiations”. As language and gender theorists have begun to demonstrate (see the articles in Hall & Bucholtz 1995, for instance), men and women in a variety of communities exploit cultural expectations of femininity and masculinity in order to establish positions of power and solidarity. The hijras have an added resource for accomplishing this, as their between male- and female-position allows them to access and claim both sides of the grammatical gender divide. But non-hijras “do gender” in conversational interaction too, working with and against ideologies of feminine and masculine speech that are themselves rooted in cultural expectations of gender-appropriate behavior. It is here that Judith Butler’s (1990, 1993) Derridean reworking of J. L. Austin’s concept of performativity becomes useful. Her argument that gender works as a performative, constituting the very act that it performs, leads us away from sociolinguistic approaches to identity that view the way we talk as directly indexing a pre-discursive self. For Butler, there is no pre-discursive self, as even our understanding of “biological sex” is discursively produced. This theoretical perspective throws a decisive wrench in the distinction between “natural gender” and “grammatical gender”, since there is no “natural” in Butlerian theory. Without the concept of natural gender to fall back on, sociolinguists can no longer make the circular claim that speaker X speaks like X because he is male or that speaker Y speaks like Y because she is female. Rather, we must turn our focus to the speech event itself, uncovering how speakers manipulate ideologies of femininity and masculinity in the ongoing production of gender.

In the case of the hijras, we located some of these ideologies in the association of *mardānā bolī* with directness, hierarchy, and anger, and *zanānā bolī* with indirectness, solidarity, and intimacy. The Banaras hijras at times challenge such associations in their creative employments of masculine and feminine self-reference, but their use of grammatical gender is nevertheless constrained by a rather traditional and dichotomous understanding of gender. While the hijras tend to use the masculine when speaking to a superior or inferior, emphasizing particular points, recalling their past selves as non-hijras, or expressing intense anger, they are more likely to employ the feminine when expressing solidarity

and intimacy with fellow community members. Because they occupy an ambiguous gender position in a city that continues to marginalize them, Banaras hijras are perhaps more attentive to the role speech plays in the performance of gender. With a heightened awareness of how language can index gender identity, they enact and contest ideologies of gendered speech in their daily interactions. The research is not yet here to tell us whether “mono-sexed” Hindi-speaking communities in India share these same expectations of male and female verbal behavior; nor do we yet know how such expectations might influence the actual language practices of men and women in specific communities of practice. I offer this analysis of a rather unusual community to excite more research on gender in Hindi sociolinguistics. The language practices of these Banaras hijras, extraordinary as they are, are not created in a cultural vacuum. Their discursive choices are influenced by dominant ideologies of gender in northern India – ideologies that no doubt affect linguistic behavior in a variety of Hindi-speaking communities.

Appendix

The transcription conventions used for the Hindi passages in this article include the following; I have not used all of these conventions in the English translations since extralinguistic features like intonation and emphasis are not parallel.

x^f	superscripted <i>f</i> indicates feminine morphological marking in the Hindi	[]	brackets enclose words added to clarify the meaning of the text
y^m	superscripted <i>m</i> indicates masculine morphological marking in the Hindi	what	bold print indicates syllabic stress
(0.5)	indicates length of pause within and between utterances, timed in tenths of a second	:	a colon indicates a lengthening of a sound (the more colons, the longer the sound)
a – a	a dash with spaces before and after indicates a short pause, less than 0.5 seconds	.	a period indicates falling intonation
but-	a hyphen immediately following a letter indicates an abrupt cutoff in speaking	,	a comma indicates continuing intonation
(())	double parentheses enclose nonverbal movements and extralinguistic commentary	?	a question mark indicates rising intonation at the end of a syllable or word
		...	deletion of some portion of the original text
		“a”	quotation marks enclose quoted or reported speech
		*	flat-palmed clap characteristic of the hijras
		< >	overlapping talk

Notes

* I began this field research in a joint project with Veronica O'Donovan after concluding an advanced language program during the 1992–1993 academic year in Banaras, India. I am grateful to the American Institute of Indian Studies for sponsoring my participation in the program. Some of the data discussed in this essay also appears in Hall & O'Donovan (1996). My thanks are extended to the many people who helped me with this project in both India and America, to my friend and Hindi teacher Ved Prakash Vatuk, and to the Banaras hijras who participated in these discussions.

1. This percentage is taken from the 1991 Census of India, in which 4022 of every 10,000 people listed Hindi as their primary language and another 518 listed Urdu. These and other language statistics are available at the Census of India website: www.censusindia.net.
2. See Kachru (1980: 3–11) for an interesting discussion of the grammatical tradition of Hindi.
3. There are, however, a number of insightful studies on women's uses of various South Asian oral traditions, such as Raheja & Gold's (1994) ethnography on the poetics of women's resistance in the songs, stories, and personal narratives of women in northern India.
4. For a more extensive discussion of Valentine's work, see Hall (forthcoming).
5. See Romaine (1999: 63–90) for a recent discussion of the "leakage" between grammatical gender and natural gender.
6. The standard Hindi *kharī bolī* area is generally said to be located in western Uttar Pradesh between the Ganges and Jumna rivers, stretching from Dehradun in the north to Bulandshahar in the south.
7. In Delhi the hijras have named their language *Farsi*. While their "hijralect" has very little, if anything, to do with what is generally known as Farsi, the term is fitting given that the hijras see themselves as descended from the eunuchs of the medieval Moghul courts, where Farsi was the dominant language.
8. I am grateful to Ved Vatuk for bringing to my attention the parallel between *sadhukkarī* and *hijrā bolī*.
9. I use the term subject in the sense of syntactic subject, not morphological subject. The syntactic subject may be in an oblique case form and does not necessarily determine agreement. The term is usually used for the NP which corresponds to the subject of the English translation.
10. In recent years, however, parents in some Hindi-speaking areas have begun to use the feminine term *beṭī* in direct address to a son, also for reasons of endearment (Ved Vatuk, personal communication).
11. The term *bhāī*, like the masculine term *yār* 'friend', is used in a variety of contexts to index informality. Wives, for instance, will sometimes refer to their husbands as *bhāī*.
12. Ved Vatuk (personal communication).
13. Except, of course, in theatrical situations when men play women's roles, as in folk-dramas known as *nautankī* or *sāng*.

14. A similar reaction would most likely occur towards women using masculine self-reference, except for the fact that there has recently been a number of public female figures who have challenged the assumption of “natural” linguistic gender by assuming a male speaking voice. Most notable in this regard is one of the lead characters in the sitcom *Ham Panch*, whose use of the masculine first-person is intended to reflect her tomboyish personality. Moreover, the popular singer Milan Singh, who is known for singing both male and female parts of traditional Bollywood film songs, regularly speaks in the first person plural when interviewed so as to keep her gender ambiguous before the public.
15. I have chosen pseudonyms for all of the hijras appearing in this article and have avoided giving the names of the four hijra communities mentioned to protect their anonymity. I have also chosen to use *her* and *she* to refer to the hijras since they prefer to be referred to and addressed in the feminine.
16. It could also be quite possible that the group of people Sulekha is referring to here are actually *jankhās* (as called in Banaras) or *kotīs* (as called in Delhi), i.e. men who dress and dance as women but do not publicly identify as hijras or officially belong to the hijra community. As these “non-castrated” men continue to remain in their extended family structures, undergoing arranged marriages and bearing children, they sometimes receive a certain amount of animosity from the hijras. See Hall (forthcoming) for a more lengthy discussion of these different groups.

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