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## Honoric Agreement in Russian

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# Universiteit Leiden

The Netherlands

Faculty of Humanities

## **Honorific Agreement in Russian**

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## List of Abbreviations

1	first person
2	second person
3	third person
ACC	accusative
CONJ	conjunction
DAT	dative
DEM	demonstrative
DIM	diminutive
F	feminine
GEN	genitive
LF	long form
M	masculine
N	neuter
NEG	negation, negative
NOM	nominative
PART	particle
POSS	possessive
PREP	preposition
PL	plural
QUOT	quotative
REFL	reflexive
SF	short form
SG	singular

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## 1. Introduction

The main aim of this thesis is to expand the current body of knowledge on the topic of honorific agreement (henceforth: HA) in Russian. It was first mentioned as evidence for the *Agreement Hierarchy* (Corbett 1979:208) and received some further attention in a later work Corbett 1983:24-25.<sup>1</sup> The existing discussion of HA in Russian in the literature is limited, due to the phenomenon being rather marginal in comparison to other, more famous, cases of semantic agreement, e.g. hybrid nouns (Corbett 2015), pancake sentences (Enger 2004), and to the lack of available data. Another factor contributing to the marginality of honorific agreement is its rarity in modern Russian. While the underrepresentation of the phenomenon serves as a great motivation for an in-depth investigation, I acknowledge the potential hardships involved in this process and thus sympathise with the reluctance of my fellow researchers to undertake such an endeavour. Fortunately enough, I happen to be a native Russian speaker, which provides me with a slight advantage of being more agile in navigating and accessing the sources in that language. This, in turn, is crucial, as collecting and analysing novel data is required to gain more insight into HA in Russian and ultimately contribute to filling the knowledge gap.

Since honorific agreement is a type of semantic agreement, the question this thesis is primarily concerned with is the interaction of HA with the Agreement Hierarchy. It is only by broadening the pool of illustrative data that we can put the hierarchy's prediction to test and make further judgements about the hierarchy's application. Apart from addressing the central question, the intention is to provide an insightful description of the phenomenon of HA in Russian itself and of any peculiarities and/or trends in the collected data.

This thesis is organised as follows: Chapter 2 introduces the reader to all the necessary theoretical notions required to understand and deal with the phenomenon under research. Sections 2.1 and 2.2 are dedicated to agreement, the gender and number features, and the influence of politeness on agreement in the context of Russian. Sections 2.3-2.5 explain the semantic agreement, Agreement Hierarchy and honorific agreement. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the methodology. Section 3.1 addresses the specificities of the data sources, whereas Sections 3.2-3.4 describe the process of data collection and processing. The research results are presented in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 is dedicated to the discussion of trends

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<sup>1</sup> In the indicated sources the phenomenon of HA is not explicitly called 'honorific agreement'. In Corbett 1979 it appears under the name 'agreement with Russian titles' and in Corbett 1983 under 'agreement with a Russian respected noun'. Further information is provided in Section 2.5.



represented by the collected data (Sections 5.1 & 5.2) and the ironic aspect of HA (Section 5.3). Chapter 6 concludes the thesis with the summary of the findings.

## 2. Theoretical Background

### 2.1 Defining Agreement

The first challenge that any linguist dealing with agreement has to face is defining it. Agreement is a multifaceted phenomenon, it operates at the interface of morphology and syntax, and, as we will see later, it is also influenced by semantics and pragmatics. Hence, there exist plenty of definitions and alternative notions of agreement tailored for specific purposes of a given theory. Some of the terminological and definitional complexities are discussed in Corbett's *Agreement* (2006). I will adopt his account here.

The broad definition of agreement is as follows:

The term agreement commonly refers to some systematic covariation between a semantic or formal property of one element and a formal property of another.

(Steele 1978:610, as cited in Corbett 2006:4)

In order to describe agreement in a uniform and concise manner it is necessary to introduce the following essential notions: the **controller**, the element determining the agreement, the **target**, whose form is determined by agreement, and the **domain**, the syntactic environment in which agreement occurs (ibid.). A target agrees with a controller with regard to its feature specifications within a given domain (ibid.:5). Consider [1]:<sup>2</sup>

[1]

<i>красив-ая</i>	<i>девушк-а</i>
beautiful- <b>F.SG</b>	lady( <b>F</b> )- <b>SG</b>
'a beautiful lady'	

In [1] the domain of agreement is a noun phrase. The controller is the singular feminine noun *девушка* 'lady', and the target is the adjective *красивая* 'beautiful'. The features inherent to the controller, i.e. number and gender, are reflected in agreement and expressed on the target by the inflectional suffix *-ая*.<sup>3</sup> It is important to note that the relation between the controller

---

<sup>2</sup> The examples in this thesis are glossed according to the [Leipzig Glossing Rules](#). Here and henceforth the most important parts of the gloss are in bold.

<sup>3</sup> In Russian tradition the bound morpheme *-ая* is called an 'ending', rather than a 'suffix'. In this thesis I stick with the Western tradition of calling it a 'suffix'.

and the target is asymmetric, since the adjective reflects the gender of the noun via its morphological form and not vice versa.

## 2.2 Features

Features play a crucial role in the analysis of agreement, they allow one to be precise about the type of information involved and therefore deserve at least a brief discussion here. Since agreement is dictated by the controller, its inherent features, gender and number for nouns, are the main agreement features (Corbett 2006:124). Later in this section I will also touch upon the effect of politeness on agreement in the context of Russian.

### 2.2.1 Gender

There are three recognised genders in Russian: masculine, feminine, and neuter. The masculine-feminine distinction is made first and foremost according to the semantics of nouns: those denoting males are masculine and those denoting females are feminine. The nouns which are not sex-differentiable are subject to formal assignment rules. The rules are based on declensional classes. The number of declensional classes as well as the allocation of their members have long been a subject of debate in the literature. Since an overview of the proposed approaches is beyond the scope of this thesis, the reader is referred to Corbett 1982, whose account is adopted here.

Corbett distinguishes 4 main declensional classes on the basis of which the following morphological gender assignment rules apply:

1. Nouns of declensional type I are masculine
2. Nouns of declensional types II and III are feminine
3. Others are neuter

(Corbett 1991:36)

It is important to note that semantic gender assignment has precedence over morphological assignment: nouns like *папа* 'father', *дядя* 'uncle', *юноша* 'young man' all belong to the declension II, however they denote males and therefore are masculine. Furthermore, there are nouns which decline irregularly: masculine *путь* 'path' and a group of neuter nouns *бремя* 'burden', *время* 'time', *вымя* 'udder', *стремя* 'stirrup', *знамя* 'banner', *имя* 'name', *пламя*

‘flame’, *племя* ‘tribe’, *семья* ‘seed’, *темя* ‘crown of a head’ decline as I in the instrumental case and as III in all other oblique cases. These nouns are classified as irregular III.

Ultimately, given the semantic assignment rules supplemented by the rules referring to the four declensional classes, the task of predicting the gender of a Russian noun is often rather straightforward. This can be illustrated by the following flow chart:

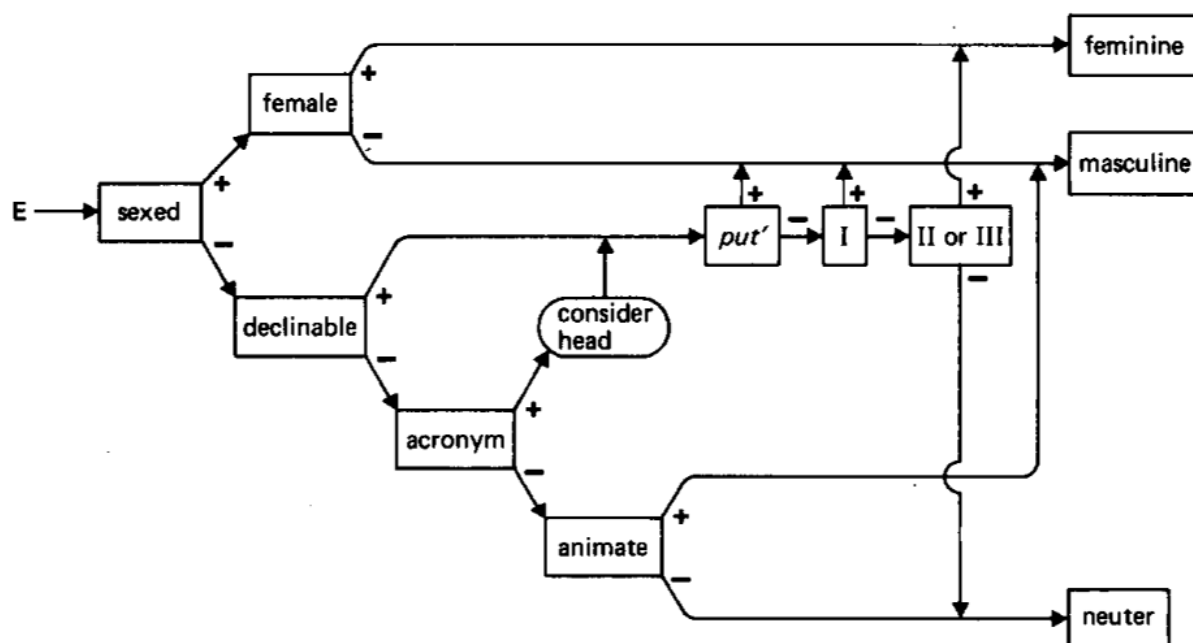


Figure 1. Gender Assignment Algorithm (Corbett 1982:216)

In the context of agreement it is important to mention the hybrid nouns. Hybrid nouns cannot be strictly assigned a gender, and their agreement pattern is inconsistent, i.e. they take different agreements with different target types (Corbett 1991:183, 2006:163). Hybrids are often nouns denoting professions, e.g. *директор* ‘headmaster’. According to its morphological form it should be masculine, however, we have to consider the semantics first. With such nouns the semantic gender assignment presents a challenge due to the following ambiguity: *директор* can refer both to the profession itself (without distinguishing the sex) and to an employee, a person of either sex. In the former case, masculine forms are preferred in Russian (Corbett:2006:164). Because of the conflict in meaning both masculine and feminine agreements are possible, and the variation is target-dependent.<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, there is a peculiar group of hybrid titles, e.g. *превосходительство* ‘excellency’, *высочество* ‘highness’, *величество* ‘majesty’. These nouns belong to the

<sup>4</sup> Demonstrated in example [13] in Section 2.3.

declension IV and are therefore neuter for morphological reasons. They exhibit neuter agreement with their attributive modifiers:

[2]

- |    |                         |                           |                   |
|----|-------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|
| a. | <i>ваши-е</i>           | <i>превосходительство</i> |                   |
|    | 2PL.POSS-N.SG           | excellency(N)             |                   |
|    | ‘your excellency’       |                           |                   |
| b. | <i>её</i>               | <i>императорск-ое</i>     | <i>величество</i> |
|    | 3SG.POSS.F              | imperial-N.SG             | majesty(N)        |
|    | ‘her imperial majesty’  |                           |                   |
| c. | <i>его</i>              | <i>императорск-ое</i>     | <i>высочество</i> |
|    | 3SG.POSS.M/N            | imperial-N.SG             | highness(N)       |
|    | ‘his imperial highness’ |                           |                   |

The second person possessive pronoun *ваши* and the adjective *императорское* ‘imperial’ express neuter agreement via the inflectional suffixes *-е* and *-ое*. It is important to note here that the third person masculine/neuter possessive pronoun *его*, feminine *её*, and plural *их* do not inflect and are identical to the genitive form of the third person personal pronouns. Furthermore, they do not agree attributively, unlike the second person possessive *ваши* in [2a] and the adjective *императорское* in [2b] and [2c], the third person possessives *её* and *его* are not controlled by the respective title nouns *величество* ‘majesty’ and *высочество* ‘highness’. The *его/её* distinction is semantically regulated and depends on the gender of the possessor-referent.

These nouns are hybrids because they can take either masculine or feminine agreements, depending on the gender of the title bearer (Iomdin 1990:86). In other words, titles are often used metonymically, and this is what causes the hybrid behaviour. Consider [3]:

[3]

- |    |   |                   |                  |                |          |                  |
|----|---|-------------------|------------------|----------------|----------|------------------|
| a. | <i>Его</i>                                    | <i>благородие</i> | <i>отпусти-л</i> | <i>кухарку</i> | <i>и</i> | <i>горничную</i> |
|    | 3SG.POSS.M                                    | honour(N)         | let.go-PST[.M]   | cook           | CONJ     | maid             |
|    | ‘His honour has let the cook and the maid go’ |                   |                  |                |          |                  |

(Sorokovik *Sokrovischa Starogo Portfelya* 2019)

- |    |               |              |            |                   |                   |            |
|----|---------------|--------------|------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------|
| b. | <i>Кстати</i> | <i>князь</i> | <i>ее</i>  | <i>величество</i> | <i>поручи-л-а</i> | <i>мне</i> |
|    | by.the.way    | duke         | 3SG.POSS.F | majesty(N)        | entrust-PST-F     | 1SG.DAT    |

<i>узнать</i>	<i>почему</i>	<i>княжна</i>	<i>Наталья</i>	<i>Платоновна</i>
find.out	why	duchess	Natalia	Platonovna

<i>сегодня</i>	<i>не</i>	<i>был-а</i>	<i>во</i>	<i>дворце?</i>
today	NEG	be.PST-F	in	palace

‘By the way, count, her majesty entrusted me to find out why the duchess Natalia Platonovna was not in the palace today?’

(Dmitriev *Zolotoj Vek* 2017)

In both [3a] and [3b] the controller is a neuter noun, however in [3a] the referent is male, and therefore the target verb in the predicative position expresses masculine agreement, whereas in [3b] the referent is female, and thus the target verb expresses feminine agreement.

### 2.2.2 Number

There are only two grammatical numbers in Russian: singular and plural (Corbett 2001:39). Number can be expressed through (zero) inflection, stem-alternation, a combination of both, and suppletion (ibid.:139-141). Consider some examples:

[4]	<b>Singular</b>	<b>Plural</b>	<b>Number expressed via</b>
a.	<i>мальчик</i> boy[.SG] ‘boy’	<i>мальчик-и</i> boy-PL ‘boys’	inflection
b.	<i>клавиатур-а</i> keyboard-SG ‘keyboard’	<i>клавиатур-ы</i> keyboard-PL ‘keyboards’	inflection
c.	<i>имя</i> name[.SG] ‘name’	<i>имена</i> name[.PL] ‘names’	stem-alternation
d.	<i>человек</i> person[.SG] ‘person’	<i>люди</i> people[.PL] ‘people’	suppletion

Not all nouns can distinguish between both numbers. Exceptions, *singularia* and *pluralia tantum*, are numerous. Unfortunately, the detailed discussion of Russian number is beyond the scope of this thesis, and the reader is thus referred to Lyashevskaya 2004, Mel'čuk 1985.

As shown by [4] the nominal number is signalled on the noun. Elsewhere within the noun phrase and on the verb it is marked by agreement (Corbett 2001:180). It is important to note that the number feature constrains the gender feature in that gender can be expressed on targets only in the singular (Corbett 2006:79):

[5]	<b>Singular</b>	<b>Plural</b>
a.	<i>голодн-ый мальчик</i> hungry- <b>M.SG</b> boy(M)-SG 'a hungry boy'	<i>голодн-ые мальчик-и</i> hungry- <b>PL</b> boy(M)-PL 'hungry boys'
b.	<i>голодн-ая девочк-а</i> hungry- <b>F.SG</b> girl(F)-SG 'a hungry girl'	<i>голодн-ые девочк-и</i> hungry- <b>PL</b> girl(F)-PL 'hungry girls'
c.	<i>голодн-ое чудовищ-е</i> hungry- <b>N.SG</b> beast(N)-SG 'a hungry beast'	<i>голодн-ые чудовищ-а</i> hungry- <b>PL</b> beast(N)-PL 'hungry beasts'

As shown in [5] the distinct gender expressions are neutralised in plural. The target adjective *голодные* 'hungry' has the same inflectional suffix *-ые* in all three instances of agreement with controllers of different gender.

### 2.2.3 Politeness<sup>5</sup>

Unlike gender and number, which are members of the main agreement features set and are nominal (ibid.:132), politeness is not an agreement feature in Russian. Rather, it functions as an agreement condition. To illustrate that I will provide some examples of polite address.

In order to address a single person politely Russian speakers use the second person plural personal pronoun *вы*:

[6] Polite plural

---

<sup>5</sup> Here I would like to point out that in this thesis 'politeness' is to be distinguished from 'honorificity'. The latter is strongly tied with the social/power hierarchy and has to do with the (obligatory) expression of respect in a bottom-up fashion, i.e. certain rules might be imposed on the lower members of the hierarchy during their interaction with the higher members and not vice versa. Politeness, in turn, has more to do with manners and is less restricted in its direction of expression. In other words, whereas courtiers are usually obliged to treat the king with a certain degree of deference (honorificity), the king has no such obligation towards the courtiers, however, he still can choose to be polite with them.

*Вы сегодня прекрасно выглядит-е*

**2PL** today great look-**2PL**

‘You look great today’

The plural target predicate verb *выглядите* agrees with the plural controller *вы*. Both number and person feature values are expressed via the suffix *-е*, and thus there are no mismatches between the controller and the target. This is not always the case. Consider [7]:

[7]

*Значитъ, вы актрис-а?*

means **2PL** actress-**SG**

‘So, you’re an actress?’

(Amfiteatrov *Anna Damby* 2012)

Despite the controller *вы* being plural, the target predicate noun *актриса* ‘actress’ is singular. This inconsistency in number is semantically justified,<sup>6</sup> since only one person is addressed. Note that plural agreement in these circumstances is infelicitous:

[8] Infelicitous with a single addressee

*вы актрис-ы?*

**2PL** actress-**PL**

Now consider examples with predicate adjectives:

[9]

a. *Дяд-юшк-а! Как мне мило что вы весел-ы*  
uncle-DIM-SG how 1SG.DAT delightful that **2PL** cheerful-(SF)**PL**

‘Uncle! How delighted I am that you are cheerful’

(Fonvizin *Nedorosl’* 2009)

b. *Вы сегодня весел-ый*  
**2PL** today cheerful-(LF)**SG**

---

<sup>6</sup> Semantically justified agreement is called ‘semantic agreement’ and is further discussed in the next section.



‘You are cheerful today’

(Gorkiy *Somov i drugie* 2011)

The predicate adjectives in [9a] and [9b] are two different forms of the same adjective. [9a] exhibits the adjective in its short form, whereas in [9b] the adjective occurs in its long (full) form.<sup>7</sup> Both the short form and the long form adjectives have the same second person plural pronoun controller *вы*, and are in the predicative position, however express different agreements. The short form predicate adjective *веселы* is plural, and thus exhibits no number feature mismatch with its controller, unlike the singular long form predicate adjective *веселый*. The number feature mismatch on the latter is semantically justified, as only one person is addressed. Note that plural agreement on the long form adjective in these circumstances is infelicitous:

[10] Infelicitous with a single addressee

<i>Вы</i>	<i>сегодня</i>	<i>весел-ые</i>
2PL	today	cheerful-(LF)PL

Due to politeness the agreement controller in all of the examples [6-9] is the second person plural pronoun *вы*. Remarkably, not every target agrees with the plural controller *вы* in number. While the mismatches in [7] and [9b] are semantically justified, since only one person is being addressed, singular agreements on verbal and short form adjectival predicates cannot be semantically justified under the same circumstances and are ungrammatical:

[11] \*Polite address with singular agreement on the predicate verb

* <i>Вы</i>	<i>сегодня</i>	<i>прекрасно</i>	<i>выгляди-шь</i>
2PL	today	great	look-2SG

[12] \*Polite address with singular agreement on the short-form predicate adjective

* <i>Вы</i>	<i>весел</i>
2PL	cheerful(SF).SG

---

<sup>7</sup> The main difference between the two is that the short form adjectives are less likely to occur in the attributive position. They are “more verb-like” (Corbett 2006:232) and, as a rule, are found in the predicative position.

Thus, we have the following distribution of number agreements on different target types with the same plural controller *вы*:

Target type	verb	noun	adjective (SF)	adjective (LF)
Number agreement	plural	singular	plural	singular
Semantically justified	-	+	-	+

Table 1. Variation in number agreements on different target types in polite address<sup>8</sup>

While with some targets [7] and [9b] singular (semantic) agreements are allowed and preferred, as evident by the infelicity of [8] and [10], with other targets [6] and [9] they are not allowed and result in ungrammatical forms. This target-dependent variability is typical of an agreement condition (Corbett 2006:137).

We have already encountered a number of examples, e.g. [3], [7], [9b], where the agreement choice was semantically justified. Such instances of agreement are far from being rare and thus deserve being reviewed in the next section.

### 2.3 Semantic Agreement

Semantic agreement is determined by the meaning of the controller, i.e. is semantically justified. It is consistent with the **properties of the referent**. Semantic agreement is traditionally contrasted with syntactic agreement, which is consistent with the formal **properties of the controller**. As the terms syntactic and semantic agreement can be said to represent opposing sides of a spectrum, rather than some particular kinds of agreement in isolation, they are most meaningful when there is a choice between the two (Corbett 2006:155). Consider [13]:

[13]

<i>Наш</i>	<i>бухгалтер</i>	<i>приш-л-а</i>	<i>получить</i>	<i>транш</i>
1PL.POSS.M	accountant(M/F)	come-PST-F	get	tranche

<sup>8</sup> This variation is also reported with other examples in Corbett 1983:52-55, 2006:232-233 as evidence for the Predicate Hierarchy.

от американского фонда NED и узна-л-а, что перечисления  
from American fund NED CONJ learn-PST-F that transfers

невозможны.

impossible

‘Our accountant came to get the tranche from the NED American fund and learnt that the transfers are impossible’

[\(https://pravo.ru/review/view/16608/\)](https://pravo.ru/review/view/16608/)

[13] exhibits both syntactic and semantic agreements. The possessive pronoun *наш* ‘our’ in attributive position agrees with the controller *бухгалтер* ‘accountant’ according to its formal properties: its morphological form is masculine. The predicate verbs *пришла* ‘came’ and *узнала* ‘learnt’, however, show feminine agreements, based on the meaning of the controller: the referent is a female accountant.

As shown in [13], both syntactic and semantic agreements can be found in the same domain of a clause. Notably, syntactic agreement occurs in attributive position, whereas two instances of semantic agreement in predicative positions. This particular distribution is what is called an Agreement Hierarchy effect: the greater the syntactic distance between the target and the controller, the more likely is the semantic agreement (Corbett 1979:223). The Agreement Hierarchy will be introduced in the next section.

## 2.4 Agreement Hierarchy

The Agreement Hierarchy is a hierarchy of agreement positions postulated on the basis of data collected from a variety of languages that allow alternative agreements (ibid.). AH facilitates predictions about the likelihood of occurrence of syntactic or semantic agreements in a given target position:

*Agreement Hierarchy* (ibid.)

attributive > predicate > relative pronoun > personal pronoun

The four positions indicate the domain where the agreement occurs: within the noun phrase, within the clause, within the sentence, and beyond the sentence. The AH imposes the following constraint on possible agreement patterns:

For any controller that permits alternative agreements, as we move rightwards along the Agreement Hierarchy, the likelihood of agreement with greater semantic justification will increase monotonically (that is, with no intervening decrease).

(Corbett 2006:207)

The effect of this constraint was already illustrated in example [13] from the previous section. The controller noun *бухгалтер* ‘accountant’ is a hybrid, it permits alternative agreements: syntactic agreement in the attributive position and semantic agreements in the predicative position. The AH effect is also evident if we revisit examples [2b] and [3b] in Section 2.2.1. The hybrid controller *величество* ‘majesty’ permits alternative agreements: we find syntactic agreement in the attributive position [2b] and semantic agreement in the predicative position [3b].

Let us further observe the AH effect by looking at examples of agreement in the target positions further to the right of the hierarchy:

[14] Relative pronoun

<i>Её</i>	<i>величество,</i>	<i>котор-ая</i>	<i>никогда</i>	<i>не</i>	
3SG.POSS.F	majesty(N)	who-F.SG	never	NEG	
<i>обнаруживала</i>	<i>удаления</i>	<i>от</i>	<i>справедливого</i>	<i>и</i>	
consider-PST-F.SG	withdrawal	from	fair	CONJ	
<i>разумного</i>	<i>мира с</i>	<i>королём</i>	<i>прусским</i>	<i>не</i>	<i>зна-ет</i>
reasonable	peace CONJ	king	prussian	NEG	know-3SG
<i>до</i>	<i>сего</i>	<i>дня</i>	<i>самого</i>	<i>главного</i>	<i>...</i>
until	this	day	the.most	important	

‘Her majesty, who has never considered withdrawing from peace with the Prussian king, to this day does not know the most crucial thing...’

(Soloviev *Istorija Rossii s Drevnejschich Vremen* 2017)

Here we can see semantic feminine agreement expressed on the relative pronoun *которая* via the inflectional suffix *-ая*. As the hybrid controller *величество* ‘majesty’ has already been shown to permit semantic agreement in the predicative position [3b], the occurrence of

semantic agreement in the relative pronoun position is no surprise and is in accord with the AH.

[15] Personal pronoun<sup>9</sup>

<i>Ее</i>	<i>Величество</i>	<i>плохо</i>	<i>перенос-ит</i>	<i>путешествия</i>	<i>по</i>	<i>воде</i>	
3SG.POSS.F	majesty(N)	poorly	tolerate-3SG	travelling	by	water	
<i>И</i>	<i>она</i>	<i>очень</i>	<i>сгова-л-а</i>	<i>по</i>	<i>поводу</i>	<i>того, что</i>	<i>в</i>
CONJ	3SG.F	very	complain-PST-F.SG	for	reason	such that	in
<i>Англии</i>	<i>осенью</i>	<i>всегда</i>	<i>плохая</i>	<i>погода</i>			
England	autumn	always	bad	weather			

(Barnes *Lady on the Coin* 1995 ([Russian Translation by Zamchuk](#)))

While it is impossible to say whether the predicate verb *переносит* ‘tolerates’ agrees with the controller syntactically or semantically, since Russian verbs do not show gender in the present tense, it is clear that the personal pronoun *она* is feminine and thus agrees with the formally neuter controller *величество* ‘majesty’ semantically.

At this point, all the necessary notions required for the theoretical embedding of the central phenomenon of this thesis are introduced. So far, most of the examples with semantic agreement we have encountered (with the exception of those from Section 2.2.3) involved hybrids and demonstrated mismatches with regard to gender. What unites these examples is that the source of agreement choice is encapsulated in the hybrid’s lexical entry, i.e. within the controller (Corbett forthcoming). In other words, the information needed to infer the choice of agreement is contained locally. The phenomenon of honorific agreement, which is about to be introduced in the next section, differs from semantic agreement with hybrids in two major ways: it exhibits agreement mismatches with regard to number, not to gender, and the source of agreement choice cannot be found within the controller, rather, it is extraneous (ibid.).

## 2.5 Honorific Agreement

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<sup>9</sup> Here and henceforth the pipe symbol ‘|’ in glosses marks the boundaries of sentences.

*Honorific Agreement* (Corbett forthcoming) or *HON3pl-C* (Houtzagers 2018) essentially is a type of semantic agreement. It is found in a construction used for referring to people with a higher social rank, predominantly in 19th century Russian.<sup>10</sup> Consider [16]:

[16]

<i>государын-я</i>	<i>одева-ют-ся</i>
empress(F)- <b>SG</b> .NOM	dress-3 <b>PL</b> -refl
‘The empress is getting dressed’	

(Druzhinina, Nagibin, Sorotkina *Gardemariny, Vpered!* 1987, Russian National Corpus)

In [16] a maid is referring to the empress while addressing another maid. The controller *государыня* ‘empress’ is a singular noun, however the target predicate verb *одеваются* ‘dress’ is in plural. Nothing in the featural specification of the controller could possibly induce the plural agreement expressed on the target, it is therefore the speaker’s obligation to show respect that determines the use of plural.

The discussion of HA in literature is rather limited. It is consistently mentioned in publications by Corbett (1983, 2009, 2010, forthcoming), but only as part of the evidence for the *Agreement Hierarchy*. Houtzagers (2018:7-9) briefly describes HA as a subtype of honorific constructions found in Slavic and points out the absence of sources where the construction and its origin are reviewed in detail.

It is crucial to differentiate the HA construction from the far more widely known polite plural construction, which was already mentioned in Section 2.2.3. The major difference between the two is that the HA occurs only in **reference** to a respected person, whereas polite plural is utilised in a direct **address**. Moreover, there is no agreement mismatch with polite plural,<sup>11</sup> e.g. [17], as the target verb agrees with the plural controller, thus the agreement is syntactic:

[17] Polite plural

<i>Вы</i>	<i>удиви-л-и</i>	<i>меня</i>
<b>2PL</b>	surprise-PST- <b>PL</b>	<b>1SG</b> .ACC
‘You surprised me’		

<sup>10</sup> More information on the time frame of usage of HA follows at the end of Section 3.1.1.

<sup>11</sup> Specifically with verbal predicates. As we have seen in Section 2.3.3, different types of targets indeed exhibit agreement mismatches.



mother(F)-DIM-SG.NOM      scold-3PL-refl  
'Mother will be angry'

B: *He*            *zapyza-em*  
NEG            scold-3SG  
'(She) won't be'

(Druzhinina, Nagibin, Sorotkina *Gardemariny, Vpered!* 1987, Russian National Corpus)<sup>13</sup>

In [19] the speaker A, a maid, is warning the speaker B, her mistress, about the potential consequences of her actions, namely that the mother of the speaker B will be disappointed. Both speakers are referring to the mother of the speaker B, however, they stand in a different relation to her. According to the plot of the movie the mother of speaker B is a duchess, therefore speaker A, who is of lower social status, is obliged to express respect when talking about her. This results in the predicate verb in A showing plural agreement, despite the controller being singular. The speaker B, in turn, is not required to explicitly show respect, since the vertical distance between her and her mother is significantly less. Thus, the target verb in B agrees syntactically rather than semantically.

As was demonstrated in [16] and [19] the plural agreement on target verbs is induced by the speaker's obligation to express respect and thus **is not dependent on the controller**. In other words, the factor determining the plural agreement is extraneous to the lexical entry of a given controller, it is the information about the communicative circumstances, the difference in social status of a speaker and a referent. Notably, there is a distinct group of controllers that are more likely to be found in HA constructions, namely, the hybrid title nouns like those already mentioned in Sections 2.2.1 and 2.4. An explanation for this can be found in the history of Russia. In 1722 Peter The Great established the Table of Ranks. It constituted the hierarchy of social ranks with the defined correlation between them across different branches of service: military, governmental, and at the imperial court ([Encyclopedia.com](http://Encyclopedia.com)). What was crucial about the Table of Ranks, from the linguistic perspective, is that it regularised the titles and the forms of address to a person of a given rank class. There were a total of 14 classes among which the 5 'title-ranges' were distributed:

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<sup>13</sup> *Gardemariny, Vpered!* is a Soviet television movie depicting events in the end of the 18th century Russia.



Class	Civil service	Army	Form of address
1	Chancellor	General-Field Marshal	Your High Excellency
2	Actual Privy Councilor	General	“ “ “
3	Privy Councilor	Lieutenant-General	Your Excellency
4	Actual State Councilor	Major-General	“ “
5	State Councilor	(abolished in 1796)	Your High Ancestry
6	Collegiate Councilor	Colonel	Your High Honor
7	Aulic (or Court) Councilor	Lieutenant-Colonel	“ “ “
8	Collegiate Assessor	Major	“ “ “
9	Titular Councilor	Captain	Your Honor
10	Collegiate Secretary	Staff Captain	“ “
11	(abolished in 1796)	(abolished in 1796)	
12	Gubernial Secretary	Lieutenant	“ “
13	Senate Registrar	Second Lieutenant	“ “
14	Collegiate Registrar	Warrant Officer	“ “

Figure 2. Classes within the Table of Ranks (Reyfman 2015:99)

These forms of address or the intitulation formulas were to be used both when directly addressing and referring to the title bearers orally and in writing (Fedosuk 2012:92).<sup>14</sup> Crucially, the respective titles were to be used only from bottom to top (Berger 2002:2), i.e. when addressing or referring to someone of higher rank. This is precisely the reason why these titles often occur in HA constructions, the prerequisite for usage of both is the same.

This chapter introduced honorific agreement in Russian and the theoretical foundation required for analysing it. In order to gain more insight into the phenomenon of HA and its interaction with AH it is necessary to find and collect illustrative data, i.e. examples of HA in use. The next chapter describes the methodology behind the search for instances of HA, as well as the difficulties faced in the process.

<sup>14</sup> It is important to highlight that the use of plural in reference was not enforced by the Table of Ranks.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Sources

##### 3.1.1 The Nature of the Sources

Since the phenomenon of HA is inherently tied to a “culture of days gone by” (Houtzagers 2018:7), above all, I shall address the problem of the sources. As noted in Berger (2002:3), we do not have any proper scientific descriptions of the authentic language use from the 18th and 19th centuries. The literature specifically dedicated to language, such as grammar books, had a rather prescriptive character back then. From what we know at the present moment, there was no rule imposed by which the use of plural in reference was regulated. Another medium that is potentially able to provide a clear representation of the language state, namely letters, is far from being truly representative due to a number of reasons. First, we have to consider that only a relatively small part of the population was literate. According to Grenoble (2003:46), the estimated overall literacy in Russia in 1897 was 24%. Second, the letters which have been preserved since those times are sparse and were usually written by someone outstanding, e.g. monarchs, nobles, renowned authors. This implies a certain level of censorship and therefore affects the authenticity of language used in such sources. This applies to newspapers as well. Ultimately, even though letters and newspapers can be useful in linguistic research, looking into HA is not one of them. Bearing in mind the scarce availability of such sources as well as the unique combination of factors for the HA construction to occur,<sup>15</sup> it does not seem like a plausible strategy to pursue.

Taking into consideration everything mentioned above, the only type of sources a researcher can resort to are literary texts. Undeniably, literary texts are fiction, and thus, taking them as our primary source, we can only arrive at the description of something approximate to reality (Berger 2002:3). Nevertheless, the huge advantage of literary texts are availability and abundance. The existence of extensive corpora, like the *Russian National Corpus*, facilitates convenient and rather quick data collection.

Before introducing the *Russian National Corpus* in the next section, I would like to recur to the time period mentioned for the usage of HA construction, namely the 19th century. As explained in the first paragraph of this section, there is no substantial linguistic

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<sup>15</sup> By the unique combination of factors I mean a communicative situation where a speaker of lower social status is referring to a person of higher social status.

work from which we can deduce when the HA emerged, and thus it is only possible to speculate about it. Taking into account the tight connection of HA with the usage of titles established in the Table of Ranks as early as in 1722, it appears plausible to assume that HA might have already been in use later in the 18th century.<sup>16,17</sup> If we pursue this logic further, the usage of HA construction in its originally intended meaning,<sup>18</sup> i.e. expression of respect to possessors of a higher status, must have been affected by the consequences of the October revolution in 1917. As the class distinctions ceased to exist,<sup>19</sup> so did the prerequisite for the HA, as there was no longer an obligation to express respect in reference. Naturally, no decree can immediately eradicate something from the language. However, taking this timeline into account, we can roughly estimate that the period of favourable circumstances for the use of HA construction lasted from the second part of the 18th century to the beginning of the 20th century.

What is remarkably fortunate about the major part of this period falling upon the 19th century is that it is considered the golden era of Russian literature (Offord 1992:2). This has several important implications for the research presented henceforth, since we have come to terms with the realisation that literary texts are to be the primary source of data. First, a significant number of literary pieces were produced during that time, hence the greater potential to find relevant examples with HA in such an extensive and diverse pool of sources. Second, due to the realism reaching its full bloom in the second half of the 19th century (Freeborn 2008:248), a great emphasis was put on portraying everyday life, even the most mundane aspects of it, as detailed and accurate as possible. This instills even more hope about finding relevant data in the texts.

### 3.1.2 Russian National Corpus

*Russian National Corpus* (henceforth: RNC), probably the most widely known corpus of Russian among linguists, is a strikingly large collection of annotated and searchable texts in

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<sup>16</sup> Even though the Table of Ranks did not impose the usage of HA, it systematised the social distinctions and established a clear hierarchy. This might have served as a fruitful ground for the emergence of HA.

<sup>17</sup> The plot of the movie *Gardemarinny, Vpered!*, the original source of examples [16] and [19], is set in 1742-1743. If we assume that the directors paid attention to historical accuracy, this might be perceived as the indication of HA being already in use during those times.

<sup>18</sup> The HA construction is reported to be used ironically in the 20th century and present-day Russian (Houtzagers 2018:7, Corbett forthcoming). A single example is given in Houtzagers (2018:7), however, with no detailed explanation. For further discussion of the ironic usage of HA see Section 5.2.

<sup>19</sup> On the 23rd of November 1917 the Soviets abolished all classes, titles and civil ranks that existed before in the *Decree Abolishing Classes and Civil Ranks* (Sverdlov & Lenin 2021).

Russian. As of May 2022 the total corpus size is about 1.5 billion tokens. It covers the time span from the 11th to the 21st century, representing the language in all its sociolinguistic varieties, whether it is standard, substandard, colloquial or dialectal. [RNC](#) comprises a collection of individual (sub)corpora specifically tailored for different linguistic research tasks which determine the structure and the annotation.

The main corpus is subdivided into two parts: texts from the 1950s to the present day and texts from the middle of the 18th century to the middle of the 20th century. The second part is of particular significance for the purposes of this research due to the fact that this is precisely the period when we would expect to see examples with HA. Furthermore, the proportion of fiction in the second part of the main corpus is much higher due to the limited availability of digitised or reprinted works in other genres ([RNC](#)).

Further subcorpora of RNC that possess a particular appeal for the type of research intended here are the SynTagRus (Syntactically Tagged Russian Corpus) and the Corpus of Spoken Russian. Both of them are drastically smaller than the main corpus: 336 million tokens (Main Corpus) vs 1 (SynTagRus) and 13 (Spoken Corpus) million tokens. Despite its relatively modest size, The SynTagRus has a huge advantage over other subcorpora in terms of making the search query as detailed as possible. While searching in the SynTagRus it is possible to specify both the grammatical/morphological characteristics of the required lexemes or word forms (Figure 3) and the syntactic relation between them (Figure 4):

<b>Часть речи</b> <input type="checkbox"/> существительное <input type="checkbox"/> прилагательное <input type="checkbox"/> числительное <input type="checkbox"/> глагол <input type="checkbox"/> наречие <input type="checkbox"/> предлог <input type="checkbox"/> союз <input type="checkbox"/> частица <input type="checkbox"/> междометие <input type="checkbox"/> КОМПОЗИТ <input type="checkbox"/> слово-предложение <input type="checkbox"/> иноязычное слово, несловесная формула	<b>Падеж</b> <input type="checkbox"/> именительный <input type="checkbox"/> родительный <input type="checkbox"/> партитивный <input type="checkbox"/> дательный <input type="checkbox"/> винительный <input type="checkbox"/> творительный <input type="checkbox"/> предложный <input type="checkbox"/> местный <input type="checkbox"/> звательный	<b>Вид</b> <input type="checkbox"/> совершенный <input type="checkbox"/> несовершенный
	<b>Степень сравнения</b> <input type="checkbox"/> сравнительная <input type="checkbox"/> сравнительная 2 <input type="checkbox"/> превосходная	<b>Время</b> <input type="checkbox"/> настоящее <input type="checkbox"/> не прошедшее <input type="checkbox"/> прошедшее
<b>Одушевленность</b> <input type="checkbox"/> одушевленное <input type="checkbox"/> неодушевленное	<b>Краткость</b> <input type="checkbox"/> краткая форма	
<b>Род</b> <input type="checkbox"/> мужской <input type="checkbox"/> женский <input type="checkbox"/> средний	<b>Репрезентация</b> <input type="checkbox"/> личная форма глагола <input type="checkbox"/> инфинитив <input type="checkbox"/> причастие <input type="checkbox"/> деепричастие	<b>Залог</b> <input type="checkbox"/> страдательный
<b>Число</b> <input type="checkbox"/> единственное <input type="checkbox"/> множественное	<b>Наклонение</b> <input type="checkbox"/> изъявительное <input type="checkbox"/> повелительное	<b>Прочее</b> <input type="checkbox"/> часть сложного слова

Figure 3. Specifying grammatical information in the [RNC search query](#)

<p><b>Актантные</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> предикативное</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> дательно-субъектное</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> агентивное</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> квазиагентивное</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> несобственно-агентивное</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 1-е комплетивное</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 2-е комплетивное</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 3-е комплетивное</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 4-е комплетивное</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 5-е комплетивное</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> присвязочное</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 1-е несобственно-комплетивное</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 2-е несобственно-комплетивное</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 3-е несобственно-комплетивное</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 4-е несобственно-комплетивное</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> неактантно-комплетивное</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> комплетивно-апозитивное</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> предложное</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> подчинительно-союзное</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> сравнительное</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> сравнительно-союзное</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> элективное</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> инфинитивно-союзное</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> сентенциально-предикативное</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> адресатно-присвязочное</p>	<p><b>Атрибутивные</b></p> <p><b>определятельные</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> (собственно) определятельное</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> описательно-определятельное</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> аппроксимативно-порядковое</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> релятивное</p> <p><b>общеатрибутивные</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> (собственно) атрибутивное</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> композитное</p> <p><b>апозитивные</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> (собственно) апозитивное</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> обособленно-апозитивное</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> номинативно-апозитивное</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> нумеративно-апозитивное</p> <p><b>количественные</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> (собственно) количественное</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> аппроксимативно-количественное</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> количественно-копредикативное</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> количественно-ограничительное</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> распределительное</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> аддитивное</p> <p><b>обстоятельные</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> (собственно) обстоятельное</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> длительное</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> кратко-длительное</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> дистанционное</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> обстоятельно-тавтологическое</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> субъектно-обстоятельное</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> объектно-обстоятельное</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> субъектно-копредикативное</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> объектно-копредикативное</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> ограничительное</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> вводное</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> изъяснительное</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> разъяснительное</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> примыкательное</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> уточнительное</p>	<p><b>Сочинительные</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> сочинительное</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> сентенциально-сочинительное</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> сочинительно-союзное</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> кратное</p> <p><b>Служебные</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> аналитическое</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> пассивно-аналитическое</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> вспомогательное</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> количественно-вспомогательное</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> соотносительное</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> эксплетивное</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> пролептическое</p>
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Figure 4. Specifying the syntactic relation between tokens in the [RNC search query](#)

The Corpus of Spoken Russian covers the time span from the 1930 to 1970 and includes the recordings of public and spontaneous Russian speech as well as the transcripts of Russian movies (Zakharov 2013:3, <https://ruscorpora.ru/en/page/corpus-spoken/>). Even though the occurrence of HA constructions in public and/or spontaneous speech from this particular period is highly unlikely, the transcripts of movies have already proven to be useful, since the examples [16] and [19] come from one. Transcripts of movies where the plot is set in the older times are of particular interest, since usually the language used by the characters is stylised accordingly for the sake of dramatic coherence.

In this section I provided an explanation for my motivation to use literary texts as a primary source of data, specified the relevant time period the focus of the search should lie upon, and introduced the RNC. Now that the questions of ‘what I am searching for’ and ‘where should I look for it’ are resolved, it is time to turn to the question of ‘how am I going to search’. The next section explains the exact details about how the search for cases of HA in the RNC was performed.

## **3.2 Corpus Search**

As mentioned in the previous section, the RNC offers multiple subcorpora to search through. I will first address the method of search in the SynTagRus corpus, as it was prioritised due to the advantages brought by the syntactic annotation.

### **3.2.1 Search in the SynTagRus**

The appeal of SynTagRus becomes clear, if we consider what exactly we are looking for and where it can be found. Since our prime interest lies in the investigation of HA and its interaction with the AH, it appears logical to look for instances of HA in the four relevant domains or target positions: attributive, predicative, relative pronoun, and personal pronoun. In order to do so it is necessary to specify the syntactic relation between the two search tokens, the controller and the target, as well as the morphological characteristics of each. The SynTagRus search query allows to do both. At least two of the target positions, attributive and predicative, are easily specifiable.

In general, the attributive target is either an adjective or a pronoun that modifies a controller. Unfortunately, the SynTagRus does not offer a ‘pronoun’ option while specifying the token’s part of speech.<sup>20</sup> Thus, the target token was set to be a plural adjective attributively modifying the controller token, a singular noun. The search yielded 545 hits which had to be manually checked, since compliance with the above mentioned settings provides no guarantee that the number mismatch is caused precisely by HA. In fact, the results show two other types of agreement, namely agreement with quantified expressions

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<sup>20</sup> Thus, specifically searching for examples with pronoun controllers or targets in relative and personal pronoun positions is not possible in SynTagRus.

and agreement with the conjoined and comitative noun phrases.<sup>21</sup> Consider an example of each:

[20] Agreement with a quantified expression

... *появля-ют-ся*    *сразу*    *два*    *одноглаз-ых*  
appear-PL-REFL    immediately    two.NOM    one-eyed-PL.GEN

*персонаж-а* ...

character-SG.GEN

‘Two one-eyed characters immediately appear’

(Karasev *Zanimatel'naya Estetika* 2018, Russian National Corpus)

This example is compliant with the above mentioned search settings - the plural adjective modifies a singular noun. However, the mismatch in number has nothing to do with the expression of respect in this particular context. It is the numeral *два* ‘two’ that requires the noun to be genitive and singular (Corbett 2006:85).

[21] Agreement with a conjoined noun phrase

... *явно*    *неземн-ые*    *Луна*    *и*    *Юпитер* ...  
evidently    unearthly-PL    Moon.SG    CONJ    Jupiter.SG  
‘The clearly ethereal Moon and Jupiter’

(Karasev *Zanimatel'naya Estetika* 2018, Russian National Corpus)

[22] Agreement with a comitative phrase

... *пожил-ые*    *муж*    *с*    *жен-ою* ...  
elderly-PL    husband.SG    CONJ    wife-SG  
‘Elderly husband and wife’

(Kapovich *Granica* 2020, Russian National Corpus)

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<sup>21</sup> For more information about these types of agreement see Corbett 2006:85, 195-197, 220-221; Corbett forthcoming.



These two examples fit the search requirements as well. Moreover, these are instances of semantic agreement. Example [21] involves resolution within the noun phrase,<sup>22</sup> the adjective agrees with both conjuncts. The same situation is in [22], as comitatives behave similarly to conjoined noun phrases with respect to agreement (Corbett 2006:221). Still, the number mismatch is not caused by the obligation to express respect.

Let us now turn to the predicative position. The predicate target can be either verbal or nominal. In case with the former it was possible to further narrow down the search query by specifying that, apart from being plural, it should be in 3rd person, since we are interested only in reference and not the address. The search settings for the controller token remained the same. The search yielded 5 hits. Unfortunately, upon closer examination, none of them exhibited HA.

The absence of true instances of HA in the SynTagRus showed that despite the possibility to indicate the required syntactic relations between the tokens, the search was still too broadly specified. As shown by [20], [21], and [22], simply looking for a number mismatch is not enough, as it is not an exclusive aspect of HA. Furthermore, the relatively modest size of the SynTagRus might have constrained the success of the intended search.

### **3.2.2 Search in the Rest of RNC**

Since it is not possible to specify the syntactic relation between the tokens while searching in any of the RNC subcorpora other than the SynTagRus, this subsection describes the approach, alternative to the one in the previous subsection, applicable to all of them at once.

The search in the SynTagRus made it clear that to find instances of HA we need to find a way to specify the communicative context. In other words, we need to ensure that the search is performed with regard to the precondition of the difference in social status, as this is the unique trait of HA. Naturally, RNC does not provide such fine-tuned settings. Thus, the only strategy to find relevant examples is to rely on the controllers frequently encountered in HA constructions. Such set of controllers is not limited only to the titles mentioned above, as demonstrated in [19]. Thus, to make sure that the search is most efficient, the list of possible controllers typical in HA contexts needs to be drawn up:

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<sup>22</sup> More information about agreement resolution can be found in Corbett 2006:238

<b>Controller Nouns</b>	<b>Translation</b>
1. <i>высокопревосходительство</i>	high excellency
2. <i>превосходительство</i>	excellency
3. <i>высокородие</i>	high ancestry
4. <i>высокоблагородие</i>	high honour
5. <i>благородие</i>	honour
6. <i>сиятельство</i>	excellency
7. <i>светлость</i>	grace
8. <i>высочество</i>	highness
9. <i>величество</i>	majesty
10. <i>государь</i>	sovereign/tsar/emperor
11. <i>государыня</i>	tsaritsa/empress
12. <i>граф</i>	count
13. <i>графиня</i>	countess
14. <i>князь</i>	duke
15. <i>княжна</i>	duchess
16. <i>барин</i>	nobleman/land owner
17. <i>барыня</i>	noblewoman/land owner (female)
18. <i>кормилец</i>	provider
19. <i>кормилица</i>	provider (female)
20. <i>маменька</i>	mother

21. <i>матушка</i>	mother
22. <i>старушка</i>	old lady
23. <i>папенька</i>	father
24. <i>тятенька</i>	father
25. <i>папаша</i>	father

Table 2. Controllers typical in HA contexts<sup>23</sup>

I would like to provide an explanation for some of these controller nouns. The nouns in positions 6-15 are essentially titles that are not mentioned in the Table of Ranks, but were in use during the same time period of Imperial Russia. The rest of the nouns in Table 2 are not titles. The nouns *барин* and the respective feminine *барыня* were used to denote members of aristocracy, who, as a rule, owned some land and serfs, feudally dependent peasants ([Ushakov 1935](#)). The nouns 18-19 as well as 25 were often used by serfs when addressing or referring to the landlords. Different versions of ‘father’ and ‘mother’, nouns 20-25, were quite often used by maids or servants, who were in a somewhat closer, in-group relationship with their masters.

Even with the expanded list of controllers at hand, the search presented a challenge. Each entry had to be manually investigated, since the occurrence of any of the above mentioned controller nouns does not per se guarantee the presence of HA. Even though it is always possible to set the morphological characteristics of the search tokens, e.g. look for a controller noun and a target verb in third person plural in one sentence, without additionally specifying the syntactic relation between the two such search query is not efficient.

However, despite the above mentioned limitations, there still are a number of useful, albeit far from straightforward, strategies to narrow down the scope of the search. In case with the title nouns, it is possible to take advantage of their accompanying possessive pronouns. To exclude the contexts where the title-bearer is being directly addressed, it appears logical to specify the preceding possessive pronoun as a member of the third person possessives set: *его* ‘his’, *еѣ* ‘her’, *их* ‘their’.

<sup>23</sup> The degree to which these controllers are typical in relation to HA is determined subjectively. The major part of the nouns in Table 2 are titles, the usage of which is an indicator of the difference in social status of the utterer and the referent required for the HA in a given context. The choice of the rest of the nouns in Table 2 is based on my personal native literary experience.

Furthermore, while searching in the Corpus of Spoken Russian, where examples of HA are most likely to be found in transcripts of movies, it is possible to create a custom subcorpus with set sociological parameters of a speaker such as name, gender, and age. Whereas deducing the social status of a character just from the information about the gender and age of the actor playing this character is arguably a difficult endeavour, we can still make use of the name parameter. Consider Figure 5:

Алла Сурикова, Владимир Кунин, Ким Рыжов. Чокнутые, к/ф (1991)

[Тихон (Леонид Ярмольник), муж] Сегодня мастерские для  
собрания паровых машин изволили посетить Их величество...  
[Алла Сурикова, Владимир Кунин, Ким Рыжов. Чокнутые, к/ф (1991)] [ОМОНИМИЯ  
не снята] ←...→

Figure 5. Entry from the Corpus of Spoken Russian (RNC)

As evident from Figure 5, the entry contains both the name of the character *Тихон* and the name of the actor *Леонид Ярмольник*. After finding at least one example of HA using one of the techniques described above (in this particular case searching for the controller title noun *величество* ‘majesty’ accompanied by the third person plural possessive *их* ‘their’), we can determine that *Леонид Ярмольник* is likely to be the utterer of potentially more examples, due to the status his character possesses according to the plot. The next step is to create a custom subcorpus which would contain all of the lines said by this particular actor by specifying their name. It is now possible to apply the described techniques while searching within this subcorpus.

As a result of multiple search iterations in all of the available subcorpora of RNC a **total of 47 entries**, some of which contained more than one instance of HA,<sup>24</sup> were collected. Consider Figure 6:

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<sup>24</sup> The whole entry was collected if it exhibited at least one instance of HA. See Section 3.4 for further clarification.

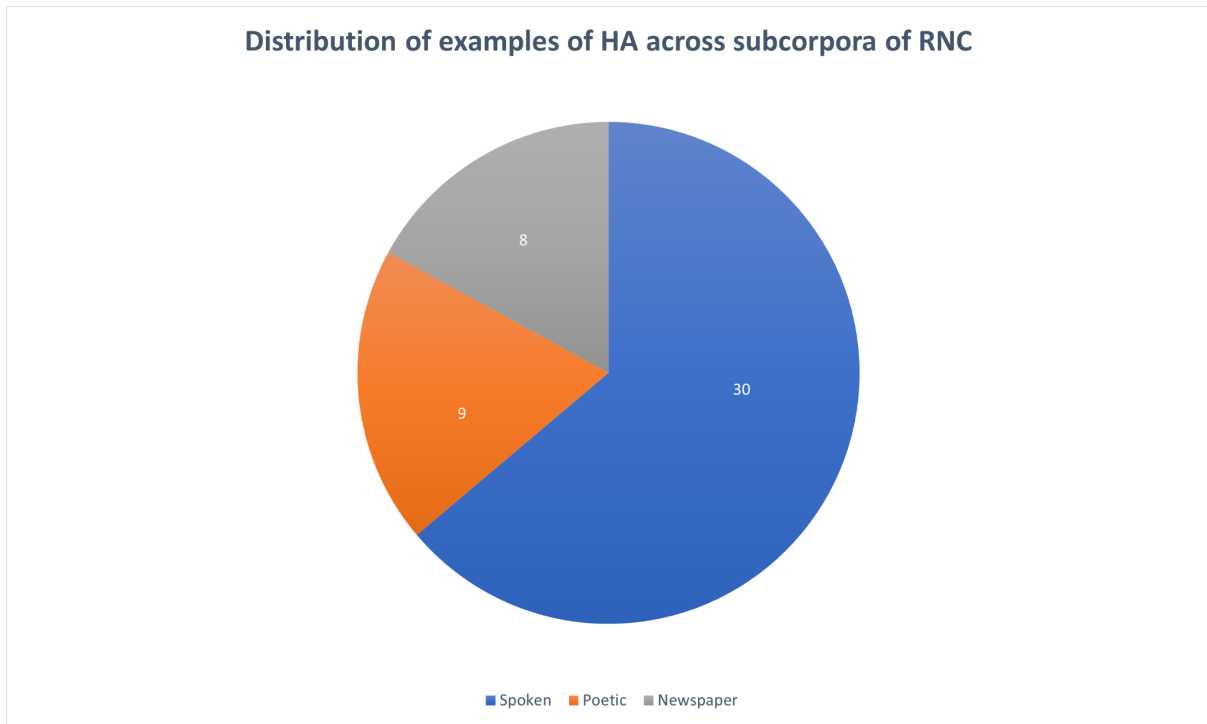


Figure 6. Distribution of examples of HA across subcorpora of RNC (as of May 2022)

Remarkably, the major part of entries, 30 out of 47, were found in the Corpus of Spoken Russian. All of them come from transcripts of movies depicting events in the 18th and 19th centuries. Some of these movies are based on the literary pieces produced during the 19th century: *Dead Souls* by Gogol, *Platonov* and *The Chameleon* by Chekhov, *Dubrovsky* by Pushkin, *The Idiot* by Dostoevsky. This reinforces the point made earlier in closing of the subsection 3.1.1, namely that the literature written during the ‘golden era’ has a great potential of being a source of data exhibiting HA. What is surprising, on the other hand, is that no relevant examples were found in the Main corpus, despite its claimed richness in fiction from the time period in question. Whether this outcome is achieved due to the faulty design of the searching techniques described in this subsection or some other external factors is a question that remains open.

### 3.3 Search in the Individual Literary Texts

The rather modest number of examples found in RNC points both to the complexity of the process of data collection and to the marginal nature of the phenomenon of HA. While having the ability to specify the syntactic relation between the tokens can provide a significant reduction of ‘manual labour’ during the search, since the entries are of greater relevance due

to being filtered according to the domain, it is not an option with the major part of the RNC subcorpora. The SynTagRus, on the other hand, has shown to be short of examples containing HA, despite the potential of combining both approaches while searching in it.<sup>25</sup> The marginality of HA construction becomes evident if we compare the number of its occurrences with a given controller versus the number of singular, syntactic agreements with the same controller. For example, the search with the specified controller *его превосходительство* ‘his excellency’ in the Corpus of Spoken Russian returns 18 entries with syntactic agreement and only 2 entries with HA.

As the main goal is to investigate the interaction of HA with the AH, the intention is to gather as much representative data as possible. After I exhausted the investigation within the bounds of RNC, the decision was made to further expand the source pool and continue the search in the individually picked pieces of literature. First, I would like to briefly explain on what grounds the selection was made and then address the more technical aspects of data collection.

The main criterion for the texts to qualify for being selected is the time period of depicted events. We are primarily interested in the 19th century. Another crucial aspect is the representation of people of different social ranks. Due to the experience with the Corpus of Spoken Russian, it appears logical to look more into the fiction pieces that served as a basis for movie scripts, as they have already shown potential for containing relevant data. Other texts by the respective authors are to be considered as well. Furthermore, one particular novel that cannot be disregarded is *War and Peace* by Leo Tolstoy. Set in the period from 1805 to 1820 this enormous text of 1225 pages portrays the lives of Russian nobility in detail. The dramatic size and praised historical accuracy of *War and Peace* make it a particularly appealing source. Since describing the exact reasons for picking each of the sources would be superfluous, the entire selection is presented in the following table:

<b>Text</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>The plot is set in</b>
<i>War and Peace</i>	Leo Tolstoy	1805-1820
<i>Dead Souls</i>	Nikolai Gogol	1830s

<sup>25</sup> By combining approaches I mean searching for controllers from Table 2 while specifying the syntactic relation between the controller and the target tokens.

<i>The Government Inspector</i>	Nikolai Gogol	1831
<i>Platonov</i>	Anton Chekhov	1877-1878
<i>The Chameleon</i>	Anton Chekhov	end of the 19th century
<i>Dubrovsky</i>	Alexander Pushkin	1820
<i>The Captain's Daughter</i>	Alexander Pushkin	1773-1775
<i>The Stationmaster</i>	Alexander Pushkin	1816
<i>Crime and Punishment</i>	Fyodor Dostoevsky	1860s
<i>The Idiot</i>	Fyodor Dostoevsky	1867-1868
<i>A Sportsman's Sketches</i>	Ivan Turgenev	first half of the 19th century

Table 3. Individually selected source texts

After the selection was finalised, I faced the problem of obtaining the texts in an easily searchable (and preferably compact) format. Fortunately, the online digital libraries [royallib.com](http://royallib.com) and [avidreaders.ru](http://avidreaders.ru) offer the required literature for download in a variety of formats, both rich and plain text. The selected works were downloaded in a .txt format due to the small size of the files and guaranteed searchability. The search was performed with the help of the free software [Notepad++](http://notepadplusplus.org). Its functionality aided the process immensely and made it much like working with a corpus, since [Notepad++](http://notepadplusplus.org) is able to open multiple text files and execute a search query in all of them simultaneously.

The approach to finding examples was largely similar to what was described in the previous section. As there is no possibility to specify either morphological or syntactic characteristics of search items, one has to rely on specific words and/or combination of words likely to occur in contexts with HA. In addition to the established list of controllers (Table 2), I searched for nouns denoting the positions in service, e.g. *швейцар* ‘doorman’, *лакей* ‘footman’, *камердинер* ‘valet’, *горничная* ‘maid’, *кучер/извозчик* ‘coachman’, since characters in these positions are more likely to be referring to people of a higher rank.

As a result of the search performed in the self-made ‘corpus’ of selected literary works (Table 3) **28 unique example entries** containing instances of HA were found. Consider Figure 7:

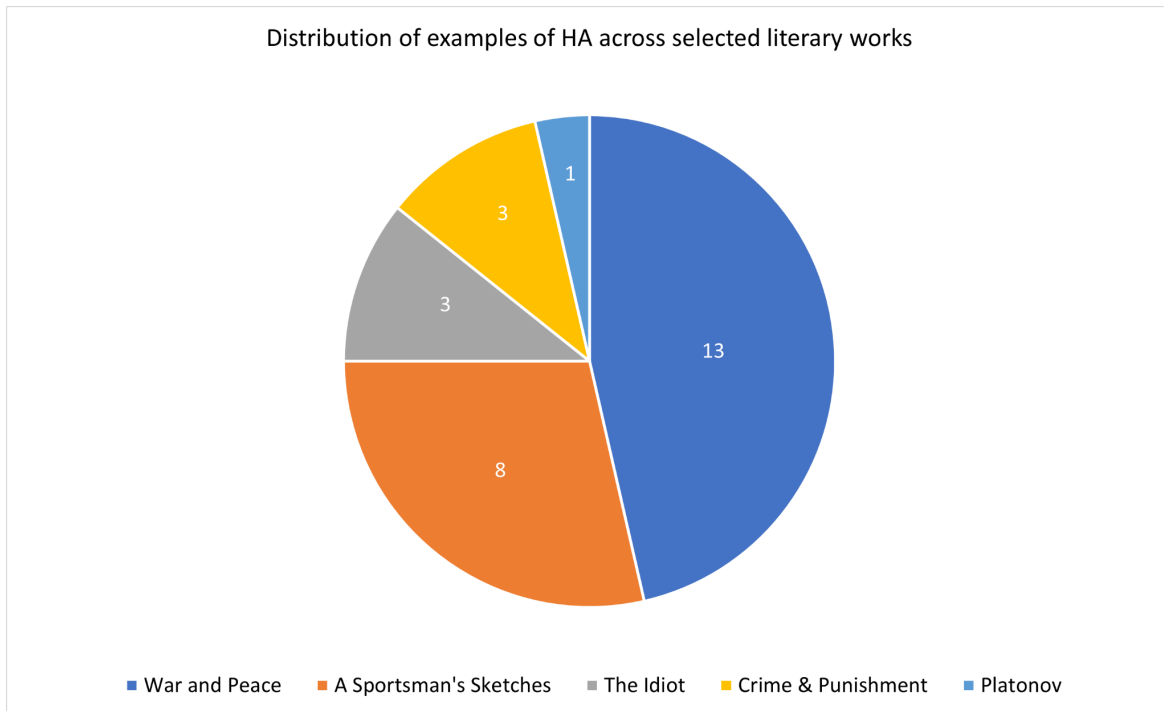


Figure 7. Distribution of examples of HA across selected literary works

As evident, *War and Peace* has met the expectations of being a great source of relevant data. Works by Gogol and Pushkin exhibited no HA constructions, the targets agreed with their controllers syntactically.

The search both in the RNC and the custom-made corpus of selected literary works resulted in the collection of **a total of 75 example entries**. The next section describes how exactly the collected data was processed.

### 3.4 Processing the Data

All 75 found example entries were compiled in a single document. The next step was the creation of a database, which would facilitate insights into data. At this point, the question arose as to how to extract the most representative chunks out of the entries in a unified manner. Despite the seeming appeal of putting single sentences containing instances of HA into the database, such an approach is problematic due to the fact that agreement is not restricted to being a local phenomenon. The domain of agreement can span beyond the single clause or sentence, as the anaphoric pronoun can be considerably distant from its controller antecedent (Corbett 2006:41). Thus, I decided to extract the so-called *contexts*, the size of which varies depending on the number of agreement targets and the domains where



agreement occurs. In most cases, the contexts do not consist of more than two sentences. After performing the extraction of the **total of 77 contexts**, I identified the controllers and all of their respective targets and marked the following information about the latter: the grammatical category, the target position, and the type of agreement. Furthermore, for each of the contexts I specified: whether the antecedent is present, the communicative circumstances, i.e. relation of the utterer to the referent, the type of the source of the context, e.g. literature, movie transcript, transcript of a radio programme, and the time period of (depicted) events.

### 3.5 Excluded & Troublesome Examples

Before introducing the results and insights into the data in the following chapter, I would like to discuss the excluded and problematic examples. Consider [23]:

[23] Whole entry from RNC, plural agreement in bold

*Отправившись проверить, в чем дело, **хозяин обнаружили** в соседней комнате на кровати незваного гостя – молодого человека, который представился Андреем.*

‘When the owner went to the adjacent room to see what had happened, he discovered an uninvited guest, a young man who introduced himself as Andrew, lying on the bed.’

<i>хозяин</i>	<i>обнаружи-л-и</i>
owner(M).SG	discover-PST-PL
‘The owner discovered’	

(Zabolotny “*Kosmichesky poslanik*” *poluchil god turmi za prizemlenie v chuzhoi kvartire* 2008, Russian National Corpus)

[23] was found in the Media corpus of RNC. The original source is a newspaper article from 2008 that describes the incident of home invasion in Sevastopol. The fact that the article was published in 2008 already excludes the possibility of [23] being an authentic instance of HA, as the author of the article is hardly obliged to express respect to one of the heroes of the story. This leaves us with two further possibilities. Either [23] is an instance of HA used ironically, or it is an instance of associative agreement. The humorous headline ‘Envoy from space sentenced to 1 year in prison for landing in the wrong apartment’ already suggests that the article is not written in a strictly formal register. Since the RNC entry contained only a single sentence, it was necessary to find and read the original source before making any

further judgements.<sup>26</sup> In fact, the author's irony is directed towards the intruder, who, upon being caught, told the owner of the apartment that he was sent to Earth to eradicate evil. Thus, the plural agreement in [23] is highly unlikely to be ironically honorific. Let us now turn to the associative agreement hypothesis. The first argument against this hypothesis is that the usage of associative agreement construction presumes some established common ground between the author and the addressee, a reader in this case, so that the intended associates could be recovered by the latter (Corbett forthcoming). This is hardly the case here. Furthermore, associative agreement is markedly dialectal, hence it is questionable whether this construction could appear in media, since the language of press tends to be standardised. Taking everything above into consideration, it only appears logical to consider plural agreement in [23] a result of the misprint and therefore exclude this example from the forthcoming analysis.

Now consider [24]. Here and henceforth, apart from glossing the crucial parts, I will supplement some especially demanding examples with professional English translations:

[24]

*A: ... Пантелей Еремеич, кажись, умирать собираются; так вот я и боюсь.*

*B: Как? умирать? ...*

*A: - Точно так-с. Сперва они кажинный день водку кушали, а теперь вот в постель слегли, и уж оченно они худы стали. Я так полагаю, они теперь и понимать-то ничего не понимают. Без языка совсем.*

(Turgenev *A Sportsman's Sketches*, [avidreaders.ru](http://avidreaders.ru))

A: Panteley Eremyitch, I fancy, is about to die; so that I'm afraid of getting into trouble.

B: What? die? ...

A: Yes, sir. First, his honour drank vodka every day, and now he's taken to his bed and got very thin. I fancy his honour does not understand anything now. He's lost his tongue completely.'

(Turgenev *A Sportsman's Sketches*, [translated by Constance Garnett](#))

a. Пантелей Еремеич            ...            умирать            собира-ют-ся

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<sup>26</sup> Fortunately, the full article is accessible online (as of June 2022): <https://newdaynews.ru/crimea/171229.html>



## 4. Results

This chapter presents the research results. The variety of found contexts is discussed in detail in Section 4.1. Section 4.2. shows the interaction of HA and AH.

### 4.1 Contexts

A total of 77 contexts were extracted from the collected data. The major part of the contexts contained up to 2 targets: 68,8% of all contexts contained 1 target, and 20,8% contained 2 targets. Consider Figure 8:

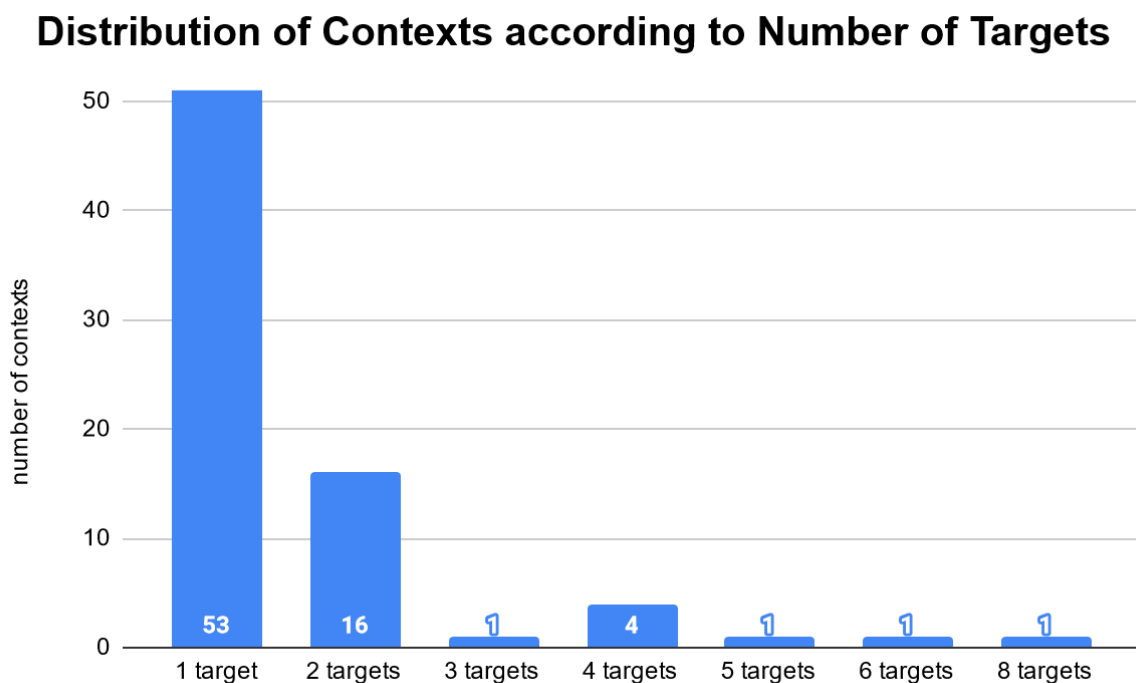


Figure 8. Distribution of contexts according to the number of targets

All contexts with 1 target unanimously exhibit honorific agreement on the predicate verb. As instances of HA with a single predicate target verb were already presented earlier in this thesis (see [16] and [19]), I would like to proceed with reviewing the contexts with more targets. The 2-target contexts show more diversity in terms of agreement target positions. Consider the following examples:

[25] HA expressed on two predicate verbs<sup>28</sup>

*Княжн-а изволи-л-и пройти в свои комнаты*  
Duchess-SG deign-PST-PL go.INF into own rooms

*и принима-ют по воскресеньям*  
CONJ receive-PL on sundays  
'The duchess deigned to go into her rooms and receives (guests) on Sundays'

(Tolstoy *War and Peace*, [royallib.ru](http://royallib.ru))

[26] HA expressed on the predicate verb and the personal pronoun

*Их сиятельств-о сяд-ут а главный ловчий*  
3PL.POSS excellency-SG will.sit-PL CONJ chief huntsman

*им ножки в стремя вденет*  
3PL.DAT feet into stirrups will.insert  
'His excellency would sit, and the chief huntsman would put his feet in the stirrups'

(Turgenev *A Sportsman's Sketches*, [avidreaders.ru](http://avidreaders.ru))

[27] Syntactic agreement expressed on the attributive adjective, HA on the predicate verb

*Всемилоостивейш-ий государь Пётр Алексеевич изволи-л-и предложи-ть*  
Most.gracious-SG sovereign.SG Pyotr Alekseevich deign-PST-PL offer-INF

*мне основа-ть в Петербурге Академию Наук*  
1SG.DAT found-INF in Petersburg Academy Sciences  
'The most gracious sovereign Pyotr Alekseevich deigned to offer me to found the Academy of Sciences in Petersburg'

(Petrov, Leschenko, Tolstoy *Pyotr Perviy* 1937, Russian National Corpus)

[28] HA expressed on the predicate verb and on the reflexive emphatic pronoun

*Его сиятельств-о князь Андрей Николаевич*  
3SG.POSS.M excellency-SG duke.SG Andrey Nikolaevich

---

<sup>28</sup> I provided 'deign' as the closest translation for *изволить*, however the Russian verb does not possess the negative connotation of its English counterpart.

*сами*            *мне*            *приказа-л-и*  
**themselves**    1SG.DAT        order-PST-PL

‘His excellency the duke Andrey Nikolaevich has ordered me to do so himself (lit. themselves)’

(Tolstoy *War and Peace*, [royallib.ru](http://royallib.ru))

The last couple of examples in particular deserve to be commented on. [27] is an illustration of the Agreement Hierarchy effect. As the syntactically closest target, the attributive adjective *всемилостивейший* ‘the most gracious’ agrees with the masculine singular noun *государь* ‘sovereign’ according to its formal properties. The predicate verb *изволили* ‘deign’ is outside of the noun phrase and agrees semantically, as the utterer is referring to the sovereign of the Russian Empire. In [28] both the predicate verb *приказали* ‘ordered’ and the emphatic pronoun *сами* ‘themselves’ are showing HA. The latter stands out, as it does not belong to any of the target positions mentioned in AH. As an adnominal intensifier *сами* is a part of the noun phrase and thus, according to the domain, the closest target position would be attributive. Still, *сами* does not function as an attribute, rather it highlights that it was precisely the duke *Андрей Николаевич* who gave the order.

The single 3-target context exhibits the AH effect:

[29]

*Ваш-а*                    *старушк-а*    ...    *бы-л-и*            *виновн-ыми*    *в*            *том*    |  
 2PL.POSS-SG            old.lady-SG                            be-PST-PL        guilty-PL        PREP    that

*Их*    *хоронили*        ...  
 3PL    buried

‘Your old lady was guilty of that. She was being buried ...’

(Trefolev *Dobrye Vesti* 1877, Russian National Corpus)

The targets that are further from the controller *старушка* ‘old lady’ syntactically: the compound nominal predicate (consisting of a copula *были* and the adjective *виновными* ‘guilty’) and the third person personal pronoun *их* show HA, whereas the second person possessive pronoun *ваша* in the attributive position shows singular agreement.

Let us now turn to the 4-target contexts. Two of them represent a particular trend that requires an in-depth explanation and thus are discussed in Section 5.1 (along with the single 8-target context). The rest are presented here:

[30] Syntactic agreement expressed on the attributive adjective, HA on the predicate verb and personal pronouns

*Покойн-ый барин приказа-л-и им компаньон-ку отыска-ть*  
 late-SG nobleman.SG order-PST-PL 3PL.DAT companion-F find-INF

*чтобы сади-л-а-сь их встреча-ть здесь по утрам ...*  
 so.that sit-PST-F-REFL 3PL.ACC greet-INF here PREP mornings  
 ‘The late nobleman ordered the female companion to be found, so that she would greet him here in the morning’

(Sadovskoy *Ideal* 1920, Russian National Corpus)

[31] HA expressed on the predicate verbs and the personal pronoun

*Его высокопревосходительств-о Нил Алексеевич прослыша-л-и*  
 his high.excellency-SG Nil Alekseevich hear-PST-PL

*когда я ещё служи-л у них в департаменте*  
 when 1SG still serve-PST.SG at 3PL in department

*и потребова-л-и меня ... к себе ...*  
 CONJ demand-PST-PL 1SG.ACC to self

*и вопросы-л-и наедине*  
 CONJ ask-PST-PL in.private

‘His high excellency heard (about it), when I still was serving at his department, and demanded me to see him and asked (me about it) in private’

(Dostoevsky *The Idiot*, [avidreaders.ru](http://avidreaders.ru))

[30] is the most illustrative of the AH effect, as it contains targets in 3 different AH target positions. As part of the noun phrase, the attributive adjective *покойный* ‘late’ is syntactically the closest to the head noun *барин* ‘nobleman’ and is singular. The predicate verb *приказали* ‘ordered’ and the two instances of the third person personal pronoun *они*, one in dative *им* and one in accusative *их*, are syntactically further from the controller and show HA.

The following contexts are distinct from the rest not only due to the greater number of targets, but also because the controller is not present, and all targets show HA in the predicative position. Consider [32]:

[32] HA expressed on the predicate verbs

*И усмеха-л-и-сь но на цифрах и подобиях*  
 CONJ chuckle-PST-**PL**-REFL but PREP numbers CONJ correspondences

*стали дрожа-ть и книгу проси-л-и закры-ть и уйти*  
 begin-PST-**PL** tremble-INF CONJ book ask-PST-**PL** close-INF CONJ leave-INF

*и награждение мне ... назначили а на Фоминой*  
 CONJ reward 1SG.DAT ... assign-PST-**PL** CONJ PREP low.week

*Богу душу отдали*  
 God.DAT soul give-PST-**PL**

‘(He) was chuckling, but (when I was explaining) the numbers and correspondences, (he) began to tremble and asked (me) to close the book and leave, assigned me the reward, and during the Low Week gave (his) soul to the Lord’

(Dostoevsky *The Idiot*, [avidreaders.ru](http://avidreaders.ru))

In the original text [32] appears close to [31]. It is a continuation of the story about his high excellency *Нил Алексеевич* told by one of the lower-rank characters. The HA on the predicate verbs *усмехались* ‘chuckled’, *стали* ‘began’, *просили* ‘asked’, *назначили* ‘assigned’, *отдали* ‘gave’ indicates that *Нил Алексеевич* remains the agent of the actions, even though he is not explicitly mentioned as a subject.

[33] HA expressed on the predicate verbs and the compound nominal predicate

A: *Что барин*  
 what nobleman.SG  
 ‘What about the nobleman?’

B:

*С вечера не быва-л-и | верно проигра-л-и-сь |*  
 since evening NEG be-PST-**PL** | probably lose-PST-**PL**-REFL |



*Коли выигра-ют рано прид-ут хвастаться а коли до утра*  
if win-**PL** early come-**PL** boast.INF but if until morning

*значит проду-л-и-сь сердит-ые прид-ут*  
means blow-PST-**PL**-REFL angry-**PL** come-**PL**

‘(He) hasn’t been (here) since the evening. Probably lost (the game). If (he) wins (he) comes back early and boasts, but if (he) is not here until the morning, then it means (he) blew it and will come back angry’

(Tolstoy *War and Peace*, [royallib.ru](http://royallib.ru))

In [33], when prompted to speak about the nobleman by the speaker A, the speaker B, who according to the plot is a footman, refers to him in plural. We thus find HA on the predicate verbs *бывали* ‘were’, *проигрались* ‘lost’, *выиграют* ‘will win’, *придут* ‘will come’, *продулись* ‘blew it’ and the compound nominal predicate consisting of the verb *придут* ‘come’, which functions as a copula, and the adjective *сердитые* ‘angry’.

#### 4.2 Honorific Agreement & Agreement Hierarchy

As evident from the previous section, the data does not contradict the AH. The AH effect is best illustrated by the contexts [27, 29, 30], as targets syntactically further from controllers agree semantically (honorifically). To summarise the interaction of HA with AH I would like to present the following statistics:

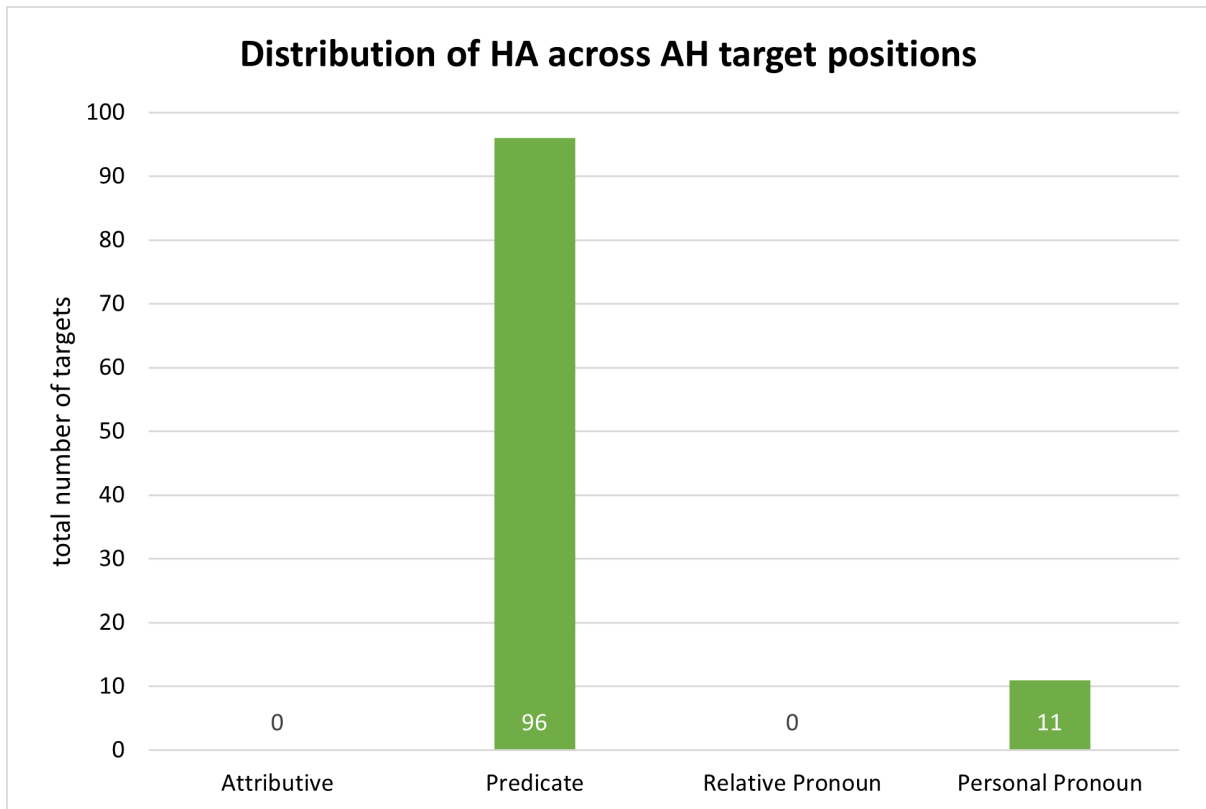


Figure 9. Distribution of targets expressing HA across AH target positions

The collected data exhibits HA only in the predicative (89,7%) and personal pronoun (10,3%) target positions of AH. Targets in the attributive position unanimously exhibit syntactic (singular) agreements. There are no contexts with targets in the relative pronoun position.<sup>29</sup>

Ultimately, only the contexts with targets in multiple AH target positions, one of them being attributive, are to be considered as genuine evidence of the interaction of HA and AH. Such contexts are rare (only 6 out of 77 contexts) and all of them illustrate the AH effect. We have already encountered some of them [27], [29], [30] in the previous section. The rest are presented here:

[34]

*Молод-ой барин приказа-л-и убира-ть-ся*  
 young-SG nobleman.SG order-PST-PL leave-INF-REFL  
 ‘The young nobleman ordered (you) to leave’

(Ivanonvsky, Pushkin *Dubrovsky* 1935, Russian National Corpus)

<sup>29</sup> Evidence for HA on relative pronouns is ultimately scarce. The only known example is given in Corbett 1983:25.

[35]

*Мат-ушк-а*            *ваши-а*            *за*    *мною*    *в*    *город*    *посыла-л-и*  
mother-DIM-SG    2PL.POSS-SG    for    me    to    city    send-PST-PL  
'Your mother sent (someone) for me to the city'

(Turgenev *A Sportsman's Sketches*, [avidreaders.ru](http://avidreaders.ru))

[36]

*Её*            *императорск-ое*    *величеств-о*    *пригласи-л-и*    *двор*    *и*    *господ ...*  
3SG.POSS(F) imperial-SG    majesty-SG    invite-PST-PL    court    CONJ    gentlemen  
'Her imperial majesty has invited the courtiers and the gentlemen ...'

(Stein, Romm *Admiral Ushakov* 1953, Russian National Corpus)

As evident, while the attributive targets *молодой* 'young', *ваша* 'your', and *императорское* 'imperial' show singular agreements, i.e. agree with their controllers syntactically, the predicate verb targets *приказали* 'ordered', *посылали* 'sent', and *пригласили* 'invited' express plural honorific agreements.

## 5. Discussion

As the general overview of results has already been presented, in this chapter I would like to discuss some trends represented by the collected data and later turn to the ironic use of honorific agreement.

### 5.1 Agreement Choices on Parallel Targets

The examples discussed in this section represent a noteworthy trend. Namely, they exhibit agreement choices on targets of the same type. Consider [37]:

[37] a passage from *Crime and Punishment*

*Пришел я в первый день поутру со службы, смотрю: Катерина Ивановна два блюда сготовила, суп и солонину под хреном, о чем и понятия до сих пор не имелось. Платьев-то нет у ней никаких... то есть никаких-с, а тут точно в гости собралась, приоделась, и не то чтобы что-нибудь, а так, из ничего всё сделать сумеют: причешутся, воротничок там какой-нибудь чистенький, нарукавнички, ан совсем другая особа выходит, и помолодела и похорошела.*

(Dostoevsky *Crime and Punishment*, [avidreaders.ru](http://avidreaders.ru))

‘The first morning I came back from the office I found Katerina Ivanovna had cooked two courses for dinner — soup and salt meat with horseradish — which we had never dreamed of till then. She had not any dresses ... none at all, but she got herself up as though she were going on a visit; and not that she’d anything to do it with, she smartened herself up with nothing at all, she’d done her hair nicely, put on a clean collar of some sort, cuffs, and there she was, quite a different person, she was younger and better looking.’

(Dostoevsky *Crime and Punishment* [translated by Constance Garnett](#))

a. Катерина Ивановна            два    блюда            сготови-л-а  
Katerina(F) Ivanovna(F)[.SG]    two    dishes            cook-PST-F.SG  
‘Katerina Ivanovna cooked two dishes’

b. Платьев-то            нет    у            ней            никаких            ...  
Dresses-PART            NEG    PREP    3SG.F.GEN            none

точно            в            гости            собра-л-а-сь  
as.if            PREP    to.visit            got.ready-PST-SG.F-REFL

*приоде-л-ась* ... *из* *ничего* *всё*  
 dress.up-PST-SG.F-REFL from nothing everything

*сделать* *суме-ют* *причеш-ут-ся* ...  
 make-INF be.able-PL comb-PL-REFL

‘There are no dresses in her possession ... (but she looked like) as if she had prepared herself to go on a visit, dressed up ... (she) is able to make everything from nothing, comb her hair...’

In [37a] the target predicate verb *сготовила* ‘cooked’ agrees with the feminine singular controller *Катерина Ивановна* syntactically, as evident by the inflectional suffix *-a*. In the following sentence [37b] no new explicit controller is introduced. The speaker continues to talk about the same woman. Therefore, the following targets either still agree with the controller *Катерина Ивановна* or with the elided third person singular feminine personal pronoun *она*: the predicate verb *собралась* ‘got ready’, the predicate verb *приоделась* ‘dressed up’, the predicate verb *сумеют* ‘is/will be able to’, and the predicate verb *причешутся* ‘will comb their own hair’.<sup>30</sup> Whereas the first two predicate verbs *собралась* and *приоделась* are singular and agree syntactically, as evident by the feminine singular inflectional suffixes *-a*, the predicate verbs *сумеют* and *причешутся* are plural and therefore can agree only semantically. Thus, we find both syntactic and semantic agreements on targets of the same type or, in other words, targets standing in the same syntactic relation to the controller. Such targets are called ‘parallel targets’ in Corbett 2006:234.

While we determined that the last two target verbs agree semantically, it is necessary to consider the communicative circumstances to determine whether it is HA. [37] is uttered by the character *Мармеладов*, a husband of *Катерина Ивановна*. According to the plot *Мармеладов* is a retired collegiate registrar, whereas *Катерина Ивановна* is a daughter of a court councilor,<sup>31</sup> a noblewoman by birth. The gap of 7 classes between their ranks serves as a good ground for HA. What still remains unclear is the inconsistency in choices of syntactic and semantic (honorific) agreements in *Мармеладов*’s speech. The next time *Катерина*

<sup>30</sup> I provided the future tense translations for the verbs *сумеют* and *причешутся* in isolation, due to the fact that these verbs are perfective. In the context of the sentence [37b], however, these verbs do not denote actions in the future, instead they denote (habitual) actions in the present, hence the forms in the translation following the gloss. As the topic of the Russian aspect is notoriously complex and is not in the focus of this thesis, the reader is kindly invited to see Paslawska & Von Stechow 2003 for detailed discussion and page 325 there for more examples of present perfective.

<sup>31</sup> Collegiate registrar belongs to the lowest 14th class in the Table of Ranks, whereas court councilor belongs to the 7th class.

*Ивановна* occurs in his narrative, 2 sentences later after [37b] in the original text, the target verbs agree syntactically:

[38]

*не вытерпе-л-а Катерина Ивановна ...*  
NEG have.patience-PST-F.SG Katerina(F) Ivanovna(F)

*на чашку кофею позва-л-а*  
PREP cup coffee invite-PST-F.SG

‘Katerina Ivanovna couldn’t wait any longer ... invited (someone) for a cup of coffee’

(Dostoevsky *Crime and Punishment*, [avidreaders.ru](http://avidreaders.ru))

Perhaps, it is a putative evidence for the horizontal distance having an influence on agreement choices. Since *Мармеладов* and *Катерина Ивановна* are married, their relationship differs from that of a servant and a mistress, or a subordinate and a superior. The significance of the vertical distance factor, i.e. difference in rank, decreases, and thus he might be exempt from expressing respect in reference to his wife at all times. While such a hypothesis seems to explain the inconsistencies in agreement types in [37b], we find similar examples where it is not applicable. Consider [39]

[39]

– *А вы разве не знали, барышня? – отвечала горничная. – Князь раненый: он у нас ночевал и тоже с нами едут.*

‘Didn’t you know, miss? - replied the maid. - The duke is wounded, he spent the night and now is riding with us’

*... он у нас ночева-л*  
3SG.M PREP 1PL spend.the.night-PST.SG

*и тоже с нами ед-ут*  
CONJ too with 1PL ride-PL

‘... he spent the night and now is riding with us’

(Tolstoy *War and Peace*, [royallib.ru](http://royallib.ru))

The predicate verbs *ночевал* ‘spent the night’ and *едут* ‘ride’ show different agreements within the same domain. The former shows syntactic agreement with the personal pronoun *он* ‘he’. The plural agreement on the verb *едут* is certainly honorific, as [39] is uttered by a maid who is telling her mistress the news about the duke. Unlike in [37], there is no personal relationship between the speaker and the referent. Still, the inconsistency in agreement choices remains, and we find different agreements on parallel targets.

Now consider [40]:

[40]

*Господин сочинитель, то бишь студент, бывший то есть, денег не платит, векселей надавал, квартиру не очищает, непрерывные на них поступают жалобы, а изволили в претензию войти, что я папироску при них закурил!*

(Dostoevsky *Crime and Punishment*, [avidreaders.ru](http://avidreaders.ru))

‘Here, if you will kindly look: an author, or a student, has been one at least, does not pay his debts, has given an I O U, won’t clear out of his room, and complaints are constantly being lodged against him, and here he has been pleased to make a protest against my smoking in his presence!’

(Dostoevsky *Crime and Punishment* [translated by Constance Garnett](#))

<i>Господин</i>	<i>сочинитель</i>	...	<i>денег не</i>	<i>плат-ит</i>	<i>векселей</i>	
Mister(M).SG	writer(M).SG		money NEG	pay-3SG	promissory.notes	
<i>надава-л</i>	<i>квартиру</i>	<i>не</i>	<i>очища-ет</i>	<i>непрерывные</i>	<i>на</i>	
give-PST.SG.M	apartment	NEG	clean-3SG	endless	PREP	
<i>них</i>	<i>поступают</i>	<i>жалобы</i>	<i>а</i>	<i>изволи-л-и</i>	<i>в</i>	<i>претензию</i>
3PL	are.received	complaints	CONJ	deign-PST-PL	PREP	claim
<i>что я</i>	<i>папироску</i>	<i>при</i>	<i>них</i>	<i>закурил</i>		
that	1SG	cigarette	PREP	3PL	began.smoking	

‘Mister writer does not pay, has given promissory notes, does not clean his apartment, there are endless complaints about him, however he dares to complain about me smoking in his presence’

The first three target predicate verbs *платит* ‘pays’, *надавал* ‘gave’, *очищает* ‘cleans’ agree with the controller noun phrase *господин сочинитель* ‘mister writer’ syntactically,

whereas the rest of the targets show plural agreements: the third person plural personal pronoun *они* in its inflected accusative form *них*, the predicate verb *изволили* ‘deign’. What is crucial here is that the last predicate verb *изволили* shows plural agreement, i.e. once again we find different agreements on parallel targets.

The question remains as to what motivates the plural agreements on *них* and *изволили*. Even though it looks like HA, we still need to consider the communicative circumstances. [40] is uttered by the character *Илья Петрович*, an assistant to the quarterly supervisor. According to the plot he is a lieutenant.<sup>32</sup> The person he is talking about is the main character, *Раскольников*, a poor student without a rank. This excludes the possibility of *Илья Петрович* being sincere in his expression of respect while referring to *Раскольников*, and thus points towards the ironic usage of HA. The intent to mock *Раскольников* for his audacity to make claims irrespective of his unfortunate situation is what motivates HA on later targets in [40].<sup>33</sup>

The examples presented in this section demonstrate agreement choices on targets within the same domain. Albeit being less frequent, such situation is accounted for by the AH, and serves as evidence for the constraint on parallel targets: “if parallel targets show different agreements, then the further target will show semantic agreement” (Corbett 2006:235). Furthermore, what is remarkable about [37] and [39] is that the agreement choices are not restricted by the communicative circumstances. We find different agreements within the same domain despite the lack of change in the speaker-referent relationship, as well as the difference in their social status, at the moment of an utterance. In other words, speakers of lower status are inconsistent in their expression of respect towards referents of higher status. In contrast, the inconsistency in agreement choices in [40] has a clear ironic motivation, the speaker of a higher status refers to a person of a lower status in plural.

## 5.2 Honorific Agreement & Quotative *зворум*

The examples in the previous section demonstrated agreement choices on parallel targets within the same domain. In this section I would like to discuss some examples that might seem to bear a resemblance to [37b-40], however are significantly different from them. Consider [41]:

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<sup>32</sup> Lieutenant belongs to the 12th class in the Table of Ranks

<sup>33</sup> See Section 5.3 for the discussion of the ironic aspect of HA.



[41]

... так и велели их сиятельство прогнать его с Богом: у меня и так, говорит, музыканты свое дело понимают.

‘... So their excellency ordered to dismiss him for good. “My musicians”, says he, “understand their job properly’

a. Так и велели их сиятельств-о прогна-ть  
so CONJ order-PST-PL 3PL.POSS excellency-SG dismiss-INF

его с Богом  
3SG.M.ACC with God  
‘So their excellency ordered to dismiss him for good’

b. у меня и так говор-ит музыканты своё дело понимают  
PREP 1SG CONJ so say-SG musicians their job understand  
“My musicians”, said (lit. says) he, “understand their job properly”

(Turgenev *A Sportsman’s Sketches*, [avidreaders.ru](http://avidreaders.ru))

First, let us examine the verbs *велели* ‘ordered’ and *говорит* ‘says’. While the former verb exhibits HA with the controller *их сиятельство* ‘their excellency’, as the speaker is referring to the possessor of the title *сиятельство*, the situation with the latter verb is more complex. In fact, the verb *говорит* in [41b] is a predicate of a quotative clause and hence agrees not with the controller *их сиятельство*, but rather with the zero-anaphoric subject.<sup>34</sup> This means that while the verbs *велели* and *говорит* belong to the two separate agreement domains and have different controllers, **the referent still remains the same**: it is the person behind the title *сиятельство*. Thus, even though both of the verbs are eligible to agree honorifically, we find the singular agreement on *говорит*, as evident by the ending *-ит*. While this can be viewed as another example of the speaker being inconsistent in his expression of respect to the higher-ranked referent, as in case with examples [37] & [40] from the previous section, we find further data that suggests otherwise. Consider [42]:

[42]

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<sup>34</sup> This behaviour is reported in Bolden 2004: “In Russian, the quotative (e.g. ‘he says’ [*говорит*]) may occur in the middle of the quote (usually with zero anaphora)” (Bolden 2004:1073). It is important to point out that while *говорит* is commonly embedded in the quoted material, it also can occur before and after the quoted speech (Bolden 2004:1086).

*Даже прослезилась, изволив все выслушать. «Ну, говорит, Мармеладов, раз уже ты обманул мои ожидания... Беру тебя еще раз на личную свою ответственность, – так и сказали, – помни, дескать, ступай!»*

(Dostoevsky *Crime and Punishment*, [avidreaders.ru](http://avidreaders.ru))

‘His eyes were dim when he heard my story. “Marmeladov, once already you have deceived my expectations ... I’ll take you once more on my own responsibility”—that’s what he said, “remember” he said, “and now you can go” ’

(Dostoevsky *Crime and Punishment* [translated by Constance Garnett](#))

*Даже прослези-л-и-сь*                      *изволив*            *все*    *выслуша-ть* |  
 even shed.a.tear-PST-PL-REFL    ADVPTCP    all    hear-INF

*Ну*    *говор-ит*    *Мармеладов* ...    *бер-у*            *тебя*            *на*    *свою*  
 PART QUOT-SG    Marmeladov                      take-1SG            2SG.ACC    PREP my

*ответственность так и сказа-л-и* ...  
 responsibility            so    CONJ say-PST-PL

‘(He) even shed a tear after he had heard everything. “So”, (he) said (lit. says), “Marmeladov ... , as I take you back I will be personally responsible for that”, this is what (he) said’

The speaker is referring to his boss who, according to the plot, saved him from being fired. Both target verbs *прослезилась* ‘shed a tear’ and *сказали* ‘said’ express HA, and thus it appears logical to assume that the speaker is consistent in his expression of respect to the referent. Still, as in [41b] the verb *говорит* is introducing the quoted material and shows singular agreement.

The examples presented in this section demonstrate that the verb *говорит* ‘speaks/says’, the third person singular form of *говорить* ‘to speak’, in its quotative role seems to be ‘immune’ to HA. A plausible explanation for this might be that the usage of the third person plural *говорят* ‘they say’ as a quotative, might lead to the clash in meaning. Unlike the third person singular *говорит*, the plural form *говорят* can also be used to introduce hearsay or a popular opinion (Shestukhina 2009:9, Gladrov 2009:245). What is crucial about the form *говорят* is that it emphasises that the speaker is unable to specify who in particular is the source of the information and the speaker is willing to distance themselves from the quoted content (Gladrov 2009:245). The third person singular *говорит*, on the other

hand, indicates that the referent is a source of information and does not signal the speaker’s mistrust towards the quoted material.

Before moving to the discussion of the ironic usage of HA in the next section, it is important to point out that there is an analysis alternative to the one presented in Bolden 2004, i.e. that the verb *говорит* as a predicate of a quotative clause. According to Wiemer & Letuchiy 2022, the inflected forms of the verb *говорить*, as well as their phonetically reduced variants, show high degree of conventionalisation in colloquial speech. Wiemer & Letuchiy show that the reduced third person form *зрит* ‘says’ can be used redundantly and even in reference to more than one speaker (Wiemer & Letuchiy 2022:443)<sup>35</sup>. Thus, Wiemer & Letuchiy hint at the grammaticalisation of the inflected forms of *говорить* and its reduced variants (with the emphasis on the third person singular forms). While this analysis is not implausible, the general consensus on the matter is yet to be established. Skepticism was expressed in the literature from previous years. Kopotev 2014:724 notes that the reduced forms *зрит* 3SG ‘says’, *зрю* 1SG ‘say’ and *зрят* 3PL ‘say’ are not yet detached from the verbal paradigm as they show number and person agreements with their subjects.

### 5.3 Ironic Usage of Honorific Agreement

Contrary to the popular belief in the literature (Houtzagers 2018, Corbett forthcoming), namely that the HA came to be used ironically in the 20th century and in Modern Russian, the collected data shows examples even from an earlier time period. We have already encountered ironic HA in [40]. The source text, *Crime and Punishment* by Dostoevsky, was published in 1866. Furthermore, there is an even older example, from a satirical poem by Vasily Pushkin dated as early as 1798:

[43] a passage from *Večer* by Vasily Pushkin

<i>А</i>	<i>там</i>	<i>оркестр</i>	<i>шум-ит</i>	
CONJ	there	orchestra	make.noise-SG	

<i>Гут</i>	<i>граф</i>	<i>жеман-ят-ся</i>	<i>и</i>	<i>Стукодей</i>	<i>крич-ит</i>	
good	count.SG	simper-PL-REFL	CONJ	Stukodei	shout-SG	

<sup>35</sup> The data showing the usage of the third person singular reduced form *зрит* with reference to multiple speakers is said to be potentially unreliable (Wiemer & Letuchiy 2022:443).

*Змеяда* *всех* *бран-ит,* *руга-ет* *за* *игрою*  
 Zmejada everyone berate-SG scold-SG while playing  
 ‘The orchestra makes noise; good count is simpering and Stukodei is shouting; Zmejada is berating and scolding everyone while playing (the game)’

(Pushkin *Vecher* 1789, Russian National Corpus)

Out of all the characters mentioned in the poem, only the count is referred to in plural. HA is expressed on the target verb *жеманятся* ‘simper’ via the plural suffix *-ят*. What distinguishes [40] from [43] is that the use of HA in the former conveys irony on its own, as the communicative circumstances exclude the genuine meaning of expressing respect towards a higher ranked referent. In [43], on the other hand, HA is not a sole contributor to the comedic effect. The author’s amusing verb choice in combination with plural agreement is what completes the irony. The verb *жеманятся* is truly unexpected in the context of HA, as its meaning inevitably encapsulates the judgement of the referent’s behaviour. In contrast, the verbs in genuine instances of HA lack any subjective shades of meaning. It is evident, if we take a look at the verbs most frequently found in (non-ironic) HA construction :

Verb	Number of Occurrences
<i>изволили</i> ‘deign’	11
<i>приказали</i> ‘commanded’	9
<i>велели</i> ‘ordered’	5

Table 4. The most popular verbs in HA constructions (in the collected data)

All of the verbs in Table 4 convey the meaning of expressing someone’s will or demands. They are used by the speakers of lower social status with the intention to report about their superiors, rather than to make fun of them.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Note that [40] is not contradicting the point made here, rather it shows the inverse situation: the speaker of **higher** social status mocks a person of lower social status by referring to him in plural.

The further examples of ironic usage of HA all come from modern sources, news articles and radio programme transcripts published within a time period from 2003 to 2016. As in [43] the HA in examples [44-45] is not the sole source of irony, but rather one of the contributors to the comedic effect:

[44]

<i>их</i>	<i>сиятельств-о</i>	<i>граф</i>	<i>уш-л-и</i>	<i>в</i>	<i>ЦК</i>
3PL.POSS	excellency-SG	count.SG	go-PST-PL	to	CC

‘Their excellency the count went to the Central Committee’

(Abacan Radio Programme *Dney Minuvschikh Anekdoty* 2004, Russian National Corpus)

[44] is an oxymoron. The mention of the Central Committee implies that the story is set in the times of the Soviet Regime, which, in turn, implies that both the title *граф* ‘count’ and the intitulation formula *их сиятельство* ‘their excellency’ are already abolished.

[45]

<i>обидел-и-сь</i>	<i>их</i>	<i>сиятельств-о</i>	<i>мол</i>	<i>сильно</i>
take.offence-PL-REFL	3PL.POSS	excellency-SG	PART	intensely

<i>жмут</i>	<i>...</i>	<i>налоговые</i>	<i>органы</i>
pressure		tax	authorities

‘Their excellency was offended due to the high pressure from the tax authorities’

([Izvestia News](#) *Opyat ne dogovoryatsa* 2016, Russian National Corpus)

[45] comes from a news article where the author mocks the Russian oligarch Mikhail Prokhorov. What is especially interesting about this example is that the author chooses to use HA, even though the singular agreement on the verb would be permissible in this situation (see [46a]) and would not have a significant influence on the ironic effect, since the irony is already signalled due to the title *их сиятельство* being enclosed into the quotation marks in the [original text](#). This means that the usage of HA in [45] adds on to the intended ironic effect.

[46]

- a. ... *спросил*            *где*    *иля-ет-ся*                    *их*                    *сиятельств-о*  
 ask-PST.SG    where loiter-SG-REFL                    3PL.POSS            excellency-SG  
 ‘... asked where their excellency is loitering’
- b. *их*                    *сиятельств-о*                    *уеха-л-и*                    *в*                    *астрал*  
 3PL.POSS    excellency(N)-SG                    go-PST-PL                    to                    astral  
 ‘Their excellency went to astral’
- c. ...    *важно*                    *изрек-л-и*                    *их*                    *сиятельств-о*                    ...  
 haughtily                    speak-PST-PL 3PL.POSS                    excellency(N)-SG  
 ‘... haughtily said their excellency ...’
- d. *граф*                    *подтянул*                    *тренировочные*                    *штаны*                    *с*  
 count.SG    pull.up.SG                    training                    pants                    with  
  
*бюстгальтерообразными*                    *коленками*  
 bra-like                    knees  
 ‘The count pulled up his training pants stretched out around the knees ...’

([AiF](#) *Slushai svoego guru, a ne jenu duru!* 2003, Russian National Corpus)

[46] comes from an explicitly humorous article mocking the practices of Gennady Goncharov, the founder of the Moscow School of Hypnosis (henceforth: MSH). The author describes his visit to the MSH, where after reading the introductory leaflet he learns that Gennady Goncharov is not just a guru, but also possesses a title of the count. This provides the author with the ground to mock the self-proclaimed count accordingly. As evident, the author is inconsistent with his choice of agreements: in [46a] and [46d] both controllers *сиятельство* and *граф* take singular agreements, whereas in [46b] and [46c] the controller *сиятельство* takes plural, honorific agreements. Let us examine the reason behind this variation. In [46a] the choice of the verb *иляется* ‘loiter(s)’ already makes the irony explicit. As for [46d], the comedic effect is achieved due to the brilliantly coined compound adjective *бюстгальтерообразными* ‘bra-like’. [46b] and [46c], on the other hand, do not exhibit any unusual or playful choice of words, and thus it is the HA expressed on the verbs *уехали* ‘went’ and *изрекли* ‘said’ that is responsible for conveying the irony.

The examples presented in this section demonstrate that one has to be cautious when talking about the ironic use of HA. Quite often the construction of HA itself is not the sole

source of irony, but rather one of the multiple contributing factors. Still, we find examples [40], [46b], [46c] where HA is truly responsible for conveying the ironic meaning.

## 6. Conclusion

This thesis aimed to shed more light on the phenomenon of honorific agreement in Russian itself as well as dig deeper into the exploration of its interaction with the Agreement Hierarchy. The presented research was conducted based on the independently collected data from the Russian National Corpus and a number of individually selected literary works. The process of data collection involved the implementation of custom strategies designed with regard to the specificities of the phenomenon under investigation.

The findings show that agreement targets in the predicative position are the ones most often expressing HA. This has to do with the fact that in the major part of the contexts it was the only (relevant) agreement domain, i.e. there were no agreement targets in other target positions of AH. The second most popular target domain is shown to be the personal pronoun. While this provides us with the general picture of the frequency of HA occurrence in a given agreement domain, it does not tell much about the prediction the AH makes. In contrast, the truly representative cases are constituted by the contexts exhibiting (relevant) agreement targets across the full range of AH domains.<sup>37</sup> All of them show the AH effect: in [27], [29], [30], [34-36] the syntactic agreement is expressed on targets in the attributive position and semantic agreement on targets in the predicative and personal pronoun positions. In addition to that, the collected data set contains further evidence for the AH, as the agreement patterns in the contexts presented in Section 5.1 are shown to be compliant with the AH constraint on parallel targets.

Apart from discussing the interaction of HA with the AH, I have also touched upon the time frame of usage of HA, as well as explained its close connection to the title controllers. We have seen that although, in essence, HA is independent of any controller, the prerequisite for usage of both HA and titles is the same. Last but not least, a considerable amount of attention was paid to the discussion of the ironic usage of HA. I have shown that the irony is not always conveyed solely by the usage of HA, as sometimes it is one of the several contributors to the ironic/comedic effect.

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<sup>37</sup> With the exception of the relative pronoun domain. At the moment it is not clear whether any examples with inflected relative pronouns exhibiting HA exist. In other words, there is still room for further research in this direction.



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