

PRACTICAL PAPERS FOR THE BIBLE TRANSLATOR

*Published twice yearly
(April and October)
by the United
Bible Societies*
Vol. 60, No. 2, April 2009

EDITOR: Stephen W. Pattemore

REVIEWS EDITOR: Lénart J. de Regt

EDITORIAL ASSISTANT: Sarah Lind

EDITORIAL BOARD:

Dr Eric Hermanson

Prof Luke Timothy Johnson

Ms Ruth (Spielmann) Heeg

Rev Dr Tim Meadowcroft

Prof Christo van der Merwe

Former Translation Consultant, Bible Society of South Africa

Candler School of Theology, Emory University, Atlanta, Ga., U.S.A.

Translation Coordinator, Canadian Bible Society

*Senior Lecturer in Biblical Studies, Laidlaw College (formerly
Bible College of New Zealand), Auckland, N.Z.*

*Professor of Ancient Near Eastern Languages, University of
Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch, South Africa*

HONORIFIC LANGUAGE IN NEPALI AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR BIBLE TRANSLATION

CHITRA CHHETRI

The author is a UBS translation consultant based in Kathmandu, Nepal.

Introduction

Nepali is a member of the Indo-Aryan branch of the Indo-European language family. Modern Indo-Aryan languages are related to Sanskrit, much as European languages are related to Latin. Nepali is closely related to other Indo-Aryan languages such as Hindi, Bengali, Punjabi, Gujarati, Marathi, and other languages of northern and central India. The total number of speakers of Nepali was estimated in the 2005 *Ethnologue* as over seventeen million, based on the 2001 census (*Ethnologue: Languages of the World* [ed. Raymond G. Gordon, Jr.; 15th ed.; Dallas: SIL International, 2005]). About eleven million speakers live in Nepal, with substantial numbers of speakers in India, Bhutan, and Myanmar.

Nepali is believed to have developed in the eighth to thirteenth centuries A.D. in India, spreading to Nepal around the tenth century. Written Nepali is attested in documents dating back to the thirteenth century. The first Nepali Old Testament was published by the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1914 in Calcutta. Grammatically, Nepali word order is subject-object-verb (SOV). Verb inflection is derived from a combination of fused person-number agreement suffixes.

Scope of the paper

The purpose of this paper is to continue what Rev Benjamin Rai briefly touched upon regarding honorifics in Nepali, along with those in Assamese, Bengali, Hindi, and Urdu, in his paper entitled “Honorifics in Some Indian Languages,” read at the 1998 UBS Asia-Pacific Regional Translation Consultation (ASPRETCON). In his paper, he investigated the discourse relating to the encounter between Moses and Pharaoh in Exod 5–9 regarding honorifics used in these languages.

Following Rev Rai, Dr Young-Jin Min’s paper entitled “Honorific Criticism for Bible Translation,” presented during the 1999 ASPRETCON, highlighted the issues of honorifics in three Korean Bible versions and called for “honorific criticism” to be recognized as a distinct field, to deal with such issues in languages where honorifics are used. Although I have not devoted any space to honorific criticism as proposed by Dr Min, I agree with him that such a framework is necessary. This call has been taken up by Dr Ji-Youn Cho, who in her doctoral dissertation entitled “Politeness and Addressee Honorifics in Bible Translation” submitted to Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, in 2008, has proposed “skopos” theory as a viable framework to address the honorific issue. The efficacy of this approach is yet to be seen.

The use of honorifics in Nepali is an enormous topic, involving second and third person pronouns and the inflection of verbs accordingly. There are also honorifics used with the name, title, and relationship of a person. When dealing with honorifics, one also needs to take into account politeness, because both are intertwined in Nepali and are expressed both in words and gestures. Since we are dealing with written scriptures, my focus will be mainly on Nepali honorifics, analyzing their application in two Nepali Bible versions, namely, the popular Nepali New Revised Version (NRV, 1998) and the common language *Holy Bible: Simple Nepali* (HBSN, 2008).

Abbreviations used

The following abbreviations for honorifics are used in this article. The full forms are retained in the tables and the subheadings.

N-Hon	Non-Honorific
M-Hon	Medial-Honorific
H-Hon	High-Honorific
R-Hon	Royal-Honorific
2P	Second Person
3P	Third Person

Registers of Nepali pronominal honorific forms

There are several registers of standard speech in Nepali, which are associated with specific verbal endings and pronouns that form distinct honorifics. The 2P pronominal forms in Nepali are: *tā*, *timii*, *tapaai*, *hajar*, *yahaā*, *sarkaar*, *mausuph*. These pronominal forms may be classified as non-honorific, medial-honorific, high-honorific, and royal-honorific forms as shown in Table One.

The second person honorific: “you”

	Non-Honorific	Medial-Honorific	High-Honorific	Royal-Honorific
Singular	<i>tā</i>	<i>timii</i>	<i>tapaāī</i> <i>hajur</i> <i>yahaā</i>	<i>sarkaār</i> <i>mausuph</i>
Plural	<i>timii-haruu</i>	<i>timii-haruu</i>	<i>tapaāī-haruu</i> <i>hajur-haruu</i> <i>yahaā-haruu</i>	<i>sarkaār-haruu</i> <i>mausuph-haruu</i>

Table 1

Literal translation of R-Hon *sarkaār* and *mausuph* into English is not possible. Equivalent renderings would be “lord” or “master” or “majesty.” When not being used to address a person, *sarkaār* means “government,” as in *nepal sarkaār* “government of Nepal.” Likewise, H-Hon *hajur* also means “yes” in polite response mode.

Honorific “you” in speech

	Superior → Inferior	Equal → ← Equal	Inferior → Superior
Singular	<i>tā</i> <i>timii</i>	<i>tā</i> <i>timii</i> <i>tapaāī</i>	<i>tapaāī</i> <i>hajur</i> <i>sarkaār</i>
Plural	<i>timii-haruu</i>	<i>timii-haruu</i> <i>tapaāī-haruu</i>	<i>tapaāī-haruu</i> <i>hajur-haruu</i> <i>sarkaār-haruu</i>

Table 2

The same level of honorifics in all forms can be mutually exchanged between equals, but never between a superior and an inferior or inferior and superior. The superior uses N-Hon or M-Hon with the inferior and the inferior uses H-Hon or R-Hon with the superior (Table Two).

Non-honorific *tā* “you”

N-Hon *tā* “you” is used in various ways. First, it is used by a superior when addressing one who is inferior to him/her. The tone of voice determines whether it is used in a decent or polite manner or in a derogatory sense. Secondly, the reciprocal use of *tā* is quite common between buddies, best friends, and equals. So, it can be used as a familiar form. Thirdly, for parents to use *tā* to address their children does not sound rude at all, but typically is quite appropriate. However, *tā* cannot be mutually exchanged in the parent-child conversation. Children are to respect their parents, and thus should address them as *tapaāī* or *hajur*.

Postpositions/case suffixes

In Nepali, there are a large number of forms that are considered to be either postpositions or case suffixes. There is no complete agreement on what is or is not a suffix. However, some Nepali linguists and grammarians regard the following forms as suffixes:

- haruu*, plural-collective marker
- ko/-kii/-kaa*, genitive marker
- le*, ergative-instrumental marker; nominative case marker
- laaii*, accusative-dative marker

The second person pronominal honorifics with command-form verb

Nepali pronominal honorific forms are mapped onto the verb. Table Three shows the 2P honorific masculine pronoun with verb inflection in present tense in the command-form of the infinitive verb *garnu* “to do.”

	Non-Honorific	Medial-Honorific	High-Honorific	Royal-Honorific
Singular	<i>tā / tai(-le) gar</i> you do	<i>timii(-le) gara</i> you do	<i>tapaai(-le) garnos</i> <i>hajur(-le) garnos</i> <i>yahaā(-le) garnos</i> you do	<i>sarkaar(-le) gari</i> <i>baksios</i> <i>mausuph(-le) gari</i> <i>baksios</i> lord/majesty do
Plural	<i>timii-haruu(-le)</i> <i>gara</i>	<i>timii-haruu(-le)</i> <i>gara</i>	<i>tapaai-haruu(-le)</i> <i>garnos</i> <i>hajur-haruu(-le)</i> <i>garnos</i> <i>yahaā-haruu(-le)</i> <i>garnos</i>	<i>sarkaar-haruu(-le)</i> <i>gari baksios</i> <i>mausuph-haruu(-le)</i> <i>gari baksios</i>

Table 3

When an honorific form with a proper selection of speech level based on the status of the addressee is used in a request, it results in a polite form of speech. Without honorifics there can be no polite form of speech. The distinction between command-form and request-form can be made by means of mode of expression and honorifics used without even adding the Nepali equivalent of the English word “please.” Hence, these two forms, i.e., command-form and request-form, have a thin border line.

The third person honorifics: “he”/“she” and “they”

Just like the 2P pronominal forms, there are 3P pronominal forms that again can be classified as non-honorific, medial-honorific, high-honorific, and royal-honorific forms, as shown in Table Four.

	Non-Honorific	Medial-Honorific	High-Honorific	Royal-Honorific
Singular	<i>u</i> <i>thyo</i>	<i>unii</i> <i>tinii</i> <i>inii</i>	<i>uhaā</i> <i>yahaā</i>	<i>sarkaar</i> <i>mausuph</i>
Plural	<i>unii-haruu</i> <i>tinii-haruu</i> <i>inii-haruu</i>	<i>unii-haruu</i> <i>tinii-haruu</i> <i>inii-haruu</i>	<i>uhaā-haruu</i> <i>yahaā-haruu</i>	<i>sarkaar-haruu</i> <i>mausuph-haruu</i>

Table 4

The third person honorific with verb inflection

Table Five shows the 3P honorific masculine pronoun with verb inflection in present tense in the command-form of the infinitive verb *garnu* “to do.”

	Non-Honorific	Medial-Honorific	High-Honorific	Royal-Honorific
Singular	<i>u/us-le garcha;</i> <i>theys-le garcha;</i> let him do	<i>un-le garchan;</i> <i>tiin-le gachan;</i> let him do	<i>uhaā-le</i> <i>granuhuncha;</i> <i>yahaā-le</i> <i>granuhuncha;</i> let him do	<i>sarkaar-le</i> <i>garibaksancha;</i> <i>mausuph-le</i> <i>garibaksancha;</i> let lord/majesty do
Plural	<i>unii-haruu-le</i> <i>garchan;</i> <i>tinii-haruu-le</i> <i>garchan;</i> let them do	<i>unii-haruu-le</i> <i>garchan;</i> <i>tinii-haruu-le</i> <i>garchan;</i> let them do	<i>uhaā-haruu-le</i> <i>granuhuncha;</i> <i>yahaā-haruu-le</i> <i>granuhuncha;</i> let them do	<i>sarkaar-haruu-le</i> <i>garibaksancha;</i> <i>mausuph-haruu-le</i> <i>garibaksancha;</i> let lords/majesties do

Table 5

Royal-honorific *sarkaar* and *mausuph* are the rigid forms used exclusively by or for the royal family and the so-called sophisticated elite family. These forms are not used by the common people. However, they may sometimes be used ironically between husband and wife in a playful or irate mode. A husband, for example, might say to his wife: *Sarkaar, li baksios* (lord/master, [please] take [it]), which means he is either teasing his wife or angry with her.

When addressing a king in the Nepali context, R-Hon *sarkaar* or *mausuph* should be used. However, not a single instance of royal-honorific is used in the Nepali Bible versions.

Traditional honorifics

The traditional Nepali honorific suffix *-jii* or *-jyuu* is added to the name or title of a person to be polite. It is applicable to both male and female. It is impolite to address a senior in rank, age, or status just by first name or surname. For example, addressing someone using the suffix *jii/jyuu*, as in Shyam-jii, Sarita-jii, Michael-jyuu, is considered polite. Even for Hindu deities, the suffix *-jii* is added, as in Ram-jii, Shiva-jii, Krishna-jii, for reverence. (The expression *jyuu* also has the meaning “yes” in polite response mode.)

In addition, suffixes of kinship like *-bhai* “younger brother,” *-daju* “older brother,” *-bahinii* “younger sister,” and *-didii* “older sister,” are informally attached to the names of the addressee, although they are not necessarily blood relations. The age is figured out just by guessing.

Jesus as *guru-jyuu* in the Gospels

In the Gospels, Jesus is addressed as *guru-jyuu* in many instances in Nepali versions (Matt 8.2, 19, 21, 25; 12.47; 13.51; 19.16; 24.3; Mark 3.32; 11.21; Luke 3.12; 5.12; 7.40; 8.24, 45; 9.38, 49, 59; 11.45; 12.13; 19.39; 20.39; 21.7; John 3.2; 4.31; 6.25; 11.8, 16, 28; 20.16). *Guru* simply means “teacher” and the honorific suffix *-jyuu* is added to it. Instead of *guru-jyuu* one can also simply use *guru*, which does not sound impolite. However, *guru-jyuu* is more respectful and thus preferable.

Husband and wife

In Nepali culture, husbands use the N-Hon form *tā* or the M-Hon form *timii* to address their wives and receive various degrees of honorifics from them. Table

Six shows the seven possible pairs of forms with which a Nepali couple address each other.

Pair	Husband as speaker →	Wife as speaker ←
1	<i>tā</i> (N-Hon “you”)	<i>tapaāĩ</i> (H-Hon “you”)
2	<i>tā</i>	<i>hajur</i> (H-Hon “you”)
3	<i>tā</i>	<i>yahaā</i> (H-Hon “you”)
4	<i>timii</i> (M-Hon “you”)	<i>tapaāĩ</i>
5	<i>timii</i>	<i>hajur</i>
6	<i>timii</i>	<i>yahaā</i>
7	<i>timii</i>	<i>timii</i>

Table 6

A wife may never use the N-Hon form *tā* to her husband even if she has higher status than her husband in education or profession. Likewise, the husband never uses H-Hon forms to address his wife. It would be interesting to know why there is a disparity between husband and wife. It may have largely to do with the influence of Hindu religion on Nepali society. Vishnu Rai has very interesting comments to make on this issue:

In Nepali society, husband is regarded as the God. He might be younger than his wife, physically weak or academically poor, may be from a lower caste and in lower post than that of his wife, yet he is regarded superior to her. Being a husband is the sole reason of his superiority, and this demands that she must cower before him and serve him. This is what reflects in the form of address: wives not only serve their husbands physically but verbally as well.

(Vishnu S. Rai, “T/V forms between husband and wife in Nepali,” *Curriculum Development Journal* 28 [1992]: 95)

The only form that is mutually exchanged is the M-Hon form *timii* →← *timii* (Pair 7), which is used by a few modern and educated couples. In my view, *timii* →← *timii* would be ideal for a married couple to use mutually. However, Nepal being a patriarchal society, the moderate *timii* →← *tapaāĩ* (Pair 4) is used by many Nepali couples regardless of their religion, and as such it has nothing to do with the husband being regarded as “the God,” as Rai puts it. This is reflected in the Nepali Bible versions where the *timii* →← *tapaāĩ* pair is readily used by the translators as standard husband-wife speech. For example, on one occasion Abram says to his wife Sarai: “You (*timii*) are a beautiful woman” (Gen 12.11). In another instance Sarai speaks to Abram: “You (*tapaāĩ*) sleep with my slave” (Gen 16.2). Such usage of honorifics between husband and wife is considered normal and appropriate in accord with Nepali cultural values.

Parents and children

In a typical Nepali context, parents address their children with the N-Hon or familiar form *tā* or M-Hon *timii*, whereas children address their parents as H-Hon *tapaāĩ* or *hajur*. In the conversation between Isaac and his two sons Esau and Jacob, *tā* and *tapaāĩ* forms are used, respectively, in Nepali translations (Gen 27). This usage is quite consistent in the Nepali versions.

However, there is a slight variation of honorific use in the story of the boy Jesus when he was lost while supposedly accompanying his parents on their way

back home from Jerusalem and later was found by his parents conversing with religious leaders in the temple in Jerusalem. At that time Mary spoke to him in the M-Hon form *timii* and Jesus responded to his parents in the H-Hon form *tapaai-haruu* (Luke 2.48-49).

Mary: Child (or Son), why have you (*timii*) treated us like this? Look, your (*timra**) father and I have been searching for you (*timii*) in great anxiety. (v. 48)

**timra* is the genitive form of *timii* “you.”

Jesus: Why were you (*tapaai-haruu*) searching for me? Did you (*tapaai-haruu*) not know that I must be in my Father’s house? (v. 49)

One can argue that Mary could very well use the N-Hon or familiar form *tã* instead of *timii*. The Nepali translators might have intentionally portrayed the divine aspect of the boy Jesus. This probably reflects the theology of the divinity of Jesus in Nepali translations.

Aaron and Moses

Older siblings are to be addressed deferentially by younger siblings. The older uses *timii* or *tã* with the younger while the younger uses *tapaai* or *timii* with the older. In the conversation between Aaron and Moses when Moses encountered the Israelites worshipping a golden calf after he came down from Mt. Sinai (Exod 32.21-22), we face an awkward situation in Nepali translations.

Moses: What did these people do to you (*tapaai*), that you (*tapaai*) led them into such great sin? (v. 21)

Aaron: Your (*hajuur* NRV) anger may not be upon me. You (*tapaai*) know the people that they are bent on evil. (v. 22)

Aaron is older than Moses. Both of them are of high and equal status as per Nepali customary norm, Aaron being a revered priest and Moses head of state. In Nepali custom, the older brother is not to use H-Hon *tapaai* with the younger brother no matter how high the status of the latter. The appropriate form for Aaron to use is M-Hon *timii*. Besides, Aaron’s use of the Hebrew *adoni* (my lord) cannot be literally translated into Nepali for an older brother addressing his younger brother. Therefore, NRV renders H-Hon *hajuur* for the Hebrew *adoni* whereas HBSN omits it. Even *hajuur* does not sound quite appropriate here for Aaron addressing his younger brother Moses, because it implies submission on the part of the speaker as an older brother, which is against Nepali cultural norms. Although the Nepali usage of *hajuur* is milder than the Hebrew *adoni*, it is hard to find a more appropriate term to suit the occasion. So here we are faced with the tension between the source and receptor cultural values.

Kings and subjects

Although the R-Hon forms *sarkaar* and *mausuph* are used for addressing kings in Nepal, such forms are not used for addressing kings by the subjects in the Bible. Since the last king of the Shah Dynasty in Nepal has been deposed, such usages will gradually become archaic. In the Bible, the king uses *timii* and the subject uses *hajuur* or *tapaai* when they address each other. Similar forms are used between kings and prophets. Such usage does not pose any problem at all.

Human and divine

The message of God to Pharaoh comes in 2P N-Hon *tã* form (Exod 5.1). While referring to God in Exod 5.2, Pharaoh uses 3P M-Hon *tinii* form in NRV, but H-Hon *uhaã* form in HBSN. Both versions are consistent in their usage of honorific forms. Although both honorific renderings are acceptable, HBSN's rendering is preferable to that of NRV on the grounds that God is divine and obviously has a higher status than Pharaoh.

God: You let my people go (*jaanaday* N-Hon 2P verb inflection), so that they may celebrate a festival to me in the wilderness. (v. 1)

Pharaoh: Who is the Lord that I should heed him (*tinii* or *uhaã*) and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, and I will not let Israel go. (v. 2)

Jesus and his mother Mary

Jesus addressing his earthly mother as “woman” or “lady” is something very difficult to render in Nepali. In the HBSN, Greek *gynai* (woman) is rendered “mother” where Jesus addresses his mother Mary on two occasions:

- (1) Mother (*aamaa*), you must not tell me what to do, because my time to work has not yet come. (John 2.4)
- (2) Look mother (*aamaa*), he is your son. (John 19.26)

The NRV maintains a literal rendering “woman,” but uses a Sanskrit term *naarii* “woman” in both instances. However, it is very impolite, if not rude, to address one's own mother as “woman” or “dear woman” (as rendered in various English versions) in Nepali society and in many other societies. Although *aamaa* sounds perfectly normal and applicable in these two instances, some church pastors and leaders are opposed to this rendering, citing the superiority of Jesus over Mary on theological grounds. They prefer to render *naarii* for the Greek *gynai*. My suggestion would be to seek advice of the church leaders, scholars, and theologians and render *aamaa* at least for the first edition of a new translation. If the Nepali Church on the whole is still not convinced, there is always room for correcting it in a later edition. HBSN (first edition) has rendered *aamaa* in both instances. So far no serious objection has been raised to the use of it.

Jesus and his disciples

Jesus is presented in the Nepali Gospels as a *dhaarmik guru* (religious teacher) who is revered and surrounded by devoted disciples. The teacher-disciple relationship pattern reflects something of the pattern that is found between a religious guru and his followers in Hinduism or between Buddha and his disciples in Buddhism (i.e., *guru-shiṣya* in Sanskrit). As a *dhaarmik guru*, Jesus stands in a different class of people than the disciples and the general followers. He is the divine *guru* and they are the ordinary people. In Nepali versions, this relationship is clearly shown in the degree of honorific pronouns Jesus and the disciples use toward each other. Jesus uses M-Hon *timii* or *timii-haruu* to address his disciple/s, whereas the disciples use H-Hon *tapaaĩ* to address their guru Jesus.

Jesus and the multitude

Likewise, when addressing a mass of people Jesus uses the M-Hon form *timii-haruu* in the Nepali Gospels. In his teaching his divine nature is depicted

disproportionately over against his earthly nature by Nepali translators. However, modern religious gurus in Nepali and India use H-Hon forms when addressing a mass of people. Should not Jesus in the Gospels be portrayed similarly while addressing a mass of people? Should it or should it not be reflected in our translations? The translators often find themselves in a dilemma in choosing the appropriate honorific terms.

Jesus and his Pharisaic admirers

I would like to cite two examples from Nepali translations where conversations take place between Jesus and his Pharisaic admirers.

Jesus and Simon (Luke 7.36-44)

During the dinner hosted by Jesus' friend Simon the Pharisee, Jesus uses M-Hon *timii* to Simon, who in turn uses H-Hon *tapaai* to address Jesus. According to Nepali translations, this shows the superiority of Jesus over Simon, which may not be the intention of the Gospel writer. They both could have used the same register in their conversation.

Jesus and Nicodemus (John 3.1-10)

Likewise, Jesus addresses Nicodemus, who is a Pharisee and a member of the Jewish Council, as *timii* when he comes to Jesus for religious counsel. This needs to be re-examined, because Nicodemus, being a Jewish religious leader and teacher (v. 10) on a par with Jesus in authority, deserves to be addressed more politely by Jesus. The appropriate usage would be mutual exchange of the H-Hon form *tapaai*.

Jesus and religious/political leaders

Jesus and the High Priest (Mark 14.55-64)

When Jesus is brought in for interrogation, the Jewish High Priest addresses him in the N-Hon form *tā*, which sounds a bit derogatory. But Jesus addresses him as *tapaai*, which is quite polite.

High Priest: Have you (*tā*) no answer? . . . Are you (*tā*) the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed God? (v. 61)

Jesus: I am, and you (*tapaai-haruu*) will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Almighty, and coming with the clouds of heaven. (v. 62)

Jesus and Pilate (Mark 15.2)

The Roman governor Pontius Pilate uses *timii* with Jesus in his interrogation and Jesus responds to him using *tapaai*.

Pilate: Are you (*timii*) the king of the Jews?

Jesus: You (*tapaai*) say so.

Here in these two scenarios, we can see that the translators are not consistent in using honorifics. Pilate's use of M-Hon *timii* is quite legitimate, because he is a high political leader and his address to Jesus is quite polite. However, the High Priest's use of N-Hon *tā* while interrogating Jesus sounds rude; and it is not fitting for a high religious leader to speak in such a derogatory manner. In my judgment, M-Hon *timii* would be more appropriate here, because the High Priest is dealing with Jesus, a popular religious guru, who deserves some respect. For instance, in the Nepali court of law today, even the presiding judge does not use

this lowest form *tã* with the accused. In my opinion, it would be more appropriate for Pilate as well as the High Priest to use *timii*. From a Nepali perspective they both are more or less equal in status in their respective domains, i.e., political and religious.

Jesus and Satan the Tempter

In the narrative of the temptation of Jesus (Matt 4.1-11 and parallel passages), Satan addresses Jesus as *tapaai* (H-Hon “you”) whereas Jesus addresses Satan in his response as *tã* (N-Hon “you”). In my opinion, the rendering of honorifics in this fashion in Nepali might have been derived from the Nepali translators’ theological assumption of Jesus’ superiority over Satan, looking from the perspective of the gospel writers. Could Satan use M-Hon *timii* or even N-Hon *tã* to address Jesus as his adversary? Is there any logic in Satan respecting Jesus in the dialogue, unless it is used sarcastically?

Jesus and God the Father

Jesus addresses God the Father as *tapaai* (H-Hon “you”), which is seen in his prayer in the garden of Gethsemane (John 17). Referring to Jesus with divine approval, God uses 3P singular M-Hon *inii* on two occasions so that the subordination of Jesus to God the Father is rightly maintained in Nepali.

(1) Jesus’ Baptism (Matt 3.17b)

God: He/This (*inii*) is my own dear Son, with whom (*inii*) I am pleased.

(2) Transfiguration of Jesus on the Mountain (Matt 17.5b)

God: He/This (*inii*) is my own dear Son, with whom (*inii*) I am pleased—
listen to what he (*inii*) says.

The pronoun *inii* literally is a 3P M-Hon form “he.” However, sometimes this expression may replace pronominal-determiner *yo* “this” for honorific reasons. Besides, syntactically, the demonstrative pronoun *yo* cannot be used with M-Hon pronoun *inii* “he” or “him.”

Conclusion

It is fair to conclude that no pragmatic analysis has been made in determining categories of honorifics used in the translation of Nepali versions. Therefore, some inconsistencies in the use of honorifics are found in these translations. Now is the time to rethink the use of honorific and non-honorific forms that have been used in Nepali versions and make necessary revisions. Honorifics and politeness are intertwined in the Nepali language. Since honorifics used with a proper selection of speech level based on the status of the addressee result in a polite form of speech in Nepali, politeness must be considered alongside honorific usage.

My recommendations to translation projects whose languages have honorifics would be that the committee should determine the appropriate usage of the honorifics at the very beginning of the project. The translators often find themselves in a dilemma in determining appropriate levels of honorifics in given contexts. In consultation with church leaders and the translation officer, feasible guidelines for honorifics should be adopted by a high level translation committee for the translators to consult for consistency.