

POLITE FORMS AND SOCIOLINGUISTIC DYNAMICS IN CONTACTS BETWEEN VARIETIES OF ITALIAN*

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1. INTRODUCTION

This study investigates the socio-pragmatic development of the system of address across Italian diachrony. The main claim made here is that different dynamics are at play in such a development, which are both socio-cultural, i.e. language-external, and linguistic, i.e. language-internal, in nature.

These dynamics are deeply affected by contact between varieties of Italian, since linguistic behavior is to be understood as an aspect of social behavior that is governed by social norms which are not necessarily uniform among speakers belonging to different social classes, nor within different textual genres. Along similar lines, considering the socio-cultural peculiarities of Italian diachrony, such dynamics have also been modeled by contact with other socio-cultural and language systems, in particular by intense prestige contact with Spanish at specific times.

The Italian system of pronouns owes to Latin the distinction between a system based on a single pronoun of address and one based on two pronominal forms, where one is marked as deferential. Classical Latin had an address system with a single pronoun of address (*tu*, 2SG), while Late

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Latin shows the first attestation of a system characterized by a two-term situation (*tu* – *Vos*). Old Italian continued the differentiation between an unmarked pronoun of address *tu* and a deferential pronoun *Voi* (2PL)¹. From the fifteenth century on, the system of pronouns of address can be schematized as a three-term situation where two deferential forms are attested, as *Voi* coexists with the third person feminine singular pronoun *Lei* (3SG.F). In the twentieth century, deferential *Voi* was progressively abandoned in the standard language in favor of *Lei*, which characterizes the standard Italian system of address today. However, in a number of Southern and Central varieties of Italian, deferential *Voi* remains the unmarked deferential pronominal form.

Throughout its history, the Italian system of address has also included nominal forms, which have played a role in the development of the pronominal system. This is the case, for instance, of abstract feminine NPs such as *Vostra Signoria* «Your Lordship / Her Ladyship», *Vostra Eccellenza* «Your Highness», and so on.

The evolution of the Latin-Italian system of address can be schematized as in *Figure 1*.

The transition through a three-term system is not peculiar to Italian but is also characteristic of other European languages, such as German, Spanish, and Slavonic languages in general². This transition has been the focus of many studies³ and has been explained differently as a result of uncertainty about appropriate social codes during the transition from the Middle Ages to the modern age (Mazzon 2010, 354) or as a result of contact with the Spanish language (for the Italian system of address in particular) (Migliorini 1957).

Yet most studies of the contemporary Italian system of address deal with the unmarked deferential pronoun (*Lei*) in the standard language; only a few of them consider the more diverse situation in different Italian varieties (e.g. Renzi 1996). These varieties can be characterized diatopically, as various pronominal systems of address differentiate some geographical areas, as well as diaphasically, as different language genres can be characterized in terms of systems of address.

¹ The capital letter in *Voi* and the following *Lei* with the clitic forms *Vi/Ve* and *Le* are conventionally used to signal the deferent form.

² See Taavitsainen - Jucker 2003, 1-2.

³ The Italian system of address and its development has been the focus of a vast number of studies. See, to name but a few, Migliorini 1957; Niculescu 1974; Renzi 1995 and 2002; Molinelli 2002 and 2010; Mazzon 2010.

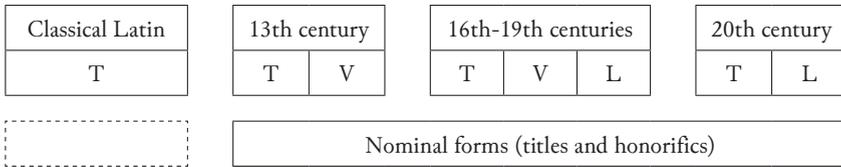


Figure 1.

Starting from these premises, the main object of this study is to highlight the different factors (linguistic and extralinguistic) at play in the development of the Italian system of address, taking into account its sociolinguistic dimension as well. In particular the study examines the co-occurrence of pronominal and nominal forms of address, together with corresponding gender agreement, to identify factors and motivations at play in their socio-pragmatic change and the motivations behind them.

As for the intra-linguistic side, the development of the Italian system of address can be considered a truly pragmatic cycle motivated by language-internal factors that starts with a two-term system, moves through a three-term situation, and returns to a two-term system. In relation to the extra-linguistic side, socio-cultural factors and contact with other linguistic systems, especially those found in neighbouring languages like Spanish, seem to have played a relevant role in the patterns of development of the Italian system of address.

This contribution describes how the system of address has moved through this transition within the standard language, and also how different varieties engage with this development. The article also discusses the characteristics of different mechanisms of deferential address (2.PL *vs* 3.SG, lack of gender agreement) and their relationship with the socio-cultural changes that Italian society has experienced, the interplay among diatopically and diaphasically characterized varieties of Italian, and their socio-cultural systems. The analysis is based on diachronically comparable corpora of comedies and letters dating from regular intervals of time (approximately every 200 years).

2. THE SYSTEM OF ADDRESS IN PRESENT-DAY ITALIAN

Forms of address are pragmatic in nature because they depend on the system of rules that governs the behavior of interlocutors in the use of both verbal and non-verbal means in their relationships. It is a linguistically defined domain that is located at the periphery of grammar.

The Italian system of address includes nominal and pronominal forms of address. Nominal forms include a wide range of nouns. Typical examples are proper names (*Pietro, Silvia*), kinship terms (*mamma, nonna*), titles (*Signore, Signor Presidente, Sua Eccellenza*), military ranks (*Sergente*), and occupational terms (*Professore, Ingegnere*)⁴.

As is shown below (§ 4.), the inventory and the use of such terms, together with corresponding politeness strategies, have changed considerably in the course of time. For instance, kinship terms are restricted to just a few, such as *mamma* and *papà*. Along similar lines, 18th century Italian had a wider range of titles and occupational terms; for instance the form *Vostra Signoria* was the unmarked address form at the time but has almost completely disappeared today. Traces of this situation can be found, however, in the use of such terms in different regional Italian varieties, which in some cases have maintained the 18th century ritualized form of address. Examples include *Vossia*, used in the variety of Italian spoken in Sicily (Renzi 1996, 208); *Signoría*, used in Salento (Sobrero 1992, 164); and dialectal forms such as *Vussignurìa* (in Calabria), *Ssignurì* (in Abruzzo), *Segnerì* (in Bari), and *Vuscià* (in Liguria) (see Rohlf's 1968).

Pronominal forms are personal pronouns used to address the interlocutor, to interact with him/her, or to get his/her attention. As is well known, the dependence of pronouns on the context of communication qualifies them as deictic elements, namely forms that find their referent in the context of communication (i.e. the interlocutor). Forms of address constitute the system of social deixis, which is a particular type of personal deixis.

The system of pronominal personal deixis in Present-Day Italian includes such canonical forms as subject pronouns and such related forms as free oblique forms, clitics, possessives, verbal agreement, and gender agreement. Typically, deictic pronouns (D) are used by the speaker to refer to him/herself (*io*), to his/her interlocutor (*tu*) or interlocutors (*voi*), or to include him/herself and other interlocutors (*noi*).

In addition, anaphoric pronouns (A) are used to refer to a third party, someone other than the speaker or the interlocutor, who may or may not be present in the context of interaction. In such cases *lui* or *lei*, depending on the gender of the third party, is used to refer to one person, while *loro* is used to refer to more than one person. The system of personal deixis, as described by Renzi (2002, 272; 1993, 349-350) and Molinelli (2010), is summarised in *Table 1*.

⁴ See also Taavitsainen - Jucker 2003.

Table 1. – Personal deixis in Present-Day Italian.

	SUBJECT PRONOUNS	FREE OBLIQUE FORMS	CLITICS	POSSESSIVES	VERBAL AGREEMENT
Speaker (D) – 1.SG.	<i>io</i>	<i>me</i>	<i>mi</i>	<i>mio, mia, miei, mie</i>	e.g. <i>vado</i>
Interlocutor (D) – 2.SG	<i>tu</i>	<i>te</i>	<i>ti</i>	<i>tuo, tua, tuoi, tue</i>	e.g. <i>vai</i>
Speaker + others (D) – 1.PL	<i>noi</i>	<i>noi</i>	<i>ci</i>	<i>nostro, nostra, nostri, nostre</i>	e.g. <i>andiamo</i>
Interlocutors (D) – 2.PL	<i>voi</i>	<i>voi</i>	<i>vi</i>	<i>vostro, vostra, vostri, vostre</i>	e.g. <i>andate</i>
Person different from speaker or hearer (A) – 3.SG	<i>lui/lei</i>	<i>lui/lei</i>	<i>lo/la</i>	<i>suo, sua, suoi, sue</i>	e.g. <i>va</i>
People different from speaker or hearer (A) – 3PL	<i>loro</i>	<i>loro</i>	<i>li/le</i>	<i>loro</i>	e.g. <i>vanno</i>

In different situations, speakers can use non-canonical forms of personal deixis. Such alternative forms enrich the framework and are used by speakers to modulate and shape the representations of their own identity, and also to shape the identity of their interlocutors in relation to a defined social context (Renzi 1993, 350).

These are deferential forms of address which are ritualized and codified in the system of social deixis. Like personal deixis, social deixis depends on the context of the interaction but is also bound to social norms in use (Molinelli 2010 and 2002; Scaglia 2003; Renzi 1995).

In Present-Day standard Italian, the unmarked deferential form implies the use of the anaphoric third person singular feminine pronoun (*Lei*), and related forms, to refer to the interlocutor (be it feminine or masculine)⁵. Other deferential forms include the use of first person plural

⁵ The unmarked form in standard Present-Day Italian is highlighted in grey in the table. The form *Ella* can be used in some varieties and is felt as strongly marked and perceived by the speaker as high, formal, and obsolete. However, it is not included in the system of Present-Day Italian because the pair *egli/ella* in speech has been systematically replaced by the pair *lui/lei* (Sobrero 1999, 414). See also Cuzzolin 2002, 70.

(*noi*) in place of first person singular pronoun to refer to the speaker, and of third person plural (*Loro*) instead of second person plural pronoun to refer to more than one interlocutor. The system of social deixis in Present-Day Italian is summarised in *Table 2*.

Table 2. – Deferential pronouns in Present-Day Italian (Renzi 2002, 1995 and 1993).

	MECHANISM	SUBJECT PRONOUNS	FREE OBLIQUE FORMS	CLITICS	POSSESSIVES	VERBAL AGREEMENT
Speaker	1SG > 1PL	<i>Noi</i>	<i>Noi</i>	<i>Ci</i>	<i>Nostro</i> <i>Nostra</i> <i>Nostri</i> <i>Nostre</i>	<i>andiamo</i>
Interlocutor	2SG > 3SG.F	<i>Lei</i>	<i>Lei</i>	<i>Le</i>	<i>Suo</i> <i>Sua</i> <i>Suoi</i> <i>Sue</i>	<i>va</i>
Interlocutor	2SG > 2PL	<i>Voi</i>	<i>Voi</i>	<i>Vi</i>	<i>Vostro</i> <i>Vostra</i> <i>Vostri</i> <i>Vostre</i>	<i>andate</i>
Interlocutors	2PL > 3PL	<i>Loro</i>	<i>Loro</i>	<i>Li/Le</i>	<i>Loro</i>	<i>vanno</i>

The grey box in the Table indicates that in some regional Italian varieties, especially in some areas in Central and Southern Italy, the unmarked standard *Lei* still coexists with relics of *Voi* used as deferential form.

In areas where *Voi* is still used alongside *Lei*, *Voi* is perceived as the less deferential of the two (Renzi 1995). In other areas in Central (Marche, Umbria, Abruzzo) and Southern Italy (especially Campania, Calabria, and Salento), local dialects do not have a deferential form, which implies a more marginal use of *Lei*.

As for diaphasically determined variation, it is interesting to note how the use of *Lei* as deferential form brings about a number of fluctuations in the use of gender agreement. Cuzzolin (2002) notes an interesting trend in spoken Northern Italian in the use of third person anaphoric pronouns.

- (1) *Cavalli è un artista delizioso che dipinge le stoffe al computer. Le piaccio con giacca, camicetta bianca foularino nero. È lui che pensa ai costumi di Sanremo e del mio tour* (Cuzzolin 2002, 74)

«Cavalli is a wonderful artist who paints fabrics through computers. He likes me with jacket, white blouse, black scarf. He is in charge of costumes for Sanremo and for my tour»

In (1) the unmarked oblique form is *gli*, the antecedent being masculine (i.e. the designer Roberto Cavalli); Cuzzolin (2002) explains *le* instead of *gli* as showing that the speaker perceives the context as formal.

Along similar lines, such fluctuations also appear in relation to verbal gender agreement in the case of masculine interlocutors who could be addressed with either feminine or masculine verbal agreement (e.g. *Ingegnere, è già tornato/la dal Suo viaggio?*), but in fact the most frequent agreement is based on natural gender.

In Present-Day Italian, the choice of the pronoun of address and related forms in the interaction is determined on the basis of parameters of social and affective distance (see Brown - Gilman 1960; Renzi 2002; Molinelli 2010 and 2002).

Social distance implies some kind of asymmetrical, non-reciprocal relationship (based for instance on age, role in society, etc.). In such contexts, the interlocutors have different, asymmetrical degrees of power in the interaction. Non-reciprocal power semantics only prescribes usage between superior and inferior and calls for social structures in which there are unique power rankings for each individual. Affective distance is characteristic of symmetrical and reciprocal relations. It is a means of differentiating address among power equals (e.g. by frequency of contacts), expressing degree of intimacy rather than respect or formality.

On the basis of the two parameters, it is possible to summarise different uses of pronouns of address that refer to an interlocutor in Present-Day Italian (*Fig. 2*).

+ Social distance -	<i>(tu)/Lei</i>	<i>voi</i>	<i>Lei</i>
	<i>tu</i>	<i>tu</i>	<i>tu/Lei</i>
	- Affective distance +		

Figure 2. – Pronominal forms of address in Present-Day Italian.

As *Figure 2* shows, speakers with intimate and symmetrical relations (two friends, two colleagues) will use *tu*, while speakers with symmetrical but distant relations will use either *tu* (e.g. a teenager asking directions in the street from another teenager) or *Lei* (e.g. older speakers in the streets asking directions).

In asymmetrical relations, forms are typically non-reciprocal (*tu* will be used by higher status members, who in turn will receive *Lei*). However, especially when affective distance is also high, reciprocal *Lei* forms may be used. It is interesting to note that in varieties of Italian where *voi* is still used, coexisting with *Lei*, it tends to characterize non-reciprocal relations and to be an intermediate form between *Lei* and *tu*, in terms of affective distance.

It should also be noted that in Present-Day Italian, which in recent years has undergone a striking loss of formality in relationships between people, the use of *tu* has also been generalized among speakers in asymmetrical relations, such as doctor-patient. The same is also true in cases of symmetrical but affectively distant relationships, such as encounters among educated adults meeting for the first time.

One final consideration relates to the use of the third person plural pronoun *Loro* as a deferential form. Although *Figure 2* records the use of pronouns of address referring to one person, it is important to mention that *Loro* addressing interlocutors is still attested in formal contexts, although its domains of use have become rare and speakers tend to perceive it as an old-fashioned variant, and it is generally replaced by *Voi*⁶.

3. CORPUS

The nature and peculiarities of the focus of this research, the system of address and its development in the diachrony of Italian, do not lend themselves to quantitative analysis, but rather require a qualitative investigation of written works.

In particular, the analysis of the role played by sociolinguistic dynamics within the diatopic and diaphasic planes requires the selection of different textual genres, each characterized by its own qualities and each differentiated on a historical and diatopic basis.

⁶ In some contexts it is also used ironically to mock somebody speaking in an old-fashioned way (Serianni 2006, 226). For an analysis of the contexts of use of *Loro* see Molinelli 2010.

A number of different sub-corpora have been built accordingly. Each sub-corpus gathers a selection of private letters and a selection of plays, each characterized diatopically, gathered at regular intervals (of approximately 200 years). The former represents a direct written interaction between a writer and an addressee, where socio-pragmatic matters are of the highest relevance. The latter consists of comedies chosen to be representative of spoken language, specifically of interactions between speakers of different social classes and in different relationships. Presumably socio-linguistic dynamics are extremely well represented in them.

Corpora have been gathered from the earliest available written records, starting from 13th-14th century Italian. But because there are no plays from that period, fictional writing has been used instead, as it often contains instances of reported speech.

The different corpora analysed are enumerated in *Table 3*.

Table 3. – Corpora.

CENTURY	TEXTS	SOURCE
1200-1300	Letters, Boccaccio's <i>Decameron</i> and <i>Novellino</i>	<i>Corpus OVI</i> http://gattoweb.ovi.cnr.it/
1500	Letters, Comedies (Pietro Aretino's <i>La cortigiana</i> , Ruzante <i>La venixiana</i> , Giordano Bruno's <i>Il candelaio</i>)	<i>Corpus LIZ</i>
1700	Letters, Comedies (Carlo Goldoni's <i>La famiglia dell'antiquario</i> , <i>L'uomo di mondo</i>)	<i>Corpus LIZ</i>
1900	Letters, Comedies (Carlo Giacosa <i>Come le foglie</i> , Di Piramo <i>Pensione Marechiaro</i>)	<i>Corpus LIZ</i> Online texts

4. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ITALIAN SYSTEM OF ADDRESS

As mentioned in § 1., the Italian pronominal system of address in the Middle Ages is a two-form system, where *tu* and deferential *Voi* coexist. However, this situation was not inherited from Latin, as Classical Latin does not have a deference pronoun form.

The origin of deferential second person plural reference is a debated issue in the literature on Late Latin. Although in Late Latin deferential *Vos* is attested, according to some scholars (e.g. Niculescu 1974, 12), it would not have continued into the daughter languages; more probably, the *tu/Voi* system would have been re-created in the Romance languages. Other scholars (e.g. Migliorini 1957, 187), on the other hand, assert that the domain of use of Lat. *Vos*, which originally referred to the emperors⁷, would have progressively expanded into the papal curia and would then have been used to address anyone of higher rank.

According to Haverling (1995), the reasons for the development of a deferential address form are to be sought in epistolographic conventions in which «illogical» uses of first plural *nos* reference instead of first singular reference *ego* are attested. This is for instance the case in some correspondence of Pope Leo I when writing to Bishop Flavianus, as in (2).

- (2) *Cum christinissimus et clementissimus imperator sancta et laudabili fide pro Ecclesiae catholicae pace collicitus ad nos scripta transmiserit ...* (Leo, *Epist.* 23, 1, in Haverling 1995, 344)

«Seeing that our most Christian and merciful Emperor, in his holy and praiseworthy faith and anxiety for the peace of the Catholic Church, has sent us a letter [...].»

These conventions would also have triggered the use of «illogical» second plural reference in place of a second singular reference. However, such forms were not used to express deference, which is «something that the Roman world never knew» (Haverling 1995, 353). Rather, the use of plural instead of singular first and second person reference was highly dependent on textual genre and conventions. Especially in letters, it was rather common for one author to alternately use the singular and the plural to address the same person. See (3), reported in Haverling (1995, 350), in which Symmachus oscillates between the singular and the plural when he criticizes Nicomachus' behavior.

⁷ The Roman empire had one emperor during its first centuries, but during the fourth-fifth centuries, two emperors ruled simultaneously.

- (3) *Dura commotio est, quam gignit iniuria, sed mollire debet dolorem medicina patientiae. Nec deest uobis usus aduersas tolerandi, nam crebro ictum fortunae ferre didicistis. Quod si in secundis rebus ageritis, iure insolitis malis felicitas laederetur. Hec eo scribo, ut miratum me scias, quod constantiam tuam lis priuata mutauerit* (Symm. Epist. 6, 22, 1)

«The agitation that an offence produces is vigorous, but the medicine of patience must soften this pain. And you don't lack practice in sustaining misfortunes, indeed you have repeatedly learnt to bear the attack of Fate. And if you do this [behave this way] in propitious situations, happiness will be damaged with justice by unused calamities. I write this so that thou knowest that I am astonished, since a private dispute has altered thy perseverance»

Only beginning in the 5th century AD is the use of second plural reference a means of expressing courtesy. This is because, starting in the 3rd century, social reorganization established rigid social classes and barriers. From the 4th century on, these barriers were expressed by a growing and increasingly formalized use of titles of address (e.g. *excellentia tua*, *mansuetudo tua*), which were the means of expressing this social distinction beginning in the late 4th century. According to Norberg, it was during these centuries that the habit of addressing an important person with a title corresponding to his/her rank was established; in particular one would address the Emperor with *vestra maiestas*, *vestra gloria*, *vestra pietas*; and other important people, depending on their rank, with *vestra excellentia*, *eminentia*, *magnificentia*, *spectabilitas*; and ecclesiastical dignitaries with *beatitudo* and *sanctitas* (Norberg 1968, 14).

In (4) it is evident that the use of titles requires third person singular verbal agreement and anaphoric reference with *suus*, coexisting with the second plural deferential reference.

- (4) *Ex qua re hortor ut uestra excellentia suis moribus congrua disponat et, quaeque ad pacem pertinent, studiose peragat ...* (Gregorius Magnus, *Registrum epistularum* [CPL 1714] SL 140A, 9, 229, 148)

«Therefore, I urge your Excellency to prepare suitable things according to his customs and to complete with diligence what relates to peace [...].»

Only in the 5th-6th century do *nos* and *vos* appear to be employed as deferential forms in the letters produced by imperial chanceries and by high-ranking imperial and ecclesiastical officials.

4.1. 13th- and 14th-century system of address: «tu» and «Voi»

The system of address in 13th- and 14th-century Italian is characterized by a two-term system where *tu* is the unmarked pronoun of address and *Voi* is used as a deferential form (see also Renzi 2002 and 2010). It is relevant to note that for these centuries, most of the available texts are written in Tuscan varieties.

In these varieties the second person singular pronoun *tu* is used in ideal communication (e.g. man-God), and in symmetrical and low-affective-distance relations, irrespective of the social status of the interlocutors. This is the case in (5), where the noble friends who are the storytellers in Boccaccio's *Decameron* address each other with *tu*, and in (6), where Consiglio de' Cerchi writes to his friend Giacchetto Rinucci in England.

- (5) *Pampinea per Dio, guarda ciò che tu dichì* (Boccaccio, *Decameron*, I, Introduction)
 «For God's sake, Pampinea, have a care what you say»
- (6) *E tu Giacchetto dimarrai in Inghilterra [...]* (*Lettere di messer Consiglio de' Cerchi*, 603, *Corpus OVI*)
 «And you, Giacchetto, will remain in England [...].»

Tu is also used in high-affective-distance symmetrical relations, as between members of the lower and middle classes. In (7), Andreuccio, a man from Perugia, rings the bell of Madonna Fiammetta in Naples, and one of her servants addresses him with *tu*.

- (7) «Chi picchia là giù?» «Oh!» disse Andreuccio «o non mi **conosci tu?** Io sono Andreuccio, fratello di madama Fiordaliso.» Al quale ella rispose: «Buono uomo, se **tu hai** troppo bevuto, **va' dormi e tornerai** domattina [...].» (Boccaccio, *Decameron*, II, 5)
 «'Who knocks below there?' 'Oh!' said Andreuccio, 'dost not know me? I am Andreuccio, Madam Fiordaliso's brother.' 'Good man,' she rejoined, 'if thou hast had too much to drink, go, sleep it off, and come back to-morrow' [...].»

The same pronoun is also used in asymmetrical high-social-distance relations, where *tu* is used by higher-status members to address lower-status members. In (8), Sir Ciappelletto addresses the friar with *Voi*, but is answered with *tu*.

- (8) *Disse [...] lo frate: **Figliuol mio**, bene **hai** fatto, e così si vuol fare per innanzi; e veggio che, poi si spesso **ti** confessi, poca fatica avrò d'udire o di domandare.*

Disse ser Ciappelletto: -Messer lo frate, non dite così [...] (Boccaccio, Decameron, I, 1)

«'Son,' said the friar, 'thou hast done well, and well for thee, if so thou continue to do; as thou dost confess so often, I see that my labour of hearkening and questioning will be slight.' 'Nay but, master friar,' said Ser Ciappelletto, 'say not so [...]»

However, the deferential address not only characterizes asymmetrical relations with high affective distance; it is also common in asymmetrical relations with low affective distance, as in the case of father and son in (9).

(9) *A voi ser Guido padre mio sine peccato io Guiduccio vi mando salutem cum desiderio revidendi (1253, Lettera sangimignanesi di Guiduccio al padre, Corpus OVI)*

«To you sir Guido, my father, without guilt, I Guiduccio send my regards with the desire to see you»

The use of deferential *Voi* also characterizes symmetrical relations, as in courtly literature where all nobles, without exception, address each other with *Voi*. The use is exemplified in (10), where Messer Gentile is addressed with *Voi*.

(10) *Ma sopravvenendo messer Gentile, disse alcun de' suoi forestieri: «Messere, bella cosa è questa vostra, ma ella ne par mutola: è ella così?» (Boccaccio, Decameron, X, 4)*

«Then, Messer Gentile coming up: 'Sir,' quoth one of the guests, 'this treasure of yours is goodly indeed; but she seems to be dumb: is she so?»

As for nominal address terms, it is relevant to note that the use of titles is widespread in the 13th and 14th centuries. Titles are used with solemnity to address people with power. The importance of using the title appropriate to the addressee in letters is discussed explicitly in contemporaneous manuals of style.

Typically, titles appear in an NP with a feminine abstract head, as in (11), where *signoria* is used together with the deferential second person plural *vostra*, but with third person singular agreement in the verb *potrà*.

(11) *Segundo che la v(ostra) signoria vedere potrà p(e)r publico i(n)strum(en)to (Guido Faba, Parlamenta, Corpus OVI)*

«On the basis of what your lordship will see in public documents»

Typically these titles refer to a quality (Majesty, Excellency, Lordship, ...). Yet, the contexts in which these virtues are used are «critical»⁸, since it is

⁸ The term «critical» is used here in the sense of Diewald 2002.

often impossible to decide whether they express a virtue attributed to the addressee or whether they represent the interlocutor him/herself as the embodiment of that virtue. In such contexts, *Vostra Signoria* is meant literally to refer to a *Lord*.

On a formal level, such titles often co-occur, as in (12), with second person plural reference in ritualized expressions like *Your Majesty*, *Your Excellency*, *Your Lordship*, *Your Holiness* (the Pope), *Your Paternity*, and *Your Highness*. It is relevant to note that these NPs all have as their head an abstract noun; abstract nouns are always feminine in Italian. In these centuries it is possible to find oscillations of verbal agreement in sentences containing nominal address.

Specifically, Migliorini (1957, 189) notes that in the 13th century the most frequent address sequence is the deferential nominal address (i.e. *Vostra Signoria*), followed by verbs and pronouns in the second person plural.

- (12) [...] *p(re)ghiamo la vostra signoria che (con)tra noi no(n) aoperiate ve(n) decta ma humilità, (et) cleme(n)tia, (et) (pi)età* (Trattati di Albertano volg., a. 1287-88 (pis.) Liber cons., cap. 50 5018.59)

«[...] we pray Your Lordship that you not exact any revenge on us but humility, mercy, and piety»

In the 14th century, by contrast, the more common address sequence employs reference to the abstract formula and uses third person singular feminine pronouns and third person verb agreement accordingly (as *Vostra Signoria potrà* in 11). The verbal agreement is not with *Voi*, although it appears in the preceding and following sentences, but with the nominal address.

Considering the examples discussed above, it is possible to summarise the system of address in use during the 13th and 14th centuries as in *Figure 3*.

+ Social distance -	<i>Voi/(tu)</i>	<i>(V.S.)/Voi</i>
	<i>Tu</i>	<i>(Voi)/tu</i>
	- Affective distance +	

Figure 3. – System of address in 13th- and 14th-century Italian.

As a general rule, *Voi* and concomitant forms are used as deferential address forms in asymmetrical exchanges with high affective distance by lower-status members to address higher-status interlocutors. In such contexts, nominal address terms can also be used. Persons equal in power in symmetrical interactions, depending on their status, can alternatively use *Voi* (e.g. in courtly literature). *Tu* is typical of intimate symmetrical relations, while *Voi* is used in asymmetrical but intimate relations, such as son to father. In such contexts *tu* is also attested, but it is less frequent.

In such a system the predominant parameters are social status, class, and, more generally, power relations: therefore the use of *tu* is typical in common people, while *Voi* is more common among nobles.

4.2. 16th-century system of address: «*tu*», «*Voi*», and «*V.S.*»

In the 16th century, the study of any linguistic phenomenon must take into account the importance of the debate on the *Questione della lingua*⁹. Therefore, we have decided to analyze the system of address in a Tuscan sample, then compare the results with comedies representing Southern varieties. Pietro Aretino's comedy *La Cortigiana* is characterized by the use of *tu* and *Voi* as pronouns of address. The use of *tu* implies both low affective distance and symmetrical relations, especially among members of the lower class who are well acquainted with each other, as in (13), where Cappa and Rosso, two servants working together, address each other with *tu*.

- (13) CAPPÀ *Tu sei molto alegro, Rosso; tu vai ridendo da te stesso.* «You are very happy, Rosso. Why are you smiling to yourself?»
ROSSO *Io mi rido d'una giuntaria ch'è stata fatta [...], e te la conterò più per agio.* «I am smiling because of a scam I carried out [...], and I'll tell you about it calmly» (Aretino, *La Cortigiana*, I, 20)

Along similar lines, *tu* is also used in asymmetrical interactions by people with higher status to address those of lower status. In (14), a sacristan addresses a fisherman with *tu*.

- (14) SAGRESTANO *Tu non odi, an?* «Can't you hear? Can you?»
PESCATORE *Eccomi servitore de la Signoria Vostra, infatti.* «Here I am servant of Your Lordship»

⁹ The comedy *La Cortigiana* dates to 1525. In around the same years were also published *Le prose della Volgar Lingua* by Bembo, which have played a relevant role in the discussion on the Italian *Questione della lingua* (see Marazzini 2004).

SAGRESTANO *Come è il suo nome?* «What is its name?»

PESCATORE *No 'l sapete voi? Lamprede.* «Don't you know? Lamprede»
(Aretino, *La Cortigiana*, I, 19)

The domain of use of *Voi* is expanding, by comparison with the 13th and 14th centuries. *Voi* is the unmarked deferential pronoun of address used in verbal exchanges to show respect between interlocutors in both asymmetrical and symmetrical interactions. As it is evident from (14), the second plural form is used by lower-status speakers when addressing higher-status speakers, who include members of the middle class and clergy.

However, the same form is also used in symmetrical interactions characterized by high affective distance by speakers of all classes, including the lower classes. This use is well exemplified in (15), where an old domestic addresses a baker's wife with *Voi*.

- (15) *E voi, moglie di messer Ercolano, entrate con Aloigia* (Aretino, *La Cortigiana*, V, 22)
«You, wife of sir Ercolano, enter with Aloigia»

As seen in (14), it is relevant to note that in comedy the use of titles, especially *Signoria* «Lordship/Ladyship», is rather frequent. Variants include *Signoria Vostra* (more frequent) «Your L.», as well as *Vostra Signoria* and *Sua Signoria* «His/Her L.». All titles are used in asymmetrical interactions where lower-status people address higher-status people. In such contexts, relationships are characterized by high affective distance.

All titles are noun phrases with an abstract feminine noun as head (e.g. *Signoria*). Their use therefore implies pronouns and related forms within the same sentence in the third person feminine. This is exemplified in (16), where the fisherman addresses Rosso, who wants to buy his fish, with *Vostra Signoria* and then continues with the clitic second plural pronoun *Vi*, but within the same sentence uses the verb *pensi* in the third person singular.

- (16) ROSSO *Ben, da qui inanzi tieni a mia stanza tutte quelle che tu pigli, e io son per servirmi da te, ch'hai cera de bon compagno.* «After this, before all these others, I want you to give me first choice. You seem a good fellow»
PESCATORE *Signor, Vostra Signoria, non pensi, ch'in fatti, tant'è... Io vi son servitore!* «I am your Lordship's slave, in fact, not thought» (Aretino, *La Cortigiana*, I, 16)

Nominal terms of address can co-occur with second person plural pronouns (*Voi*) as well as with third person singular pronouns (*Lei, Ella*),

and verbal forms correspond. This is particularly evident in letters, where writers show a certain degree of variation in their use of types of address depending on the addressee and on the type of relationship.

Examples (17) and (18) are cases in point. Both letters were written by Torquato Tasso. In the first, addressed to an intimate family friend, the author switches from the usual second person plural forms of address (*Voi* and *avete*) to *Vostra Signoria* and third person singular agreement, when asking his friend for a favour. In (18) the same author writes to Doctor Verini, who had commissioned a sonnet from him; and throughout the text the poet uses third person singular address.

- (17) *Del mio venire a Ferrara non sono tanto risoluto quanto vorrei, perchè voi non avete voluto ch'io n'abbia maggior certezza. De' cinque ducati ho bisogno; però scrivo di nuovo a fra Iacomo, e prego Vostra Signoria che gli dia la lettera* (Tasso, *A Luca Scalabrino*, G885)

«I am not so sure of my coming to Ferrara as I would like to be, because you did not want me to have more certainty [about it]. I need five ducats; but I am writing again to Friar Giacomo, and I pray Your Lordship to give him the letter»

- (18) *Mando a Vostra Signoria il sonetto sopra il nome di Pandolfina, ch'ella m'ha chiesto. [...] se le piacerà di rimandarmene copia, risponderò volentieri* (Tasso, *Al dottor Verini*, G186)

«I send to Your Lordship the sonnet on Pandolfina that you have asked of me. [...]. If you will be pleased to send me back a copy, I will answer gladly»

It is possible to hypothesize that third person address, typically co-occurring with titles, is used in asymmetrical interactions with high affective distance, as is presumably the case in (18).

Several scholars¹⁰ have stressed that the spread of this use can be traced back to the influence of Spanish culture. At the time, Spanish dominion characterized some territories in the South (Naples, Kingdom of the Two Sicilies), and part of the North (Lombardy). Migliorini (1957) notes that in this century, the use of titles explodes. Their semantic field expanded, and such forms as *Vostra Reverenza* «Your Reverence», *Vostra Mansuetudine* «Your Mildness», *Vostra Padronità* «Your Mastership», *Vostra Magnanimità* «Your Magnanimity», and *Vostra prestanza* «Your Prowess» are attested. *Vostra Signoria* «Your Lordship» is the most frequent and unmarked title referring to people of quality or power (regardless of their social status).

¹⁰ See Migliorini 1957; Brunet 1987, chap. 9.

Diatopic variation in this case gives interesting insights. The use of the pronouns *tu*, *Voi*, and of the most common title *Vostra Signoria* and variants, in a comedy written in a Southern variety, where Spanish dominion had settled in almost a century before, namely, Bruno's *Il candelaio*, which is set in Naples, have been analysed.

From the data in *Table 4*, it can be seen that the use of titles is similar in both varieties. What is striking, however, is the higher frequency of *Voi* in the Southern variety than all other forms of address.

Table 4. – Use of address pronouns «tu», «Voi» and the nominal address «Vostra Signoria».

	<i>Tu</i>	<i>Voi</i>	<i>V.S.</i>
Aretino's <i>La Cortigiana</i>	19 ¹¹	17	5
Bruno's <i>Il candelaio</i>	10	37	5

The authors of the time denounced the fashion for ceremony and flattery. The use of titles is one of the aspects of these salaams which is present in both Central and Southern varieties (*La signora vi bascia le mani e' piedi: La cortigiana*, Act II, Scene 18; *Lievati su e non usare tante spagnolerie e gagliofferie: La cortigiana*, Act III, Scene 3).

The examples discussed above make it possible to summarise the system of address in use during the 16th century as in *Figure 4*.

+ Social distance -	<i>V.S./Voi</i>	<i>V.S./Voi</i>
	<i>Voi</i>	<i>V.S./Voi</i>
	<i>Tu</i>	<i>(voi)/tu</i>
	- Affective distance +	

Figure 4. – System of address in 16th-century Italian.

¹¹ Frequencies are normalised per 10,000 words.

As a general rule, *Voi* and concomitant forms are used as deferential forms of address in asymmetrical exchanges with high affective distance by lower-status people addressing higher-status interlocutors; similar considerations are also true for the incipient use of *Vostra Signoria* as the unmarked form of politeness. Persons equal in power, in symmetrical interactions, depending on their status, can use *Voi* (e.g. among upper and middle classes, but also within lower classes). This happens when speakers want to show respect to their interlocutors. *Tu* is typical of intimate and symmetrical relations. We can hypothesise that the habit of using titles spread as a way of showing respect and formality to people, along the dimension of affective distance.

4.3. 18th-century system of address: «*tu*», «*Voi*», and «*V.S.*»

The 18th-century system of address shows interesting developments. The Northern variety in Goldoni's comedies *La bottega dell'antiquario* and *L'uomo di mondo* is characterized by a tripartite system¹².

The second person singular pronoun *tu* is used in asymmetrical interactions characterized by both high and low affective distances. For instance, a master addresses his servant with *tu* in (19).

- (19) BRIGHELLA *La me perdona; ma buttar via tanti bezzi in ste cose...*
«Please forgive me, but to throw away so much money in these things...»
ANSELMO *Buttar via? Buttar via? Ignorantaccio! Senti se vuoi avere la mia protezione, non mi parlar mai contro il buon gusto delle antichità.*
«Throw away? Throw away? Idiot! Listen, if you want to stay in my service, do not speak against the good taste of antiquities» (Goldoni, *La famiglia dell'antiquario*, I, 1)

Second person singular address is also used in low-affective-distance interactions (be they positive or negative) when characters express strong emotions, such as anger or affection. In (20) a father expresses affection to his daughter. Here Pantalone, a middle-class merchant, is asking his daughter Doralice, married to a nobleman, to get on well with her mother-in-law. The interaction begins with *Voi*, but in the course of the conversation, when the father shows affection to her, he switches to *tu*. In that context he also switches to Venetian dialect.

¹² Goldoni's comedies are some of the most representative texts for the 18th century. The author's comedies were intended to reform the *commedia dell'arte*, which had been in vogue until then, along with its language.

- (20) DORALICE *Signor padre, vi ringrazio dell'amorosa correzione che mi fate.* «Sir father, I thank you for the kind correction that you are offering me»
PANTALONE *Vostra madonna sarà in tutte le furie, e con rason. [...] Via, cara fia, dàmè un poco de consolazion. No gh'ho altri a sto mondo che ti. Dopo la mia morte, ti sarà parona de tutto.* «Your mother-in-law will have flown off the handle and she is right. [...] Come on, dear daughter, give me some consolation. I do not have anybody else in the world, excepting only thee. After my death thou wilt own everything» (Goldoni, *La famiglia dell'antiquario*, I, 20)

As for third person address, it is interesting to note that in Goldoni's plays its domain has broadened. In many contexts the third person singular feminine pronoun of address appears alone, without co-occurring titles, most frequently in the forms *Ella* (subject) or *Lei* (object or oblique cases). Generally the third person pronoun of address is used to express formality and deference – high affective distance – in asymmetrical interactions.

These forms can sometimes be used by servants who are not well acquainted with their masters, as in (19), where Brighella addresses his master with a third person pronoun. However, more frequently, third person feminine address is used by middle-class people when addressing higher classes, as in (21), where Pantalone, a middle-class merchant, addresses his daughter's father-in-law, a nobleman, with *ella*, the third person feminine subject pronoun, and uses masculine verbal agreement. Interestingly, he is addressed with a second plural form by the man in turn.

- (21) ANSELMO *Ridete, perché non ve n'intendete.* «You laugh because you do not know these things»
PANTALONE *Benissimo, mi son ignorante, ella xé virtuoso, e non voi catar bega su questo.* «Well then. I am ignorant and you are clever and I do not want to discuss it» (Goldoni, *La famiglia dell'antiquario*, I, 18)

Third person forms are also used to address strangers with high (or perceived high) social status. This situation is exemplified in (22), where Arlecchino, disguised as a merchant of antiquities, addresses Pantalone with third person forms.

- (22) PANTALONE *Galantomo, chi seu? Chi domandéu?* «Gentlemen, who are you? Who are you looking for?»
ARLECCHINO *Innanz che mi responda, l'am favorissa de dirme chi l'è vussioria.* «Before I answer you, please tell me who Your Lordship is»
PANTALONE *Son un amico del sior Conte Anselmo.* «I am a friend of Count Anselmo»

ARLECCHINO *Se dilettele de antichità?* «Are you interested in antiquities?» (Goldoni, *La famiglia dell'antiquario*, II, 12)

The domains of the second plural forms of address have also broadened. *Voi* is the unmarked form for showing respect in asymmetrical as well as symmetrical interactions. *Voi* is used by low-class people with interlocutors of higher social status (especially when they are well acquainted and there is lower affective distance). The same form is also used by upper- or middle-class people when addressing lower classes (as in 21). *Voi* is also used among equals in both higher and lower classes, as in (23) and (24) respectively. Those examples also show the agreement of the Italian language and the Venetian dialect as regards *Voi*.

(23) ISABELLA *Cavaliere, siete venuto a tempo. Ho bisogno di voi.* «Chavalier, you arrive at the right moment. I need you»

CAVALIERE *Comandate, signora. Disponete di me.* «Order, Milady. At your disposal» (Goldoni, *La famiglia dell'antiquario*, I, 14)

(24) MOMOLO *Stè anca fina doman, se volè.* «You can stay up until tomorrow if you want»

TRUFFALDINO *Sorella, ve lasso in compagnia de sto sior.* «Sister, I leave you in the company of this Sir» (Goldoni, *L'uomo di mondo*, I, 15)

It is relevant that the type of address used by characters is not predetermined by their social classes, but it is negotiated in the local context of interaction. This is an indication that considerations relating to social status were no longer paramount in the 18th century.

Example (25) illustrates this fact well. The dialogue takes place in Mr. Brighella's inn. All characters are lower- or middle-class people. Brighella addresses Silvio, one of his lodgers, with a third person feminine reference, while Silvio, according to his higher status, replies with the second person plural pronoun. At this point Silvio turns to the Doctor, another of his lodgers. The two, who have just met, begin a conversation with a third person form of address. At one point the Doctor invites his interlocutor to come and visit him. This invitation has the effect of reducing affective distance, thus determining a shift to the less formal, but respectful, *Voi*. This shift has the effect of a social accelerator.

(25) BRIGHELLA *Eccola là, quello l'è el sior Dottor che la cerca* [a Silvio]. «There you go, the man over there is sir Doctor who is looking for you»

SILVIO *Vi ringrazio; non occorre altro* [a Brighella]. «I thank you, that's enough»

SILVIO *Favorisca vedere se questa lettera viene a lei.* «Please, consider if this letter is for you»

DOTTORE [...] *Permetta ch'io veda. Ella dunque è il signor Silvio Aretusi romano?* «Can I see it? You are then Sir Silvio Aretusi, from Rome?»

SILVIO *Per obbedirla.* «At your service»

DOTTORE *E la sua signora dov'è?* «And where is your wife?»

SILVIO *Nella locanda, ove siamo alloggiati, da messer Brighella.* «In the inn where we are lodging, at Mr. Brighella's»

DOTTORE *L'amico mi raccomanda lor signori, ed io li prego venir in casa mia, ove staranno un po' meglio forse di quel che stiano nella locanda.* «My friend has recommended your Lordships, and I pray you to come to my house where you will maybe be more comfortable than in the inn»

SILVIO *Signore, io non intendo d'incomodarvi.* «Sir, I do not want to inconvenience you» (Goldoni, *L'uomo di mondo*, III, 8)

Nominal terms of address continued to be very common in 18th-century language. As seen in (22), the frequency and ritualization of titles in the preceding centuries had created frozen variants of the more frequent form *Vostra Signoria* as *Vussioria*, *Vossustrissima* (derived from *Vostra signoria illustrissima* «Your illustrious Lordship»), or *Lustrissimo* (derived from *Illustrissimo*). Along similar lines, in different varieties of Italian ritualised variants of *Vostra Signoria* appear, such as Sicilian *Vossia* or Genoese *Vuscìa*.

Analysis of the use of different pronominal and nominal forms on the basis of diatopic variation gives some interesting information. The use of the pronouns *tu*, *Voi*, and *Ella/Lei*, together with the more common title *Vostra Signoria*, has been analysed in a comedy written in the Tuscan variety, Gigli's *Il Don Pilone, ovvero il bacchettone falso*.

The data gathered in *Table 5* show that third person deferential pronouns are attested in comedies in both varieties, although their overall frequency is higher in the comedy written in Tuscan. The two variants of third person address (*Ella* and *Lei*) also show interesting variation, as *Lei* is more frequently used for the subject in the Tuscan comedy.

The use of *tu*, which is also more common in the Tuscan variety, has decreased overall since the 16th century. What emerges clearly from the data is that in both varieties, *Voi* has become the more frequent and unmarked deferential form of address. Titles, on the other hand, are more common in the Goldoni play.

On the basis of the discussion above, it is possible to summarise the 18th-century system of address used in the comedies as in *Figure 5*.

Table 5. – Use of address pronouns «*tu*», «*Voi*», «*Ella/Lei*» and of nominal address «*Vostra Signoria*».

	<i>Tu</i>	<i>Voi</i>	<i>Ella</i>	<i>Lei</i>	TOTAL	<i>V.S.</i>
Goldoni's <i>La famiglia dell'antiquario</i>	4 ¹³	34	6	1	8	9
Gigli's <i>Il Don Pilone</i>	7	43	7	6	13	3

+ Social distance –	<i>V.S./Voi</i>	<i>Ella/V.S./Voi</i>
	<i>Voi</i>	<i>V.S./Voi</i>
	<i>Tu</i>	<i>(voi)/tu</i>
	– Affective distance +	

Figure 5. – System of address in 18th century Italian.

In 18th-century Italy, deferential address towards upper social levels had already switched from the previous *Voi*, which had become too common, to the more refined *Vostra Signoria*, third person singular pronouns, and related forms. *Voi* has instead become the unmarked form of address used in both symmetrical and asymmetrical interaction to show respect, irrespective of social status. Conversely, intimate relations are given more prominence, and *tu* is also used to address members of higher classes in moments of anger or special empathy.

4.4. 20th-century system of address: «*tu*», «*Lei*», and «*Voi*»

The 20th century is characterized by rapid evolution of the system of address, considering its situations at the beginning and end of the century. The economic, political, social, and cultural transformations that char-

¹³ Frequencies are normalised per 10,000 words.

acterize the 20th century had important repercussions on the language system¹⁴. These changes are reflected in the system of address.

Tu is used in both asymmetrical and symmetrical interactions. Asymmetrical *tu* expresses social distance from higher- to lower-status people at the beginning of the century, but this use is absent at the end of the century. Symmetrical *tu* is used among family members and more generally to indicate low affective distance. This holds true for texts written throughout the century.

The two uses are exemplified in (26) and (27)-(28) respectively. In (26) Tommy, the son of a wealthy nobleman who has suffered a financial meltdown, addresses his servant Lucia with *tu*.

- (26) TOMMY *Gaspare. Dov'è Gaspare?* «Gaspar! Where is Gaspar?»
 LUCIA *È in cortile per il carico.* «He is in the yard for the load»
 TOMMY *È mezz'ora che lo chiamo. Digli che salga a finire di vestirmi.* «I have been calling him for half an hour. Tell him to come up and help me get dressed» (Giacosa, *Come le foglie*, I, 1)

Along similar lines, in (27) a husband addresses his wife with *tu*, in (28) father and son address each other with the same form, and in the letter in (29) a soldier addresses his aunt with *tu*.

- (27) GIOVANNI *Ieri mi avevi domandato ottanta lire per comprare dei colori. Ti ho supplicato di non far spese, ti ho detto che ho i danari contati!* «Yesterday you asked me for eighty lire to buy some paint. I begged you not to buy anything, as I do not have much money left» (Giacosa, *Come le foglie*, I, 7)
- (28) GIOVANNI [...] *Me ne dispiace per i tuoi knickerbockers, ma quel bel costume ne vedrà dell'altre e si dovrà avvezzare. Si parte di casa fra mezz'ora. Prego di essere puntuali.* «[...] I am so sorry for your knickerbockers, but that beautiful costume will see some other things and it will have to get used to them. We are leaving in half an hour. Please, be on time»
 TOMMY *Hai detto tutto? Lo sai che mi hai parlato come ad un nemico?* «Have you said everything? You know, you have spoken to me as if I were your enemy?» (Giacosa, *Come le foglie*, I, 7)
- (29) *Cara zia, ricevo ora la tua lettera e come pure ricevetti la cartolina nel quale sento ciò che mi dici e ne sono assai dispiacente* (Palmieri, Lodi 14 gennaio 1917)
 «Dear aunt, I have just now received your letter as I received your postcard where I read what you tell me. I am really sorry about that»

¹⁴ One of these repercussions is the stabilization of different regional varieties (see De Mauro 1963, 367-401).

The 20th century system of address is characterized by the diffusion of *Lei* as the unmarked deferential address form at the expense of *Voi*.

Voi, after its domains of use had increased in the 18th century, was in decline. At the beginning of the 20th century, the form was used between unmarried men and women to express respect in symmetrical as well as asymmetrical interactions. This is true in both letters and comedies. For the former, the written exchanges between the writer Gozzano and Amalia Guglielminetti are characterized by symmetrical *Voi* (see 30). For comedies, in (31) a painter addresses a woman he likes with *Voi*, and in (32) an old male servant is addressed with *Voi* by his mistress.

- (30) *Da molto tempo sapevo di esservi antipatico: forse prima ancora che lo sapeste Voi* (Gozzano, *Lettere d'amore*, S. Giuliano d'Albaro, 10 giugno 1907)
«I have known for a long time that you did not like me, maybe even before you knew it»
- (31) GIULIA *Ho una piccola memoria per voi. Aspettate.* «I have a present for you. Wait!»
HELMER *Il vostro ritratto! Com'è bello. Come siete bella!* «Your portrait. How beautiful! How beautiful you are!»
- (32) *Avete fatto voi il giro delle camere di servizio? Non c'è più nulla dentro?* (Giacosa, *Come le foglie*, I, 3)
«Did you check all the rooms? Nothing is left in there?»

The same uses are not attested in comedies at the end of the century, where *Voi* is only used by older characters of higher social ranks or by characters who use a Southern variety; see (33) and (34) respectively. In (33), Countess De Santis, an elderly lodger at the Pensione Marechiaro in Genoa, addresses Gennaro, the owner of the Pensione, with *Voi*, having received a third person address. In (34), the same Gennaro, who is from Naples, uses *Voi* when he resorts to his Southern variety.

- (33) GENNARO Contessa *De Santis, tra un diritto e un rovescio, per caso ricorda anche che mi deve quattro mesi di arretrati?* «Countess De Santis, between a plain and a purl, do you by chance remember that you also owe me four months' arrears?»
CONTESSA *E dagli! Sempre la solita storia! Soldi, soldi... ma non sapete pensare ad altro, voi?* «Come on! It's always the same story! Money, money... can't you think of anything else?» (De Piramo, *Pensione Marechiaro*, I, 7)
- (34) GENNARO *Era pure nervosa come voi, signò* «She was also as nervous as you, madam» (De Piramo, *Pensione Marechiaro*, I, 2)

As for third person address, its use as the unmarked deference form is spreading into domains which were characterized by *Voi* in preceding centuries. The different variants of third singular feminine pronouns (*Ella* and *Lei*), which were widespread during the 18th century, are less frequent, and the form *Lei* becomes the unmarked pronoun used as subject.

Third person feminine address is used reciprocally to show deference in asymmetrical interactions between members of different social status. This is exemplified in (35), where a seamstress uses the third person to address her client, a noblewoman, and in the letter in (36), where a soldier addresses an officer.

(35) LABLANCHE *Se la signora me lo avesse detto due o tre giorni fa...* «If madame had told me two or three days ago...»

GIULIA *Ha ragione... m'è passato di mente.* «You are right... I forgot»
(Giacosa, *Come le foglie*, 1900, I, 5)

(36) *Gentilissimo Sig. Della Rovere, non so come ringraziarla del gentile interesse che ha per me* (Cuccioli, war zone, 25 marzo 1917)

«Dear Mr. Della Rovere, I don't know how to thank you for the kind interest that you have in me»

However, the same form is also used in symmetrical interactions between strangers, as in (37).

(37) CONTESSA *Era lei l'uomo nudo?* «Was it you who was the naked man?»

PROFESSORE *Come può constatare... con chi ho il piacere di parlare?* «As you can see... with whom do I have the pleasure of speaking?»

CONTESSA *Sono la Contessa Marisa De Santis.* «I am Countess Marisa De Santis» (De Piramo, *Pensione Marechiaro*, I, 7)

As for titles, it is interesting to note that the more common title that characterizes the 18th century, *Vostra Signoria*, is attested only in a few letters (38), probably a more conservative genre in this regard. In comedies, however, the unmarked deferential terms of address become *Signore* and *Signora* (see 35, discussed above).

(38) *Illmo S. Sindaco Di Persiceto [...] Il sottoscritto [...] rivolge alla S:V: Ill'mo preghiera [...]* (Muzzi, war zone, 13 giugno 1916)

«Dear Mr. Mayor of Persiceto [...], the undersigned [...] pray your Lordship [...]

Considering the examples discussed above, it is possible to summarise the 20th-century system of address as in *Figure 6*.

+ Social distance -	<i>Lei</i>	<i>Voi</i>	<i>Lei</i>
	<i>Tu</i>	<i>Voi</i>	<i>Lei</i>
	- Affective distance +		

Figure 6. – System of address in 20th-century Italian.

The system is characterized by the diffusion of *Lei* in both symmetrical and asymmetrical interactions, where it is used to show deference and respect. *Tu* is used in symmetrical interactions to express low affective distance. *Voi* remains the unmarked deferential pronoun in some regional varieties, especially in the South.

As for third person address, it is relevant to note that during the 20th century people had different opinions on its use. Some considered it the proper form of address among civil, well-educated people, who are not exceptionally servile or given to flattery. Some, on the other hand, consider it to be the effect of the negative influence of the Spanish language. It worth mentioning that especially during the Fascist regime, authoritarian measures were taken in this regard, but they had no permanent effect.

On January 15, 1938, Bruno Cicognani wrote in *Corriere della Sera* an article denouncing what he called «a grammatical and syntactic aberration» (i.e. *Lei*), which he considered to be the result of exceedingly courtly Spanish manners during the 16th century – of affectation of morals, feelings, ideas, and words. He therefore suggested returning to the Roman system of address and therefore to *Voi* as a sign of respect and recognition of hierarchy.

Many Fascist papers took up the arguments orchestrated by Cicognani, and soon circulars forbade the use of third person address, first among members of the party, then in the Fascist Youth, and gradually among State employees, the military, educational institutions, etc. The ban had been widely defied anyway – militantly by some, but also by the majority – because it is not possible to alter by simple decree a centuries-old practice¹⁵.

¹⁵ For a detailed analysis of the situation during the Fascist regime, see Raffaelli 1993.

5. CONCLUSIONS: LINGUISTIC FACTORS AND SOCIOLINGUISTIC DYNAMICS

The Italian system of address has lexical and morphological devices that express deference towards the interlocutor (linguistic > social behavior). This system has grammatical reflexes. Being deeply rooted in social deixis and social fashion, it is characterized by rapid changes (Renzi 1996, 259).

The diachronic evolution of the Italian system of deference implies the use of two different mechanisms:

- 2p-as-2s-deferential (*Voi*): speakers refer to an individual as if on the basis of his/her merits, prestige, or authority he/she «had the worth of two» (Serianni 2006, 224);
- 3s-as-2s-deferential (*Lei*): speakers refer abstractly to the «lordship» or «highness» of the other, as if it were too daring to address him/her directly (Serianni 2006, 224).

This evolution is cyclic on both a morphological and a pragmatic level. Deference has its basic mechanisms in titles on the lexical level, and in pluralization on the morphological level. In Latin, titles are the unmarked strategy, while pluralisation arises first from first person plural reference with a sociative meaning. Only later does the deference value develop and become the first, basic mechanism for deference in Old Italian, and more generally in Romance languages.

Between the 13th and 16th centuries, in the Italian system of address, honorifics had a relevant role and triggered anaphoric abstract reference to a third person (*Vostra Signoria* and third person related forms). These alternatives are then morphologised as third singular pronouns (*Ella* and *Lei*). For some centuries, Italian had a three-term system of address where two deferential forms coexisted (*Voi* and *Ella/Lei*)¹⁶.

In the 20th century, the system of address was reduced: in standard Italian the unmarked deferential form is *Lei*, while in some regions *Voi* survives both in regional Italian and in dialects.

In order to understand the linguistic development, the role of external factors motivating pragmatic choices has to be considered. The parameters of social distance and affective distance are relevant throughout the centuries, but to different degrees (social distance in the 13th century and affective distance in the 18th century).

When *Voi* extends its domains of use, it becomes so commonplace that it ceases to accomplish a deferential function ([+ respect], [- social

¹⁶ This system is well represented in Manzoni's *Promessi Sposi* (see Kolková 2006), but the 19th century was not represented in the time frames chosen for this study.

distance]); it marks affective distance, but no longer social distance, which becomes served by *Lei*.

In the pragmatic development of *Lei*, a third person anaphoric pronoun, several factors play a role:

- contact with Spanish culture, where codes of behavior in society associated with ceremony, and therefore with the use of titles, were paramount, especially in the 16th century;
- the use of nominal address forms (*Vostra Signoria* and variants) was particularly frequent in two time periods, Late Latin from the 3rd century AD on, and 18th-century Italian;
- once a title is used to address somebody, the successive references are anaphoric forms.

These new codes, rich in formulas, also influence regional varieties and dialects, where routinised variants of the more common form (*Vostra Signoria*) appear as a result of coalescence:

- *Ussurìa* (Lucania Merid., Rohlfs 1968, 182);
- *Vustrissima* (Siena, Niculescu 1974, 51);
- *Voscenza* and *Vossia* (Sicilia, Renzi 1996, 268);
- *Vuscià* (Genova).

(39) *Del resto, sapete, quando suona la generale nelle batterie, non si sente più né scia né vossia, e le carabine le fanno parlar tutti allo stesso modo* (Verga, *I Malavoglia*, cap. 9)

«Besides, you know, when the charge sounds in the artilleries, you no longer hear *scia* or *vossia*, and rifles make them all speak the same way»

Among these, *vossia*, due to frequent use and subsequent routinization, in Sicilian Italian becomes the unmarked address pronoun (similarly to what has happened in Spanish *vuestra merced* > *usted*).

In conclusion, the «social trend of ceremony» extended in Italy well beyond the Spanish cultural model, with independent development of the system of address, where the third person reference pronoun became the unmarked deferential form, while Spanish language maintains the second plural (*Usted*).

In Labovian terms, the change was from above, reaching from higher registers to lower ones (different regional varieties and local dialects). Resistance existed up to the first half of the 20th century, as a rejection of the influence of foreign models, but by the end of the 20th century, the cycle was closed.

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