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Cyclic Change in Grammar and Discourse

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Cyclic Change in Grammar and Discourse

Edited by

MAJ-BRITT MOSEGAARD HANSEN
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Series preface

Modern diachronic linguistics has important contacts with other subdisciplines, notably first-language acquisition, learnability theory, computational linguistics, sociolinguistics, and the traditional philological study of texts. It is now recognized in the wider field that diachronic linguistics can make a novel contribution to linguistic theory, to historical linguistics, and arguably to cognitive science more widely.

This series provides a forum for work in both diachronic and historical linguistics, including work on change in grammar, sound, and meaning within and across languages; synchronic studies of languages in the past; and descriptive histories of one or more languages. It is intended to reflect and encourage the links between these subjects and fields such as those mentioned above.

The goal of the series is to publish high-quality monographs and collections of papers in diachronic linguistics generally; that is, studies focussing on change in linguistic structure, and/or change in grammars, which are also intended to make a contribution to linguistic theory, by developing and adopting a current theoretical model, by raising wider questions concerning the nature of language change, or by developing theoretical connections with other areas of linguistics and cognitive science as listed above. There is no bias towards a particular language or language family, or towards a particular theoretical framework; work in all theoretical frameworks, and work based on the descriptive tradition of language typology, as well as quantitatively based work using theoretical ideas, also feature in the series.

Adam Ledgeway and Ian Roberts

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List of abbreviations

1	first person
2	second person
2PL	second-person plural
3PL	third-person plural
3FSG	third-person feminine singular
3MSG	third-person masculine singular
3SG	third-person singular
3SGM/F	third-person singular masculine/feminine
AB	absolute case
ACC	accusative case
ACT	active
AD	additive
ADNEG	additive negation
ADV	adverb(ial phrase)
AF	actor focus
ANS	<i>Algemene Nederlandse Spraakkunst</i>
AOR	aorist
AV	actor voice
BH	Biblical Hebrew
BNC	British National Corpus
BulNC	Bulgarian National Corpus
CC	Continuative Cycle
CDH	<i>Corpus del Diccionario histórico de la lengua española</i>
CLAPI	Corpus de Langue Parlée en Interaction
CLF	classifier
CMP	comparative
CN	common noun marker
COMP	complementizer
CONJ	conjunction
CONT	continuative
COP	copula
CoSIH	Corpus of Spoken Israeli Hebrew
DAT	dative
DE	denominal (verb class iv)
DEF	definite
DEM	demonstrative
DIM	diminutive
DIST	distal

DM	discourse marker
DY	dynamic verb (verb class iii)
EMPH	emphatic particle
EXC	exclusive
F	feminine (other languages)
FA	factive (verb class ii)
FAM	familiar (makasar)
FP	sentence-final particle
GEN	genitive
HON	honorific
IE	Indo-European
IMP	imperative
IMPERFECT	imperfect
INF	infinitive
INDEF	indefinite
INS	instrumental
IPFV	imperfective
IV	inverse voice
LIA	Language Infrastructure made Available
LOC	locative case
LSAC	Longman Corpus of Spoken American English
LSJ	Liddell, Scott, Jones Ancient Greek lexicon
M	masculine
MASC	masculine
MP	modal particle
MV	monovalent
N	neutral
NCI	negative concord item
NDC	Nordic Dialect Corpus
NDM	De Mauro, Tullio (ed.), <i>Il Nuovo De Mauro</i> . Online at <i>Internazionale</i> , https://dizionario.internazionale.it
NEG	negation
NFIN	non-finite
NOM	nominative case
NOM/ACC	nominative/accusative
NOML	nominalizer
NOMZ	nominalizer
NoTa	Norwegian Speech Corpus
NP	noun phrase
NTLLE	Nuevo tesoro lexicográfico de la lengua española. http://ntlle.rae.es
OED	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i>
PDH	Present-Day Hebrew
PFV	perfective
PL	plural
PM	pragmatic marker

PN	proper noun marker
POSS	possessive
PP	potential productivity
PREP	preposition
PRON	pronoun
PRS	present
PRT	particle
PST	past
PTCL	particle
PTCP	participle
Q	question
RC	relative clause
RE	realis
RED	reduplication
REL	relativizer
RNC	Russian National Corpora
SBC	Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American English
SBJ	subject
SF	augmenting stem prefix former
SG	singular
SJS	<i>Slovník jazyka staroslověnského</i>
SoAs	states-of-affairs
ST	stative verb (verb class vii)
STRONG	strong form
TAM	tense, aspect, and modality
TAUS	The spoken language investigation in Oslo
TLFi	<i>Trésor de la Langue Francaise informatisé</i> , www.atilf.fr/tlfi
TOP	topic
TRS	transitivizer
VOC	vocative
VS	Piccitto, Giorgio, Giovanni Tropea, and Salvatore C. Trovato (eds.). 1977–2002. <i>Vocabolario siciliano</i> , 5 vols. Palermo: Centro di studi filologici e linguistici siciliani
WFT	<i>Woordenboek der Friese Taal (The Dictionary of the Frisian Language)</i> . https://gtb.ivdnt.org/search/?owner=wft
WNT	<i>Woordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal</i> . https://ivdnt.org/woordenboeken/woordenboek-der-nederlandsche-taal
WSJP PAN	<i>Wielki słownik języka polskiego PAN (The Polish Academy of Sciences Great Dictionary of Polish)</i> , https://wsjp.pl

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Weakening of pragmatic force and socio-cultural factors

The pragmatization cycle of Italian grammatical deference

Chiara Ghezzi

17.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on cyclical patterns of pragmatic change and on how communicative, cognitive, and socio-cultural factors may contribute to their unfolding. Specifically, it considers the pragmatic cycle that characterizes the Italian system of grammatical deference from the 16th to the 20th century.

Linguistic cycles can be defined as the recursive renewal of some type of linguistic markers (Hansen 2020b: 167). In the outcome of a cyclical change, ‘an already existing older element is replaced by a more recently emerged synonymous or near-synonymous item, which, in turn, may itself be replaced by yet another element at a later stage’ (Detges 2020: 290). These changes are distinguished from linear developments, as in the latter the input of a change may disappear from the language as, for instance, in the elimination of declensions in the passage from Latin to Romance languages. The assumption that will be discussed here is that language changes at the pragmatic level may be subject to cyclical change.

Cycles of pragmatization can be defined as language changes of a pragmatic nature where the content-level source item of a context-level (i.e. pragmatic) marker is replaced by a new item which becomes the source of the context-level function (Hansen 2014: 280; cf. Hansen 2020b: 168). Thus, meanings are not ‘prepackaged container-like entities’ but ‘can be contextually enriched when used in actual communication, thereby yielding usages, especially by inference’ (Detges 2010: 196).

The main point made in this chapter is that this type of change characterizes the development of the Italian system of grammatical deference as it emerges in plays written between the 16th and 20th centuries.

Grammatical deference implies processes of honorification; that is, the co-optation of elements operating at the level of grammar, such as personal pronouns

(including oblique and clitic variants), possessive adjectives, and verb agreements, for ‘social’ work at the level of pragmatics in what has been defined as the system of ‘social deixis’ (Renzi 1993). In (1), from a contemporary Italian comedy, although reference would suggest the use of the second-person singular to address the interlocutor, the speaker uses the polite third-person singular feminine, which is still the canonical V form in the Italian system of grammatical deference.

- (1) *Ersilia: Anche lei Virgilio, non da un attimo di pace, e la radio, il giornale, la televisione, oh che non gli riesce di stare un momento tranquillo?* (Giunti, *A ciascuno il suo*, I, 4)

You.3FSG too, **Virgil**, (**you.3FSG**) **don’t.3SG** give a moment’s peace, and the radio, the newspaper, the television, oh (why) **can’t.3SG** **you.DAT.3MSG** be quiet for a while?’

This honorification process is a force (or ‘drift’ in Sapir’s words¹) that is ubiquitous in Indo-European (IE) languages, to the point that it has been considered a pan-IE ‘slant’ phenomenon (cf. Joseph 1987: 274). However, in some IE languages, among them Italian, this pragmatic development, which is linear in essence, is scattered with pragmatic cycles, whose unfolding provides glimpses on how cyclical changes develop and on the factors that promote language change at the level of pragmatics. Specifically, they suggest hypotheses about the connection between socio-cultural, communicative, and cognitive factors. As a matter of fact, a single grammatical distinction between a T form and a V form corresponds to a complex set of pragmatic rules and social contexts determining the choice between the two (Helmbrecht 2013). Grammatical deference is the linguistic icon of an attitude of deference towards the interlocutor, which is often institutionalized through politeness systems and is thus deeply imbued with ideologies on language use, which have their roots in socio-cultural changes (Ghezzi 2021). It is therefore relevant to consider how social factors, which operate in actual communicative contexts and are driven by cognitive operations, interact with more systemic factors in triggering the development of a cycle. As will be discussed in this chapter, these extra-systemic factors had direct (even though gradually instantiated) consequences for the morphology of Italian and they triggered cognitive processes, such as routinization, that have long been assumed to take part in language change in crucial ways.

The Italian system of grammatical deference embarked on a pragmatization cycle that resulted in a function–form reconfiguration of the linguistic means used to express deference at the V pole. This implied first a pragmatic enrichment of the second plural V form (*voi*), its subsequent pragmatic weakening, and then its

¹ Sapir (1949: 23) defines these ‘drifts’ as ‘the very slow but powerful unconscious changes in certain directions which seem to be implicit in the phonemic systems and morphologies of the languages themselves.’

substitution by the third-person feminine singular (*lei*), which thus underwent pragmatic enrichment. This change had an essential pragmatic nature as it pertained to the system of social deixis, where the content-level source item (*voi*) of a context-level marker (i.e. the codification of grammatical deference) was replaced by a new item (*lei*), which became the source of the context-level function. This change arguably represents an instance of an onomasiological cycle, as the new V form (*lei*) has the same function as the one that is substituted (*voi*). Yet, as will be discussed in this chapter, the parameters and the domain of use of the V form, as such, have changed considerably over the centuries, also in connection with changing rules and conventions for polite behaviour, and thus do not completely overlap with the original ones.

Moving from these premises, this chapter analyses the development of the Italian system of grammatical deference with the objective, firstly, of discussing why this type of development has a cyclical nature and what its properties are, and secondly, of considering, on the one hand, the systemic forces that favour these changes, and on the other hand the factors that may propel them in specific contexts; that is, the ways in which the socio-cultural factors involved can be related to communicative and cognitive factors.

This chapter is structured as follows. In Section 17.2 the forces at play in the development of grammatical deference in the context of IE languages are considered; in Section 17.3 the factors in the Italian context which may have played a role in the Italian pragmatic cycle are discussed. Section 17.4 describes the data analysis, while in Section 17.5 some conclusions are drawn.

17.2 Grammatical deference and IE languages

Lexical deference exists universally, being implicit in basic systems such as address terms (e.g. *Sir* vs. *my boy* vs. *buddy*), whereas grammatical deference does not. From a strictly linguistic perspective, grammatical deference, or honorification (Agha 1994), implies the replacement of a morphological device, coded for reference to the subject or object, with forms that apply to another person category.

Grammatical deference has been considered a pan-IE phenomenon as all IE languages, at some point in their histories, share a shift of paradigm-internal values and value relations to codify honorific meaning (Joseph 1987: 259). This implies making use of a cluster of grammatical resources (e.g. personal pronouns, possessive adjectives, and verb agreement) to show deference (or respect) towards interlocutors.

IE languages display great variation in the grammatical resources employed to codify grammatical deference, for instance Fr. *vous* (2PL), It. *lei* (3FSG), Ger. *Sie* (3PL). Moreover, if most languages express grammatical deference through deictic forms (i.e. *you*.2PL for *you*.2SG, but also *we* for *I*, although less common), some

languages make use of the anaphoric third person, as is the case with Italian *lei* '3FSG' and with the Spanish pronoun *usted*, originally from the honorific NP *Vuestra Merced* 'Your Mercy'. Other languages have a third-person deference pronoun parallel to the second-person system, such as Romanian *dumnealui* (and variants), or have more complex systems, like Hindi, which has a deferential *vah* + 3SG verb and a super-deferential *ve* + 3PL verb (Joseph 1987: 260).

Joseph (1987: 262–263) identifies four basic strategies that IE languages use to codify grammatical deference, which include the absence of morphologized deference (type 1), for example, Latin, as well as many other ancient languages; second-person plural as deferent (type 2), for example, Late Latin and Modern French; third person as deferent (type 3), the focus of this chapter, which includes both third-person singular grammatical deference, for example, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, and German up to the 18th century, and third-person plural grammatical deference in German, Norwegian, or Danish; and finally a mixed system (type 4). The different types are synthesized in Table 17.1 from Joseph (1987: 262–263).

Interestingly, pluralization is the first and basic mechanism of deference that IE languages develop, so that languages that develop other devices in the course of their histories do so only after passing through the pluralization stage. This is the case with Italian, Spanish, and German, which moved from a bipartite system with T–V distinction, where the second plural form was the deferent form, to a tripartite stage where two V forms coexisted for some time (for Italian, second plural coexisted with third singular feminine), to return to a bipartite system where the original V form was substituted by an incipient new form (i.e. *voi* was substituted by *lei* in Italian).

The case of German is a model in this regard, as the first attestations of the use of second plural as deferent are found in the Old High German period around the ninth century. Such uses became more and more regular in the Middle High German period. However, this originally binary system expanded to a ternary system in the 17th century through the introduction of a super-polite third singular as deferent. Around the 18th century, the paradigm of personal pronouns distinguished four levels of politeness, as the third plural as deferent began to be used as a super-polite form of address, when the degree of respect expressed by *er/sie* (<3SGM/F) diminished. This system began to collapse by the middle of the 19th century, resulting in the contemporary binary opposition between *du* (T) and *Sie* (V) (Helmbrecht 2014: 318–319).

Systems with binary distinctions are much more common cross-linguistically than systems with multiple distinctions, although in the IE family these are attested particularly in the Indo-Aryan branch or in Romanian and Lithuanian, within European languages (Helmbrecht 2013).

These processes show the interconnection of the grammatical categories of person and number in the process of honorification. Both are among the most

Table 17.1 Types of grammatical deference

Type 1 no morphologized deference	Type 2 2p as deferent	Type 3 3s as deferent	Type 4 mixed systems
<p>Archaic IE tongues (pre-Christian era): for example, Latin, Old Prussian, Old Church Slavonic, Old English, Old Danish, Old Irish, Oscan-Umbrian, Old Armenian, Classical Greek, Sanskrit, Old Persian</p> <p>Modern dialects, for example, in Italy (Abruzzo, Marche, Umbria, the Sabine mountains, Puglia, parts of Campania and Calabria; Aromanian and sub Danubian Daco-Romanian colonial dialects)</p>	<p>(2a) 2p > 2p/2s-deferent: for example, Bulgarian, Serbo-Croatian, Russian; Albanian; Swedish; Breton, Scots Gaelic; Late Latin, Medieval Spanish, Medieval Italian, French; Modern Greek; Western Middle Iranian, Modern Persian</p> <p>(2b) 2p > 2p/2s-deferent > for example, English <i>you</i></p> <p>(2c) 2p > 2-deferent; 2-dual > 2p (non-deferent): Icelandic</p> <p>(2d) 2s (with special deference pronoun) > 2s-deferent 2p (with special deference pronoun) > 2p-deferent/2s-superdeferent: Daco-Romanian</p> <p>(2e) p > 2p; 2p (with special deference pronoun) > 2s-deferent: Frisian</p>	<p>(3a) 3s > 3s/2s-deferent; 3p > 3p/2p: Spanish of W. Andalusia, Canary Islands, America (non-<i>voseo</i> regions) <i>usted</i>, <i>ustedes</i></p> <p>(3b) 3s > 3s/2s-deferent; 3p > 3p/2p-deferent: Polish, Italian, German to mid-18th century, Spanish of Spain (except W. Andalusia, Canary Islands), Continental Portuguese</p> <p>(3c) 3p > 3p/2-deferent: German and W. Yiddish, Danish and Norwegian</p>	<p>(4a) 2s (~ 3s) (both with special deference pronoun) > 2-deferent: Dutch</p> <p>(4b) 2p > 2p/2s-deferent; 3p > 2-superdeferent: Hindi</p> <p>(4c) 2p > 2p/2s-deferent > 2 > 2p/2s-superdeferent; 3s > 3s/2s-deferent; 3p > 3p/2p-deferent: Judeo-Spanish; Golden Age Spanish</p> <p>(4e) 2p > 2p/2s-deferent > 2s-deferent > 2s-non-deferent; 3s > 3s/2s-deferent; 3p > 3p/2p: Spanish of America (<i>voseo</i> regions)</p> <p>(4d) 3s > 3s/2s; 3p > 3p/2p; 2p > 2s-superdeferent: Brazilian Portuguese</p>

important categories of language and are intimately connected: for instance, the development of plurals starts from the first person and spreads to second and third, followed by nouns designating people, animate nouns, and objects. Moreover, the development of the plural is dependent on the crystallization of the singular, which, in turn, is strictly correlated to the deictic nature of the word (Forcheimer 1953: 11–19). Pronouns, generally, lead the vanguard of person categories because of their essentially deictic nature and relational structure. They include both the *origo* pole and the referential target, which reflect the cognitive representation of the speech event in a dyadic conversation (Helmbrecht 2003: 199).

It has been widely stressed how the honorification of pronouns metaphorically codifies hierarchy (deferential uses) and distance or formality (reverential uses)² (Agha 1994; cf. McCready 2019). Both second plural for second singular and third person for second person are linguistic strategies based on discourse-referential values of the grammatical categories of number and person. In the shift from plural meaning to singular usage, the effect is to make addressees count for ‘more than one social individual’ for merits, prestige, and authority; that is, to accrue to their persona the social weight of many (Serianni 1997: 185). The movement from second singular to second plural deference ‘dilates’ the person category when somehow it has become uncomfortable because it is too confining (*pluralis maiestatis*) or too exposing (*pluralis modestiae*) (Benveniste 1946: 11–12). In the shift from second-person usage—where individuals are indexed in the speech situation—to the realm of anaphora of the third person—where an already established entity is understood as the referent of the substitute—the effect is to make addressees ‘larger than life’ by taking away their individual personhood as if it were too daring to directly address them (Silverstein 1976: 39). This shift is not a real replacement as third singular is one of the conceptual components of second plural its less definite component, considering that the plural imposes the presupposition that the entity is a sum of other entities (one entity and other(s) present in the interaction) (Bates and McKenzie 2021: 5). Joseph (1987: 272) considers this a movement of synecdoche whereby third singular, realized linguistically in place of all other components of second singular, is often marked lexically by an overt synecdochic reference to the addressee: for example, *your honour, your lordship, your mercy, your majesty* (i.e. addressing one aspect or quality of the person in lieu of the person as a whole). Therefore, the earlier second plural-as-second singular deferent is reanalysed as second singular, the person of the addressee, plus third singular, his/her power.

² The adjectives reverential and deferential are not used here as synonyms, although the overlap between these two notions is somehow difficult to avoid. Reverence implies profound respect mingled with love, devotion, or awe, while deference has been defined as ‘the expression of respect for and social distance from people of higher status, where status is assumed to be fixed prior to the relationship [...] a key presumption underlying *deference* is that some persons are more highly ranked on some kind of hierarchical scale than others’ (Haugh 2010: 271). Thus, deference is asymmetrical and vertical in essence, while reverence can also be used symmetrically as it implies respect as social power, as social rules or norms, but also as caring, or as equality and accepting differences (Haugh 2010: 280).

The deferential use of plural for singular is best attested in some languages within the Latin-Romance branch, beginning with Latin documents of the early Christian era (Maley 1974; Molinelli 2018); however, those other languages which have passed beyond the pluralization stage have done so by first creating lexical alternatives to plural morphological deference, then morphologizing these alternatives as third singular pronouns. The end point of the cycle is when the singular-to-plural change repeats itself, leaving third plural as the second singular deferent form, as in German today. It is possible to schematize the cycle as in Figure 17.1.

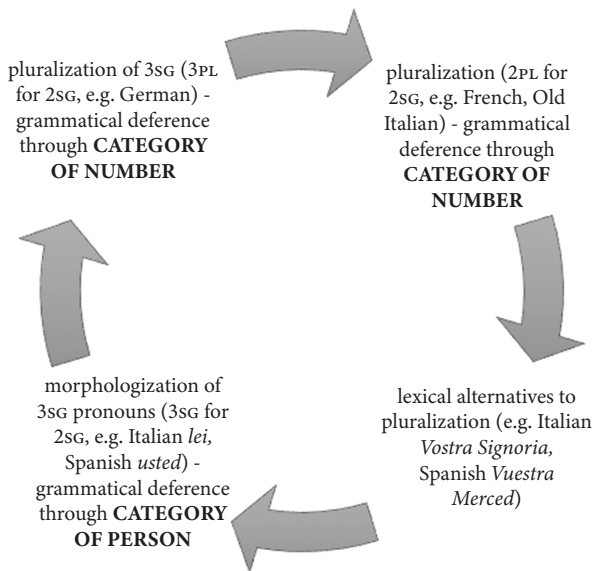


Figure 17.1 Person and number as means of grammatical deference

The development of grammatical deference itself, within IE languages, was connected with the heightened morphological relevance of the category of person (Lakoff 1972). Joseph (1987) puts forward the hypothesis that this innovation probably developed across the IE family after the language communities ceased to be in steady, large-scale contact, so that it can be considered a ‘slant’ present in their common structural heritage; that is, the totality of structural proclivities which predispose a language towards accepting and generalizing certain innovations made by speakers but not others (Joseph 1987: 265). In this perspective, the rise of grammatical deference can be connected in crucial ways with the much-investigated slant phenomena in IE languages (e.g. the development of periphrastic auxiliaries, appositions, etc.), which all relate to the movement from synthesis towards analysis; that is, changes in the direction of greater segmentation and independence of the word (Lakoff 1972: 174–179).

For honorification, Joseph's hypothesis is that what was relevant was the *mise en relief* that a feature underwent, concomitant with its segmentalization. Joseph (1987: 267) exemplifies this change, and its connection with segmentalization, by examples (2) and (3). In (2a) the Latin verbal forms carry information on tense, mood, aspect, and voice, in addition to the person of the subject, conveyed by the grammatical morpheme attached to the root. Instead, in (2b) the French pronoun *je* has no expressive function other than person, while the first-person subject is expressed by no sign other than *je*, thus elevating the form to the status of a word (although phonologically cliticized to the verb). Thus, it is possible to assume that subject-person information is treated at a higher order in French than in Latin.

(2) (a) Latin	vs. (b) French
<i>porto</i> 'I carry' (indicative)	<i>je porte</i> 'I carry' (indicative and subjunctive)
<i>portam</i> 'I carry' (subjunctive)	
<i>portavi</i> 'I have carried'	<i>j'ai porté</i> 'I have carried' (Joseph 1987: 267)

Similarly, in (3) the person inflection (Latin *-s*, Italian *-i*) has moved in (3b) closer to the verb stem; that is, just before it in Italian or separated by the past perfect inflection in Latin. As is suggested in (Bybee 1985a, b), the proximity of an inflectional category to the verb stem is directly proportional to the category's semantic relevance. Moreover, the shift of the person morpheme to an auxiliary, preceding the verb-semantic root, accomplishes a topicalization of person information (Joseph 1987: 268), while the spreading of syntactic-semantic information over two separate words allows additional information to be conveyed, as is the case for gender.

(3) (a) Latin	vs. (b) Italian
<i>veneras</i> 'you had come'	<i>eri venuto</i> '(you) had.2sg come.M' (Joseph 1987: 268)
	<i>eri venuta</i> '(you) had.2sg come.F'

Moving from these developments, it is possible to synthesize some elements. The increase in relevance of person creates a linear drift of changes, including the development of grammatical deference, as it becomes easier to charge person with further distinctions. When the development of grammatical deference takes place, the first and most basic mechanism of deference is pluralization (e.g. Late Lat. *vos*), but from this stage some languages develop other means that substitute pluralization in cyclical changes (e.g. Italian, Spanish, and German). In other words, the linear slant development of honorification triggers cyclic changes in some languages. The next sections of this chapter will be devoted to considering the

socio-cultural, communicative, and cognitive factors that in the specific context of Italian had a role in such types of cyclical change.

17.3 The Italian grammatical deference cycle and its socio-cultural context

The development of the Italian grammatical deference system, and more generally of its address system, is extremely well documented (see, among others, Niculescu 1974 and Molinelli 2015, 2018, 2019 for detailed overviews). The Old Italian pronominal system includes a T form (*tu* ‘you.2SG’) and a V form (*voi* ‘you.2PL’). However, progressively a second V form begins to be used (*ella/lei* ‘she.NOM/ACC’). The introduction of a new V form, which syntactically requires a third-person feminine verb agreement, is triggered by extensive use of honorific titles, typically noun phrases with a feminine abstract noun as head and a second plural possessive adjective as modifier (e.g. *Vostra Signoria* ‘Your.F Lordship.F’) (Molinelli 2019: 59–60; see §2).

In texts of the 13th and 14th centuries, only the nominal form is used with second-person plural or third-person singular verb agreement. However, from the second half of the 15th century, the nominal form can already be found in co-occurrence with an anaphoric third-person feminine pronoun (*ella* ‘she.NOM’ or *lei* ‘she.ACC’, *quella* ‘that.FSG’, *questa* ‘this.FSG’). Starting from texts of the 17th century, two pronominal V forms coexist—that is, second plural *voi* (V1) and/or third-person feminine *ella/lei* (V2)—which can be used without an explicit reference to a previous feminine noun phrase (Niculescu 1974: 97–99; Molinelli 2018: 63–65). At the beginning of the 20th century, the ‘standard’ system of pronouns only includes the T form *tu* and one V form (*lei*); *voi* remains as a substandard V form in central and southern varieties (Serianni 1997: 187–188).³

The development of the new V form *lei* is closely connected to the frequency of use of honorifics. Molinelli (2018: 58–62) shows that honorifics date back to Latin already in the third century AD (e.g. *Vestra Excellentia* ‘Your Excellency’, *Maiestas* ‘Your Majesty’, etc.). In 13th-century Italian, their use is codified in normative treaties in Latin and model letters in vernacular Italian, while in the 14th and 15th centuries their semantic field progressively broadens to reach its climax in the 18th century, but then progressively decreases in the following centuries (Brunet 2003: 26; Molinelli 2019: 58–66).

Grammatical deference maps social relations, which can be represented onto a metaphoric bidimensional space as rooted in vertical (power) and horizontal

³ However, a recent study shows that this distribution is far from uniform, as the status as well as the vitality of *voi* vary greatly from city to city, even within the same administrative region (see Bresin 2021).

(social distance) semantic dimensions (Pérez Hernández 1999). Power relations imply vertical and ordinal rank distinctions in a prestige order in some kind of hierarchy. Thus, they are essentially non-reciprocal, based on ‘physical strength, wealth, age, sex, role in the church, the state, the army or within the family’ (Brown and Gilman 1960: 255). Distance relations relate to horizontal nominal distinctions rooted in perceived similarities and differences between interlocutors. Therefore, they are reciprocal relations, which are based on the degree of contact between interlocutors (informal and intimate vs. formal relations), on the length of contact (occasional vs. frequent relations), and on their attitude (associative/respectful vs. dissociative/disrespectful) (Spencer-Oatey 1996: 17–18).

Both these dimensions bring with them a series of ‘social’ indexicalities as they index multiple dimensions of the social context, which are used by speakers to position themselves, their interlocutors, and their relationships, and to define the setting of interaction and their role within it. For instance, the non-reciprocal dimension of power translates into a deferential linguistic style towards the social superior, which implies the speakers’ refinement, through an ability to efface emotion, sensitivity to the stability of others, and pragmatic delicacy (Irvine 1992: 256). The studies on the interrelations between these dimensions show that, together with actual forms of address, they acquire or lose prominence over time, also in connection with socio-cultural changes in practices of rapport management and, consequently, ideologies of language use, which underlie both social and linguistic behaviour.

From a socio-cultural point of view, some developments that characterize the Italian peninsula, from the 16th to the 20th century, can be synthesized into some pivotal points (Ghezzi 2021; Fedriani and Ghezzi 2025).

First, from the 16th century, a new conduct code based on courtly behaviour progressively gains influence. It is a social behaviour which in Italy is deeply influenced by Spanish ceremonial etiquette, introduced due to the Spanish rule. It is a code based on the art of *sprezzatura* (‘effortless mastery’) (Jucker 2020: 15), a strategic type of politeness ‘built on the intentional conglomerate of education, wit, tact and a sense of good communication’ (Held 2010: 199). This system is governed by complex and rigidly established rules for polite conduct, which include a series of *precedenze*, lit. ‘precedencies’, reflecting the smallest differences in social rank. These *precedenze* are expressed through a series of *cerimonie*, lit. ‘ceremonies’ or ‘pleasantries’, that imply a fixed and mandatory protocol for any situation of social life.

What counts as polite depends on the speaker’s exact social positioning. Ceremonial language, through immediately perceptible forms and symbols, signals the rank of each person within society and legitimizes one’s social identity. Clothes, deportment, words, the type of bow used, its degree of inclination, the formalities of visits, titles, commensality, distance in steps between people, and so on are

among the elements necessary to affirm one's own social position and to perceive that of others (Ago 1990: 45). As Valleriani (2004: 17) notes, ceremonial language is nothing more than the translation of hierarchical language. In such a society, the semantics of power—and of social rank as a contextual factor—is central, and language structure, especially as regards grammatical deference, follows suit: deference devices are frequent and their codification is rich and varied, as it needs to reflect the complexity of differences in social rank (O'Driscoll 2010: 273–274).

Second, in the 18th century, new political and economic ideologies revolutionize the social class system, which becomes more important and more 'permeable' (Jucker 2020). As such, this century represents a divide between the *ancien régime* and bourgeois society.⁴ In the 18th century, the socio-cultural premises are laid for later changes to occur in the system of politeness and conduct rules, as well as in the system of grammatical deference, in the form of a reconfiguration of both the function–form relations of the V form (*voi* is substituted by *lei*) and in the relative balance of the power–distance semantics of usage. The two examples in (4) and (5), both from a play by Goldoni, illustrate this point.

(4) *CAVALIERE* Signora, io credo che **voi scherziate**.

'Madam, I believe **you.PL are.PL** joking'

DORALICE Perché lo **credete**? (Goldoni, FAM, 1, XXI)

'Why do (you) **believe.2PL** so?'

(5) *ISABELLA* Anche **voi mi rompete** la testa?

'Are **you.PL driving.2PL** me crazy too?'

DOTTORE Io non parlo; ma **ha ella** sentito che cosa ha detto il signor Pantalone? (Goldoni, FAM, 2, XIII)

'I am not saying anything but **did.3sg you3FSG** hear what Sir Pantalone said?'

In the comedy, the grammatical deference system includes two V forms: an unmarked *voi* and a marked *lei*, whose use is strictly dependent on the social status of the characters. Both the 'Doctor' and the 'Chevalier' are two gallants, but while Doralice, who is addressed with *voi*, is a member of the middle class, Isabella, who is addressed with *lei*, belongs to the aristocracy. Thus, if in (4) the distance semantics prevails and the choice of the pronoun is in the direction of a reverential use, in (5) the power semantics prevails and vertical deference is chosen.

⁴ In the *ancien régime* (15th–18th centuries), economy was mostly based in agriculture, although trade, dominated by the bourgeoisie, progressively became more important, while the social system was stratified as in the Middle Ages. Bourgeois society identified a social order dominated by the bourgeoisie, or middle class. A bourgeois, in medieval France, denoted an inhabitant of a walled town, but its overtones became important in the 18th century when the middle class of professionals, manufacturers, and their literary and political allies began to demand an influence in politics consistent with their economic status.

As regards conduct rules, bourgeois relational networks begin to challenge existing social rules and new norms are introduced and instantiated through socialization and education. These changes modify the way in which members of the society perceive their social relations (Kádár and Haugh 2013: 142). On one hand, the new social conventions are connected with the economic and cultural rise of the bourgeoisie, whose conventions become a new model and gradually replace those of the aristocracy. On the other hand, the political unification of the Italian peninsula, later in the second half of the 19th century, shapes the transformation of Italians from subjects to citizens and their perceptions of social relations (see Paternoster 2015: 263–267 on the flourishing of conduct books after the political unification). Ideologies regarding conduct, including language use, begin to challenge the centuries-old aristocratic world. Extant politeness rules, which are perceived as false and cold, begin to be fiercely criticized. For instance, in the Lombard newspaper *Il caffè*, the Verri brothers attack the idle aristocracy, whose titles and *precedenze*, as they say, no longer correspond to any actual social usefulness. The aristocratic behavioural code is felt to be old-fashioned and inappropriate for rapport management in a society that is undergoing radical change.

Furthermore, in the 19th century the seeds planted in the previous century grow, as earlier norms based on deference are substituted by new ones aiming to respect the face desires of individuals (Paternoster and Fitzmaurice 2019: 12–16). The system of politeness embarks on major changes: new ways of greeting and exchanging pleasantries are developed. One example, more than others, gives a clear image of the importance of the changes that are taking place, as the vertical hierarchical *riverenza* ‘bow’, perceived as an unbearable sign of servility, is substituted by the horizontal handshake (see Paternoster 2015: 221). Although the aristocratic model of conduct remains in Italy until World War I, it is used alongside the new emerging bourgeois code, so that two different types of politeness are at speakers’ disposal: the old distancing politeness (or negative politeness in Brown and Levinson’s 1987 words) and a new *rapprochement* politeness (or positive politeness; Brown and Levinson 1987), based on reducing the exaggerated distances of the previous centuries (Paternoster 2015: 263–302). Thus, the modernization of conduct in Italy stresses the importance of *rapprochement* politeness involved in meeting the needs of others, so that by the end of the century the system includes both the socially institutionalized *buone maniere* ‘good manners’, which imply putting a civil distance between interlocutors, and *cortesía* ‘courtesy, kindness’, which implies attention to others’ needs (cf. Paternoster 2015: 305–306; Jucker 2020: 160–183). In sum, it is possible to synthesize these changes in the passage from ‘I am what others recognise me to be’ into ‘I am what I recognise myself to be’ (Fedriani and Ghezzi 2025).

The next section analyses and describes how these developments within society and, consequently, within its politeness system are reflected in the development of the system of grammatical deference.

17.4 Data analysis of Italian grammatical deference from the 16th to the 20th century

The data analysis of the evolution of the Italian system of grammatical deference is based on Ghezzi (2021), who considers a series of comedy plays written between the 16th and 20th centuries as synthesized in Table 17.2.

Table 17.2 16th- to 20th-century Italian comedy plays

Century	Author, Title (Year of Publication)	Tokens
1500	Niccolò Machiavelli, <i>La Mandragola</i> (1524)	13,558
	Pietro Aretino, <i>La Cortegiana</i> (1525)	26,034
1700	Carlo Goldoni, <i>La famiglia dell'antiquario</i> (1749)	22,792
	Carlo Goldoni, <i>La locandiera</i> (1753)	22,124
1900	Luigi Pirandello, <i>Così è se vi pare</i> (1917)	17,501
	Luigi Pirandello, <i>Il gioco delle parti</i> (1918)	15,001

From a methodological perspective, some caution must be taken. In the corpus composition there is a difference between the 16th century, where two authors are considered, and the 18th–20th-century plays, where only one author is considered; thus, the writing of only two (or one) language users, with their own personal preferences and style, serves to represent the grammatical deference system of a century. Although it entails limitations on the possibility of generalization, this was a conscious choice, dictated by the themes dealt with in the comedies and by the type of language used by the author.

As for the themes, they were chosen among those that were more socio-historically representative of the history of Italian politeness, as they embody ideologies on socio-cultural conventions of the century when the comedy is written. As for the language, the choice was determined by the variety of Italian used by the playwright: Italian, originally the Tuscan vernacular, has never been a monolithic entity, as it was formed in the absence of a central political state. Initially, it developed as a tool of a community of scholars and literati. It became the national language from the second half of the 19th century, after the political unification, but, up until the early years of the 20th century, it was mostly the language of a written literary tradition rather than a spoken variety.

The 16th-century comedies were chosen because both authors are Tuscan and share similar language varieties. Secondly, they describe two different societies and have opposite ideas on what a theatrical language should look like. *La mandragola* ‘The Mandrake (Potion)’ is set in republican Florence where people of different social standing share the same social environment. In his comedy, Machiavelli adopts an ‘organic monolingualism’; that is, a grammatically homogeneous

language based on the 14th-century literary tradition (Folena 1991: 132). This is combined with a ‘functional pluri-stylism’ used for rendering characters (Trifone 2000: 33). It is one of the first comedies where characters are presented through their language (Patota 2019: 304). *La cortigiana* ‘The Courtesan (Comedy)’ is a parody of Roman court life, as Rome was a cosmopolitan centre which Aretino defines as the ‘new Babylon’ (Paternoster 2019: 32). The language is characterized by a marked multilingualism reflected in different registers used by the characters (cf. Pacagnella 2019: 26). In the play, the author’s Tuscan-Romanesque usage prevails (cf. Trovato 2013).

The 18th-century comedies, instead, are both written by Carlo Goldoni, who was the most, and almost the only, representative Italian playwright of the century. He introduced an important theatrical reformation together with an Italian *koiné* to be used in the plays. Although the two comedies are set in Sicily and in Florence, both portray the decadence of the Venetian aristocracy, while celebrating the reason and common sense of the bourgeoisie. On the part of the language, there is a shift from the language of the masks of the *Commedia dell’arte* ‘comedy of art’ to the language of the bourgeoisie and commoners. The lack of a common standard ‘Italian’ language, which could be understood by audiences throughout the peninsula, made Goldoni’s comedies the first attempt at an expressive experimentalism (cf. D’Onghia 2014: 160–163). The writer creates a ‘spoken’ theatrical *koiné* that has the liveliness of spoken Florentine. This *koiné* is nourished with the language spoken by educated people in the northern regions; it is enriched with Venetian and French tones and written literary usages (Folena 1958: 25). Different codes, namely Italian and Venetian in the two comedies analysed, are exploited in the depiction of characters and operate as stylistic planes to which the characters adapt accordingly. Code-switching gives voice to the language ideologies of the time. At one extreme is Venetian, the language of nature, impulsivity, and expressivity, but also of cosy affectivity. At the other is Italian, the language of social convention and interaction (Folena 1993: 194).

The early 20th-century comedies analysed, *Così è se vi pare* ‘So It Is (If You Think So)’ and *Il giuoco delle parti* ‘The Rules of the Game’, are written by Pirandello. At the beginning of the 20th century, the need to identify a common national Italian language is felt with difficulty. Pirandello identifies this variety ‘in the language spoken (or that wants to be spoken) in schools and which is found in books’ (Pirandello 1965: 879). Thus, in the comedies he adopts a medium formal Italian register, but he avoids more marked traits both of the high literary register and of regional and popular varieties (Trifone 2000: 96). In the comedies, this choice is reflected in the lack of a specific setting and the themes can help explain these choices, as Pirandello gives voice, for the first time, to the existential anguish of individuals by plumbing the recesses and difficulties of modern man.

Lastly, as regards the tagging scheme used in the analysis, each address form (pronouns, nominal forms, and verb agreement) was annotated and tagged for

two different orders of parameters: the type of exchange within the power/vertical and distance/horizontal dimensions (i.e. reciprocal vs. non-reciprocal and distant vs. intimate exchanges) and the macro-social variables relating to characters (i.e. social status, kinship relation, and gender). A synthesis that emerges from the data is given for each century in the paragraphs that follow, while we refer to Ghezzi (2021) for a detailed discussion of examples.

17.4.1 Grammatical deference in 16th-century comedies

Grammatical deference is characterized by a substantially binary system with an unmarked V1 form *voi* ‘you.2PL’ and a T form *tu* ‘you.2SG’. Norms for *tu-voi* variation are based on a non-reciprocal power semantics that is vertical in nature, as non-reciprocal *tu-voi* indexes power, particularly the status of characters (e.g. masters are addressed with *voi* by their servants, who receive a *tu*), but also their kinship relation, especially among characters belonging to higher classes. For instance, in Machiavelli’s *La Mandragola*, Messer Nicia addresses his wife Lucrezia with *tu* but receives *voi*.

Conversely, in the distance dimension, the use of a reciprocal pattern with *voi* indexes civil formality and reciprocal *tu* intimacy. *Voi* characterizes interactions among members of higher classes, while reciprocal *tu* does so for those of lower classes.

A second marginal V form (V2), which only concerns verb agreement, is used in connection with the honorific *Vostra Signoria* ‘Your Lordship’. This is a characteristic trait of Aretino’s comedy but it is totally absent in Machiavelli. In Aretino, *Vostra Signoria* and third-person verb agreement are used as overly deferent forms or to mock courtly behaviour, as seen in (6).

(6) *Sanese: Dite: la Signoria Vostra. Non sentisti voi Maestro Andrea che disse: la Signoria Vostra?*

‘Say.2PL Your Lordship. Didn’t you.2PL hear.2PL Master Andrea saying: Your Lordship?’

Messer Maco: Mi raccomando alla Signoria Vostra.

‘I recommend myself to Your Lordship’

Sanese: Bene; mandate su la veste!

‘Very good; lift.2PL up your vest’

Messer Maco: Così, la Signoria Vostra?

‘Like this, Your Lordship?’

Sanese: Messer sì; accomiate la berretta così, andate largo di qua, di là; ben, benissimo. (CORT, I, 3)

‘Yes Sir, put.2PL (your) hat like this, walk.2PL this way, that way; good, very good’

In the extract, Messer Maco, a simpleton from Siena who went to Rome to become the perfect courtier, after having been put through a series of hilarious tests,

is rehearsing his courtly behaviour with the help of his servant Sanese. This behaviour includes specific ways of posing, dressing, and speaking. One important landmark of courtly language is the use of *Vostra Signoria*.

17.4.2 Grammatical deference in 18th-century comedies

In 18th-century comedies, the system of grammatical deference is more markedly orientated towards the power semantics. The system of address includes three forms, a marginal T form *tu*, used only when emotions come to the surface (as in (7)), and two V forms for grammatical deference: a reverential V1 *voi* 'you.2PL' and a deferential V2 *lei* 'she.3SG'. The system is strongly orientated towards the power semantics and social status is the only parameter indexed. Non-reciprocal patterns are rather fixed: they include *lei-tu* in interactions among the lower class and aristocracy (8) and *lei-voi* among the middle class and aristocracy (9). Apart from grammatical deference, lexical means are also relevant to indexing the power dimension, particularly titles and honorifics, which are frequent and varied (e.g. *Vostra Signoria* 'Your Lordship' and routinized variants as *Vossignoria* or *Vostrissima* from *Vostra Signoria Illustrissima* 'Your most illustrious Lordship').

- (7) DORALICE *Signor padre, vi ringrazio dell'amorosa correzione che mi fate.*
 'Sir father, I thank you.2PL for the kind correction that (you) are.2PL doing 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.*⁵ (FAM, I, 2)
 'Your.2PL mother-in-law will have flown off the handle and she is right. [...] Come on, dear daughter, give.2SG me some consolation. I do not have anybody else in the world with the only exception of you.2SG. After my death you.2SG will own.2SG everything'
- (8) BRIGHELLA *La me perdona; ma buttar via tanti bezzi in ste cosse*
 'Please (you.ACC.3SG.F) forgive.3SG me, but to throw away so much money in these things ...'
 ANSELMO *Buttar via? Buttar via? [...] Senti se vuoi avere la mia protezione, non mi parlar mai contro il buon gusto delle antichità* (FAM, I, 1)
 'Throw away? Throw away? Listen.2SG, if (you) want.2SG to stay at my service, do not speak against the good taste of antiquities'

⁵ In the examples, code-switching to Venetian is underlined. In the comedies analysed, Venetian is a characteristic trait of the lower classes and the bourgeoisie.

- (9) ANSELMO *Ridete, perché non ven' intendete.*
 '(You) **laugh.2PL** because **you.2PL** do not **know.2PL** (these things)'
 PANTALONE
Benissimo, mi son ignorante, ella xé virtuoso, e non voi catar bega su questo.
 (FAM, I, 18)
 'Well then. I am ignorant and **you.3FSG are.3SG clever.MSG**, and I do
 not want to discuss it'

In the distance dimension, there are relevant innovations in comparison with the 16th century, as the reverential use of V1 (*voi*) expands, together with its domain of use, to the point that it indexes almost any parameter (or none). By contrast, its deferential function is taken over by V2 (*lei*), along the power dimension. In connection with these developments within the grammatical system of deference, other lexical means, apart from titles and honorifics (*signor conte* 'sir count'), are added to the repertoire to modulate social distance, as is the case of kinship terms (e.g. *moglie* 'wife') or endearment terms (e.g. *cara* 'dear').

17.4.3 Grammatical deference in 20th-century comedies

In 20th-century comedies, the distance dimension, and its horizontal semantics, became dominant. The non-reciprocal vertical pattern is peripheral in the system, especially as regards grammatical deference. However, some instances of *lei-tu* or *voi-tu* patterns are found. In the comedies considered, these patterns develop between a butler and his master: the first pattern characterizes more formal relations, the second more intimate ones. Instead, lexical deference develops more in the vertical dimension: for instance, surnames (*Centuri*) versus professional titles (*signor Prefetto* 'Mister Prefect') are indexes of differences in power among characters.

The reciprocal horizontal pattern is central for grammatical deference and is dominated by a *lei-lei* structure for formal interactions or *tu-tu* for intimate ones (10).

- (10) LEONE *Avanti, avanti, Barelli!—Oh! Con tutto questo armamentario?*
 'Come in, come in, **Barelli!** Oh, with all this paraphernalia?'
 BARELLI *Ah, senti, caro mio: sono cose da pazzi ... da idioti ... [...] Che cos'è?*
 '**Listen.2SG, dear friend**, these are crazy things, silly things. What is it?'
 LEONE *Ti presento alla mia signora (A Silia): Barelli, tiratore formidabile.*
 'I introduce **you.2SG** to my wife (to Silia): Barelli, an excellent shooter'
 BARELLI *(s'inchina). [...] Io non ho mai visto una cosa simile! Mi perdoni, signora; ma se non lo dico, io ... io ci faccio una malattia, ecco.*
 '(he bows). [...] I've never seen such a thing! **Forgive.3SG me, Madam;**
 but if I don't say it, I ... I'll get mad, that's it'

The domain of *tu* expands in this dimension when compared with the situation in the 18th century. New elements enrich the repertoire of lexical forms within both the distance and the intimacy poles; this is especially true for endearment terms such as *cara signora* 'dear madam' or diminutives like *zietto* 'uncle.DIM'.

Moving on from the situation described for each century, it is possible to summarize the developments of the Italian grammatical system of deference in the comedies. In the 16th century (see Figure 17.2), the vertical dimension of power is central: *voi* indexes higher status, as it is used reciprocally among the higher classes or by the lower classes to address them, whereas the use of *Vostra Signoria* and of third-person verb agreement index courtly behaviour. The system of *distancing* politeness is central.

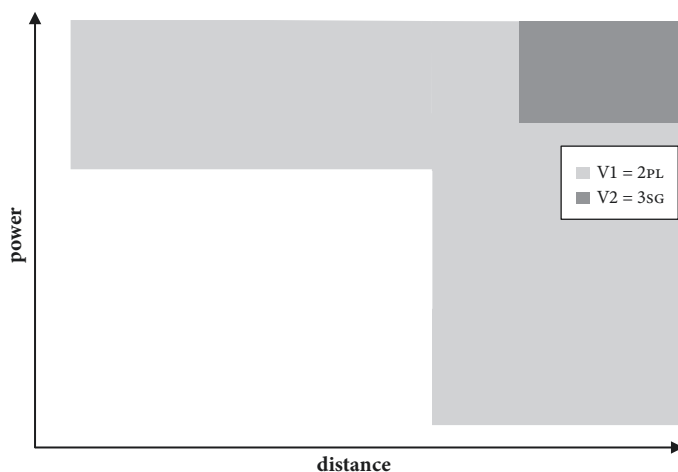


Figure 17.2 Grammatical deference in 16th-century comedies.

In the 18th century (see Figure 17.3), reverential *voi* indexes 'civil' relations, especially along the horizontal distance dimension; deferential *lei* indexes social status along the vertical power dimension, while an intricate repertoire of titles and honorifics is used for the correct social positioning. Thus, the politeness system is still dominated by *distancing* politeness. However, new types of strategies appear, especially associated with the use of endearment terms, which modulate reciprocal distance (intimate vs. formal relations), and a new type of *rapprochement* politeness begins to develop.

In the 20th century (see Figure 17.4), reciprocal *tu* is used for intimate relations, reciprocal *lei* is used for formal ones, and *voi* is marginal. Lexical deference develops along the power dimension. The horizontal distance dimension is central and two types of politeness are at speakers' disposal: a *distancing* politeness and a *rapprochement* politeness.

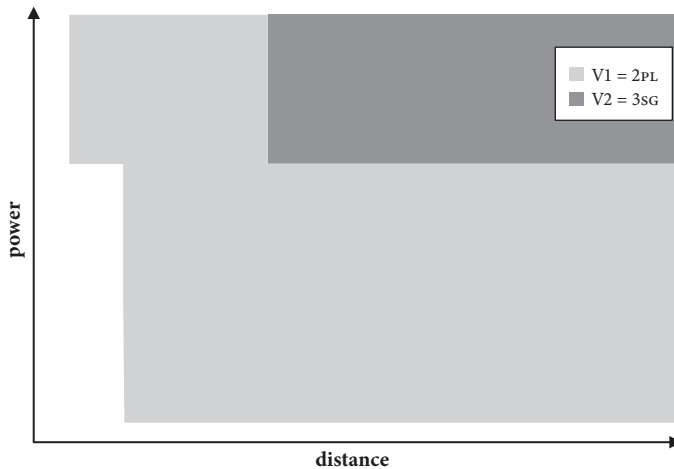


Figure 17.3 Grammatical deference in 18th-century comedies

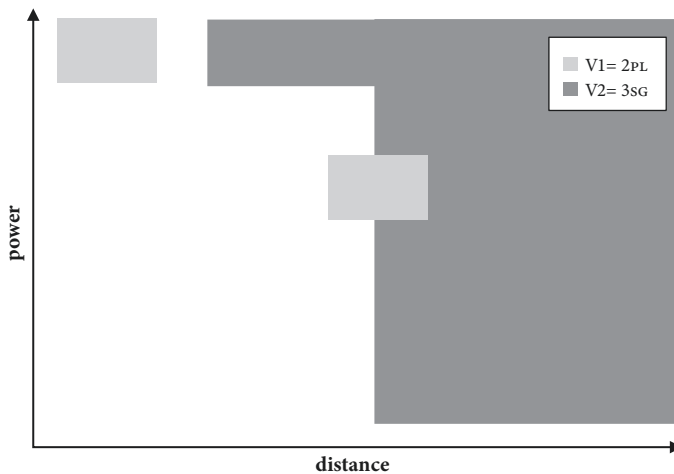


Figure 17.4 Grammatical deference in 20th-century comedies

17.5 Concluding remarks

The slant development of grammatical deference in IE languages has been explained as having its roots in the increasing relevance of the category of person. This change is linear in essence as it inserts itself into the linear evolution from synthetic to analytic that characterizes IE languages but, in a minority of European languages, creates the *humus* for the development of cyclical changes, as in the case of Italian analysed here. In these languages, the system of grammatical deference shifts over the centuries towards less definite categories, or to a less

definite constituent within a category (e.g. from second plural as deferent to third singular feminine). Different factors, which are not strictly 'systemic', played a role in favouring these cyclical changes; particularly relevant are socio-cultural, communicative, and cognitive factors, which are all interrelated in the development of Italian grammatical deference.

The Italian system develops from a situation where the vertical dimension of power is central (16th–18th-century comedies) to one where that of horizontal distance is more relevant (20th-century comedies) (see Figures 17.2–17.4).

In the 16th century, the courtly ideal is dominant in (parts of) society (Rome vs. Florence) and ridiculed in comedies (*La cortigiana*). The exact social positioning is so relevant that it is codified in an all-Italian intricate system of *precedenze* 'precedencies' and *cerimonie* 'ceremonies'. This ceremonious etiquette is initially used in courtly contexts, but it progressively spreads to other parts of society, thus increasing the range of contexts where titles are required (*curializzazione della società* 'courtization of society', Valleriani 2004: 17)—that is, feminine abstract nouns that imply third-person verb agreement—thus creating the opportunity for routinization of third-singular verb agreement and, later, of 3FSG pronouns.

In the 18th century, the *ancien régime* and its conduct rules begin to be seen as old-fashioned and unbearable. In the system of grammatical deference, the use of *voi* is ubiquitous and its spread is propelled by its role as a pronoun used by aristocrats and to them. This use qualifies it as a 'contextual' prestige variable; that is, a desirable trait to be used also by members of other classes who want to position themselves positively within the 'competitive' public ceremonial of the time (see Labov 1972 on prestige variants). However, within the linguistic system, widespread *voi* develops indexicality within the distance dimension, acquiring an increasingly reverential value which indexes civil formality. At the same time, it loses its role within the power dimension, so that its original deferential role is taken over by *lei*.

This development is propelled by changes in politeness systems, as the 16th-century *power deference* is gradually substituted by a 'distance' *deference*. The trajectory of *voi* is exemplary in this regard: as *voi* is the canonical form used among aristocrats or, more generally, when speaking to them, initially its indexical value of prestige plays a role in its spread across other classes, but this same value is later responsible for its general decline because of the linguistic ideology attached to it. In the 20th century, as the bourgeoisie promotes a new type of *rapprochement* politeness, the system of grammatical deference is rooted in the horizontal semantics of social distance, where reciprocal *lei* indexes distance relations. Two different developments are at work. On the one hand, the incipient V2 form *lei* substitutes the 'old-fashioned' V1 *voi*. This form remains, however, as a marginal deferent variant until the end of World War II. On the other hand, the T form *tu*, which in the 18th century is relegated to moments when the ability to efface emotions is put to the test, is used in a higher number of contexts to index intimacy. In

other words, the domains of use of *voi* in the distance dimension are progressively eroded in favour of both those of *lei* and *tu*, and in the power dimension, in favour of those of *lei*.

Thus, what emerges from these trajectories is that the dynamics of change that characterize the system of grammatical deference revolve around both pragmatic enrichment and weakening. The first is essential both to the individual diachronic trajectories of the two V forms and to the cycle formed by them. The propagation of *voi* to new contexts of use, through the development of a reverential value within the social distance dimension, as opposed to its original use in the domain of the vertical dimension of power, is a crucial stage in its trajectory as this allows its original deferential role to be later taken over by *lei*. This is essentially a pragmatic enrichment. The stage at which *lei* gains ground over *voi* is also a stage of pragmatic enrichment, which is made possible by the concomitant pragmatic weakening of *voi* also in its reverential value.

These developments, which include changes to both forms and functions, can be connected with diachronically informed changes related to synchronic variation. From the 16th century onwards, two competing forms expressing grammatical deference are at speakers' disposal (i.e. V1 *voi* or V2 *lei*). The forms are not fully synonymous in terms of their pragmatic functions in the system of social deixis and in their grammatical meaning, and their use is not comparable at the socio-linguistic level either, as V1 soon becomes a common form among all social classes, while V2 remains a prerogative of address to higher classes for a long time. *Voi* is the unmarked and canonical V form, while *lei* is the marked form and has a 'satellite' role (Koch and Oesterreicher 1996; Detges 2020: 301–302), as it begins to be used in contexts associated with the court and has a 'courtly' connotation. Thus, *voi* is increasingly used in any type of contexts and registers, whereas *lei* is used in more deferential ones. However, *lei* begins to oust the canonical *voi*, especially when the domain of use of *voi* expands. This implies changes at two levels: (a) at the level of function, as a consequence of repeated overuse, due to the Italian ceremonious etiquette, where titles and honorifics played an important role, the use of *lei* gradually generalizes its grammatical deferential function, without a co-occurring title, and (b) at the socio-linguistic level, it gradually becomes more acceptable also in contexts without a courtly connotation to express first deferential values and then reverential ones.

Therefore, what ended the pragmatic life cycle of *voi* is partly its internal deficiency when it comes to expressing deference, its original function, and partly speakers' preference for its competitor *lei*. As Detges (2020: 309–310) notes, there is competition between items involved in cyclic change at two levels. If, on one hand, little change is observable with respect to the canonical *voi*, on the other hand, many innovations characterize the trajectory of *lei* (HON + 3SG/2PL verb agreement > PRON.NOM (*ella*) + 3FSG verb agreement > PRON.ACC (*lei*) + 3F/M.SG verb agreement). This evolution can be described as a push chain: the incipient *lei*

arises from courtly contexts, then processes of curialization of society favour an increase in the frequency of contexts where *lei* is (over)used, which leads to the loss of its courtly connotation. More and more, *lei* turns into a functional equivalent of *voi*, first in the vertical dimension of power and then in the horizontal dimension of social distance. Meanwhile, *voi*, due to the cognitive propensity to routinization connected with its prestige role, loses its salience and expressivity in the system, as it is progressively extended to almost all communication domains (18th-century comedies). This results in the weakening of its (socio-)pragmatic force due to its frequency of use, being used to address virtually anyone, and to the fading of its distinctive value, as it no longer expresses deference, being so widespread (Mithun 2016). These developments lead to a mismatch between form and function, which results in the renewal of the V form (*voi* > *lei*). Such changes are favoured by the socio-ideological climate of profound critique of the rules of polite behaviour and social relations, which play a role in propelling first routinization and then pragmatic weakening.

Therefore, motivations for language change reside in the needs of speakers, who tweak language conventions for their advantage in communication (Waltereit 2012). Thus, the Italian cycle of grammatical deference presents evidence against a predominantly system-based explanation of cyclic change. This explanation would struggle to explain how an essentially functional evolution could take place even if the diachronic intervals involved are so extensive (400 years) that the nature of the overall linguistic system of grammatical deference (and of the contextual parameters involved) has changed considerably in the meantime. In their trajectories, both *lei* and *voi* change their pragmatic value so that the resulting outcome of the change is a spiral-like evolution rather than a return to the point of departure (see Figure 17.5).

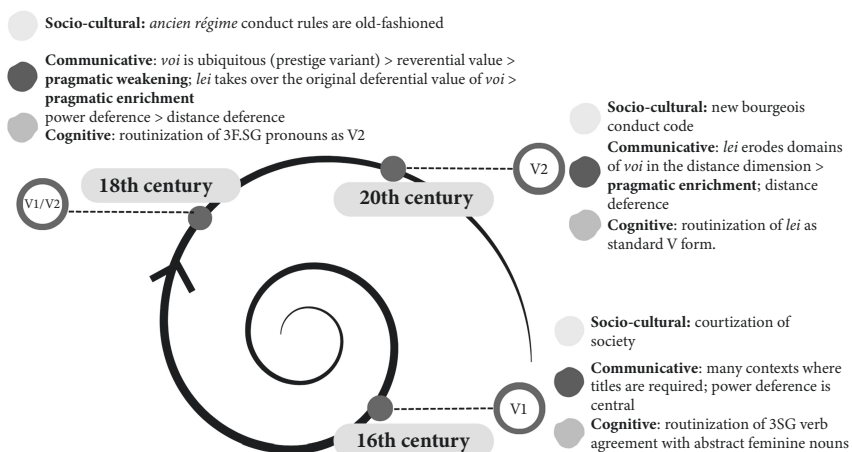


Figure 17.5 The Italian cycle of grammatical deference

Finally, the development of the Italian grammatical deference system sheds light on how social factors affect the cognitive basis for language use, which, in turn, the morphology of the language comes to reflect. However, its cyclical or spiral-like development, and the similarities of developments that took place in other European languages (e.g. Spanish *usted*, Portuguese *você*, German *Sie*, and Danish and Norwegian *de*), also highlight the interrelation of pragmatic cyclical developments that occur in specific contexts (and languages) and more general forces at work, as is the case of the increase in relevance of the category of person that drives linear directional processes in IE languages.

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