**Weakening of pragmatic force and socio-ideological factors: The pragmatic cycle of Italian address pronouns**

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Deferential pronouns are a pan-Indo-European slant phenomenon involving shifts of paradigm-internal values and value relations. These uses have been connected with the increase in relevance within the Indo-European languages of the grammatical category of person (cf. Joseph 1987). In some IE languages, as is the case of Italian in focus here, these shifs are caracterised by cycles that provide glimpses on processes that can drive language change. Specifically, they suggest hypotheses on how social, communicative, and cognitive factors are interrelated.

Deferring implies a replecement of a morphological device, coded for reference to the subject or object, with forms (pronouns and inflections) that apply to another person category. These developments have a cyclical nature and, if pluralization is the basic mechanism of reference, languages develop other devices only after passing through the pluralization stage (Joseph 1987). This grammatical deferring is, however, the icon of an attitude of deference (often institutionalized) toward the referent on the part of the speaker deeply imbued in ideologies, which have their roots in socio-historical changes (Ghezzi 2021).

The focus of this presentation is on the cycle of the Italian system of address pronouns. The standard Italian system includes today a T form (*tu* ‘you.2SG’) and a V form (*lei* ‘she.OBJ.F.3SG). This binary system represents the current phase of a series of changes. Old Italian was characterized by a binary opposition between a T (*tu*) and a V (*voi* 'you.2PL') form. Moving from the 16th century, two V forms coexist: reverential *ella/lei* ‘she.NOM/ACC’ and ‘civil’ *voi* ‘you.2PL’. This system embarked in changes that culminated in a function-form reconfiguration of the V pole in the standard language (*voi > voi/lei > lei*) (cf. Niculescu 1974 and Molinelli 2019).

Moving from the analysis of Italian comedy plays written in the 16th, 18th and 20th centuries, this presentation considers the motivations which may have prompted these developments.

On one hand, the IE slant phenomenon of deferential address creates the humus for the cyclical developments that characterize the Italian system. Specifically relevant are the IE general increase in relevance of the category of person and deference shifting person toward less definite categories (or the less definite constituent within a category, e.g. Italian 2PL > 3SG).

On the other hand, the cognitive propensity for routinization results in a loss of salience of the V form *voi*, as it is extended to almost all communication domains. This consequently results in the weakening of its (socio)-pragmatic force, due to its frequency of use, as *voi* comes to be used to address virtually anyone, and to the fading distinctive value of *voi*, as it no longer expresses deference, being so widespread (Mithun 2019). These developments lead to a mis-match between form and function which result in the renewal of the V form (*voi > lei*). These changes inserted in a socio-ideological climate of profound critique of the rules for polite behaviour and social relations which had a relevant role in propelling routinization and pragmatic weakening (c f. also Ghezzi & Fedriani in print). These affected the cognitive base which morphology came to reflect.

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