

Politeness in pronouns

Third-person reference in Byzantine documentary papyri

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1. Introduction: the *T-V* distinction

In many languages, a person can be addressed in the second person singular or plural:¹ the former indicates *familiarity* and/or *lack of respect*, while the latter suggests *distance* and/or *respect* towards the addressee.² Consider, for example, the following two French sentences:

(1) Tu ne peux pas faire ça!

(2) Est-ce que vous voulez manger quelque chose?

The first sentence could be uttered in an informal context, e.g. by a mother to her son, while the second could be uttered in a more formal context, e.g. by a student to his supervisor. In the literature, this distinction is known as the *T-V* distinction (Brown & Gilman 1960),³ referring to the Latin pronouns *tu* and *vos*.⁴ It is considered a ‘politeness strategy’ (Brown & Levinson 1987, 198-206).

In Ancient Greek texts, such a distinction does not appear to be common (Zilliacus 1953, 5).⁵ Consider, for example, the following petition:

(3) ἐπεὶ οὖν, κύριε, καὶ οἱ δι’ [ἐναντίας ἐνταῦθα] κατηῆλθαν ἀξιῶ καὶ δέομαι ὅπως
[κελεύσης] ἰκανὰ [αὐ]τοὺς π[αρασχεῖν ἐν]ταῦθα ὄντων [[καὶ] ἢ παραγγεῖλαι αὐτοῦ[ς
διὰ τῆς σῆς τ]άξεως πρὸς [τὸ] προσεδρευεῖν αὐτοὺς τῷ ἀχράντῳ σ[ο]υ δικασ[τηρίῳ ἵνα
τῆ]ς δίκης λε[γομένης] μηδὲν ἐμπόδιον γένηται, καὶ τούτ[ου] τυχόντα δι]ὰ παντός [σ]οι
[χάριτας][ομολο]γῶν (P.Cair.Isid.66, ll. 19-24; 299 AD)

“Since, then, my lord, my opponents in the case have also come down here, I request and beseech you to command that they furnish security while they are here or be instructed through your office to remain in attendance on your immaculate court, so that there may

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² See e.g. Dickey (2010:327). On these social dimensions, see further Brown & Gilman (1960).

³ For a more recent treatment, see e.g. Cook (2014). Cook (2014) argues that next to T and V an additional dimension, N (*neutral*), should be distinguished. This will not further concern us here.

⁴ For the polite second person plural, Zilliacus (1953) uses the term *pluralis reverentiae*, which he distinguishes from the *pluralis sociativus* (‘Plural der Gemeinschaft’) and the *pluralis maiestatis*.

⁵ Contrast with Modern Greek (on which, see e.g. Comrie 1975; Sifianou 1992).

be no obstacle to hearing the case. If I obtain this favor, I shall eternally acknowledge my gratitude to you.” [tr. Boak & Youtie]

This petition is sent by the landowner Aurelius Isidorus to the prefect of Egypt, concerning a case of arson. It is noteworthy how even the highest-ranking official is addressed in the second person (singular),⁶ through the forms *κελεύσης*, and the pronouns *σῆς*, *σ[ο]υ* and *[σ]οι*. This is not to say that there were no other politeness strategies. Note, for example, the use of the polite nominal form of address⁷ *κύριε*.⁸

In a recent contribution, Dickey (2010) 327 has stated in this regard that ‘Ancient Greek, like English, does not have such a [T-V, KB] distinction in pronoun and verb usage: there is only one second-person singular pronoun for all addressees’.⁹ I will argue that this view represents an overgeneralisation: previous studies have shown that Ancient Greek did develop a T-V distinction towards the Post-classical period (§2). Ancient Greek developed yet another politeness-strategy in this same period, which has gone unnoticed so far: the use of third person pronominal reference (§3). This, I argue, should be connected to the introduction and rise of abstract nominal forms of address (§4). I conclude the article by making a comparison with other Indo-European languages, where a similar development is attested (§5).

2. The development of a T-V distinction in Ancient Greek

While Ancient Greek initially did not distinguish between the second person singular and the second person plural as a politeness strategy, such a distinction did develop.¹⁰ Zilliaccus (1953) 7 places this development in the Early Byzantine period,¹¹ more in particular towards the end of the fourth century AD. By the end of the sixth century AD, it is common.

⁶ Cf. similarly Zilliaccus (1953) 47, who notes with regard to the Ptolemaic petitions that the king is always addressed in the second person singular.

⁷ For a definition of ‘address’ and ‘forms of address’, see Braun, Kohz & Schubert (1986) xv: ‘Unter Anrede verstehen wir die sprachliche Bezugnahme eines Sprechers auf seinen oder seine Gesprächspartner’ ... ‘Anredeformen sind die Wörter und Wendungen, die der Anrede dienen’.

⁸ The use and development of these forms of address has been studied most recently by Eleanor Dickey (1996, 2001, 2010) for Archaic, Classical and Post-classical Greek (VIII BC - II AD), and by Michael Grünbart (2005) for Byzantine Greek (VI – XII AD). For some older studies, see e.g. Dinneen (1929); Wendel (1929); Zilliaccus (1949, 1953, 1964); Svennung (1958).

⁹ Cf. also Dickey (1997) 5 (specifically with regard to Classical Greek).

¹⁰ As Zilliaccus (1953, 71) notes, the second person plural is typically manifested through *ὑμέτερος/ὑμῶν* attached to an abstract form of address (see further §3). The occurrence of simple *ὑμεῖς* is less frequent.

¹¹ I define the Byzantine period as the period from the fourth to the fifteenth century AD.

Zilliacus (1953) 57-8 notes that at an early stage second person plural address occurs particularly frequently in Christian writers, in particular those who were not influenced by the Classical tradition. He relates this to the fact that (a) the 'Autoritätsglaube' and hierarchy inherent in the Christian community caused a diminished frankness of speech, and (b) that the leader of a Christian community was often associated with his community.

One of the first Christian authors to consequently make the T-V distinction is Theodoretus of Cyrillus (ca. 393 AD – after 458 AD). Zilliacus (1953) 71 notes the following about his usage:

'Vertraute Freunde werden geduzt und dasselbe gilt, wenschon nicht hundertprozentig, auch für Kollegen und Amtsbrüder des priesterlichen Standes und der hierarchischen Organisation. Weltlichen Herren sowie Personen, die dem Briefschreiber verhältnismässig ferner stehen, wird der höfliche aber zugleich kühlere Pluralis entgegengebracht'.

Consider the following passage, where Theodoretus congratulates the prefect Eutrechius:¹²

(4) δέδωκεν ἡμῖν τῶν ὄλων ὁ Πρύτανις καὶ τοῦτο, τῆς **ὑμετέρως** μεγαλοφυΐας ἀκοῦσαι τὸ γέρας, καὶ συνησθῆναι μὲν **ὑμῖν** οὕτω τετιμημένοις, συνησθῆναι δὲ τοῖς ἀρχομένοις ὑπὸ τοιαύτης ἰθυνομένοις πραότητος (Thdt., *Ep.* 57, 1229 C)

"Besides other boons the Ruler of the universe has granted to us that of hearing of your excellency's honour, and of congratulating at once yourself on your elevation and your subjects on so gentle a rule." [tr. Schaff]

Note the use of the forms *ὑμετέρως* and *ὑμῖν*, indicating distance and respect towards the addressee.

Early parallels of this use can be found in the work of Classical authors, but such examples occur much more sporadically; often, we are dealing with a *pluralis sociativus* or *maiestatis*, rather than a *pluralis reverentiae*.¹³ The same is true for the Ptolemaic papyri (Zilliacus 1953, 54-55), where plural address occurs in private correspondences: a mother or father may be addressed in the plural form, as the entire family is co-involved. In more formal contexts, however, the second person plural does not seem to be used.

¹² I borrow this example from Zilliacus (1953, 65).

¹³ Cf. footnote 2 for these terms.

3. Third person pronominal reference: the *Apiones*-archive

What has gone entirely unnoticed so far, however, is the fact that Ancient Greek developed yet another politeness strategy: occasionally, the addressee is referred to in the third person singular. In the documentary papyri, instances of this use can be found, among others, in the so-called *Apiones*-archive, the archive of a powerful and wealthy family with extensive landholdings in the Oxyrhynchite nome (V – VI AD).¹⁴

In this archive,¹⁵ we find some interesting variation: second person singular and second person plural forms of address are both attested.¹⁶ Consider the following two examples:

(5) † θελήση σοῦ ἢ τιμ[ι]ότης πάραυτα [. . .] ἔλθεῖν ἐνταῦθα φέρων μοι πάντα ὅσα κατὰ πρόσωπον εἶπόν σοι, χρ[εῖ]α γὰρ ἐσ[τι] κατὰ τὸ ἀναγκαῖον, τοὺς δὲ προνοητὰς πέμψον εἰ[ς] ἀγρὸν εἰς ἀπαίτησιν, παραγγέλων αὐτοῖς εὐτροπίσαι μοι πολλὰ ὀλοκόττινα. ζῆ γὰρ [ὁ] κ[ύριος, ἐάν] μὴ ἐ[ὔρω] ὅτι σπουδὴν πολλὴν ἐποιῆσαι εἰς τὴν ἀπαίτησιν, διαστρέφω αὐτοὺς πάνυ. τὰ οὖν εὐτρεπισθέντα πάντα φέρε μοι ἅ εἶπόν σοι κατὰ πρόσωπον. † (P.Oxy.16.1840, ll. 2-6; VI AD)

“May your honour be pleased to come here at once, bringing me everything that I told you of in person; for I am in urgent need: and send the administrators to the fields to collect the dues, exhorting them to have many solidi ready for me. For as the Lord lives, if I do not find that they have shown much zeal in collecting, I will punish them well. So bring me all the money that is ready, as I told you in person.” [tr. Grenfell, Hunt & Bell]

(6) ✠ θελήσατε ἐνδοῦναι τοῖς ἀπὸ Πεμπῶ καὶ ἀγελθεῖν ἐπὶ τὴν πόλιν πρὸς δύο ἢ τρεῖς ἡμέρας ἕνεκεν τῶν ἑορτικῶν· καὶ πάλιν ἀπολυο ὑμᾶς ἐκεῖσε ἀπελθεῖν καὶ ἀπαιτησαὶ αὐτά. ✠ † ἐπίδ(ος) Ἰακῶβ Ψαεῖ ἀπὸ Μεσκ(ανούνεως) πα(ρὰ) τοῦ γεοῦχος. ✠ (P.Mert.2.96, ll. 1-3r, l. 1v; VI AD)

“Have the goodness to grant a respite to the people of Pempo and return to the city for two or three days for the festival presents; and I will let you depart home again and collect them. Addressed: Deliver to Jacob son of Psaei of Meskanounis, from the landowner.” [tr. Rees, Bell & Barns]

(5) is a letter from a taxation official, asking the recipient to bring money collected.

While the addressee is initially referred to as σοῦ ἢ τιμ[ι]ότης, we are clearly dealing with second person singular address: note, among others, the use of σοι and the imperatives πέμψον and φέρε. In (6), on the other hand, which, the editors of the document suggest, is a letter from a γεοῦχος (landowner) to a προνοητής (supervisor),

¹⁴ For this archive, see most recently Mazza (2001); Hickey (2012).

¹⁵ For an overview of the texts belonging to this archive, see the Trismegistos-database (<http://www.-trismegistos.org/arch/detail.php?tm=15>, last accessed July 16, 2014).

¹⁶ Cf. also Zilliacus (1953, 73-4).

we observe what was discussed under §2: while there is only a single addressee, that is, Jacob son of Psaei, he is addressed in the second person plural, as indicated by the imperative *θελήσατε*, and the pronominal form *ὕμᾱς*.

Interestingly, however, third-person reference is also attested in this same archive. Consider the following example:

(7) ✠ τρίτην ταύτην ἐπιστολὴν ἔγραψ[α] . . . [.] τ[ῶ] ἐμῶ ἀγαθῶ κ[α]ὶ θεοφυλάκτῳ δεσπό(τη) καὶ ἐξ ὧν μίαν † μὲν διὰ τοῦ σταβλίτου τοῦ ἀποφέροντος **αὐτῆ** τὰ δίδυφα, δευτέραν δὲ ὁμοίως μετὰ Ἄππα Κύρου τοῦ καθοσιωμένου, καὶ νῦν ταύτην, ὡς εἶπον, [τρίτ]ην χάριν τοῦ καρδαλαμίου, ἵνα πέμψητέ μοι, καὶ βάλλω αὐτὸ εἰς τὴν [. . .]λ[. . .]ν. παρακαλῶ τοῖσιν τοῦτο στεῖλαι μοι διὰ τοῦ ἀποδίδουντος [αὐτ]ῆ τὰ εὐτελῆ μου γράμματα, ὄ[πω]ς καὶ ἐν τούτῳ χάριτας **αὐτῆ** ὁμολογήσω. (P.Oxy.59.4006, ll. 1-6; VI-VII AD)

“This I write as a third letter ... to my good and God-defended master, and of these (I sent) one by the stable lad who brought you the jujubes, and a second likewise with Appa Cyrus the soldier, and now this one, as I said, a third, on the subject of the sword-belt (?), so that you may send (it) me, and I shall put it ... So I beg you to send it to me by the man who delivers my poor letters to you, so that in this matter too I may acknowledge my thanks to you.” [tr. Handley *et al.*]

At first instance, this example is quite puzzling: the letter is sent from Christophorus to the *comes* and *μειζότερος* Theodorus, asking him to send a *καρταλάμιον* (probably an elaborate belt). It is clear that *αὐτῆ* is used to refer to the addressee, Theodorus, but why is the pronoun female? *δεσπότης* clearly must be interpreted as a male form, as the adjectives *ἀγαθῶ* and *θεοφυλάκτῳ* indicate. Another example brings clarity:

(8) † ἀπέστειλα τῆ ὑμετέρᾳ προστατικῆ μεγαλοπρεπείᾳ διὰ τοῦ γραμματηφόρου ἵπποκόμου σίμαριν ἓν, ἀλάβητας πέντε λιτρῶν [ἐ]β[δ]ομήκοντα. παρακαλῶ δὲ **αὐτῆν** κελεῦσαι γράψαι μοι τὴν ποσότητα τῶν λιτρῶν. (P.Oxy.16.1857, ll. 1-3; VI – VII AD)

“I send to your protecting magnificence by the groom who brings this letter one small *sinus* and five *alabetes* of seventy pounds; and I exhort you to give orders to write to me the number of pounds.” [tr. Grenfell, Hunt & Bell]

This letter, which was sent by a certain Menas (who elsewhere appears as *χαρτουλάριος* (secretary)) to the same *comes* and *μειζότερος* Theodorus, shows that the form *αὐτῆν* anaphorically refers to a feminine nominal form of address, in this particular case *μεγαλοπρέπεια* “magnificence”.

Similar examples can be found in various other texts belonging to the *Apiones* archive, including P.Oxy.1.128 (l. 9), P.Oxy.16.1848 (l. 2), P.Oxy.16.1855 (l. 17), P.Oxy.16.1858 (l. 6), P.Oxy.16.1860 (ll. 4, 9), P.Oxy.16.1861 (l. 8), and P.Oxy.27.2479 (ll. 4, 26). The contexts in which third person pronominal reference occurs are varied: we find it both in formal contexts (official letters and petitions), and less formal ones (business and private letters); this type of reference is typically used by subordinates writing to their superordinate.

4. Nominal and pronominal forms of address

It may be clear that the use of third-person pronominal forms of address, as discussed under §3, is still limited: these pronouns are strictly connected to abstract nominal forms of address, and therefore always occur in the feminine gender.

Zilliacus (1949, 44; 1964, 172) notes that abstract nominal forms of address become much more frequent in the Post-classical¹⁷ period,¹⁸ especially towards the end of the third century AD.¹⁹ Examples from the Byzantine documentary papyri include ἀδελφότης “brotherhood” (e.g. P.Harr.1.154, l. 1; V/VI AD), ἀρετή “virtue” (e.g. P.Oxy. 1.177, l. 1; VI/VII AD), δεσπότης “mastership” (e.g. P.Eirene.3.15, l. 1; VI AD), εὐδοκίμησις “good reputation” (e.g. P.Cair.Masp.1.67068, l. 1; VI AD); θεοφιλία “love of God” (e.g. P.Bas.19, l. 2; VI/VII AD), λαμπρότης “brilliance” (e.g. P.Oxy.16.1844, l. 2; VI/VII AD), μεγαλοπρέπεια “magnificence” (e.g. P.Harr.1.157, l. 1; V/VI AD), παιδείσις “education” (e.g. CPR.25.8, l. 2; V/VI AD); τιμιότης “dignity” (e.g. P.Oxy.16.1840, l. 2; VI AD), φιλία “friendship” (e.g. CPR.30.15, l. 2; ca. 643-644 AD), etc.²⁰ These terms are

¹⁷ I define the Post-classical period as the period from the third century BC to the third century AD.

¹⁸ Cf. also Dihle (1952, 172); Svennung (1958) 85-6. Dihle (1952) 173 traces this usage back to phrases of the type ἵνα τύχω τῆς παρὰ σοῦ φιλανθρωπίας “so that I may receive your benevolence”, which were used already in Ptolemaic times (especially in petitions). In time, φιλανθρωπία was used to refer directly to the addressee.

¹⁹ This is not to say that abstract forms of address are entirely absent in the Classical period. For some examples, see Zilliacus (1949) 11-29.

²⁰ For a more extensive overview, see Zilliacus (1949) 105-8; Grünbart (2005) 205-361. It is worth noting that these abstract concepts are not only used as forms of address: those responsible for a document also use them to refer to themselves. See e.g. P.Mich.20.816, ll. 11-13 (374 AD): ἐξ ἀναφορᾶς ἰδίῳ κινδύνῳ Ἀρίου καὶ Ἰσιδώρου τῶν ταβουλαρίων τῆς τάξεως καὶ Ἐπιμάχου καὶ Προεχίου οἰκονόμων καὶ Διογυσίου βοηθοῦ διακεντήσεως ... ἡ ἐμὴ καθοσίωσις μεμάθηκεν “my devotion has been informed by a report (made) at their own risk by Arios and Isidoros, tabularii of the office, Epimachos and Proechios, oikonomoi, and Dionysios, auditing (?) assistant”.

typically feminine in gender,²¹ and most often end in -(ε)ια or -της, less often in -σις (Zilliagus 1949, 47).

The spread of such abstract forms of address can be connected more generally to what Svennung (1958) 3-6 calls ‘indirect’ address (to be contrasted with ‘direct’ address). Grünbart (2005) 40 defines indirect address as follows: ‘von indirekter Anrede spricht man, wenn eine Anredeform in das Satzgefüge eingebaut wird und durch die Verwendung der dritten Person gekennzeichnet ist. Das Anredewort kann auch Subjekt des Satzes sein, dessen Prädikat in der dritten Person steht’. Abstract forms of address are typical for indirect address (Zilliagus 1953, 64-5; Grünbart 2005, 41).

What is interesting, however, is that the use of third personal pronominal reference seems to be undergoing a semantic extension: it often occurs in contexts that are typical for humans, rather than inhuman abstract concepts. To be more specific, it is not only used with *verbs of communication*²² such as αἰτέω “I ask” (e.g. P.Bas.19, l. 2; VI/VII AD), ἀξιόω “I request” (e.g. P.Oxy.24.2418, l. 8; V/VI AD), ἀσπάζομαι “I embrace” (e.g. CPR.25.21, l. 8; VI AD), γράφω “I write” (e.g. P.Laur.2.45, l. 6; VI/VII AD), εὐχαριστέω “I thank” (e.g. P.Gen.4.178, l. 3; VI AD), εὐχόμαι “I pray” (e.g. P.Grenf.2.91, l. 2; VI/VII AD), παρακαλῶ “I entreat” (e.g. CPR.14.52, l. 18; VII AD), πέμπω “I send” (e.g. P.Cair.Masp.2.67202, l. 6; VI AD), and σημαίνω “I indicate” (e.g. P.Oxy.56.3871, l. 5; VI/VII AD),²³ but also with *verbs of change of possession*²⁴ such as ἀναδίδωμι “I deliver” (e.g. P.Oxy.16.1848, l. 2; VI/VII AD), ἀποφέρω “I deliver” (e.g. P.Oxy.59.4006, l. 2; VI/VII AD), ἀποδίδωμι “I deliver” (e.g. P.Amst.1.54, l. 2; VI AD), and παρέχω “I furnish” (e.g. P.Princ.2.106, l. 2; VI AD), *psychological verbs*²⁵ such as καταξιόω “I deem worthy” (e.g. PSI.7.742, ll. 2-3; V/VI AD) and μέμφομαι “I blame” (e.g. P.Cair.Masp.1.67068, l. 2; VI AD), *mental state verbs*²⁶ such as οἶδα “I know” (e.g. P.Oxy.51.3637, l.9; 623 AD), and *verbs of existence*²⁷ such as πολυετέω “I am many years old” (e.g. SB.6.9107, l. 3; VI/VII AD). It

²¹ Zilliagus (1949) mentions a few neuter nouns that are used as forms of address, such as κράτος “strength” (e.g. P.Cair.Masp.1.67019, l. 1; VI AD); μέγεθος “greatness” (e.g. SB 1.5357, l. 10; V – VI AD) and ὕψος “height” (e.g. P.Cair.Masp.1.67003, l. 24; ca. 567 AD). In the Byzantine documentary papyri, these nouns occur in contexts very similar to those of the feminine nouns, but never seem to be referred to anaphorically by a third person pronoun.

²² Typically as the object (addressee).

²³ Grünbart (2005) 40-1 notes that this class of verbs often occurs in the context of indirect address.

²⁴ Both as the subject (agent) and indirect object (recipient).

²⁵ Both as the subject (experiencer) and object (theme).

²⁶ As the subject (experiencer).

²⁷ As the subject (experiencer).

can be found as the genitive complement of *abstract nouns* such as σωτηρία “salvation” (e.g. P.Oxy.16.1841, l. 4; VI AD) and υγιεία “health” (e.g. P.Ant.2.94, l. 2; VI AD), *kinship nouns* such as ἀδελφός “brother” (e.g. P.Cair.Masp.2.67202, l. 7; VI AD), υἱός “son” (e.g. P.Bodl.1.80, l. 6; VI/VII AD), and οἰκεῖος “family member” (e.g. P.Ant.2.100, l. 2; VI AD), *verbal nouns* such as ἐντολικόν “command” (e.g. P.Ant.2.95, l. 4; VI AD) and λιτή “prayer” (e.g. P.Fouad.88, l. 6; VI AD), and *body-part nouns* such as πούς “foot” (e.g. P.Oxy.16.1855, l. 2; VI/VII AD). It not only occurs after pronouns denoting an *intermediary*, such as διά “through” + gen. (e.g. CPR.25.21, l. 8; VI AD) and a *recipient*, such as πρὸς “to” + acc. (e.g. PSI.8.889, l. 15; VI/VII AD), but also after pronouns denoting an *agent*, such as παρὰ “by” + gen. (e.g. P.Oxy.16.1864, l. 12; VII AD).

Given this semantic extension, I believe this type of pronominal reference bridges the gap between Svennung’s ‘direct’ and ‘indirect’ address: grammatically, the pronoun is used in reference to an abstract concept, but since it is used in typically ‘human’ contexts, it is clear that the actual addressee of the document is meant. This goes the furthest in examples such as (7),²⁸ where an abstract nominal form of address is no longer present.

5. Parallel developments in other Indo-European languages

Abstract forms of address, and more generally indirect address, are not limited to Ancient Greek. In his comparative treatment of indirect address in Latin and Greek, and the Romance and Germanic languages, Svennung (1958) makes a broad distinction between two types: (i) ‘Indirekte Anrede mit einem konkreten Substantiv’ (e.g. Latin *dominus*, Spanish *señor*, French *seigneur*, German *Herr*, etc.), and (ii) ‘Indirekte Anrede durch ehrende Abstrakta’ (e.g. Latin *maiestas*, Spanish *merced*, French *excellence*, Italian *Signoria*, etc.).²⁹ Similarly to what we have observed in the Byzantine documentary papyri, both types are often referred to anaphorically by a pronoun, which in time can also be used independently.³⁰ As Svennung (1958) 160 observes with regard to type (i),

‘Die indirekte Anrede durch “Herr” u.dgl. hat für mehrere der grossen Sprachen weitreichende Folgen gehabt, weil das sich auf das vorangehende “Herr” usw. beziehende

²⁸ For similar examples, see e.g. P.Oxy.16.1848, l. 2 (VI/VII AD); P.Prag.1.87, l. 13 (VII-VIII AD).

²⁹ Note that these are typically feminine, as in Ancient Greek.

³⁰ E.g. Italian *Lei*, which is nowadays still used, and originally referred to *la vostra Signoria*.

“anaphorische” Pronomen allmählich auf eigne Hand als Anredewort in einer indirekten Anrede aufgetreten ist’.³¹

Quite surprisingly, however, Svennung (1958) makes no mention whatsoever of Ancient Greek, which may be the oldest attested European language where such a development took place. This being said, it should be stressed that the development in Ancient Greek was very limited: (a) while we do find indirect address with specific nouns such as δεσπότης,³² these are not typically repeated anaphorically by a third person pronoun, (b) third person pronouns that are used independently of a nominal form of address occur infrequently, (c) in Ancient Greek, there does not seem to be one nominal form of address that became dominant; we find a wide variety of forms of address.

6. Concluding remarks

In the preceding sections, I discussed how Ancient Greek developed pronominal reference as a politeness strategy: as in other European languages, a distinction gradually developed between second person singular and second person plural address.

Additionally, however, the addressee could be referred to in the third person singular. This last development, I argued, should be connected to the rise of abstract nominal forms of address, a process which can be dated to the fourth century AD.

Awareness of the existence of third person pronominal address is important for our interpretation of Byzantine documentary papyri: since editors generally do not comment upon the phenomenon, modern readers of these documents may wrongfully assume that αὐτή (or a similar form) refers to an actual female person, rather than an abstract nominal form of address (or the other way around), especially in those cases where the original address is absent, or a female is also mentioned in the document.³³ This is explicitly signalled by one of the leading experts in papyrology, Roger Bagnall:

‘Dans les lettres mutilées, où l’on cherche des formes grammaticales féminines pour pouvoir identifier l’auteur, les lettres byzantines peuvent nous égarer à cause des noms abstraits, pour la plupart du genre féminin, qui désignent des personnalités. Car on peut y parler d’un homme comme de “Sa Grandeur” ou une autre expression qui va générer une syntaxe féminine inopportune.’ (Bagnall 2001,138)

³¹ For a more recent treatment, see e.g. Jucker & Taavitsainen (2002, 3-6).

³² See e.g. P.Oxy.16.1859, l. 1 (VI/VII AD): παρακαλῶ τὸν ἐμὸν ἀγαθὸν δεσπότην “I exhort my good master”. For further discussion, see Dickey (2001).

³³ In P.Ant.2.95, ll. 8-11 (VI AD) and P.Oxy.16.1847, ll. 4-5 (VI/VII AD), for example, there is some potential for confusion.

Knowledge of the phenomenon may also help us to reconstruct its diachrony in the (Indo-)European languages more satisfactorily, in particular the question whether Ancient Greek could have influenced Latin and by extension the Romance languages,³⁴ in which third-person address has become much more prominent.³⁵

³⁴ On the question of Greek influences on the Romance languages, see a.o. Dietrich (1998).

³⁵ Zilliacus (1949) 96 mentions the linguistic similarities between Latin and Greek in the Post-classical period, and notes that 'das Griechische in den meisten Fällen die Anregungen und Vorbilder erstellt hat'.

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