



# Plural pronouns and social deixis in Latin: a pragmatic development

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## ABSTRACT

Address systems are central to communication and typically comprise nominal and pronominal forms (and related verbal agreement) that distinguish between familiar / affective and reverential/courtesy values. Forms of address are pragmatic in nature and constitute a linguistic domain that is located at the periphery of grammar, and whose forms and functions are subjected to rapid and dramatic developments since they are deeply rooted in the socio-cultural situation and can change considerably according to political, social and cultural transformations.

This study investigates the socio-pragmatic development of the system of address from Early Latin, when the system was unmarked as to the reverential dimension, to Late Latin, when such functions emerged and were clearly expressed, by unravelling the main diachronic steps and the factors at play. In a corpus language like Latin, socio-linguistic groups and variables are not straightforwardly identifiable. It is registers and styles that allow us to analyse patterns of variation in interactional contexts and in social deixis. Accordingly, this paper offers a case study on Cicero's *Verrine* that allows us to make both qualitative and quantitative observations.

KEYWORDS: address system, identity, inclusive plural, reverential plural, honorific titles.

## 1. *Introduction*

The system of address is central to communication as it defines, shapes and indexes both the speaker's and the interlocutor's identity and their mutual relationship. The system of address is independent of the content which is being conveyed in a given interaction and is made up of both verbal and non-verbal elements, constituting a system in Saussure terms: what constitutes the social deixis system which is anchored to a given socio-cultural context are not single elements, but their coherent integration.

Address systems in modern Indo-European languages comprise nominal and pronominal forms (and related verbal agreement, if this exists) that typically distinguish between familiar and affective values, on the one hand, and reverential and polite values, on the other. These values are deeply rooted in the socio-cultural situation and can change rapidly according to political,

social and cultural transformations, whenever previously established criteria are substituted or enriched by newer ones, which give rise to a new system.

This study investigates the socio-pragmatic development of the system of address from Early Latin, when the system was unmarked as to the reverential dimension, to Late Latin, when such functions emerged and were clearly expressed along the *tu/vos* opposition that is still found in some Romance languages.

An important aim of the research is to highlight the main diachronic steps and the factors at play in the linguistic representation of identity by means of nouns, pronouns and verbal agreement. While nouns and pronouns rely on the speaker's choice, verbal agreement is due to the grammatical constraints of a given language; this difference highlights the pragmatic power of nominal and pronominal strategies.

In this type of linguistic change the existence in Latin of a pool of synchronic variables featuring a set of alternative, but similar, strategies played a key role. Indeed forms and functions can dynamically reduce or increase their relative importance, thus making the general scenario not always straightforwardly defined.

In order to describe this complex diachronic development, we will analyse subsequent steps of synchronic variation in different chronological periods and literary genres, rather than taking into account sociolinguistic parameters. Speakers typically select an address form on the basis of sociolinguistic considerations that fit with a given interactional context. In many studies on modern languages, speakers are classified according to sociolinguistic features such as age, social rank, education, and in most cases research has been carried out on highly standardized languages (see, e.g., Braun, 1988: 23-24). Corpus languages, however, have a specific status: sociolinguistic groups and variables are not straightforwardly identifiable, and it is rather registers and styles that allow us to analyse patterns of variation in interactional contexts and in social deixis.

This study stems from previous research on specific authors (e.g., Conway, 1899 and Pieri, 1967 on Cicero's letters; Lilja, 1971 on Pliny's letters; Haverling, 1995 on Symmacus) that provided interesting insights. These results are worth reconsidering both over a longer time span and in relation to remarks such as those of Brown and Gilman (1960: 254) who, partially relying on previous studies<sup>1</sup>, explain the emergence of the reverential value

<sup>1</sup> CHATELAIN (1880); MOMMSEN (1882: 540-544); BYRNE (1936).

of *vos* as depending on the presence of two emperors (in Constantinople and Rome).

In this perspective, the aim of this paper is twofold: to reconstruct this long diachronic development from Early to Late Latin, trying to systematically integrate earlier specific observations on single authors within a longer diachronic perspective, and to challenge the widespread opinion that the domain of use of the second-person plural pronoun *vos*, originally used to refer to the emperors, would have progressively expanded to address people of higher ranks.

This paper is organized as follows. In order to describe the emergence of a system of social deixis in Latin, in Section 2 we will first describe the Early Latin address system, which was unmarked as to the reverential dimension. In Section 3, we will focus on the pragmatic mechanism that triggered the emergence of this pragmatic strategy, namely pluralization, which is closely connected to the use of abstract nouns to refer to the interlocutor (e.g., *maiestas*). In Section 4 we will offer a case study based on Cicero's *Verrine*, also to provide a quantitative corpus-based description of the spread of pluralization in a specific text genre. Section 5 broadens the scope of the discussion, extending it to further developments that produced new rules in the system of Late Latin social deixis and challenging previous interpretations of the motivations that led to the emergence of later uses. Section 6 concludes with a discussion of the analysis developed in this paper and summarizes the main results.

## 2. *The Latin system of address*

Forms of address are pragmatic in nature because they depend on the system of social rules that govern the behaviour of the interlocutors in a given historical context. They constitute a linguistic domain that is located at the periphery of grammar, and whose forms and functions are subject to rapid and dramatic changes in diachrony. Let us briefly consider, for instance, the two poles that are at the chronological extremes of the system, namely Contemporary Italian, on the one hand, and Classical Latin, on the other. It emerges clearly that the strategies for expressing social deixis are remarkably different.

In Contemporary Italian, the system of address comprises:

- a. Nominal forms, including a wide range of names (e.g., proper names), kinship terms (*mamma* “mum”, *nonna* “grandma”), titles (*signore* “Sir”, *Sua Eccellenza* “His/Her Worship”), military ranks (*Sergente* “sergeant”) and work-related terms (*Professore* “professor”, *Ingegnere* “engineer”). The nominal system has progressively been reduced over time (for example, in the 18th century titles like *Vostra Signoria* “Your Lordship” were much more common: Molinelli, 2010; 2015).
- b. Pronominal forms include *tu* (informal) as opposed to *Lei* (formal and reverential, Migliorini, 1957); there is a regression of *Voi*, whose use is now circumscribed to some Southern regional varieties. The tripartite system *tu/Lei/Voi* was used according to social rules from the 16th to the 20th century, though *Lei* had some ideological antagonists mainly in the 18th and 20th centuries, especially during fascism, because of its supposed foreign influence.

In Classical Latin, the system of address was built upon the following strategies:

- a. Nominal forms represent the main strategy, and proper names are the most frequent: the use of *praenomen*, *nomen* and *cognomen* could modulate and express different address types (Dickey, 2002: 56-67). Other frequent strategies include titles (*dominus*); kinship terms (*mater*, *frater*); terms to express affect and esteem (*carissima*, *dilecte*: Dickey, 2002: 136 ff.); figuratively used terms like *cor*, *lumen* (Dickey, 2002: 152).
  - b. Regarding pronouns, *tu* is the only option available; in address structures, the possessive adjective *mi* (*mea*, *meum*, *meus*, *mei*, *meae*, *noster*) followed by a proper name (ex. 1) or an abstract noun (ex. 2) or adjective (ex. 3) is widely attested to convey affective involvement, especially in private letters (see Dickey, 2002: 218 for more examples). *Noster* often has sociative value (ex. 4).
1. *Me*, mi Pomponi, *valde paenitet vivere*. (Cic. *Att.* III, 4)  
“My dear Pomponius, I am heartily sorry to be alive.”
  2. *Obsecro te*, *mea vita*. (Cic. *Fam.* XIV 2, 3: to Terentia)  
“I implore you, my darling.”
  3. *Vale*, mi *optime et optatissime frater*. (Cic. *Q.fr.* II, 7, 2)  
“Good-bye, my best and most longed-for of brothers.”
  4. *Vehementer me sollicitat Atticae nostrae valetudo*. (Cic. *Att.* XII, 33, 2)  
“I am much disturbed about dear Attica’s hill-health.”

Pieri (1967: 212) points to subtle pragmatic differences in the use of *meus* and *noster* in Cicero: *meus* entails an affective involvement, such as that

felt by a father, a brother, a friend; *noster*, by contrast, implies a basic sociative meaning and expresses a lesser degree of intimacy, or even deference, towards the interlocutor. As we will see, this semantic nuance played a crucial role in the development of further pragmatic values deployed by forms that are connected to the first-person plural.

The functional enrichment of the social deixis system lies in the continuum between these two opposing poles: in Classical Latin the system inherited from Early Latin is basically constituted by nominal and pronominal *tu* forms, but already in Classical Latin and in the subsequent decades a new pluralization strategy emerges. This emergent strategy, attested as early as in Cicero, is based on the use of first-person plural pronouns (and related verbal agreement) for the expression of sociative and inclusive values, which also foster the development of *pluralis auctoris* and *modestiae*, as will be discussed in Section 4.

The train of reasoning followed here, partially along the lines of Haverling (1995)<sup>2</sup>, is that another value developed out of the *pl. modestiae* function, namely, that of *pluralis maiestatis*. The *pluralis maiestatis* can be interpreted as a means of honorific self-designation used by the speaker in order to pragmatically modulate and emphatically express his/her identity in specific contexts. The motivation behind the pluralization strategy of the *pluralis maiestatis* is iconic in nature, along the lines of the principle ‘what counts more is more’. In this perspective, pluralization plays a key conceptual role in such a pragmatic development: further evidence for this claim comes from the fact that in many languages pluralization is the basic mechanism for deference (Head, 1978: 191, fn. 6). Interestingly, Joseph too refers to this pragmatic use of the plural as an «icon of an attitude of deference». To quote Joseph’s own words:

In deferential address the speaker defers from using the morphological devices originally coded for reference to the human subject or object in the sentence, replacing them with pronouns and inflections that apply literally to another person category. The morphological deferring is the icon of an attitude of deference (genuine or institutionalized) toward the referent on the part of the speaker. The ‘error’ can end up as a requisite of usage, and in the most extreme case replace the original form

<sup>2</sup> HAVERLING (1995: 354) argues that «the reason for the initial development of the ‘illogical’ use of the plural of the 2<sup>nd</sup> person should be sought in a more frequent use of the ‘illogical’ plural of the 1<sup>st</sup> person in epistolography in general, rather than in the political or even in the social conditions of the day».

entirely, as in English, where deferential you has driven 2s thou to a marginal, archaizing para-existence. (Joseph, 1987: 259)

This strategy, which points to a honorific self-evaluation entailing a positive representation of the self, is likely to have analogically triggered a complementary strategy, that of *pluralis reverentiae*, that is, the symmetrical use of *vos* to address someone who refers to him/herself with *nos*, with the aim of recognizing the self-representation of identity maintained by the interlocutor.

This is, in sum, the development that we seek to untangle and analyse in this study. Let us now investigate more closely the stages of this functional development that, as far as we are aware, has never been explored across a wide chronological span and not even with a specific pragmatic approach.

### 3. *Pluralization strategies in Latin*

As we have seen above, the system of address in Early Latin does not feature reverential pronouns: the only available and unmarked form is the singular *tu*. Even a frequently cited passage such as that found in Ennius (VIII 377), *nos sumus Romani, qui fuimus ante Rudini*, represents a controversial case: the plural here could have been used by the poet to recall his *tria corda*, i.e., Oscan, Latin and Greek languages. Evidence for the exclusive use of *tu* comes from dialogues reported in Early comedies, from epistolary material, and also from the greeting formulae used by gladiators to address the emperor, which survived even after the Classical period:

5. *Have, Imperator, morituri te salutant.* (Svet. *Claud.* 21, 6)  
 “Hail, Emperor, those who are about to die salute you.”

From a diachronic perspective, the earlier non-referential pluralization in Latin emerges with the first-person pronoun, whereby *nos* is used instead of *ego* with a sociative and inclusive value. In this perspective, *nos* literally points to the inclusion of the addressee and evokes a sense of commonality and close relationship, also enhancing participation, interest and support (cf. Hofmann, 2003: 291; Brown and Levinson, 1987: 127). By including the interlocutor within an action that, in principle, does not require his interven-

tion, the speaker wishes to establish a more direct contact, and the outcome of this supportive move is to trigger a close association.

In Cicero's letters, the inclusive plural is widely attested as associating the interlocutor within a move of appraisal or contempt, in order to reinforce or mitigate a precise communicative move – and this can happen even if the letter is sent only to Atticus:

6. *Sed opinor quiescamus, ne nostram culpam coarguamus qui, dum urbem, id est patrias, amamus dumque rem conventuram putamus, ita nos gessimus ut plane interclusi captique simus.* (Cic. *Att.* IX, 6, 2)

“But I suppose I had better keep quiet, for fear of convicting myself of folly in managing to be cut off wholly and made captive through my love of my country and an idea that the matter could be patched up.”

In orations, the inclusive plural is frequently used by Cicero to associate his client with himself or to show his own participation and involvement in his cause (see Ronconi, 1946: 2), as in the following passage:

7. *Unum perfugium, iudices, una spes reliqua est Sex. Roscio [...] vestra pristina bonitas et misericordia. Quae si manet, salvi esse possumus.* (Cic. *P.Sex.R.Am.* 52, 150)

“The only refuge, the only hope that is left for Sextus Roscius is [...] the kindness and compassion which you showed in earlier times. If these feelings abide, we can even now be saved [that is: “Sex. R. can be safe”].”

As I will try to show in the next section, forensic rhetoric constitutes an interesting text genre, since it provides a communicative pattern that fosters the development of this pragmatic function.

Another pragmatic development, which dates back to Classical Latin, is referred to as *pluralis auctoris* or *pluralis modestiae*, that is, the use of *nos* for *ego* in speaking of oneself and one's own actions. In doing so, the speaker downplays his individual personality, and identifies with his audience: this is why this type of pluralization acquires a modesty value, precisely because the author does not emphasize his own creative process and highlights instead the relationship that, by means of his own work, he has established with his readers (see Pieri, 1967: 217-218). By means of a plural reference, the personality of the author is defocalised and blurred in a plurality of subjects:

8. *Ut supra demonstravimus.* (Caes. *Gall.* 5, 19)  
 “As above set forth.”
9. *Nos hic φιλοσοφοῦμεν (quid enim aliud?) et τὰ περὶ τοῦ καθήκοντος magnifice explicamus προσφωνοῦμενque Ciceroni.* (Cic. *Att.* XV, 13, 6)  
 “I am philosophizing here (what else can I do?) and getting on splendidly with my *De Officiis*, which I am dedicating to my son.”

The *pluralis acutoris* or *modestiae* basically functions as a pragmatic means to modulate the affective distance between the speaker or writer and his interlocutors. At this chronological stage this is the only value that clearly emerges from the texts at our disposal. Some ambiguous uses found in Catullus and in Pliny’s letters to Trajan cannot be interpreted as earlier cases of *pluralis reverentiae* (see below), which, at this chronological stage, has not yet emerged. The same holds true for the singular-plural opposition in the first person, as argued by Lilja at the end of her detailed study on Pliny (1971: 103): «the singular use of *nos* is rare in Pliny’s letters, the first person plural ordinarily referring to more than one person». Lilja found just «a couple of instances» of pluralization that however should be interpreted as *pluralis modestiae*, as in the case of *scripta nostra* (IV, 26, 2 e VII, 2, 1). Pieri (1967: 218) and Fridh (1956: 170) provide an interpretation along the same lines.

The *pluralis maiestatis* constitutes a further development that emerges in the 3rd century CE and is likely to have stemmed from the systematic use of the *pluralis modestiae* in formal contexts. A crucial role was played at this juncture by a specific type of text, namely, imperial rescripts, that is, documents that were issued in response to a specific demand made by its addressee, most typically on juridical matters. These legal texts were in many cases prompted by the emperor, who tended to adopt means of honorific self-designation, including plural verbal forms such as *iudicamus*, *permittimus*, *decernimus*, and abstract nominals, as evinced in the following passage from the *Codex Theodosianus*, whose *scriptio* dates back to July 27th, 398.

10. *Repugnantes priscorum sententias nostra serenitas temperavit.*  
 (*Codex Theodosianus* 11, 30, 56: 398 AD)  
 “Our Serene Highness moderated those who made resistance to the decisions of the ancestors.”

According to Hofmann (2003: 292), the *pluralis maiestatis* spreads from the 5th century onwards. Hofmann and Szantyr (1965 II: 20), however, argue that its use was already established by the time of Gordianus III



(238-244 CE). Once conventionalized as pragmatic strategy to express honorific self-evaluation, the *pluralis maiestatis* triggered the complementary use of 'illogical' second plural reference in place of a second singular reference, which was re-interpreted as a deferent form of address: the *pluralis reverentiae*. This type of pluralization progressively became the conventional, ritualized strategy to modulate and express social distance and as such was codified in the social deixis system of the time (Molinelli, 2015). Once part of the system, the *pluralis reverentiae* rapidly spread in all those social environments that were heavily influenced by official registers; Norberg (1999: 27) reports that this kind of plural was even used as a polite form to address colleagues in specific socio-cultural contexts. This use occurs in Symmachus (Haverling, 1995)<sup>3</sup>, later in Cassiodorus and Gregorius Magnus (Hoffman and Szantyr, 1965 II: 20-21). This use of the second plural reference pragmatically interpreted as a deferent address form subsequently passed into the spoken language and into early Romance varieties. To cite an example: the plural *voi* "you" is used by Dante to express respect and social distance with interlocutors such as Farinata, Brunetto, and Cacciaguیدا (but not with his beloved Vergil), who, by contrast, addresses Dante with the *tu* form (Ronconi, 1946: 4).

Summing up, the decisive turning point in the context of this long pragmatic development is constituted by pluralization as a codified strategy to linguistically express social distance. It first emerged in Classical Latin with a sociative value and triggered subsequent developments. At this chronological stage, epistolary texts and forensic rhetoric constitute the most interesting genres. Crucially, the latter has been less investigated: however, it is worth looking into further in order to explore the emergence of sociative-inclusive functions and the development of the related *pluralis auctoris*.

The genre of forensic rhetoric, indeed, intrinsically realizes a sort of 'scene' where (i) the speaker addresses his interlocutors by seeking to estab-

<sup>3</sup> According to HAVERLING (1995: 337-338), the earliest indisputable examples of *vos* (instead of *tu*) to express deference, respect and, more generally, social distance, first appear in Symmachus – and this in spite of diverging authoritative interpretations: «Some recent experts of Symmachus take the plural in this and other passages to be sociative [...] In my view, however, we are actually dealing with examples of an 'illogical use' of the plural». The passage referred to in the quote is given below: *Summa adficio gratia, quod animadverto litteras meas tibi in subidas non videri, et in gravi dono habeo hanc apud vos esse de nostris epistolis censionem [...] verum ut hoc mihi laetitiae fuit, ita illud ludificandi gratia opinor adiectum, si quid in tuis versibus sorduisset, id ut mei stili cura limaret [...] interea si nobis utendas aures datis, dicam, quid diebus superioribus egerimus [...]. Hinc vos munere salutationis imperio, doque nuntium, prope nos, Deo volente, esse redituros. Fors fuit huiusce promissi. Vestra tamen indulgentia affatum saepe tribuat, quasi diutius abfuturis. Vale. (Symm. Epist. 1, 3).*

lish an emphatic relationship, both in the case of judges to be persuaded and defendants to be defended; this may eventually trigger inclusive values; and (ii) the speaker effectively draws the attention of the audience, this eventually leading to the development of *auctoris/modestiae* plurals. These features make this text genre particularly suitable to fostering bridging contexts in which both the pragmatically enriched interpretation and the literary reading are possible, and this is the reason why we have decided to explore Cicero's *Verrine* orations in depth in the next section.

#### 4. *A Case Study: Cicero's Verrine orations*

The case study offered in this section was carried out using a corpus-based methodology. The text under scrutiny was quantitatively analysed using the *LASLA Opera Latina*<sup>4</sup>.

The *Verrine* orations were selected after a comparison with other orations by Cicero because of their quantitative and qualitative adequacy: the phenomenon of pluralization is well represented both in quantitative and in qualitative terms. The body of data analysed comprises all first-person plural pronouns (Section 4.1) and all verbs inflected in the first-person plural (Section 4.2).

##### 4.1. *Pluralization of pronouns and adjectives*

The token frequency of first-person plural pronouns in the *Verrine* orations is 106. Remarkably, 17% of the pronouns out of the total number carry pragmatic values: this quantitative evidence suggests that the pragmatic functions performed by pluralization strategies are stabilized in Cicero, not only in epistolary texts, also in this text genre. The quantitative distribution is summarized in Table 1.

Total amount of 1 <sup>st</sup> person plural pronominal forms	Inclusive / sociative plural	<i>Pluralis auctoris / modestiae</i>
106	9	9

Table 1. *Pronominal forms of 1<sup>st</sup> pers. pl. in the Verrine orations.*

<sup>4</sup> This corpus, compiled at the University of Liège, contains Early and Classical works that can be searched according to lexical parameters and grammatical categories (<http://cipl93.philo.ulg.ac.be/OperaLatina/>).

Let us briefly comment on some significant examples.

Firstly, the corpus contains interesting cases of sociative plural which alternates with uses of the corresponding singular pronoun within the very same excerpt: this testifies to the fact that the plural form constituted a pragmatically oriented alternative form carrying a specific communicative value. In (11), for example, *causa a me perorata* is opposed to *accusatio nostra*: the cause is perceived as the individual product of Cicero's original thought, while its content, that is, the act of accusation, mirrors Cicero's projection towards the external and public audience, an attitude that is capable of producing tangible consequences involving the whole community.

11. *Non sinam profecto causa a me perorata quadraginta diebus interpositis tum nobis denique responderi cum accusatio nostra in obliuionem diuturnitatis adducta sit.* (Cic. *In C. Verrem actio prima*, 54)

“Assuredly I will not suffer the reply to our case to be made only when forty days have passed after I have ended my speech for the prosecution, and the lapse of time has blurred the memory of the charges we bring.”

Example (12) sheds more light on the use of the sociative plural as pointing to the clear inclusive import of the choices that Cicero wishes to share with the judges. What Cicero is claiming has a collective meaning that involves everyone and from which nobody can escape.

12. *Quid est, Verres? [...] Non credemus M. Octavio non L. Liguri? Quis nobis credit, cui nos?* (Cic. *In C. Verrem actio secunda* I 127,4)

“What have you to say then, Verres? Shall we not believe Marcus Octavius Ligus? Or Lucius Ligus? Who will then believe us, or whom shall we believe?”

The passage given in (13) neatly illustrates another pragmatic nuance achieved by the inclusive meaning, namely that of the generalizing plural with intensifying value. Cicero amplifies his experience so that it can serve as a paradigmatic representation of the experience of virtually everybody, associating them with his own behaviour and in his reflections, which are seen and presented as universally valid.

13. *Haec eadem est nostrae rationis regio et uia horum nos hominum sectam atque instituta persequimur.* (Cic. *In C. Verrem actio secunda* V 181,8)

“For persons like myself, our lives must be planned to follow the same path and take the same direction; we belong to the school, an copy the methods, of the men I speak of.”

As far as the *pluralis auctoris* is concerned, we can observe that this function is closely connected to Cicero's professional activity as a lawyer, with reference to procedures that only he, with his skills and personal choices, could have performed. However, Cicero occasionally uses plural pronouns to express self-reference in relation to salient juridical acts in order to virtually involve the whole audience and to share his legal actions, such as, for instance, that of requiring *tabulas* (ex. 14), the notification of the summons to appear (ex. 15), the submission of pieces of evidence for allegation (ex. 16), and the act of bringing charges (ex. 17).

14. *Hoc uero nouum et ridiculum est quod hic nobis respondit cum ab eo tabulas postularemus.* (Cic. *In C. Verrem actio secunda* I 60,15)

“But what we have here is a ridiculous novelty: I demanded his accounts, and he told me that [...]”

15. *Minari Siculis si decreuissent legationes quae contra istum dicerent [...] gravissimos privatarum rerum testis quibus nos praesentibus denuntiauimus eos ui custodiis que retinere.* (Cic. *In C. Verrem actio secunda* II 12,11)

“They began to threaten the Sicilians, if they decreed any deputations to make statements against him [...] to detain by force and under guard the most damaging witnesses of his private transactions, whom we had summoned by word of mouth to give evidence.”

16. *Quid a nobis iudices expectatis argumenta huius criminis? Nihil dicimus.* (Cic. *In C. Verrem actio secunda* II 104,9)

“Why should this Court feel that we must prove this charge? We hold our tongues.”

17. *Atque ut aliquando de rebus ab isto cognitis iudicatis que et de iudiciis datis dicere desistamus et quoniam facta istius in his generibus infinita sunt nos modum aliquem et finem orationi nostrae criminibus que faciamus pauca ex aliis generibus sumemus.* (Cic. *In C. Verrem actio secunda* II 118,16)

“Now I cannot prolong indefinitely my tale of the cases Verres tried, the sentences he pronounced, the proceedings he authorized. His misleadings of this kind are without number; but my list of charges must be cut short, or my speech will never done. I will therefore select a few instances of other kinds.”

The *pluralis auctoris* is also used to corroborate discourse planning and discourse managing devices: for example, when Cicero introduces a new top-

ic, thus seeking to actively draw the audience's attention to what he is about to say (cf. ex. 8 and 9 above for a comparable function):

18. *Uerum ad illam iam ueniamus praeclaram praeturam crimina que ea quae notiora sunt his qui adsunt quam nobis qui meditati ad dicendum parati que uenimus.* (Cic. *In C. Verrem actio secunda* I 103,3)

“But now let us come to his illustrious career as praetor. Let us proceed to offences that are more familiar to this audience than to us who have thought out and prepared the case we have come here to conduct.”

19. *Quid? Hoc nos dicimus?* (Cic. *In C. Verrem actio secunda* IV 92,8)

“And is it I who say so?”

Parallel to that, the attention the audience pay to his speech cannot gratify anyone else but him. However, Cicero cleverly involves all the listeners in his satisfaction, which becomes a collective, general achievement of a shared goal, that is, Verres' exile. This communicative and pragmatic entailment is realized once again by means of the *pluralis auctoris*:

20. *Superiore omni oratione perattentos uestros animos habuimus id fuit nobis gratum admodum.* (Cic. *In C. Verrem actio secunda* III 10,4)

“In all the earlier part of my speech I have enjoyed your close attention, to my very great satisfaction.”

#### 4.2. *Pluralization of verbs*

The quantitative distribution is even clearer and more telling if we consider the process of pluralization with verbs. Out of the total number (269 tokens), we have pragmatically oriented meanings – either sociative or *auctoris/modestiae* – in almost 77% of cases, as shown in Table 2.

Total number of 1 <sup>st</sup> -person plural verbs	Inclusive / sociative plural	<i>Pluralis auctoris / modestiae</i>
269	122 (45.3%)	85 (31.5%)

Table 2. *1<sup>st</sup>-person plural verbs in the Verrine orations.*

Suffice it to mention here some representative passages. In (21) we have a bridging context in which Cicero associates Hortensius with himself by

using a plural with a clear sociative function. We suggest that this context constitutes a bridging case since both the literal plural meaning (Cicero and Hortensius) and the sociative one are in principle allowed:

21. *Dissimulamus Hortensi quod saepe experti in dicendo sumus.*  
(Cic. *In C. Verrem actio secunda* I 27,2)

“We are pretending ignorance, Hortensius, of what our experience at the Bar has repeatedly shown to us.”

Verbs of perception like *audio* and *video* or verbs of cognition like *scio* inflected in the first-person plural deserve separate mention in this context, as they seem to partially function as discourse markers used to point to shared knowledge with the aim of imposing a generalizing perspective on what is being said. In this case, we have an abstract sociative value that does not involve a specific person – as happened with Hortensius in ex. (21) above.

22. *Pergae fanum antiquissimum et sanctissimum Dianae scimus esse.*  
(Cic. *In C. Verrem actio secunda* I 54,2)

“At Perga there is, as we know, a very ancient and much revered sanctuary of Diana.”

23. *Audimus aliquem tabulas numquam confecisse quae est opinio hominum de Antonio falsa.* (Cic. *In C. Verrem actio secunda* I 60,9)

“We have heard of a man’s never keeping any accounts; that is what is widely believed about Antonius, though incorrectly.”

24. *Huic etiam Romae uidemus in basi statuarum maximis litteris incisum ‘A communi Siciliae datas’.* (Cic. *In C. Verrem actio secunda* II 154,17)

“Even in Rome we see him glorified by the inscription, cut in huge letters on the pedestal of his statues, *Presented by the united people of Sicily.*”

As in example (14) to (17) above, also with pluralized verbs we have cases of *pluralis auctoris* when Cicero describes specific procedures that characterize the juridical process. Cases in points are crucial verbs like *accusemus* (ex. 25), *dicimus* (ex. 26), in *uestrum iudicium adduximus* (ex. 27); see also *denuntiavimus* in example (15) above. Of course, these are technical moves that he performed alone. However, by means of the plural, Cicero broadens the scope of his actions with a view to including the audience, thus calling upon it to witness and implicitly appraise his behaviour.

25. *Fructum istum laudis qui ex perpetua oratione percipi potuit in alia tempora reseruemus nunc hominem tabulis testibus priuatis publicis que litteris auctoritatibus que accusemus.* (Cic. *In C. Verrem actio prima* 33,3)  
 “The harvest of fame that might have been gathered by making a long continuous speech let us reserve for another occasion, and let us now prosecute our man by means of documents and witnesses, the written statements and official pronouncements of private persons and public bodies.”
26. *Haec primae actionis erit accusatio. Dicimus C. Verrem cum multa libidinose multa crudeliter in ciuis Romanos atque socios multa in deos homines que nefarie fecerit tum praeterea quadringentiens sestertium ex Sicilia contra leges abstulisse.* (Cic. *In C. Verrem actio prima* 56,2)  
 “The scope of the prosecution in the first part of the trial will be this. We submit that Gaius Verres has been guilty of many acts of lust and cruelty towards Roman citizens and Roman allies, of many outrageous offences against God and man; and that he has, moreover, illegally robbed Sicily of four hundred thousand pounds.”
27. *Non enim furem sed ereptorem non adulterum sed expugnatorem pudicitiae non sacrilegum sed hostem sacrorum religionum que non sicarium sed crudelissimum carnificem ciuium sociorum que in uestrum iudicium adduximus.* (Cic. *In C. Verrem actio secunda* I 9,5)  
 “It is no common thief, but a violent robber; no common adulterer, but the ravager of all chastity; no common profaner, but the grand enemy of all that is sacred and holy ; no common murderer, but the cruel butcher of our citizens and our subjects, whom we have haled before your judgement-seat.”

Besides technical juridical procedures, other actions too are seldom expressed using a pluralized verb. In this case, this strategy strengthens the assertive force and bestows a greater validity on what is said. In (28), for instance, the act of having seen Verres’ statues is presented as a general account: the use of the plural calls upon the whole audience to actively witness Cicero’s deeds, to share responsibility for the actions performed by him, and to show empathetic solidarity with him. In (29), even a cognitive process such as acquiring knowledge of certain acts is depicted as shared ascertainment.

28. *Quae signa nunc Verres ubi sunt. Illa quaero quae apud te nuper ad omnis columnas omnibus [...] uidimus.* (Cic. *In C. Verrem actio secunda* I 51,4)

“Where are those statues now, Verres? I mean those we saw in your house the other day, standing by all the pillars.”

29. *Cum haec maxime cognosceremus.* (Cic. *In C. Verrem actio secunda* II 187,1)

“While noting these particular facts.”

Parallel to the discourse-managing function performed with pronouns, also verbal pluralization can serve with the *pluralis auctoris* to introduce new topics (cf. ex. 18 and 19 above):

30. *Uerum ad illam iam ueniamus praeclaram praeturam.*

(Cic. *In C. Verrem actio secunda* I 103,1)

“But now let us come to his illustrious career as praetor.”

The data discussed so far show that in Cicero’s orations, pluralization is established as a pragmatic tool to skilfully gain the audience’s agreement and to lend authority to the voice of the speaker. As we shall see in the next section, these uses constitute the functional core from which new pragmatic values developed, thus enriching the system of social deixis in the subsequent centuries.

### 5. Further developments

In the previous sections the analysis of *nos* has shown that the use of the pronoun as a cooperative-inclusive plural pointing to the emphatic involvement of the interlocutor is the first pragmatic value to emerge. This function relies on modulations of the affective distance, which is typically realized in symmetric and reciprocal relations. Therefore, the inclusive plural is a linguistic means that differentiates and scales different degrees of intimacy between interlocutors that share the same power level and social status.

A crucial development is represented by the emergence of the honorific value, which the speaker could use in order to self-evaluate himself positively: the *pluralis maiestatis*, which constitutes a subjectively marked evolution of the sociative-inclusive plural. By means of this strategy, the speaker expresses himself as an abstract and collective plurality of subjects, thus self-representing himself as a subject that ‘counts more’. This is a key develop-



ment in the diachrony of Latin social deixis, since it links older values with further functions related to deference and respect. In other words, with the *pluralis maiestatis* first emerged an idea of social distance and asymmetric relation, which augmented the difference with the interlocutor. Significantly, while the inclusive plural flourished in the republican period (according to the *TLL*, its first attestation is found in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, 90 BCE; see also our data on the *Verrine* orations), the *pl. maiestatis* was initially used in the imperial age, by Roman bishops (Pope Clement I, ca. 91-101) and subsequently by emperors, starting from Gordianus III (238-244) (Sasse, 1889: 7, 53, 55, quoted by Uspenskij, 2008: 133).

A further, complementary development is represented by the *pluralis reverentiae*, which was used as politeness acknowledgement of the positive image of himself/herself asserted by the speaker. This plural shares with the *pl. maiestatis* the fact that the interlocutors have asymmetric degrees of power within the interaction. Politeness and reverential forms rapidly became ritualized and codified within the system of social deixis: this led to the pragmatic encoding of distance by means of the complementary functional development of *vos* (cf. e.g. Wackernagel, 1926-1928 I: 101; Haverling, 1995; Uspenskij, 2008: 134). The complementary role played by the *pl. reverentiae* with respect to the *pl. modestiae* is clearly explained by Schmid (1923: 479) in terms of a specular interactional relation featuring a question inflected in the first-person plural that triggers an answer inflected in the second-person plural: «Die Antwort der ergebenen Untertanen auf die Prätension, die sich seitens der Fürsten in der ersten Person Pluralis ausspricht, ist die Anrede in der zweiten Person Pluralis». The widespread interpretation, first suggested by Mommsen (1882: 540-544) and later followed by Brown and Gilman (1960), according to which the *pl. maiestatis* (and therefore the *pl. reverentiae*) had a concrete rather than an abstract use is therefore significantly challenged. Older examples of this pragmatically driven function are also found for instance in Ancient Greek (see, e.g., Schmid, 1923: col. 479 for a discussion) and in typologically distant languages and cultures<sup>5</sup>. Uspenskij (2008: 134) emphasizes in this respect that we are dealing with linguistic processes that are anchored in specific socio-cultural and historical contexts, which, however, are motivated in terms of communicative and cognitive principles that are cross-linguistically valid.

<sup>5</sup> Consider the 45A map of the *World Atlas of Language Structures* 'Politeness Distinctions in Pronouns', <http://wals.info/feature/45A#2/25.7/137.0>.

In parallel to the emergence of the reverential value, the nominal strategy turned out to be very productive in Late Latin. What late texts reveal is that there is an increasing tendency to address a person using abstract nouns accompanied by the possessive adjective, with honorific and reverential value. This reverential nominal strategy was already attested in Early Latin (see e.g. Hofmann and Szantyr, 1965: 101-102 and the detailed lists provided by Dickey, 2002: 132-133, 152-153), but it is at this chronological stage that it reaches a systematic codification within the system of social deixis, as pointed out in the following passage by Fridh (1956: 169):

L'emploi des noms abstraits comme titres d'honneur adressés aux destinataires est un trait caractéristique du style épistolaire grec et latin des derniers siècles de l'antiquité. L'origine de cet usage est à chercher dans la tendance fort répandue non seulement dans le style de la rhétorique et de la poésie, mais aussi dans le langage populaire, à employer les noms abstraits, surtout les noms de qualités dérivés d'adjectifs, avec un génitif ou un pronom possessif pour faire pour ainsi dire incarner dans une personne ou dans une chose concrète la cause efficiente de l'action accomplie. (Fridh, 1956: 169)

The semantic and pragmatic development of *maiestas* can serve as an interesting example in this context, since its functional enrichment mirrors the emergence of the reverential values we have just described.

Originally, *maiestas* had a religious value and was used to refer to the emperor, depicting him as a divinity (see, e.g., Svennung, 1958: 71). In Classical Latin we find the first cases in which *maiestas* was used to refer to the *princeps* (ex. 31-32). Later, in the first century CE, we have a passage attested in Vindolanda tablets where *maiestas* does not refer to the emperor but to someone of lower status, presumably the provincial governor (ex. 33):

31. *Sed neque parvum carmen maiestas recepit tua.* (Hor. *ep.* 2, 1, 258)  
“But neither does your majesty admit of a lowly strain.”
32. (*Auguste [...]*) *maiestas adeo comis ubique tua est.* (Ovid. *trist.* 2, 512)  
“So benign is your majesty everywhere.”
33. [...] *mine probo tuam maies*  
[t]atem imploro *ne patiaris me*  
[i]nnocentem uirgis cas[us]igatum  
esse. (Tab.Vind. 344, 4.5)  
“As befits an honest man (?) I implore your majesty not to allow me, an innocent man, to have been beaten with rods.”

It is important at this point to underline that the passages by Horace and Ovid constitute two bridging contexts featuring the attribution of the quality linked to *maiestas* to Augustus. Significantly, this use first appears in poetry texts and does not seem to mirror a stabilized pragmatic strategy designed to express social deixis. Further evidence for this claim comes from the fact that in the examples given above the use of the second-person singular (*tua*) always appears, which demonstrates that the reverential value of the second plural has not yet come to light. Along the same lines, Fridh (1956: 170) argues that they «ne sont pas encore à regarder comme de vrais titres consacrés par l'usage et que l'origine de ces titulatures n'est probablement pas antérieure au début du IVe siècle».

In the passage from the Vindolanda tablet, an innocent man is imploring the 'majesty' of the local governor: similarly to examples (31-32), *maiestas* is not employed with an addressing value in a proper allocutive sense, but bears the constitutive trait of the person who is being implored. The attribution of this specific quality to a given person constitutes the bridging context that determines a further complete identification of the interlocutor with the abstract quality expressed by *maiestas*. This process explains why in Late Latin it will be possible to refer directly to the interlocutor using the name that expresses the abstract positive quality that best represents him. Such instances exemplify crucial steps along the road to the conventionalization of *maiestas*, whose intrinsic qualities were gradually pragmatically exploited as a means of social deixis. The increasing frequency of *maiestas* as a pragmatically stable honorific term of address is demonstrated by the wider use made by authors like Quintilian and Plinius; between the 3rd and the 4th centuries, these nominal forms of address were systematically used as titles for emperors by the *Scriptores historiae Augustae* and by Symmachus.

Other expressions pragmaticalized in a similar vein: *tua pietas*, for instance, is found as early as in Quintilian and Plinius (cf. *Ep.* 10, 1); other honorific nominals that were later adopted are *claritas*, *clementia*, *dignatio*, *dignitas*, *eminentia*, *excellencia*, *magnificentia*, *magnitudo*, *perennitas* and, to refer to bishops, also *sanctitas tua*. Complementary to the use of positive address nominals, new expressions of modesty emerge: examples would be *mediocritas nostra* (cf., e.g., Vell. 2, 111, 3) and *mea parvitas* (cf., e.g., Val Max. 1, praef.), which pragmaticalized in order to refer to oneself while interacting with the emperor from the age of Tiberius onwards, that is, when the *pluralis maiestatis* was becoming pragmaticalized (Svennung, 1958: 81-82, cited by Uspenskij, 2008: 124, fn. 36).

It is important in the present discussion to observe that the process of pragmatization leading to the conventional fixation of these address formulae, which mirror the emergence of new social rituals, can be better understood if linked to the contemporary socio-historical context. As early as the 3rd century CE the Roman Empire was torn by both internal and external crisis: on the one hand, Rome lost part of its political hegemony and cultural primacy, while on the other, neighbouring peoples were pushing from the East. As a result, at the end of this period of transition the balance of power between senate and emperor was drastically shifted towards the latter and his court: as Norberg (1968: 14) writes:

The emperors imposed on society a caste system according to which all were linked to a certain profession and a certain social class. At the same time a new system of honorific titles was instituted. The emperor could be called *gloriosissimus*, *serenissimus*, *christianissimus*, the functionaries were divided into four classes of which the attributes were *illustres*, *spectabiles*, *clarissimi*, and *perfectissimi*. The emperor was addressed by the words *vestra maiestas*, *vestra gloria*, *vestra pietas*, others were addressed, depending on their rank, *vestra excellentia*, *eminentia*, *magnificencia*, *spectabilitas*, etc. The titles *beatitudo* and *sanctitas* were preserved for ecclesiastical dignitaries. (Norberg, 1968: 14)

## 6. Concluding remarks

In this paper, we have investigated the diachronic development of the Latin address system and the stages of functional enrichment from Early Latin, where the nominal strategy was the one primarily used, to Classical Latin, where we have the emergence of sociative/inclusive values, to the Imperial period, characterized by the development of the *pluralis maiestatis* and *reverentiae*. A productive system of honorific titles was instituted after the 3rd century, when a caste system where all were linked to a certain profession and a certain social class was established.

Crucially, the diachronic process we have described could be better characterized in terms of a cyclical development whereby the nominal strategy continued across the history of Latin. This strategy was initially highly productive due to the lack of an alternative politeness device in the grammatical system – for instance, the lack of pronouns of address in Early and Classical Latin. When pluralization finally emerged, names of address were reinterpreted and honorific titles re-functionalized.

These morphological and structural changes ultimately depend on social motivations and develop in other Indo-European languages as well (Joseph, 1987). What the data confirm is that, arguably, there existed in Latin society a structured system of social stratification and that it was mirrored by linguistic strategies of social deixis that initially emerged as purely lexical ones. The innovation we have tried to illustrate rests on the fact that gradually this stratification reached the morphological and the syntactic structure. Latin constitutes a privileged laboratory in this respect because it allows us to explore the emergence of socially determined innovations in morphology and in syntax.

All such values are to be connected partly with the contemporary socio-political situation: the *pluralis maiestatis*, entailing a positive self-evaluation, emerges in the Imperial age, where the political system was basically structured around the prominent figure of the emperor, and triggers later developments, such as the complementary strategy of the *pluralis reverentiae*. The established use of the plural form also for the second person as a means to express deference constitutes the most important innovation in Late Latin – and as such it continued in Romance languages (see Niculescu, 1974: 12; Watts *et al.*, 1992: 92-93; Janner *et al.*, 2014). The use of the reverential second plural develops as a deviation from the unmarked form that progressively becomes part of the system. Significantly, the use of *maiestas* as an honorific title first appears in Augustan poets and is never attested in earlier periods, when the republic could not advance the development of such a person-oriented strategy. As we have seen, however, forensic oratory may have enhanced the early emergence of some of these functions. Cicero's *Verrine* constitute an interesting text type in this respect and our corpus-based analysis has hopefully shed light on both qualitative and quantitative aspects of the phenomenon.

From a theoretical perspective, these pragmatic uses of plural pronouns and plural verbal agreement can be better accounted for if linked to the notion of 'face', that is, «the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact» (Goffman, 1967: 23). Accordingly, sociative and inclusive values and the *pl. maiestatis* have to be connected to positive face needs, such as the need to foster agreement, to be valued, to maintain a positive self-image and to establish sympathetic relations. Reverential values, by contrast, seem to be pragmatically motivated by the need not to impose on others and to create social distance – i.e., they have to be linked to the notion of negative face.

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