

Deferential Attributive Possessives:

What persons to use them with, what for, and what it may lead to

Frans Plank, iv/03

1. Who's possessor?

This much is relatively straightforward about possessive pronouns (free as they happen to be for example in English, but why should bound ones differ).

Possessive pronouns can occur in reference-establishing NPs with nouns of all sorts, including non-relational ones like *parrot*, inherently relational ones like kin terms, and also endearments of a not-so-nouny, but more adjectival or verbal kind:

(1) REFERENCE (to "3rd persons")

- a. *My parrot has disappeared, Inspector.*
- b. *My uncle has disappeared, Inspector.*
- c. *My dear/my darling/my love has disappeared, Inspector.*

Nouns (or rather NPs) that can be used as titles aren't any different, provided they take a possessive pronoun:

(2) *My Lord has disappeared, Inspector.*

Nor are NPs used for self-reference, although this reading of the relevant relational nouns needs an added interpretive effort or rather familiarity with a convention:

(3) *Your humble servant/Yours truly [= I] will now leave you alone.*

Since it is always relative to the speaker that the referent of the NPs in the examples (1)/(2) holds the relationship at issue – 'being a parrot owned by' (in the simplest possessive interpretation), 'being the uncle, darling, lord of', 'being dear to',

‘being loved by’ – the possessive pronoun is here always 1st person. That’s how it is with deictics for speech-act roles. When the relationship is one held relative to the addressee, as in (3), 2nd person possessive pronouns have to be chosen; when it is to neither speaker nor addressee, 3rd person.

To complicate matters insignificantly, there is the possibility of delocutive fossilization: 1st person may get generalized, based on uses like ‘the one I/we (i.e., speaker and others, possibly including addressee) call “My Lord”’.

And there can be overt de-relationalization, which makes little interpretive difference:

(4) *Uncle/madam/honey has disappeared.*

Like certain indefinite pronouns (*Open the door, somebody!*), proper names and/or titles (*How are you, Professor Bertinetto/Professor/Bertinetto?*), certain nominalizations (*Open the door, whoever sits closest! Listen, stupid!*), such relational terms as ‘uncle’, ‘dear’, ‘lord’ are available for potential use as terms of address, which is the function personal pronouns of 2nd person are dedicated to (possibly amplified, further distinguishing the intended addressees: *Open the door, you over there! How are you, you guys? Listen, you idiots!*):

(5) ADDRESS (to “2nd persons”)

- a. *How are you, my uncle?*
- b. *How are you, my dear/darling/love?*
- c. *How are you, My Lord?*

Reference of term of address is to the addressee (that’s what terms of address are for), regardless of the possessive pronoun; there appears to be a preference for possessors to be the speaker, favouring 1st person possessive pronouns:

- (6) a. *How are you, Mary’s/her uncle? [?]*
- b. *Open the door, Mary’s/her uncle! [??]*

When the possessor is not the speaker, presumably another mode of address is preferred, e.g. by a plain personal pronoun, possibly accompanied by a proper name rather than a relational noun (*How are you, Mr. Brown?*)

The speaker-related one is certainly the preferred interpretation when such relational nouns are overtly de-relationalized, as they often are, sometimes even obligatorily:

(7) *How are you, uncle/dear/Lord?* [*Sir*, rather]

When integrated with the clause, like 2nd person personal pronouns are, such terms of address are still 3rd person for purposes of verb agreement, unlike 2nd person pronouns:

- (8) a. *How is My Lord today?*
b. *How is my uncle today?*

[Is the address interpretation possible at all? less easy than with titles of respect; better if de-relationalized: *How is uncle today?*]

Perhaps they are marginally also recategorized as 2nd person for purposes of verb agreement?

- (9) a. *How are my Lord today?* [?]
b. **How are my uncle today?*

2. Whose attribute?

Now, how come possessive pronouns seem to work differently in cases like this?

- (10) a. REFERENCE :
His Lordship has disappeared, Inspector.
b. ADDRESS:
How is Your Lordship today, Your Lordship?

In (10a), the speaker refers to someone identified through the noun *Lordship*, which seems not a far cry from *Lord* as in example (2) above – except that the possessive pronoun is not 1st person but 3rd. In (10b), the speaker addresses someone distinguished from possible other addressees through the noun *Lordship*, which again seems not a far cry from *Lord* as in (2) above – except that the possessive pronoun is not 1st person but 2nd.

However, it's not really the possessive pronouns that make the difference but what they combine with.

Reference is here established through an ATTRIBUTE, not through a RELATION (though an attribute that distinguishes a referent in relation to others – and insofar there is some similarity to relational nouns/adjectives/verbs as above).

The NP's reference is to who that attribute is ascribed to, hence the choice of possessive pronouns:

if 3rd person (i.e., neither speaker nor addressee): 3rd person possessive;

if 2nd person, as in address: 2nd person possessive;

if 1st person, as in self-reference: 1st person possessive, as in (11).

(11) *Meine Wenigkeit ist nicht gefragt worden.*

– showing that self-reference IS possible, at least self-effacingly or also ironically; self-aggrandizement works differently, by changing 1st person to 3rd, metaphorically removing oneself from the scene:

Her Majesty is NOT amused.

This is just as with nouns for attributes in general:

(12) a. *His height has increased.*

Your height has increased.

My height has increased.

or also:

b. *His self has disappeared.*

Your self has/have [!] disappeared.

My self has/have disappeared.

What has happened in cases like (10) is that a distinctive attribute denoted by an abstract noun has got conventionalized as a title for persons in elevated social roles commanding deference. I call such NPs, or the possessive pronouns they contain, DEFERENTIAL ATTRIBUTIVE POSSESSIVES (DAPs for short).

English attribute terms that have been thus conventionalized as titles are in (13):

- (13) *Highness, Holyness, Lordship, Ladyship, Worship, Majesty, Eminence, Reverence, Excellency, Grace, Honour*

German has, or rather had, a similar set:

- (14) *Hoheit, Heiligkeit, Majestät, Eminenz, Exzellenz, Gnaden, Ehren* (the last two plural forms, but singular reference);
in addition *Magnifizenz, Spektabilität, Durchlaucht, Hochwürden, (Hoch)Wohlgeboren, Herrlichkeit, Wenigkeit, (Wohl)Weisheit, Liebe* [why /d/?], *(Ge)Strenge, Feste, Niedere* are also mentioned by Jacob Grimm (1837: 297-298), but aren't, or weren't, equally popular.
Unlike *Lordship, Herrschaft* apparently isn't or wasn't used in DAPs; the loan *Lordschaft*, with the suffix translated, is.

Other Germanic, Romance, and Slavonic languages have or had similar sets. And I wouldn't be surprised if Hungarian had too.

It is evident from (13) and (14) that the nouns in DAPs are not really the inherently most personal and concrete, hence the nouniest of nouns. They are all abstract nouns, either transparently derived from adjectives by native or Latinate means (e.g. *high-ness, eminence*, from *eminent*) or basic but with closely associated adjectives by their side (*honour, honest*), or also transparently derived from nouns (*lord-ship*); a few are deverbal (participial). Some are shared European cultural vocabulary, of Latinate origin. (German *Durchlaucht* is a participle and translates Latin *perillustris: durch-liuht-et* 'radiated through', with side form *durchlûht*.) And all these nouns would typically retain their abstract meanings/uses. (Making allowances for a few formal

irregularities: e.g., the regular abstract noun of *hoch* ‘high’ would be *Höh-e* or *Hochheit*, with the stem-final fricative retained in productive derivation and compounding.)

(Cf. “*your highness* = you that are so high”, in the paraphrase given by Jespersen (1924: 218), concerning “deferential substitutes consisting of a possessive pronoun and the name of a quality”, as he calls DAPs.)

As a title of deferential reference a noun in a DAP can be used as a term of address, as an appellative/vocative outside the clause, like other such titles:

(15) *How are you today, Your Lordship/My Lord?*

And it can also be integrated with the clause, though still 3rd person for purposes of verb agreement:

(16) *How is Your Lordship/My Lord today?*

And it seems easier to recategorize as 2nd person than other titles:

(17) *How are Your Lordship/My Lord today?*

The attribute reading can become opaque with some items, with a role reading taking over, and subsequent overt de-relationalization or conceivably also realignment of possessives on the relational noun model, causing potential confusion if you have both models; German goes in this direction, English apparently doesn’t:

(18) a. *Haben* [=3PL, like for 2SG FORMAL pronoun *Sie*] *Majestät wohl geruht?*
b. *Haben Unsere Majestät wohl geruht?* [?]

It is unclear (at least to me) whether REFERENCE or ADDRESS use is chronologically primary when DAPping gets started. Perhaps they are simultaneous. On the theory that reference-related honorification is universally more basic than addressee-related honorification (as espoused in Brown & Levinson 1978, building on Comrie 1976) DAPping ought to begin in REFERENCE .

Once established in both uses in German, the REFERENCE 3rd person possessive was occasionally extended to ADDRESS uses, where you'd expect 2nd person for your addressee's attributes:

- (19) *Haben Seine* [for earlier: *Eure*, in writing often abbreviated to: *Ew.*]
Durchlaucht wohl geruht?

To make matters worse, this 3rd singular possessive extended to ADDRESS could be replaced by 3rd person plural, perhaps to fit in better with the 3rd plural verb form:

- (20) *Haben Ihre* [with formal variant, an inflection not used anywhere else: *Ihro*]
Durchlaucht wohl geruht?

(See the brief sketch in Blatz 1879: 542. Otherwise this sort of thing is rarely covered in historical grammars, typically giving short shrift to key aristocratic concerns. But what do you expect of the likes of Jacob Grimm!)

Choosing a possessive pronoun in DAPs must have kept deferential German subjects busy for several centuries. Outside noble households and the media covering them, ecclesiastic, legal, and academic circles seem to have been plagued by, or graced with, DAPs longest: perhaps they still are. Fieldwork is required to determine current pronominal practice among contemporary DAPpers.

For English, there is an authoritative guide, though it is naturally somewhat normative: *Debrett's Correct Form*. In English, 2nd person could also be replaced by 3rd in ADDRESS, as in German, but not singular by plural – which confirms that verbal plural may have been a factor in German:

- (21) a. *How is His Lordship today?*
(and I wonder whether you might have added extra-clausally:
Your Lordship? Vocative *His Lordship* was hardly the done thing ever.)
b. **How is/are Their Lordship today?*

But such replacements are not recommended by *Debrett's* (latest edition, 1999).

Switching to a 3rd person possessive, thereby removing oneself from the scene, is the only way for non-self-effacing self-reference of that sort, needing no special license from *Debrett's*:

- (22) a. *Her Majesty is NOT amused.*
b. **My Majesty is NOT amused.*

3. DAP Questions

What is the typological and diachronic interest of DAPs?

3.1. In some languages/cultures or indeed subcultures attributes can be used, or are standardly used, for (honorific) personal REFERENCE, in others they aren't. Or is this universal? Or is the distinction attribute/person, with Adj and N as the corresponding word classes prototypically accommodating these meanings, one admitting of being conceived of as more or less strict across languages/cultures, correlating perhaps with how strictly Adj is differentiated from N?

Cf. Paul (1920: 99): "Sehr gewöhnlich in den verschiedensten Sprachen [how *verschiedenst?*] geht eine Eigenschaftsbezeichnung über in die Bezeichnung dessen, dem die Eigenschaft anhaftet; vgl. *Alter, ... Verwandtschaft ... Schönheit ...* Auf einer Übergangsstufe stehen noch Titel wie *Majestät, Hoheit, Exzellenz* etc.; sie standen zunächst parallel mit solchen, wie *deine Güte wird mir verzeihen, ich wende mich an deine Großmut ...*".

Two things need to be distinguished, though: (i) synchronic (eventually perhaps also diachronic) transpositions of words for attributes ("property concepts") to words, proper names perhaps, for substances (persons) characterized by the attribute through nominalization ('being young', 'having a big nose' -> 'the one who is young', 'the one with a big nose'); (ii) the use of attribute words to refer to and/or address people characterized by the respective attributes WITHOUT categorial transposition, that is, without changing the attribute word to a person word. DAPs are instances of the latter.

3.2. In some languages/(sub-)cultures reference through attributes is used for purposes of honorific ADDRESS, in others it possibly isn't. Egalitarian cultures presumably don't DAP much, neither for address nor reference.

It is customary in the Near East, or used to be, to address the mayor or other officials in such a manner; e.g., *How is your office?* meaning 'How are you?'. Sounds plausible enough to be universal, wherever you have self-important officials.

Still, the European-style DAPs as illustrated here are unlikely to have sprung up independently in Romance, Germanic, Slavonic. Rather, DAPping was practised in Imperial Rome, where it had become inappropriate to address the Emperor by a mere plural *Vos*: it had to be something grander, *Tua Maiestas*, or, even better, with the possessive pronoun for plural possessors, *Vestra Maiestas*. As the privilege of being DAPped was spreading from the emperor to lesser addressees, these were among the more popular attribute nouns in Latin DAPs:

- (23) a. imperial: *maiestas, indulgentia, clementia, mansuetudo*
- b. generally deferential: *amplitudo, auctoritas, benignitas, celsitudo, eminentia, excellentia, experientia, felicitas, honestas, honorificentia, magnificentia, prudentia*
- c. Christian ecclesiastical: *beatitudo, sanctitas, sanctitudo, reverentia, apostolica auctoritas*

Medieval chancelleries kept the habit going and added a few more attributes, usually distinguished for subtypes of DAPpees:

- (24) a. papal: *sanctitas, pietas, serenitas, paternitas*
- b. other ecclesiastical: *gracia, solitudine, seignoria*
- c. monarchical: *maiestas, perennitas*
- d. nobility and general deferential: *excellencia*

And this mode of deferential, hence appropriately cumbersome, addressing was retained in the Romance vernaculars, with *signoria* and its variants as the most conspicuous DAP noun. (See Svennung 1958: 68-77, Niculescu 1974: 89-109.) In imitation,

beginning in the Renaissance, DAPping then became the vogue at European courts, whatever the vernacular.

3.3. There should be a universal hierarchy of such attributes being utilizable for purposes of address, and also self-reference:

The Better (the more highly valued a human propensity or character trait or age range, the more exalted a value or size or position or quantity), The Better for deference (i.e., 2nd person);
and the other way round – i.e., The Worse, The Better – for self-effacement (1st person).

Colours would seem to be among the property concepts least fit for DAPping; other physical properties shouldn't do so well either, unless they represent cultural values.

3.4. 3rd vs. 2nd person is not a categorical distinction but a gradual one, and the terms of address in DAPs, originally clearly 3rd person (assuming adjectives applied to people are 3rd person), can be more or less strongly 2nd-personified, in terms of (i) integration with clause > (ii) non-amplifiability in a noun's manner > (iii) verb agreement.

The second position on this scale has not been elaborated above. The idea is that modifiers such as e.g. 'royal' (*Your Royal Highness*) wouldn't be expected to be freely addable even before verb agreement changes from 3rd to 2nd person, although they may continue to be added to DAPs that are part of clauses rather than extra-clausal vocatives.

3.5. Attribute-based terms of address, wherever they are licensed, seem high on the hierarchy of 2nd-personifiability. [Is 'self' one? Though what it is even higher in is 1st-personifiability.] Proper names, though popular as terms of address, are bottom of that table, baby-talk notwithstanding.

Known or suspected sources of, or ingredients of, or Ersatz, personal pronouns are social role nouns, body part nouns ('body', 'head', and such, also 'self', unless it's an attribute), and local deictics; adjectives or abstract nouns for attributes are another,

then. Adjective > Personal Pronoun might perhaps seem a rather astonishing grammaticalization path; but it's a natural one, given DAP.

As is well known, in Spanish, one DAP has made it to honorific 2nd person pronoun, even though it continues to trigger 3rd person verb agreement: *usted(es)* < *vuestra(s) merced(es)* 'your grace(s)'. (Special abbreviated forms in writing: *Ud(s)*, *Vd(s)*; cf. German *Ew.*) Catalan has corresponding *vostè(s)*. Early forms of such address also had the non-honorific 2nd person singular possessive (*tu merced*). Contracted forms on the way from *vuestra merced* to *usted* included *vuesarced*, *voacé*, *vucé*, *vuced*, *vusted*, and yet others, hardly more compositional than the eventual winner, *usted* (Penny 1991: 123-125).

Portuguese has *você* < *Vossa Mercê*, via *Vosmecê*, which is on its way to become the ordinary, non-honorific 2nd person pronoun, with the even more deferential non-possessive, non-attribute-based *o(s) senhor(es)*, *a(s) senhora(s)* 'the Mr/Mrs' serving as standard honorific, especially in Brazilian Portuguese (Camara 1972: 81).

The Italian pronouns of formal address, *Lei* (SG) (from one of the 3rd SG feminine variants) and *Loro* (PL) (from a 3rd PL form, MASC and FEM undistinguished; competing with 2PL *voi*), seem to have been sponsored by the vogue for using DAPs such as *la signoria vostra* (or, with prenominal possessive, *Vostra Signoria* (*illustrissima*)) and *l'eccellenza vostra*, in monarchical address *Vostra Maestà*, *Altezza*, in ecclesiastical address *Vostra Santità*, *Beatitudine*, *Magnificenza*, *Eminenza*. As abstract nouns, these are all feminine: in 16/17th century Italian they began to license 3rd person feminine anaphoric pronouns, irrespective of the addressee being male or female (Niculescu 1974: 109-122). These nouns in DAPs themselves show a wealth of contractions in regional varieties from the 16th to the 20th century (*Vossignoria*, *Ussignuria*, *ssignirí*, (*vos*)*sustrissima*, *voscenza*, *voss(i)a*, *vass(i)a*, and others), before being largely superseded by *Lei* and *Loro* and *voi*. (See Niculescu 1974.)

Rumanian has/had corresponding DAPs too, and also non-compositional variants: *domnia ta*, *domnia voastr*, *domnia lui* > *dumneata*, *dumneavoastra*, *dumnealui* (Niculescu 1974).

Are there more well-documented cases of honorific pronouns from DAP nouns on record outside Romance – incipient or entrenched?

3.6. As just mentioned, honorific addressee pronouns which are originally (and continuingly) 3rd person appear to have originated as grammatically (though not necessarily referentially) regular pronominalizations of (feminine) DAPs in Italian. For German, the honorific addressee pronoun *Sie*, which is originally (and continues to be) 3rd person plural, has likewise been assumed to have come about through regular pronominalization of plural DAPs (*Euer Ehren/Gnaden ... Sie*), just like the no-longer-so-honorific 3rd singular address (*er/sie*) has apparently been licensed through non-DAP titular NPs like *der Herr/die Dame*.

Are honorific address uses of 3rd person pronouns ALWAYS contingent on DAPs or other titular NPs, rather than being always a possibility, regardless of whether or not a language has DAPs or other titular NPs, motivated metaphorically, treating the addressee as if (s)he weren't there?

3.7. Assuming that DAPs were only re-innovated (on a large scale) in vernacular European languages in the Renaissance (14/15th century onwards), on the model of the Latin of Imperial Rome, and presumably spreading from Romance, then it didn't take such a long time for an NP term of address such as *vuestra merced* to be turned into a pronoun, *usted* (or *vostè*, *você*) – a handful of generations or two.

Assuming DAPping was always practised, if perhaps less conspicuously, then the grammaticalization of *usted/vostè/você* would have taken more than one and a half millennia.

3.8. Categorizing them in terms of a framework such as that of Brown & Levinson 1978, DAPs represent Negative Politeness, realizing the maxim “Communicate Speaker's want not to impinge on Addressee” through an Impersonalization strategy – reference through attribute rather than role designation.

(They fit in, then, even though attribute adjectives/abstract nouns are not recognized as a possible source specifically of referent- and addressee-related honorifics in Brown & Levinson 1978.)

3.9. With DAPs as sources, whenever possessive pronouns or their relics survive as constituent parts of new or reshaped honorific pronouns of address and self-reference, they will be of corresponding person. Thus, in the innovated 2nd person honorific *usted*

Spanish, /ust/, the surviving part of the possessive in the DAP *vuestra merced* ‘your grace’, is diachronically related to a 2nd person form, *vuestr-* possessive, *vos-* personal in current Spanish.

By contrast, with social role nouns as sources, there would be a person REVERSAL: when there are formal relics, new honorific 2nd person pronouns should include 1st person possessive material (‘you’ < ‘my master’), and new honorific 1st person pronouns should include 2nd person possessive material (‘I’ < ‘your servant’).

The pronoun etymologist’s lot is not an easy one, therefore – unless (s)he has reason to be confident that the source was a DAP or a social role noun.

To complicate matters, what are now typical social role nouns (standardly used as titles, and hence available for potential grammaticalization as honorific pronouns of address), such as English *Sir* and its Romance source, French *Monsieur*, < *mon sieur* ‘my lord’, or also German *Herr*, may turn out to ultimately derive from attributes too. As it happens in these particular cases, the ultimate source of *sir* and its counterparts elsewhere in Romance is ‘elder’, i.e., Latin *senior*, the comparative of an attribute, *senex* ‘old, aged; old person’; German *Herr* has an analogous history, deriving from the comparative of *hehr* ‘old, venerable’. In the case of *monsieur* etc., the possessive pronoun got added when the attribute term had become a social role noun; had it been a TAP, it would now be *vossieur*, from ‘YOUR elderness’, or, in Dutch, *uwheer* instead of *mijnheer*.

3.10. A more general point last. Person distinction being limited to (personal) pronouns, with all nouns categorized as 3rd person, is only one option – the one English took; the other is to let nouns also distinguish persons, as in Nama (Khoisan) or Sumerian (isolate, Ancient Near East), where nouns obligatorily come with person markers (‘I-king, you-king, (s)he-king’), obviating some of the problems English has with agreements, as seen above.

But then, isn’t English somewhat like this, too, showing this type of paradigm with at least some nouns (those designating attributes), with definite articles “really” 3rd person pronouns (as is even more transparent in virtually all other relevant languages, with definite articles being regularly form-identical with demonstrative or 3rd person personal pronouns; cf. Plank et al. 1994):

(25) *I idiot* *we idiots*
 you idiot *you idiots*
 the [= (s)he] idiot *the [=they] idiots*

(For Scandinavian Germanic and North Frisian, replace the personal by possessive pronouns in such paradigms.)

References

- Blatz, Friedrich (1879). *Neuhochdeutsche Grammatik mit Berücksichtigung der historischen Entwicklung der deutschen Sprache für angehende und wirkliche Lehrer*. Tauberbischofsheim: Lang.
- Brown, Penelope & Stephen Levinson (1978). Universals in language use: Politeness phenomena. In Esther N. Goody (ed.), *Questions and Politeness: Strategies in Social Interaction*, 56-289, 295-310. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Camara, J. Mattoso, Jr. (1972). *The Portuguese Language*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Comrie, Bernard (1976). Linguistic politeness axes: Speaker-addressee, speaker-referent, speaker-bystander. *Pragmatics Microfiche* 1.7:A3.
- Grimm, Jacob (1837). *Deutsche grammatik, vierter theil*. Göttingen: Dieterich.
- Jespersen, Otto (1924). *The Philosophy of Grammar*. London: Allen & Unwin.
- Montague-Smith, Patrick (ed.) (1999). *Debrett's Correct Form: Standard Styles of Address for Everyone from Peers to Presidents*. Introduction by Celestria Noel. (Latest edition.) London: Debrett.
- Niculescu, Alessandro (1974). *Strutture allocutive pronominali reverenziali in italiano*. Firenze: Olschki.
- Paul, Hermann (1920). *Prinzipien der Sprachgeschichte*. 5th edn. Halle: Niemeyer.
- Penny, Ralph (1991). *A History of the Spanish Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Plank, Frans, & the Extended Noun Phrase Group (1994). A panel on the lawfulness of the double life of the definite article; Definite Double Life: An afterthought. In *Conversations on Noun Phrases* (EUROTYP Working Papers VII/20), 49-79, 113.
- Svennung, J. (1958). *Anredeformen: Vergleichende Forschungen zur indirekten Anrede in der dritten Person und zum Nominativ für den Vokativ*. (Skrifter utgivna av K. Humanistiska Vetenskapssamfundet i Uppsala, 42.) Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell.

Postscriptum

It's all in Svennung, essentially. Should have read him before. No need to write it up again. What might be worth writing up is this, especially if I had an answer to the final question.

There is a typologically rare pattern of using nouns for abstract attributes plus a possessive pronoun for deferential address: 'your highness'. Analogously for self-reference: 'my lowliness'.

Such terms of address were possible in Ancient Greek and (Republican) Latin, but they really gained currency only in Imperial Rome, beginning with the newly and carefully devised address of the holder of a new office, the emperor, 'your majesty'. The Latin model was continued in Medieval Latin as well as the Romance vernaculars, as well as in Byzantine and later Greek, and was adopted, sooner or later, more or less everywhere in the aristocracies of Europe, arguably given an extra boost by Spanish court etiquette of the 16th and 17th century.

Outside Romance, Germanic, Greek, Slavic, Baltic, and Hungarian, all ultimately inspired by a special way of addressing the Roman Emperor, deferential addressing through abstract nouns plus possessive pronoun does not seem attested widely. It is found in Afro-Asiatic: with 2nd person suffixes of the appropriate gender (the addressee's), the abstract nouns 'presence' and 'sovereignty' (*5a#ra, siy da*), one existential and the other honorific, serve as standard terms of deferential address in Arabic; 'your happiness' is a variation on this same theme. 'Your soul' is a term of address also elsewhere in Semitic and also in Cushitic; but this is really a somewhat different category of noun, more like body or body part nouns ('body', 'head', 'self') which serve as terms of address more frequently than abstract nouns like 'highness', 'lordship', or 'presence' do. For certain American Indian languages, including Dakota, the most highly grammaticalized term of address, the 2nd person pronoun, has been claimed to be an existential abstract noun plus a possessive, just as in Arabic: 'your presence'. And in East Asia there are at least Chinese and Japanese where there are some abstract nouns, such as '(your) (old/elder-brotherly) eminence, excellence', '(my) selfishness', among a host of terms of deferential address and self-reference.

See Svennung (1958) (with numerous further references) especially for the European part of this story

Now, of what interest are such terms of address and self-reference for GRAMMAR?

First, such terms of address and self-reference instantiate the principle ABSTRACTUM PRO CONCRETO (APC), and one would expect that APC is active in the relevant languages (and cultures) also elsewhere – for example in reference rather than only in address. A beautiful person, a person of beauty, ought to be able to be referred to as ‘beauty’, a loved one as ‘love’, etc. People ought to be able to be named after their attributes (‘Hope’, ‘Irene’, ‘Clement’, etc.). Perhaps there would be special APC constructions, such as epexegetical genitives (‘beauty of a girl’, ‘profligacy of a man’, ‘monstrosity of a painting’, meaning ‘beautiful girl’, ‘profligate man’, ‘monstrous painting’). Presumably, not all languages practise APC, at least not to the same extent: to get terms of address through APC, you probably need to be an experienced practitioner. Possibly, there is also some crosslinguistic variation as to how firmly the distinction of concrete and abstract is grammatically entrenched in the first place. Such entrenchment should be reflected in word classes (concrete \approx noun, abstract \approx adjective) as well as in word subclasses, with concrete and abstract nouns showing different grammatical behaviour. When there is no overt distinction between an abstract and a concrete noun, one of its uses should still be recognizably primary (thus, ‘beauty’ is basically an abstract noun, which can secondarily be used with concrete reference).

Second, such terms of address and self-reference pose problems for distinctions that are often considered categorical, namely those of 3rd person vs. 2nd/1st person and of noun vs. pronoun. These are problems for linguists using such descriptive terminology. More interestingly, there are corresponding problems for those constructing and reconstructing grammars faced with such terms, and they can be solved in different ways, despite the point of departure having been exactly the same.

The point of departure is the use of NPs consisting of an abstract noun and a possessive pronoun (free or bound) as terms of address or self-reference. Presumably it is not only in addressing but also in referring that such NPs as ‘your highness’ have personal as well as abstract reference. Previously such NPs were 3rd person, their referent being neither speaker nor addressee; but used for address and self-reference, they are like 1st and 2nd person personal pronouns, referring to speaker and addressee.

Their lexical core, however, is a noun, not a pronoun, and that does not seem to change with the new use for addressing and self-reference.

Such terms of address and self-reference are prone to undergo formal and semantic depletion, or at least those standardly used are: they tend to lose phonetic substance, to the extent that their constituent parts, possessive pronoun and abstract noun, may no longer be recognizable (cf. Spanish *uste(d) < vuestra merced*, Dutch *u < uwe edelheit*); and their meaning tends to be bleached, to the extent that they may end up as mere deictics for speaker or addressee, with only a honorific contrast remaining of the colourful attributes of old – but even that may be levelled out (as in Spanish and Portuguese), requiring new honorific distinctions.

Such formal and semantic changes need not perforce affect the categorization of such NPs as 3rd person and of their core elements as nouns.

What distinguishes nouns from personal pronouns, *inter alia*, is that they can freely take modifiers and determiners that pronouns cannot take, or cannot take in the same way. The abstract nouns in terms of address and self-reference could take modifiers (e.g. ‘royal’), and they took a determiner, namely the possessive pronoun: those in standardized use came to resist modification, and in this sense became more pronominal.

But it is change in their external syntax that was destined to spell trouble. From being vocatives or some such clause-external elements, as in (i), they are prone to be internalized, replacing the corresponding personal pronoun of address or self-reference and acquiring its full relational potential (being able to occur as subject, object, etc.) and the corresponding overt marking through case, agreement, etc.:

- (i) ‘Can I help you, Your Highness?’
- (ii) ‘Can I help Your Highness?’

This internalization, on top of formal and semantic depletion, is what happened everywhere in European languages adopting this mode of addressing and self-reference from Latin. But from here on, the pathways of further grammaticalization separated.

One possibility is for nothing else to happen – that is, allowing terms of address and self-reference which are internal clause constituents and which govern verb agreement and control anaphoric co-reference in the ordinary manner of NPs. That is,

verb agreement would be 3rd person, singular or plural depending on the number of the abstract noun, gender also depending on the abstract noun's gender; anaphoric co-reference would be through 3rd person pronouns of appropriate number and gender, with gender regulated on a grammatical or also on a semantic basis:

- (iii) 'Has Your Highness found her/his crown, or does she/he not wear it today?'

This is what most relevant European languages would do, never going any further in the grammaticalization of such terms, especially with those terms of address or self-reference which are not formally or semantically too depleted.

Being used for address or self-reference, however, such terms could be expected to follow the model of terms of address and self-reference already fully grammaticalized, namely 1st and 2nd person personal pronouns. That is, they would govern verb agreement and control co-reference like 1st and 2nd person pronouns do:

- (iv) 'Have Your Highness found your crown, or do you not wear it today?'

This is what Rumanian does as a rule (*dumneata, dumneavoastra*), and what regional varieties of Spanish and Italian can do, deviating from the 3rd person norm illustrated in (iii). Arabic too has recategorized such terms as 2nd person.

Personal pronouns differ from nouns in being able to serve as their own co-reference markers; plain repetition would be unusual for a noun: 'the king ... he/*the king'. It would therefore be a step towards pronominalization if terms of address and self-reference were repeated, rather than being co-referenced by anaphoric pronouns as in (iii):

- (v) 'Has Your Highness found Your Highness's crown, or does Your Highness not wear it today?'

In their most deferential moments, some European languages have been observed to indulge in this manner. Evidently, such repetition is rather cumbersome – unless the terms of address or self-reference have progressed far on the road to formal and

semantic depletion. Spanish *usted(es)*, Catalan *vostè(s)*, Portuguese *você(s)*, or Dutch *U* can conveniently be used as in (v), being 2nd person pronouns on all counts except that of governing 3rd person verb agreement.

Wavering between inertness, with terms of address and self-reference based on abstract nouns being 3rd person and nouns, as per (iii), and the cumbersome repetitiousness traded in by their 3rd-person pronominalization, as per (v), an elegant way out is to let the regular 3rd person pronouns themselves do the deferential addressing:

- (vi) ‘Has she/he [=you] found her/his [=your] crown, or does she/he [=you] not wear it today?’

This is what Italian did, whose pronouns of formal address, *Lei* (SG) (from one of the 3rd SG feminine variants) and *Loro* (PL) (from a 3rd PL form, MASC and FEM undistinguished; competing with 2PL *voi*) originated as anaphoric pronouns for *vostra signoria (illustrissima)* (with contractions such as *Vossignoria*, *Ussignuria*, *ssignirí*, *(vos)sustrissima*, *voscenza*, *voss(i)a*, *vass(i)a* in regional varieties) and a few other such terms, whose abstract nouns are all feminine. German did the same, as did those Scandinavian languages following its model: here the current honorific addressee pronoun is *Sie*, which is originally 3rd person plural, having come about through regular pronominalization of plural terms of address such as *Euer Ehren/Gnaden*, just like the no-longer-so-honorific 3rd singular address (*er/sie*) had been licensed through titular, non-abstract terms of reference and address like *der Herr/die Dame*. For purposes of co-reference and agreement, such 3rd person pronouns replacing NP terms of address have remained 3rd person in Italian and German, though they are (and of course were) pronouns on all other counts.

With the alternatives outlined, the question now would be to see whether it is predictable which one will be taken. It’s an open question, so far as I am concerned. As the examples suggest, genealogy is not a sure guide: different Romance languages and dialects went different ways, so did different Germanic languages, German going with Italian, etc. And of course the original model was the same for all European languages practicing the mode of addressing once specially designed for just one man, His Majesty, the Emperor Augustus.

Presumably the major difference is whether honorific pronouns of address and self-reference are of the same person as other pronouns of address and self-reference (2nd) or are of 3rd person like non-pronominal NPs. German and Italian, and in a different way English and Hungarian, are solidly in the 3rd person camp, and Rumanian and Arabic seem equally solidly in the 2nd person camp; but otherwise there is dialectal or intra-familial variation which suggests it is not such a big deal to switch from 3rd person to 2nd. Given this particular source of the terms of address and self-reference, abstract nouns, such a switch must have occurred wherever agreement and co-reference is 2nd person.