

# **Politeness distinctions in second person pronouns**

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## **1. Introduction**

Politeness distinctions in personal pronouns of the second person are a common phenomenon in European languages. Nevertheless, these distinctions have received attention in linguistic typology only sporadically. The present paper aims to fill this gap. After a discussion of the deictic nature of personal pronouns and their formal properties (Section 2), an overview will be given on the range of data which can be found in the languages of the world with respect to politeness distinctions in second person pronouns (Section 3). Section 4 will show that politeness is a functional domain of language use; two major politeness strategies will be discussed which may well point to the emergence of politeness distinctions in pronouns. The frequency of politeness distinctions and the areal distribution of the different historical sources of polite pronouns in the languages of the world will be presented in Section 5. There are certain large areas in the world where politeness distinctions occur, which allows the conclusion that politeness distinctions in pronouns are not only functionally conditioned but also areally by means of linguistic and cultural contact.

## **2. Theoretical background**

Personal pronouns belong to the deictic expressions of a language. Speakers use personal pronouns in order to direct the attention of the addressee to one or more human individuals who may be present or absent in the actual speech situation. Usually, this act of reference is an integral part of a speech act, or more generally of a communicative exchange.

There is a wide variety of linguistic means a speaker may use in order to refer to one or more people that he wants to talk about or he wants to talk to. Expressions such as *the tall guy with the red hair* or *this woman over there* are noun phrases used to pick a specific human being out of a range of referential possibilities in a certain speech situation. In addition, these expressions indicate that the individuals referred to are presumably not known to the addressee or that they are not activated at the time of speaking in the mind of the addressee. Therefore, the speaker adds specifications to facilitate the addressee's interpretation in order to understand who is meant by the speaker. These specifications may be linguistic or gestural or both. An expression like *the woman over there*, for instance, is usually accompanied by a certain body position of the speaker — he or she faces or turns slightly towards the intended referent, and in most cases a slight gesture with the eye or arm helps the addressee identify the referent.

Other linguistic means for referring to people are “honorific terms of address” such as *Mister, Madam*, which are often combined with a proper name, “relational nouns” such as *father, uncle* which imply a certain kinship relation to someone else who has to be obligatorily specified by possessive pronouns in some languages, “proper names” such as *Tom Smith*, and last but not least “personal pronouns”. The distinctive features of personal pronouns may be summarized as follows.

1. Personal pronouns are inherently referential expressions. They do not occur with modifying and determining elements that are otherwise necessary to form referential noun phrases. Adjectives, attributive demonstratives, and articles are dependent elements (in terms of dependency grammar) in a noun phrase with a lexical noun as head and fulfill certain functions there.

2. The referent of a personal pronoun can be identified only with respect to the actual speech event, i.e. according to the speech act roles he or she performs during the speech event. Personal pronouns were classified as “indexical symbols” in semiotics exactly because of this trait. They have a specific semantic content, the speech act roles, and at the same time they are pointers, i.e. they establish a reference which can be decoded only with respect to the actual speaker who uses the pronoun in his utterance (cf. Jakobson 1971[1957], and Helmbrecht 2002 for a more detailed discussion of this categorization).

What makes personal pronouns (and deictics in general) a special category of linguistic expression is that they encode a certain type of relation, the relation between the “origo” (cf. Bühler 1982[1934]) and an intended “referent”. Every act of pointing presupposes a commonly shared point of departure,

the indexical ground (cf. Hanks 1990, 1992), from which the pointing starts. This is the origo of gestural as well as linguistic pointing. The addressee of the pointing needs to be aware of the indexical ground of pointing; otherwise s/he is neither able to interpret the pointing itself nor to correctly identify the intended target. The relation between origo and target encoded in personal pronouns (and other deictic expressions) reflects a basic cognitive principle, the conceptualization of scenes along the notions figure and ground (cf. Langacker 1990; Dirven & Verspoor 1998). The origo of the pointing is the presupposed ground of the reference to an entity in the focus of attention. The referent is the figure in this relation.

It is the default assumption that the origo of a pointing act coincides with the speaker of the same act. However, the origo may be shifted to some other person, a process which then has to be marked by certain linguistic means (cf. Bühler 1982: 102–120). The target of the act of pointing is the intended referent. The intended referent is usually characterized semantically by the pointing expression. Demonstrative pronouns, for instance, may characterize the referent as male or female, as human or non-human, or as animate or inanimate. Personal pronouns characterize the referent as well with respect to the speech act role and the size of the respective speaker and hearer groups.

Deictic expressions are, in addition, characterized by the encoding of a “deictic relation” between the origo and the intended referent. This deictic relation is semantically characterized in demonstrative pronouns. Categories such as proximal versus distal, or visible versus non-visible indicate the type of relation between the origo and the intended referent (cf. Hanks 1992: 51). The specific deictic relation between the origo and the referent in personal pronouns of the first and second person coincides with the characterization of the referent itself. The addressee is the hearer of the utterance in relation to the speaker, who is the indexical ground for the second person singular reference. The relational structure of deictic expression is summarized in Figure 1.

The indexical ground of the deictic reference is the origo in Figure 1. As already mentioned above, the default origo for pronominal reference is the speaker. Personal pronouns of the first and second person singular refer to the respective speech act participating individuals by characterizing the intended referent according to his or her performance of a certain speech act role. Who is meant can be determined only with regard to the origo, the actual speaker. Pronouns such as *I* and *you* encode not only the speech act role of the intended referent, but also the relation of the intended referent to the origo, the speaker of the actual speech act. Both the characterizing semantics and the deictic

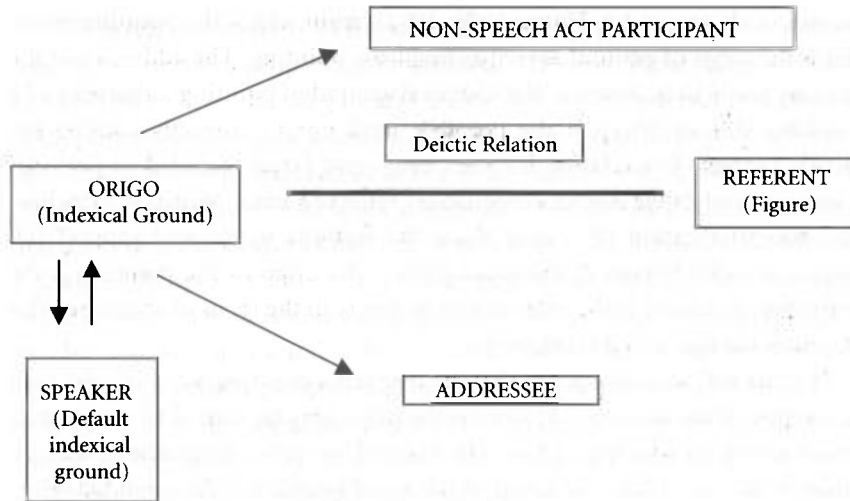


Figure 1. The relational structure of personal pronouns

relation to the origo are conventionally (i.e. semantically) encoded in personal pronouns. It is especially the encoded relation to the origo (indexical ground) that makes personal pronouns (and other deictics) a particular class of expressions in language.

3. There are two basic speech act roles, speaker and hearer, which are opposed to a negatively defined non-person category (cf. Benveniste 1956). Personal pronouns encode the singular roles as well as various combinations of these roles in the languages of the world. The identification of the referent of a first or second person personal pronoun in general does not pose a problem for the addressee. A communicative event is a highly structured situation with clear acoustic, perceptual, and gestural signs about who is performing which role. The structure of a communicative event together with the rules of the use of personal pronouns is learned *empractically* (cf. Bühler 1982[1934]) from the beginning of language acquisition. It is therefore hardly surprising to find a parallelism between cognitive and linguistic structure.

From the point of view of semantic structure, there are some similarities between kinship nouns such as *father*, polite nominal forms of address such as *excellence*, and personal pronouns. These expressions construe different social roles in terms of a kinship relation or in terms of a social relation between the addressee and the speaker. Their primary function, however, is not the identification of the referent — as is the case with speech act roles designating

pronouns — but rather the attribution of respect to the addressee due to the social rank of the role expressed. Nouns designating social ranks are possible historical sources for personal pronouns (cf. Lehmann 1995: 39–42).

4. Personal pronouns are shifters (cf. Jakobson 1971[1957]), i.e. they have a systematically changing reference depending on the change of speech act roles during a conversation. This feature of pronoun usage is reflected in the systematic correlation between the different pronominal forms within a single paradigm. In this respect, pronouns contrast sharply with proper names, which have a unique reference throughout all instances of discourse. Since speech act roles are the defining semantic features of personal pronouns, the number of forms in a paradigm is necessarily limited. Proper names and nouns employed for reference to people do not have such limitations; they usually belong to an open class of words in a language.

Reference to absent or present human participants in a speech event is certainly the primary function of personal pronouns. Another aspect of the reference of personal pronouns, however, is what has been termed *social deixis* in the literature (cf. Levinson 1983: 89–94; Fillmore 1997). There are many languages in which different pronominal forms may be used to indicate different degrees of respect. In principle, there are two types of honorification: *referent honorifics* (cf. Levinson 1983: 90, Shibatani 1998: 342–44), i.e. polite reference to a third person, and *addressee honorifics*, i.e. polite reference to an addressee of the speech act. The latter are the subject of this paper. Only those forms displaying at least some of the distinguishing characteristics of personal pronouns are considered.

### 3. Pronominal forms of polite address — the data

There is a remarkable variety of linguistic means to express some degree of politeness with respect to the addressee. The linguistic strategies speakers use to account for the various social relationships between themselves and the hearers in a communicative event may lead to the conventionalization of non-prototypical usages of already existing personal pronouns in a language. For example, speakers of French and other languages in Europe and many other languages in the world use second person plural pronouns to address the hearer politely. The exact historical date, political region, and circumstances under which French people started to use *vous* to address higher ranking or

foreign persons is not known, although it is plausible to assume that this convention was developed during the Middle Ages around the courts of the French crown and the aristocracy. The polite use of *vous* became a conventional rule. This usage then introduced a new distinction into the paradigm of personal pronouns without increasing or changing the actual number of forms. The second person singular reference received a distinction between familiar/equal versus formal/polite, a distinction not made in second person plural reference in French.

The fact that so many languages conventionalize the polite use of the second person plural pronoun for the reference to a single addressee does not mean that the pragmatic rules underlying the usage of second person plural pronouns are the same in all languages. Politeness rules may differ considerably across languages. The sets of people who are considered to deserve polite address by means of a second person plural pronoun (or other honorific second person pronoun) may vary significantly from language to language. In addition, the polite form and the corresponding familiar form may be used either asymmetrically or symmetrically. In the former case, one of the interlocutors has to give the polite form whereas the other uses the familiar form in return. In the latter case, both use the same level of politeness. And thirdly, these underlying pragmatic rules of the use of polite forms may change over time within a single language. For example, the usage of the second person plural polite pronoun *you* in the early period of Modern English was generalized to such a degree that the original second person singular pronoun *thou* became obsolete. Finally the familiar/polite distinction disappeared in the English pronoun system leaving the former second plural polite pronoun as the sole pronoun for second person reference in the system.

The linguistic strategies to account for the social relations between interlocutors may lead to the intrusion of new pronominal forms. In Spanish, e.g. the forms *usted/ustedes*, which are derived historically from a complex term of polite address — *vuestra merced* meaning 'your grace', became an integral part of the pronominal paradigm. They are used for second person singular and plural polite address. Here, the introduction of politeness distinctions in the paradigm of personal pronouns was achieved by the introduction of new forms.

The grammaticalization of certain nouns — mostly designating high social status — to pronouns can be observed frequently in Far East Asian languages where the linguistic expression of politeness is much more pervasive than in European languages. In Table 1, I have compiled a list of pronominal forms and their diachronic sources used in languages as addressee honorifics. For each

usage type that may lead to a change in the pronoun system with respect to politeness distinctions, one illustrative example is given.

**Table 1.** Pronominal forms for polite addressee reference<sup>1</sup>

Target	Source	Example
	2nd pl	French: <i>tu/vous</i>
	3rd sg	Italian: <i>tu/lei</i>
	3rd pl	German: <i>du/Sie</i>
2nd sg hon	1st pl	Ainu: <i>aoka</i> (< <i>a-</i> (1st transitive actor) + <i>oka</i> (exist.pl))
	Dem (2nd)	Sinhalese: <i>oyaa</i>
	Refl.	Hungarian: <i>maga</i> (2nd sg hon) / <i>maguk</i> (2nd pl.hon)
	Status term	Spanish: <i>Usted</i> (2nd sg hon < <i>vuestra merced</i> 'Your grace')

Third person singular pronouns as well as third person plural pronouns are used to express respect. First person plural pronouns (particularly inclusive forms), demonstrative pronouns, reflexive pronouns, and nouns designating social status or social rank are used for polite reference to the addressee.

A distinct word class of personal pronouns as we know them from European languages is sometimes difficult to discern in Far Eastern Asian languages. In Japanese, Vietnamese, and other languages of that area, there are numerous words which are used in a way similar to European pronouns, namely to refer to the speaker, hearer, a non-speech act participant or combinations of these referential categories. In addition, these words distinguish the sex of the speaker or addressee, his or her social rank, the level of style of the conversation and the social distance between the interlocutors. These distinctions are difficult to systematize and represent in an ordered paradigm with pairs of oppositions as is usually done with personal pronouns in other languages. Rather, these words display many grammatical features typical of nouns in these languages. Therefore, attempts were made to classify and to describe these words by means of a pronoun — noun continuum rather than as a single class of words (cf. Sugamoto 1989).

Another characteristic of these languages is that their speakers generally try to avoid the use of pronouns in discourse. The intended referent, no matter whether this is the speaker, hearer or some third person, often has to be pragmatically inferred from the situational or linguistic context of the utterance. Because English and other European languages have personal pronouns in syntactic positions where these languages have none, this phenomenon has been dealt with under the rubric of *zero anaphora* (cf. e.g. Li & Thompson 1979). This phenomenon should not be confused with what has been called *pro*

*drop* in the generative tradition. Pro drop languages indicate the referent of the subject by means of a bound pronominal affix on the verb, i.e. the syntactic/morphological place of the pronominal reference is different, but there is a pronominal expression.

Nevertheless, a closer look at words used for person reference in these Far Eastern Asian languages reveals that some of them come close to the traditional notion of personal pronouns and these are covered in the present investigation. There are words in Japanese and in Vietnamese which are predominantly used e.g. for speaker reference or hearer reference and their morphosyntactic behavior differs in significant ways from the behavior of regular nouns.

In Japanese, for example, nouns are generally not pluralized. They are free to receive a plural or singular interpretation depending on the context, but may optionally take a plural marker. Some of the putative personal pronouns such as first person *watashi* are intrinsically singular and have to be pluralized obligatorily if used as a first person plural pronoun; e.g. *watashi* is pluralized by a suffix *-tachi* (*watashi-tachi* 'we'; cf. Sugamoto 1989: 276).

Kinship terms such as Vietnamese *anh* 'elder brother' also have certain differences in their grammatical behavior if they are used for pronominal reference. In this pronominal usage they are not allowed to take nominal classifiers which are possible in their nominal usage (cf. Cooke 1968: 125).

#### 4. Functional interpretation

Politeness is a functional domain of language and language use. Linguistic research in pragmatics, anthropology and sociolinguistics of the last decades has shown that the dimension of participation (cf. Hymes 1974; Duranti 1985, 1997; Goffman 1981; Levinson 1983; a.o.), i.e. the question of who is talking to whom in which situation, is crucial for the understanding of the linguistic and cognitive structure of expressions and grammatical categories. This is especially true for the social relations among the participants in speech situations. Speakers, hearers, bystanders, audience and others not present but who are talked about are not simply senders, receivers, or subjects of a message, but rather they are normally connected to each other within a system of social roles and relations and cultural practices.

There are two social parameters that seem to be of particular significance with respect to politeness. One involves the relative social rank, power and prestige of the individual members within a society, the other involves the



social distance, i.e. the degree of intimacy and familiarity relative to one another.<sup>2</sup> The relative social rank of an individual depends on variables such as age, sex, kinship relation, heritage, wealth, political power etc. and the social roles that the individual is licensed to play. The parameter of relative social distance describes the fact that people who are close relatives or friends, or who belong to the same peer groups etc., are usually closer to each other than unrelated people who do not know each other on an every-day basis. It is obvious that these parameters and values play a role as conceptual categories and determine the choice of linguistic means for polite address. But the question remains what exactly politeness is and what linguistic strategies are used to express respect.

A very powerful theory of the nature of politeness is the concept of *face* proposed by Brown & Levinson (1987). Face is the public self-image every adult member of a society wants to claim for him- or herself. Face is an important part of the personal identity, it includes a knowledge of the social position of oneself as well as the social position of others. Brown & Levinson assume "that the mutual knowledge of members' public self-image or face, and the social necessity to orient oneself to it in interaction, are universal" (Brown & Levinson 1987: 62). They hypothesize that there are basically two aspects of face, negative face, which is "the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, rights to non-distraction — i.e. to freedom of action and freedom from imposition" (Brown & Levinson 1987: 61). On the other hand, positive face crucially includes the desire that this self-image should be appreciated and approved by the other interactants (cf. Brown & Levinson 1987: 62). In short, negative face includes all wants which have to do with the maintenance of the self-assigned autonomy of a person, while positive face, on the other hand, includes all wants which have to do with the positive evaluation and acceptance of oneself by others.

Face is interpreted by the authors not as a psychological entity, but as face wants of the speaker and hearer. There are numerous acts which may threaten these face wants. For example, orders and requests may threaten the addressee's negative face wants, because these speech acts might urge him to respond in a positive way i.e. to do what was ordered or requested although he does not like it. The positive face wants of the addressee are threatened if the speaker expresses disapproval, criticism or complaints about the addressee. Now, since these face-threatening acts (hence FTAs) occur all the time and are unavoidable to some degree, speakers may follow certain linguistic strategies to combine these FTAs with redressive actions. These redressive actions constitute politeness. Their purpose is to minimize the imposition of the addressee if an FTA is

unavoidable. Corresponding to the two types of face wants, there are two types of redressive actions, i.e. two types of politeness; negative politeness and positive politeness.

Positive politeness comprises all the redressive strategies which appeal to the positive face wants of the addressee. An example may illustrate this point. If you want to ask someone for a favor, it might be helpful to highlight in advance that you belong to the same set of people who share specific wants, goals and beliefs. Linguistically, the one who intends to direct the request to someone else may use in-group markers such as the same slang or dialect variety as the addressee, nicknames which are normally used only among close friend or colleagues, or he may include the addressee in the designated activity by using a first person plural inclusive pronoun. An example for this strategy is given in (1). The situation is as follows. A customer asks for ten regular stamps in a post office. In response, the employee offers a prefabricated booklet instead of stamps taken from a larger sheet of stamps, asking the following question.

(1) *Nehmen wir auch das kleine Briefchen hier?*

'Do we also take this little booklet (with stamps) here?'

The employee used the first person plural pronoun including himself in the activity expressed, although his role in this situation is obviously the opposite. His role is to sell the stamps and not to buy them. But this type of inclusion is a strategy to express positive politeness. The employee expresses that he shares the interest and perspective of the customer. It is plausible to imagine that this polite use of first person plural pronouns in German, which is not conventionalized, may become a convention in German or was the starting point for the development of a second person polite pronoun out of a first inclusive plural form in other languages. This is perhaps what happened in Ainu, an isolate language of Japan, in which one can observe an extension of the first plural pronoun to the second person polite meaning (cf. Table 1 above).

Negative politeness includes all linguistic strategies that diminish the degree of potential imposition of an FTA on an addressee. Speakers try to avoid a direct and clear expression of the FTA. This avoidance strategy includes, among other things, a lowering of the illocutionary force of the speech act and an avoidance of a direct reference to the addressee. The latter aspect is particularly important for the rise of politeness distinctions in pronouns.

The use of second person plural pronouns in order to refer to a single individual could have been motivated by the reluctance to address the hearer directly. An FTA usually forces an addressee to act in a way intended by the

speaker. A speaker X who is not licensed to commit an FTA toward hearer Y because of his social position with respect to Y or because of the personal relation between them may use the second person plural pronoun instead of the singular one in order to dissolve the obligation imposed on Y among a plurality of addressees. Speaker X diminishes Y's responsibility to act in the requested way by addressing a plurality of hearers. The reference to the single addressee can easily be inferred from the situational context and does not pose a problem for the interlocutors. If this usage of the second person plural pronoun is repeated frequently, it may become a convention of language use. However, as soon as there is a rule in a language to use the second person plural pronoun for polite address, this choice is obligatory if the pragmatic and sociolinguistic conditions are fulfilled. Then, people do no longer use this pronoun to make an indirect reference. The French second plural pronoun *vous*, for instance, is used like a normal second person singular pronoun.

But how do the second person plural pronouns acquire polite meanings historically? The assignment of polite meaning to personal pronouns is certainly an epiphenomenon of the linguistic practices outlined above, i.e. it is an unintended result of this pronoun usage. At some point in history, hearers of a social rank higher than the speakers' are repeatedly addressed in the second person plural in order to minimize FTAs. The second person plural pronoun now receives a polite meaning and this polite usage will become conventionalized. The original motivation for this usage disappears and eventually, this process — which is an invisible-hand process in terms of the theory of linguistic change by Keller (1994) — leads to the introduction of a new politeness distinction in the pronominal paradigm.<sup>3</sup> Further, the asymmetrical use of the second person plural polite pronoun — i.e. the social superior receives the polite second plural pronoun but uses the singular pronoun to address the inferior — may develop into a symmetrical usage later, e.g. among strangers, since speakers who do not know each other cannot be certain about their relative social position and may therefore address each other slightly more politely than the rules may require.

The avoidance strategy of speakers is the main functional source for the emergence of politeness distinctions in pronouns. The processes by which different forms acquire a politeness meaning vary, however. Owing to lack of space, I cannot give a detailed analysis of the other sources of politeness distinctions given in Table 1 (cf. Helmbrecht 2001, 2002).

### 5. Frequency and areal distribution

A statistical survey of the frequency and geographical distribution of politeness distinctions in pronouns shows (a) that about 25% of all languages have politeness distinctions in pronouns and (b) that the occurrence of politeness distinction is not randomly distributed but shows certain geographical foci.

In Table 2, an overview of the relative frequencies of the different techniques to express politeness is given. The frequencies are calculated from a representative sample of 100 languages that has been established independently of the research topic. It turns out that the use of the second person plural pronoun is the most common technique to address politely among the languages of the sample. Less frequent is the use of third person plural pronouns, reflexive pronouns, and kinship and status nouns. Some of the techniques, such as the use of third person singular pronouns, are not attested in the languages of the sample. The majority of languages showing politeness distinction in second person pronouns use pronominal sources to express these distinctions. Only a third of these languages, that is 8% of all the languages examined, use status or kinship nouns. The languages which use kinship nouns for polite address are mostly located in the East and Southeast Asian area.

Table 2. Linguistic techniques and frequency

Target	Source	Examples	Frequency
	2nd pl	French, Persian, Yoruba, Nama, Kannada, Fijian, etc., (not found e.g. in central America)	16 %
	3rd sg	Italian, Hungarian, Indonesian	n.a. <sup>4</sup>
	3rd pl	German, Hindi, Kannada, Luvale, Tagalog	5 %
2nd sg hon	1st pl	Nahuatl, Ainu	n.a.
	Dem	Sinhalese	n.a.
	Refl.	Imbabura Quechua, Hungarian, Hindi	3 %
	Kinship term	Indonesian, Vietnamese, Burmese, Thai	2 %
	Status term	Dutch, Spanish, Rumanian, Burmese, Vietnamese, Thai	6 %

In Table 3, the languages of the sample are grouped according to their membership in different honorific types. Four types are distinguished:

1. languages which have no politeness distinctions in their pronouns,
2. languages which show the European type binary politeness distinction,
3. languages which show two and more degrees of politeness distinctions in their pronoun system, and
4. languages whose speakers in general avoid the use of pronouns for second person polite address.

The first parameter is self-explanatory. Languages grouped under this feature in my database have no personal pronouns in their paradigms used to express different degrees of respect or intimacy toward the addressee. Around 75% of the sample have no politeness distinctions in personal pronouns. As can be seen from Table 3, there are certain large geographical areas where politeness is not a category of personal pronouns at all, e.g. North and South America, Papua New Guinea, Australia, and perhaps Africa. There are languages in Africa showing binary politeness contrasts. These binary politeness distinctions may be the result of language contact with the colonial languages such as French, German, and Dutch. This question certainly needs further investigation.

The second parameter "Binary politeness distinction" covers all languages with a European T/V type of politeness distinctions. These languages have a paradigmatic opposition between at least one intimate or familiar pronoun of address and another one expressing respectful address. Such a binary distinction may also be expressed by several distinct pronouns. It is criterial that pronouns do not indicate more than one politeness distinction. Table 3 below shows that there are two culturally and historically connected areas where this honorific type is prevailing, Europe and to a lesser degree the Near and Middle East.

The third parameter — "Several politeness distinctions" — covers all languages exhibiting two or more degrees of politeness within a pronominal paradigm. These systems are rare cross-linguistically. Languages with this feature do occur in Meso-America (e.g. Nahuatl) and in Southeast Asia (e.g. Java) they are, however, frequent in India. It seems to be a defining linguistic feature of this area. Many languages there have two degrees of politeness expressed by a second person plural pronoun and an even more polite third person pronoun or reflexive pronoun.

The fourth parameter — "Pronoun avoidance" — is perhaps the most difficult of the four and deviates terminologically from the previous ones. The names of the first three parameters describe a categorical feature of the pronominal paradigms to be investigated. The term "pronoun avoidance", however, describes a strategy of pronoun usage which has some effect on the shape of the respective paradigm. Languages such as Japanese, Burmese, Korean, Thai and others in that area have a strong sensitivity to politeness within their grammars. Speakers generally avoid using personal pronouns when addressing other persons and rather use status and kinship terms, titles and other complex nominal expressions. The effect of this strategy is that there are rarely polite pronouns of address. If there are second person pronouns, they are used to address equals or inferiors. Polite forms of address (for addressing superiors)

Table 3. Distribution over global regions and continents

Global regions/ continents	No politeness distinction	Binary politeness distinction	Several politeness distinctions	Pronoun avoidance
100 Languages in total	74	18	3	6
Europe	English	Basque, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Russian, Spanish		
Near and Middle East	Abkhaz, Hebrew, Lezgian	Persian, Georgian, Turkish		
India	Manipuri		Hindi, Kannada	
Central Asia	Mongolian, Burushaski, Chukchee	Chinese		
Southeast Asia	Chamorro, Hmong Njua, Paiwan		Tagalog	Burmese, Indonesian, Japanese, Korean, Thai, Vietnamese
Central America	Jakaltek, Mezquital Otomi, Rama, Copainala Zoque	Mixtec		
Papua	Alamblak, Asmat, Bukiyip, Daga, Dani, Imonda, Kewa, Maibrat, Pasi			
Australia	Goonyiandi, Kayardild, Mangarayi, Martuythunira, Maung, Tiwi, Wangaaybuwan- Ngiyamba			
Pacific	Luvukaleve, Rapanui	Fijian		
North America	Acoma, Cree, Inuit, Karok, Keres, Kiowa, Koasati, Kootenai, Lakhota, Makah, Maricopa, Oneida, Slave, Wichita, Yaqui			
South America	Apurina, Barasano, Guarani, Hixkaryana, Kraho, Mapuche, Mataco, Mura-Piraha, Sanuma, Warao, Wari, Yagua	Quechua		
Africa	Amele, Egyptian, Bagirmi, Grebo, Hausa, Krongo, Lango, Malagasy, Oromo, Senoufo, Songhay, Swahili, Tamazight, Zulu	Luvale, Nama, Sango, Yoruba		

mostly do not belong to the class of personal pronouns in these languages. Hence there are lexical gaps in the group of pronominal forms with respect to second person politeness categories.

## 6. Conclusions

The relational structure of personal pronouns includes two poles, the origo and the referential target. The origo is the cognitive ground for an act of pointing, the referent of the pointing is the figure. The peculiarity of personal pronouns is that they have lexicalized this relation. The default cognitive ground for pronominal reference is the speaker and the different types of targets semantically coded in pronominal paradigms are the speaker, the hearer, third persons, and combinations of these categories. The principal deictic nature of pronouns reflects the cognitive representation of the speech event, i.e. the relation between two individuals in a dyadic conversation. However, personal pronouns also reflect social relations. Speakers have clear concepts of the social relations in their society and their position in this network. Politeness distinctions in personal pronouns take up aspects of these social relations and the cultural practices which are associated with them.

The investigation of politeness distinctions in personal pronouns has shown that the emergence of linguistic distinctions may be explained functionally on the basis of pronoun usage with respect to certain underlying strategies of positive and negative politeness. Pronouns of different person and number categories and other referring expressions receive politeness meanings secondarily via the conventionalization of their usage in FTAs with some redressive efforts. The typological study of the geographical distribution of honorific types has shown that politeness distinctions in pronouns are areal phenomena. This leads to the conclusion that the existence of politeness distinctions in personal pronouns of a specific language can be explained in two ways. One explanation may be functional, taking the politeness strategies of pronoun usage into account. The other way refers to contact-induced borrowing. The fact that there are certain large geographic areas where politeness distinctions in pronouns occur very frequently suggests that linguistic practices of polite address as well as the forms for polite address can be subject to borrowing.

### Notes

1. The following abbreviations are used: 1st, 2nd, 3rd = first, second, third person, sg = singular, pl = plural, hon = honorific, Dem = demonstrative pronoun, Refl = reflexive pronoun, FTA = face threatening act.
2. These parameters were introduced by Brown, R. & Gilman, A. (1972) in their pioneering study on the polite use of personal pronouns.
3. This theory describes language change as the result of local processes of language use, which comprises two aspects. The first is intentional. Speakers start to use a new expression or way of speaking in certain contexts for certain communicative reasons. If other speakers adopt this habit for whatever reason, this new way of speaking may become conventionalized. The effect on the language system, however, may be very different from what the speakers intended to perform with the new expression. If speakers avoid a direct reference in certain types of social situations — e.g. inferior speaking to superior — using a second plural pronoun (with a singular addressee reference), features of the context “superiority of the addressee” may finally become a semantic feature of the second plural pronoun. This has never been the intention of the speakers, but is a causal result of this new type of pronoun usage.
4. Since these languages do not belong to the 100 language[s] sample from which the percentages of occurrence are calculated, the occurrence of the third person singular pronoun as a polite form of addressee reference has to be marked as “not attested” in this table.

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