

# LES TITRES DE CIVILITÉ: A DP ANALYSIS OF FRENCH HONORIFICS\*

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Les titres de civilité – French honorific titles

French, like many Indo-European languages, possesses a system of prenominal titles used as honorifics. The function of these *Titres de civilité* ranges from deference to a stranger or someone of a higher social rank than the speaker to identifying an individual of a specific profession or certification (Develey 2018). This paper examines an alternation in the presence or absence of a definite article preceding a nominal expression bearing an honorific title in argument position, identifying a major distinction between Old French honorifics (*Monsieur, Madame*) and professional honorifics (*Docteur, Professeure*).

### 1.2 Data

Honorific titles such as *Monsieur* and *Madame*, to which I will refer hereinafter as Old French honorifics for reasons that will be explained in Section 2, behave differently from honorific titles such as *Docteur* or *Professeure*, to which I will refer as professional honorifics. At first glance, both expressions, when paired with a proper name, typically an individual's family name, seem to serve the function of referring to a specific individual in the real world. However, a difference becomes apparent when nominal expressions containing honorific titles appear in argument position. For example, (1) illustrates a difference in acceptability between two honorific titles in subject position.

- (1) a. (\**Le*) *Monsieur Przewalski aime les escargots.*  
'Mr. Przewalski likes snails.'/lit. \*'The Mr. Przewalski likes snails.'
- b. \*(*La*) *Professeure Madouri aime les escargots.*  
'Prof. Madouri likes snails.'/lit. 'The Prof. Madouri likes snails.'

(1a) shows that adding the overt definite article *le* to the nominal expression in subject position containing the Old French honorific *Monsieur* paired with a proper name results

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in an ungrammatical sentence. In contrast, (1b) shows that the presence of the definite article *le* is obligatory with a nominal expression in subject position containing the professional honorific *Professeure* paired with a proper name. The same contrast is noted between *Madame* and *Docteur* as illustrated in (2).

- (2) a. (\**La*) *Madame Bruneaux aime les escargots.*  
 ‘Ms. Bruneaux likes snails.’/lit. \*‘The Ms. Bruneaux likes snails.’
- b. \*(*Le*) *Docteur Wakabayashi aime les escargots.*  
 \*‘Dr. Wakabayashi likes snails.’/lit. ‘The Dr. Wakabayashi likes snails.’

This contrast between Old French and professional honorifics extends to nominal expressions in other argument positions, namely those of direct object and the object of a preposition.

- (3) a. *Pierrot a vu (\*le) Monsieur Przewalski.*  
 (lit.) ‘Pierrot has seen Mr. Przewalski.’/ \*‘Pierrot has seen the Mr. Przewalski.’
- b. *Pierrot a vu \*(la) Professeure Madouri.*  
 (lit.) \*‘Pierrot has seen Prof. Madouri.’/ ‘Pierrot has seen the Prof. Madouri.’
- c. *Je viens de recevoir un colis de (\*la) Madame Bruneaux.*  
 (lit.) ‘I just received a package from Ms. Bruneaux.’/ \*‘I just received a package from the Ms. Bruneaux.’
- d. *Je viens de recevoir un colis du<sup>1</sup>/(*\*de*) Docteur Wakabayashi.*  
 (lit.) \*‘I just received a package from Dr. Wakabayashi.’/ ‘I just received a package from the Dr. Wakabayashi.’

Once again, (3a) and (3c), which contain *Monsieur* and *Madame* in honorific position contrast with (3b) and (3d), which contain *Professeure* and *Docteur*. In the case of (3a) and (3c), the ungrammaticality is the result of the presence of a definite article. In the cases of (3b) and (3d), ungrammaticality arises when there is no definite article.

However, both kinds of nominal expressions with titles and a proper name behave similarly when preceded by an indefinite article and followed by a subjunctive relative clause.

- (4) a. *Je cherche un(e) \*Monsieur/\*Madame Bruneaux qui puisse m’aider.*  
 ‘I am looking for a \*Mr. Bruneaux/\*Ms. Bruneaux/ who could help me.

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<sup>1</sup> The form *du* is a result of the contraction between the preposition *de* and the masculine singular definite article *le*, and, as such, can be analysed as *de + le*.

- b. *Je cherche un(e) Docteur/Professeure (\*Bruneaux) qui puisse m'aider.*  
 'I am looking for a Doctor/Professor \*Bruneaux who could help me.

(4) shows that no honorific title paired with a proper name can be preceded by an indefinite article and followed by a subjunctive relative clause. A DP with both elements would refer to an indefinite extra-linguistic entity. Moreover, *Professeure* and *Docteur* on their own (i.e. not followed by a proper name) forces a different interpretation – that of a common noun and not a proper name. Thus, by uttering (4b) using the common nouns *professeur* or *docteur*, a speaker refers to some unspecified entity in the subset of things that are doctors or professors. As for *monsieur* and *madame*, while not typically used as common nouns in Standard Metropolitan French, these are sometimes used as such in very familiar or domestic registers. However, since this usage is particularly marked, (4) remains at best strange and at worst ungrammatical. In sum, nominal expressions containing an honorific title, Old French or modern, cannot combine with indefinite determiners.

Interestingly, the contrast between the grammaticality of the definite article in combination with a nominal expression containing an honorific title followed by a proper name is neutralised in vocative position.

- (5) a. *(\*Le) Monsieur Przewalski, auriez-vous la gentillesse de me passer le sel ?*  
 b. *(\*La) Professeure Madouri, auriez-vous la gentillesse de me passer le sel ?*

'Mr. Przewalski/Prof. Madouri, would you please pass the salt?'

(5a)-(5d) are only grammatical when there is no definite article preceding the nominal expression in question, regardless of whether the honorific title is *Monsieur/Madame* or *Docteur/Professeure*.

In the next section, I propose an analysis of the contrasts between Old French and professional honorifics, as well as the neutralisation of this contrast in vocative position.

### 1.3 Proposed analysis

I propose an analysis of these phenomena assuming that all nominal expressions in argument position are DPs, regardless of whether or not an overt determiner is present. I will argue that the distinctive characteristic of Old French honorific titles is that they take definite DPs as their arguments. In contrast, professional honorific titles paired with proper names constitute NPs that merge with a definite article to form a DP. The grammaticality judgements for this study were elicited from three native speakers of Standard Metropolitan French. Each of these speakers was monolingual in French until at least the age of 20. In addition to grammaticality judgements, they also provided English translations of grammatical sentences read back to them, which were also included in the analysis in Section 3.

To elaborate, Section 2 focuses on previous theoretical work that constitutes the base for my hypothesis. In particular, I draw upon ideas from Longobardi's (1994) paper on N-movement of proper names and de Swart et al.'s (2005) paper on bare nominal predicates describing capacity.

## 2. Theoretical background

### 2.1 Previous work related to DP/NP contrasts

De Swart et al.'s (2005) work on bare nominal predicates, i.e., nominal predicates lacking a determiner that describe capacity, in Germanic and Romance constructions noted that these predicates tend to be very restricted, typically denoting specific roles in society, including professions (e.g. teacher, doctor), religions (e.g. Catholic, Jewish), and nationalities (e.g. French, Japanese) (2005: 197, 203).

The presence of a determiner in these constructions is typically only possible when the nominal predicate in question is modified in some way, for example, by a prenominal adjective or a relative clause. In these cases, the nominal predicate no longer refers to a capacity, but rather a property of the individual.

- (6) a. *Il est (\*un) catholique.*  
(lit.) 'He is (\*a) Catholic.
- b. *Il est \*(un) **bon** catholique.*  
(lit.) 'He is \*(a) **good** Catholic.
- c. *Il est \*(un) catholique **qui va toujours à la messe du dimanche.***  
(lit.) 'He is \*(a) Catholic **who always goes to Sunday Mass.**

(De Swart et al. 2005: 200)

(6a), which contains the bare nominal predicate *catholique* is ungrammatical when the latter is preceded by an indefinite article. However, (6b) and (6c) show that the indefinite article is obligatory when the nominal predicate *catholique* is modified by a prenominal adjective in (6b) and a relative clause in (6c).

In contrast with professions, titles like *Monsieur* and *Madame* do not necessarily denote capacities or societal roles. Rather, they are used, on the part of the speaker, as a means of address to denote deference toward the interlocutor. In other words, they are not typically used as predicates, but rather, as illustrated in Section 1.2, as arguments or with a vocative function.

However, the titles *Docteur* and *Professeure* are homophonous with nouns denoting profession, namely *docteur* and *professeur*, both of which, according to de Swart et al, can function as bare nominal predicates (2005: 203). Thus, it could be that the obligatory presence of a definite article when referring to an individual of title bearing a distinct social role may be related to what happens when a nominal predicate is modified: a title paired

with a proper name is not a predicate denoting capacity, but rather an argument representing a unique individual.

On the other hand, Longobardi's theoretical contributions identify a case of stylistic conditioning, such that both the presence and absence of the definite article with a proper name are acceptable in some Western Romance languages.

- (7) a. *(Il) Gianni mi ha telefonato.*  
 the Gianni me has called.up  
 'Gianni has called me up.'

(Longobardi 1994: 622)

However, (8a) and (8b) below show an asymmetry when the proper name is preceded by a possessive determiner.

- (8) a. *\*(Il) mio Gianni ha finalmente telefonato.*  
 the my Gianni has finally called.up.  
 'My Gianni has finally called up'

- b. *(Il) Gianni mio ha finalmente telefonato.*  
 the Gianni my has finally called.up  
 'My Gianni has finally called up.'

(Longobardi 1994: 623)

(8a) is ungrammatical when the expression *mio Gianni* is not preceded by an overt definite article. However, (8b) shows that the presence of the definite article is optional when order of the possessive determiner and the proper name is *Gianni mio*. Longobardi explains the acceptability of the absence of the article in (8b) by stating that the lack of the article forces an N-initial order. In other words, the N head moves into D to fill the empty position (1994: 623). This is consistent with the observation that the cross-linguistic structure for proper names in argument position is that of a DP whether or not the determiner is overtly realised (Hornstein et al. 2005: 225-226). The question remains, however, why French allows definite determiners in vocative position in some contexts.

- (9) a. *Les/\*des enfants, à table !*  
 lit. 'The/\*some children, to the table!'
- b. *(\*Le) cher ami, viens me voir quand tu peux !*  
 lit. '(\*The) dear friend, come to see me when you can!'

While Longobardi's paper does not dwell on the contrast between *les enfants*, where the definite article is allowed, and *le cher ami*, where the presence of the definite article results in ungrammaticality, he does note that examples with partitives are ungrammatical across Western Romance. In other words, indefinite determiners seem not to be allowed in

vocative position as the vocative function is “highly individualizing” and thus “semantically incompatible with indefiniteness” (1994: 627).

To continue with the semantics of vocatives, in his 2010 paper on vocatives, Gerhard Schaden proposes three possible functions of vocatives: identifying the addressee, predicating something on the addressee, activating or interpellating the addressee (2010: 181). With this in mind and returning to definite descriptions, especially those containing an overt definite article given their ability to extract and individuate entities, one can imagine that their vocative function could serve just as well to identify an addressee. In instances like (9a), the definite article helps to call upon a specific subset of children in the context of discourse, which, depending on context, could serve both to activate or to identify the addressee. However, in (9b), *cher ami* is an epithet given to a sole addressee who, in the context of discourse, has supposedly already been identified via some previous exchange. Thus, its function is solely predicative. Schaden’s description of vocative functions will prove particularly useful in Section 3, where I propose an account of the lack of definite article before Old French and professional honorifics.

## 2.2 The history of *Monsieur* and *Madame*

In Section 2.1, we discussed the possibility that, in the case of proper names not preceded by a definite article, the N heads move into the empty D head. Before I present my full analysis, in this section, I discuss the origin of the Old French honorifics *Monsieur* and *Madame* and how these two may once have been decomposed.

According to *Le Figaro* journalist Alice Develey, *Monsieur* originated in the Middle Ages and appeared in writing sometime around 1314 (2018). This title was derived from the first-person singular possessive determiner *mon* [mõ], which typically precedes a grammatically masculine and singular noun, and the oblique form of the noun *seigneur*, itself present in Modern French meaning “lord” (le Monde.fr). Thus, the honorific title *Monsieur* was at one point in history a transparent compound of *mon* and *sieur*.

In a similar fashion, the word *Madame* originated in the Middle Ages to refer to the women of noble households, typically the wives of knights (le Monde.fr). It was derived from the first-person singular possessive determiner *ma* [ma], which typically precedes a grammatically feminine and singular noun, and the noun *dame* meaning “lady” (le Monde.fr). Thus, like its male counterpart *Monsieur*, the honorific title *Madame* was at one point a transparent compound.

In fact, even Modern French usage of *Madame* and *Monsieur* retains some degree of transparency as the plural forms *Mesdames* and *Messieurs* is marked by a vowel alternation in the first syllable. It should be noted that *mes* [me] is the contemporary French first-person singular possessive determiner that typically precedes a plural noun.

- (10) a. *Ce qui frappe chez **Messieurs Rossé**, c'est cette passion, mais aussi cette rigueur et cette recherche de l'équilibre!*  
 ‘Indeed, it is this passion that strikes you when you meet **the Rossé brothers**, along with this precision and this search for balance!’

- b. *Mesdames Nowlin et Moores vous proposent quelques conseils pour aider vos petits-enfants à acquérir de bonnes habitudes alimentaires.*  
 ‘Ms. Nowlin and Ms. Moores offer some ways you can help your grandchildren develop good food habits.’

(Linguee Dictionary 2019)

(10a) and (10b) show the plural forms of *Monsieur* and *Madame*, respectively, when paired with proper names. As described above, the plural form is marked by vowel alternation. In fact, the final -s is not typically pronounced in spoken French and its use as a plural marker has largely been reduced to an orthographic convention, with feature information communicated phonetically through the form of the determiner. Thus, it appears as though the Old French honorifics in question still retain some degree of transparency from their introduction into the language at an earlier stage, namely during the period of Old French. In contrast, the plural forms of *Professeure* and *Docteur* are not marked on the titles themselves, but rather on the article preceding them. Thus, *la Professeure Madouri* becomes *les Professeures Madouri* to refer to more than one (female) individual with a Ph.D bearing the last name “Madouri” and *le Docteur Wakabayashi* becomes *les Docteurs Wakabayashi* to denote multiple individuals with medical degrees bearing the last name Wakabayashi. Since the presence of the definite article before a name with an honorific title in vocative position is not grammatical in French, this distinction can only be marked on a nominal expression in argument position. In contrast, the plural marking on *Monsieur* or *Madame* can appear in a vocative:

- (11) *Messieurs Dupont>(\*Les) Docteurs Wakabayashi, veuillez nous excuser de déplorable retard !*  
 ‘Messrs. Dupont/Drs. Wakabayashi, please excuse our deplorable lateness!’

While plural form of *Monsieur* preceding a proper name is grammatical the plural form of *Docteur* cannot be preceded by a definite article in vocative position. Moreover, as mentioned in Section 2.2, Old French honorifics were derived from compounds containing forms of the first-person singular possessive determiner *mon* or *ma*. In Modern French, they are capable of preceding definite descriptions with an overt some definite article, unlike professional honorifics:

- (12) a. ... *Monsieur le Président a tout simplement oublié la définition d'un pays neutre.*  
 ‘Mr. President just forgot the definition of a neutral state.’
- b. \*... *Docteur le Président a tout simplement oublié la définition d'un pays neutre.*  
 ‘Dr. President just forgot the definition of a neutral state.’

(Linguee Dictionary 2019)

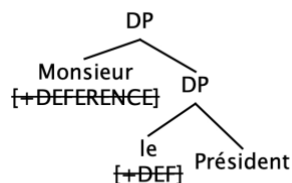
(12a) shows the honorific *Monsieur* preceding a nominal expression with an overt definite article, *le Président*, which contains a definite article and a professional title that can also appear as a common noun. In addition, (12b) shows that the professional honorific *Docteur* cannot precede a nominal expression with an overt definite article. In Section 3, I will account for the variations discussed in the previous sections and do so assuming a definiteness feature on the Old French honorific in question.

### 3. Analysis

#### 3.1 Old French honorifics

I begin my analysis with the Old French honorifics *Monsieur* and *Madame* when preceding proper names. Examples where *Monsieur* and *Madame* stand on their own are discussed in Section 4.1. To account for the data in Sections 1 and 2, I propose an analysis where *Monsieur* and *Madame* merge with definite DPs –including proper names – for feature checking. However, the principle of Last Resort stipulates that “a movement operation is licensed only if it allows the elimination of [–interpretable] formal features” (Hornstein et al. 2005: 276). With this in mind, I suggest that this feature is indeed interpretable, and that one possibility is that Old French honorifics are D’s that merge with Definite DPs in order to check it. I propose that the name of this feature be [+DEFERENCE] in light of its history and modern usage. This would yield (13):

(13)

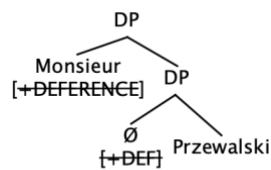


(13) shows *Monsieur* merging with the definite DP *le Président*<sup>2</sup> in order to check its interpretable [+DEFERENCE] feature. In contrast, when an Old French honorific precedes a proper name, the latter does not typically take a definite article in Standard Metropolitan French, which would render structures similar to (14a) and (14b) that showcase the need of *Monsieur* and *Madame* to merge with a definite DP to check their [+DEFERENCE] feature.

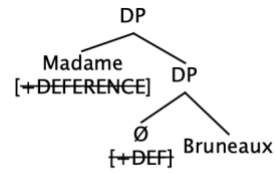
<sup>2</sup> In contrast to [+DEFERENCE], the [+DEF] feature in the diagrams refers to a definiteness feature.



(14) a.



b.



In Section 2.1, I discussed Longobardi's observation that vocative constructions with the definite article are acceptable in French, while those with the indefinite article are not (c.f. (9a) –(9c)). Longobardi summarises this with the observation that the vocative is “semantically incompatible with indefiniteness” (1994: 627). A similar case can be made for the Old French honorific titles *Monsieur* and *Madame*. When preceding a nominal expression that is not a proper name, it is necessary that this be a definite DP. This rule applies both for expressions in argument and vocative positions. Thus, although constructions such as (13) (c.f. Section 3.1) are acceptable, (15a) below is unacceptable. In addition, (15b) shows that the construction in (13) in Section 3.1 is acceptable in vocative position:

- (15) a. ... \***Monsieur un Président** a tout simplement oublié la définition d'un pays neutre.  
lit. 'Mr. a President just forgot a definition of a neutral state.'
- b. *Je tiens tout d'abord à vous remercier, Monsieur le Président, de votre accueil chaleureux.*  
'I should first like to thank you, Mr. President, for your warm words of welcome.'

(Linguee Dictionary 2019)

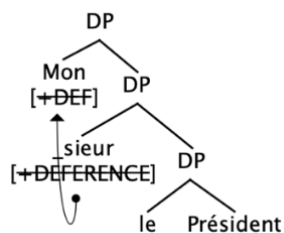
At first, selecting fully formed DPs as arguments in an Indo-European language may seem rare and inconsistent with the data in related languages. However, some Celtic languages show a similar phenomenon at play, albeit with distinctly functional elements. For example, in demonstrative constructions in Scottish Gaelic, demonstratives merge with definite DPs containing an overt definite article (Adger 2003).

- (16) [[*an duine* DP]            *seo/si* DP]  
the man this/that  
'This/that man'

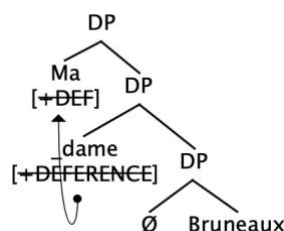
Once again, it is apparent that the DPs in (16a) and (16b) are merged with functional elements, namely demonstratives, while it is not clear at this point that either *Madame* or *Monsieur* are, in their entirety, functional elements. However, what is transparent to native

speakers of Modern French are the possessive elements *ma* and *mon*, the feminine and masculine forms, respectively, of the first-person singular possessive determiner. Thus, another possible analysis of *Madame* and *Monsieur* exists, based more in the morphology of each honorific. Initially, both *mon* and *ma* are part of the complete words, *Madame* and *Monsieur*. The honorifics, determiners themselves, select a definite DP to check their [+DEFERENCE] feature, at which point the possessive element is copied and moved into a higher D head in order to check its definite feature. At this point, there are two functional levels to consider in examples (17a) and (17b).

(17) a.



b.



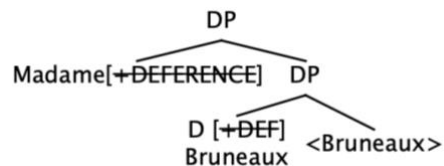
Nevertheless, in spite of the transparency of this analysis, I will not adopt it on account of one particular phonetic cue that suggests that *mon* and *ma* as part of *Monsieur* and *Madame*, respectively, do not constitute functional elements on their own. Namely, the nasal vowel [ɔ̃] in *mon* is not pronounced as such in *Monsieur*. Rather, a more accurate transcription of the latter would be [mɔ̃sjøʁ]. In contrast, *mon* in the DP *mon seigneur* (my lord) is pronounced with the nasal vowel. This contrast raises the question of whether the morphological analysis illustrated in (17) is indeed viable.

To return to (15b), the construction *Monsieur le Président* is also acceptable in vocative position. These facts, along with the lack of alternation of the presence of an overt initial determiner in the argument-vocative examples with *Monsieur* and *Madame* in Section 1.2 and the acceptability of vocatives such as “*Les enfants!*” in (9a) in Section 2.1, suggest that nominal expressions containing the Old French honorifics *Monsieur* or *Madame* followed by a definite DP with an overt definite article have the same structure in vocatives as they would in argument position. Given that the DPs selected by *Madame* and *Monsieur* are all definite descriptions, typically proper names or titles, I suggest, in the spirit of Schaden’s (2010) analysis, that vocative expressions like *Monsieur Przewalski* or *Madame Bruneaux* be treated as either identifying or interpellative (181). In (18a) and (18b), Merge into the closest D head is blocked by the presence of the overt determiner *le*. However, to return to *Monsieur* and *Madame* paired with proper names in a vocative, movement into the closest D head would not change the linear order of the expression. (18a) shows the proper name *Przewalski* copying and merging in the D head, while (18b) shows the same for the proper name *Bruneaux*. The lower copy is not read.

(18) a.



b.



### 3.2 Professional honorifics

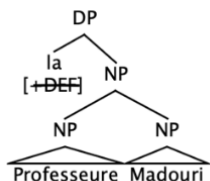
In contrast with Old French honorifics, professional honorifics such as *Professeure* and *Docteur* are merged with a proper name in the nominal projection and do not have any interpretable features to check. Thus, in argument position, the professional honorific and proper name form an NP that merges with the definite article to check the former's definite feature. However, this begs the question of what the exact syntactic relationship of the proper name and the professional title in question is. In this section, I will discuss two possible analyses. One possibility is that the two elements in an expression such as *Docteur Wakabayashi* are indeed two parts of a co-compound, as defined by Fábregas and Scalise: “the intersection of the meaning of the two words” (2012: 119). At first, this seems intuitive. Expressions like *la Professeure Madouri* denotes a professor who is also a member of the Madouri family while *le Docteur Wakabayashi* denotes a medical professional who is also a member of the Wakabayashi family. Another clue that may support this analysis is the fact that internal modification of expressions like *le Docteur Wakabayashi* are forbidden, which is consistent with what is characteristic of co-compounds (Fábregas and Scalise 2012: 119).

(19) a. *le Docteur Wakabayashi*

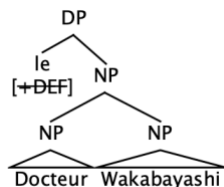
b. *le grand Docteur Wakabayashi*/\**le Docteur grand Wakabayashi*  
 ‘the great Dr. Wakabayashi’

However, the overwhelming majority of nominal compounds are common nouns, rather than proper names, yet the second element of both *la Professeure Madouri* and *le Docteur Wakabayashi* are proper nouns, whose semantic properties are different from that of common nouns in that they lack a predicative function. Instead, I will adopt a provisional analysis of these expressions as appositive structures. The presence of the definite article in argument position suggests that the expressions in question cannot move into D as proposed by Longobardi (1994). Thus, I propose that expressions like *le Docteur Wakabayashi* be analysed [D [[NP] [NP]]],

(20) a.

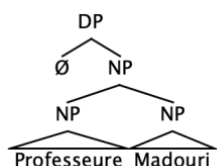


b.

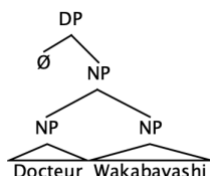


In the spirit of Longobardi's proposal that the N head in constructions such as Sentence 8b in Section 2.1 moves into D to fill the empty position (1994: 623), I propose that proper names, including those containing professional honorifics, move into D in vocative constructions. I also propose that their vocative function, on account of the professional title, is primarily predicative, in that rather than simply identifying a referent, the title simply ascribes them a social capacity.

(21) a.



b.



## 4. Outstanding questions and conclusion

### 4.1 Outstanding questions

In Section 3, I proposed an account for the differences of acceptability of an overt determiner preceding a nominal expression in argument and vocative position containing an Old French honorific title, such as *Monsieur* or *Madame*, versus a professional honorific title, such as *Docteur* or *Professeure*. Nevertheless, several outstanding questions remain as to the choice of my analysis and aspects of French grammar for which it cannot account.

The first point is that, while *Monsieur* and *Madame* can stand on their own, that is to say, not precede a proper name or definite nominal expression, and be used to deferentially refer to or interpellate a discourse participant, *Docteur* and *Professeure* cannot:

(22) a. *Monsieur/Madame/\*Docteur/\*Professeur aime les escargots?*  
'Do you like snails?'

b. *\*Monsieur/Madame aime les escargots?*  
'Does Monsieur Przewalski/Ms. Bruneaux like snails?'

The only grammatical interpretation of (22a) is such that *Monsieur* or *Madame* refers politely to an interlocutor and not a third party. Interestingly, the verbal inflexion is still that of the third person. This is reminiscent of the development of the Spanish formal pronoun *usted*, itself derived from the deferential expression *Vuestra merced*, meaning “your grace”, a DP containing a possessive determiner, *vuestra*, and an NP, *merced*. (Hualde et al. 2012: 253). This contrasts with *Señor* and *Señora*, which are not only cognate with the Spanish words for “lord” and “lady”, respectively, but are also atomic lexical elements not paired with any functional element. While their meaning and use is similar to that of *Madame* and *Monsieur*, *Señor* and *Señora* do not pattern the same way as their French counterparts, to the point of requiring the definite article *el/la* to precede them in argument position.

- (23) a. *El señor Seeber está casado y tiene dos hijos.*  
 the mister Seeber is married and has two children  
 ‘Mr. Seeber is married and has two children.’
- b. *(\*Le) Monsieur Seeber est marié et il a deux enfants.*  
 the mister Seeber is married and he has two children  
 ‘Mr. Seeber is married with two children.’

(Linguee Dictionary 2019)

To return to *usted*, while *usted* and its plural form *ustedes* can be used in a variety of syntactic contexts, including that of object of a preposition (Hualde et al. 2012: 248), the use of *Monsieur* and *Madame* as a means of addressing one’s interlocutor is less flexible.

- (24) a. *Monsieur/Madame aime les escargots.*  
 ‘You like snails.’
- b. *??Pierrot a vu Monsieur/Madame.*  
 ‘Pierrot saw you.’
- c. *??Je viens de recevoir un colis de Monsieur/Madame<sup>3</sup>.*  
 ‘I just received a parcel from you.’

While (24a), where *Monsieur/Madame* appears on its own in subject position, is grammatical, (24b), where *Monsieur/Madame* appears in object position, and (24c), where *Monsieur/Madame* is the object of the preposition *de*, were judged as odd by the consultants recruited for this study. Indeed, this use of the honorifics *Monsieur* and *Madame* to refer to a discourse participant is primarily characteristic of servile, and, more recently, customer service registers. In its association with the former, it is commonly

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<sup>3</sup> While these examples were judged unacceptable by the consultants, I find personally only find them odd. I recommend large study with a broader sample of French speakers for conclusive results.

found in historical novels, such as Anne Hébert's novel *Kamouraska*<sup>4</sup>, which takes place in the mid-nineteenth century, where the protagonist's maidservant produces the following sentence regarding her duties:

- (25) *Je vais coiffer Madame pour le bal. Madame doit se rendre compte par elle-même.*  
 'I will dress **your** hair for the ball. **You** must find out on your own.'  
 (Hébert 1970)

With this in mind, the true grammatical status of *Monsieur/Madame* remains uncertain and warrants further investigation. Moreover, an asymmetry remains between proper names, like *Pierrot*, and proper names preceded by titles, like *Docteur Wakabayashi*, such that the former do not require an overt determiner in argument position in Standard Metropolitan French<sup>5</sup>. Doing so would result in ungrammaticality, which suggests that the internal structure of the NP containing a professional honorific, not fully represented in this analysis, is different from that of an NP consisting solely of a proper name. The question remains what exactly about proper names prevents them from being preceded by an overt determiner in argument position and what happens when the NP contains a professional honorific such as *Professeure* or *Docteur*. It is unclear whether a compound such as *Docteur Wakabayashi* constitutes a distinct entry in the Numeration, or whether *Docteur* and *Wakabayashi* are two distinct elements that enter their linear order through applications of Copy and Merge. One way to see this is that movement of proper names from N to D is obligatory, but if professional honorifics are full NPs in apposition, they cannot move to D. Conversely, they may work as nominal modifiers of a proper name, like the *The Big Lebowski*, and are therefore unable to move to D. Finally, it should be noted that *Monsieur* and *Madame* do have common noun counterparts, so to speak, in the form of *monsieur* and *madame*, which mean "gentleman" and "lady", respectively. Like most common nouns in French, these can take both the definite and the indefinite article. Finally, it appears as though there are two concurrent instantiations of *Monsieur* and *Madame* in the French language. One possibility is that the common nouns *monsieur* and *madame*, derived from a reanalysis of the Old French honorifics, are converted into functional elements when paired with a definite DP. Thus, they take on the role of honorifics, and the indefinite article becomes less acceptable.

## 4.2 Conclusion

The goal of this project was to describe and account for a syntactic distinction between Old French honorifics, such as *Monsieur* and *Madame*, and professional honorifics, such as

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<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that this novel is written in modern Laurentian French, while the majority of this paper examines European varieties of French.

<sup>5</sup> A speaker who grew up around speakers of Helvetic French, commented that proper names can be preceded by an overt definite article in argument position in some regional dialects in Switzerland. Another speaker, who grew up around speakers of Occitan, confirmed that the same phenomenon was true in Meridional French.

*Docteur* and *Professeure*. This distinction was drawn on the basis of an asymmetry in the presence or absence of an overt determiner in argument or vocative position when each title was paired with a proper name or, in the case of *Monsieur* and *Madame*, a definite DP. In light of historical evidence, which shows that, at one point in the evolution of French, the former honorifics were transparent constructions consisting of a possessive determiner and a title, alongside theoretical work in *NP/DP* distinctions, I proposed an analysis based in interpretable features. However, it does explain why only Old French honorifics can appear without a definite DP following it and modern ones cannot. It cannot account for what may be an instance of grammaticalization in progress as *Monsieur* and *Madame* can be used to refer to one's interlocutor, while *Docteur* and *Professeure* are unable to do so. Moreover, this study scarcely touches upon the syntactic nature of proper names and why they never take an overt determiner in Standard Metropolitan French, while professional honorifics paired with proper names must do so in argument position. Finally, it does not examine the common nouns *madame* and *monsieur* as both arguments and predicates.

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