



*By Miranda, Mary
Hamilton, Mrs Dickenson*



Self-reference in Late
Modern English Private
Correspondence

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Abstract This paper is set in the late Georgian period, when letter writing became a widespread social practice and letter-writing manuals established norms of propriety and elegance of style for addressing persons of all ranks. More specifically, it turns its attention to author-oriented address with a focus on the use of personal names in self-reference expressions, as these address the recipient of the letter at the same time as they describe the status of the writer. The aim is to explore their role as a means of socially-governed linguistic practice and as an index of politeness on the positive-negative continuum, as proposed for Early Modern English correspondence.

The study is based on a set of private letters written by Mary Hamilton (1756–1816), a well-connected figure in royal, aristocratic and literary circles. The analysis traces intra-speaker variation in the use of self-reference in the main text and in the signature, and explores sociolinguistic factors as well as notions traditionally connected with pragmatic language use. The research presented here will thus contribute to the growing body of literature that considers ego-documents as representations of the self, of particular interest in the fields of historical sociolinguistics and historical sociopragmatics.

Keywords forms of address, historical sociopragmatics, Late Modern English, Mary Hamilton, politeness

1. Introduction

In the field of historical sociolinguistics scholars are particularly interested in collections of ego-documents, such as correspondence, diaries and travel journals, since these constitute sources of speech-based language which, although written, can be interpreted as a reflection of more informal, involved and oral linguistic strategies which shed light on language variation and change over time.¹ While various types of ego-documents from the private

¹ The term *ego-document* was coined by the Dutch historian Jacques Presser to refer to historical sources in which there is “a distinctive ego” which is continuously present and which “deliberately or accidentally discloses or hides itself” (Baggerman & Dekker 2018: 91, 93).

sphere convey the “language of immediacy” (Elsaß 2012: 158), it has been argued that private letters in particular provide “the next best thing to spoken authentic language, aware of certain limitations (Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg 2012: 32). In addition, due to its interactive purpose, private correspondence often functions “as a powerful means of self-representation” (van der Wal & Rutten 2013: 7; also Baggerman & Dekker 2011). A lack of information about historical writers as well as the randomness of textual transmission often make it difficult to focus on individual language use and stylistic repertoires. Private letters and other types of ego-documents can help overcome these shortcomings to some extent in that not only do we gain data on more personal idiosyncratic language use from such sources, but we also learn about the people involved in much greater detail compared to most other text types (see, for instance, Elsaß 2012, Dossena 2013, Allen 2015, Auer *et al.* 2015).

Interest in the study of ego-documents has been thriving for some decades from the perspective of historiography (Dekker 2000, Baggerman & Dekker 2018) as well as from a sociohistorical linguistic perspective, in English and other languages (e.g. Elsaß *et al.* 2007, van der Wal & Rutten 2013, Brown 2019, Schiegg & Huber 2023). In the context of Late Modern English (LModE) correspondence, which is the focus of the research presented in this paper, a number of studies have offered fruitful insights into inter- and intra-speaker variation, social identity and social networks, such as Sairio (2009) on the Bluestocking Elizabeth Montagu, Nurmi & Nevala (2010) on the governess Agnes Porter, Henstra (2014) on the writer and politician Horace Walpole, and Tieken-Boon van Ostade (2014) on the literary writer Jane Austen (see also the case studies in Nurmi *et al.* 2009). Access to original materials has been facilitated by advances in the domains of corpus linguistics and the digital humanities, which has in turn led to an increasing number of corpora of ego-documents – for instance, the *Corpus of late 18th Century Prose* (Denison 1994), the *Corpus of Scottish Correspondence* (Meurman-Solin 2007), *A Corpus of Irish English Correspondence* (McCafferty & Amador-Moreno 2012), the *Bluestocking Corpus* (2017), the *Corpus of Early English Correspondence* (Nevalainen *et al.* 2018) – and to ongoing projects involving digital editions – *Elizabeth Montagu Correspondence Online*, *The Collected Letters of Hannah*

More, The Collected Letters of Robert Southey, The Darwin Correspondence Project and Women's Early Modern Letters Online, amongst others.

The project undertaking the compilation of *The Mary Hamilton Papers* has added to this growing body of scholarship with a new digital edition consisting of private correspondence, diaries, commonplace books and other manuscript materials dating from c.1740 to c.1850. Mary Hamilton (1756–1816) was a well-educated courtier and diarist, and was well-connected in London society as a member of the Bluestocking circle. The project aims to exploit a hitherto almost untouched collection towards answering questions that relate to textual traces of reader circulation, reception and response in the context of late eighteenth-century and Romantic literature, about the progress of the wholesale realignment of the English auxiliary verb system in the late Georgian period, and about letter-writing practices concerning norms and usage at a crucial point in the process of standardisation of the English language and of changes in the notion of politeness. The research presented here is framed within the latter research strand, in the field of historical sociolinguistics and historical sociopragmatics, and starts from the premise, an increasingly important one in various disciplinary fields, that social networks are crucial to maintenance and change in both linguistic and cultural behaviour. More specifically, the paper presents a new case study of letter-writing practices in Mary Hamilton's private correspondence as evidence of intra-speaker variation in the context of several interlocking royal, literary and friendship circles in the late Georgian period. Given that ego-documents stand out for their special role in the representation of personal experiences and the representation of *the self* (Baggerman & Dekker 2011, 2018), the focus here lies in Hamilton's use of self-reference expressions with personal names in the main text of the letter and in the signature, as in *every thing that gives Miranda satisfaction* (HAM/1/15/2/4(2)) and *Your affectionate friend – Mary Hamilton* (HAM/1/7/13/5(2)). These are examined in a set of 170 letters and notes written by Hamilton between 1776 and 1814 to twenty-two correspondents with whom she enjoys different relationships in terms of distance (family, friend, acquaintance, member of the royal family) and social status/relative power (equal, inferior). The linguistic strategies identified in her writings are interpreted in this study as an index of politeness

on a continuum from more positive to more negative nuances (Nevala 2004a), and as a means through which Hamilton constructs her social identity in light of her societal and interactive relations with members of her various circles, to protect or enhance the author's own face while signalling deference to and protecting that of the addressee (Nevala 2010a). This complements the research in Yáñez-Bouza (forthc.) concerned with Hamilton's forms of direct address.

The outline of the paper is as follows. Section 2 contextualises the study of forms of address from a historical sociopragmatic approach and with a focus on the notion of politeness as adopted by Nevala (2004a) for the analysis of Early Modern English (EModE) correspondence. Section 3 describes the data and the methodology. The analysis of self-reference with personal names is presented in Section 4, where Hamilton's strategies are discussed in terms of distributional patterns in the letter as a whole and in two specific structural parts – the main text and the signature. Concluding remarks are provided in the final section.

2. Politeness and forms of address in private correspondence

The writing of private letters becomes customary during the EModE period as a means not only of maintaining contact with family and friends, but also of establishing and sustaining social relations, to the extent that over the course of the eighteenth century letter writing develops as a social practice (Barton & Hall 2000) and the private letter becomes a text type (Görlach 2001: 211); for instance, in the form of the familiar letter (Anderson *et al.* 1966, Fitzmaurice 2002) or in epistolary novels (Fitzmaurice 1990, Whyman 2009: 161–190). Letter-writing manuals with instructions on how to write 'elegant and polite epistles' proliferated from the seventeenth and through the eighteenth centuries in a way that they become a fine source of "evidence of discursive, commercial, and social conventions", as well as a rich and varied description of the ongoing details of life in general, thus reflecting changing conventions over time (Mitchell 2007: 197 n.9; see also Brant 2006, Whyman 2009). In Bannet's view, these handbooks made "efforts to disseminate standard epistolary forms and standard (often known as 'polite')

cultural practices”, and they succeeded in doing so “by offering instruction in grammar, spelling, and reading”; furthermore, “by demonstrating the proper language, codes, sentiments and *forms of address* to be used on different occasions to correspondents of different ranks in letters of different kinds” (Bannet 2005: 4, 15, emphasis added). For women in particular, letter-writing manuals were a source of entertainment, moral instruction and authoritative reference works, which merged to some extent with their reading of fiction (Mitchell 2003: 345).

One of the features often discussed with regard to the polite and elegant style of writing specified in these manuals is forms of address, as highlighted in Bannet (2005). These concern direct address towards the recipient (i.e. addressee-oriented address), such as the salutation formula *my dear Lady Wake* to open a letter, and self-reference expressions by the author to refer to her/himself (i.e. author-oriented address), as in the subscription formula *your affectionate friend – Mary Hamilton* to close a letter. Instructions regarding forms of address were often advertised on the title-page of manuals as a marketing strategy, as we see in letter-writing manuals such as *The Complete Letter-Writer*, which includes “proper directions for addressing persons of rank and eminence” (Anonymous 1755), and in grammars which included letter-writing advice, as in Metcalfe’s (1771) *The Rudiments of the English Tongue* “[w]ith proper directions and address from inferiors to persons of distinction”. Nevalainen (2001) has traced changing conventions from the late Middle English period to the end of EModE and observes that letter-writing manuals “stressed the demands of social *decorum* in the use of address forms” (emphasis in the original) and that, although structures became simpler and there was more freedom in the lexical choice of formulae over time, “[a] high degree of social sensitivity, however, continued to be mirrored, for instance, in the forms used when writing to the socially upwardly mobile” (Nevalainen 2001: 219; see also Nevala 1998). This is crucial as well in the eighteenth century, in a social context in which politeness becomes an “ideal that was aspired to in all aspects of daily life”, including language (Jucker 2020: 117–159).

Expressions of self-reference occur within the inner part of a letter, that is, in the main text or in the signature, and may appear in the form of nominal

structures, pronouns or personal names with or without honorific terms. Their relevance lies in that names and other forms here are strategies which reflect “diachronic variation and change at both the societal and interactive level of communication” and are indicative of how writers view their mutual relationship with the addressees (Nevala 2004a: 4, 134–135). A large body of research on the topic of address has been framed within the field of historical sociopragmatics, with a particular emphasis on the notion of politeness and social identity, as in the study of EModE correspondence by Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg (1995), Raumolin-Brunberg (1996) and Nevala’s extensive work (2004a,² 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2010a; Nurmi & Nevala 2010). From a different angle, some previous studies have examined forms of address by looking at intra- and inter-speaker variation in LModE letter-writing practices of writers such as John Wesley (Baker 1980), John Gay and his literary circles (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 1999, Bijkerk 2004), the network of Sir Joshua Reynolds and Samuel Johnson (Navest 2004), the grammarian Robert Lowth, and the novelist Jane Austen (e.g. Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2011, 2014). My research aims to contribute to this body of work by combining the two perspectives, historical sociopragmatics and intra-speaker variation, and by mapping Nevala’s (2004a) findings on EModE correspondence onto the LModE period. The forms of address that have received most attention to date are salutation formulae for addressee-oriented strategies, a strategy examined in Hamilton’s correspondence in Yáñez-Bouza (forthc.), and subscription formulae for author-oriented expressions, which are explored in this paper together with self-reference expressions in the signature.

Changing trends in how people address each other reflect variation and change over time, not only at the societal level but also at the interactive level of communication, in a way that the linguistic strategies employed convey the writer’s underlying intention to become closer to, or more distant from, the recipient, and thus “to emphasise the social and relative status of both correspondents” (Nevala 2004a: 85). The particular relevance of

2 Nevala’s (2004a) monograph compiles various individual publications, namely Nevala (1998, 2002, 2003, 2004b, 2004c); the latter source also includes data from the eighteenth century.

self-reference expressions is that not only do they state the social role of the addressee but also “describe the status or the emotional state of the writer at the same time as they address the recipient of the letter” (Nevala 2004a: 95). Thus, the letter-writer’s choice to express address by means of self-reference expressions may function as an index of politeness in order to maintain or alter the author’s social status, whether as an indication of involvement and solidarity or to avoid attachment; in other words, self-reference “includes the possibility of performing self-politeness [...] to protect and enhance [the author’s] own face” (Nevala 2010a: 155). The current paper takes an approach which broadly reflects the perspective of Brown & Levinson’s (1987) politeness theory, taking also the general sense of the approach by Leech (1983: 10), in which variation and change are considered at a more “local” level of language use, this by taking social and societal dimensions into account (Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg 1995: 542, Nevala 2009c: 239). Thus, positive politeness is seen as relating to those strategies “emphasising what people have in common by minimising the distance between them”, that is, oriented toward the addressee’s positive face; by turn, negative politeness is seen in relation to those strategies concerned with “the avoidance of invading one’s privacy by increasing the distance” between the addressee and the writer, that is, “oriented toward partially satisfying the addressee’s negative face, which means the want to keep one’s territory and self-determination intact” (Nevala 2004a: 133, 57). Adding a further dimension to this, positive and negative politeness can be mapped onto a continuum rather than as seen in terms of opposing poles, that is, “on a sliding scale of values” from positive to negative, and also including neutral values (Raumolin-Brunberg 1996: 171–172, Nevala 2004a: 66–67). The present case study takes a traditional sociopragmatic approach to the study of address by considering factors which are “more sociolinguistically oriented notions”, such as gender, “as well as notions that are traditionally connected with pragmatic language use in human relationships”, which include “power, distance and politeness” (Nevala 2004a: 4).

The role of distance and power status as influential factors in the choice of forms of address has been demonstrated in various case studies (see the review in Nevala 2010b: 427–433) and it has been observed that when both are

considered, it is often the case that relative power weighs more strongly. This is seen consistently in EModE correspondence regarding salutation formulae (Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg 1995, Raumolin-Brunberg 1996), in both salutation and subscription formulae in the context of kin-relations in EModE (Nevala 2003), in direct address in the body and the superscription of the letter in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Nevala 2004c), and also in the selection of address pronouns from late Middle English to the LModE period (Nevala 2002). These trends in usage are in line with the advice given in letter-writing manuals of the EModE and LModE periods, which “agree on the overriding relevance of power as a factor determining the choice of an address form”, and thus it is the social standing of the addressee that writers must “bear in mind” in both the superscription of the letter on the outside and in the forms of address on the inside (Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg 1995: 563, 547; also Yáñez-Bouza in prep. for LModE).

The analysis in this paper concentrates on the use of personal names and honorifics as expressions of self-reference in the context of Mary Hamilton’s private correspondence. Personal names can be expressed as first name, last name or nickname/codename. First names and last names can be accompanied by a title of the type *Mr, Mrs, Miss* and by honorifics like *Lady/Ladyship, Lord/Lordship* or *Your Majesty*. There are, naturally, many possible combinations of these, and it is the aim of this study to explore the variety of combinations with which Mary Hamilton chooses to refer to herself in order to delineate the mutual relationship between the participants in the letters in terms of social distance, relative power and gender (cf. Nevala 2004a: 134–135, 147). It has been observed that “[t]he core vocabulary of address forms offers an interesting testing ground for an analysis in terms of the two politeness strategies, the positive and the negative”, and, in particular, “at the negative end of the scale we place the honorific terms indicating a person’s social status, while nicknames and terms of endearment are placed at the other end of the scale” (Raumolin-Brunberg 1996: 170–171). Nevala (2004a: 90) adds to this that if first names are used from an inferior to a superior correspondent, “it often means aspirations to be approved as an ‘equal’ by the addressee”. We adopt here the politeness continuum as adapted in Nevala (2004a: 89, 137) from Raumolin-Brunberg (1996: 171).

Nevala’s (2004a) work, which provides an important framework for the present case study, follows the first wave of politeness research for the study of terms of address, a point of departure which has been seen in the literature as solidly justified and has proven “useful and flexible” in the context of the history of the English language (e.g. Nevala 2010b: 422–425, Jucker 2011). At the same time, it has been widely recognised that the conventional(ised) meanings of certain linguistic expressions are not static; rather, they are discursively negotiated in the context of the interaction (Jucker 2020: 9–13, Culpeper & Haugh 2021: 318–321), and change in the choice of address may stem from various factors relating to attitude, purpose and the topic of the letter, or from conventions across time, amongst others (Häcker 2019: 103). Thus, the present study is a first step in the sociopragmatic analysis of Hamilton’s correspondence at the level of micro-context, with a focus on the role of power, distance and face-saving strategies, while future research will expand in scope towards the examination of the social dynamics between Mary Hamilton and her circles, looking at interactional, attitudinal and social shades of meaning. Implications of this kind can already be gleaned from the data here and will be alluded to in the discussion.

3. The Mary Hamilton Papers

Mary Hamilton (1756–1816) was born to Lady Mary Catherine Hamilton (née Dufresne, d. 1778) and Charles Hamilton (1721–1771), son of Lord Archibald Hamilton and soldier. After the death of her father, Hamilton lived variously with her mother, relatives and guardians, including homes in Northampton and London. In 1777 she was recruited as a royal sub-governess to Queen Charlotte, George III’s wife, who showed great confidence in Hamilton by entrusting the education of the young princesses to her. Hamilton retired from Court in late 1782, she found her duties exhausting and felt that she needed to pursue “independence & liberty” (GEO/ADD/3/83/89), but she maintained regular contact with other royal governesses through correspondence, for instance with Charlotte Gunning and Martha Goldsworthy. Hamilton was well-educated, an avid reader and writer and an antiquarian. She was also a member of the Bas Bleu (Bluestocking) circle led by women such as

Elizabeth Montagu, Elizabeth Carter, Frances Burney or Mary Delany. She was part of their social and literary network and also corresponded with them frequently. In 1785 she married John Dickenson (c.1757–1842), only son of John Dickenson Senior of Birch Hall, and lived in various places including Taxal (Derbyshire), Leighton Buzzard (Bedfordshire) and London, where Hamilton died in May 1816. They had one child, Louisa Dickenson (later Anson), born 1787. As Crawley (2014: 42) put it, Hamilton’s life is “the life of a member of the social and cultural elite of the eighteenth century”, and to us she is a female figure who stands out as a nexus of several royal, aristocratic, literary and artistic circles in the late Georgian period.

Critical work on Hamilton to date is thin on the ground. Several brief mentions of her can be found in the literature but these relate mainly to literary matters in the context of Bluestocking women and eighteenth-century women’s social and domestic life (Miegon 2002, Pelling 2018a), and in these cases Mary Hamilton is not herself the focus of the research (Smith 2006, Pelling 2018b). More recently, with the release of some materials in digital form and text transcriptions, scholars have investigated the figure of Mary Hamilton in her own right, examining her travel accounts (Voloshkova 2017, 2021) and her letter-writing practices (Gardner 2018, 2021). These publications bear witness to the scholarly need for a more nuanced disciplinary consideration, one which the research project *Unlocking the Mary Hamilton Papers* will facilitate, from literary, historical and linguistic perspectives (Coulombeau 2021, Yáñez-Bouza & Oudesluijs *forthc.*, Coulombeau *et al.* *in prep.*).

The Mary Hamilton Papers is a digital edition of original ego-documents consisting of private correspondence, diaries, commonplace books and other personal items, currently totalling c.3,200 items, c.1,600 of which have been transcribed. The research presented here concentrates on the transcribed letters and notes written by Hamilton between 1776 and 1814, which comprise 170 items and c.53,000 words.³ The time frame spans four periods in Mary Hamilton’s life: before she joined Court as a sub-governess

3 The limited size of the dataset is due to the fact that the larger archive from which most of the materials are drawn is Mary Hamilton’s own collection, and hence contains items written to her rather than by her (see details in Denison *et al.* *forthc.*).

in 1777, the period in which she worked at Court, the years she spent after leaving Court and before marrying John Dickenson in 1785, and her life as Mrs Dickenson after marriage. The letters are addressed to twenty-two correspondents, of whom fourteen are female (102 items, including a joint letter to Hamilton’s sisters-in-law, Sarah and Elizabeth Dickenson), seven are men (sixty-seven items), and there is a letter jointly written to Mr and Mrs Smelt. Table 1 gives an overview of the background of each correspondent and their mutual relationship in terms of social distance (family, friends, acquaintances, royal family) and relative power (equal-to-equal, inferior-to-superior). The spelling of the names reflects contemporary practice when Hamilton wrote to them and numbers in brackets are included for those recipients of whom we preserve more than one letter or note. It should be noted that the dataset includes some copies or drafts written in Hamilton’s hand, which, we believe, are largely faithful to the originals (cf. Oudesluijs *forthc.*), and some which are incomplete because the sheets have partially deteriorated or corners of pages have been cut off. As in previous work in this field, we have erred on the side of inclusiveness “making the best use of ‘bad’ data” (Nevalainen 1999), on the grounds that what has been preserved may contain data relevant for research in other parts of the letter, despite a text’s incompleteness.

Table 1. Correspondents in Mary Hamilton’s dataset.

Correspondent	Dates	Distance				Power	
		Fam	Friend	Acq.	Royal F	E-to-E	I-to-S
Blosset (née Peckwell), Robert Henry	1814			✓			✓
Burney (later D’Arblay), Frances	1789		✓			✓	
Clayton (née Fermor), Louisa	1789			✓			✓
de Guiffardière, Charles	1782			✓			✓
Delany (née Granville), Mary [2]	1780– 1781		✓			✓	

Dickenson, Sarah and Dickenson (later Palombi), Elizabeth	1790	✓				✓	
Finch (née Fermor), Charlotte (2)	1781–1783		✓				✓
George, Prince of Wales (later George IV) [61]	1779				✓		✓
Goldsworthy, Martha Carolina [2]	1783–1789		✓			✓	
Gunning, Charlotte Margaret [81]	1779–1784		✓			✓	
Hagedorn, Johanna Louisa	1782			✓			✓
Hamilton, William	1782	✓					✓
Jackson, Mary Johanna	1805	✓				✓	
King, Anne	1796	✓				✓	
Litchfield, Ann [3]	1776		✓			✓	
Murray, David (Lord Stormont)	1790	✓					✓
Princess (unidentified)	1782				✓		✓
Queen Charlotte	1781				✓		✓
Seroux d'Agincourt, Jean Baptiste Louis Georges	1784			✓			✓
Smelt, Leonard and Smelt (née Campbell), Jane	1789			✓			✓
Wake (née Fenton), Mary [4]	1782–1814		✓				✓
Walpole, Horace	1788		✓			✓	

As indicated above, the present dataset is drawn from the transcribed sources. These are based on manual reading of the original materials and contain annotations with customised TEI/XML tags for the relevant strings of text with linguistic strategies relating to addressee-oriented and author-oriented forms of address. The strings can be extracted directly from the XML mark-up with an XML-editor or any other concordancer. The mark-up was added to the four structural parts of the letter – salutation, body, subscription, superscription – and these concern nominal phrases with head nouns such as terms of friendship, kinship or endearment, as well as personal names and honorifics.⁴ Since this case study concentrates on personal names in self-reference expressions, the data here have been retrieved from the main text in the body of the letter/note, as in examples (1) and (2), and from the signature in the subscription part, as in (3) and (4).

1. I tell you this because I know every thing that gives *Miranda* satisfaction affords pleasure to her *Astrea* (HAM/1/15/2/4(2))
2. *Mrs. Dickenson* is much disappointed to lose the pleasure of seeing Mr- *Walpole* this evening but shall be very happy to see him next Wednesday afternoon (MSS1 b.12 f.53)
3. Adieu my dear friend ever yours – *M Hamilton* (HAM/1/8/8/1)
4. I remain, my dear *Lady Wake* your sincere & obliged friend – *Mary Dickenson* (HAM/1/8/8/31)

4. Self-reference expressions in Mary Hamilton's correspondence

This section discusses the data attested in letters and notes written by Mary Hamilton to various correspondents between 1776 and 1814. It starts with an overview of the distributional patterns (Section 4.1), before examining the self-reference expressions employed in the main text of the correspondence (Section 4.2) and in the signature (Section 4.3).

⁴ Pronominal forms of address go beyond the scope of the research strand within our project (cf. Nevala 2002 for a study of pronouns of address in the framework adopted in the present paper).

4.1. Distributional patterns

A first look at the use of Mary Hamilton's forms of address in her private correspondence reveals a generally low frequency of self-oriented expressions, as well as a lower frequency of self-references in comparison with the use of forms of direct address towards the recipient, in that, of the 170 items written by Hamilton, less than half contain a self-reference expression, (eighty-two) while only forty-six lack some kind of direct address. Besides, there are thirty-five items which lack both author-oriented and addressee-oriented forms of address.

We can also observe variation in Hamilton's use of self-reference with regard to the part of the letter in which the expression occurs: she signs forty-nine letters, less than thirty per cent of the dataset, but adds a self-reference expression in the main text in only twenty-eight items, an even lower proportion. Often, the letter is signed but the main text lacks a self-reference, a pattern observed with family, friends, acquaintances and the royal family alike. Occasionally, Hamilton chooses to include a form of self-oriented address in the main text but omits the signature in the subscription, as in letters to George, Prince of Wales, Jean Baptiste Seroux d'Agincourt and Horace Walpole. At the same time, the presence of both types of self-oriented address is observed in letters to her friends Mary Delany, Charlotte Gunning and Mary Wake. Regarding the absence of the signature, as pointed out in Section 3, we should bear in mind that the dataset contains copy/draft letters, and for this reason Hamilton may have simply omitted the signature in the item that has been preserved.

A closer look at Mary Hamilton's lexical choices in the form of personal name and honorifics reveals that self-reference expressions of this type are attested in letters to sixteen of the twenty-two correspondents in the dataset, both female and male and covering all categories of distance and power status relations (see Table 1). Amongst the participants with whom Hamilton omits self-references are two correspondents whose letters do not contain any form of either author-oriented or addressee-oriented address – Mary Jackson, Hamilton's goddaughter, and Charles de Guiffardière, an acquaintance from Court. There are two other correspondents with whom Hamilton uses direct address but omits self-references: her Northampton

friend Ann Litchfield and the Dickenson sisters-in-law. In the particular case of Jean Baptiste Seroux d'Agincourt and the unidentified princess, the letters preserved do indeed include self-reference expressions, but not in the form of a personal name; instead, Hamilton chooses a term of friendship like *your true attached friend* (HAM/1/1/1/11).

With correspondents for whom Hamilton chooses to use a personal name, there are fifty-four items, with fifty-nine individual expressions, including those instances which Hamilton censors. Differences across structural parts of the letter must be considered: only eight of these forms appear in the main text of the letter, and are found in seven different items addressing four different correspondents. The remaining self-references occur in the signature and are found in forty-nine items written to fourteen different correspondents. Only two of the items with self-reference include author-oriented forms of address in both the main text and the signature, both of these being letters to her close friend Charlotte Gunning.

Table 2 provides an overview of Mary Hamilton's choice of self-reference in the form of a personal name in the main text (marked with an asterisk) and in the signature, mapping these onto the politeness continuum (left column). It indicates the correspondents with whom each form is employed and the social relations in which they occur.

Table 2. Personal names in Mary Hamilton's self-reference expressions.

Polit. contin.	Pattern (items/tokens)	Personal Names (tokens)	Recipient	Distance (recipients)	Power (recipients)
Positive ↓	Nickname (12/13)	Miranda (8, 5*)	Gunning George, PoW	friend (1) royal fam. (1)	equal (1) inf-sup (1)
Positive ↓	First Name + Last Name (43/44)	MH (7) M.H. M:H: M:H Mry. H—	Gunning Hamilton, W Wake	family (1) friend (2)	equal (1) inf-sup (2)
↓		M Hamilton (10) M. Hamilton M: Hamilton Mry. Hamilton Mry: Hamilton	Delany Finch Gunning Wake	friend (4)	equal (2) inf-sup (2)
↓		M Dickenson (5) M: Dickenson Mry: Dickenson	Burney Clayton Goldsworthy King Murray	acquaint. (1) family (2) friend (2)	equal (3) inf-sup (2)
Neutral ↓		Mary Hamilton (18, 1*)	Blosset Finch Goldsworthy Gunning Hagedorn the Queen Smelts Wake	acquaint. (3) friend (4) royal fam. (1)	equal (2) inf-sup (6)
		Mary Dickenson (3)	Blosset Smelts Wake	acquaint. (2) friend (1)	inf-sup (3)
	Title + Last Name (2/2)	Miss Hamilton (1*)	Delany	friend (1)	equal (1)
		Mrs Dickenson (1*)	Walpole	friend (1)	equal (1)

Overall Hamilton selects three different patterns on the politeness continuum: her nickname *Miranda*, the most positively charged expression; the sequence with a first and a last name (e.g. *Mary Hamilton*); and a title with a last name (e.g. *Miss Hamilton*). The pattern with a title and a first name is not found in Hamilton's correspondence (e.g. *Miss Mary*). This may well relate to the advice given in letter-writing manuals since the late seventeenth century in which a social distinction is made concerning social status: first names with titles should only be used in letters to an inferior (De la Serre 1673), and Hamilton's dataset does not contain letters from her to an inferior correspondent. Honorifics such as *Lady/Ladyship* are not found either in Hamilton's correspondence, given that she did not hold a noble title from birth or marriage, unlike, for instance, Lady Catherine Hamilton (née Barlow), married to Hamilton's uncle Sir William. Hamilton's husband John Dickenson was the son of John Dickenson Senior, a Manchester lime merchant. The absence of the term *Madam* is perhaps surprising given that at the time this could be employed as an unmarked form of address which had undergone *pragmatization* and thus would "reduce the complexity of social interaction and minimise the risk of face loss on the part of the writer" (Raumolin-Brunberg 1996: 179), and also given that Hamilton was often addressed as *Madam* by her correspondents, including kin and non-kin family, friends at Court and friends of the Bluestocking circle (Yáñez-Bouza forthc.).

4.2. Self-reference in the main text of the letter

In the main text of the correspondence by Mary Hamilton, her general preference tends towards simple structures with a determiner and a term of friendship (e.g. *your friend*, GEO/ADD/3/83/15) and, occasionally, a pre-modifying adjective (e.g. *your true friend*, HAM/1/9/66) or an intensifier (e.g. *for ever your friend*, GEO/ADD/3/83/25). This is in line with the findings reported in other sets of EModE correspondence (Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg 1995, Raumolin-Brunberg 1996). As noted above, self-reference expressions in the main text are not common overall, but the scope is further reduced when Hamilton selects a personal name on some isolated instances in letters written to four correspondents: her friend Charlotte Gunning, the

Bluestocking Mary Delany and Horace Walpole, and George, Prince of Wales. A similar limited scope of self-reference with few correspondents is observed in Nevala's study of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century correspondence (2010a: 157). At the same time, Hamilton shows awareness of variation and makes use of three different patterns: her nickname *Miranda*, on five occasions, two of which are crossed out; her first name followed by the last name, once; and title with last name, once with her maiden name, *Miss Hamilton*, and another time with her married name, *Mrs Dickenson* (see Table 2).

On the traditional continuum of politeness, Hamilton's use of her nickname *Miranda* conveys positive politeness and familiarity. It is found in the letters to her intimate friend Charlotte Gunning, whom she also often addresses by the nickname *Astrea*, and once in a letter to George, Prince of Wales, a superior to her but with whom she corresponded in confidence and secrecy (see Oudesluijs & Yáñez-Bouza 2023). In the letter to the Prince, the expression *poor Miranda* (5) is used with irony in a context in which Mary Hamilton rebukes him for his insinuations that she had no friends who take care of her and, thus, the use of her familiar nickname may be seen as an attempt to tone down the direct reprimand with which she starts the letter. This is a letter in which she chooses the term *friend* as a form of direct address on various occasions, and which she ends as *your sincere, & truest friend*. A conscious change of address term relating to attitude is seen elsewhere in Hamilton's correspondence with the Prince (Yáñez-Bouza forthc.) and indeed in other letter collections (e.g. Nevala 2009a).

5. So you are vain enough to suppose I shall, from all your fine speeches & protestations begin to imagine you are the only person in the world that really cares for *poor Miranda* — to convince you to the contrary please to peruse the letters I send, & let me have them again Monday Morning (GEO/ADD/3/83/23)

In the letters to Gunning, Hamilton chooses the expression *your Miranda* (6) in a passage in which the author shows affection for her friend and expresses how much she misses her. The positive connotation conveyed in the nickname is further enhanced by the use of the possessive determiner *your*. On the

presence of the possessive, Raumolin-Brunberg (1996: 170) observes that in EModE correspondence *my* was “often added to the forms of address” and this seems to reflect the author’s intention to “intensify the intimacy and affection prevailing between the correspondents”; Hamilton’s selection of *your* in the context of her letter to Gunning seems to serve the same purpose.

6. surrounded as you are at present with every one that is dear to you except *your Miranda*, & though she has not the comfort of being with you, or near you, assured of her affection & the sincerity of her friendship (HAM/1/15/2/19)

The nickname without pre-modification is found in a letter in which Hamilton addresses Gunning affectionately with the opening salutation *my dear love* and later with her nickname *Astrea*: “I tell you this because I know every thing that gives *Miranda* satisfaction affords pleasure to *Astrea*” (HAM/1/15/2/4(2), see (1) above). In another letter (7), Hamilton censors the use of *Miranda* twice and changes it into a pronominal address, *I* and *me*. This is a letter in which she crosses out many other expressions with personal names, including her own signature *Mary Hamilton* and the direct address *Astrea* (Yáñez-Bouza forthc.).

7. perhaps you are lodged in the very house *Miranda* I was was[sic] in 3 or 4 years ago [...] knowing that you never would write to *Miranda* me what you did not think [...] (HAM/1/15/2/2)

Another pattern conveying positive politeness, albeit to a lesser extent, is the combination of first and last name, attested in the form *Mary Hamilton* (8). This appears once in a rather complex letter in which various members of the Gunning family add interspersed passages. The use of the full name seems to be added by Hamilton for clarity in a way that mirrors the structure first selected by the Gunnings.

8. [George Gunning] Miss Hamilton has been tiring herself to Death here ... [Robert Gunning] Miss H.— thinks the suite of rooms horrible, old fashioned & a hundred horrible

[Bell Gunning] Miss H— has spent a delightfull day -- she had a very pleasant drive ...

[George Gunning] My compliments to the little worthies ... we underwritten beg of you to present our congratulations to their Majesties tomorrow – G. Gunning. / Mary Hamilton / Rob Gunning / B-Gunning (HAM/1/15/2/25)

The two self-reference expressions involving a title and a last name are particularly interesting in that they illustrate Hamilton's choice of self-reference in the third person and, furthermore, they co-occur with addressee-oriented third-person reference (see also Yáñez-Bouza forthc.). The presence of both types in the same thematic context is attested elsewhere in eighteenth-century collections and seems to respond to a means of saving the writer's face as well as that of the addressee (Nevala 2009a, 2010a). Hamilton's forms of address appear in brief notes written to friends of the Bluestocking circle with whom she had been corresponding fondly: Mary Delany, in a note dated 1781 when Hamilton was still at Court (9), and Horace Walpole, in a note dated 1788 when she was already married to Dickenson and an active member of the Bas Bleu (10); the latter is in response to Walpole's earlier note in (11).

9. *Miss Hamilton* is commanded by the King to tell Mrs. Delany that his Majesty sends his best compliments to her & hopes to see her at Gerrards Cross on Tuesday Morning (LWL Mss Vol. 75(24))
10. *Mrs. Dickenson* is much disappointed to lose the pleasure of seeing *Mr- Walpole* this evening but shall be very happy to see him next Wednesday afternoon (MSS1 b.12 f.53)
11. *Mr Walpole* begs *Mrs Dickenson* will be so good as to excuse his waiting on her this evening, which he will have the honour of doing on Wednesday or Thursday, which ever she will please to name. (MSS1 b.12 f.52)

In (9), Hamilton chooses the forms *Miss Hamilton* and *Mrs. Delany*. Previous work on reference expression notes that the governess Agnes Porter uses titles in direct address with friends so as to keep her distance “in order to remain an honourable governess” (Nurmi & Nevala 2010: 178), and the

same social meaning could be conveyed in Hamilton's self-reference here. Besides, the use of the third person seems to function as a means of avoiding personal involvement, which in turn responds to various situational factors in which the note was sent; for instance, the formality of the context, this being a message on behalf of the King, the formal request for a social visit and the epistolary convention to send compliments. The same pattern is thus employed towards the addressee, *Mrs. Delany*, whereas elsewhere in their correspondence Hamilton opts for the term *Madam*, and that is also the form of address used by Delany in her letters to Hamilton (LWL Mss Vol. 75). In (10), Hamilton likewise uses the self-oriented expression in the third person at the start of her note to Walpole, with her married name *Mrs. Dickenson*, hence distancing herself from her correspondent. The current dataset of transcribed materials only contains one letter from Hamilton to Walpole and thus we cannot draw conclusions on her tone or attitude, but we do preserve the note sent by Walpole to Hamilton on that same day, and here Walpole makes use of the same strategy with title and last name for both the reference to himself and the reference to Hamilton (11). We could interpret Walpole's choice of a title and last name as a means of saving face and showing deference in the context of apology for not calling on Hamilton, and to interpret Hamilton's choice of *Mrs. Dickenson* as a reaction to Walpole's strategy in the same vein, to accept his apology and show respect. This would soften the inappropriateness of calling off an engagement at the last minute and would smoothen the way for their next social encounter (see also Nevala 2010a: 160).

4.3. The signature

The signature of the letter naturally contains a personal name, and in Mary Hamilton's dataset this appears in the form of her nickname *Miranda*, in eight letters, and in the combination with a first and last name, in forty-three items. There are no instances of the expression with her married title *Mrs. Dickenson*, a strategy which has only been attested once in the main text of the materials under study, as discussed in relation to (10) above. As can be seen in Table 2, the letters and notes signed by Hamilton are written to fourteen different correspondents, male and female, and with whom she maintained

varied social relations in terms of distance and power status. Most of the signed items belong to the period 1779–1782, when Hamilton worked as sub-governess at Court, which is the largest period in the dataset (see also Table 1). At the same time, it is noteworthy that although her correspondence contains fewer items from the years during which she was married, eight of these eleven letters and notes are signed.

On the politeness continuum, the choice of Hamilton’s nickname *Miranda* is narrow in scope, in that the eight instances attested appear when writing to Charlotte Gunning before Hamilton left Court in 1782; their correspondence continued, but in later years she opted instead for the use of her first and last name, as in “Your true friend *Mary Hamilton*” (HAM/1/15/2/31 p.16), or for omitting the signature (see Oudesluijs & Yáñez-Bouza 2023). We also note that Hamilton does not use her own nickname as often as she uses Gunning’s nickname *Astrea* in forms of direct address towards her friend (see Yáñez-Bouza forthc.). Whereas previous studies on EModE correspondence have reported on the common use of nicknames with correspondents from nuclear family and friends (Nevala 2004a: 89, 137), Mary Hamilton’s practice is attested only with one of her friends, who is of an equal social status. The closing structure in which the nickname appears is generally simple, with just one instance in which the nickname is preceded by a subscription formula, as in (12); longer structures with an introductory phrase are not attested in this context (cf. however, examples like (21) and (22) which do contain introductory phrases). There is one letter in which the omission of an explicit head noun in the subscription formula results in a sequence with the possessive determiner preceding the signature alone, illustrated in (13).

12. ever yours – *Miranda* (HAM/1/15/2/15(3))

13. Your *Miranda* (HAM/1/15/2/15(2))

In addition, it is worth noting that in three letters originally signed as *Miranda* this is crossed out by Hamilton: in two cases the expression is replaced with the pattern first and last name, her preferred expression of self-reference (14); the other is left unsigned (15). On various occasions Hamilton also censors the use of a nickname in addressee-oriented expressions, in particular *Astrea* in letters to Gunning and *Clara* in a letter to Anne Litchfield (Yáñez-Bouza

forthc.). The effect of Hamilton’s self-corrections in both types of address is one of the loss of positive politeness. This may reflect a common practice elsewhere in her correspondence and personal diaries of offering greater clarity as to the content of the letter or of being discrete and prudent in case her personal writings were read by others (see Gardner 2016, in prep.).

14. Adieu my dear dear friend God grant you a speedy recovery. *Miranda Mary Hamilton* (HAM/1/15/2/16)
15. Adieu my friend my Astrea – I have not time for more Adieu <gap> – *Miranda* (HAM/1/15/2/11)

As can be inferred from Table 2, when Mary Hamilton does sign her letters, her preference, at least in the materials available, is for the sequence with first and last name together, a pattern which is at a neutral position on the politeness continuum. This common practice in Hamilton’s writings is in line with Nevala’s (2004a: 96, 138 n.12) observations about EModE correspondence, and also seems to be the preferred pattern in Robert Lowth’s and Jane Austen’s letter collections (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2011: 157, 2014: 73–74). What is perhaps more peculiar in Mary Hamilton’s practice is that she creatively writes her name in many different forms, with full name, abbreviations of first name and abbreviations of both first and last name. *Mary Hamilton* is the most frequent self-reference expression, and overall her maiden surname *Hamilton* appears in more letters than her married name *Dickenson*. This might be expected given the bias in the dataset, as the majority of the signed letters predate her marriage in 1785. Nonetheless, it is indeed notable that all the items signed during her married years show the pattern first and last name, thus with *Dickenson*.

In Nevala’s EModE letter sample, the sequence with first and last name was found in relationships involving acquaintances and strangers, while plain initials or with a first name alone “appear in a few cases” in the correspondence of nuclear family members (Nevala 2004a: 138 n.12). In Mary Hamilton’s correspondence we find a varied range of recipients with whom she held different kinds of relationship: acquaintances and also other (closer) friends, equal-to-equal relations and inferior-to-superior roles. This

seems to be in line with Nevala's (2004a: 96) conclusion that "[t]here appears to be no correlation between the relationship of the writer and the recipient and the type of signature: letters to intimates are signed in a similar manner to those written to more distant correspondents", in EModE correspondence. That said, Nevala (2004a: 90) also argues that if first names are used "from inferior to superior, it often means aspirations to be approved as an 'equal' by the addressee", as noticed above. In LModE correspondence, it has been observed that the grammarian and bishop Robert Lowth selected the pattern first and last name in full "in initial stages of a correspondence", as in *Robt. Lowth* or *R. Lowth*, with variations to include the episcopal diocese to reflect common practice at the time after he became bishop, as in *R. Oxford* and *R. London*; the abbreviated form *R. L.* is used "habitually" in the letters to his wife, but never the first name alone (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2011: 157). Thus Tieken-Boon van Ostade concludes that this pattern used by Lowth signals "distance rather than closeness" (2011: 157). Jane Austen's usage, however, is described as "haphazardly idiosyncratic" and not very indicative of any index of formality, although "there are some signs that the form of the signature correlated with relative formality", at least in the more formal correspondence, for instance the use of *J. Austen* instead of *J. A.* (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2014: 73–74).

Mary Hamilton's correspondence shows the sequence first name and last name with equal-to-equal as well as inferior-to-superior relationships. With correspondents of an equal status, Hamilton signs her letters to close friends from Court as *M:H:* and *M: Hamilton* when writing to Charlotte Gunning (16), and as *M Dickenson* in a note to Marta Goldsworthy dated 1789, after her marriage. Similarly, with Bluestocking friends Hamilton signs as *Mry: Hamilton* in a letter to Mary Delany from 1780 and as *M: Dickenson* in a letter to Burney from 1789 ((21) below). The range of correspondents of a superior rank to Hamilton is large and varied, including friends like Lady Wake and Lady Finch (17); family members like Sir William Hamilton and Lord Stormont (18); acquaintances such as the Smelts (19), Lady Clayton, Mrs Hagedorn and Robert Blosset; and, from the royal family, Queen Charlotte (20).

16. in haste ever ever yours – *M: H:* (HAM/1/15/2/22)
17. Adieu my dear dear Lady Charlotte I love & respect you more much more than I can express. *M. Hamilton* (HAM/1/12/72)
18. I am my dear Lord ever most affectionately yours – *M: Dickenson* (HAM/1/18/180)
19. I remain ever my dearest Mr. & Mrs. Smelt's sincere & affectionate friend – *Mary Dickenson* (HAM/1/1/1/13)
20. Your Majesties most faithful, & most dutiful servant; *Mary Hamilton* (HAM/1/1/2/8)

Regarding diachronic trends in the presence or absence of the signature in private correspondence, it has been observed that in the EModE period subscription formulae “are almost always followed by the writer’s signature” (Nevala 2004a: 96). However, in LModE correspondence the signature is often missing in letters by John Gay (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 1999: 104–107) and it is also “usually lacking” in the correspondence by Robert Lowth (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2011: 157). Mary Hamilton’s practice is difficult to assess given that some letters/notes are incomplete or are copies/drafts in which it would not be necessary to include elements such as her own signature. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that not one of the sixty-one letters and notes written to George, Prince of Wales are signed, and that many of the items written to Charlotte Gunning lack a signature too (fifty of eighty-one items). The Prince was a superior to Hamilton and the fact that their correspondence was secretive may explain the deliberate absence of her signature, at the time of writing or later. However, the reason for omitting the signature with Gunning is less clear. Some of the unsigned letters are copies, but these amount to less than half. The issue, then, may relate to their equal social status and intimate friendship, since Gunning often leaves her letters to Hamilton unsigned too.⁵ In general, Hamilton seems to adhere to the observed practice followed by contemporary writers in that when she writes a subscription formula, this is not always followed by a signature. For instance, the letter to Frances Burney

5 Oudesluijs & Yáñez-Bouza (2023) examine further the use of forms of address in the mutual correspondence between Mary Hamilton and Charlotte Gunning, and between Mary Hamilton and George, Prince of Wales.

in (21) shows a complex structure, while the letter to the Prince of Wales ends abruptly without a signature (22).

21. I am ever most affectionately & faithfully yours – *M: Dickenson*
(HAM/1/6/5/2)
22. Adieu I am truly your friend & sister (GEO/ADD/3/83/52)

5. Concluding remarks

The aim of this paper has been threefold: to investigate letter-writing practices in the late Georgian period based on evidence from ego-documents, specifically from a set of private correspondence written by Mary Hamilton between 1776 and 1814; to observe trends in the use of personal names and honorifics as an index of politeness on a continuum from more positive to more negative face-saving strategies; and to identify patterns of intra-speaker variation in the use of expressions of self-reference address (Hamilton's) which may respond to sociopragmatic factors reflecting the relationships between Hamilton and her correspondents in terms of distance and relative power. Nevala's (2004a) work has served as a central framework here, and the case study overall lends support to the usefulness of the notion of face, power and social distance for the study of terms of address in the LModE period.

The findings reveal the use of self-reference expressions is relatively scarce, especially in the main text of the letter, but at the same time Mary Hamilton styles herself using a rich variety of self-reference expressions, from her nickname *Miranda* to her married name *Mrs. Dickenson*, making frequent use of her first and last names, as in *Mary Hamilton* and *Mary Dickenson*. These effectively span the entire politeness continuum, albeit to varying degrees. At the positive end of the scale, her nickname *Miranda* is restricted to use with her close friend Charlotte Gunning, with the exception of letters written to George, Prince of Wales. Notably, self-corrections always concern the censorship of her nickname and thus the loss of positive politeness. This has also been observed in Hamilton's use of direct forms of address towards the recipient of the letter, for instance crossing out Gunning's nickname *Astrea* (Yáñez-Bouza forthc.). Thus an appropriate focus of further research

would be to explore Hamilton's self-censorship practices in more detail. At the negative end of the scale, the combination of a title and last name, as in *Miss Hamilton* and *Mrs. Dickenson*, appears only in the main text and in certain circumstances determined by situational factors and by the content of the letter, these being beyond the micro-context of relative power and social distance. Instead, Hamilton's preferred strategy is the combination of her first name and last name, which is employed in a variety of forms with her correspondents over time, using both abbreviations and expanded forms, as in *MH, Mry. Hamilton, M: Dickenson* or *Mary Dickenson*, to name but a few.

In future research it would be interesting to examine Hamilton's use of self-reference expressions in relation to the forms of direct address employed towards the recipient; such an approach to the letter as a whole would afford us a better overall view of the writer's assessment of her correspondents and how this is reflected in the address forms she employs. Likewise, a closer inspection of the sets of correspondence with lifelong friends might also yield insights into possible diachronic change in the way in which Hamilton refers to herself, especially after her marriage in 1785; for instance, the use of nicknames in her letters to Gunning is attested in their early correspondence during their time at Court, but not after Hamilton retired from her duties as sub-governess in 1782 (Oudesluijs & Yáñez-Bouza 2023). Sets of mutual correspondence are also central to the study of discourse negotiations between participants, as already inferred from the data in the present case study. To give an example, whereas Hamilton only uses her nickname in a self-reference expression once in her letters to George, Prince of Wales, and none of her letters or notes are signed with her name, the Prince does sign his letters to Hamilton and very frequently he does so with his nickname *Palemon*.

Also, as pointed out in Section 2, in light of the limitations of the research framed within the first wave of politeness research, future investigations in the *Unlocking the Mary Hamilton Papers* project will consider the conventional meanings of certain terms of address in the context of eighteenth-century politeness (e.g. courtesy, etiquette, civility, sincerity) in terms of context-driven variation and change. A first step to this end will be to reconstruct Hamilton's social network (Denison & Oudesluijs in prep.); this will shed light on the ways in which Hamilton and her circles negotiate,

and re-negotiate, their interactions in different situational discourses and for different communicative functions. To cite Taavitsainen & Jucker (2016: 427), “[a]ddressing people is one of the most prominent interactive features of language use, and an efficient means of attracting attention or of creating and maintaining interpersonal relations”, and thus, from a pragmatic perspective, “[s]ocial and attitudinal meanings are embedded into the terms of address with subtle shades of meaning”.

From a broader perspective, this case study illustrates the potential of *The Mary Hamilton Papers* in the multi-disciplinary field of ego-documents, constituting as it does a rich source of material relating to the history the English language and also to English society generally. The so-called ‘personal turn’ in the writing of history (Baggerman & Dekker 2018) has brought to light the special value of ego-documents not only as archival sources of historical events and social history, but also as a powerful source of language use, variation and change in the field of historical (socio)linguistics. In this context, the current paper has explored a set of private correspondence as a niche case of sociopragmatic strategies whereby the author, Mary Hamilton, represents herself, or her *self*, and whereby she constructs her social identity through interaction with a variety of correspondents with whom she holds different types of social relationships in terms of distance and power. These, together with the role of politeness, are crucial in the society and culture of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, a period dominated by linguistic correctness, propriety and etiquette. 

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