

English in Transition 1500-1700: On Variation in Second Person Singular Pronoun Usage¹

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In the course of the Middle English period, a number of major changes took place in the structure of English. Most important among these were: a) the reduction of inflectional contrasts in nouns, verbs, and adjectives; b) the shift from a basic word order SOV to one predominantly SVO; and c) the trend towards the use of analytic resources instead of synthetic ones.

These and other related changes were still going on during the Early Modern English period. In fact, because of the ongoing changes, speakers and writers of Early Modern English often had at their disposal a choice of forms and constructions where today we have no choice -for example, in verb inflections, in personal and relative pronouns and in several other areas of grammar and syntax-. In the course of the seventeenth century, however, the abundance of variant expressions was gradually reduced, with the result that by the eighteenth century the structure of the language came to resemble fairly closely the structure of Present-day Standard English. It can be said, therefore, that in the course of the period under discussion there is a movement from greater grammatical variability and lack of organization towards a more regulated and orderly state. This description of the development of Early Modern English is, of course, a traditional one, but, still, there is a great deal of truth in it.

In what follows, I will try to illustrate some of this existing variability by looking at a well known grammatical development starting in Middle English, but completed only within the Early Modern period. Specifically, my discussion will focus on the variation between the second person singular pronouns *thou* and *you*, that is, the so-called pronouns of address. I have chosen this much explored topic primarily because it constitutes a good illustration of how complex could at times be the contrasts in usage between existing variant forms. So complex, in fact, that the changes affecting the pronouns of address from the fourteenth to the early eighteenth centuries are usually described as lying at the interface of linguistics proper, sociolinguistics, and pragmatics.

Let me start, then, with a brief summary of the history of the second person pronouns since Middle English times. As is well known, *ye/you* were originally the pronouns of the second person plural (from OE *ge/eow* respectively); *thou/thee*, in their turn, are historically the singular forms (from OE *thu/the*). From as early as the 13th century, however (cf. Mustanoja 1960: 126; Blake 1992: 536), *ye/you* came to be used as singular pronouns of reverential or polite address, probably on the model of French *vous*, which could also be used in this way (see Wales 1983: 108). The use of *you* as a polite form became more and more widespread, until it eventually brought about the decline of *thou/thee*. Opinions vary as to the exact date when this took place in actual speech, as distinct from literature, but, on the whole, it can safely be said that by the middle of the 18th century (cf. Strang 1970: 140; Barber 1976: 212) *thou* had become confined to biblical use, to the speech of Quakers, and to a sociolectally restricted use in local dialects.

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This, then, is the outline of a change which brought about a substantial modification of the English pronominal system, since there is now no morphological contrast between the second persons singular and plural. Important issues are: a) which exactly were the factors controlling the distribution of the *you/thou* forms?; b) why was *thou* ousted by *you* and exactly at what time? This second question is, of course, of great interest, but I will not be concerned with it today, so the audience is referred to studies such as Strang (1970: 139-140), Wales (1983), or, more recently, Mausch (1993).

Turning then to question (a), as expounded above, the received answer to it was supplied by Brown and Gilman in their celebrated analysis (1960) of the evolution of second person pronoun systems in European languages. This was followed in 1989 by another, more detailed study using as evidence data collected from Shakespeare's 'four major tragedies', that is, from *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, and *Othello*. In these two analyses, Brown & Gilman put forward the sociological concepts of 'power' and 'solidarity' to account for the pronoun usages observed in dramatic texts; roughly, as Hope (1993: 85) notes, "characters '+power' (monarchs, the rich, men, parents, masters and mistresses) can expect to give *thou* and receive *you* when interacting with those '-power' (subjects, the poor, women, children, servants). Theoretically, under this model, we expect characters of equal power, or equal social status, to exchange reciprocal *you* if they are upper class, and *thou* if they are lower".

One problem with the power rule as formulated by Brown and Gilman is that it cannot easily account for the fact that, in English usage, there was, right from the beginning, considerable fluctuation between *thou/you* forms in the singular. In other words, speakers could vary from one pronoun to another even when addressing the same interlocutor. Such shifts, as Mossé (1952: 94), Wales (1983: 114), or Blake (1992: 537-540, note), can be found already in Middle English times, and occur even within one and the same sentence or line. In this connection, Mossé (1952: 94) calls attention to the apparently inconsistent use of pronouns in, for instance, lines 485-486 of *Havelok the Dane* (end of 13th century):

(1) Al Denemark I wile *you* yeve
 To that forward *thu* late me live
 ['All Denmark will I give you in return for the agreement that thou lettest me live']

This type of swift pronominal shift, which is very prominent in dramatic dialogue during the Early Modern period, has come to be usually explained in terms of "a fluctuation of feeling, a raising of the emotional atmosphere or a change in an affective relationship" (Calvo 1992: 9). In other words, by the side of socially motivated uses, critics have long recognized the existence of emotionally expressive uses of the second person pronouns; as Barber (1976: 209) puts it:

We also find that *thou* is used, even in situations where *you* would be normal, when the emotional temperature rises. There are two cases in particular where we find this emotional use of *thou*. The first is to indicate intimacy, affection, tenderness: members of the polite classes who are social equals may slip into the *thou* forms to express such affectionate feelings, and return to *you* to indicate greater formality and distance. The second case is just the opposite: *thou* can be used, even by a social inferior to a superior, to show anger, contempt, disgust [...] Curiously enough, there are situations where the reverse is true, and *you* becomes the insulting and hostile form: a master who normally addresses a servant as *thou* may in anger switch to *you*.

Since *thou* was used to social inferiors, the use of *thou* to a stranger of equal rank was a deliberate insult. Cf. in this connection the passage adduced as (2) below, or the oft-quoted line from *Twelfth Night* III.ii.45 ("If thou thou'st him some thrice, it shall not be amiss") where Sir Toby Belch advises Sir Andrew Aguecheek, who is about to write a challenge, to use the insulting *thou*.

(2) 1603 *The Trial of Sir Walter Raleigh* I, 209.C1 [cf. Hargrave 1730]:

RALEIGH: I do not hear yet, that *you* have spoken one word against me; here is no Treason of mine done: If my Lord Cabham be a Traitor, what is that to me?

ATTORNEY: All that he did was by *thy* Instigation, *thou* Viper; for I *thou thee, thou* Traitor.

RALEIGH: It becometh not a Man of Quality and Virtue, to call me so: But I take comfort in it, it is all *you* can do.

ATTORNEY: Have I anger'd *you*?

RALEIGH: I am in no case to be angry.

LORD CHIEF JUSTICE POPHAM: Sir Walter Raleigh, Mr. Attorney speaketh out of the Zeal of his Duty, for the Service of the King, and *you* for *your* life;

So, summarising so far, 16th and early 17th century usage of the pronouns of address is usually accounted for on the basis of the following assumptions:

a) The overall distribution of the *thou/you* forms is largely controlled by norms dictated by the social model of power and solidarity.

b) Beyond these socially conditioned uses, there are emotionally expressive ones, which can result in rapid changes of pronominal choice, such as those alluded to by Barber, or as those exemplified in (2) above. Very importantly, the usual assumption is that these emotionally expressive uses derive their pragmatic force, that is, their contextual effect, from the fact that they are 'deviations' from the norms predicted by the power and solidarity model. In other words, as Brown and Gilman themselves note (1989: 177), "in cases where *you* is expected, the occurrence of *thou* indicates that the speaker is emotionally aroused".

c) Also importantly, discussions of second person pronoun usage are based almost exclusively on drama, and, more specifically, on Shakespearean drama. This is usually justified by the rather dubious claim that "dramatic texts provide the best information on colloquial speech of the period" (Brown and Gilman 1989: 159), or by assuming that "Shakespeare surely used *thou* and *you* with a confident intuition that mirrored general Elizabethan usage" (*ibid.*: 179). In other words, as Hope (1993: 85) notes, drama is resorted to because it is taken for granted that dramatic usage of the *thou/you* distinction will mirror the actual usage of that distinction in Early Modern spoken English.

So far, then, I have briefly summarised a number of commonly accepted tenets concerning the distribution of the second person pronouns in Early Modern English. Recently, however, a few studies have appeared which challenge at least some of those tenets, and this has brought about a renewal of interest in the issue of how *you* and *thou* really differed. Essentially, the studies I am alluding to are Lass (1996), Calvo (1992), and Hope (1993, 1994).

Starting first of all with Lass (1996), Lass's analysis of the English pronouns of address is expounded in the morphology chapter of Volume 3 of *The Cambridge History of the English Language* (Cambridge: CUP), which was due to appear in June 1996. It has, therefore, not yet been published, though draft versions of it have been circulating around for some time. I personally have not seen any of these preliminary versions, but references to them can be found in, for instance, Hope (1993, 1994). Briefly, Lass's research on *thou* and *you* differs from earlier approaches to the topic primarily in the type of supporting evidence. In other words, Lass, unlike his predecessors, has not made use of dramatic dialogue, but rather of a collection of private letters. Aside from this, as might have been expected, he seems to have found ample evidence of the existence of (at least) two distinct uses of *thou* and *you*: a) socially determined uses, as largely predicted by the Brown and Gilman model; and b) what Lass terms 'micro-pragmatic' uses, these latter depending on immediate linguistic and situational context, rather than on broader social context. These micro-pragmatic uses correspond, basically, to the emotional or expressive uses of *thou/you* recognised by more traditional analyses.

Turning now to Calvo (1992), this is a brilliant paper in which the author questions much of the earlier work on the pronouns of address, and in particular, Brown and Gilman's power and solidarity model.¹ Detailed consideration of Calvo's many observations would be out of place here, so I will refer only to that aspect of her study which I have personally found most appealing, namely, her suggestion that, in Shakespeare's usage at least, shifts of pronominal address cannot always "be directly related to a character's emotional outbursts nor to a negotiation of social identities" (p. 22). Instead, in some contexts, *you* and *thou* appear to function as discourse markers that indicate "the presence of boundaries in the supra-sentential organisation of the dramatic dialogue" (p. 16). In other words, Calvo argues that *thou* and *you* can at times be seen as having a textual function, in the sense of Halliday (1985: 53; 1994: 52, etc.), in that there are passages where "the shift from one pronominal form to another seems to have [...] been exploited by Shakespeare to differentiate two intertwined conversational topics or to mark the boundary between two distinct sections in a dramatic dialogue" (p. 26). This novel proposal is illustrated by Calvo by examining pronominal usage in a few passages of *As You Like It* and *Much Ado about Nothing*. Thus, in this latter play, Benedick's sudden shift from *thou* to *you* in Act V, Scene ii, lines 72-94 (cf. [3] below) is accounted for by Calvo (p. 23) in this way: "[the] shift from *thou* to *you* which takes place in line 88 ('And now tell me, how doth *your* cousin?') coincides with an obvious change in discourse topic, in conversational mood and in deixis: Benedick moves from whether it is wise or not to praise oneself to enquiring about Hero, Beatrice's cousin. There is also a change in conversational mood: from jest to seriousness; and a change in deixis: from 'I-you' to 'she'. Benedick's pronominal shift in line 88 helps to establish the structural organisation of the discourse; it signals that the talk is now reaching some sort of discursal boundary, that a unit of the interaction -the jestful wooing, the comic interlude- is over, and that a new unit -the serious action, the as yet unresolved problem of Hero's damaged reputation- is about to begin".

(3) 1600 Shakespeare *Much Ado About Nothing* V.ii.72-92:²

BENEDICK: *Thou* and I are too wise to woo peaceably.

BEATRICE: It appears not in this confession; there's not one wise man among twenty that will praise himself.

BENEDICK: An old, an old instance, Beatrice, that liv'd in the time of good neighbors. If a man do not erect in this age his own tomb ere he dies, he shall live no longer in monument than the bell rings and the widow weeps.

BEATRICE: And how long is that, think *you*?

BENEDICK: Question: why, an hour in clamor and a quarter in rheum; therefore is it most expedient for the wise, if Don Worm (his conscience) find no impediment to the contrary, to be the trumpet of his own virtues, as I am to myself. So much for praising myself, who I myself will bear witness is praiseworthy. And now tell me, how doth *your* cousin?

BEATRICE: Very ill.

BENEDICK: And how do *you*?

BEATRICE: Very ill too.

As Calvo herself points out later in her paper (p. 26), from this perspective, therefore, "it is not the use of one particular pronominal form or another in a precise context that is meaningful but rather the *shift* from one pronoun to the other. The shift, and not each pronominal form *per se*, performs a signalling function in the global organisation of the dramatic dialogue". Calvo acknowledges, however, that her approach is not a new magic formula for the pronouns of address which can account for all kinds of pronominal shift; the primary aim of her paper is, basically, "to

¹ See also Calvo (1996), this volume.

² Quotations of Shakespeare's plays are from *The Riverside Shakespeare* (Blakemore Evans 1974). The emphasis on the pronouns *thou* and *you* is mine.

question the validity of some extant approaches” (p. 26) and to put forward some novel suggestions.

Though I cannot concur with all aspects of Calvo’s research, her claim concerning the possibility of *thou* and *you* having a discourse marking function is certainly attractive, at least for dramatic dialogue. In particular, I would suggest that certain pronominal shifts taking place in asides or soliloquies could perhaps be explained by reference to that discursal function of the second person pronouns. Consider, for instance, the pronominal shifts in the following passages from Shakespeare’s *Richard III*. The first is from the opening scene of the play, where Richard uses *you* to Clarence; but, as soon as Clarence goes off, Richard switches to *thou* in soliloquy. In the second passage, Buckingham converses politely with Hastings, using *you*, but changes to *thou* in a contemptuous aside:

(4) 1597 Shakespeare *Richard III* I.i.111-121:

GLOUCESTER: [...] this deep disgrace in brotherhood
 Touches me deeper than *you* can imagine.
 CLARENCE: I know it pleaseth neither of us well.
 GLOUCESTER: Well, *your* imprisonment shall not be long,
 I will deliver *you*, or else lie for *you*.
 Mean time, have patience.
 CLARENCE: I must perforce. Farewell.
Exit Clarence with Brakenbury and Guard.
 GLOUCESTER: Go tread the path that *thou* shalt ne’er return:
 Simple plain Clarence, I do love *thee* so
 That I will shortly send *thy* soul to heaven,
 If heaven will take the present at our hands.
 But who comes here? the new-delivered Hastings?

(5) 1597 Shakespeare *Richard III* III.ii.118-124:

HASTINGS: [...] What, go *you* to the Tower?
 BUCKINGHAM: I do, my lord, but long I cannot stay there.
 I shall return before *your* lordship thence.
 HASTINGS: Nay, like enough, for I stay dinner there.
 BUCKINGHAM [*Aside.*]: And supper too, although *thou* know’st it not.-
 Come, will *you* go?
 HASTINGS: I’ll wait upon *your* lordship.

For most scholars, such changes “may occur when a character is being hypocritical, and then reveals his true feelings in an aside or a soliloquy” (Barber 1981: 170). But it is tempting to see these and similar switches as dramatic clues, that is, as ways of clearly indicating to the audience that the lines in question are meant as asides, or as material that the speaker shares only with the audience, and with no one else. To borrow Calvo’s words (1992: 26) once more, the change of pronoun would serve “to mark the boundary between two distinct sections in a dramatic dialogue [...] it would help to establish the structural organisation of the discourse.”

To conclude this brief review of recent literature on the pronouns of address in Early Modern English, let me now turn to Hope (1993, 1994). Both papers are closely related, to the extent that Hope (1994) is in fact merely a shorter version of his 1993 study. From the outset, Hope challenges (1994: 142) the traditional view that literary dramatic dialogue represents our closest source to spoken Early Modern English. He points out that Shakespeare’s dramatic usage of the pronouns, “if it bears any relation to ‘real’ Early Modern usage at all” (*ibid.*: 148), may well

preserve uses of *thou* and *you* which had long disappeared from everyday, non-literary speech.¹ Hence his analysis of the pronouns of address departs from all prior research in being based not on literary language, but, instead, on a collection of court records held at Durham University. The records, which date back to the second half of the sixteenth century, consist of depositions, that is, statements given orally by a deponent or litigant, and written down by a court clerk. They thus have an intimate relationship with actual speech, though, as Hope acknowledges (1993: 84), “the quality of the evidence for spoken language features provided by the depositions depends to a large degree on the ability of the scribe, and the conventions and constraints he worked under”.

In all, Hope’s collection of depositions contains transcriptions of 89 conversations, in which there are 377 individual occurrences of the second person pronouns (namely, 185 *thou* vs. 192 *you*; cf. 1993: 97). These figures constitute, I would say, a very limited body of evidence, as will be clear if we consider that, according to Barber’s count (1981: 286-287), in Shakespeare’s *Richard III* there are 568 examples of *thou* as against some 491 of singular *you*. In other words, Hope’s total instances of the pronouns of address would roughly amount to just one third of those likely to occur in an Elizabethan or Jacobean play. This is a serious limitation to which I will return later in this lecture.

With regard to Hope’s main findings, these can be summarised as follows:

a) The court records confirm the existence of “socially-pragmatic usages encoding differentials of status” (1994: 146), and they also “give strong support for the non-socially pragmatic, emotional usage of the forms” (1993: 92).

b) Certain usages predicted by the power and solidarity model of Brown and Gilman (1960, 1989) are not found. Most notably, Hope calls attention (1993: 94) to the fact that a mutual lower class *thou*, as postulated by Brown and Gilman and by most other accounts of Early Modern English pronominal usage, is absent; in other words, *you* is the dominant form for address in the depositions, even among lower class characters.

c) Even more interestingly, Hope further contends (1993: 93) that the sex-patterning of the forms predicted by the power and solidarity model is not corroborated by his material. In other words, according to Brown and Gilman’s principles, we would expect male to female address to favour *thou*, and female to male address to favour *you*, but this does not occur in the depositions that Hope has examined, where *you* is apparently the more usual pronoun in exchanges between the sexes. From this he argues (1993: 98, note 8) that the failure of the sex variable to pattern as predicted by the power and solidarity norm “confirms in a historical context Lesley Milroy’s suggestions that sex and class should be held separate in models of sociolinguistic variation (1992)”.

d) Hope’s fourth and last important finding concerns the time at which *thou* becomes the marked form in English. In connection with this, Barber points out (1981: 286-287) that in Shakespeare’s works as a whole “there is no enormous difference in frequency between *Thou* and singular *You*”, so that, according to him, it can by no means be said that *you* was the usual, or unmarked, form in Shakespeare, and “*Thou* merely an occasional variant used on special occasions” (cf. for a similar view Kielkiewicz-Janowiak 1995). Hope, however, finds (1994: 148) that “the situation is very different in the court records. Here *thou* is unquestionably the marked form -and this is in only 1560. There is no doubt that for these speakers, *you* is the default, or neutral form, and *thou*, when it is used, is almost always motivated in some obvious way”.² For

¹ Cf. also in this connection Barber (1981: 287): “we do not have to assume that usage in Shakespeare’s plays exactly reflects the usages of the society around them. It would be perfectly possible for *Thou* to play a relatively small role in real life, while in drama, because of its concentration of emotional tension and its tendency to present scenes of confrontation, *Thou* appeared much more frequently. Even when we are more certain, therefore, about the significance of usages in Shakespeare’s plays, we shall need to use caution in drawing conclusions about usage in Shakespeare’s society.”

² Here and elsewhere, Hope gives 1560 as the date of his depositions; cf. (1993: 97) and specially (1994: 142, “depositions made to the Durham ecclesiastical court in the north-east of England in the 1560s”). Yet we learn

Hope, the strong implication of this is “that Shakespeare’s dramatic usage, if it bears any relation to ‘real’ Early Modern usage at all, preserves modes of usage which have long disappeared from everyday speech” (*ibid.*). He ends up by suggesting that probably *thou* and *you* lead separate lives in the written and spoken mediums.

From this brief review of some of the existing literature on the English pronouns of address, there emerge a number of findings which seem to be largely unquestionable. The most obvious is, as repeatedly noted, that *thou* and *you* had both socially motivated uses and micro-pragmatic, or emotionally motivated, ones. What is less clear, however, is whether these two kinds of uses should be interpreted as norm and deviations from that norm, as postulated by Brown and Gilman (1960, 1989), or, rather, as complementary functions resulting from two different pragmatic principles, one social in nature, the other contextual. In addition, it seems highly probable, though I do not think that this has yet been demonstrated, that, in the course of time, and specially as *thou* gradually became the marked form in the spoken language, the pronouns of address developed a number of ‘literary’ uses which could be effectively exploited by literary authors. Here I would place, for instance, the use of *thou* and *you* as discourse markers, as discussed by Calvo (1992). Finally, it is also undeniable that there still remain pronominal shifts that simply cannot be explained on the basis of any of the parameters just mentioned, as variously noted by Barber (1987: 282), Brown and Gilman (1989: 178), Calvo (1992) or Bolton (1992: 194-195). Confronted with this fact, we may draw the conclusion that the alternation between *thou* and *you* in Early Modern English represents one type of linguistic variation that was not orderly, or at least not completely so, but random. This, however, is hard to believe; anyone who works within the framework of sociohistorical variation analysis, as is my own case, proceeds on the assumption that linguistic variants are rarely in free distribution; their choice correlates either with intralinguistic factors, or with extralinguistic ones (i.e., social status, ethnic group, sex, age, etc.), or with both at the same time. The alternation between *thou* and *you* must also have been of this type, that is, orderly and systematic; if we have not yet managed to identify all the factors controlling it, this can probably be put down to the fact that more work is still needed on the topic. In other words, it seems to me that one problem with most of the existing approaches to the English pronouns of address is that they are all based on partial, insufficient evidence, that is, on corpora which are neither large enough for the purpose, nor representative of all levels of usage. We have to bear in mind that recent studies of similar variational paradigms have made use of huge corpora comprising, in some cases, several million words; cases in point are, for instance, Stein’s research (1985, 1987, 1990) on the alternation between the *-(e)s* and *-(e)th* endings of the third person present singular of verbs (i.e., *he writes* vs. *he writeth*) in Early Modern English, or, more recently, my own analysis (1996) of the variation between infinitives and gerunds in object position, for which I examined well over two million words.

By comparison, the samples used in practically all of the research on *thou* and *you* are disappointingly limited: thus, Barber (1981) is based solely on Shakespeare’s *Richard III*, McIntosh (1963), Calvo (1992) and Kielkiewicz-Janowiak (1995) on *As You Like It*, Mulholland (1967) on *Much Ado About Nothing* and *King Lear*, Hope (1993, 1994) on a small collection of court records. With corpora of this size, it is not surprising that the conclusions reached in these various studies should at times be contradictory. In what follows, in order to better illustrate the dangers of analysing linguistic variants like *thou/you* on the basis of insufficient evidence, I will briefly report the results of a pilot investigation which I carried out while I was preparing this lecture. Since I wished to observe for myself how the pronouns of address patterned, I selected a batch of family letters dating back to the 16th and 17th centuries and comprising about 50, 000

from the list of references (p. 99) in the 1993 paper that the records cover, in fact, a thirty-year span (from 1565 to 1595).

words.¹ I also examined some 44,000 words of trial proceedings, but these proved of considerably less interest, so I will not refer to them in the discussion that follows.

With respect to the authors of the letters, they belong either to the gentry, or to the professions, that is, clergy, lawyers, administrative officers, doctors, etc.² The lower classes, therefore, are not represented in my corpus, which would be, of course, an important limitation if I had meant my collection of letters to be representative of Early Modern English society, as was not the case.

As regards the sex variable, both men and women were included among the letter writers in my sample, though letters written by men (= 60 in number) slightly outnumbered those written by females (= 52 in all). Finally, the correspondents were related either by blood, or by marriage: there were letters from husband to wife, from father to daughter or son, and from mother to daughter or son, and also the other way round, that is, from wife to husband, from son or daughter to father, from son or daughter to mother, and even from daughter-in-law to mother-in-law.

If I had to summarise second person pronoun usage as observed in this limited collection of letters, the following aspects would deserve mention:

a) Among the ranks of society represented in the sample, *you* is the unmarked form, even in first half of the 16th century; *thou*, whenever it occurs, is motivated in some more or less obvious way. Note in this connection, for instance, example (6) below; though *you* is the usual form of address from Sir Thomas More to his daughter Margaret Roper, he switches to *thou* when addressing her with the endearing nickname *Megge*:

- (6) 1534 *Correspondence of Sir Thomas More* (More to his daughter Margaret Roper) 546: Surely Megge a fainter hearte than *thy* fraile father hath, canst *thou* not have. And yet I verely trust in the great mercye of God, that he shall of his goodnesse so stayer me with his holy hand, that he shall not finally suffer me to fall wretchedlie from his fauour. And the lyke trust (deare doughter) in his high goodnes I verely conceue of *you*.

Thus, the apparently marked status of *thou* from so early in the period largely agrees with Hope's findings (1993, 1994) in this respect, but contradicts the claims of scholars like Barber (1981) or, more recently, Kielkiewicz-Janowiak (1995) that, as late as Shakespeare's time, neither of the two pronouns of address can be identified as unambiguously marked.

b) As might have been expected, there is abundant evidence for the power variable; that is, the pronouns are used to encode differences in status. This is apparent in the fact that instances of *thou* occur only from a technically superior correspondent to a technically inferior one. More specifically, *thou* is only found from mother to son, from father to daughter and, finally, from husband to wife. Clearly, however, its most frequent and regular use is in this last case, that is, from husband to wife; in this context, the use of *thou* can be observed from the early 16th century to the late 17th, which suggests that the sex variable was in fact a very important one as far as pronominal choice was concerned, contrary to the findings of Hope (1993: 93), as detailed earlier in this lecture. Obviously, it could be argued that occurrences of *thou* from husband to wife are not manifestations of the power model, but rather, of the micro-pragmatic, or emotional, use of the pronouns. This is, to some extent, true, as can be inferred from an example like the following:

¹ The selection of this particular text type can be justified on the grounds that private letters are widely recognised to come much closer to oral communication than most other genres (cf. Markus 1988). For instance, they encode many of the pragmatic features of dialogue: forms of address to the reader (listener), speech acts (such as questions and commands) that only make communicative sense if there is somebody to respond, and, even more importantly, the use of second person pronouns. As regards the specific letters examined for this lecture, they comprise all of those included in the Early Modern English section of The Helsinki Corpus of English Texts (Kytö, Rissanen et al. 1991). These total 35,370 words, which I supplemented with a second sample of about 14,000 words taken from other letter collections of the period.

² On the stratification of Early Modern English society cf. Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg (1989).

- (7) 1621 *Knyvett Letters* (Thomas Knyvett to his wife) 55: My deere Harte/ the cause of my not writing to *thee* the last week was because I thought to haue been at home with *the* before my letter, and therefore I cannot chose but condemne *y^r* to rashe censure of my forgettfullnes; which although it proceeds from *y* infinite love, yet the assured testimonies of my affection to *you* haue bene such as showld rather have layd the fault vpon something else, for I protest to god I love nothing but onely *thee*, and so rest assured.

Here *thou* indeed denotes intimacy and affection, but these feelings interact with the power principle, as is clear from the fact that in my collection of letters wives are often very affectionate to their husbands, and yet they invariably address them with *you*. The possibility exists, of course, that this marked difference between husbands and wives as regards pronominal choice may just have been a convention observed in letter writing, and not in actual speech. Be that as it may, what is specially noteworthy is that my data concerning the influence of the sex variable on pronominal usage are just the opposite of Hope's (1993), and this reflects, I think, the extent to which one's conclusions on the *thou/you* variation in Early Modern English can be crucially determined by the type of supporting evidence used.

c) Also according to expectation, my collection of letters contains pronominal shifts which appear to be unmotivated; consider, for instance, the forms typed in capitals in the passages below:

- (8) 1621 *Knyvett Letters* (Thomas Knyvett to his wife) 56: Sweet harte I am forst yet to send the shaddowe of my selfe, the true affection of a substance that loves *you* about all the world./ My busines I hope wilbe effectually dispatcht presently and god willing I will be with *THE* before *YOU* are aware. I haue been to look for stufe for *y^r* bedde and haue sent downe paternes for *you* to choose which *you* like best. They are the neerest to the patourne that wee can finde./ If *you* lack anything accept [= except] my company *you* are to blame not to lett me knowe of it, for my selfe being only *yours* the rest doe followe. Thus in hast Intreating *the* to be merry and the more merry to think *thou* hast him in *thy* armes that had rather be with *YOU* then in any place vnder heaven; and so I rest/ *Thy* dear loving husband [...]
- (9) 1624? *Correspondence of Lady Katherine Paston* (Lady Katherine to her son William) 65: [...] I thanke *THE* for *THY* kinde token sent me in *YOUR* first letter: and also I haue received two other letters this last by Iohnsons. by whom I did not wright, because this mesenger will be with *you* sooner than he: /in all which of *thy* most louinge letters I haue *thy* faithfull promises redubled. wherfor I haue no doupt of the parformanc of them seinge they be allwas in *thy* minde: /*YOUR* father comende him to *THE* and doe acsepet kindly of the token *YOU* sent him, he sends *you* this 10 s for a remembranc of his Love
- (10) 1662 *Oxinden and Peyton Letters* (Henry Oxinden to his wife) no. 178, p. 275: [...] as the case now stands I know no way under heaven so effectually probable as for *THEE* to send to my brother Richard or my Cozin Dalison to lay out the 16^l adventured with my Cozin George to my best advantage and in case *YOU* do not pay it them againe in good time, they to have the benfit of it. /Surely, surely, without considerable monie nothing can considerably be done.
- (11) *Ibid.* no. 179, p. 277: [...] *You* have advised mee well in being my own secretarie; howsoever I think Sir Robt Hales, Mr. Hannington and Ch. N. are some of our truest friends. Mr. Hannington and I were a Sunday last and heard a sermon at White Hall before the King. Dr. Bolton preached and that *YOU* may know

that Mr. Hannington is of no ordinary esteeme, I will assure *THEE* hee had such a presence with him as though a stranger to every one in the Church,

In order to account for such shifts, one option would be to say, as is partly suggested by Calvo (1992: 26), that “it is not the use of one particular pronominal form or another in a precise context that is meaningful but rather the *shift* from one pronoun to the other”. In other words, in examples like (8)-(11) it would be the shift itself, and not each pronominal form individually, that would be indicative of, for instance, the degree of intimacy existing between the two correspondents involved in each case. This sounds plausible, but, of course, it needs to be confirmed by further statistical data.

Finally, it seems to me quite certain that at least some of the variation between the English pronouns of address must have been controlled by grammatical factors of various kinds.¹ And, in fact, aspects like the type of verb (i.e., closed-class versus open-class, *thou* being said to be more readily associated with the former than with the latter) or the lexical context have been mentioned from time to time in the relevant literature as conditioning the occurrence of *you* and *thou* (cf. Mulholland 1967; Barber 1981: 285-286). But suggestions of this kind have never proved completely convincing because, without exception, they have been based on insufficient evidence. And it is here, as I have pointed out earlier in this lecture, where I think the heart of the problem lies as far as the study of the *thou/you* variation in Early Modern English is concerned.

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¹ Two recent studies exploring this topic are Martín Miguel & Fernández-Corugedo (1996, this volume) and Kielkiewicz-Janowiak (1995). This latter concludes, on the basis of a computational analysis of Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, that there is little evidence for the linguistically conditioned occurrence of the pronouns.

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