

DEMOCRATIC *YOU* AND PARADIGM

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The elimination of *thou* and the generalization of *you* as the only pronoun of address in English has been attributed primarily to social factors (e.g. Brown and Gilman 1960; Schlauch 1965 [1959]:53; Barber 1976:204-213; Gillian 1983; Leith 1983:106-110; Wales 1983). The sociolinguistic analyses, however, neglect the history of *ye*. Its disappearance from Standard English is treated, if at all, as a mirror effect of the spread of *you*. I think that inflectional paradigms, including the ones of *you* and *thou*, have their own morphological history independent from social factors.

There were attempts at identifying the phonetic and semantic similarities in the paradigms of *ye* and *thou* (e.g. Jespersen 1965; Stevick 1968; Strang 1970). They, however, have not proved that these similarities were decisive for the merger. I will concentrate on the morphological conditions of the mergers in question again, i.e. analyze both the involved forms and their contents (meanings) applying, however, a new model of analysis (Mausch 1989). I will try to trace the disappearance of the old subjective *ye* from the 2nd person plural paradigm. I will also try to demonstrate why in French, through which the use of the 2nd person plural pronoun to single addressees was introduced into English, the 2nd person merger could not take place.

1. History (1)

The use of the 2nd person plural subjective *ye* for polite address dates back to the second half of the 13th c. In the 14th c., it is well established. Already at the close of the 15th c., *thou* is used in emotionally marked settings, i.e. [-distance] (personal matters and instances of psychological climax) and

[+ distance] (offense), whereas *ye* is the more neutral form of address (Mausch 1986; cf. Kielkiewicz-Jankowiak 1990)¹. In the 16th c., the use of *ye/you* in addressing single addressees becomes a norm and in the second half of that century it is *you* which becomes dominant as the subjective/oblique form of the 2nd person plural. In the 18th c., the 2nd person singular pronoun forms² become obsolete. The pronominal form which replaces them is *you* (the former oblique case form).

The oblique form of the 2nd person plural starts to occur in the subjective case in the 14th c., however not frequently. Chaucer uses *ye* (the subjective form) for the oblique and, occasionally, *yow* in the function of the subjective (Sanved 1985:60). In the first half of the 16th c., *ye* still dominates in the subjective (Mustanoja 1960:125). Shakespeare in *Much Ado About Nothing* does not use *ye* at all whereas he uses *you* 403 times. In *King Lear*, he uses *you* 374 times and *ye* only 5 times of which only once is it a subjective *ye* (occurring after a verb in a statement) (Mulholland 1967).

The above datings show that although the 2nd person plural forms were used for addressing single addressees since the second half of the 13th c. that practice became a norm after more than two centuries when *ye* was still the dominating form of the subjective.

The forms that can be matched phonologically, i.e. the ones that share phonemes, cannot be matched in terms of their content (meaning) since the phonological matches are between subjective and oblique case forms across numbers.

Phonological developments of the 2nd person singular oblique and the 2nd person plural subjective were identical starting from OE till modern times (in those varieties of English in which they are still used), i.e. from OE *þe* and *ȝe* to ModE *thee* and *ye* (cf. *OED*). The situation, however, was very different in the 2nd person singular subjective and the 2nd person plural oblique. If they had the same vowel it could have been between 1300 and before the Great Vowel Shift (see rhymes in Chaucer; Sanved 1985, Kerkhof 1966). In the 16th c., the 2nd person singular *thou* vowel becomes diphthongized whereas the 2nd person plural *you* vowel continues its 13th c. /u:/ value (Welna 1978)³.

It follows that shortly after *ye* becomes a norm for addressing single addressees (15th/16th c.), *you* ceases to share its vocalism with *thou*.

¹ "By about 1500 it seems that this practice had been copied by the middle class, and *thou* was becoming the 'marked' form. It could be used for special effects; moreover, it was the reciprocal pronoun of the lower class". (Leith 1983:108).

² If used, in religious texts and in poetry, they are felt archaic.

³ Though, occasionally, their identity is claimed for the late 16th c. (Jespersen 1965: 268).

2. Model of analysis

Histories of inflectional paradigms become interpretable if one perceives (a) relations among the contents/meanings of the forms, e.g. the 1st person plural subjective to the 2nd person plural subjective.

(b) relations among the actually occurring forms, i.e. how the forms are similar and how they differ in terms of their phonological make-up.

In my 1989 paper*, I presented an interpretation of the accusative/dative mergers in some Germanic languages. These mergers gave various results: either the dative or the accusative or the nominative case forms were generalized. I demonstrated, however, that they could be interpreted in a unified way. The directions of changes and sequencing (e.g. the 2nd person plural accusative/dative merger before the same merger in the 1st person plural) turned out to be predictable. I analyzed the contents/meanings of forms within a postulated model of related grammatical closed systems whose terms were assigned unmarked and marked values (the RGSTM model, i.e. related grammatical systems, terms marked). (My use of "unmarked/marked" is restricted to relations among terms within closed grammatical systems, e.g. nominative – unmarked, accusative – marked in relation to the nominative, dative – marked in relation to the accusative).

RGSTM model

HIERARCHY OF SYSTEMS/RELATIONS AMONG TERMS

System	Number	Term	Values	Number
PERSON	4	3rd person	u	0
		1st person	m	1
		2nd person	m	2
NUMBER	3	singular	u	0
		plural	m	1
		dual	m	2
GENDER	2	neuter	u	0
		masculine	m	1
		feminine	m	2
CASE	1	nominative	u	0
		accusative	m	1
		dative	m	2

System numbers and unmarked/marked values of terms reflect the hierarchical ordering among systems and among the terms in each of them.

* On p. 86 there, under neutralization in the value of Y there is $\begin{matrix} \downarrow m \\ \textcircled{u} \\ m \end{matrix}$ whereas it should be $\begin{matrix} \downarrow u \\ \textcircled{m} \\ m \end{matrix}$. This mistake is not my responsibility.

The directions of changes, i.e. neutralization and extension of forms, and their conditionings were defined. Extension prevails whereas neutralization takes place only when a marked term with value 1, i.e. "dominated" by the unmarked term, is referred to the unmarked term in the higher system.

Within the RGSTM model the contents of individual forms were analyzed and they determined the sequence in which the changes were to occur. At that point the numbers (see the RGSTM model) were important,

e.g. OE <i>hine</i> 3rd person	= unmarked	= 0
singular	= unmarked	= 0
masculine	= marked	= 1
	+ system	= 2
accusative	= marked	= 1
	+ system	= 1
<hr/>		
content		= 5

The higher the numerical content value of a form the more likely it is that its content will undergo a change reflected in the possible change of a form, e.g. extension of OE dative *him* with content value 6 over *hine* with content value 5 and a lesser likelihood of that change than that of EOE dative *eow* with content value 13 over accusative *eowic* with content value 12.

Speaker-hearer oriented analysis of the actually occurring forms (which because of their content were liable to change) constitutes the second, but equally important part of my analyses. The same model will be applied for the case under discussion.

I claimed morphological transparency for instances of cumulative exponence referring to similarities (shared, common elements) and differences among forms which, according to my content analysis (RGSTM), were expected to merge. The easier both of them, i.e. similarities and differences, are identified by a speaker-hearer (not necessarily an ideal one) the greater is the morphological transparency of the forms involved. The greater is the morphological transparency of the involved forms, the easier, faster, is the merger. If the forms cannot be compared, i.e. they share nothing, they have zero morphological transparency (cf. instances of suppletive forms) and the merger is blocked, delayed or modified. No attempt is made at associating any form element(s) with any content element(s). (For details see Mausch 1989.)

In my two-fold interpretation the RGSTM model is the starting point of analysis. It is an attempt at handling a fragment of the complex structure of language (IE?). It is not an absolute one because the outlined approach to morphological transparency makes forms of a language equally important. Furthermore, my interpretation of changes is focused on discovering the conditions under which a change is likely to occur, i.e. on the degree of its

probability. I am not claiming anything about its actual occurrence or completion. The RGSTM model is treated as a tool for finding the forms which are likely to alternate and the forms which are the likely outcomes of thus identified probable mergers.

3. Merger in the system of person⁴

Its expected sequence (and directions) is:

I. 2nd person plural	↓	extension
II. 1st person plural	↓	
III. 2nd person singular	↓	extension
IV. 1st person singular	↓	
V. 3rd person plural	↓	extension
VI. 3rd person singular fem	↓	
VII. 3rd person singular msc.	↑	neutralization
VIII. 3rd person singular neuter.	↑	

(see pp.145-6 above and Mausch 1989:83-6).

These mergers did not take place because of the zero or very weak morphological transparency between the involved forms (i.e. forms pairs linked by their contents). The phonological make-ups of the 2nd person plural paradigm forms cannot be easily matched with the make-ups of the 1st person plural paradigm forms. According to my analysis only the forms which differ by one specified content element (RGSTM) can be matched thus, since the contents differ by person (2nd and 1st), the subjective form should be matched with the subjective form and so on. The situation in the 2nd and 1st person singular pair is even more difficult.

ye/you: we/us, -e in subjective shared, and when both *you* and *us* have /u:/ it is also shared (oblique) but its respective positions are different

subjective (ʔ/w)+e, oblique (y)+/u:/+(s)

thou/thee: I/me, -e in oblique shared.

subjective (thou)+(i), oblique (ʰ/m)+e

Across paradigms the subjective forms in the plural share -e and the oblique forms in the singular also -e. The oblique forms of the 2nd person plural pronouns share one element but its respective positions are different and thus their transparency is even weaker. The problem is that two paradigms are being compared and that the relations between the involved forms are different for every pair (subjective – subjective, oblique – oblique). Even if the relatively

⁴ In the meantime the dual number was eliminated, not to mention the changes connected with the loss of grammatical gender in nouns. All of them were complex and their interpretation is beyond the scope of the present paper.

weak transparency, i.e. the second element shared, could be sufficient for a pair to merge, i.e. for the speaker-hearer the forms could be comparable in terms of both forms and contents, the matching of paradigms remained difficult. For every pair in the involved paradigms the situation was different, e.g. *-e* shared by the subjective forms and /u:/ shared by the oblique forms and the unstable differences (/w/) in the subjective and (y)_(s) in the oblique. In addition to this if any change was to occur in the system of person it was also to affect verbs.

Starting with OE, the English verb was not sensitive to person in the plural. In the singular, it was sensitive, i.e. it had, in OE, distinct person markers/endings and its most distinctive ending was *-()st* of the 2nd person singular in the present indicative and, in Weak Verbs, in the preterite indicative.

"In the North *-en*, *-e* and *-est* were dropped at the end of the 12th century thus simplifying the preterite system at the beginning of the Middle English period. In the Southern dialects this innovation appeared in the 14th century". (Fisiak 1968:99)

The English verb ceased to distinguish person and number in the preterite. That leveling was completed in the North at the end of the 12th c., i.e. before *ye* started to be used in address to single addressees. It reached the South in the 14th c. when the use of *ye* for polite address was established. (The present indicative *-()st* was lost in the 17th c.) Between the 12th and 14th c., in preterite structures the system of person becomes relevant only to personal pronouns.

The change in verbal endings affected only the singular but at the same time it leveled the 2nd person plural with the 2nd person singular.

Comparison of *thou/thee: ye/you* shows that in both sets, i.e. singular and plural, the 1st element is shared. If they are compared across they share the vocalic elements (till the 15th c.), i.e. second elements, but in forms which do not have matching contents, i.e. subjective of the 2nd person singular and oblique of the 2nd person plural /u:/ and, likewise, *-e* of the oblique singular and subjective plural. That is interpreted as zero-transparency in terms of across paradigms comparability.

4. The subjective mergers and the disappearance of *ye*

With the accusative dative mergers the three term oppositions are reduced to two term oppositions. In the system of case new mergers start. The oblique forms are to be extended over the subjective case forms except the 3rd person singular neuter where the expected neutralization takes place leaving (*h*)*it* as the only form. The expected sequence of the subjective/oblique mergers is the same as the one given for mergers in the system of person, i.e. from I. the 2nd person plural subjective/oblique to VIII. the 3rd person singular neuter subjective/oblique (cf p. 147 above).

In the 2nd persons the morphological transparency of forms in paradigms is comparatively great, i.e. the first element is shared, the second is vocalic but of different qualities. In the 1st persons there is suppletion, i.e. zero-transparency⁵. In the 3rd person plural there are various developments⁶ but the introduction of the *th-* form and their gradual spread could, temporarily, give paradigms with suppletive forms. In the feminine, introduction of *she* resulted in suppletive forms⁷. In the masculine, the merger was not blocked by transparency, i.e. *he: him*, but was probably dependant on changes in the system of gender⁸.

In the 2nd person plural the merger was completed first. In the 2nd person singular, it was also completed. In the 17th c. speech of the Quakers *thee* dominated (Finkenstaedt 1963).

"The Quakers (the Society of Friends) [...] *thou'd* (or rather *thee'd*) everybody".

(Jespersen 1965:235)

2nd person singular

1. "Ah! George! What a blessed Spirit wouldst *Thee* have thought Satan, if *Thee* hadst seen him, when he was transform'd into an Angle of Light"
 2. "I wish I could say *thou* as *thee* does"
 3. "Oh! my dear ... *thee* must hate ground he treats on, *thee* canst not help it"
- (all three quotes from the speech of Quakers after Finkenstaedt 1963:216-217).

The mergers in both 2nd person paradigms started in the 14th c.⁹ however not simultaneously. According to the *RGSTM* model analysis the merger in the

⁵ However, observe "The existence in the eastern south-west region of a system of personal pronouns in which the form of the pronoun is not for the most part determined by subject versus object function but by weak or strong stress position". (Hughes and Trudgill 1989:18). *Us* may function as the subjective *we*.

⁶ Cf. Hughes and Trudgill (1989:18) for "weak" *'m* as the subjective form of *they*.

⁷ Cf. Hughes and Trudgill (1979:55-56) who recorded, in West Midlands, the use of *her* for the subjective "*Her says, no, I'm going to see the finish of this.*" and Hughes and Trudgill (1989:18) for "weak" *er* as the subjective form of *she*.

⁸ Attempts at the 3rd person masculine oblique extension over the subjective (cf. morphological transparency) are also early (however, finally the extension was conditioned by relations in the system of gender. Today, we may find *er* from feminine (*RGSTM*) as the subjective of *he*. According to Wakelin (private communication, April 1987), in the South of England one may hear "*He do go to church every Sunday, don't er?*". The co-occurrence of these pronominal forms, i.e. *he* and *er*, may, in my opinion be not due to a purely phonetic introduction of *-r* (rhoticity) but to a change in the system of gender, i.e. extension of the oblique feminine *her* over the masculine. Cf. also Hughes and Trudgill (1988:18) for "weak" *er* as the subjective forms of *he*.

⁹ In remaining persons (suppletion) they started to occur later (the 15th c.) and have never been fully accepted.

2nd person plural was to start before the merger in the 2nd person singular. *You* was generalized in the second half of the 16th c. and *thee* in the 17th c.

In the remaining persons the old subjectives have remained but the obliques started to be used as absolute forms (Heltveit 1952; Schlauch 1965 [1959]:97), i.e. when subjects of sentences but grammatically isolated from the other sentence elements. Examples are numerous:

1st person plural

4. "...none other shal knowe the same, but only we, *us* three, unto the time that the dede be accomplysshed" (Caxton, *Aymon*, 212, 30)

1st person singular

5. "What could I do with Fanny? *Me!* a poor helpless widow" (Jane Austin, *Mansfield Park*)
 6. "Is she as tall as *me?* (Shakespeare, *Anthony and Cleopatra*, III, 3, 11)
 7. "... that the two which appear'd, Friday and *me*, were two heavenly spirits" (Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*)
 8. Nobody saw him but *me*.
 9. Who should go there? He or *me?*
 10. What? *Me* dance?

3rd person plural

11. "a man schal be lete blood for to kepe himself, and principali *hem* þat etip good fleisch and drinkip good wijn (Lanfrank 298)

3rd person singular feminine

12. "I don't know his mother, - *her* who wrote the hymns, you know... comes to be Rebecca (Thackeray, *The Newcomes*)

3rd person singular masculine

13. "Lay on, Macduff, And damn'd be *him* that first cries 'Hold, enough'" (Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, V, 8, 33-4)

(examples after Brunner 1984:11-115, Mustanoja 1960:129; Schlauch 1965 [1959]:97)

5. The *you/thou* merger

The subjective/oblique merger in the 2nd person plural paradigm changes the relations among paradigmatic forms. The merger of the 2nd and 1st person plural paradigms remains blocked (cf pp. 147-8 above), i.e. now *you* shares nothing with *we* in terms of their phonological make-up (and *us* does not merge with *we*). But, *you* and *thou* which share /u:/ become different only by one

element in terms of their content, i.e. before the *ye/you* merger they differed by case and number, and now they differ only by number. They could both have been used in the function of the subjective and the paradigm of *you*, I would claim, was reduced to one form¹⁰ for a speaker-hearer:

you *thou*
 thee

OED registers *zue* in the function of the subjective plural in *Cursor Mundi* 1300? and *þe* in the function of the subjective singular in 1375. Thus in the 14th c., the singular and plural /u:/ forms had matching contents, i.e. the 2nd person subjective, and the morphological transparency of the subjective forms was increased, i.e. /u:/. It was the second element of the forms which was shared (cf. pp. 147 above) but the situation in the paradigms was different, i.e. the oblique *thee* in terms of a special form for the oblique case matched with nothing in the nonexistent paradigm of *you*. The oblique *thee* did not block in any way the paradigmatic leveling of *thou* and *you*. (The *ye/you* and *thou/thee* mergers are not simultaneous (cf. the *RGSTM* model and the *OED* datings)). At the same time the verb loses person markers in the preterite and the 'polite' use of the 2nd person plural pronoun forms for addressing single addressees becomes well established. The morphologically conditioned merger of the 2nd person pronouns may and does take place. *You* starts to be used for the subjective *thou*¹¹. Already at the close of the 15th c., *thou*, if co-occurring with *you*, is used for special effects. In the 16th c., *you* dominates over both *ye* and *thou*.

6. French

The situation in French personal pronouns was about the same as in English. *Vous*, the 2nd person plural only form, was used for 'polite' address. From the 2nd person singular *tu/toi* the absolute form *toi* developed. There, however, the 2nd person singular and plural merger did not take place. Possibly, the morphological transparency of the forms was weaker than in English but there was still another important difference between English and French, i.e. their verbal morphology. In the plural, the French verb had and has personal endings in e.g. *Passé Simple* and *Passé Composé* though not in

¹⁰ The forms of the genitive are not taken into consideration because in English the genitive, in opposition to other cases, functions only within a noun phrase and it should be treated together with other NP constituents.

¹¹ It is important to note that what counts in my interpretation is not the time of the completion of a change but the time of its probable initiation. It is impossible to claim that a change started at a given time. We have only written "chance" records at our disposal. We can only say that a form was recorded at a certain time, i.e. it was used. In this case *you* starts to be used for the subjective before *thee*.

Présent and Imparfait. The system of person never ceased to be relevant to French verbs.

Once, in English, a change in the system of person was to affect only personal pronouns it was relatively easy for it to take place. In French, it has not taken place because both personal pronouns and the verb have remained sensitive to person in their morphology.

7. History (2)

12th c.: verb ceases to distinguish persons in the preterite in the North

13th c.: polite *ye* in address to single addressees

14th c. 1st half: *ye/you* merger starts

you/thou merger may start

2nd half: *thou/thee* merger starts

15th c. before GVS: *you/thou* co-occur

16th c. 2nd half: *you* dominates over *ye* and *thou/thee*

17th c.: *thee* dominates over *thou*

18th c.: *thou/thee* eliminated

The above interpretation of the elimination of *ye* and *thou/thee* and of the rise of *you* as the only 2nd person pronoun form in English points to the primacy of systemic features in morphology.

Sociolinguistic factors contributing to the spread of *you* are not to be ignored but they have not been the reason for the complex *ye/you/thou/thee/ > you* merger.

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