

**SOCIOLINGUISTICS AND THE COMPUTER:
PRONOMINAL ADDRESS IN SHAKESPEARE***

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English historical address, including that of the works of William Shakespeare, has long attracted the attention of researchers. In particular, many focus on the address pronouns *thou* and *you* (and their respective forms) (cf. Kennedy 1915, Stidston 1917, Byrne 1936, Finkestaedt 1963). This distinction has often been viewed in the context of the option of the so-called polite and familiar pronouns present in many European languages (Svennung 1958, McIntosh 1963) and described in terms of the semantic dimensions of power and solidarity (Brown – Gilman 1960; re-appraised in Wales 1983, also in Braun 1984; Brown – Gilman 1989).

The address pronouns have been of special interest to the sociolinguist, due to the differential social meaning expressed by variable pronoun choice.

Frequently, discussions centre upon the impact of *you/thou* variation on the social and stylistic dimensions of discourse (McIntosh 1963, Mulholland 1967, Barber 1981, Wales 1983); the notions of power and solidarity, or distance, have been applied to explain their social force.

An interesting new study by Calvo (1992) supports the view that address pronouns are social markers used to reflect speaker's/hearer's status and to negotiate their social identities. More importantly, she considers their function as discourse markers which indicate boundaries in text organization and point to a topic change, a change in conversational mood, or an introduction of an important conversational element.

In all these studies priority is given to the investigation of the extralinguistic conditioning of the fluctuation in the use of address pronouns. As for linguistic factors of variation, if they are tackled at all, authors typically refer to the sug-

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gestion by Abbott (1966) that the distribution of *thou* and *you* depends on sentence type.

Wales (1983) recognizes the need for a systematic analysis of the linguistic context. Mulholland (1967) actually analysed the distribution of *you/thou* pronouns in Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* (MAAN) and *King Lear* (KL) according to syntactic function (subject, object), sentence type (statements, questions, imperatives), and co-occurrence with lexical verbs and closed class verbs. Her main conclusion in this matter is that there occurs a drop in the use of TH-forms as subjects of lexical verbs in statements and questions in MAAN; she observed a similar, though weaker, tendency in KL for more TH-forms to co-occur with closed class verbs than with lexical verbs. Barber (1981) in his study of *Richard III* (RIII) supports Mulholland's conclusion, yet he does not find the tendency statistically significant.

AIMS

Following the belief that a study of address pronouns as socially motivated should be preceded by considerations of linguistic context, I attempt here a systematic analysis of address pronouns in Shakespeare's *As You Like It* (AYL) to see if there is any regularity in their occurrence in different linguistic contexts. I will address both Abbott's and Mulholland's conclusions.

With the scarce language material analysed, I do not venture to make claims about the linguistic conditioning of address pronouns in the whole of Shakespeare or, for that matter, in Elizabethan English. Rather, this is an attempt to demonstrate one way to approach questions of linguistic conditioning systematically. Thus, specifically, I wish to point to a method – the computational text analysis – and to evaluate it.

ANALYSIS

The system of EModE second person address pronouns – TH-forms for singular reference and Y-forms for singular and plural reference – is amply demonstrated in the text of AYL (the electronic edition 1989). The computer-readable text has been analysed with the use of the Oxford Concordance Program (Micro OCP 1988).

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

1. General statistics

There are 738 Y-pronouns in AYL, including about 91 pronouns with plural reference, and 313 TH-pronouns. Particular forms are tabulated below:

	Y-PRONOUNS			TH-PRONOUNS		TH:Ysing
	sing	(pl)	total			
YOU	456	70	526	THOU	143	0.51
				THEE	90	
YOUR	174	18	192	THY	75	0.43
YOURS	7	–	7	THINE	2	0.28
YOURSELF/ /SELVES	9	1	10	THYSELF	3	0.33
YE	1	1	2			
total Y-forms	647	91	738	total TH-	313	0.48

The ratio of TH-forms to Y-forms with singular reference is 0.48; not unexpectedly, the Y-forms considerably outnumber the TH-forms.

The figures have to be slightly changed to be comparable with Mulholland's data for MAAN and KL as she excluded from her analysis the pronouns which occurred in songs:

	TH	Ysing	TH:Ysing	
MAAN	219	584	0.37	(Mulholland 1967: 36)
KL	538	575	0.93	(Mulholland 1967: 38)
RIII	568	491	1.18	(Barber 1981: 176)
AYL	296	639	0.46	

The above comparison is rather confusing; singular address presents the picture of considerable fluctuation with no definite preference towards either of the forms. The situation is only slightly more orderly when the ratios of TH-forms to *all* (sing and plural) Y-forms in each play are compared and juxtaposed with the whole of Shakespeare's work.

	TH	Y	TH:Y
Shakespeare	14410	22767	0.63
MAAN	220	700	0.31
KL	533	706	0.75
RIII	568	689	0.82
AYL	313	738	0.42

(data from Spevack 1968-75)

It is difficult, in view of these data, to support the widely accepted idea that *you* was the unmarked, general address form, while *thou* was only used as an expression of special, marked social relations and emotional states. One conclusion could be that Elizabethan pronominal address indeed could be described like this, except that this is not adequately reflected in drama which necessarily involves more tension, and thus more fluctuation, than real life (cf. Barber 1981).

2. Grammatical context

In the analysis of the occurrence of address pronouns in grammatical context I have decided to test Mulholland's conclusion that there is a tendency for *thou* to co-occur with closed-class verbs and for *you* to co-occur with lexical verbs. She examined a number of positional and functional contexts (cf. Mulholland 1967: 36-37), of which I have chosen the ones where the tendency had been found the most pronounced: the pronoun as subject in statements, questions and imperatives. The figures for AYL are the following:

	YOU all	YOU sing	THOU	THOU:YOU sing
A. subject before closed class verbs	136	121	61	0.50
B. subject before lexical verbs	63	51	30	0.59
C. subject after closed class verbs in questions	62	58	19	0.33
D. subject after lexical verbs in questions	29	29	8	0.27
E. subject after closed class in imperatives	—	—	1	
F. subject after lexical verbs in imperatives	21	18	4	0.22
total subject pronouns (excl. "other")	311	277	123	0.44

For one thing, the tendency found by Mulholland, and weakly supported by Barber (1981), is not confirmed by the data from AYL. In fact, the reverse is true in the case of categories A and B: more *thou* subjects occurred with lexical verbs than with closed class verbs in proportion to *you* forms. Even if the tendency for more *thou* with auxiliaries appears corroborated in C and D, the difference is by no means statistically significant. The data for imperatives are too scarce to provide any basis for comparison.

Moreover, in the course of my analysis of the text some doubt arose concerning Mulholland's criteria. The distinction which has critically borne on her results is the one between closed class verbs and lexical verbs. Under closed class verbs she included the auxiliaries *be, have, do, shall, will, should, could, would, may, might, must, and ought* as well as the non-auxiliary uses of *be* and *have*. The latter inclusion seemed questionable to me, so I checked on the occurrence of pronouns with auxiliary and non-auxiliary uses of *have* and *be*. Indeed, their relationship with pronouns may be purely contextual, as there was no great discrepancy between the two groups.

Finally, the data imply that there is no significant difference in the proportion of TH : Y when the subject and the object positions of the pronouns are compared.

3. Statements and questions

Abbott's suggestion that "*thou* is often used in statements and requests, while *you* is used in conditional and other sentences where there is no direct appeal to the person addressed" (Abbott 1966: 158), which has often been taken to be a comment about linguistic conditioning of address pronoun occurrence, clearly points to a pragmatic aspect of the pronoun choice and the social motivations of the speaker. The fact that my AYL data suggest more frequent occurrence of *thou*

in statements than in questions may bear no relation to pragmatic considerations. Anyway, more data need to be examined to call this a tendency.

Similarly, pragmatic in nature is the observation by Abbott that "*ye* seems to be generally used in questions, entreaties, and rhetorical appeals" (Abbott 1966: 159). Of the two instances of *ye* in AYL, one could certainly serve as an adequate illustration:

God ye good ev'n, William.
And good ev'n to you. (AYL; V, 1, 14-15)

4. Lexical context

TH- and Y-pronouns tend to collocate with certain types of vocative expressions (cf. Barber 1981). Apparently, this again constitutes extralinguistic rather than purely linguistic context, because the vocatives in question usually carry a strong emotional load: they are either respectful or abusive. Barber (1981), for instance, investigated the co-occurrence of some vocatives in RIII with *thou* and *you* pronouns. He has found that *lord* necessarily collocates with *you*, while *fellow* only co-occurs with *thou*. Abbott (1870) claims that *sir* calls for the use of *you*. Interestingly, both authors suggest the respectful vocatives to be so strongly associated with *you* that the pronoun is selected even if the vocative is not meant to be polite at all (cf. Barber 1981 – mock-polite vocatives; Abbott 1870 – *sir* used in anger).

In my own analysis of the 59 instances of the vocative *sir* in AYL, 53 co-occurred with *you*, 3 had no pronominal collocate, and only one combined with *thou*. Actually, two of the occurrences of *sir* with *you* are clearly addressed to a social inferior (mock-polite) and one is used in anger. This suggests, in accord with Abbott and Barber, that the strength of the collocation overrides considerations of social and affective nature of the vocative expressions.

Another question of lexical co-occurrence is the use of TH- and Y-pronouns in formulaic expressions. Mulholland (1967) considered phrases such as *pray you, thanke you, and fare thee well*, and did not find them restricted to either pronominal form. I searched the text of AYL for selected set phrases, with the following results:

fare thee well	1	pray thee	3	thank thee	1
fare you well	6	prithe	17	thank ye	1
		pray you	19	thank you	5

Obviously, the data are insufficient for definitive conclusions, yet they hardly disprove Mulholland's observation.

CONCLUSIONS

The (limited) textual data analysed here present little evidence for the claim that the variable occurrence of TH- and Y-pronouns is linguistically conditioned. Moreover, some factors which have often been considered as linguistic in nature should rather be taken to indicate extralinguistic conditioning.

EVALUATION OF THE METHOD

The present work has been aided by the computational analysis of the text of AYL. The Oxford Concordance Program (Hockey – Martin 1987), specifically its micro version, has been used to analyse the electronic version of W. Shakespeare's play, which comes specially edited to serve the researcher's needs. The text is described by means of references, which mark particular characteristics of the literary work (e.g., author, title, speaker, text type – prose, verse, song, etc. – act, scene, line).

Some of the applications of the OCP have been demonstrated or referred to above. The *wordlist* function provided the frequency figures for the address pronouns. The *concordance* option proved particularly useful: it presents a list of selected words or phrases in context together with their frequency, precise localization in the play (act, scene, line) and the name of the character speaking. The following is an instance of an entry of a concordance of TH-forms:

CELIA 1 2 1 I pray *thee* Rosalind, sweet my coz, be merry.

One of the program's many options is to find collocations: the command "XXX" upto 11 "YYY" will identify collocations in which the string XXX is followed by the string YYY up to eleven words apart. This function can be applied to check whether *you* co-occurs with *thou* in a passage of selected length. Also the co-occurrence of pronouns with vocatives, prepositions, etc. could be examined.

Another feature of the program is the possibility to analyse only specific parts of the text – for my purposes I required it to exclude *songs* in the play.

Thus, the OCP offers numerous advantages to the researcher, some of them being: 1) the reliable and quick counting of words, phrases, word patterns, etc.; 2) the presentation of required items in easily expandable context (e.g., up to a full stop); 3) the performance of simple statistics (e.g., word frequency profiles, type-token ratios).

On the other hand, the limitations of the computational text analysis should not be underestimated. The computer acts quickly and accurately, yet mechanically; the objectives and commands have to be precisely defined. Many of the tasks are definitely easier to the human eye than to the machine. For example, the computer will identify and add up all the instances of Y-pronouns but it has no way of knowing which of them have plural reference. Finally, some other problems are due to the limitations of a particular program. With the OCP, for instance, when looking for collocations, it is easy to examine the right hand context for the collocate in question, but not the left context.

All in all, however, much of the time-consuming and dull work is spared to the researcher, and the reliability of the calculations can be trusted.

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