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AN INSIGHT INTO PRONOUNS OF ADDRESS IN ENGLISH

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1. INTRODUCTION

The *English Oxford Living Dictionaries* define *language* as “[t]he method of human communication, either spoken or written, consisting of the use of words in a structured and conventional way” (2016). The most direct and simple way of communication consists of a spoken interaction where two participants, a speaker and a receiver, take turns to engage in a speech situation.

When analysing a particular speech context from a sociolinguistic point of view, the characterisation of each of the participants becomes much more thorough; in particular, and for the purpose of our present project, every participant plays a specific social role which contributes to creating their own identity. These social role relationships played by interactants, the *tenor* (Halliday 1985), are very rarely symmetrical, but rather either exhibit different power status, such as differences in age, experience, riches, etc.; or show certain degree of solidarity (see Brown & Gilman 1960; Wales 1996: 73) or contact and/or affective involvement between participants (Poynton 1985; Eggins 2004: 100). All of this inevitably conditions the way they address each other. After all, a language is a reflex of the society or community that uses it, and thus the way we speak characterises the way we fit and define ourselves in a particular social group and vice versa (see Eggins 2004: 99). For this reason, it becomes paramount to analyse how all of these patterns and behaviours are realised in the actual language. The route chosen for doing so will be the study of personal pronouns of address and politeness distinctions in the English language. Even if none of these aforementioned features became realised in a speech situation, and the relationship between both participants was 100% equal, then that would be object of study as well.

2. JUSTIFICATION AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

There is a wide range of means available in the language to direct attention or refer to one or more people. Among these referential possibilities we find in communicative exchanges, Helmbrecht (2003) presents a series of ways to reference individuals. We can use noun phrases combined with certain specifications that help us identify and define the referent that the speaker is talking about. Next come the honorific terms of address, together with proper names and relational nouns, i.e. nouns implying a certain kinship relation to one of the participants. Last and object of our study are personal pronouns, as a clear-cut and fixed group of deictic expressions of the language. What

distinguishes this latter group of referential forms from the rest is that personal pronouns are not modified or determined by other constituents in the sentence. Furthermore, while the other referential expressions can be frequently used in a series of speech contexts simultaneously, personal pronouns are shifters (Jakobson 1971), as they take a specific referent in a particular speech event but their meaning will change and be updated as the communicative exchange evolves, identifying a different referent each time.

What all these above-mentioned referential expressions have in common is that they encode certain social relationships between speakers. When aiming to predict the linguistic features that are going to be realised in a particular context of situation we need to go beyond the linguistic signs themselves, and study the register of the situation (Halliday 1978: 33). Halliday, McIntosh and Stevens (1964: 87) suggested a triadic formula of three different variables involved in language use, namely 'field', 'tenor' and 'mode', which later Halliday encompasses as the three categories to determine register (1978). By defining these variables, and consequently the register, claims the author, we are going to be able to investigate "the linguistic foundations of everyday social interaction from an angle that is complementary to the ethnomethodological one" (Halliday 1978: 62).

In particular, the 'tenor' or 'style of discourse' as it was initially coined (see Halliday *et al.* 1964), which is the category this project is concerned with, refers to the relationship between participants. However, as Halliday (1978: 33) claims, it does not only involve the levels of formality but also other factors as the degree of emotional charge in a particular situation. For this reason, we can talk of 'social deixis' (Levinson 1983: 89) in personal pronouns, that is, their capacity of expressing different degrees of respect and familiarity among participants.

All in all, the present project focuses on personal pronouns of address, i.e. the forms we have of addressing the other participant/s when establishing a dialogue or conversation, in the English language, a language which, strikingly enough, at least for foreigners, only has one recognised pronoun of address in its present-day form (Brown & Gilman 1960: 252). The study of these pronouns becomes even more tempting for me as an English-as-a-foreign-language teacher in Europe, since the difference in pronoun use between English and many other European languages is rather remarkable. One of the aspects that calls English students' attention most at the first stages of their learning process is the fact that present-day standard English has one

single form, *you*, for both singular and plural address, as well as to express familiarity and/or politeness connotations, while most other European languages offer at least two pronouns. At the point of learning about this particularity of English, students feel the need to fill in this gap the language has left and always enquire on how natives resolve the situation and find ways of expressing these meanings, connotations and subtleties.

While it is true that *you* is the form available for second-person address in contemporary standard English, this has not always been the case. Earlier periods of the development of the English language have seen the emergence and disappearance of other forms, which still persist in certain regional non-standard dialects of the language. As a consequence, it can be said that social distinctions between participants in terms of their personal status have been at times possible to be encoded in English with the pronoun *thou* (see Wales 1996: 73). Nowadays, however, the pronoun *thou* is reserved for literary and religious purposes (Brown & Gilman 1960: 252), and overall the English language seems to have lost the capacity of expressing such politeness distinctions and meanings, a process that has not happened in other languages belonging to its very same family or having had a parallel development.

As Wales admits, from this description it may seem that there is no real use in trying to analyse and dissect personal pronouns of address of English in much more detail (Wales 2003: 172). As a consequence, the description of pronouns in grammar books and histories is prescriptive in most cases, barely offering a very limited insight into the topic with just a few strokes, without going into much detail (Wales 1996) and ruling out a potential discussion when deeming English to “ha[ving] only one second person pronoun, *you*” (see, e.g. Gramley & Pätzold 1992: 196). Furthermore, most history books stop examining these distinctions after the seventeenth century as if there was no point in their discussion whatsoever. This viewpoint seems to be rather limited and narrow, focusing only on the standard varieties of the language and excluding most other regional non-standard dialects, some of which still maintain these referential distinctions, such as the cases of the regions of Scotland or Ireland, to name but a few. All in all, this disregard calls for a need to define the term ‘English’ and what it actually comprehends, which Wales critically calls “formal written standard English” (Wales 2003: 173).

Nowadays, the large array of viewpoints and techniques we have to carry out research in real language in the fields of sociolinguistics, semiotics and discourse analysis, together with corpus linguistics, should allow for a deeper and more complex study of personal pronouns of address (Wales 1983) to get a bigger picture of the whole paradigm. After all, we use personal pronouns at all times day after day, and consequently their use should be thoroughly and pragmatically analysed. We tell English-as-a-FL students that the English are stereotypically rather formal and polite when compared to the Spanish, for instance, but instead they lack a personal pronoun of address to mark politeness; how can that be accounted for?

The difficulty in studying all these features is that we do not have real speech from the past, and consequently linguists have drawn their information from plays, several legal proceedings as well as letters. For a contemporary analysis, the amount of data available poses no problem to research, and though some have been drawn from literature, the most practical for Brown and Gilman's research study (1960), for instance, come from long conversations with native speakers and questionnaires to students from abroad.

The aim of the present project is in the first place to go back in history and summarise the main changes and processes that personal pronouns of address have undergone in the English language. Next, to make a comparison between English and other Indo-European languages to describe the different patterns available to us. Then, we will move to the present day and describe the current situation in the English speaking world; to finally move to our research study offering a pragmatic analysis of these pronouns in their real usage both synchronically and diachronically. In order to accomplish this, we will rely on four different online corpora that will provide us with the necessary data to draw sound conclusions.

Our objective is double-fold as we not only intend to delve into and get to know first-hand the evolution of personal pronouns of address in English until the present day, but also to try and explain why this gap might have appeared, whether it means an actual gap for natives, and if so, how they find systems to fill it in. We will also see that alternative pronominal expressions are appearing to make a singular-plural distinction available for speakers. For long, it seemed the existing forms in the standard were fitting enough for all possible speaking purposes, but if so, why is it that new forms are emerging in a totally natural and spontaneous way? This question clearly raises a few issues about our topic at hand.

3. PRONOUNS OF ADDRESS IN THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH

Today the English language only has one personal pronoun of address, *you*, while other languages with common ancestors, roots or grammars and lexis related to English do actively use two singular pronouns of address.

In Old English, the use of second person pronouns was very simple and straightforward: *thou* was the singular nominative form, with its variants *thee*, *thy* and *thine*, and it was used in talking to one single person or addressee; its counterpart in the plural was *you* in the objective form, with *ye*, *your* and *yours* as other variant forms, all used when talking to more than one person (see Crystal 2004: 580). It is interesting to notice that this originally plural identity of the pronoun *you* can still be construed in present-day English from the use of the verb *to be* in the plural form, *are / were*, for both singular and plural *you* (Wales 1996: 74), i.e. *you are*. The form **you is / was* can only be found in non-standard varieties, and it has never become ingrained in any formal written standard of English.

The next historical event that would mark the development of the English language is the Norman Conquest, which took place in 1066. The reason why this episode is so relevant to historical linguistics is the fact that it had a tremendous influence on the adoption of French vocabulary, something that clearly characterises the Middle English and later periods. Likewise, the personal pronouns of address also witnessed a change: *you* emerged and, regardless of its plural use, it started to be also used as a singular pronoun in the thirteenth century. At the beginning, its use was confined to English literature and to polite address. It would be one century later, in the fourteenth century, when this use would become formally established, thanks mainly to the flourishing courtly practice of the time, first to address superiors and then extended among equals as well. In contrast, *thou* was used to address inferiors and in the family sphere only. This specialization led to the emergence of a clear *you-thou* distinction in English (see T-V distinction below). In this same line, something similar had been happening in the French language some years before, with the pronoun *vous* becoming the specific singular and polite form as an alternative to *tu*. In fact, Crystal (2004: 475) links the emergence of this first change in the English language to the French nobility, who supposedly would have extrapolated these changes in French pronouns to the English language, just like they did with the lexis.

This distinction that was appearing in English in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries is thought to have first started with Latin in the fourth century, when the plural

vos (V) was first used to address one single person, the emperor. Up to that moment the only form available in the antiquity for singular address was *tu* (T). Presumably, the reason that might have propelled such a trend is that there were actually two emperors at the time, and although they did have a unified power, it made sense to treat them in the plural form. Another conjecture claims the form comes from the plural role of the emperor as a representative of his people. Besides, Brown and Gilman (1960) explain, it was commonplace for the power figures to use the first person plural, where the layman would use a singular, and by extension, this would have been applied to the choice of pronoun of address as well.

From the figure of the emperor, this was gradually extended to addressing kings and aristocrats and eventually would be adopted to address any social superiors or strangers as a general pattern (Crystal 2004: 476). Nevertheless, for long, there was fluctuation between the use to T and V pronouns. It was not until roughly the fourteenth century that a set of rules was established in Latin, a set that most other European languages would later adopt under Latin influence.

What is striking of this T-V distinction to mark deference and formality is the fact that it seems it was not specific to Latin or Romance languages, but there was a large number of other languages with little or no relation and contact with Latin that developed parallel patterns as well (Brown & Levinson 1987: 203. Accordingly, the division that prevailed in the ME period in educated standard English was the one that follows in Table 1. It needs to be noted that there was no clear-cut division but rather it could be better defined as a continuum.

Little by little, the *you*-form started to gain power in detriment of the *thou*-form, which started to become obsolete in Early Modern English. As a result, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries we find the exact reverse situation from that in the thirteenth century as *you* started to be used as an unmarked form, and the *thou*-form constituted the marked pronoun of address (Jakobson 1971). As Strang (1979: 140) reasons, once the change was made, it would quickly become popular, simply because, in case of doubt, one would always rather sound too polite than offending the listener, and would thus always favour the new 'plural' unmarked form to address a single person. Furthermore, these changes originated in the upper spheres of society and the nature of people led them to imitate those they would like to resemble, making *you* gradually more and more famous. All in all, the pattern most commonly followed was *you* among equals in the upper ranks, such as among kings, courtiers, the nobility, country

gentlemen and the like, while *thou* was used among servants, shepherds, farmers and the clergy (Fennell 2002: 164).

YOU		THOU
to social superiors (ordinary people to nobles, children to parents, servants to masters...)	←-----→	to social inferiors (nobles to ordinary people, parents to children, masters to servants...)
by the upper class (even when talking to each other or if closely related)	←-----→	by the lower class (when talking to each other)
respect, admiration	←-----→	contempt, scorn
address in public	←-----→	address in private
formal or neutral address	←-----→	familiar or intimate (also in addressing God, to ghosts, witches and other supernatural imaginary beings, address to someone absent...)
change in the emotional temperature	←-----→	change in the emotional temperature

Table 1. Values of *thou* and *you* in ME period (adapted from Wales 1996: 75; Crystal 2004: 477)

Concurrently, another change was taking place during the sixteenth century: the subject and object pronominal forms *you-ye* and *thou-thee* merged, leaving room for only the *you* and *thou* forms in Early Modern English. *Ye* was progressively confined to literary, religious and archaic contexts, until its final disappearance (Strang 1979: 140). The disappearance of the subject *ye* is linked by Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg (2003: 60) to the disappearance of case contrast in general in English. Nevertheless, in particular, the authors explain that this change is originally derived from phonological confusion between the two pronouns, which had the same weak forms and thus sounded too alike (see Fennell 2002: 143).

As for *thou*, its use in the literature of the time varied a lot depending on the author. While Shakespeare made extensive use of it, probably due to his adherence to a particular regional dialect, it did not materialise in writings by other authors such as Jonson's (Crystal 2004). It seems Shakespeare's use of the T-V distinction was not particularly consistent anyhow, as he alternated their use to mark differences in social status and rank, as well as to denote intimacy and familiarity between friends and lovers. In some cases, this variation was intentionally used to convey certain

connotations, while in others it was seemingly random (see Mazzon 1992: 134). According to Crystal (2004: 478), the main factor to mark the choice of one form or the other was mainly changes in the emotional temperature (see section 5 below; Brown & Gilman 1960: 277). It is for this reason, apparently, that switches between *you* and *thou* were not unusual between characters when the author wanted to express special affection or intimacy, while the opposite change was used to denote respect (Crystal 2004: 583). By all means, this switch was context-dependent, since a certain change at a particular time could indicate disdain or condescension if used among equals, for instance. This advantageous use of language was not confined to literature only but speakers could also frequently be found using these switches to construe certain connotations and meanings.

Finally, it is in the midst of the seventeenth century when the *thou* form would disappear from the standardised version of English. It is thought that there were a series of factors involved in the marginalisation of *thou*, all of them assumed to be highly linked to the development of a stiffer set of social norms at the time. Besides, this specialisation in usage is still visible nowadays in the few and marginal uses of *thou*, mainly in religious and liturgical texts, as will be explained in later sections.

During this same period, the foundation of a written and spoken standard in London marginalised the dialects, consequently downgrading their status. As a result, the *thou* forms that had been prevalent in rural dialects together with the language of the artisan immigrants, which had been directly inherited from Old English, were progressively forsaken by the rising middle classes, who associated them to impoliteness and social unacceptability. Nevertheless, these forms continued to survive and still do so among the oldest generations of speakers, as well as in the regional dialects of certain areas in England and Scotland, as will be explained in later sections of this project.

The emergence of new revolutionary political and religious factions with the Religious Society of Friends movements, such as the Quakers, was another factor that had an influence on this marginalisation of *thou*. These groups were in favour of universal brotherhood and social equality, and thus, for them, *thou* was the most suitable form to address their peers as it denoted familiarity and intimacy. This is the reason why the use of *thou* spread in the fifteenth century, since it reflected Plain Speech much more accurately, and it brought them all closer to what they considered was the reality that Christ would have lived with his disciples. Precisely because they

liked such forms, the Quakers and other similar groups were often confronted and even suffered violent attacks, for using forms that had started to be considered too impolite and rural, and even insulting (see Brown & Gilman 1960: 268; Crystal 2004: 478).

The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries also witnessed a proliferation of publications in the scholarly biblical field, especially due to the establishment of the Church of England. This led to large number of translations and new productions. The pronoun *thou* was favoured as a pronoun of singular address in an attempt to imitate Greek and Latin originals, as revealed by its appearance in the *Book of Common Prayer* (1549). The use of *thou* would progressively construe archaic connotations, but its presence in the Authorised Version, for instance, ensured its survival as a marked form to address God. By extension, *thou* acquired elevated connotations and started to adopt a stylistic function for poetic and dramatic address. Such was the case that its use was even extended to invoke supernatural forces, as seen in Table 1.

In short, by 1770 the survival of *thou* was confined to religious and literary discourse, dialectal speech and among the Quakers (Strang 1979: 140). It is remarkable how in a matter of centuries *thou* and *you* switched roles, from *thou* being regarded as a pronoun of low-prestige, reserved for the lower classes, with intimate and even impolite connotations in medieval times, to being directly linked to high prestige and upper social classes. The present-day pattern of use in marriage ceremonies of the pronoun *thou* also calls our attention as it retains some of its medieval connotations of intimacy. This is probably the same intimacy nuance present in prayers, which can be understood as private and intimate monologues for only God to hear (see Wales 1996: 78).

	<i>Old English</i>	<i>Middle English to sixteenth century</i>	<i>Seventeenth to twentieth centuries</i>	<i>Late twentieth century</i>
<i>Thou</i>	sg.	familiar, informal, intimate	Marked	Archaic
<i>You</i>	[pl.]	polite, formal, authoritative	Unmarked	Common core

Table 2. Stages of *thou* and *you* in linguistic history (adapted from Wales 1996: 77)

Finally, from the twentieth century onwards, the use of *thou* has been and continues to remain basically confined to liturgical discourse as well as to certain dialects, as will be seen in more detail in later sections. Yet, Wales (2003) criticises the fact that *thou* is overall excluded from grammar books simply for not being part of the standard. Table 2 summarises the different stages of the linguistic history of *thou* and *you* in a very simplified manner.

4. PRONOUNS AND OTHER FORMS OF ADDRESS AROUND THE WORLD

This section is going to summarise the main pronoun politeness markers that exist in a variety of languages around the world in order to broaden the scope of this project and see other realities beyond English. For such a purpose we are going to rely on Helmbrech's (2003) geographical survey on politeness distinctions in pronouns, according to which he then grouped languages in four different classes according to how politeness is marked.

As has been previously introduced, the English language represents an exception among many Indo-European languages and other languages around the world, as it only has one single pronoun of address which is not marked in terms of politeness. But English is not the only language that does not have politeness distinction in its pronouns. This is also the case of other languages such as Hebrew, Mongolian or Swahili, as can be seen in Table 3.

A second group of languages encompasses those showing binary politeness distinctions, as is the case of most of the European ones showing the T-V distinction pattern. In particular, many of these languages mark politeness in the address to the hearer by making use of a second person plural pronoun. For example, in the Middle Ages, the French started to use the V pronoun *vous* to address people from a higher rank as well as foreigners. Although its origins are not known, it transferred into the English language as Crystal (2004: 475) postulates. Consequently, this process led to the creation of a new distinction without the need for new forms to be introduced into the language. All in all, this duality implied that for the second person singular there would be a choice between formal/polite *vous* or informal/equal *tu*, a distinction that did not apply to the plural reference, which used *vous* regardless of the degree of politeness intended.

The fact that a majority of languages share the feature of using a second person plural pronoun for reference to a single addressee in the polite form does not mean that they all display the same pragmatic rules. Each language shows its register particularities, and decides the most suitable option for each context either situationally or linguistically, depending on how field, tenor and mode are realised (see Halliday 1985). This means that what could be interpreted as a sufficiently formal context in a language as to use a polite pronoun, might not be so in another (see section 5). Similarly, address between equals might vary a lot, some languages favouring the informal option while others require the polite. Besides, some languages portray a more symmetrical pattern than others, that is, if one is addressed by a specific pronoun, s/he should answer accordingly. In contrast, in other cases these changes depend on one's social status. A final remark is necessary to highlight the volatility of all these patterns, which tend to vary both synchronically and diachronically. As we have seen with the example of English, at some point it fitted in the second parameter of T-V binary distinction, before *you* replaced *thou* setting it aside to a merely anecdotal presence in the language. In section 5, we will see these pragmatic interpretations applied to the English language under Brown and Gilman's (1960) guidance.

In the case of German or Italian, to name some alternative examples, the third person singular and plural pronouns are used for formal address: distinction *tu/lei* in Italian and *du/Sie* in German. Besides, as previously introduced, not all languages rely on existing pronouns to develop a singular form to express respect, but instead need to resort to the introduction of new forms into the paradigm. This is the case of Spanish, which took the complex form *vuestra merced*, i.e. "your grace", that evolved into *usted/ustedes*, and turned it into a new pronoun with both singular and plural forms. Finally, other European languages resort to demonstrative pronouns, reflexive pronouns, and nouns designating social status and rank, among others, for polite address to the hearer.

Third come languages that mark more than one degree of politeness in their pronominal systems. As can be seen in the table, this is the case of languages in Central America and Southeast Asia. In most cases, we can find one degree of politeness marked by a second person plural pronoun, as is the case of French presented above, and another form even more formal often using a reflexive or a third person pronoun.

Finally, a fourth parameter used to group languages is what Helmbrecht (2003) calls “pronoun avoidance”, i.e. languages whose speakers tend to avoid the use of pronouns in discourse, which often have to be construed from context, a phenomenon known as ‘zero anaphora’. This is the case of Far East Asian languages where the focus is no longer on pronouns, but on other words used in a similar way to European pronouns. This system complicates the classification of their forms from a western perspective, since these languages understand the paradigm as a continuum of nouns displaying many complex grammatical features in one single word.

GLOBAL REGIONS/ CONTINENTS	NO POLITENESS DISTINCTION	BINARY POLITENESS DISTINCTION	SEVERAL POLITENESS DISTINCTIONS	PRONOUN AVOIDANCE
EUROPE	English	Basque, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Russian, Spanish, Italian		
NEAR AND MIDDLE EAST	Abkhaz, Hebrew, Lezgian	Persian, Georgian, Turkish		
INDIA	Manipuri		Hindi, Kannada	
CENTRAL ASIA	Mongolian, Burushaski, Chukchee	Chinese		
SOUTHEAST ASIA			Tagalog	Japanese, Korean, Thai, Vietnamese
CENTRAL AMERICA	Jakaltek, Mezquital Otomi, Rama	Mixtec		
PAPUA	Alamblak, Kewa, Maibrat, Pasi			
AUSTRALIA	Goonyiandi, Kayardild, Tiwi, Maung			
PACIFIC	Luvukaleve, Rapanui	Fijian		
NORTH AMERICA	Acoma, Kiowa, Lakhota, Wichita			
SOUTH AMERICA	Mapuche, Mataco, Sanuma, Warao	Quechua		
AFRICA	Egyptian, Bagirmi, Swahili, Zulu	Luvale, Nama, Sango, Yoruba		

Table 3. Distribution over global regions and continents (adapted from Helmbrecht 2003: 198)

5. LINGUISTIC AND SITUATIONAL VARIABLES CONDITIONING PRONOUNS OF ADDRESS

Once a thorough description of the diachronic evolution of pronouns of address in English has been offered and we have been able to see its features in contrast with those of other coexisting languages, it is necessary to obtain some insight into the pragmatic use of these pronouns, that is, the different variables that condition our choice.

According to Brown and Gilman (1960: 252), what makes these pronouns interesting from a socio-linguistic point of view is their “close association with two dimensions fundamental to the analysis of all social life – the dimensions of power and solidarity”. The authors claim that these two dimensions are essential in the semantic and stylistic analysis of pronouns of address. First, from a semantic point of view, the choice of the pronoun is determined by the existing relationship between the speakers, regarding both power and solidarity. Because this is objectively established, it could be extrapolated to any parallel relationship between two people with the same features. However, an additional stylistic variation is introduced by the authors, as they claim the covariation between the pronoun used is sometimes determined by the transient moods and attitudes of the speakers, and that is definitely a subjective choice made by the speaker. Thus, what we see is that the choice of pronouns might not only come from the social life of speakers, but also carry some expressive meaning as well. In fact, it needs to be highlighted that, at the time the T-V distinction was introduced through Latin, it seems that it was stylistics and not semantics that governed the covariation between the pronoun uses, as exemplified earlier in section 3 with Shakespeare. In those cases, we have explained that one pronoun could be favoured over the other simply because it rhymed better in the verse.

The first dimension to be established was power semantics. This essentially meant that the choice of pronoun was marked by the power relation between speakers in terms of wealth, age, physical strength, sex, or by the role they played in the social or institutional group they belonged to such as church, state, army, family... In addition, this power was non-reciprocal, in the sense that the two speakers did not have the same status: a superior would use T but receive V. For instance, in medieval times the Pope would address his subordinates using T and they would answer with T. The first experience one had from birth with T-V distinctions was in the relation to parents, and this was then extended to other similar forms of address. Other similar relationships

include address between nobility and the common people, employer-employee, soldier-office, etc. Even though these distinctions existed, the structures were not rigidly marked and it was not a clear-cut choice.

The abovementioned examples always presupposed a difference in power between the speakers, but in some cases there could also be an equivalent relation of power between them. At first, no rule was established for these cases and thus the decision was made by imitation; in general, the upper classes would exchange V and the lower classes T.

Gradually, a second dimension started to emerge and a distinction was made between T for intimacy and familiarity and V for formality and politeness. The solidarity semantic dimension basically postulates that the more closeness there is in a relationship, the more solidarity there is, and thus, consequently, the more probability to use T, e.g. twin brothers have the highest possible solidarity and will reciprocally and symmetrically use T. It needs to be noted, though, that not every personal attribute plays a role in determining the solidarity in a relationship. Brown and Gilman (1960: 258) selected like-mindedness and similar behaviour predispositions, such as political membership, family, religion, profession, sex or birthplace, as the most decisive factors to choose one of the two pronouns. Another rule that applies to the solidarity dimension is that the more frequency of contact between speakers, the more probable a use of T will be; nevertheless, the authors state that again, this is not clear-cut, and frequent contact does not necessarily in all cases imply a mutual use of T: it will depend on whether contact goes hand in hand with like-mindedness.

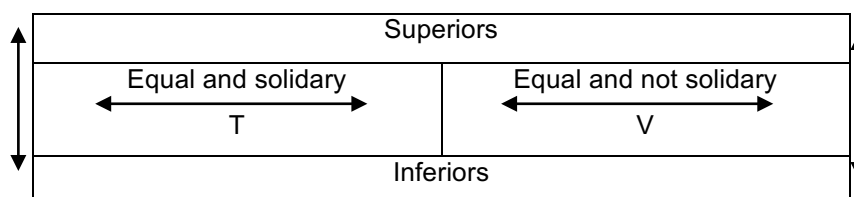


Table 4. The two dimensional semantics (adapted from Brown & Gilman 1960: 259)

Now that the two dimensions have been defined, it is easier to justify the choices of speakers in real examples. For instance, a customer will use either T or V with a waiter depending on the solidarity they share, while the waiter will always use V. Similarly, a parent will use T with his/her child for solidarity and familiarity reasons, while the child

might use either T or V depending on whether s/he gives more importance to power or solidarity.

Besides, in some cases, it seems that the pronoun does not always necessarily follow a group norm and it can violate the relationships within the group. As we have seen in the introductory comments to this section, according to Brown and Gilman (1960: 253), the choice of a pronoun was not simply a matter of status alone conditioned by the semantic dimension, but the expressive or emotive side of the speaker could additionally also play a role. This means that whenever an unexpected pronoun is used, we should consider the speakers' attitudes towards one another in order to justify the choice. For instance, Fennell says that a marked use of a *thou*-form when *you* was most expected would indicate that "the exchange is emotionally charged" (2002: 164). As Brown and Gilman (1960: 277) explain, there are two possibilities: that either the norms of power or the norms of solidarity are broken. If the former happens, it would imply that the speaker explicitly makes it known to the hearer that s/he considers him/her as an inferior, superior or equal. Conversely, if the latter takes place, it can be seen as a change of sympathy, either extending it and thus increasing the intimacy and familiarity between speakers, or the opposite. For example, an employer may start using T with his/her employee to show satisfaction with his/her job, or an outsider may start using T with his/her group-mates to show that s/he feels comfortable and fitting in the group.

The contemporary use of the T-V distinction is also somewhat complex across languages, as the choice is not equally applicable to every one of them. There is a considerable contrast between French and German, for instance, as it is more probable for a German to use T within the family than it is for a French person. Conversely, a French person would more easily use T to express camaraderie than a German one. Italian also differs from these two languages in the sense that it surpasses both of them in the probability to use T, among relatives and friends alike. Besides, the probability for an Italian male to use T with a female is much greater than for a German or French.

In this line of comparisons, unlike languages such as French or German which were rigid in these behavioural patterns, this change was not irreversible in the English language at the times when it offered this T-V distinction, as Gilman and Brown (1960: 280) point out: regardless of whether a *you*-form had been previously introduced, the speaker could then very easily shift back to *you*, even in the same speech, as seen

with Shakespeare's example in section 3. This feature, called 'easy retractability' by the authors, could have played a role in the final disappearance of *thou* in English, as Fennell (2002: 164) suggests (see also Jespersen 1905); the fact that no specific set of norms is established facilitates changes.

Brown and Gilman (1960) conclude that the development of open and equalitarian societies could have been behind the preference for the reciprocal solidarity semantic dimension, i.e. when one receives T answers T and when one is addressed with V reciprocally answers with V, and against the former non-reciprocal use. Besides, they also mention as evidence for this conclusion that the language additionally offers a large number of alternative expressions for address that are similarly non-reciprocal, as titles and proper names. However, the authors compare the use of pronouns to the use of these other alternative expressions, and reach the conclusion that in general the former pose the speaker in a greater face-threatening act than the latter, as s/he has to at least implicitly code power through the inflection of the verb chosen (see Brown & Levinson 1987). In this sense, English is at an advantageous position in comparison with other European languages, in that the lack of a T-V distinction allows the speaker not to take a stance and save his/her face by avoiding any term of address. When one sticks to the pronoun *you*, one saves his/her face by not showing any particular inflection for the verb either in the singular or in the plural.

In response to the question posed in section 2 on how it is possible for English to be regarded as a formal language when it lacks politeness marks in its present-day pronouns, it should be noted that, certainly it has been proved that "more polite strategies are employed in speaking Spanish, while more neutral strategies are used in English" (Walters 1979: 277). Consequently, we infer from these data that, in fact, this presumed formality of English is mostly stereotypical and probably more cultural than linguistic. The question that we could raise here, however, is whether the nature of both languages is sufficiently similar as to make this comparison possible. After all, the use of *usted* in Spanish is considered formal in opposition to the informal *you* in English, but the lack of a distinction in standard English makes *you* perfectly valid and sufficiently formal for all cases.

6. PRESENT-DAY ADDRESS IN ENGLISH

The present-day standard of the English language only uses one unmarked expression for singular and plural address, and that is the pronoun *you*. This has often been presented as a drawback of the language, when compared to other similar European languages offering more choices, since English does not allow the speaker to convey any shades of meaning. Nevertheless, this fact can also be seen as an advantage, as Brown and Gilman (1960: 270) claim, precisely in the ambiguous sense it connotes, for instance, in advertising and propaganda, or in social relations where solidarity is not clear to the speakers. In these cases, the lack of precision allows the speaker to avoid risking his/her face, as seen in the previous section.

All in all, this section focuses on two main features: first, it turns our attention to the pronoun nowadays presumably in disuse, i.e. *thou*. While it is true that the informal familiarity once related to the *thou* pronoun is mere history, some everyday uses of this pronoun still survive in certain regions of England, as well as in the language of liturgy and literary compositions. Secondly, this section will move on to tackle several new emerging forms of pronominal address in the English language in its different regional varieties.

6.1. *Thou* in religion

In liturgical discourse, the use of *thou* has, for a few centuries, started to be seen as a style marker of authority and status, and therefore it is often used as a powerful symbol in religious ceremonies. However, what is remarkable about its use is that apparently it can take two different connotations, which at first sight seem contradictory but at the same time seem to somehow connect at certain levels. On the one hand, we have just seen that it can be used in a deferential manner to express respect and denote power (Brown & Gilman 1960: 256). It very often appears in the scriptures to refer to any figure of authority. Nevertheless, it can, at the same time, be used with intimacy connotations in prayers, which, after all, can be regarded as private and intimate dialogues with God. Similarly, the pronoun continues to be used in marriage ceremonies, even in civil ones, where once more there is a certain degree of intimacy as well as affection implied in its use (Wales 1996: 78). This usage of the pronoun *thou* retrieves the origins of the term in Old English as a form denoting familiarity, as well as it reminds us of the sense of brotherhood and equality among those sharing the pronoun that the Quakers tried to instil.

As for its actual use in figures, it needs to be noted that the presence of the *thou* pronoun in the English language is not very common and has a merely anecdotal presence in corpora such as the British National Spoken Corpus (see Wales 2003: 174). Regarding the types of texts it appears in, it is most common in written liturgical documents as well as chants, and in some very specific formulaic expressions generally deriving from religious uses, such as *thou shalt (not)*, which, as Wales (2003) explains, started off as a parody of the Ten Commandments of the Old Testament. Section 7 of this project presents our research study, which focuses on offering some insightful additional data to support and validate this thesis.

6.2. *Thou* in regional dialects

In opposition to the ambivalent use of *you* in formal written English to refer to both a single individual or a mass-noun, which has been explained to be regarded as advantageous by some linguists, “many dialects and varieties of English seem to find a formal distinction extremely useful between a single addressee and more than one, at least for statements and questions” (Wales 1996: 73). For instance, *thou* is still used among the older generations of speakers in areas such as Lancashire, the north of England, etc. The use that these regional varieties make of the pronoun takes us back to the two dimensions Brown and Gilman (1960: 253) refer to, as it is ruled first by the relationship of power between speakers, but next by the solidarity they share. One of the subjects interviewed by Wales (2003: 176), for instance, claimed one would not dare use a *thou* form with a young person of his/her same age if this person was not well known to him/her. Furthermore, affective switching is also detected even in the same utterance, as happened in earlier periods of the language when *thou* was actually in extensive use.

In the analysis of usage, Wales (2003: 178) presents two main examples which strikingly have a contradictory nature; one supports the idea of *thou* having familiarity connotations between a mother and her child (i), while the other stresses the authority and rudeness of the manager uttering it towards his employee (ii). She accounts for this by concluding that in the same way that the word “mate” has different positive or negative connotations depending on the area of use, so do *thou*-forms, which are likely to vary from region to region.

- (i) toddler: ‘That man’s looking at me’
mother: ‘That man’s looking at **thee**? That’s all right’

- (ii) 'This particular day [the manager] comes round to me, he says, 'Take this lamp', he said.' Bugger off down there', he says, 'and **thou** can <unclear> the coal...'

6.3. Filling the gap: New pronouns of address

It is interesting to acknowledge that despite the predictions of linguists, *thou* is still very much present in the language, at least through regional dialects, which will not allow it to die out, at least in the near future. In fact, new forms are constantly being created to suit the needs of speakers, and these are progressively gaining more ground. In response to our question at the beginning of this project which enquired on the need for speakers to replace the '*thou*-gap', Wales confirms that indeed "it would seem that speakers across regions clearly do feel the need to fill the 'gap', so to speak, left in the history of 'standard' English with the loss of a singular/plural distinction" (1996: 73).

On the one hand, the lack of a singular/plural distinction caused by the disappearance of *thou* can simply be avoided as standard English chooses to do, by using an ambiguous *you* or by resorting to other forms of address, such as the use of titles as opposed to first names.

Nevertheless, on the other hand, it seems most dialects are opting for the development of new forms derived or lexicalized from existing ones. First of all, one of the possibilities that speakers have is to create a distinction between singular and plural by changing the verb-form; this would imply using *you is / was* to address one single person, and maintaining the *you are / were* only for plural use. This pattern does not seem to have been very pervasive and only settled in the colloquial speech of Tees-side in the East-End of London, particularly in the eighteenth century (see Wales 2003: 182).

Another way of solving the problem is by resorting to the creation of a specific form for the plural, which normally stems from the pronominalisation and localization of *you*. This process is much more widespread, the American English version being probably the most stigmatized of them all: from the phrase *you all*, a new form has been created eliding the *you* into the *all*. Curiously, the elision has not merged the *all* into the *you*, which would have been expected in order to make the pronominal origin of the expression clear. As for its pervasiveness, this form is most frequent in southern areas of the United States and also among Black American communities (Wales 2003: 182). The film industry, for instance, has taken advantage of this characteristically southern trait to feature southerners in movies. What allows linguists to conclude the

pronominal status of *y'all* is that it allows for the addition of possessive 's, in the same line as the pronoun *one*. This pronominal form has spread and reached British English, where it is most commonly used as an emphazier, i.e. not only to mark the plural, but also to denote inclusiveness of the group addressed (Wales 2003: 183).

In the British Isles context, we find other pronominalised forms such as *yous(e)* in Dublin, Northern Ireland and Northern English of Liverpool, Glasgow and several north-eastern regions. It is thought that this form might have been influenced by Gaelic at some point, but it has spread widely to areas like southern England in present-day, which makes it difficult to trace back its origin. Besides, Hiberno-English uses a similar variant *yi* (see Wales 1996; 2003).

Other regions opt for a combination of these pronominal forms in short phrases or formulaic expressions, mostly used in informal conversation, such as *two of yours*, *any of yours*, *yous lot...* and even with numbers, like *you two*. These phrases can also be lexicalized in some cases, resulting in NPs where *you* works as a determiner, such as *yousuns* (Hiberno-English), *yins* i.e. 'you ones' (Glaswegian), *you together* (East Anglian) or the already mentioned *y'all* (Southern United States) and *yu ol* (Samoan Plantation Pidgin) (Wales 1996: 73).

As has been seen, in general, all these forms are used in an informal, familiar or even emotive tone, and they are normally difficult to categorise due to their ambiguous nature; it is difficult to tell where the pronoun ends and the phrase begins. This is what happens with many *you* + NP phrases such as the expression *you guys* from American English. Curiously, this form has sometimes been used to refer to both sexes, even if originally it should construe only male reference, adding supporting evidence to the new pronominal nature of the phrase (Wales 2003: 181).

7. RESEARCH STUDY

7.1. Objectives and methodology

With the purpose of confirming and reinforcing the theoretical data offered in previous sections, it is now our aim to provide insight into our research study on the use of the address pronouns *thou* and *you* in the English language, offering data at both synchronic and diachronic levels. The research was conducted using four different computerised corpora, all of them available for free for internet users after registration. Most of the corpora were created and developed by Mark Davies, professor at Birmingham Young University, and are all collected and edited under one single web

interface. The corpora used for our research include: (1) the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) and (2) the British National Corpus (BYU-BNC) for a synchronic comparison of the pronouns across genres and variation in the last 25 years, (3) the Corpus of Global Web-Based English (GloWbE) for a dialectal comparison, and (4) the Corpus of Historical American English (COHA), which will offer us some diachronic insight of use in the last century (Davies 2008-). For each corpus, two main searches were carried out with the pronouns *you* and *thou* in the section of charts in order to draw comparable data.

7.2. Corpora

First of all, we used the COCA, which is the largest freely-available corpus of English, and contains more than 520 million words of text, with texts from a wide range of genres (e.g. spoken, fiction, magazines, newspapers, and academic). Secondly, the BYU-BNC was originally created by Oxford University Press in the 1980s, it contains 100 million words of text, and it is equally divided into genres among spoken, fiction, popular magazines, newspapers, and academic texts. The reason why both corpora, the BYU-BNC and the COCA, have been used as sources of contemporary data is that each offers information on two major varieties of the English language in the world: British English and America English respectively. These two corpora have thus been used to draw data on contemporary use of *thou* and *you*, at the same time that they have allowed for a comparison between American and British English. Not only have we derived some general data in total numbers, but the search has also included a comparison of the results classified in genre sections. Both corpora have further yielded results on several new emerging pronominal forms.

However, a search in these two major varieties is clearly limited and offers a narrow picture of the English language present-day panorama with its different dialects and uses. This is the reason why a third corpus has been consulted so as to obtain information on other varieties of the language that allow us to make a sounder comparison. The GloWbE has been particularly useful to our objective, as it allows comparisons between different varieties of English. It contains about 1,9 billion words of text from twenty different countries.

Finally comes the COHA, the largest structured corpus of historical English. It contains more than 400 million words of text ranging from the 1810s to the 2000s and, like the BYU-BNC and the COCA, it is further divided into genres and decades.

7.3. Analysis and results

After a first general analysis, the figures for the relative frequency per million of *thou* and *you* in each of the corpora used are shown below in Table 5. As can be seen, the number of tokens for *thou* and *you* is by no means comparable, with *you* exceeding by far the *thou* instances, a foreseeable outcome. It is interesting to see, however, that the historical corpus COHA is indeed the one that yields the largest percentage of *thou* tokens of all, which allows us to anticipate that undoubtedly if we trace back the use of *thou* some decades ago, its presence is at least greater than in the present day.

Corpus	<i>thou</i>	<i>you</i>
BNC	712	661.492
COCA	5.250	8.242,176
GloWbE	31.265	16.129,419
COHA	51.106	2.814,440

Table 5. Frequency per million of *thou* and *you* in the four corpora studied

7.3.1. COCA

As for the COCA, first and foremost, the general results unsurprisingly confirm that the number of tokens diverge a lot in figures, as *thou* yields 5.250 results while *you* has more than eight million (as seen in Table 5). What is interesting about the data analysis, however, is that, as shown in Table 6, most of the results for *thou* are located in the Fiction section, with 12,18 results per million if compared to the average 3 results in the rest of text types. Also of considerable interest is the fact that the second position is occupied by the Academic section. In contrast, *you* is most common in the Spoken genre, followed by Fiction, the Academic field being the one that uses *you* the least.

Genre	<i>thou</i>	<i>you</i>
SPOKEN	2,61	17.620,26
FICTION	12,18	10.444,59
MAGAZINE	3,60	5.957,74
NEWSPAPER	2,53	3.186,02
ACADEMIC	3,85	1.008,67

Table 6. Frequency per million of *thou* and *you* by text type (COCA)

In particular, if we compare the use of both pronouns in the sub-sections of Fiction, we see that *thou* is most frequent in the Science Fiction and Fantasy genres

(with 15,12 and 15,93 of relative frequency per million) in opposition to *you*, which offers the most results in Movies. Examples of uses of *thou* in the Fiction section include:

- (i) “Lucy, my dear. **Thou** dost not need to bow to me.” Sarah spoke in the odd manner of the Quakers, all **thees** and **thous**.
- (ii) If **thou** hast ravished what thou couldst, wealth, friends, and honour; say what more thy wrath intends. And so in his secret chambers, the ogre thumbs coins, lets them fall from crooked homed fingers, and calms to their soft clinks.

(Davies 2008)

As can be seen, example (i) explicitly makes reference to the use of *thou* of the Quakers, to justify for the choice of this pronoun. Besides, in both examples the use of *thou* is accompanied by a use of the inflected ending –st in the verb form, reinforcing the idea of the archaic connotations of the personal pronoun.

The COCA also offers relevant data as for the evolution of the two pronouns’ frequency for the last 25 past years. Table 7 shows that the variation in these last decades is minimal, and in any case, both *you* and *thou* have mostly remained stable, with *you* increasing slightly in the last 5 years.

Period	<i>thou</i>	<i>you</i>	<i>y’all</i>	<i>yous</i>
1990-1994	5,45	7.138,09	2,48	0,15
1995-1999	4,48	7.999,98	2,68	0,30
2000-2004	4,97	7.373,01	3,65	0,38
2005-2009	5,16	7.815,20	3,93	0,16
2010-2015	4,15	8.182,23	4,88	0,21

Table 7. Frequency per million of *thou*, *you*, *y’all* and *yous* by period (COCA)

Finally, a third search was carried out in order to shed some light on the new emerging pronominal forms of address in English. We considered the forms *y’all* and *yous* for analysis. Parallely to *thou* and *you*, Table 7 also shows that, especially in the case of *y’all*, there is a considerable rise in its frequency, doubling the figures in only two decades: from 2,48 between 1990-1994 to 4,88 in 2010-2015 of relative frequency per million. Strikingly enough, it is not in the Spoken section where this form is most common, but rather in the Fiction one with 928 entries. This goes in line with Wales’ (2003) explanation in the previous section, where she refers to the American film industry as taking advantage of this southern trait to typify characters in movies.

As for *yous*, the variation in time is not as significant, since there is in fact a rise in the years 2000-2004, but then a decrease in the last 10 years. Most of *yous* tokens are found in the Spoken section, as in “Ah, will **yous** keep back and give the man room to breathe” (Davies 2008).

It needs to be noted that results for the pronouns *yi* and *yins* had to be ruled out from the search as they seem to constitute a common surname in certain English speaking countries such as Singapore, and thus we considered the results to be misleading and unrepresentative.

7.3.2. *BYU-BNC*

The BYU-BNC was the second corpus used to carry out a comparative search between *thou* and *you* in contemporary English. Table 8 outlines the results by text type. In contrast with the COCA, the BYU-BNC includes two additional sections: Non-Academic and Miscellaneous. It is in fact in this last section, Miscellaneous, together with Fiction, in line with the COCA, that we find the most results for *thou*, with 164 tokens in Fiction, 210 in Miscellaneous and, for instance, only 12 in Newspaper.

In particular, inside the section of Fiction, Drama yields most of the entries. As for Miscellaneous, it is unsurprisingly the subsections of Essay Scholar and Religion which yield the most tokens, which corroborates what the literature claims on the specialisation of *thou* for liturgical discourse.

Genre	<i>thou</i>	<i>you</i>	<i>y'all</i>	<i>yous</i>
SPOKEN	7,73	26.926,84	0,00	8,53
FICTION	10,31	13.043,56	0,13	1,13
MAGAZINE	3,72	5.510,20	0,14	0,14
NEWSPAPER	1,15	1.797,56	0,38	0,00
NON-ACAD	6,97	1.867,88	0,12	0,06
ACADEMIC	6,98	685,64	0,00	0,00
MISC	10,08	4.105,37	0,14	0,14

Table 8. Frequency per million of *thou*, *you*, *y'all* and *yous* by text type (BYU-BNC)

Regarding the use of *you*, it is the Spoken section the one that encompasses most tokens with 26.926,84 in contrast with, for example, the 685,64 of relative frequency in the Academic section.

As for the new emerging pronominal forms of *y'all* and *yous*, already analysed with the COCA, the results in the BYU-BNC confirm, first of all, that the incidence of *y'all* is much higher in the American than in the British corpus, the highest frequency per million being found in the Newspaper section with 0,38, and 0,00 in the Spoken one; these are very low and almost non-existent figures if we compare them to the COCA with 2,11 in the Newspaper section, or 8,85 in the Fiction section as presented above.

In contrast, *yous* does indeed present more tokens in the BYU-BNC with 8,53 tokens in the Spoken section, in opposition to the 0,42 of the COCA, in line with the literature, which claimed its incidence was higher in “Dublin, Northern Ireland and Northern English of Liverpool, Glasgow and several north-eastern regions” (see above). Some examples include:

- (i) So I went back later on, I says, why weren't **yous** in? And she said we were in!
- (ii) Hello ha! And I say, hello. He says, well how **yous** a going? (laugh) (pause) I'm doing fine. Your fine? Oh, ye how [...]
- (iii) Between the four of **yous** I'm fed up buying hairspray

(Davies 2004)

All of the examples were drawn from recorded spoken conversations between 1985 and 1994. As can be seen, *yous* seems to be used regardless of whether it is for singular or plural reference, since, in the first two examples, reference is made to a single speaker, while the third refers to four people.

7.3.3. *GloWbE*

As previously justified, the *GloWbE* corpus was used in order to offer insight into other varieties of the language beyond British and American English. Figure 1 shows the relative frequency of use of *thou* and *you* in the 20 different countries researched. What we can construe from the results is, first of all, that *thou* has a considerably much lower incidence than *you*. Next, while *you* seems to remain mostly constant in all of the varieties, with its relative frequency barely fluctuating from 6.295,29, the lowest, to 10.315,35, the highest, *thou* does show a greater fluctuation. In Pakistan and Nigeria, followed by Sri Lanka and the Philipines, we find six times the frequency that we find in Singapore or Bangladesh.

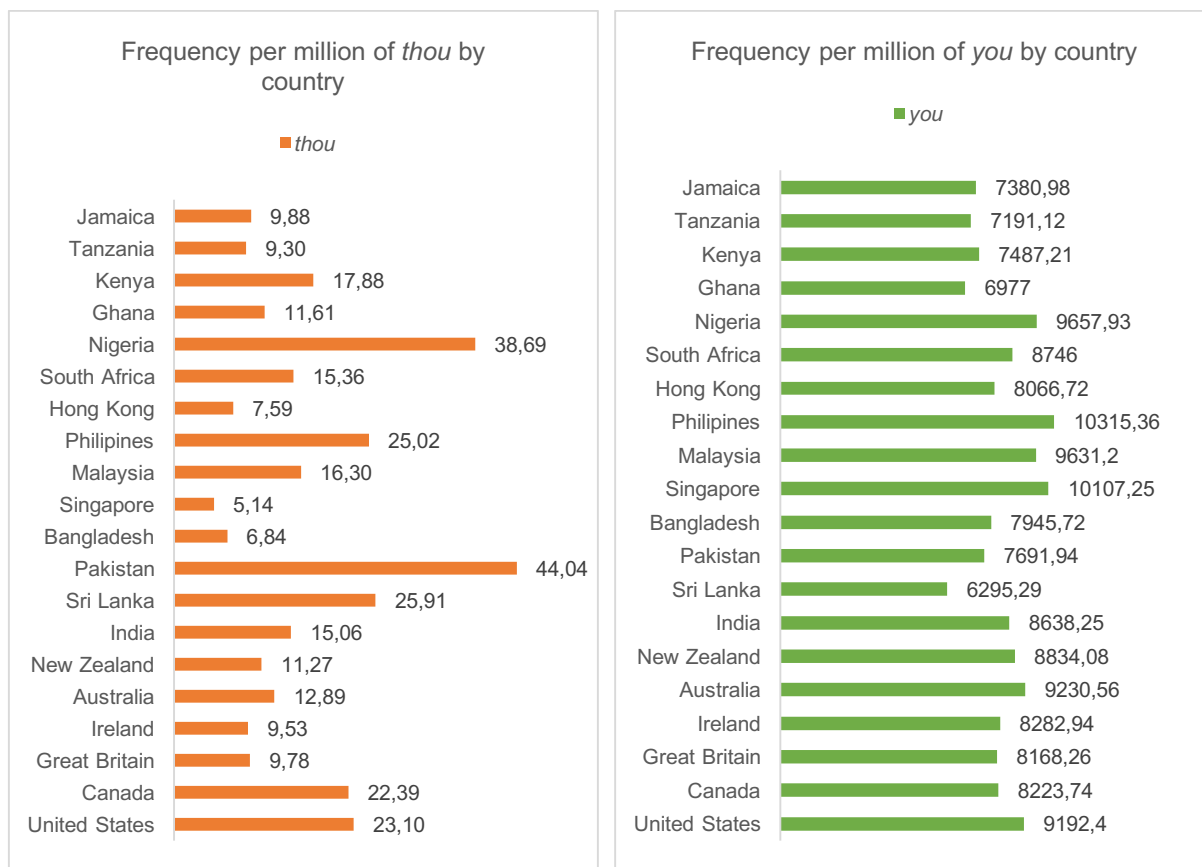


Figure 1. Relative frequency per million of *thou* and *you* by country (GloWbE)

Pronoun	Countries	Average
<i>y'all</i>	Nigeria 8,21	2,63
	United States 7,06	
<i>yous</i>	Ireland 1,15	0,41
	New Zealand 0,79	
	United States 0,51	

Table 9. Frequency per million of new forms of address in countries with greatest incidence

With the aim of learning some additional information on new emerging pronominal forms of address and their incidence in different geographical areas, a second search was carried out focusing on the two forms previously analysed with the COCA, as presented above. Table 9 outlines the results. Regarding the form *y'all*, it is mostly extended in Nigeria and the United States, in line with the literature presented on this matter. As for the pronoun *yous*, its incidence is greatest in Ireland, followed by New Zealand and the United States.

7.3.4. COHA

The figures for relative frequency per million of the *thou* and *you* forms by decade starting in 1810 are outlined in Figure 2. In line with what was introduced at the beginning of the section, the figure shows that the further we go back in time the more tokens we obtain for *thou*, moving from 1.283,44 of relative frequency per million in 1810 to 47,97 in 1910 and to 8,23 in 1990. In opposition, *you* remains much more constant, yielding roughly the same number of results in 1810 than in 1910.

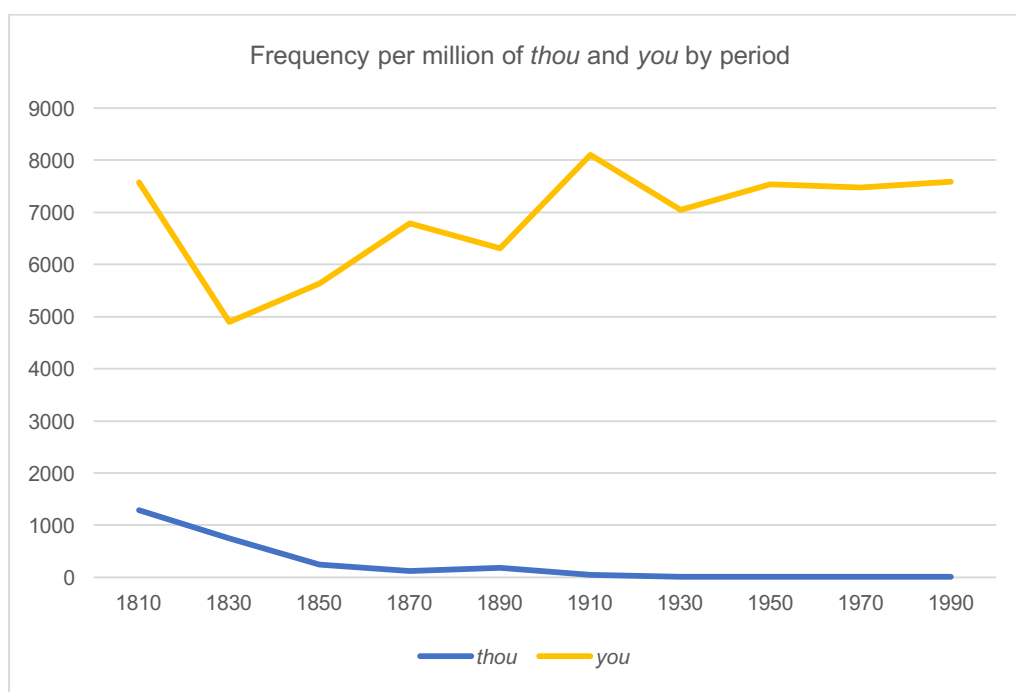


Figure 2. Frequency per million of *thou* and *you* by period (COHA)

7.4. Discussion of results

All in all, it could be argued that despite the claims of many that deem the *thou*-form to have fallen into disuse for a long time (see Gramley & Pätzold 1992: 196), its presence in the English language is still more than symbolic, although its incidence is by no means comparable to that of the pronoun *you*. It could be expected from the literature presented in previous sections, that by the 1810s, which is the time of the first data from the COHA, the pronoun *thou* would no longer appear in corpora, as we have seen that its reference from the seventeenth century onwards is uncommon. Nevertheless, it is striking that even in the 1810s we do see a tendency of *thou* to slowly decline in use and become more and more specialised for religious and academic purposes.

As for genres in present-day English, unsurprising is the fact that *you* is always most common in the Spoken section, followed by the Fiction, while its presence in the Academic section is scarce, in line with the nature of this type of texts, which are usually particularly formal and tend to avoid direct reference to the reader. Both corpora, the COCA and the BYU-BNC, coincide in yielding most results of *thou* in the Fiction section, which is in agreement with the theoretical data presented in previous sections of this project.

As for the GloWbE, it has offered relevant information regarding the varieties of English around the world. We have seen that it is certainly of little use to only consider the COCA and the BYU-BNC when analysing the present-day incidence of *thou*, since its relative frequency per million in Great Britain, Ireland and the US, for instance, barely surpasses 20, in contrast with Pakistan, Sri Lanka or Nigeria, as outlined above. Therefore, we can conclude that it seems most studies focusing on the major varieties of American and British English are leaving out a very different reality of the English speaking world.

Finally, of considerable relevance is also the fact that new emerging forms such as *y'all* and *yous* do show significant incidence in the corpora analysed, confirming that in the last decades they have certainly gained ground. The results also reinforce the claim that these forms are clearly region-bound, with *y'all* being prominently used in the United States and Nigeria and *yous* in the countries of Great Britain and Ireland, to name but a few. We can therefore conclude that the differences among geographical areas, as seen in the COCA and BYU-BNC, and then expanded with the GloWbE, are noteworthy.

8. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This project has tried to illustrate the relevance of the topic of pronouns of address in the English language by showing that they are by no means extinct, despite the efforts of some who seem to be deliberately obscuring their presence. We have seen that the issue of personal pronouns continues to be a crucial matter even nowadays. Although there is an apparent normalisation of *you* as the only available unmarked form of address for second person in the English language, the language is never so rigid and there are many elements that come into play and should consequently be analysed before over-simplifying it. Our research study has confirmed that new forms are spontaneously emerging in everyday speech in a number of regions, taking new

shades, nuances and meanings as a result of a series of processes of lexicalisation, and could be predicted to continue gaining ground in the near future. In general, it seems that history does tend to repeat itself, and the same old dimensions are still applicable to classify and define the new pronouns coming into the language, namely familiarity, politeness or indefiniteness, among others (Wales 2003: 184), although more research in this direction is needed.

It cannot be denied that this topic is overall underresearched and that it is essential that more studies are carried out in order to delve into regional speech varieties and these new emerging forms, the specific degree of recessiveness of these pronominal expressions, distribution amongst older or younger speakers of the different forms available, and other grammatical sociolinguistic and pragmatic functions of pronouns, to name but a few (Wales 2003: 178). It would be of great interest to continue studying these forms in much more detail trying to disentangle the similarities and differences among them and their potential pervasiveness and feasibility in the language.

It is thus of the utmost importance to try and predict how personal pronouns of address will evolve in the future, despite the difficulty of foreseeing the path regional dialects will take, as these in the end seem to play a decisive role in potentially making new forms come and stay in the standard language.

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