

## The Use of *You* and *Thou* in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*

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### ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to analyse the different factors which determine the choice of one of the two variants of the second person singular pronoun, *You* or *Thou*, by the various characters of Shakespeare's play *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. The total number of *you* and *thou* forms which constitute this corpus is 777. Each of these forms has been analyzed taking into account the social relationships of power and solidarity established between the interlocutors, as well as the variables of social class and sex. In addition, emotional factors have been considered. It is not my intention to extrapolate the results obtained in this study to the English usage of Shakespeare's age. They simply refer to the play itself.

### 0. Introduction

Present-day English, as opposed to most languages of its environment, has an only pronominal form for the second person singular. It is, therefore, impossible to mark different degrees of formality or familiarity with an interlocutor by means of pronominal usage. Nevertheless, this has not been always the case, since in earlier periods English distinguished two forms, *you* and *thou*, for the second person singular pronoun. As Catalina Weinerman states in her work *Sociolingüística de la forma pronominal*, "las formas de la segunda persona del singular tienen, dentro del conjunto de los pronombres personales, un interés lingüístico particular porque vinculan las propiedades abstractas de la gramática con categorías semánticas derivadas de propiedades socioculturales" (33-34). This statement can be applied to the case of *you* and *thou*, and to show evidence of this, we will analyse the circumstances which determine the usage of one variant or the other in William Shakespeare's play *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, in which, in addition to

sociocultural aspects, it is evident that the use of *you* and *thou* is on some occasions conditioned by emotional factors. The first section of the paper concerns itself with a description of the corpus, in the second and third sections the dimensions of power and solidarity are respectively analysed, section four deals with the emotional value expressed by the second person singular pronouns and finally, the social class and sex variables are dealt with in sections five and six respectively.

## 1. Description of the corpus

Brown and Gilman consider that dramatic texts offer the best information about the colloquial language of the period. Moreover, theatrical plays constitute, according to these authors, the only possible source, since, although there are also letters, these cannot inform us about oral and colloquial language ("Politeness Theory" 170). Jonathan Hope, however, thinks that the use of *you* and *thou* in Shakespeare's plays does not reflect the real usage of the English spoken in the Early Modern period (142). Salmon, in justifying the use of theatre works in her analysis of sentence structures in Elizabethan colloquial English, says that we can only resort to "the language written to be uttered as though spontaneously arising from a given situation which we find in dramatic texts" (265). In any case, whether Shakespeare's plays are a loyal reflection of the colloquial language of his age or not, the play chosen for this study has been *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* due to the fact that its characters represent different social strata. Moreover, the multiplicity of changes from *you* to *thou* and viceversa makes of this text a very appropriate object for the study and exemplification of the factors which condition the selection of the pronominal variant. In addition to this, nobody can deny Shakespeare's mastery in language management, which guarantees that the shifts from one pronominal form to the other are significantly motivated. However, it is not my intention to extrapolate the results obtained in this study to the English usage of the age.

Seven hundred and seventy-seven cases have been found in the play in which one of the variants is used. In addition to *you* and *thou*, I have also counted the variant *ye*, the oblique form *thee*, the possessives *yours* and *thine*, the intensive and reflexive pronouns *yourself* and *thyself*, and the determiners *your*, *thine* and *thy*. The reason is that all these forms behave in the same way, since if in a speech or in a passage a character uses regularly *thou* to address another character, he or she will also normally employ *thee*, *thine*, *thy* and *thyself*. By convention, I will use *You* and *Thou*, with capital letters, to refer not only to these forms, but also to their respective associated forms. Obviously, I have not considered the forms *you* with plural referent. Those second person singular pronouns which referred to an inanimate object or to an indefinite being have not been included in the corpus either. The number of *y* forms found in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* is, as can be seen in Table 1, 466, which represent 59.97% of the total number of second person singular pronominal forms. *Thou*, on the other hand, constitutes 40.03%, with 311 cases.

YOU		THOU		TOTAL	
N	%	N	%	N	%
466	59.97	311	40.03	777	100

Table 1. Distribution of the variants *You* and *Thou* in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*

## 2. The social dimension of power

I will first deal with the dimension which Brown and Gilman have named “power semantic” in their article “The Pronouns of Power and Solidarity” and which they have defined in the following terms:

One person may be said to have power over another in the degree that he is able to control the behaviour of the other. Power is a relationship between at least two persons, and it is nonreciprocal in the sense that both cannot have power in the same area of behaviour. The power semantic is similarly nonreciprocal; the superior says T and receives V (255).<sup>1</sup>

The power dimension accounts for a relationship of verticality in the social hierarchy and it is therefore linked to the variable of social class. Three social classes can be distinguished in this play: high, middle and low. In the high class, the characters have different degrees of power. The pronoun predominantly used by the members of this social class is *You*, with 278 cases, which represent 56.67% of the total. *Thou* is employed on 240 occasions, which account for 46.33%. When both interlocutors belong to the high class, as Table 2 displays, *You* is the most frequent pronoun with 237 occurrences and 57.11%, as opposed to 178 cases in which *Thou* appears, which represent 42.89%. However, it is necessary to make a distinction here depending on the different interlocutors. When the speaker's power is inferior to that of the listener, the former will employ mostly *You* to address the latter. While *Thou* is used on 60 occasions (84.51%), *You* appears in 11 examples (15.49%). If the level of power is equivalent or similar, although *You* is still the dominant form (146 cases= 56.59%), the usage of *Thou* is not infrequent at all (112 cases= 43.41%). If the power of the speaker is superior to that of the listener, the use of *Thou* is, conversely, superior to that of *You*: 31 *you*-forms (36.05%) and 55 *thou*-forms (63.95%). When a high class character addresses a low class one (See Table 3), in which case the speaker's power is obviously superior to the listener's one, he will do it using mainly *Thou*, with 40 registered examples. While in the previous cases *Thou* was the marked form, now this role belongs to *You*, with 46.67% and 35 examples.

HIGH CLASS ---> HIGH CLASS											
+ TO - POWER				= POWER				- TO + POWER			
YOU		THOU		YOU		THOU		YOU		THOU	
N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
31	36.05	55	63.95	146	56.59	112	43.4	60	84.5	11	15.48
TOTAL											
YOU						THOU					
N		%		N		%		N		%	
237		57.11		178		42.89					

Table 2. Use of *You* and *Thou* between high class characters.

HIGH CLASS ----> LOW CLASS			
YOU		THOU	
NUMBER	PERCENTAGE	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
35	46.67	40	53.33

Table 3. Use of *You* and *Thou* by high class characters towards low class characters.

Those characters who belong to a low stratum, as Table 4 reflects, generally make use of the *th* forms to address their equals (60 *Thou* forms= 82.24% and 8 *You* forms= 11.76%). On the other hand, when low class members, maids and servants, address their superiors in the social scale, they always use the form *You*, except on one occasion (131 *You* forms: 99.24% and 1 *Thou* form: 0.76%).

LOW ---> LOW				LOW ---> HIGH				TOTAL			
YOU		THOU		YOU		THOU		YOU		THOU	
N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
8	11.8	60	82.2	131	99.24	1	0.76	191	95.5	9	4.5

Table 4. Use of *You* and *Thou* by low class characters.

As these data display, while the high class members have a great freedom to use any of the two forms, the representatives of the low class are submitted to a much more rigid

rule. Although masters generally address their servants by means of *Thou*, they could also use *You* to them, and, in fact, as we have seen, in this play this is quite a frequent practice. Servants, conversely, almost invariably used *You* to address their masters, since the use of *Thou* to refer to a social superior was considered a great lack of respect.

### 3. Solidarity

According to Brown and Gilman, solidarity is the second dimension which conditions the use of the pronouns of address. While power constituted the vertical axis of social relationships, solidarity is conceived as the horizontal one. It is a feeling of sympathy and comprehension, a group of shared ideas, traits and values which identify and link together groups of people, without taking into account their social status. According to Brown and Gilman, "Solidarity is symmetrical. The corresponding norms of address are symmetrical or reciprocal with V becoming more probable as solidarity declines" ("Pronouns" 258). Thus, the norms of address prescribe the reciprocal usage of the intimate informal *Thou* between solidary people and of the distant formal *You* between people who are not so. Let us see how solidarity governs pronominal address in the play with which this study is concerned.

*The Two Gentlemen of Verona* deals with the Renaissance ideal of friendship and it thus offers very clear expressions of solidarity. The strong link of friendship and the affinities between Protheus and Valentine, the two protagonists of this play, constitute the reason why at the beginning of the play they reciprocally address each other using *Thou*:

VALENTINE: Cease to persuade, my loving Protheus;  
Home-keeping youth, have ever homely wits,  
Wer't not affection chains *thy* tender days  
To the sweet glances of *thy* honoured Love,...  
PROTHEUS: Wilt *thou* be gone? Sweet Valentine adieu,  
Think on *thy* Protheus, when *thou* (haply) seest  
Some rare note-worthy object in *thy* travel.  
Wish me partaker in *thy* happiness,... (I.1.21)<sup>2</sup>

Another case in which solidarity regulates pronominal address in this play can be found in those scenes in which the Outlaws speak to Valentine. Valentine has been banished from Milan and the Outlaws appear on his way. In the beginning, as the rules of social behaviour indicate, they use *You* to address Valentine, because he is a stranger and because his social class is apparently superior to theirs:

3 OUTLAW: Stand sir, and throw us that *you* have about ye.  
If not: we'll make *you* sit, and rifle *you*....  
1 OUTLAW: That's not so, sir: we are *your* enemies....  
2 OUTLAW: Whither travel *you*? (IV.1.71)

However, when they find out that Valentine, like them, has been banished and that all of them belong to the same social class, since they all are knights who have been victims of misfortune, a link of solidarity is created between them and Valentine, which is based upon their affinities. This leads them to address him as *Thou* from that moment onwards:

3 OUTLAW: What say'st *thou*? wilt *thou* be of our consort?  
 Say ay, and be the captain of us all:  
 We'll do *thee* homage, and be rul'd by *thee*,  
 Love *thee*, as our Commander, and our King (IV.2.72).

Apart from these two cases, there is hardly any other in which the dimension of solidarity is the determinant factor which governs the use of the second person singular pronoun. Brown and Levinson consider that the members of the low strata of a society like that reflected in this play were necessarily quite interdependent, in such a way that solidarity relationships were likely to emerge among them (332-333). According to this, the interchange of *Thou* between low class characters can be motivated by a combination of the dimensions of power and solidarity. On the other hand, between lovers, like Silvia and Valentine, the pronoun employed is generally *You*, which indicates a preponderance of power over solidarity. The same happens with parental-filial relationships, since the Duke as well as Antonio address their respective children, Silvia and Protheus, as *Thou* and *You* alternatively, but they always receive *You* from them. This fact is an indication that familiar relationships were in that society much more hierarchized than they are today:

SILVIA: Perchance *you* think too much of so much pains?  
 VALENTINE: No (Madam) so it stead *you*; I will write.  
 (Please *you* command) a thousand times as much (II.1.37).  
 ANTONIO: How now? What Letter are *you* reading there?  
 PROTHEUS: May'st please *your* Lordship, 'tis a word or two...  
 ANTONIO: ... I am resolv'd that *thou* shall spend some time  
 With Valentinus, in the Emperor's Court:...  
 PROTHEUS: My Lord I cannot be soon provided,  
 Please *you* deliberate a day or two (I.3.32-33).

Brown and Gilman state that "The solidarity T reaches a peak of probability in address between two brothers or in a man soliloquizing with himself" ("Pronouns" 258). In this connection, there are two scenes in the play in which this summit of solidarity is reached. On both occasions there is a character who addresses him or herself and uses the form *Thou*. The first of these soliloquies is performed by Julia:

JULIA: ... unkind Julia,  
 As in revenge of *thy* ingratitude,  
 I throw *thy* name against the bruising stones,  
 Trampling contemptuously on *thy* disdain (I.2.29).

Afterwards, it will be Valentine who will address himself by means of the *thou* (*thee* on this occasion) of the highest solidarity:

VALENTINE: ... Withdraw *thee* Valentine: who's this coming here? (V.4.90).

#### 4. Emotional value

Sometimes the choice of a pronominal form contradicts the social norm or the speaker's habitual practice. In those cases, the motivation for this will probably be connected with some attitude or emotion on the part of the speaker. These types of variations in the linguistic behaviour generally express transient feelings or attitudes. Two types of expressive meanings are distinguished. Breaking the norms of address implies that the speaker temporarily thinks about the other as a stranger or as someone related. In this connection, the emotional use of *Thou* can express endearment, intimacy, tenderness, as well as all the opposite, anger or contempt. Curiously enough, there are situations in which *You* can become the hostile or abusive form, as will be seen afterwards. According to Jespersen, in English there was a greater alternation between the two variants of the second person singular pronoun than in other European languages (28). Wales coincides in this appreciation:

the fact remains that in English usage, right from the beginning, there was always considerable fluctuation between T and V forms in the singular, whereas in French and German, even today, momentary shifts are rare. (114).

In Shakespeare's plays the quick shifts between *You* and *Thou* are extremely frequent, and in this sense, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* is not an exception. On numerous occasions the same character fluctuates between the use of *Thou* and *You* with the same interlocutor. The exchanges between Protheus and Valentine are very useful to study and illustrate the expressive or emotional value of the pronouns of address. As has already been seen, in the beginning Protheus and Valentine address each other as *Thou*, which reflects their high degree of solidarity. *Thou* is the habitual unmarked form between them. However, after having been using the *th* form, some lines below, Valentine unexpectedly addresses his friend as *You*. Their disparity of opinions about love provokes the change in address from the solidary *Thou* to the distant *You*:

VALENTINE: 'Tis true; for *you* are over-boots in love,  
and yet *you* never swom the Hellespont (I.1.21).

As Brown and Gilman point out, the fundamental characteristic of this emotional pronominal change is its easy retractibility ("Politeness Theory" 178). Thus, once they have expressed their divergent points of view, Protheus and Valentine return to their habitual *Thou*:

PROTHEUS: And thither will I bring *thee* Valentine.

VALENTINE: Sweet Protheus, no: Now let us take our leave:

To Milan let me hear from *thee* by letters

Of *thy* success in love, and what news else

Betideth here in absence of *thy* Friend

And I likewise will visit *thee* with mine (I.1.22-23).

Although the fact that Valentine and Protheus address each other as *Thou* is generally motivated by their relationship of solidarity, when Valentine discovers that he has been betrayed by his friend, the *Thou* he uses to address him has a very different motivation. In this case, *Thou* expresses the fury that Valentine feels when he realizes that he has been deceived. The content of his words and the adjectives he employs to refer to Valentine, like *ruffian* or *treacherous*, indicate which is the true value of *Thou* here:

VALENTINE: *Ruffian*: let go that rude uncivil touch,

*Thou* friend of an ill fashion....

VALENTINE: *Thou* common friend, that's without faith or love,

For such is a friend now: *treacherous* man,

*Thou* hast beguil'd my hopes;... (V.4.91).

This fluctuation of pronominal forms does not only happen between the two protagonists. Thus, for instance, when Silvia, who generally addresses Protheus by means of the polite *You*, wants to show her contempt in front of the latter's pretensions and treasons, she uses an unequivocally scornful *Thou*:

SILVIA: *Thou* subtle, perjurd false, disloyal man:

Think'st *thou* I am so shallow, so conceitless,

To be seduced by *thy* flattery,

That hast deceiv'd so many with *thy* vows?

Return, return and make *thy* love amends:

For me (by this pale queen of night I swear)

I am so far from granting *thy* request,

That I despise *thee*, for *thy* wrongful suit;... (IV.2.76).

In other scenes in which the emotional temperature is high, the use of the *th* form expresses just the opposite, endearment and affection. Thus, at a moment of great emotional tension, such as the farewell between Julia and Protheus, these two characters use *Thou*, a symbol of the love they feel for each other:

JULIA: If you turn out: you will return the sooner:

Keep this remembrance for *thy* Julia's sake....

PROTHEUS: Here is my hand for my true constancy:

And when that o'erslips me in the day,

Wherein I sigh not (Julia) for *thy* sake,...

The tide is now; nay, not *thy* tide of tears,

That tide will stay me longer than I should,  
 Julia, farewell... (II.2.39-40).

The Duke, who had shown his contempt for Valentine addressing him as *Thou*, finally realizes that he was mistaken and becomes reconciled with him. To show the affection that he now feels for Valentine, he addresses him by means of a respectful, affectionate and in a sense fatherly *Thou*:

DUKE: ... I do applaud *thy* spirit, Valentine,  
 And think *thee* worthy of an Empress' love:  
 Know then, I here forget all former griefs,  
 Cancel all grudge, repeal *thee* home again,  
 Plead a new state in *thy* unrivall'd merit,  
 To which I thus subscribe: Sir Valentine,  
*Thou* art a Gentlemen, and well deriv'd  
 Take *thou thy* Silvia, for *thou* hast desrv'd her (V.4.94).

As Brook states, one of the uses of *Thou* in Shakespeare's plays is that masters make of it to address their servants as an indication of a kind superiority (74). However, when a master considers that his servant has acted in a bad way and wants to show his anger and irritation, the pronoun used to address the servant is *You*. In this connection, Protheus, after having addressed his new servant Sebastian as *Thou*, uses *You* to his other servant, Launce, as an indication of his bad-tempered state for Launce's long and unjustified absence:

PROTHEUS: Sebastian is *thy* name: I like *thee* well,  
 And will employ *thee* in some service presently...  
 PROTHEUS: (to Launce) How now *you* whoreson peasant,  
 Where have *you* been these two days loitering? (IV.4.81).

Barber says that in these cases the pronoun *You* has an ironic nuance. When *You* is used in this way, it is specially frequent for the servant to receive the burlesque address of *sir* or *sirrah*, defined by Barber as "mock-polite vocatives" (*Early Modern English* 207). In the following example, Valentine uses this ironic *You* to address his servant Speed:

VALENTINE: (to Speed) How now *Sir*?  
 What are *you* reasoning with *yourself*? (II.1.38).

These are the main emotional uses of *You* and *Thou*. Comparatively, *Thou* acquires this emotive value much more frequently than *You*. As can be seen on Table 5, out of the 311 *thou*-forms, 102 (32.80%) appear in situations with a high emotional tension, whereas only 15.24% of the *you*-forms, 71 out of the 466, are an expression of emotional aspects.

Y O U				T H O U			
EMOTIONAL VALUE		TOTAL		EMOTIONAL VALUE		TOTAL	
N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
71	15.24	466	100	102	32.80	311	100

Table 5. Emotional value and the two 2nd sing. pronoun variants.

### 5. Sex variable

The interlocutors' sex does not seem determinant in the use of one variant or the other. The literature on the topic of pronouns of address does not generally refer to this variable. From the point of view of the speaker, the pronominal uses of men and women are very similar, although *Thou* is slightly more used by women. As Table 6 shows, out of 162 second singular pronouns employed by women, there are 71 *thou*-forms, which represent 43.83% and 91 *you*-forms (56.17%). Men use *Thou* on 240 occasions (39.02%), as opposed to 375 on which they use *You* (60.98%). From the point of view of the listener, the difference is much more noteworthy, since whereas in the pronouns addressed to men 54.35% are *you*-forms (337) and 45.65% *thou*-forms (283), when the listener is a woman, only in 17.83% of the cases *Thou* is used, with 28 registered forms, as opposed to 82.17% in which *You* is employed, which corresponds to 129 instances. These data seem to imply, therefore, that *Thou* is a less appropriate form to address a woman than a man.

	WOMAN						MAN					
	Y O U		T H O U		TOTAL		Y O U		T H O U		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
speaker	91	56.17	71	43.83	162	100	375	60.98	240	39.02	615	100
listener	129	82.17	28	17.83	157	100	337	54.35	283	45.65	620	100

Table 6. Use of *You* and *Thou* according to the sex of addresser and addressee.

Table 7 contains the four possible combinations regarding the sex of speaker and listener. When a man addresses another man, he does it on 298 occasions by means of *You* (56.44%), whereas on 230 cases, he employs *Thou* (43.56%). Women use *You* to address women in 74.29% of the cases (52) and *Thou* in 25.71% (18 ex.). *You* is the predominant form used by men to address women, with 88.51% (77 ex.), while in only 11.49% *Thou* is used (10 ex.). Women, on the other hand, use *Thou* to men in 57.61% (53 ex.) and *You* in 42.39% (39 ex.).

	WOMAN TO WOMAN		MAN TO MAN		WOMAN TO MAN		MAN TO WOMAN	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
THOU	18	25.71	230	43.56	53	57.61	10	11.49
YOU	52	74.29	298	56.44	39	42.39	77	88.51
TOTAL	70	100	528	100	92	100	87	100

Table 7. Use of *You* and *Thou* in the 4 possible combinations according to the sex of the interlocutors.

### 6. Conclusions

Although in quantitative terms, the difference between *You* and *Thou* in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* is perhaps not large enough to speak of a marked and an unmarked form, we can establish that distinction if we attend to other criteria. Both *You* and *Thou* occasionally acquire an expressive or emotional value in this play, but whereas *Thou* has these connotations in 32.80% of the cases, the percentage with respect to *You* goes down to 15.24%. This marked character that *Thou* has in the semantic level is also reflected, as Wales points out, in the linguistic level, since *Thou*-forms are outnumbered by *You*-forms, the reciprocal interchange of *You* is more frequent than that of *Thou*, and momentary changes from *You* to *Thou* are more numerous than changes from *Thou* to *You*.

As regards the factors which condition the selection of the pronominal form, the dimension of power is the most decisive one in opting for one form or the other. However, we cannot consider that the social usage is the norm and everything that does not correspond to it is a deviation which will have to be explained by means of affective or emotional reasons, since other factors, like solidarity, can play their part. It is necessary to pay attention to the form generally used between two interlocutors and to the emotional situation, since the same form used between the same speakers can have two different values. Thus, the *Thou* which Valentine uses to address Protheus generally reflects the relationship of solidarity between them both, but it can also express, as has been shown, fury and anger.

Finally, I want to emphasize that the aim of this study is a quantitative as well as a qualitative analysis of the use of the second person singular pronoun in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. It is not my intention to draw any generalizations about the usage of *You* and *Thou* in Shakespeare's society, since, as Wales indicates, "while it may be reasonably supposed that the usage of dialogues in drama reflects that current in society, yet allowance must also be made for literary selectiveness on the one hand, and artistic exaggeration on the other" (128). It is possible that in real life, *Thou* were less used, while in drama, due to its concentration of emotional tension, this variant appeared more frequently.

## Notes

1 *T* and *V* (from Latin *tu* and *vos*) stand respectively for the familiar and the formal variants of the second person singular pronoun, in our case for *Thou* and *You* respectively.

2 Emphasis on all the second singular pronoun forms in the quotations is mine.

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