DEMOCRATIC YOU AND PARADIGM

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

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

1. History (I)

The use of the 2nd person plural subjective ye for polite address dates back to the second half of the 13th c. In the 14th c., it is well established. Already at the close of the 15th c., thou is used in emotionally marked settings, i.e. [-distance] (personal matters and instances of psychological climax) and
[distance] (offense), whereas ye is the more neutral form of address (Mausch 1986; cf. Kielkiewicz-Jankowiak 1990). In the 16th c., the use of ye/you in addressing single addressees becomes a norm and in the second half of that century it is you which becomes dominant as the subjective/oblique form of the 2nd person plural. In the 18th c., the 2nd person singular pronoun forms become obsolete. The pronominal form which replaces them is you (the former oblique case form).

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

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

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

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

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

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2. Model of analysis

Histories of inflectional paradigms become interpretable if one perceives (a) relations among the contents/meanings of the forms, e.g., the 1st person plural subjective to the 2nd person plural subjective. (b) relations among the actually occurring forms, i.e., how the forms are similar and how they differ in terms of their phonological make-up.

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

RGSTM model

### Hierarchy of Systems/Relations Among Terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>System</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Values</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PERSON</td>
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<td>3rd person</td>
<td>u</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1st person</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2nd person</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>plural</td>
<td>m</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>dual</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>GENDER</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>u</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>dative</td>
<td>m</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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* On p. 86 there, under neutralization in the value of Y there is 1u whereas it should be 1m. This mistake is not my responsibility.
The directions of changes, i.e. neutralization and extension of forms, and their conditionings were defined. Extension prevails whereas neutralization takes place only when a marked term with value 1, i.e. “dominated” by the unmarked term, is referred to the unmarked term in the higher system.

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

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

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

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

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

In my two-fold interpretation the RGSTM model is the starting point of analysis. It is an attempt at handling a fragment of the complex structure of language (IE?). It is not an absolute one because the outlined approach to morphological transparency makes forms of a language equally important. Furthermore, my interpretation of changes is focused on discovering the conditions under which a change is likely to occur, i.e. on the degree of its probability. I am not claiming anything about its actual occurrence or completion. The RGSTM model is treated as a tool for finding the forms which are likely to alternate and the forms which are the likely outcomes of thus identified probable mergers.

3. Merger in the system of person

Its expected sequence (and directions) is:

I. 2nd person plural ↓ extension
II. 1st person plural ↓ extension
III. 2nd person singular ↓ extension
IV. 1st person singular ↓ extension
V. 3rd person plural
VI. 3rd person singular fem ↓ extension
VII. 3rd person singular masc.

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

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

subjective (/u/) + e, oblique (y) + /u/ + (s)

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

subjective (thou) + (I), oblique (thu) + (e)

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

4 In the meantime the dual number was eliminated, not to mention the changes connected with the loss of grammatical gender in nouns. All of them were complex and their interpretation is beyond the scope of the present paper.
weak transparency, i.e. the second element shared, could be sufficient for a pair to merge, i.e. for the speaker-hearer the forms could be comparable in terms of both forms and contents, the matching of paradigms remained difficult. For every pair in the involved paradigms the situation was different, e.g. -e shared by the subjective forms and /u/ shared by the oblique forms and the unattested differences (/I/) in the subjective and (y.)s in the oblique. In addition to this if any change was to occur in the system of person it was also to affect verbs.

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

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

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

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

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

4. The subjective mergers and the disappearance of ye

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

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

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

"The Quakers (the Society of Friends) [...] thou'd (or rather thee'd) everybody" (Jespersen 1965:235)

2nd person singular

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

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

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1 However, observe "The existence in the eastern south-west region of a system of personal pronouns in which the form of the pronoun is not for the most part determined by subject versus object function but by weak or strong stress position" (Hughes and Trudgill 1999:18). Us may function as the subjective we.

2 Cf. Hughes and Trudgill (1999:18) for "weak" vs as the subjective form of they.

3 Cf. Hughes and Trudgill (1979:55) who recorded, in the Midland, the use of her for the subjective "Her says, no, I'm going to see the finish of this." and Hughes and Trudgill (1989:18) for "weak" vs as the subjective form of she.

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

5 In remaining persons (suppletion) they started to occur later (the 15th c.) and have never been fully accepted.
2nd person plural was to start before the merger in the 2nd person singular. You was generalized in the second half of the 16th c. and thee in the 17th c.

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

1st person plural

4. “...none other shall knowe the same, but only we, as three, unto the time that the dode be accomplisshed” (Caxton, Aymon, 212, 30)

1st person singular

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

3rd person plural

11. “a man shal be late blood for to kepe himself, and principali hem bat etip good fleisch and drinkip good wyn” (Lanfrank 298)

3rd person singular feminine

12. “I don’t know his mother, - her who wrote the hymns, you know…” comes to be Rebecca (Thackerey, The Newcomes)

3rd person singular masculine

13. “Lay on, Macduff, And damn’d be him that first cries ‘Hold, enough! ’” (Shakespeare, Macbeth, V, 8, 33-4)


5. The you/thou merger

The subjective/oblique merger in the 2nd person plural paradigm changes the relations among paradigmatic forms. The merger of the 2nd and 1st person plural paradigms remains blocked (cf pp. 147-8 above), i.e. now you shares nothing with we in terms of their phonological make-up (and us does not merge with we). But, you and thou which share /w/ become different only by one element in terms of their content, i.e. before the ye/you merger they differed by case and number, and now they differ only by number. They could both have been used in the function of the subjective and the paradigm of you, I would claim, was reduced to one form for a speaker-hearer:

you thou thee

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

6. French

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

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

It is important to note that what counts in my interpretation is not the time of the completion of a change but the time of its probable initiation. It is impossible to claim that a change started at a given time. We have only written “chance” records at our disposal. We can only say that a form was recorded at a certain time, i.e. it was used. In this case you starts to be used for the subjective before thee.
Présent and Imparfait. The system of person never ceased to be relevant to French verbs.

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

7. History (2)

12th c.: verb ceases to distinguish persons in the preterite in the North
13th c.: polite ye in address to single addresses
14th c. 1st half: ye/you merger starts
   you/thou merger may start
   2nd half: thou/thee merger starts
15th c. before GVS: you/thou co-occur
16th c. 2nd half: you dominates over ye and thou/thee
17th c.: thou dominates over thou
18th c.: thou/thee eliminated

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

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

REFERENCES