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Krechetova Axinya
Alexandrovna
Modern University for the
Humanities, Moscow, Russia

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How did “Thou” disappear in english?

Krechetova Axinya Alexandrovna

Abstract

The article is devoted to the history of the development of second-person pronouns in the English language and the features of the functioning of the *thou/you* opposition in fiction, the Bible and the language as a whole. For all the known difficulties that arise when you are translating from English, there is one problem that isn't so obvious, but no less important: in the pronoun system of the English language there is no formal difference between you and polite You. The article analyzes the main difficulties in translating second-person pronouns in fiction (using the works of W. Shakespeare as an example) and suggests the possible reasons for the disappearance of the pronoun “*thou*” from the speech of modern English-speaking people. In this work, the following methods were used: comparative, method of frequency analysis, generalization. This study can be used to organize the work of the club “Lovers of English,” in elective courses for in-depth study of the English language.

Keywords: *Thou / You* pronouns, second - person appeals, conversion, translating, fiction, poetry, Bible, Shakespeare

1. Introduction

The choice of research topics and material is primarily due to the relevance of studying the features and traditions of various regions and the nations of the world in connection with the importance of intercultural dialogue in modern life. Skillful use of messages is an important element of any national culture. The object of the study is the English form of second-person appeals. The subject of the study is the identification of features of the use of second-person pronouns in modern English.

So, in the literary works of English writers you can find material about adults and children, neighbors, relatives and how they communicate with each other. Educational material “Works on linguistics” by Anichkov I.E. helped to find answers to linguistic questions. The linguistic encyclopedic dictionary made it possible to reproduce some forms of treatment most accurately.

The purpose of the work is to show the features of the forms of appeals of English etiquette on the basis of language material, reflecting the material and spiritual culture of the nation, to find out why the second-person pronoun *thou* has become archaic and has sunk into Oblivion. The goal set in the work identified several research topics and tasks:

- show the features of the forms of second-person appeals, identify the national-specific properties of the linguistic picture of the world of the English language as a whole;
- to analyze the linguistic and verbal means of expression of forms of treatment in English;
- to identify on the practical material, with examples from works of English fiction, the specifics of the speech behavior of native English speakers.

Methods

When this article was writing, some research methods were applied, for example the analysis of the textual material of the works of English literature and the Bible.

Correspondence
Krechetova Axinya
Alexandrovna
Modern University for the
Humanities, Moscow, Russia

The methodological basis of the study was the scientific works of various scientists in the field of stylistics and grammar of the English language and the analysis of verbal communication. The linguistic and speech means of expressing the forms of treatment in English etiquette are analyzed, the features of the forms of appeals are shown, national-specific properties of the linguistic picture of the world of the English language are revealed as a whole. The unit of analysis is the *thou* pronoun, which isn't longer in use in the English language, and the pronoun *you*, which replaced it almost completely.

Probably, the first thing that English beginner learns in class is the fact, that there isn't formal distinction between the pronouns *thou* and *you* in English. The British are perfectly fine with one short pronoun - *you*.

But the question is: has it always been so simple? And what strange forms are found in poetry? Maybe they're typos? This is the fact, that English, like any other language, is constantly evolving, changing both grammatically and lexically and phonetically. This path isn't always associated with the acquisition of a new one; it happens that old, "long-worn-out" forms appear overboard.

Main part

In ancient English the pronoun *thou* was used when it was referring to one person, and *ye (you)* - to several people. After the Norman Conquest, which marked the beginning of the influence of French vocabulary, which marked the Middle English period, *thou* was gradually replaced by *ye (you)*, as a form of appeal to the highest rank, and later, to the equal. For a long time, *thou* remained the most commonly used form for referring to a person of a lower rank.

The word *thou* [ðəu] was previously a singular pronoun in the English language. Subsequently, it was supplanted by the second-person pronoun of the plural *you*, due to the ubiquitous reference to *you* (a joke is known, that the Englishman refers to *you* even to his dog). To this day, *thou* has been preserved in religious texts to appeal to the Lord, now rarely used, although quite often found in conversation in the north of England and Scotland, as well as in some places in the United States. It's in the nominative case, the object case is *thee*, the possessive form is *thy* or *thine*. Almost all verbs related to *thou* have the endings -st and -est, for example *thou goest* (you go). In England, at the beginning of the 11th - middle 15th century, the word *thou* was sometimes shortened by substituting a small letter *u* over the letter of the Anglo-Saxon alphabet Þ (thorn).

But to this day, in some dialects there are separate *you* and *thou*. For example, in Lancashire and Yorkshire, *thu/tha* is used as a nominative case, singular, and *thee* as an object case, singular. With this pronoun, it's necessary to use the forms of the second-person singular, which aren't in active use in modern English. As already mentioned above, the verbs following the word *thou* usually end in -st or -est in the indicative mood both in the present and in the past tenses. The letter *e* in the end can't be used. Old English hasn't been standardized in orthography yet.

That is a typical example of using verbs with this word:

Expression	Present Tense	Past Tense
you know	thou knowest	thou knewest
you drive	thou drivest	thou drovest
you make	thou makest	thou madest
you love	thou lovest	thou lovedest

Some irregular verbs are used as follows:

Expression	Present Tense	Past Tense
you are	thou art (or thou beest)	thou wast (or thou wert)
you have	thou hast	thou hadst

The contrast of the singular and plural informal and formal context is called the TV-difference and appeared in English, mainly due to the influence of the French language. The beginning was the developing tendency to appeal to the king and other aristocrats, using the plural pronoun, and soon such an appeal to people in a higher position in society became considered polite, as in French. In French, *tu* was subsequently considered familiar and condescending (and for a stranger it was a possible insult), while the plural *vous* was preserved and remained formal. If W. Shakespeare had been given the newspaper of our day, it is unlikely, that he would read it easily. But back to *you*. Many years ago, the British made a distinction between *thou* and *you*.

It looked like this:

Nominative case, singular	Thou
Nominative case, plural	Ye
Object case, singular	Thee
Object case, plural	You

For example, in sonnet 3 V. Shakespeare addresses to Friend as "*thou*":

Look in thy glass, and tell the face thou viewest
 Now is the time that face should form another;
 Whose fresh repair if now thou not renewest,
 Thou dost beguile the world, unless some mother.
 For where is she so fair whose unear'd womb
 Disdains the tillage of thy husbandry?
 Or who is he so fond will be the tomb
 Of his self-love, to stop posterity?
 Thou art thy mother's glass, and she in thee
 Calls back the lovely April of her prime:
 So thou through windows of thine age shall see
 Despite of wrinkles this thy golden time.
 But if thou live, remember'd not to be,
 Die single, and thine image dies with thee.

However, in the Middle Ages, plural forms - *Ye* and *You* - became widespread. They were used to express respect and reverence, especially in relation to officials, important people. It can be said, the popularity of the plural forms ruined the singular pronouns *thou* and *thee*, since by 1600 they acquired a shade of familiarity and soon went out of use completely, preserved only in a poetry and in the Bible. Why has this transition occurred? There isn't definite answer. Language historians can, at best, track the stages of changes in the use of *thou* from monuments fairly accurately, and put forward their own hypotheses. According to Nielsen, already at the end of the Middle English period (somewhere in the second half of the 15th century) *ze [ye]/you* (forms of the nominative and object cases of second-person singular, respectively) begins to be used instead of the previous *pou/pee*, it may reflects French influence. The pronoun *pou (thou)* is still used this time, but narrows the context of use: it's used to express a negative attitude towards the interlocutor, while *ze* stands for respectfulness. Apparently, this is a development of an older trend, insofar as according to Kisby, Chosser (late 14th

century) already used *ye* and *thou* to distinguish between these meanings. By the time of W. Shakespeare (late 16th century) the object case of the second-person plural pronoun *you* is gradually replacing the old nominative case *ye* (although even in the 17th century many educated people adhered to the old rules in writing), and now for both cases there is only one option, which we can see in modern English : "You came to see me" (*you* is in the form of the nominative case) and "I came to see you" (*you* is in the form of the object case) don't differ from each other. Simultaneously with this simplification (apparently associated with the same neutral sound of forms in unstressed positions: in Shakespeare's "The Tempest" - "a southwest blow on ye and blister you all over" (Act 1, Scene 2)) *you* substitutes *thou* even further: Shakespeare's *you* isn't painted in any stylistic way, but *thou* emphasizes familiarity or irritation. Further, *thou* becomes a thing of the past more and more and is fixed only at the level of a poetic style. According to Kisby, there is only one sociolect, where the consistent use of *thou* is preserved. This is the Quaker language ("Friends of Religious Society").

However, all educated people know, that there's a strict grammatical distinction between *you* and *thou* in liturgical and religious texts, and these pronouns haven't any stylistic coloring. This tradition dates back to the famous Bible of King Jacob (1604-1611). This wasn't the first translation of the Bible into English (John Wycliffe was a pioneer in the middle of the 14th century, there were also translations of 1535 and 1568), but it was became canonical (it's called the "authorized version"). The text of the Bible of King Jacob was later checked and corrected in accordance with the changed spelling in 1769, but although other translations have appeared, the version of the 17th century is considered the most authoritative.

Like other Protestant translators and purists, the 47 scholars of King Jacob worked with the originals (although the apocrypha was translated from Latin partially) and in Greek, Aramaic, and Hebrew the second-person plural pronoun wasn't used referring to one person. Therefore, the translators faithfully repeated the original, that's why *thou* in the religious texts is still the norm.

Of course, you can't attribute the disappearance of *thou* from daily communication to the uppercase only to the Bible of King Jacob by the time of working on it, it was already very limited - but, apparently, you shouldn't discard it. In fact, any texts of sacred books "cast in bronze" the language, which they are written, and often they are consciously written in an archaized style. There's nothing surprising in the fact, that the language, that English speakers heard in the church was perceived by them as something very far from real life more and more and became, to a certain degree, a taboo for "low" conversations. However, don't think that English speakers don't understand or don't feel the difference between the plural and singular of the second person. Firstly, unlike the frozen language of the Bible, modern English is much richer and has many variations. So, Kisby points out that in the northern British dialects *thou* "fought" the longest time and somewhere even survived in dialects. Secondly, English speakers, as a rule, don't face serious difficulties in learning other languages, where there is a difference *thou / you*. And finally, thirdly, English speakers often need for such a distinction and there are a large number of non-normative variants, based on the

pronoun *you*: *yous / youse, y'all, all y'all, you guys / you gals, all of you*, etc.

In South American speech you can see the turn of speech as *you all* or *y'all*, as a polite appeal to several people:

What do you all think of this book?

By the way, *you all* has a possessive form - *you all's*:

We'll finish soon with you all's help!

Nowadays the pronoun *ye* can be found in literature, dialects, and locutions:

As ye sow, so shall ye reap	saying used to mean that the way you behave in life will affect the treatment you will receive from others
ye Gods	used to show surprise

Conclusion

Undoubtedly, a study of the practice of using various forms of treatment in the communication of people in the English-speaking community helps to identify both the specifics of interpersonal communication and the specifics of the communication culture as a whole. The paper analyzes the linguistic and speech means of expressing the forms of appeal in English etiquette, shows the features of the forms of addresses, reveals the national-specific properties of the linguistic picture of the world of the English language as a whole, due to the peculiarities of cultural and historical development.

The level of knowledge in the field of understanding and using forms of appeals is different and requires further development. People who study English and plan to travel to English-speaking countries should be aware of the forms of treatment accepted in these countries.

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