Second Person Pronouns in Contemporary English: The End of a Story or Just the Beginning?

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Abstract

This paper argues that most textbooks on the history of English describe the conventional story where the T form of address (*thou*) falls out of general use in the seventeenth century, so that looking at pronouns of address in English is no longer of interest or value. This story is generally based on standard English, however, so that it ignores the active use of *thou*-forms in English regional dialects well into the late twentieth century and their survival up to the present day; and also their continued use in the language of the liturgy and related discourses. The accepted story also ignores the development of new singular and plural oppositions in pronouns and pronominals of address in regional speech, not only within the British Isles, but also, very importantly, beyond them. The second part of the paper will therefore make a general survey of English pronouns of address in a global anglophone context.

1. Introduction

At first glance it might appear that in discussing second person personal pronouns (2PP) in contemporary English there is not much to say. Gramley & Patzold's *Survey of Modern English* states baldly: 'To all intents and purposes English has only one second person pronoun, *you*' (1992: 288). It follows therefore that in comparison with other European languages there is no distinction made formally between singular and plural (but consider the reflexive *yourself/yourselves*), and none between 'polite' and

'familiar'/'impolite', as there once were in English during the medieval and renaissance periods (see Wales 1983, 1996). It might be argued that this multivalence for *you* is an advantage in certain registers, for example advertising and propaganda, where a mass consumer readership or audience is simultaneously an individual singled out. 'I want *you* for U.S. Army' says Uncle Sam on an old recruiting poster, his index finger pointing outwards. 'I am telling *you*' he says on another, 'On June 28th I expect *you* to enlist in the army of war savers', his hands on his hips. Is he pointing at one person, or a whole group, or both? Is he being personal and friendly (T), or polite (V)? Or authoritative, even rude (T)?

There is certainly no *thou*-forms in the usual tables of personal pronouns in contemporary grammar-books, for example Biber et al's most recent *Student Grammar of Spoken and Written English* (2002). Most histories of English stop discussing *thou* after the seventeenth century, or the eighteenth at the latest, when it is considered 'marked' rather than 'unmarked' (*you*) and characteristically regard it as 'obsolete'. However, time and again we must be wary about grammarians' and linguistic historians' use of the term 'English'. What is usually meant is '*written* English'; and '*formal* written English'; and '*standard* English'; and more specifically 'standard *English* English': hence 'formal written standard English English'. Even Gramley & Patzold have to admit that *thou* has not actually completely disappeared; although it is clearly 'marginalised' from 'common core' usage.

2. 'Thou' in liturgical discourse

Thou-forms and corresponding verb forms (- (*e)st, -(e)dst*), surprisingly perhaps, remain in contemporary standard liturgical discourse, written and chanted, twenty years after the introduction of the 'Alternative Service' book in 1980 for the Church of England, and the gradual revision of hymns and psalms and the popular use of

modernised versions of the Bible. Even in the 'Alternative Service' *thou*-forms occur in the Eucharist; and *The Book of Common Prayer* is still widely used for Evensong. *Thou* in liturgical discourse is very much a powerful symbol, a style marker of something set apart, super-deferential even. I think Joseph (1987) is right when he says 'we would not term [the] use [of *thou*] as non-standard. The person praying violated a contemporary 'norm' in order to exploit every bit of the authority and status which the standard language enjoys'.[1] Joseph is discussing prayer specifically, and there is probably also the connotation of intimacy at work here. Prayers can be seen as private and intimate monologues addressed to God. Most people, certainly, still prefer to use the traditional version of the Paternoster or 'Lord's Prayer': 'Our Father, which *art* in Heaven, hallowed be *thy* name.' *Thou*-forms are also retained in the marriage service, even in civil ceremonies, in all parts of the anglophone world: 'I, Katie Wales, do take *thee*, David Bovey, to be my lawful wedded husband': again, there is the connotation of intimacy and affection to take account of. For Quakers, who still also apparently use *thou*-forms, the historical association of 'brotherhood' must be a factor in its persistence.[2]

Thou-forms, somewhat surprisingly perhaps, turn up in the British National Spoken Corpus (BNSC), but are unsurprisingly, however, not very common: no more than about 30 in 11 million words. They occur in religious text types such as sermons, and direct quotations from the Authorised Version of the Bible. A productive contemporary formula, however, is *thou shalt (not),* a parody of the Ten Commandments of the Old Testament, used to suggest an edict:

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[1] J. E. Joseph, *Eloquence and Power*, Pinter, p.73.
[2] D. Leith & D. Graddol, 'Modernity and English as a national language', in D. Graddol, D. Leith & J. Swann (eds) *English: History, Diversity and Change*, Routledge, 1996, p.155 fn.3.

(i) '…If the development plan said, *Thou shalt not* develop that green field, if it was not allocated in the development plan, then section fifty-four A would er would work very well…' <f_108301-N-mixed>

The following example taken from a radio phone-in is interesting because the physical context is indeed a church, but the confusion of Old and New Testament adds to the unintentional comedy:

(ii) female caller from Chipping Norton: 'erm it was the lady that talked earlier, and evidently in church *thou shalt not* smoke. It just amazed me…'

radio presenter: 'You think that's wrong?'

caller: 'Did Jesus Christ ever say *thou shalt not* smoke?'

radio presenter: 'Well, I don't know if Marlborough tobacco was around in the time of Jesus Christ….' <fbheimb-S-mixed>

In the following example the variant of the formula still suggests authority, since it is spoken by a teacher giving a pottery demonstration to the class:

(iii) 'So can you see the board there? That's just-er Emma keep *thy* hands to *thyself* otherwise that the eye can induce the old custom of putting them off…' <f_077302-N-mixed>

Another formula, now completely lexicalised, is the phrase *holier than thou*, now having the adjectival meaning of 'sanctimonious' and hence used derogatively. It occurs three times in the BNSC, with considerable syntactic flexibility:

(iv) 'So I don't want to sit here *holier than thou*, start preaching'; 'I mean I'm not going to be sort of *holier than thou* about it all I mean'; What could I have done to make Justin *holier than thou*, say anything like that?'

In the following example, again in a religious context like (ii) above, the phrase is parodied: the speaker is describing a funeral:

(v) '…and we went in and like the vicar greets you at the door don't he and she was like <unclear> up to the vicar like, you know, she's more fucking *heavier than thou*...' <f_009701-S-mixed>

3. 'Thou' in regional dialects

Leith & Graddol (1996) have a map with a legend that does at least recognise that 'the pronouns *thou* and *thee* are still used in some regional dialects in England'.[3] Their map of England, Wales, the Scottish border and the Isle of Man shows *thou* well away from London, the East Midlands, East Anglia and the South-east: i.e. in the North from the Humber estuary down to the Mersey; the West Midlands and Welsh borderlands, and many parts of the South-west. Frustratingly, the map cannot indicate any patterns of pronominal usage north of the Scottish border. Yet *thou*-forms have been recognised as a traditional feature of Shetland speech (see, e.g. Melchers 1985). In the following quotation from the BNSC *thou*-forms are clearly noted as present in the Orkney islands, although there is reference to speech customs of the past, and the phrase which provokes the discussion is a conventional greeting:

(vi) A: The *thou* and the *thee* and the *thines.* You've just said *thou*, 'hoo's *thou* the day'. There are a lot of old folks still use that?'

B: 'Oh yes it's quite common and common in middle-aged folk even yet among people you're familiar with. I mean even when I was small you wouldn't use *thee* and *thou* to an older person. It was somehow thought of as being irreverent but to members of your own family and people your own age or somebody younger than you you would use *thee* and *thou.* But if it was perhaps even a little one your own age if you didn't know them very well it would be *you. Thee* and *thou* were <unclear> a

[3] D. Leith & D. Graddol, op.cit., p.155 fig 4.6.

term implied intimacy and affection and closeness as far as I always understood it…' <f_107901-N-F>

As a result of the monumental survey of regional rural dialects by Harold Orton and his co-workers at the University of Leeds from 1952 onwards, dialectologists know a great deal about the active use of *thou*-forms (with their rich phonetic variants) in over 300 localities amongst older speakers at least up to the 1970s if not also later. So Upton et al (1994, 1996), albeit based on the Survey of English Dialects (SED) , note *thou*-forms in the areas designated by Leith & Graddol, but also Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire. There is no doubt that *thou*-forms, like many other dialect features, were expected to be recessive by Orton and his colleagues, because of the spread of standard English into the educational system, the increased mobility of the population, and the rise of urbanisation, etc: indeed these were factors which lead to the Survey being undertaken. Even Joseph Wright in his thesis on his local Windhill dialect (1892) recognises that *thou* is not so general then as it had been 20 years before.

However, the extent of *thou*'s recessiveness needs to be thoroughly examined. Orton's older speakers of the 1960s and even 1970s have been replaced by a new generation of older speakers: the example in (vi) shows *thou*'s retention. Moreover, it is highly significant that the SED largely ignored non-rural localities, areas which offer potentially rich and highly complex dialect variation for investigation. In semi-industrial areas, in suburbs and town and city centres especially in the North of England and the Midlands, the assumption that all is 'dialect levelling' is not proving the case. So in the 'Black Country' round Wolverhampton and Dudley near Birmingham *thee*- subjective and objective forms are still heard amongst the elderly ('Bist *thee* a-gooin?'). Shorrocks' work on the Bolton area of Greater Manchester in

the 1970s and 1980s (published 1996, 1998, 1999) revealed extensive use amongst a wider age group and localised special features such as enclitic interrogatives like/dust ( )/. *Thou*-forms in the North-east pit villages can certainly be traced though the mining songs of the first two-thirds of the twentieth century as collected by Lloyd (1978); but they are also testified (*thoo, tha, theesell*) in the recent tabulations by Griffiths (1999). I myself can cite recent examples in the last two years of *thou*-forms in speech -and not only amongst older speakers- in the Leeds (West Yorkshire) and Sheffield (South Yorkshire) town centres. In Sheffield *thoo* as vocative was part of a farewell formula admittedly, uttered by a bus driver; in Leeds the following dialogue took place on a bus between a young mother in her early twenties and her toddler in a buggy:

(vii) toddler: 'That man's looking at me'

mother: 'That man's looking at *thee*? That's all right'

John Widdowson, formerly of the National Centre for English Cultural Tradition (NATCET) at the University of Sheffield has confirmed (personal communication) that *thou*-forms are alive and well in the Sheffield area. It is interesting in this connection that when a survey he undertook on local dialect was reported in the local press in 1999, it was headlined: '*Tha* wot? As they say in these parts' (*Sheffield Star* 13.01.99); and 'Watch what *tha*'rt saying' (*Sheffield Telegraph* 15.01.99). However, the testimony of the headlines is ambiguous, although valuably so. On the one hand the headlines suggest the use of *thou*-forms in formulas as in greetings and partings above (and also (vi)) or discourse tags (*tha wot?*), as in the many examples of *thou knows* from Bolton in Shorrocks (1998) (see also footnote 9 below); but on the other, that such formulas are fast fading into cultural memory, and therefore increasingly

stereotypical. This would also be in tune with journalists' general fondness for stereotyping of regional (especially Northern) speech, even in their own region.

Not only does more research need to be done on the general extent of *thou*'s use in regional speech, its degree of recessiveness, its distribution amongst older or younger speakers, but also on its grammatical, sociolinguistic and pragmatic functions, to judge whether they match the accepted T/V distinction of familiarity/politeness, for example; or whether there are different patterns of usage between men and women. Even at the time of the *Survey of English Dialects*, evidence for such patterns and distinctions was scanty, since phonology and morphology were of prime interest. [4] The example in (vi) above about Orkney usage stresses *thou*'s use 'among people you're familiar with'; 'to members of your own family'; 'people your own age or somebody younger' because it 'implied intimacy and affection and closeness '. To people 'you didn't know…well' or to 'an older person' the *you* of respect was used. The *thou* of affection amongst family members is evident in my Leeds example in (vii). As in earlier periods of English, *thou* can be ambiguous in its values. In the following example from the BNSC, a man is telling his listener about his life down the coal-mines, probably in South Yorkshire or Derbyshire:

(viii) '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…' <f_095702 Mid>

The manager shows both his authority and also his rudeness.

There are probably also variations in the values of *thou*-forms from region to region: for example, one man's 'mate' is another man's 'stranger', according to community. It is a well-known stereotype and belief, certainly, that Northerners are

generally friendlier than Southerners; and that terms of address like *love* and *pet* are quite frequently used to complete strangers: so consider the Sheffield bus-driver's *thoo* noted above. In *The Guardian* in August 1983 there was a report on the increasing use of 'familiar' *tha* amongst children to parents and teachers in the Barnsley area, normally reserved for their school-mates. (It is interesting that the newsworthiness consisted in the spread of the familiar forms, not in the fact that it was young people rather than the elderly who were using *tha* in the first place.)

It is also possible for *thou* to be used in an 'impersonal' or 'generic' sense, like *you* most commonly, but I have never seen this commented upon (nor indeed in connection with late medieval or Elizabethan English usage). In the following examples from the incidental material of the earlier *Survey of English Dialects* the informants are obviously describing a process that habitually takes place: '*thou* greases it'; '*thou* ties it up'. There is a connotation of vividness, and perhaps even the semiotic reflex of self-reference.[5] This is clearer in the following more recent examples from the Bolton area, as recorded by and to Shorrocks. He has played back a recording to his informant:

(ix) '*Thou doesn't /dunt/*realise *thou art/d t/*talking broad like that. I know I talk broad, but *thou- thou thinks/d d 0inks/* everything's coming out all right, *thou knows*, */d no:z/* and it's not- well, it's not when *thou hears /de (r)z /* it come back on *thee/di/....*[6]

4. 'New' pronouns of address in regional and colloquial English

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[4] Certainly G. Melchers using SED materials herself from the West Riding of Yorkshire wishes for a sociolinguistic investigation: *Studies in Yorkshire Dialects,* Stockholm University, 1972, p.137.
[5] Examples quoted in C. Upton, D. Parry and J. D. A. Widdowson, *Survey of English Dialects: Dictionary and Grammar*, 1994, p.494. On the subjectivity of so-called 'impersonal' *you* see K. Wales, *Personal Pronouns in Present-day English,* Cambridge University Press, pp.78-9.
[6] See further G. Shorrocks, *A Grammar of the Diaelct of the Bolton Area, pt. 1,*Peter Lang, pp.93-5. Note that his informants use *thou knows* frequently, equivalent to the common discourse tag *you know*

Thou's apparent strong resistance to obsolescence might be seen as surprising, were it not for the fact also that the 'death' of dialect has been predicted for well over a hundred years, as indicated in section 3. above. Indeed, because of the significant growth of urban areas each with their own local linguistic characteristics, as also indicated above, so-called 'non-standard' linguistic features are flourishing, with new forms emerging in every-day informal speech. As far as 2PPs are concerned, 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.

One possible choice is *you* plus a singular rather than plural verb (e.g. *you is/was*). This is found in colloquial speech from Tees-side to the East-end of London, and was quite widespread in the eighteenth century, as letters, epistolary and other fairly informal types of poetry reveal.

There are well over a dozen possibilities of distinctive plural forms, each with varying degrees of pronominalization and also of localization. There is heard *yous(e)* in Dublin and Northern Ireland, and in Northern English (Liverpool, Glasgow, the North-east): in these latter urban areas possibly under the influence of immigrant Irish workers. The presence of the plural morpheme in Hiberno-English may itself be due to Gaelic influence, which apparently had a singular plural distinction in the equivalent pronoun.[7] A similar variant *yiz* occurs in general Hiberno-English (dubbed a low prestige form by Quirk et al 1985); and *ye's* in Tyneside and Durham. However, on the evidence of the BNSC *yous(e)* appears to be even more widespread , since many of the 70 examples I found are from southern England discourses. In the

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in informal standard English. *Thoo knaas* is also noted as a common feature of Durham dialect in 1969 (C.Geeson, *A Northumberland and Durham Wordbook,* Harold Hill, p.30).

[7] See M. Montgomery, 'British and Irish antecedents', Cambridge University Press, 2001, p.131.

following example, the speaker is not consistent. He is clearly emotive; it is a public union meeting:

(x) 'We're doing *yous* a favour, our lads speak*s* plain to *you*, we're doing *yous* a favour. We are asking *you*, withdraw the motion…*Some of yous people* must remember that…' <f_100908-S-mixed>

Other examples occur in informal conversations among friends or family; and interestingly combine, as in (x), with other lexical items to form noun phrases: *two of yous; any of yous; yous two; yous lot; bugger yous; all of yous; '*about *yous* and Billy'; and even formulaic expressions, e.g. in farewells: 'So I will love and leave *yous folks* then'. It is interesting to note that in Hiberno-English *yous* (as a determiner) plus another word has become lexicalised in the compound *yousuns*, comparable to the Glaswegian *yins* 'you ones'. I return to *you* as a determiner below, and also some of the noun phrases above.

As the 'about *yous* and Billy' example possibly reveals, although the context is ambiguous, there might be a singular sense here. This is hardly an emerging 'polite' usage, however, by analogy with *you*'s history (and see *y'all* below in section 5). It rather suggests that for some people *youse* is simply becoming the norm in everyday conversation, especially to family and close friends.

With several phrases which mark plural address it becomes increasingly difficult to see where pronouns end and the lexicalization of NPs into pronominals begins (see also section 5 below). It is also difficult to see where non-standard or dialectal usage ends and informal, colloquial everyday common core English begins. There are many *you* +NP phrases, for example, with *you* as an apparent determiner. Take *you guys*, for example. As the BNSC reveals, the phrase as a whole has varied grammatical roles: as a subject:

(xi) ‘Having said that, I’ve been on some of the deliveries that *you guys* have to do, and some of the places where *you* have to go and er I fully appreciate it’s not easy…’ <f_084601-N-M>

or as separate vocative:

(xii) ‘… And *you*’re going, *you* asked for it, *you guys*, *you* asked for it’ <f_139201-S-mixed>

We can note the common collocation here with *right* or *look,* to attract or focus people’s attention, and often in the context of re-enacting previous speech, as if to add vividness or drama:

(xiii) ‘But as of nineteen forty-eight, forty-nine, if you’d said-you’d gone into a village, *right you guys* we’re going into socialism, we are gonna create- collective family…’ <f_113901-S>

(xiv) A: ‘We said *look* we’ll bring out a price guide

B: Mm

A: but we ain’t gonna pay for it

B oh no no

A: so *you guys*

B: get it sponsored by the-

A: Yeah. *You guys* are gonna sponsor this… <f_117701-N-M>

Although *you* guys is commonly used with male reference only, amongst younger generations in particular it usefully serves for both sexes (*you people* is certainly not common, but see 5,. below); and this is undoubtedly due to American influence (see also section 5). The BNSC has only 200 examples of *guys* in 11 million words, but the popularity of phrases like *wise guys* is increasing. The contexts for *you guys* (17 examples in the BNSC) are often ‘blokey’ and obviously informal (cf. the use of

gonna and *aint* in (xiii) and (xiv) above). The 'chumminess' often disguises authority in examples where a speaker wishes to change the direction of a conversation from generality to direct involvement, as in (xi) above.

The older generation's equivalent of *you guys* must be *you chaps*, with male reference only. I found only 2 examples in the BNSC, one from an older speaker reminiscing about the Second World War: 'Quite *a lot of you chaps* did attend [church]'. Other gender-marking phrases would include *you boys, you fellows*, and *you girls*.

You lot has another set of connotations: rather familiar like *you guys*, but possibly slightly disparaging or retorting. In the following example, it is also exhortatory:

(xv) [studio discussion]: 'Get Bert on the phone I want a word with him now. Come on *you lot* you know where he is get him on the phone I want to talk to him…'<f_008001-S>

In the following quotations, there is clearly a recognition that *you lot* may be impolite:

(xvi) [panel game]: A. 'Are we ready?'

B: Sorry

A: Nobody's answering

C: yes yes

A: Well let's have this team for answering then. I like polite terms. *Oi you lot*

B: Sorry yes. They're not polite, deduct a point…' <f_117101-Mid-mixed>

(xvii) [meeting in an educational establishment:] A: 'Do you want me to come round there so you can read -this sheet as well?

B: No it doesn't matter *you lot* can keep me right

A: Okay

B: *You lot* that sounds awful *You lot*-…' <f_078002-N-mixed>

However, over-familiarity may be permitted from someone with authority, a teacher for example:

(xvii) '…In that case take the first paragraph erm-take this first paragraph *you lot* over here. The second paragraph *you you three*, the third paragraph *you three* and do me an idiomatic version in -five minutes<f_123801-S-mixed>

Lot is itself a very common word in colloquial English (over 11500 examples in the BNSC), and many of the *you lot* phrases (about 60 of them altogether) occur in contexts where *a lot* was being used anyway: as in

(xviii) 'They've got to make some money out of that, haven't they? Otherwise it's costing *you lot* over at Southwold *a lot* of money…' <f_032501-S-mixed>

Formally speaking, *you lot*, unlike *you guys,* belongs to a recognisable set of phrases with *lot*: (a) with objective case pronouns as in *us lot; them lot* (b) with demonstratives as in *this lot; that lot* and (c) equivalent to the partitive or quantifier phrase *a lot of you,* although the semantic range of the latter is partial, not inclusive. However, *you lot*'s own semantic range has its own ambiguity: what is the least number that *you lot* can refer to? It is not clear from (xvii) above; but in (xix) it is varied by *you two*, in obvious hyperbole however. Three girls are walking to school:

(xix) A: 'Wait up. I can't walk as fast as *you two*, I'm not s healthy as *you two*

B: Healthy, me healthy—

A: Yeah well at least *you lot* eat up more healthy foods…' <f_133702-S>

You + numeral is also a common NP of address: from *you two* up to-what? *You three* as in (xvii) above, *you four? You five*? Beyond that we must be in a teaching or military planning situation most probably. *You two* is certainly a common collocation according to Biber et al (1999), occurring about 40 times per million words in the whole of the British corpus they used. Again, it has phrasal equivalents: *them two, us*

two in the objective case as with *you lot*; but also *we two* in the subjective case.[8] It is also equivalent to other 'dual' forms such as *you both* and *both of you* (cf. *the two of you*); as well as *both of them/ both of us*.

5. Pronouns of address in English around the world

Some of the pronouns and NPs noted above are also found in many varieties of English around the world. Surprisingly, however, English grammar-books are relatively 'silent' about pronouns generally around the world, even those text-books recently entering the market on International English(es), e.g. Bauer (2002). Many pronouns of address are due to patterns of colonial settlement. *Yiz* in Newfoundland English was probably brought by Irish immigrants, as indeed *yous/yuz* in Australian English and in American English from the mid-West eastwards to Pittsburg.[9] Similarly *you'uns* and *yinz* are heard in 'Pittsburgese', brought from Ulster or Scotland; and even *your-uns, yourerunses* in Tennessee. *You guys* I have noted above in section 4, popular amongst middle-class white Americans; *youse guys* is also heard. Interesting analagous NPs are found in Tok Pisin (*yupela* 'you fellow') and Fiji English (*you gang*).

It seems surprising that Bauer (2002) again does not refer at all to the most salient and even stigmatised pronoun of address in American English, *you-all/ y'all (ya'll)*, characteristic of the Southern United States in particular. This form has been much commented on since the 1920s (see Axley 1926-7, Hills 1926-7), but there is still no general agreement as to its origins or its semantic values. It seems to be an interesting case of de-nominalization or encliticization, like *yinz*: *you* (as head) + *all* (in

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[8] D. Biber et al *The Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English*, Longman, 2001, p.329 see this construction as pronoun+ apposition, not determiner +numeral. A related regional appositive construction not so far noted is the East Anglian *you together.*

[9] L. Bauer, op.cit., p.27 does refer briefly to *youse*, stating it is derived from Scottish and Irish, but is vague on its distribution outside the UK.

apposition) with equal stress (as in British English '*you all* know the answer') now pronounced as an unstressed monosyllable rhyming with *wall*. In British English *all* seems to function as an emphasizer, as well as making explicit not only that *you* is plural, but also the inclusiveness of the group addressed : cf 'all of you'. It is unlikely, therefore, in British English to refer to two people, unlike *y'all*. However, a recent article on *-all* compounds by Hantson et al (2002) notes forms like *sure-all, damn-all, naff-all, what-all* (as in 'with *what-all* they're doing to this planet', i.e. 'everything'), where they appear to be emphatic, and *all* would be the head. It is certainly noteworthy that in *y'all* the pronoun has been 'elided' into *all*, and not the other way round (**you'll*), although the latter would be homophonous with the abbreviated *you will.* In present-day American English *y'all* has clearly filled a gap: analogous forms with other pronouns (*we-all, they-all*, *who-all)* are noted in dictionaries of American English (e.g. Wentworth 1944, Matthews 1951) in only sporadic contexts, particularly associated with Black American speech from the 1880s onwards (also *why-all, where-all*). It is interesting that the earliest reference to *y'all*, dating from 1824, suggests an association with slave discourse. For Samoan plantation pidgin has *yu ol*, Montserrat creole has *ayu* ('all you'), and many African and Jamaican English varieties, Atlantic creoles and South Carolinan English have *unu (oono, hunu, yunnah, wunu)*, a plural form of address which may be derived from Igbo, but here a calque for *y'all*. [10]

The extent of the lexicalization of *y'all* is confirmed by the remarkable possessive clitic <'s> , of long standing, which I heard myself in Baton Rouge in 2001 on a group guided tour: 'Come on in and put *y'all's* coats in the cloakroom'. Historically, of course, other pronouns have acquired such a suffix: notably *one's* (cf. also

somebody's/ someone', etc). *Y'all* also occurs in formulaic or phatic phrases such as 'thank *y'all* '; *'y'all* have a nice day'; 'how are *y'all?'.* These phrases may well be examples of what Montgomery intriguingly calls 'plurality by association', although this is not explained. [11]Butters, however, in the same volume has an interesting explanation of these 'service encounter' formulas. He gives the example of '*Y'all* come back, hear?' to a lone customer in closing a sale: the intention is to invite the return of the addressee, *and* friends and family. This might solve the question as to whether *y'all* is used in the singular, and hence possibly following the historical path of *you* as a 'polite' form. Present-day opinion thinks it doubtful, although earlier dictionaries (e.g. Wentworth 1944) have quotations, again from Black American speech, that seem clear.[12]

6. Conclusion(s)

I have tried to illustrate very generally how pronouns of address, in the widest sense, must continue to be of interest to English language scholars despite the apparent 'normalization' of *you* as an unmarked form since the seventeenth century. In the flux of everyday speech new forms have emerged, and lexical processes undergone. The plethora of apparent plural phrases, however, ostensibly filling the 'gap' left by the demise of the *thou/you* opposition in standard English at least, are acquiring other semantic values in addition . 'Familiarity' is the main value (*youse, you guys);* also 'impoliteness' or 'condescension' (*you lot*), values traditionally associated with T forms; but also 'gender' (*you chaps, you boys, you girls, you guys* (British English)) ; and possibly 'indefiniteness' (*youse, y'all*). Given the expressiveness of informal

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[10] See M. Lipski, '*Y'all* in American English', *English World-wide* 14, 1993. M. Montgomery, op.cit.p.131, 149 thinks *y'all* comes from *ye aw* in Ulster Scots; R. Butters in the same volume p.332 sees it as an 'entirely indigenous form'.

[11] M. Montgomery, op.cit. p.149.

discourse, and in some cases the 'non-standardness' of the forms (*yous, yins, y'all*) in defiance of written 'norms', it should not be too surprising, perhaps, that the expressive singular *thou* has not entirely died out yet in regional English at the beginning of this new millennium.

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[12] See also Richardson 1984. On 'service encounter' forms, see Butters, op.cit. p.332f. Quirk et al,

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op.cit. p.344 note [b] think *y’all* is ‘misunderstood as a singular by outlanders’.

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