The Use of Second Person Pronouns in Shakespeare's *Tragedy of Hamlet* and *Macbeth*

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Abstract

This article concerns on the use of second person pronouns thou *and you in Shakespeare's Tragedy of Hamlet and Macbeth. Throughout the history of English language, second person pronouns have undergone many changes until they become only one form you. In the earlier period, the distinction between thou and ye was in a matter of the number of people being addressed. However, in early modern English, the use of second person pronouns did not depend only on the number of people, but also on the power and solidarity relations. Dealing with its changes, the use of second person pronouns* thou *and you in Shakespeare's plays is interpreted in this article. Results show that Shakespeare's plays provide a different view of the use of these pronominal forms. Nevertheless, Shakespeare actually follows the rule of pronominal forms dictated by society, yet some cases show inconsistency. The inconsistency refers to the switching between* thou *and you. It indicates that something emotionally happens among the characters which can be observed through their conversations.*

Keywords: *second person pronouns, thou, you, Tragedy of Hamlet, Macbeth*

Introduction

Society has built up variations for address toward certain people in certain circumstance. One significant variation is the preference of using pronominal form of second person pronoun *you*. People are dictated by society to use variations of addressing *you* depending on with whom they are speaking and where they are holding the conversation. The variations in conversation can reveal the social relationship of the addresser and addressee. Many European languages signify the relationship between second person pronouns and social relationship, such as *vous* and *tu* in France, *du* and *thr* in Germany, *tu* and *voi* in Italia. Present day English, however, does not make a distinction of social relationship in addressing people with second person pronouns. Yet English language in the past did make the distinction. It refers to the fact that one of the most important changes during the history of English is the form of second person pronouns *thou* and *you* and its variations. That makes English language said to have a long history until it reaches its standard form as people know it today.

This article discusses the use of second person pronouns in two plays in Renaissance period. It uses two prominent Shakespeare's tragedies, namely *Tragedy of Hamlet and Macbeth*. Furthermore, this article provides the context of situations within conversation, such as the social status of the speakers, the relationship of the speakers, the level of intimacy of the speakers, and the tone of situation. Through observations of the context, it explains when and how to use *thou* and *you*. Accordingly, this article would like to answer a question: How are the second person pronouns *thou* and *you* used in Shakespeare's *Tragedy of Hamlet* and *Macbeth*?

The Stages of the Development of *Thou* and *Ye* and Its Variations

According to Baugh and Cable (1978), the period of Renaissance was important because there involved two changes in term of the use of *thou* and *ye*. The first change indicated that *thou, thy*, and *thee* were disappeared. They stated that in the earliest period of English, the distinction between *thou* and *ye* was just in a matter of the number of people being addressed. *Thou* was used to address one person, while *ye* was used to address more than one person. The related forms of *thou* were *thy*, *thee*, *thine,* and *thyself* , while the related forms of *you* were ye, yours, *your,*and *yourself.* Single forms are marked by the use of *thou, thy,* and *thee*. The plural forms were marked by the use of *ye, your,* and *you*. The distinction grew up by the thirteenth century. During this period, *thou* and its related forms were used to address children and people having lower class (inferior). On the contrary, *ye* and its related forms were used to address people having higher social class (superior). This distinction was influenced by French forms *tu* and *vous* in the way of addressing. Then, *ye* and its related forms were recognized as forms to show either irrespective of rank or intimacy. In the sixteenth century, the singular forms were gone, but they were still used by the Quackers.

The second change was the replacement of *you* for *ye* as a nominative case**.** The distinction occurred between the nominative *ye* and the objective *you***.** In the fourteenth century, the objective *you* was used as the nominative, resulting that there is no distinction in the nominative form between *ye* and *you*. The use of *you* as the nominative then gradually replaced *ye*. In the end of sixteenth century, *ye* was only used in specific situations dealing with archaic, religious, and literary contexts (Crystal, 1995). In the seventeenth century, *you* became the accepted form for both nominative and objective form. It signified that *thou* was disappeared.

The Variations of *Thou* and *You* in Renaissance System

Crystal (1995) pointed out that in the Shakespeare time, the use of second person pronouns had many variations. *You* could be used to address either one person (singular form) or more than one person (plural form). But for addressing one person, there were many alternatives in term of using *thou/thee*. It was used by inferior people to address superior people and was also used among upper class. By contrast, *thou/thee* were used by superior people to address inferior people, and were also used by lower class to address each other. Additionally, it was used in literary works in addressing God and supernatural beings. In special cases, a husband might address his wife as *thou*, and she reply with *you*.

The preference of using *thou* and *you* depended on situations. Some situations could break the rule of convention. When it was used to express intimacy and affection, the use of *thou* was preferred. The use of *you* was found when it came to the formal situation as well as to show politeness and distance. *Thou* could be used even by inferior to superior to express annoyance and hatred. The use of *thou* to a person of equal rank who expect to be addressed *you* could thus be easily regarded as an insult. (Crystal, 1995)

The Use of *Thou* and *You* in Shakespeare's *Tragedy of Hamlet* and *Macbeth*

Shakespeare's *Tragedy of Hamlet* and *Macbeth* are classified as tragedies. Tragedies are kinds of play in which the main character suffers excessive sorrow. Accordingly, the tone of situation is serious and tragic started from beginning until the end of the plays. The setting of these two plays is mostly in the royal palace. It signifies that the conversation takes place among the member of royal palace, such as king, queen, noble, prince, soldier, servant, laborer, and so forth. Therefore, this discussion focuses on the conversation occurs between them.

Generally, Shakespeare uses *thou* and *you* form like what the rule of society expects. The

rule dictated in the society denotes that the use of *thou* and *you* expresses power and solidarity. As stated in the literary review, *thou* is used to address a social inferior, such as servant and laborer. It is also used among lower class and social inferior. *Thou* is also used in addressing God and supernatural beings like ghost and witches. *You* is used to address a social superior, such as king, queen, noble, prince, and so forth to show respect. It is also used among high class and social superior to show solidarity. The use of these pronominal forms in Shakespeare's plays will be explained further as follows.

In *Tragedy of Hamlet*, *thou* is used to address an inferior, such as King Claudius to servants and Queen Gertrude to Hamlet, his son. Also, it is used among people of low rank, such as among servants and gravediggers. The form *you* is used among nobles such as king and aristocracy, Prince Hamlet to Prince Laertes, Laertes to Ophelia, and so forth. Similarly, in *Tragedy of Macbeth*, *thou* is used to address an inferior, such as Lady Macbeth to her servant and Banquo to his son, Fleance, and Macbeth to Lady Macbeth, his wife. The form *you* is used to address an superior, such as Malcom to King Duncan (his father) and Lady Macbeth to Macbeth.

In *Tragedy of Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, there are some scenes in which the main characters have to address supernatural beings. In the beginning of the play, Hamlet meets a ghost which introduces itself as ghost of Hamlet's father. The following dialog is the case of the interaction between Hamlet and his ghost father. The dialog shows that Hamlet uses *thou* rather than *you*, as he is accustomed to.

HAMLET. *Where wilt **thou** lead me? speak; I'll go no further.*
Ghost. *Mark me.*
HAMLET. *I will.*
Ghost. *My hour is almost come, When I to sulphurous and tormenting flames. Must render up myself.*
***HAMLET.** Alas, poor ghost!*
Ghost. *Pity me not, but lend thy serious hearing to what I shall unfold.*
(*Tragedy of Hamlet*, Act I Scene V, in a part of platform)

The scene shows that Hamlet addresses the ghost with *thou* although the physical appearance of the ghost is his father-like. If it is really his father, Hamlet should address him as *you* but he does not since it is common to address ghost as *thou*.

In another play, *Tragedy of Macbeth*, there is also an interaction between main character and supernatural beings. In the beginning of the play, Macbeth and Banquo meet three witches on the way home. Macbeth addresses the witches using *you* since unlike the singular form there is no alternative to address second person pronoun plural of *you*.

MACBETH. *Speak, if you can: what are **you**?*
FIRST WITCH. *All hail, Macbeth! Hail to thee, thane of Glamis!*
SECOND WITCH. *All hail, Macbeth! Hail to thee, thane of Cawdor!*
THIRD WITCH. *All hail, Macbeth, that shalt be king hereafter*
(*Tragedy of Macbeth*, Act 1 Scene II, a camp near forest)

Besides addressing supernatural beings, a parent-children relation is taken into account. Children use only *you* with their parents and their parents generally use *thou* to express their affection toward their children. In *Tragedy of Macbeth*, Banque addresses his son, Fleance with *thou* and Lady Macduff addresses her son with *thou*. A different case takes place between Lord Polonius and Ophelia, her daughter in *Tragedy of Hamlet*. It can be seen in the following conversation.

OPHELIA. *He hath, my lord, of late made many tenders of his affection to me.*
LORD POLONIUS. *Affection! pooh! **you** speak like a green girl, Unsifted in such perilous circumstance. Do **you** believe his tenders, as you call them?*
OPHELIA. *I do not know, my lord, what I should think.*
LORD POLONIUS. *Marry, I'll teach **you**: think yourself a baby; That you have ta'en these tenders for true pay, Which are not sterling. Tender yourself more dearly; Or--not to crack the wind of the*

*poor phrase, running it thus--**you**'ll tender me a fool.*

OPHELIA. *My lord, he hath importuned me with love in honourable fashion.*

LORD POLONIUS. *Ay, fashion **you** may call it; go to, go to.*

OPHELIA. *And hath given countenance to his speech, my lord,*
With almost all the holy vows of heaven.

(*Tragedy of Hamlet*, Act I Scene III, a room in Polonius' house)

This scene portrays the Polonius' anger toward Ophelia since she does not want to obey his father's advice to keep away from Hamlet. It raises assumption that Polonius prefers using *you* rather than *thou* because of his anger. But in the daily conversation between them, Polonius always addresses Ophelia using *you*. It can be assumed that Ophelia is regarded as the apple of his father's eyes so that his father treats her like a queen. No matter how anger his father to her, she keeps being addressed with *you*. It is like an honor for Ophelia.

The Switch between *Thou* and *You* in Shakespeare's *Tragedy of Hamlet* and *Macbeth*

The important case found in Shakespeare's *Tragedy of Hamlet* and *Macbeth* is the switch between *thou* and *you*. Four cases are chosen and highlighted in this discussion. The first case is the conversation between Hamlet and Horation which is located in the castle. Horation is the close friend of Hamlet who just comes from Wittenberg.

HAMLET. *I am very glad to see **you**. Good even, sir. But what, in faith, make **you** from Wittenberg?*

HORATIO. *A truant disposition, good my lord.*

HAMLET. *I would not hear **your** enemy say so, Nor shall **you** do mine ear that violence, To make it truster of **your** own report. Against yourself: I know **you** are no truant. But what is your affair in Elsinore? We'll teach **you** to drink deep ere **you** depart.*

HORATIO. *My lord, I came to see **your** father's funeral.*

HAMLET. *I pray **thee**, do not mock me, fellow-student; I think it was to see my mother's wedding.*

(*Tragedy of Hamlet*, Act 1 Scene II, a room of state in the castle)

Hamlet starts the conversation using *you* as they are accustomed to in normal conversation. He switches *you* into *thou* variation (*thee* as objective) when the tone of situation changes. He says that Horatio mock him although actually he knows that it is not kind of insult. Hamlet tries to break the coldness since they haven't met for a long time. Horation also realizes that Hamlet is kidding him so he does not feel offended.

The second case takes place between Hamlet and Queen Gertrude, his mother. In a usual and normal conversation between them, Hamlet uses *you* to address his mother and his mother replies with *thou*. The use of *thou* is common for a mother to show affection to her child. In the following conversation, Hamlet's mother suddenly changes the pronominal form to Hamlet.

HAMLET. *Now, mother, what's the matter?*

QUEEN GERTRUDE. *Hamlet, **thou** hast thy father much offended.*

HAMLET : Mother, **you** have my father much offended.

QUEEN GERTRUDE : Come, come, **you** answer with an idle tongue.

HAMLET : Go, go, **you** question with a wicked tongue.

QUEEN GERTRUDE : Why, how now, Hamlet!

HAMLET : What's the matter now?

QUEEN GERTRUDE : Have **you** forgot me?

HAMLET : No, by the rood, not so: **You** are the queen, **your** husband's brother's wife; And--would it were not so!--**you** are my mother.

QUEEN GERTRUDE : Nay, then, I'll set those to **you** that can speak.

HAMLET : Come, come, and sit **you** down; **you** shall not budge; **You** go not till I set **you** up a glass. Where **you** may see the inmost part of **you**.

QUEEN GERTRUDE : What wilt **thou** do? **thou** wilt not murder me? Help, help, ho!

(*Tragedy of Hamlet*, Act III Scene IV, the Queen's closet)

The scene reveals that something happen when Hamlet enters his mother's room angrily to question her about marrying his uncle. In the beginning of the conversation, his mother responds Hamlet using *thou* indicating nothing happens as a normal conversation. Then it comes to the point that Hamlet's raising tone of intonation really makes his mother upset. Thus she suddenly changes *thou* into *you* to address Hamlet. When Hamlet calms himself, she switches back into *thou*. Therefore, the switch between *thou* and *you* is caused by his mother's anger toward Hamlet.

The third case is the conversation between Hamlet and his ghost father. In Act I, Hamlet calls his ghost father using *thou*. Conversely, going forward to the Act III, Hamlet uses *you* to address his ghost father. In this scene, Hamlet does not seem that he sees ghost, rather he sees his father. The reason of the switching between *thou* and *you* is that he is convinced that the ghost is really his father whom he adores very much. The tone of son's affection towards his father embraces this scene. The scene is depicted as follows.

(Enter Ghost)

HAMLET : Save me, and hover o'er me with **your** wings, you heavenly guards! What would your gracious figure?

QUEEN GERTRUDE : Alas, he's mad!

HAMLET : Do **you** not come **your** tardy son to chide, That, lapsed in time and passion, lets go by The important acting of **your** dread command? O, say!

Ghost : Do not forget: this visitation. Is but to whet thy almost blunted purpose. But, look, amazement on thy mother sits: O, step between her and her fighting soul: Conceit in weakest bodies strongest works: Speak to her, Hamlet.

(*Tragedy of Hamlet*, Act III Scene IV, the queen's closet)

The fourth case happens between Macbeth and his wife, Lady Macbeth. In the usual conversation, Macbeth addresses his wife as *thou*, and she replies with *you*. In Act I Scene VII, Lady Macbeth breaks the rule as what is seen in the following conversation.

LADY MACBETH : Was the hope drunk. Wherein **you** dress'd yourself? hath it slept since? And wakes it now to look so green and pale. At what it did so freely? From this time such I account thy love. Art **thou** afeard to be the same in thine own act and valour As **thou** art in desire? Wouldst **thou** have that which **thou** esteem'st the ornament of life, And live a coward in thine own esteem, Letting 'I dare not' wait upon 'I would,' Like the poor cat i' the adage?

MACBETH: Prithee, peace: I dare do all that may become a man; Who dares do more is none.

(*Tragedy of Macbeth*, Act I Scene VII, Macbeth's castle)

The scene really shows that the tone of situation changes. Lady Macbeth is angry with Macbeth because he is still in doubt whether to kill the king or not. Lady Macbeth tries to persuade Macbeth to murder the king in order to get the throne. The fact that Macbeth feels unsure makes her really upset. Therefore, she switches *you* as the usual conversation with Macbeth to *thou*. In the rest of this scene, Lady Macbeth continuously uses *thou* whenever she feels upset with Macbeth.

Concluding Remarks

In the history of English language especially in early modern English, there are a distinction of second person pronouns between *thou* and *you*. The pronoun *you* can be used to address more than one addressee (Macbeth to witches, for instance). For addressing merely one addressee, there are many norms related to power and solidarity. The first rule is observed when the addressee is socially equal with the addresser (or it is

related with solidarity). The use of *you* form is required to address someone who is not close indicating a neutral and respect behavior. It also can be used by people of high rank to address one another. *Thou* form is used to address someone close indicating either intimacy or insult. The second rule is when the addressee is socially unequal with the addresser (or it is related with power). *Thou* form is used to address an inferior (such as parents to children, prince to servants), while *you* form is used to address a superior.

In Shakespeare's *Tragedy of Hamlet* and *Macbeth,* the rules can suddenly collapse. It is due to the fact that Shakespeare as found in his plays repeatedly switches between *thou* and *you* form. It happens whenever the character includes emotions within conversation so that the tone of situation changes, resulting on the switching between *thou* and *you*.

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