

An Enquiry into the Occurrences of Pronouns of Address (POAs) in Natural Speech of the Elizabethan Society

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Abstract: *The roles of power, ideology and distance are the key factors in any communication activity which determine the choice of lexical elements and the pattern of conversation. This paper aims to analyse the conversational patterns prevalent in the Elizabethan era and the reasons behind a particular choice from the wide range of pronouns of address and their relative forms which were prominently used during the period. In this regard, the Shakespearean dramatic discourse of Macbeth is considered to conduct the study. Plays are formulated in the form of conversation. Thus, this particular genre of literature can be the best available corpus to understand the natural speech patterns. Through this research study, an analytical linguistic enquiry has been conducted about the varied forms of addresses which depend not only on the addresser and the addressee but also on the stage in conversation, psychological situation of the participants, the types of speech patterns they are involved in and also on the identity related to social power and class.*

Keywords: Pronouns, discourse, conversation, speech, address

1. Introduction

The impact of power and ideology on language in use is evident from the linguistic elements employed during conversation. The role of pronouns as address terms is very important in this regard due to the choice adopted by the participants while addressing one another. In any social structure, pronouns play a key role in analysing speech variations across social classes of varied power, distance and ranked extremity. The Elizabethan and Jacobean era is best represented through Shakespearean discourse and dramas. In this paper, an attempt has been made to investigate the discourse of the tragic play Macbeth and analyse the pattern of occurrences of the pronouns of address based on linguistic and extra-linguistic factors.

The reason behind choosing the dramatic discourse is because casual speech is best represented through this genre. It is only through natural and spontaneous conversations that power and ideological frameworks in practice are conveyed. The usage of varied forms of addresses depend not only on the addresser and the addressee but also on the stage in conversation, psychological situation of the participants, types of speech patterns, issues of social power and class. In this research study, the selected conversational corpus will be comprehensively examined for forms of address which reveal social power and distance, communicative strategies aimed at fulfillment of specific purposes, motif of adaptation of certain speech style etc. The specific lexical forms considered for usage (as address terms) in conversational activities and their syntactic roles will be analysed using the Transitivity Model of Michael Halliday's Systematic Functional Linguistics.

2. Aims and Objectives of the Study

- 1) Identify the power relations and ideological complexes through comprehensive analysis of tragic discourse.

- 2) Determine the occurrences of pronouns of addresses based on linguistic and extra linguistic features.
- 3) Predict the choice of pronominal addresses in a conversational activity.
- 4) Facilitate better understanding of the Shakespearean text w.r.t the complex usage patterns of multiple pronouns of address in contrast to only one POA of the present day.

3. Why Plays Have Been Considered as the Corpus for the Study

- 1) The plays are the best representation of conversational discourse from the Elizabethan Era.
- 2) The plays through its conversational structure reveal the role of power and ideology in varied speech patterns among people belonging to different social classes.
- 3) Factors behind the selection of the varied Pronouns of Address (POA) can be best addressed from the plays as the participants across a wide range of society are present.

4. Why Shakespeare's Dramatic Discourse is Considered for Analysis

- 1) William Shakespeare's plays are the best possible representation of conversational patterns from the Elizabethan Era.
- 2) Shakespeare's understanding of the human psyche in varied social contexts is unmatched.
- 3) The factors behind the selection of a particular pronoun of address among many can be addressed and studied from the dramatic discourse because of the numerous distinct social situations, varied characters and conversations among characters belonging to different social classes.

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5. Usage of the Pronouns of Address

In a sharp contrast to the present day limited usage of pronouns in everyday speech, the Elizabethan era society reflected in the writings of William Shakespeare exhibits the usage of a greater number of pronouns. The choice of pronouns to be considered in conversation greatly depended on the participants of the discussion, their societal relationship and also the contextual social situation. It is important to understand the cues which determine the choice of pronouns which will help in understanding the communication strategies in Elizabethan era. Unlike the other functional elements in a sentence which depend on the syntactical structure, the selection of the pronouns of address relied on the social status of the concerned individuals and the conditions surrounding the discourse of conversation.

England was extremely aware and sensitive to the issue of class and the same reflected in the way of inter-class and intra-class communication. This is evident from the

availability of the choice of pronouns at their disposal. Being extremely conscious of the class that they belonged to, the pattern of inter-class communication greatly varied. The English society was typically demarcated into the following categories (top to bottom):

- a) The King.
- b) His immediate family members.
- c) The English Nobility which consisted of ‘The Earl’ and ‘The Thane’.
- d) The chief controllers of the Army viz., the Knight, the commanders etc.
- e) Merchants.
- f) The general public.
- g) Attendants and Servants.

5.1 Categorical Description of the pronouns of address

A brief overview of the pronouns of address and their pattern of usage during communication can be presented as follows:

Figure 1: Categorical usage of pronouns of address

| S. No. | Pronouns of Address | Case | Situations of Occurrence |
|--------|---------------------|---|--|
| 1 | You | Nominative & Objective | a) Address to an individual belonging to higher strata of the society. |
| | | | b) Address of communication among the higher sections to show respect for each other. |
| | | | c) Address by the wife to husband in public and in general conversation as a mark of honour and respect. |
| 2 | Thou | Nominative | a) Address to an individual belonging to lower strata of the society. |
| | | | b) Address of communication among the lower sections. |
| | | | c) Address among the equals of the upper class to show affection and solidarity. |
| | | | d) Address to show disrespect or anger to a person who is otherwise attributed as ‘you’. |
| | | | e) Address by the wife to husband to portray love, affection and intimacy. |
| 3 | Thee | Objective | a) Address to an individual belonging to lower strata of the society. |
| | | | b) Address of communication among the lower sections. |
| | | | c) Address among the equals of the upper class to show affection and solidarity. |
| | | | d) Address to show disrespect or anger to a person who is otherwise attributed as ‘you’. |
| | | | e) Address by the wife to husband to portray love, affection and intimacy. |
| 4 | Thy | Possessive (form of ‘you’ equivalent to ‘your’) | a) Commonly used before a noun that begins with a consonant or a consonantal sound. Eg: <i>thy sword</i> . |
| 5 | Thine | Possessive (form of ‘you’ equivalent to ‘your’) | a) Commonly used before a noun that begins with a vowel or a vowel sound. Eg: <i>thine enemy</i> . |
| 6 | Ye | Nominative (Plural form of ‘you’ used while addressing more than one addressee) | a) Used when the addresser states something to more than one individual. |

5.2 Shifts from the conventional usage

A systematic analysis of the discourse of the tragic play Macbeth has revealed that the usage of pronouns of address is not restricted to the general norms of occurrences as stated above. It has been observed in the discursive structure of the play that the choice of ‘you’ and ‘thou’ varies within a single range of speech addressed to a specific person. It means that the addresser addresses the addressee randomly as ‘thou’ or ‘you’. However, on careful observation, it can be seen that the choice of the lexemes is not random but is determined by certain situational and psychological motives towards the addressee.

For example, in Act I Scene 7(39-42), when Macbeth declines to proceed further with the plot of murdering King Duncan, Lady Macbeth, who generally addresses her

husband as ‘You’ shifts swiftly to ‘thou’ as an outpour of emotion of anger and frustration. She says,

“...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,/....”

It is to be noted that the same utterance started with ‘You’ which shows the gradual outburst of emotion and the inability to abide by the societal convention of addressing the husband. Lady Macbeth started the speech by saying,

“Was the hope drunk/ Wherein you dress’d yourself?.....”
Act I, Scene 7(36-37)

5.3 Rules of Usage of the Pronouns of Address

The occurrences of the pronouns of address in the entire course of the play is systematic and is determined by linguistic rules, emotional situations of the addresser and societal conventions that existed in the society. However, the rules of addressing individuals were broken during situations of emotional outburst. The shifts were adopted to show disrespect and anger on one hand and also intimacy and romantic love, on the other. The shifts from 'you', nevertheless, converged into 'thou' or 'thee' as these, in their subject and object positions were markers of attachment to lower section of society as also expression of solidarity among members of equal classes, both high and low.

The reverse shift was also prominent but much less in occurrences. The address occurred when an individual belonging to lower class happened to do or achieve something which deserved honour or praise.

The selection of pronouns of address, in general, was chiefly motivated by the following circumstances:

- 1) *Thou/Thee* is used by higher class individual to address the lower class individual and *You* is used by the lower class individual to address higher class individual.
- 2) The higher sections of the society use *You* among each other as a mark of respect, whereas the lower sections prefer *Thou/Thee*.
- 3) However, the higher classes shift to the use of *Thou/Thee* among close individuals to display love, affection and solidarity. However, they shift to *You* to address the same individuals in public to maintain their social image and class sensitive honour and respect.
- 4) A person who is generally addressed as *You* might be addressed as *Thou/Thee* to display his anger,

| | | | | | | | | | |
|-----|-------------|--------|-------------|-------|------|-------------|-------|----------|--------|
| Let | me | enfold | thee | and | hold | thee | to | my | heart. |
| Vb. | Pro. | Vb. | POA | Conj. | Vb. | POA | Prep. | Pos.Pro. | N |
| | HSP | | LSP | | | LSP | | | |

b) Macbeth to Servant; Act V Scene III(15)

| | | |
|-------------|--------------|-----|
| Thou | lily-livered | boy |
| POA | Adj. | N |
| LSP | | |

Scenario II: Address to each other among equals of higher class.

a) Macbeth(Thane of Glamis) to Angus(Thane of Scotland); Act I Scene III(108-109)

| | | | | | | | |
|-----|-----|------------|-------|------|-------|----------|--------|
| Why | do | you | dress | me | in | borrowed | robes? |
| Adv | Aux | POA | Vb. | Pro. | Prep. | Adj. | N. |
| | | HSP | | | | | |

Scenario III: Address by wife to husband during the state of anger and frustration

a) Lady Macbeth to Macbeth; Act I Scene VII(39-40)

| | | |
|-----|-------------|---------|
| Art | thou | afear'd |
| Aux | POA | Adj |
| | Wife | |

disappointment or frustration towards the actions adopted by the addressee.

- 5) On the other hand, A person who is generally addressed as *Thou/Thee* might also be attributed as *You* as a mark of respect and honour for the accomplishments. For example, the King may address the Thane/Glamis as *You* who is under normal circumstances addressed as *Thou/Thee* to show his admiration for some accomplishments like winning a war against an enemy.
- 6) In the Elizabethan era, the husbands of the higher sections of the society were addressed as *You*. However, the wives shifted to *Thou* while expressing anger, love and intimacy towards the husbands.
- 7) While addressing to more than one individual, 'ye' is used and not simply 'you'.
- 8) The possessive pronouns equivalent to 'your' prevalent in the Elizabethan era are 'thy' and 'thine'. The selection of the pronouns depend on the noun that follows. If the noun begins with a vowel or a vowel sound, 'thine' is used; whereas if the noun begins with a consonant or a consonantal sound, 'thy' is used.

5.4 An SFL approach towards the selection of pronouns of address in the dramatic discourse of Macbeth

In this section, references are provided from the text to understand the occurrences of the pronouns in a sentential structure and how far the rules stated above are abided by the participants in the conversation.

Scenario I: Address by higher class individual to lower class individual.

a) King Duncan to Macbeth(Thane/Commander of Army); Act I Scene IV(31-32)

Scenario IV: Address by wife to husband during normal conversation.

a) Lady Macbeth to Macbeth; Act I Scene VII(36)

| | | | |
|---------|-------------|---------|----------|
| Wherein | you | dressed | Yourself |
| Adv | POA | Vb. | Pro |
| | Wife | | |

Scenario V: Address by individual to more than one person

a) Banquo to the three witches; Act I Scene III(53)

| | | |
|-----|---------------------------------|-------------|
| Are | ye | fantastical |
| Aux | POA | Adj. |
| | Address to more than one | |

Scenario VI: Address by individual indicating second person's possession(pronoun is followed by a vowel/vowel sound)

a) Lady Macbeth to Macbeth; Act I Scene V(27)

| | | | | | | | |
|-----|-----|------|-----|---------|------|---|-----|
| I | may | pour | my | spirits | in | thine | ear |
| Pro | Aux | Vb. | Pro | N | Prep | Poss.Pro | N |
| | | | | | | Indicating possession: equivalent to 'yours' | |

Scenario VII: Address by individual indicating second person's possession(pronoun is followed by a consonant/consonantal sound)

a) Macbeth through a letter to Lady Macbeth; Act I Scene V(13)

| | | | | |
|-----|-----|------|---|-------|
| Lay | it | to | thy | heart |
| Vb. | Pro | Prep | Poss.Pro | |
| | | | Indicating possession: equivalent to 'yours' | |

| | | | | | | | | | | |
|------|------|------|-------|------|-------------------------------------|------|-----------|-------|--------|--------|
| We | are | sent | to | give | thee | from | our | royal | master | thanks |
| Pro. | Aux. | Vb. | Prep. | Vb. | POA | prep | Poss.Pro. | Adj. | N. | Vb. |
| | | | | | Address among equals of high class. | | | | | |

Scenario IX: Address by individual of higher class to lower class in a moment of praise and affection.

a) King Duncan to Macbeth(Thane of Glamis); Act I Scene IV(42)

| | | | | |
|------|------|---------|-------|------------|
| Bind | us | further | to | you |
| Vb. | Pro. | Adv. | Prep. | POA |
| | | | | LSP |

Scenario X: Address by individual of lower class to higher class.

a) Servant to Lady Macbeth; Act I Scene V(24)

| | | | | | |
|------|--------|-------------|------|------|------|
| So | please | you, | it | is | TRUE |
| Adv. | Vb. | POA | Pro. | Aux. | Adv. |
| | | HSP | | | |

6. Concluding Remarks

The analysis of the occurrences of the POAs reveals that the selection of a particular form is determined by a number of factors. In contrast to modern usage of only 'you' as a second person address, the Elizabethan era had a number of POAs to choose from. The conversational pattern in the discourse of Macbeth provide a great evidence in support of the variety of factors that determine the usage of any one form of POA over the others. As discussed 'thou' and 'you' are used alternatively keeping in tune with the status of the addressee. Apart from the social status, the choice, at times, although irregularly, is motivated by the emotional state of the addresser. 'Thee', on the other hand is used in the objective position. Besides, 'thy' and 'thine' are used as possessive pronouns and are equivalent to 'yours'. The selection of either of them is based on the noun that follows them(whether the noun starts with a vowel/consonant). Finally, 'ye' is used when the addresser seeks to state something to more than one person. The usage of pronouns throughout the Shakespearean discourse of Macbeth is a proper reflection of the patterns of pronoun usage in the concerned era. The dramatic discourse being closest to natural speech helped find the pronouns in its casual usage patterns and thereby conclude upon the rules of occurrences and the reasons for switches against the conventional norms.

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Scenario VIII: Address by individuals of higher class in a mood of affection & solidarity.

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