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Formal/informal distinction of second-person pronouns in "The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale" by Geoffrey Chaucer

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Contents

Abbreviations

ME   Middle English

MS   manuscript

PDE   Present Day English

OE   Old English

pl   Plural

ps   Person

sg   Singular

T/V   tu and vous

WoBT   Wife of Bath's prologue and tale

Y-forms   You and ye

Abstract

Middle English is defined as a period of transition in the history of the language, there were several remarkable changes and one of them is related to second-person pronouns formal versus informal use, the topic this study is concerned with. Second-person pronouns acquired a utilization that did not exist previously and was lost over the time, although, other Indo-European languages maintain nowadays this feature. Geoffrey Chaucer is one of the most important authors of this period and one of the first who used English as a written language instead of French, which was the language used by high social classes and the most extended in literature. The distinction can be perceived in his works as it will be studied in "The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale" included in *The Canterbury Tales,* written c. 14th century and which recounts a journey made by a group of pilgrims to Canterbury Cathedral. The tale and prologue considered in this project are narrated by a woman who presents many differences with the ideal woman at that time, basically because of her attitude towards men and way of speaking, a reason why "The Wife of Bath's Tale" and its prologue are considered one of the first feminist writings. Therefore, this particular text seems interesting to establish if there is a rule followed by the author to alternate plural and singular second-person pronouns when addressing a single person to mark formal or informal use or, if there is a random use in his writings. Other authors have also studied this feature (in a lesser extent) this and other works, so their conclusions will be compared with the ones reached here to know whether they are similar or they present differences. The data will be obtained through the close reading of the tale and its prologue, the manual recount of personal pronouns used by Chaucer and the analysis of the ones that create more controversy due to the different situations or contexts in which they are pronounced. It is remarkable the use of second-person pronouns in the conversations between the two main characters of the tale, the old woman and the knight, because it is clear that they vary the use of pronouns in each encounter.

Key words: Chaucer; Middle English; Second-person pronouns; "The Wife of Bath".

1. Introduction

This project is the result of my interest in the two main branches, linguistics and literature, developed in the English Studies degree at the ULL. It will analyse "The Wife of Bath's tale" (and its prologue) included in the *Canterbury Tales*, written by Geoffrey Chaucer at the end of 14th Century. Specifically, I will concentrate on the use of second person pronouns in the text, identifying and making a recount as a way of contrasting if the distinction between formal and informal *tu/vous*[1] (T/V) can be established and a clear pattern is followed in the different contexts: female and male conversations, social scales, lack of superiority, husband and wife relationships etc. This will be a form of differentiating if there is a random utilization of pronouns in his writings or considering the existence of a rule related to respect/familiarity that the author follows. Wherever possible, a comparison with what other authors defend at different points in history can also be applied to Chaucer's work in general and specifically to the tale this project is concerned with.

The importance of Geoffrey Chaucer in the development of the English language is totally recognized, so the study of a specific aspect such as second-person pronouns in one of the *Canterbury Tales* will make me consider the changes in this lexico-grammatical aspect and develop my own opinion after the analysis.

1.1 Middle English Features

Middle English conventionally starts around 1150 and finishes in 1500 which is the moment established for the beginning of Modern English (Baugh and Cable 1991, p.52).

Chaucer's language can be set within the Middle English period. Middle English comprised different dialects: Northern, West Midland, East Midland, South-Western and South-Eastern, which were clearly based on the OE boundaries. All equally important, none of them was considered a standard language as compared to West-Saxon during the Old English period, for this reason, it is almost impossible to develop common characteristics to all dialects or to establish a date that marks off the beginning of the period. With the passing of time, the variety that acquired importance was the London one (East Midland) which was used by Chaucer in *The Canterbury Tales* (Wardale 1972, pp. 1-11). Nevertheless, there are several

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[1] *Tu/vous*: The French forms are conventionally used to refer to this distinction

general characteristics that make a contrast between the language spoken in England before the Norman Conquest and the one used after the 13th century.

Middle English lexicon was characterized mainly by the influence of Old Norse, Latin and mainly French; the latter can be related with the T/V distinction that characterized this period and that is going to be analysed in the following pages. In ME the weakening of inflectional endings becomes more apparent and the syntactic importance of linking words like prepositions is reinforced. A very important change that characterized this period in relation to the previous one is that grammatical gender was substituted by the natural/notional gender that is applied nowadays because of the weakening and disappearance of final unaccented vowels and syllables. (Wardale, 1972) General changes of the period are summarized by Fanego (1996, p.5) as follows:

> In the course of Middle English period, a number of major changes took place in the structure of English. Most important among these were: a) the reduction of inflectional contrasts in nouns, verbs, and adjectives; b) the shift from a basic word order SOV to one predominantly SVO; and c) the trend towards the use of analytic resources instead of synthetic ones.

Some inflectional endings evolved to distinguish plural forms, still maintained in Modern English, but the inflexional system of Old English that was used to indicate case and gender and to differentiate strong and weak noun declensions disappeared at this time. Another difference between these stages of the language is also connected to inflections in adjectives, these changed according to the noun they went with and its case number and gender. But in ME, traces of case and gender were no longer relevant (Burnley 1983, pp.11-13). The use of relatives also differs in the different periods:

> Fourteenth-century English used a range of relatives similar to that of modern English, but differing in certain particulars of their use. Although from Old English onwards there had been a tendency to distinguish between personal and non-personal antecedents in pronoun usage, no distinction was regularly maintained in Chaucer's time, so that *which* frequently follows a personal antecedent. (Burnley 1983, p.25)

In terms of verbs, Germanic languages were characterized by the division between strong and weak verbs, in Chaucer's work, these forms can be distinguished by the forms of preterite and past participle, the first one was characterized by a change in the root vowel and the second by inflectional ending *–e(n).* Weak verbs were more used and formed their preterite and past participles adding *–(e)d* or *t* at the end of the verb.

1.2 The importance of "Chaucer's language"

Geoffrey Chaucer, who was born between 1340 and 1345 in London, is a writer whose language was closer to what today is PDE. Because of this, he seems relatively easy to understand for a modern reader. Words and phrases can have different meanings in relation to the present use but the sense can be deduced (Burnley 1983, p.10). Chaucer decided to write in English instead of French, which was the language used by the high social scale. Some researchers consider that at this time took place the creation of a language named as Chaucerian English as it is explained by Machan (2012, p.148)

> Early Chaucerian commentary offers a critical tradition in which Chaucer did invent the language as well as its rhetorical achievements, and this tradition -as much as any particular aspects of Chaucer's usage- formed a factual basis for the earliest sixteenth- and seventeenth- century commentators on the history of English.

When some studies of the language started to be made in the nineteenth century, it was found that Chaucer was not the "language inventor" as he was believed to be before but still, he was considered an author that used a language worthy of admiration. His language appears as a step that English had to take as a way of reaching its present form and a link between the early Germanic writing and present-day English. It serves as a testing of the general features that both languages share and the changes that happened in this process. Some authors continue considering Chaucer the person that made possible the appearance of a standard variety inside the chaos of regionalisms (Machan 2012, p.149-151).

Chaucer's contributions and importance are perfectly summarized by Machan (2012, p.175): "beyond any words or literary forms he may have popularized, Chaucer's language has served as the epitome of Middle English, and in this way Chaucer offers a model for imagining a linguistic history of discrete periods with historical continuity among them".

1.3 The Canterbury Tales

The Canterbury Tales narrates the journey that a group of pilgrims made from London to Canterbury Cathedral. Pilgrims are said to tell two tales during the journey as a form of making it more bearable. There is a huge variety of characters who were outstanding in the 14th century society, these characters make the author use different registers and try different topics and using frequently dialogues what makes the text ideal for the purpose of this project. After the Norman Conquest, *The Canterbury Tales* became the first major work in literature written in English.

These tales are mainly found in two different manuscripts. Firstly, the *Hengwrt Chaucer* or *Hengwrt Manuscript*, which is described by the National Library of Wales where the manuscript can be found, as follows:

> A late fourteenth-, or early fifteenth-century manuscript of Geoffrey Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, lacking VIII(G)554-1481 (i.e., the Canon's Yeoman's Prologue and Tale) X(I)1180-end lost).Doyle and Parkes's 'Scribe B', the scribe of the Hengwrt Chaucer, has long been identified as having also been responsible for writing other manuscripts, including the Ellesmere Chaucer (Huntington Library MS 26 C 9). He was identified in 2006 by Linne Mooney as Adam Pinkhurst, a London-based scrivener associated with Chaucer.

This association between author and scribe, together with palaeographical considerations, suggests that the Hengwrt Chaucer may have been written before Chaucer's death in 1400, or soon afterwards.

Secondly, the Ellesmere Chaucer or the Ellesmere Manuscript, which appeared after 1400, is characterized by the beauty of its illustrations and the structure used that makes it easier to be read.

> The chief purpose of the Ellesmere pilgrim portraits is to facilitate reading by making explicit and visible the manuscript's arrangement that classifies the tales according to the speakers. As visual "titles" their function is to introduce and represent the twenty-three tale tellers and only secondarily to illustrate the General Prologue descriptions. Indeed, only about a third of the miniatures can be considered faithful to the text of the General Prologue. The other pilgrim portraits are more visually artistic in conception. (Schoeffling, n.d)

Many modern editions of the tales are based on this second MS. For my purpose I will use the edition by Skeat (2007) as it will be specified in following sections.

In the following pages, the use of second person pronouns will be discussed, considering its use in other languages and making a contrast with Old English in which the T/V distinction did not exist.

2. The distinction of T/V in English

The Indo-European core of languages is easily perceived in the use of pronouns because some European languages from different branches share nowadays common features. In French, *tu* makes always reference to a single person in a close context, it is often assumed that this is used because of age factors, but researchers found that there are several reasons for a correct utilization, such as social status, what has similarities with Middle English *thou/yow*, and German (*Sie* and *du*) as it will be later explained. The other form is *vous* "linguists sometimes use the term honorific to denote 'polite' forms of language like *vous*. More generally, *tu* is often referred to as the familiar form, and *vous* as the formal or polite form." (Hawkings & Towell, 2014, p.43). In German, for instance, pronouns *Sie* and *du* are used, capital letters characterize the formal way of referring to somebody and it is a form of avoiding confusion because the third person plural is expressed in the same way, *du* corresponds to the second person singular form which is used in an informal context in which there is familiarity between speaker and listener. In Spanish, this categorization is made by *usted* and *tú*. The factors, in which the election between these pronouns is based on, are similar to the languages previously mentioned. The first is used in formal contexts, people you do not know and to address someone who is older than the speaker. There is also another pronoun, *vos*, which is mainly used in Argentina and Uruguay, as a form of substituting pronoun *tú* when addressing directly someone familiar to the speaker. Finally, tú presents the same use as sg. *you* in Modern English and *tu* in French*,* it is used in informal situation and when you speak directly to someone you know. It is explained by the *Real Academia Española* as follows:

> Frente a *tú* y *vos* (→ tú y vos), el singular *usted* es la forma empleada en la norma culta de América y de España para el tratamiento formal; en el uso más generalizado, *usted* implica cierto distanciamiento, cortesía y formalidad: *«Usted escriba su reclamación en un papel»* (Leñero *Mudanza* [Méx. 1979]); *«Ustedes perdonen. Soy el Oficial del Juzgado»* (Suárez *Dios* [Esp. 1987]). El mismo valor presenta la forma de plural *ustedes,* frente a *vosotros* (→ vosotros), en la mayor parte de España: *«Siéntense, se lo ruego. Ustedes no se conocen: el señor Germán Hernando, el señor Juan Antonio Molero»* (Marsillach *Ático* [Esp. 1995]). En cambio, en todo el territorio americano y, dentro de España, en Andalucía occidental y Canarias, *ustedes* es la única forma empleada para referirse a varios interlocutores, tanto en el tratamiento formal como en el informal: *«Quiero hacerles un presente, expresión de nuestro cariño y simpatía por ustedes»* (Aguilera *Pelota* [Ec. 1988]); *«A ver, niños, ¿a ustedes les gustan los dulces?»*(Maldonado *Latifundios* [Col. 1975]).

"For English, the T/V distinction is typically attributed to French influence and identified as early as the thirteen century" (Machan 2012, p.154) In other words, this switching was not made in OE. As stated by Hogg (2002, p.20) "In OE the singular forms are always singular and the plural forms always plural, without exception". Although both periods bear some minor similarities, the differences between OE and ME use of pronouns is clear.

Table 1. OE second person pronouns

Second Person	Singular	Dual	Plural
N	þū	git	gē
A	þē, þec	inc (incit)	ēow (īow, ēowic)
G	þīn	incer	ēower (īower)
D	þē	inc	ēow (īow)

Table extracted from Millward (1996, p.100)

At the beginning of the Middle English period, plural forms started to appear as a way of speaking directly to a socially superior person. Until that moment, þū was the form used to address a single person. The Norman Conquest and the influence of French in the English language, as it was mentioned previously, are the main reasons used to explain this new trending.

Table 2. ME second person pronouns

Case	Second-Person Singular	Second-Person Plural
Subject	þu, thou, etc.	ʒe, ye
Object	þe, thee, etc.	ʒou, eu, you, ʒiu, etc.
Possessive	þin(e), þi, thin(e), etc.	ʒur(e), your(e), etc.

Table extracted from Millward (1996, p.170)

As it can be seen in the chart above, "the existence of separate pronouns for second-person singular and plural allows a differentiation in usage which is impossible in modern English" (Burnley 1983, p.15-17) The beginning of this distinction is not clear, "Tauno Mustanoja thus asserts that the honorific plural was sporadic until the fourteen century" (Machan 2012, p-155).

In Brown & Gilman's useful examination of pronouns' quoted in Fanego (1996, p.6), it is concluded that characters that belong to an upper social scale, in general, can use *thou* and

receive *you* when they are talking to someone with a lower status. If the two members of a conversation present the same power, they should employ the same type of pronouns according to their common social status, although, contradictions in this topic might be apparent due to the fact that there are exchanges in pronouns' use, from *thou* to *you* and vice versa, within the same conversation.

It is also explained that there is a difference in the alternation between *you* and *thou*, in relation to the feelings that the author wants to transmit by its use. This is supported by an example in Fanego's work (1996, p.9) based on Shakespeare's *Richard III.* At the beginning of the play, the protagonist uses *you* when he refers to Clarence but when she goes, he starts a soliloquy in which he turns to *thou.* Some authors indicate that this change is motivated by the hypocrisy of the speaker, for this reason, when he starts a soliloquy as a form of revealing his true feelings, he switches to *thou.*

Similarly, Machan (2012, p.154) finds that *thou* and *thee* mark not just the singular form but also familiarity whereas second-person plural pronouns establish not only plural but formality when used in the singular, what can be connected to the "plural of majesty" in Latin which was used to show respect while speaking to a superior.

Fanego (1996, p.10) transmits Hope's findings in relation to some studies made in Shakespeare's works, summarizing the achievements in four main points: firstly, the existence of a different way of referring to someone according to social differences is reinforced. Secondly, the reciprocity expressed in the previous paragraph is not contrasted in Shakespeare because of the expanded use of *you* between lower classes. Thirdly, sexes' relationships are also challenged because it should be expected the use of *thou* from a man to a woman and *you* on the contrary case, but as it was explained before, there is a standardization of the utilization of the pronoun *you.* Fanego (1996, p-11) also explains that these pronouns present what is called "socially motivated uses and micro-pragmatic or emotionally motivated" utilizations of pronouns which depend on the situation in which the speaker is involved, changes that are a product of a specific moment and feeling.

Burnley (1983, p.18) confirms that Chaucer in the *Canterbury Tales* took into account the social status of speakers in order to make a proper alternation between pronouns although this distinction does not follow an unbreakable rule:

> The choice between *ye* and *thou* when addressing a single individual is a stylistic rather than a grammatical one, and it has certain social and attitudinal implications. Most obviously, they are concerned with the relative status of the speaker and addressee. If their

status or age is acknowledged by both to be distinctly unequal as *thou* and expect to be answered with the form *ye*.

It is also important to highlight that there are not grammatically established rules that mark the election of pronouns, the different options are chosen because of stylistic reasons rather that grammatical fixed rules, but they depend also on the feelings that characterize the speaker at this point of the conversation. (p.19)

Thou/you forms of Middle English gradually disappeared during the Early Middle English period apparently as a sign of triumph of middle-class values (Leith 1997, pp. 105-107). Therefore, nowadays this distinction is no longer present, *you* can appear in formal and informal contexts, singular and plural and the perception of the speaker's intentions must be made by the listener according to what he/she considers a good grade of respect or familiarity in the conversation.

In the following sections, some studies about Chaucer's tales will be included and also my study of "The Wife of Bath's Tale" and its prologue. An analysis of second-person pronouns' utilization in the tale this work is concerned with, will be made.

3. The Wife of Bath's Prologue & Tale

This tale is narrated by a woman who, in the prologue and as other pilgrims demand from her, explains her life experiences with the husbands she has had until that moment. She considers herself an expert because she has had five husbands and all were different, as she explains in the prologue. Some of them were old but good and only the last one was her real love; in some occasions she was moved by money and she was not the ideal of wife expected in this period. The three first husbands, were accused of infidelity because it was another form of controlling them; not until they recognised this infidelity and promised their wife they would give her money, did she sleep again with them.

She makes some biblical references mainly in the prologue although they are not really accurate, she refers to the wedding at Cana, the Samaritan woman, some apostles, Solomon… Her rewriting of history can be seen in King Midas' narration, for example, the traditional story says that his hairdresser was the person who told the secret and buried the secret in the ground although it was finally known. In Chaucer's work, the spreading of this secret is attributed to his wife but he directs the reader to Ovid's work to know the development. It can be seen as a form of affirming that men also like gossip and find it difficult to keep a secret.

She uses these examples as a way of supporting what she is saying and imitating a priest to catch the audience, she is in some occasions rewriting history in her own benefit. It can be seen as a way that Chaucer used to ironize with the form in which orators and priests used history as they wanted. She speaks about virginity, sexuality and marriage. She knows her most powerful weapon is her sexuality and she explains how she controlled her husbands through it. In the last part of her love experiences, she talks about her fifth husband. He was younger than her and this became a problem because the tactics she used with the other four started to be invalid and he controlled her as she had controlled the others. Despite this, she recognized that he is the only man she truly loved even though she lied to him, hit him and was also hit back.

The prologue is the longest in the manuscript as the Friar told her in the last lines "this is a longe preamble of a tale!" (line 831). This tale is considered in some occasions a feminist writing because it represents the contrary to the ideal of woman of the time and introduces some ideas that are modern for the 14th century.

The tale of "The Wife of Bath" relates what happened to a knight in ancient times in which the legendary Arthur was king. This knight was accused of rape and that meant decapitation, but the king gave his wife, the queen, the opportunity to decide about his future and she before resolving she asked him to look for *what women most desire*. We can see at this point feminist connotations because the queen acquires the importance to take decisions that concerned her husband. After travelling for a year and listening to several opinions, the knight met an old woman who gave him the correct answer although in exchange he should take her as his wife. He felt miserable living with this old ugly woman but she offered him a choice between living with an ugly and old woman but faithful or with a young and beautiful one who would probably betray him. In the end, he gave her the power to decide and she turned into a young and beautiful because this power is what women most desire according to this tale.

To sum up, it narrates a typical medieval history in which appears a king, a knight, a queen and a wise person, who is a woman in this case. This kind of story always ends with a moral which is used to teach something to the listener.

3.1 Method for the selection of data

I will make a close reading and manual recount of the 2nd ps. pronouns subject and object forms used in the tale and its prologue to analyse in each case the possible reason of its election. I will compare my examples, when possible, with Andreas Jucker's findings in his article 'Thou art so loothly and so art also' The Use of *Ye* and *Thou* in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales" (2006).

The transcriptions of the tale in Middle English can differ depending on the MS used or the editor. For this reason, I specify that I use the Middle English version included in the Gutenberg project which was edited by Walter Skeat (2007). To support my reading I also used the present-day English translation made by Gerard NeCastro available in eChaucer site. This is a webpage that tries to include Chaucer's texts in twenty-first century technological world. Both sources are available online.

3.2 Thou and yow forms in The Wife of Bath's Tale & Prologue

3.2.1 Prologue

Since the topic and characters vary from the prologue to the tale, I will present the data obtained in two different sections and with two different tables including subject and object forms and also enclitics.

- *Singular forms:*

2nd ps.sg. pronouns appear sixty-seven times in the prologue. The use of *thou* I found, is perfectly summarized by Skeat as quoted in Jucker (2006, p.57) "*thou* is the language of a lord to a servant, of an equal to an equal and expresses also companionship, love, permission, defiance, scorn, threatening"

Table 3: 2nd ps.sg. pronouns

Cases	Pronouns	TOTAL
Nominative	Thou/Thow/Tow	54
Accusative	Thee	13
Total		67

These singular pronouns used to mark social superiority from one speaker addresing another appear at the beginning of the text, for example, Christ's words are portrayed in a passage of the Bible:

> **Thou** hast yhad five housbondes,--quod he,
>
> And that ilke man that now hath **thee** (WoBT 17-18)

In this passage, Jesus Christ is talking to a woman, he was the most powerful man on earth so he speaks to her using singular pronouns that show his superiority over her. They are also employed, in general, in conversations between people that belong to the same social class.

This relationship between equals can be seen when the Summoner and the Friar argue because of the different points of view they have, they belong to middle class and following the general rules, use singular pronouns when addressing each other. Furthermore, the tone is not a relaxed one and in an argument you do not usually take into account respect when referring to your listener.

> What spwkes**tow** of preambulacioun?
>
> What! Amble, or trotte, or pees, or go sit doun!
>
> **Thou** lettest oure disport in this manere
>
> Ye, wol**tow** so, sire somonour? Quod the frere (WoBT 837-840)

The Friar, in the last line, refers to the Summoner using *"sire somonour"* which could be understood as a form of showing respect. Though this might seem a contradiction because as Mazzon (quoted in Jucker 2006, p.60) states, nominal forms such as *sire, dame, lord…* often appear with *you* but category names like *Somonour, Preest, Cook…* appear with *thou,* precisely, in this conversation, it is an ironic way of referring to the person he is discussing with and it makes a contrast between the use of singular pronouns and the respect demonstrated by addressing him using *sir*.

The Wife knows she has the information the men who are listening to her need, so she addresses them using singular pronouns as a form of showing she is superior to them. In this specific case, even if a higher social status of the narrator were not known, it would be deduced that she feels superior to these men because of her life experiences and knowledge.

> Abyde! Quod she, my tale is nat bigonne.
>
> Nay, **thou** shalt drynken of another tonne,
>
> Er that I go, shal savoure wors than ale.
>
> And whan that I have toold **thee** forth my tale (WoBT 169-172)

In this case she is talking to the Pardoner, she uses singular when referring to this man as a way of showing that she is more powerful than him because of the information she has as it is portrayed in the following lines:

> Of tribulacion in marriage,
>
> O which I am expert in al myn age,
>
> This is to seyn, myself have been the whippe,-- (WoBT 173-175)

- *Plural forms:*

There are 36 plural forms in accusative and nominative in the prologue of this tale. Sixteen plural pronouns are used when talking to two or more listeners but there are others that are going to be analysed because they appear when addressing one person as a form of showing superiority or social distance as it was explained in the previous sections.

<p style="text-align:center;"><u>Table 4.:</u> 2nd ps. pl. pronouns</p>

Cases	Pronouns	Number of times	Y-forms plural	Y-forms singular
Nominative	You/Yow	11	7	4
Accusative	Ye	25	11	14
Total		36		

There are differences in the uses of plural forms. It is important to take into account, as Jucker (2006, p.57) explains, the social status of interactants, which does not usually change abruptly, and also the more variable situational status that depends on the feelings that appear in the moment of the conversation, for example, and on other different factors.

Plural pronouns appear when women in general are directly addressed. In this case, the Wife portrays the apostle's words in which he says:

> In habit maad with chastitee and shame
>
> **Ye** women shol apparaille yow, quod he,
>
> And noght in tressed heer and gay perree, (WoBT 342-344)

The most widespread use appears when the narrator speaks to her audience, she uses plural pronouns without any formal/informal implications because there are various listeners paying attention to her narration.

> Wher can **ye** seye, in any manere age,
>
> That hye God defended mariage
>
> By expres word? I pray **yow**, telleth me.
>
> Or where commanded he virginitee? (WoBT 59-62)

The cases that are going to be analysed below are related to plural forms used in singular contexts. There are eighteen cases in which *you* and *ye* appear when addressing a single person. This is exemplified in the work undertaken by Jucker (2006, p.57) who transmits in Skeat's words: "ye is the language of a servant to a lord, and of compliment, and further expresses honour, submission, or entreaty".

Firstly, examples of the cases in which the superiority of a speaker over the other is portrayed clearly are going to be analysed. There are some in which the Pardoner addresses directly the Wife and uses y-forms, this shows that he needs her to improve his knowledge and wants to

sound respectful, in this case he is giving her a compliment. It is also important the fact that he uses *dame* in these examples and as it was explained before, this noun is often accompanied by *you/ye* used in singular contexts.

> Now, <u>dame</u>, quod he, by God and by seint john!
> **Ye** been a noble prechour in this cas. (WoBT 163-164)

The same speakers appear some lines after, the Pardoner tells the narrator that men need her wisdom so he continues being polite and trying to sound respectful because he wants something that the Wife has, her knowledge about women. In the last line, it can be deduced that she is older than him because he refers to himself as one of the *"yonge men"* that need the help of a person that has had various experiences and can be considered an expert in these topics. What has been said until this point is affirmed by Jucker (2006, p.62) who establishes that "a person may have temporary power over her interlocutor because he needs her help. Perhaps she has some information that he lacks but needs".

> <u>Dame</u>, I wolde praye **yow**, if youre wyl it were,
> Seyde this pardoner, as **ye** bigan,
> Telle forth youre tale, spareth for no man,
> And teche us yonge men of youre praktike. (WoBT 184-187)

The superiority and respect appear again in the use of pronouns some lines after, the Wife is talking to her husband and advices him what he should say to her. There is a contrast between the way in which she speaks to her husband, using *thou* and *thee*, and the form in which she tells him to address her.

> **Thou** sholdest seye, wyf, do wher **thee** liste;
> Taak **youre** disport, I wol nat leve no talys.
> I knowe **yow** for a trewe wyf, <u>dame</u> alys. (WoBT 318-320)

She requests that her husband treats her in a respectful form in contrast with the form in which she speaks to him. She also includes "*dame alys*" to highlight even more that a husband must be submissive and respect his wife.

In the last part, the only listener that she talks to in a more polite form intervenes, the Host, he appears to calm the debate created between the Summoner and the Friar. He talks to the Wife in a respectful manner and she answers in the same tone:

> Do, <u>dame</u>, tele forth youre tale, and that is best.
> Al redy, sire, quod she, right as **yow** lest,

> If I have licence of this worthy frere.

> Yis, <u>dame</u>, quod he, tel forth, and I wol heere (WoBT 852-856)

It can be seen again, that the pilgrims usually speak directly to the Wife using *"dame"* to show respect to her narration and experiences. She answers to these interventions using th-forms but in this case, she shows respect. The reason why she changes in this occasion is not clear, maybe due to the fact that he is the Host and also because he defends her when the other men started to feel impatient because of the longer prologue she made.

Hereinafter, some cases in which the use of y-pronouns in singular is not clear are going to be analysed. In one of the conversations named previously between the Pardoner and the Wife, the addressee of her answer is not clear:

> Gladly, quod she, sith it may **yow** like;

> But that I praye to al this compaignye,

> If that speke after my fantasye,

> As taketh not agrief of that I seye;

> For myn entente is nat but for to pleye.

> No, sire, now woll I telle forth my tale.—(WoBT 188-193)

In the first line of this example, she uses the Nominative form *yow* that can be understood not only as a direct allusion to all these young men that she can help with her experiences but also as a reference to the Pardoner who talked to her in a polite form and requested her help. Editorial punctuation helps to interpret this fragment because the original does not include a semicolon.

> What dos**tow** at my neighebores hous?

> Is she so fair? Ar**tow** so amorous?

> What rowne **ye** with oure mayde? Benedicite!

> Sire olde lecchour, lat thy japes be! (WoBT 239-242)

The three pronouns used during this speech present different characteristics. *Thou* is the usual form that she utilizes with her husband, she feels confident and they belong to a similar social status. The problem appears in the third verse because she uses *ye* within the same speech. There is not a change of attitude in the speaker, she does not consider her husband superior to her at this point. This change can be a product of her feelings at this point. She is angry and she expresses it with this alternation in pronouns use. It is what some authors call "interactional status" that depends on the social status, relation between interactants and the situational status (Jucker 2006, p.62).

The last example includes several y-forms that must be closely studied because the development of the narration obscures its understanding. She explains at this point the form in which she behaved with her husbands, she had always the last word and she was grumpy all the time with them. In this case, she is referring to her third husband.

> **Ye** sholde been al pacient and meke,
>
> And han a sweete spiced conscience,
>
> Sith **ye** so preche of jobes pacience.
>
> Suffreth alwey, syn **ye** so wel kan preche;
>
> And but **ye** do, certain we shal **yow** teche
>
> That it is fair to have a wyf in pees. (WoBT 434-439)

In this fragment, she is speaking to her husband, her tone changed in relation to other interventions because she wants to get something from him. She tries to transform her husband into a calm and submissive person, for this reason, she sounds respectful although she really uses these sentences to confuse him. She always gets what she wants from her husbands as she explains along the prologue. She can sound manipulative at this point of the narration.

> Oon of us two moste bowen, doutelees;
>
> And sith a man is moore reasonable
>
> Than a womman is, **ye** moste been suffrable.
>
> What eyleth **yow** to grucche thus and grone?
>
> Is it for **ye** wolde have my queynte alone? (WoBT 439-444)

The conversation between the couple continues, she is manipulative, she changes reality as she wants and this also reflected in the use of pronouns. She is more powerful than her husband and she has also the power of language that she uses in her favour. The narrator shows her way of thinking that is really modern to the period of time in which she lives, because although she says men are more reasonable than women, when she does not really think so, it is a step necessary to reach her objectives. Pronouns depend on the interactional status of this conversation, as it was said before, she feels superior to her husband and pronouns are used to show a kind of respect that she does not really feel but that will be necessary to control him.

> Wy, taak it al! lo, have it every deel!
>
> Peter! I shrewe **yow**, but **ye** love it weel;
>
> For if I wolde selle my bele chose,

I koude walke as fressh as is a rose;

But I wol kepe it for youre owene tooth.

Ye be to blame, by god! I sey **yow** sooth.-- (WoBT 445-450)

Finally, she continues talking about sexuality and changing reality to her own benefit. She is a woman in the 14th century and she is talking about sex with her husband and explaining it freely in front of a group of men. This conversation is a clear example of plural pronouns used in singular contexts and the form in which changes are produced by the speaker because of the situation, feelings and reactions. She wants to reach her objective that is to be more powerful than her husband and to control him.

In summary, the narrator always uses *you/ye* in the prologue when she speaks directly to the audience. There are some occasions in which this utilization can be seen as a direct addressing to a listener that is speaking to her but in general, she uses these forms in plural talking to several people. Another interesting fact is that the men who are listening to her always use the same pronouns but speaking to a single person as Alisoun (we know her name in the prologue in line 804). It is a form of talking to an older person that is using her wisdom to help them with their future relations. We cannot know if she is socially superior to her listeners.

3.2.2 Tale

- *Singular forms*

Singular forms, as explained before, appear always in singular contexts in Middle English. These contexts differ depending on the speakers that participate in the conversation. There are seventeen singular pronouns in accusative and nominative in the tale as is showed in the following chart.

Table 5.: 2nd ps. sg. pronouns

Cases	Pronouns	TOTAL
Nominative	Thou/Thow/Tow	10
Accusative	Thee	7
Total		17

At the beginning of the tale, the queen acquires importance because her husband gives her the authority to decide on the knight's future:

> **Thou** standest yet, quod she, in swich array
>
> That of thy lyf yet has**tow** no suretee.
>
> I grante **thee** lyf, if **thou** kanst tellen me
>
> What thyng is it that women moost desiren.
>
> Be war, and keep thy nekke-boon from iren!
>
> And if **thou** kanst nat tellen it anon,
>
> Yet wol I yeve **thee** leve for to gon (WoBT 902-908)

She is commanding what she wants to receive from the knight when a year passes, an answer to her question "What is what women desire the most?" she is a superior person in a court context, she belongs to upper class and she is more important than the knight, especially after his offence, so she uses singular pronouns when speaking to the knight.

When the knight arrives from his journey without an answer, he meets an old woman who promises to help him. In the court, he gives a response that the queen considers appropriate and pardons him. In that moment the old woman intervenes:

> Bifore the court thanne preye I **thee**, <u>sir knyght</u>,
>
> Quod she, that **thou** me take unto thy wyf;
>
> For wel **thou** woost that I have kept thy lyf.
>
> If I seye fals, sey nay, upon thy fey! (WoBT 1054-1057)

She uses "sir knyght" as a form of showing respect because she knows that she belongs to a lower social scale but in the following line, she realizes that she has the power because she gave him what he needed to save his life. For this reason, she started to feel stronger and uses *thou* in front of the people that was judging her future husband. There is a change in the interactional status of the conversation members that derives in the superiority of the old woman. Jucker (2006, p.64) also analyses this example, adding that "the use of *thou* by an old and apparently lower class woman to a knight of much higher social status must have a very strong impact. It communicates the woman's power over him in no uncertain terms."

Finally, the last example of singular pronouns' use corresponds to an angry speech made by the knight after they are married. He speaks directly to his wife and says:

> **Thou** art so loothly, and so oold also,
>
> And therto comen of so lough a kynde,

That litel wonder is thogh I walwe and wynde.

So wolde God myn herte wolde breste! (WoBT 1100-1103)

It can be deduced by the tone employed, that he is angry and unhappy because he is obliged to live a life that is not the one what he wanted. He lives with an ugly old woman that manipulated him to become his wife. So it can be seen in the previous example, that he loses his polite forms and expresses his true feelings.

- *Plural forms:*

The controversy of this topic is created by the use of plural pronouns in singular contexts. The reasons why one pronoun is chosen instead of other are going to be analysed.

Table 6.: 2nd ps. pl. pronouns

Cases	Pronouns	Number of times	Y-forms plural	Y-forms singular
Nominative	You/Yow	16	1	15
Accusative	Ye	22	4	18
Total		38	5	

There are thirty-eight y-forms that appear in singular contexts which is more than double of the plural pronouns included in the prologue. The remaining five follow the conventional rules, they are used when addressing directly to several people. The narrator speaks directly to the public at the beginning of the tale:

Heere may **ye** seye, thogh we a tyme abyde,

Yet out it moot; we kan no conseil hyde.

The remenant of the tale if **ye** wol heere,

Redeth ovyde and ther **ye** may it leere. (WoBT 979-982)

After explaining her version of Ovid, she advises the listeners to read the original version as a form of reaching their own conclusions. In this occasion, she uses *ye* in the normal context because she is talking to a group.

The only example of y-forms used in singular contexts which are not conversations between husband and wife appear in the court when the knight goes there after knowing the answer that the old woman gave him. He addresses the queen who belongs obviously to a higher class, creating a contrast since the queen had used *thou* to speak to the knight (lines 902-908)

and he uses *ye* to address her. The alternation in pronouns' use depending on the social status is clearly perceived in the conversation between these two characters.

> This is youre mooste desir, though **ye** me kille.
>
> Dooth as **yow** list; I am heer at youre wille. (WoBT 1041-1042)

The changes between the husband and the wife's conversations are really interesting because it is easily perceived a rule followed by Chaucer in which the different status of characters and above all, the interactional status marks the alternation of forms. The moment in which both characters met for the first time is really significant because it can be appreciated the relation between interactants without taking into account other external factors. The old woman says:

> And seyde, <u>sire knyght,</u> heer forth ne lith no wey.
>
> Tel me what that **ye** seken, by youre fey!
>
> Paraventure it may the better be;
>
> Thise olde folk kan muchel thyng, quod she. (WoBT 1001-1004)

She uses *sire knyght* as a form of showing deference to a man that belongs obviously to an upper social scale than hers and she addresses her future husband at this point with *ye* to highlight these obvious differences between them and to show respect. He answers to tell her the problem that has accompanied him until this point of the narration:

> My <u>leeve mooder</u>, quod this knyght, certeyn
>
> I nam but deed, but if that I kan seyn
>
> What thyng it is that women moost desire.
>
> Koude **ye** me wise, I wolde wel quite youre hire. (WoBT 1005-1008)

He is respectful because he puts his last hopes in this old woman that appears in his way and that promises to help him although she belongs to a lower social class. She is older than him, for this reason, he also utilizes y-forms to speak to her, "both of them show deference to each other, the lady because of the knight's higher social status, and the knight because of the lady's old age" (Jucker 2006, p.63).

The last part of this conversation is really interesting for the development of this project because there is a clear change in the interactional status of the speakers. She realizes that the knight depends on her to live and she acquires power in this moment of the conversation what is clearly seen in the change of the pronouns used, they turn into singular forms:

> Plight me thy trouthe heere in myn hand, quod she,
>
> The nexte thyng that I require **thee**,
>
> **Thou** shalt it do, if it lye in thy might,
>
> And I wol telle it **yow** er it be nyght. (WoBT 1009-1012)

She is the person who can save him and it makes her feel powerful, so she addresses a person socially superior to her with singular pronouns. She is not obliged to show respect at this point because she is superior. The last line presents a contradiction because she changes to plural again, it can be seen as a form of showing respect again and make the conversation more serious because she is telling him to make a promise that will benefit both of them.

Further on, the old woman starts a speech in which she uses all the time y-forms to refer to her husband, she feels upset because of his attitude towards her after their marriage and she offers him the opportunity to have an old but faithful wife or the contrary:

> To han me foul and old til that I deye,
>
> And be to **yow** a trewe, humble wyf
>
> And nevere **yow** displese in al my lyf
>
> Or ells **ye** wol han me yong and fair,
>
> And take youre aventure of the repair (WoBT 1220-1224)

Plural forms appear as a way of showing respect to her husband in the turning point of the narration, this is the moment in which he has to decide what he really prefers. It can also be understood as a form of speaking in a moment in which the old woman feels angry so the relation between the speakers at this point and the situational status acquire importance.

The change of attitude of the knight after the ultimatum makes a contrast with all his previous interventions. He shows that he learnt what she advised him when he was going to meet the queen to decide his future and he uses his most respectful tone to address his wife, telling that she has the power to decide and that he will accept her verdict:

> My lady and my love, and wyf so deere,
>
> I put me in youre wise governance;
>
> Cheseth yourself which may be moost pleasance,
>
> And moost honour to **yow** and me also.
>
> I do no fors the wheither of the two;
>
> For as **yow** liketh, it suffiseth me. (WoBT 1230-1235)

He is also affected by the interactional status because she was sincere and he accepted that this woman became his wife although he did not agree at the beginning. In this case it is not a

question of social differences, it is an example of how a situation can make pronouns use vary. He realizes that she is the woman he is married with and he also takes into account *what women desire the most* before starting this speech. So, this can be seen as the moment in which he really understands what the old woman told him when they met.

> For, by my trouthe, I wol be to **yow** bothe,
>
> This is to seyn, **ye**, bothe fair and good.
>
> I prey to God that I moote sterven wood,
>
> But I to **yow** be also good and trewe
>
> As evere was wyf, syn that the world was newe. (WoBT 1239-1243)

The old woman answers that she will be both, true and young, because the man gave her the capacity to take the control of the situation. She continues using y-forms but in this case it is not due to the fact she is angry, it is based on the mutual respect that they have reached.

To sum up, as Jucker (2006, p.63) explores, the knight and the old woman's use of pronouns changes through the development of the story, at the beginning both use *ye* to show mutual respect but there is a moment of the narration (line 1010) in which the old woman realises that she controls the future of this man and she switches to *thou/thee*.

4. Conclusion

The close reading, selection and analysis of data carried on, has led me to validate the distinction T/V for the 2nd ps. pronouns of M.E. in Chaucer's "The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale". In this work there is an alternation in the use of pronouns according to the different social classes that appear. It must be said that there are some pronouns that are used following the standard rule, in plural when they refer to more than one listener and in singular when talking to a single person. Nevertheless, the most interesting cases I have found appear in the last part of the tale in which clear changes in pronouns use between the old woman and the knight can be perceived. At the beginning, the presumption that defended pronouns change according to the social scale seemed the most widespread, especially in the Prologue. Advancing in the Tale, the interactional status comprising social status, relation between interactants and situational status acquired importance, it defined the majority of the conversations in which the 2nd ps. pronouns appear.

In the Tale, social status and its importance in pronouns use appears in the court, for example, but the relation between speakers is also relevant because the moment when the old woman realizes that her wisdom gives her power to control the knight, corresponds to a change to y-forms. Finally, the situational status, feelings produced in a specific point of time because of different factors, is also present as it was seen through the development of this paper.

Despite the fact that a rule cannot be established for Chaucer –these alternations in pronouns could be a product of the different scribes who participated in the transcriptions of the tale- it could be affirmed that changes in 2nd person pronouns are following a similar pattern and consequently, their use in "The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale" is not a random one. The work carried out in this project has served for a clearer understanding of this ME peculiarity and that there is still much to learn about this period.

> […], I wolde praye yow, if youre wyl it were,
>
> Seyde this pardoner, as ye bigan,
>
> Telle forth youre tale, spareth for no man,
>
> And teche us yonge men of youre praktike. (WoBT 184-187)

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