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The Pronouns of Power and Solidarity

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On the evolution and use of pronouns as representative of Power Relations and Solidarity

Title:

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Abstract

English in its current form employs only one form of address - “you”, used with both single persons and multiple people.

“Thou” is limited in use today, but was more extensively utilised in the past to address more familiar single persons.

Other languages closely related to English (French, German, etc) still have two active singular pronouns of address.

Interestingly, their usage is closely associated with the dimensions of power and solidarity in social life.

Sections in the Paper

What

The paper is divided into five broad sections under two parts.

The first three sections are concerned with the semantics of the pronouns of address.

The final two sections of the paper concern expressive style; the covariation between pronoun used and the characteristics of the person speaking.

The Divisions:

1. The semantic evolution of the pronouns concerned in certain European Languages
2. Current semantic differences between the pronouns of German, French, and Italian.
3. Connection between social structure, group ideology, and pronoun semantics
4. Correlation of consistent pronoun usage to class status and political views
5. Examines matching style variation to express transient moods and attitudes.



Data and Collection Methods

Data collected was both historical and contemporary.

Primary evidence for language usage in the past comes from plays, letters, and legal proceedings

For contemporary data, literature was used but the primary source was a questionnaire answered by students from abroad visiting.

Most of the information was for English, French, Italian, German, and Spanish than for any other language.

Data and Collection methods

A look at the Questionnaire used

The respondents → students from abroad visiting Boston in fall 1957.

Filled by 50 Frenchmen, 20 Germans, 11 italians, and 2 each from Spain, Argentina, and other countries.

The majority of respondents were male, from middle class professional families. Any data outliers were ousted from analysis.

The data is old (the paper is from 1960) and all analysis was done on that. Parts of the study may yield different results if run today.

We'll take a look at the questions used later. An example from the French questionnaire is given alongside.

1.(a) Which pronoun would you use in speaking to your mother?
T (definitely) —
T (probably) —
Possibly T, possibly V —
V (probably) —
V (definitely) —
1.(b) Which would she use in speaking to you?
T (definitely) —
T (probably) —
Possibly T, possibly V —
V (probably) —
V (definitely) —



General Semantic Evolution of T and V:

The evolution of 'you'

European development of two singular pronouns starts from Latin's *tu* and *vos*, represented here as T and V respectively

Earlier in Latin, *tu* was singular and *vos* only used for plural

The first to be addressed with *vos* in the singular was the Emperor

This usage may not have been associated with actual plurality as plurality is historically ubiquitously associated with power. It was eventually extended to beyond the Emperor.

Indo-European languages kept this usage of pronouns to some extent



General Semantic Evolution of T and V:

The nonreciprocal power semantic

Power semantic: If one can control the behaviour of another, they can be said to have power over them. The relationship defined is nonreciprocal, and similarly the power semantic is nonreciprocal - Superiors say T and receive V.

Examples of power: physical strength, age, role in church, within the family.

Issue: Calls for a social structure clearly defining unique power ranks for every individual



General Semantic Evolution of T and V:

Evolution towards a solidarity semantic

Persons of roughly equal class addressed each other with either T or V - they're being used as reciprocal terms of address

People of higher classes used V with one another and those of lower classes used T

Initially, there was no rule differentiating address among equals, but one developed where T was used for intimacy and V for formality - evolution of the solidarity semantic

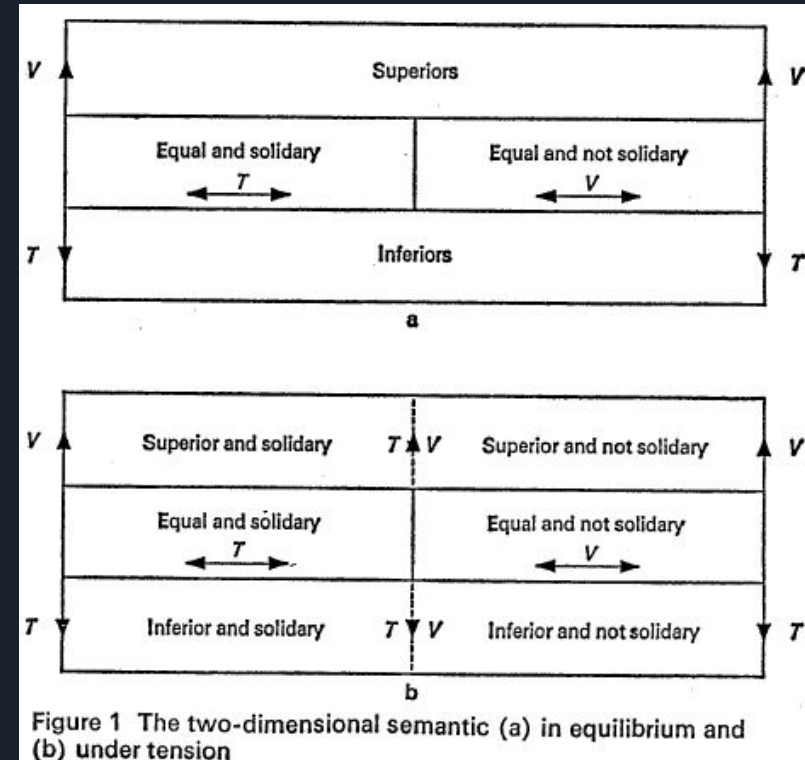
General Semantic Evolution of T and V:

The solidarity semantic

Not all relations are to differences of power - eg: people attending the same school have a symmetrical relationship

The closer two power equals, the greater chance of T being used (two dimensional system, in equilibrium)

Dimension of solidarity is not necessarily restricted to power equals - power superiors or inferiors may be solidary too (two dimensional system under tension)





General Semantic Evolution of T and V:

The solidarity semantic (continued)

The power semantic prevailed well into 19th century

Largely resolved, result is a simple one-dimensional system with reciprocal T for solidary, reciprocal V for non solidary

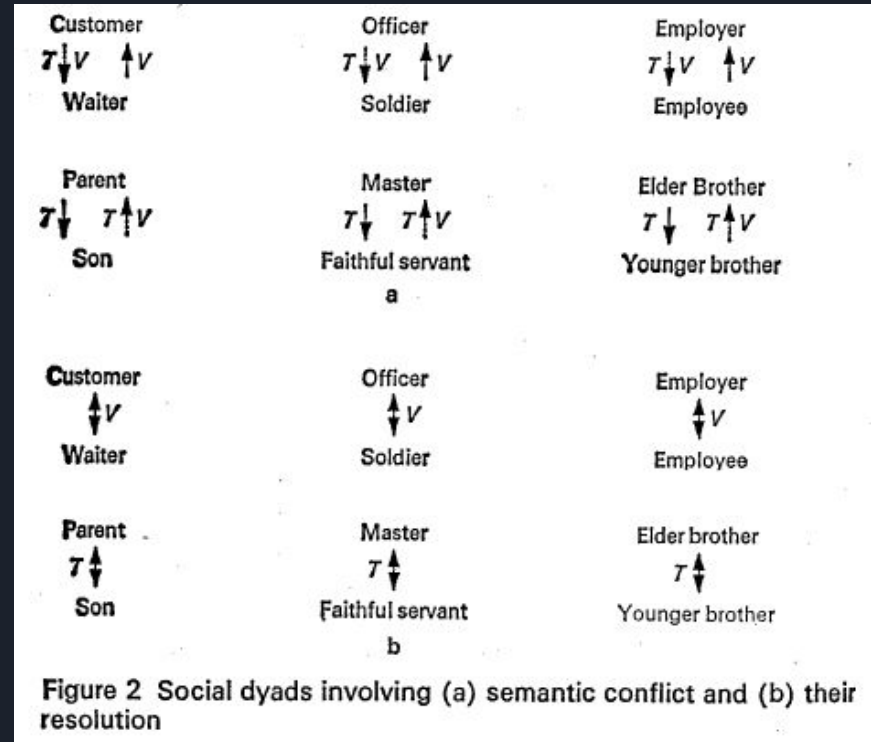
Presently, power laden attributes are turned into symmetrical ones.
Eg: older than → same age as, richer than → same income as

If these relationships hold, probability of mutual T increases. Else, probability of mutual V increases.

General Semantic Evolution of T and V:

The solidarity semantic (continued)

Interesting residual of the power relation - notion that right to initiate the reciprocal T belongs to member of dyad with better power based claim to say T without reciprocation





General Semantic Evolution of T and V:


The solidarity semantic (continued)

Proof that change has occurred - literature, quotations from language scholars

Best evidence: questionnaire results.

Across all six social dyads percentage of nonreciprocal power answers: 11% in French, 12% in German, 27% in Italian. Would've been mostly along power lines in the past

Author's opinion: Languages studied are changing such that the domain of mutual T is expanding



Contemporary differences in French, Italian, German:

The questionnaire

Although T and V have passed through the same general semantic sequence in these three languages, there exist differences in detailed usage as per the questionnaire

The questionnaire (which is in English) asked usage of pronoun type between subject and various relations, categorized under *Definitely T*, *Probably T*, *Possibly T*, *possibly V*, *Probably V*, *Definitely V*, and some elaborate questions asking the subject to imagine themselves in social situations and their correspondent pronoun usage.

Informants: students from abroad residing in Boston in fall 1957. All members in sample for analysis are male, from upper middle class, professional families. Outliers were eliminated for analysis.



Contemporary differences in French, Italian, German:

Analysis Method and Results

Numbers 0-4 were assigned to the five response alternatives, with *Definitely V* as 0. Replies dichotomized into a) *Definitely T* or *Probably T*, and b) the rest. To detect errors the chi-squared test was used with Yates' correction for the small frequencies obtained.

General characterization: the German T is more reliably applied within family than the French T - greater solidarity of family relationships. French T more likely to be used to express camaraderie among fellows -coding of acquired solidarity. The Italian T is nearly equal to the German in family solidarity, and surpasses the French in camaraderie, and is further extended to the Italian female unlike in the German or French males.



Semantics, Social Structure, and Ideology

The circumstances surrounding the semantics

The nonreciprocal power semantic is associated with relatively static society with little power redistribution, like feudal or manorial systems. The reciprocal solidarity semantic grows with social mobility and the scope for vertical societal movement.



Semantics, Social Structure, and Ideology

Examples (circa 1960, might be outdated)

In France, after the Revolution, the use of V was condemned as a feudal remnant and replaced across the board with T*.

English largely copied the pronoun usage from French. In the seventeenth century, The Religious Society of Friends condemned the use of V (you) and insisted on saying the T (thou) to everyone.

Yugoslavia just after Communism had universal mutual T. Now, V has returned.

*The shift to egalitarianism was $V \rightarrow T$ and not otherwise because of ancient upper-class preference for V: animus against the pronoun itself.



Semantics, Social Structure, and Ideology

An afterthought on Power Asymmetry

Societal changes merely created a distaste for face-to-face expression of power asymmetry

Pronouns are not the only forms of nonreciprocal address - existence of Titles and Proper Names

Difference between expressing power asymmetry through pronouns and through titles: pronouns are more frequently used, and even when avoided the verb is often inflected

In a fluid society, crisis of address occurs more frequently



Group style with the pronouns of address

Linguistic Style as an Identifier of Group

The identification of a style is relative to identification of some constancy. There is enough constant in English, French, Latin, and all these to classify them under one family.

Linguistic styles are potentially expressive when there is a covariance between characteristics of language performance and performer characteristics.

Interpretations of style (where the constancy is Indo-European and the styles are English, French, Italian, and such) must be statements on communities of speakers, statements of national character, social structure, group ideology.

The last section hazards propositions at that level.



Group style with the pronouns of address

Case Study: Pronoun usage as Class Identifier in French

According to the French Informants, V and T still function as indicators of class membership

A French nobleman claimed he didn't use T with anyone but a childhood nurse

In literature, pronoun style is often used to expose pretensions of social climbers - they may extend the usage too far.

The French students surveyed couldn't be split by social status as they were roughly homogenous.

They were split by general radicalism or conservatism of ideology - assuming that wide or narrow use of the solidary T would be split along those lines



Group style with the pronouns of address

Case Study: Examining usage of T by radicalism (in French)

Method used: Eysenck's Social Attitude Inventory (1957) and the Guttman technique of Scalogram Analysis.

Result: The table shows mean radicalism score for each style.

Higher score → more radical ideology.

Rank difference correlation: 0.96

Significant correlation: pronoun styles may be expressive of level of radicalism in ideology.

This *might* have universal application

Table 1 Scores on the Pronoun Scale in Relation to Scores on the Radicalism Scale

<i>Group pronoun score</i>	<i>Group mean radicalism score</i>
1	5.50
2	6.66
3	6.82
4	7.83
5	6.83
6	8.83
7	9.75

Guttman Scaling

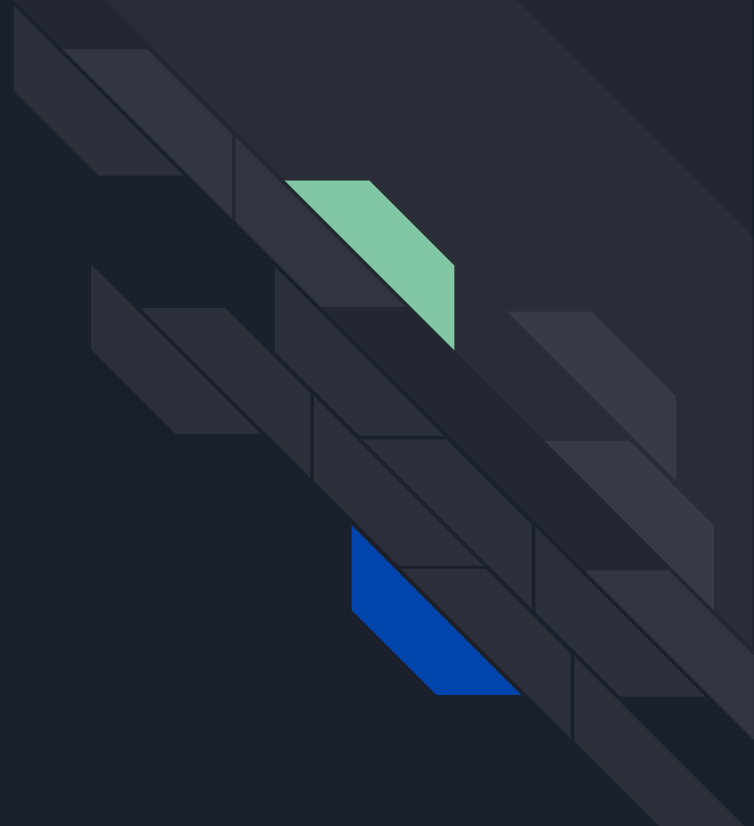
Or scalogram analysis; a brief overview

A Guttman Scale is formed by a set of items if they can be ordered in a reproducible hierarchy.

Only applies to tests that have binary outcomes .

Use: A person scoring a "7" on a 10 item Guttman scale, will agree with items 1-7 and disagree with items 8,9,10.

This means that a person's entire set of responses to all items can be predicted from their cumulative score because the model is deterministic.





Pronouns of address as expressions of transient attitudes

Looking outside the group norm

Behaviour norms are practices consistent within a group

Consistent personal style does not reveal much of a speaker's unique character, but can place them in one or another larger category.

Sometimes, one's choice of pronoun may violate group norm. Then the meaning is looked for beyond group norm; in the attitude or emotion of the speaker.

Examples are found in Racine's and others' dramas, often to express outbursts of emotion, or momentary changes in dynamics, and many others.

Expressive shifts have reduced in modern times.



Authors have suggested that the modern direction of change in pronoun usage expresses a will to extend the solidarity ethic to everyone.

The apparent decline of expressive shifts between T and V is more difficult to interpret.

Could be because excluded persons or races or groups can become the target of extreme aggression from groups that are benevolent within themselves.

Maybe Europeans would like to convince themselves that the solidary ethic once extended will not be withdrawn, that there is security in the mutual T.

Conclusion

Thank You

