

Beyond T and V – Theoretical Reflections on the Analysis of Forms of Address

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Abstract Pronouns of address are customarily discussed within a binary scheme of alternatives where T symbolizes an informal/familiar approach and V a formal/polite stance. No provision is made for a neutral option, a lacuna which has become increasingly more visible as English unmarked, single address pronoun *you* makes its presence felt around the globe. The current article reviews the dual system of analysis and argues for a tripartite classification of pronouns and other forms of address. This is offered as a reprise of Cook's (2010 (1997)) proposal of a third dimension, N, for neutrality. Equally taken into account are other theoretical and empirical contributions deemed to assist in the achievement of better theorization in the field.

Keywords Address pronouns, Address forms, English *you*, Neutrality, Power and Solidarity

1. Introduction

The sociolinguistic performance of address pronouns is customarily discussed in terms of a dual system of alternatives. This practice is based on the theoretical model advanced by Brown and Gilman [1] who, concentrating on European languages, adopted symbols T and V as designators for respectively a 'familiar' and 'polite' approach, in a parallel with Latin subject pronouns *tū* and *vōs*, where the former was the familiar pronoun of address directed at one person and the latter was for a polite approach directed at one person, as a sign of reverence, and was also the invariable plural, both familiar and polite.

In support of their theoretical model, Brown and Gilman argue that Latin *tū* and *vōs* are at the root of the European development of two singular pronouns for respectively a T and V approach. In their argument these authors do not provide an explanation for modern English single *you*. This exception points to the need to consider an extra dimension outside the T-V duality. The present article will discuss the sociolinguistic significance of English constituent *you* and will adopt a framework of analysis that caters for this case.

Brown and Gilman's T and V classification concerns second-person pronominal subjects. In a more comprehensive sociolinguistic appraisal, two aspects call for consideration. First, a second-person subject constituent may not necessarily be a pronoun; secondly, T and V nuances may also be conveyed via other means. In order to

gain insight into available options, one must discern between structural and semantic provision in the area of second-person subjects and other forms of address. The present article attempts to achieve this goal.

Brown and Gilman explained the semantic content of T and V alternatives as being governed by factors power and solidarity. Whilst solidarity tends to result in reciprocal T or V, power will determine a non-reciprocal interaction in which the superior says T but may expect to receive V. This will be revisited in the present article, where power and solidarity will be considered as variables associated with cultural difference and evolution.

Finally, today, over half a century since Brown and Gilman's theoretical model was first published, symbols T and V are still being used. The alternatives they represent, however, may have come to stand for a formal/informal dichotomy (V/T), instead of the original 'polite' (V) and 'familiar' (T) interpretation. The implications of this sharper contrast will also be pondered upon in the current article.

The different threads of argument listed above will be considered concurrently in the defence of a tripartite classification of address forms which will include a dimension of neutrality (N). The debate is grounded in naturally-occurring language data and will draw on linguistic theory and research findings as published in previous works.

Bearing in mind the existence of some fluctuation of practice in the use of linguistic terminology, please note that the expression 'forms of address' is used in this article in the sense of grammatical and semantic language provision that encodes and establishes relations between addresser and addressee, be they of a neutral, polite/formal or

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familiar/informal orientation. It encompasses second-person systems as well as other methods, including titles and honorifics, in the polite/formal sphere, and expressions of affection and camaraderie, in the familiar/informal sphere. From a structural angle, morphological and syntactic features will be discussed. From a semantic angle, both pronominal and nominal forms of address will be discussed in their role to encapsulate, define and promote interpersonal and intergroup relations as they are understood and valued.

2. The N Dimension

As highlighted by Brown and Gilman, most of us in modern English use only one pronoun of address, which is presented by these authors as an exception to their theoretical model [2]. Unlike the non-reciprocal interaction of T-V pronouns, single *you* is used reciprocally between old and young, rich and poor, monarch and citizen, and so on, thus bridging across possible social divides such as age, wealth, birth and others. Indeed, with its single second-person pronoun *you*, structurally, the English language recognizes grammatical provision for one second-person paradigm only, which, semantically, in face of its universal application, is void of T-V denotations.

The position occupied by English *you* in relation to the T-V binary is what Cook [3] [4] would classify as N, a neutral form of address in a triad of possible orientations in forms of address, i.e. N-V-T, where N can be the opening door into an objective process of assessment in relation to V and T parameters.

Cook's article focuses on the Portuguese language but recommends that the proposed inclusion of a dimension of neutrality – N – be considered more widely: 'This essay seeks to contribute a framework of analysis that centres specifically on the Portuguese language but which can be given a wider application, encompassing other languages [...]'. [5]

The N proposal acknowledges a dimension of neutrality, thus catering for an uncommitted alternative by which the addresser can bypass the T-V binary: 'Another address approach is also identified, a mode of neutrality, N, which coexists with V-T and enables avoiding a commitment to the binary system'. [6]

More recently, Clyne et al.'s findings can be deemed to support Cook's proposal for the addition of a neutral alternative, N, to the customary V and T binary. In relation to the English single pronoun of address, these authors state that the 'use of U on its own can be considered the default, neutral address form' [7]. Cook's N-V-T tripartite framework of analysis provides a theoretical basis for the evaluation of this case.

With respect to languages which have a pronominal distinction, the N dimension provides a theoretical tool for the assessment of T-V avoidance strategies. These vary from language to language. Discussing means of avoiding a V-T contrast, Brown and Levinson contribute the following

statement: '[...] pluralization, substitution of third person for second person, and other person switches are widespread throughout the world, and common in that order' [8]. In a study on dyadic interaction, Anita Fetzer analyses the adoption of collective identity markers in German [9]. Discussing Portuguese, Pountain comments as follows: 'Cook [...] argues that the absence of a subject is an intentional neutralization of the Portuguese *você* – o senhor opposition' [10]. Clyne and al. also allude to possible alternatives: 'There are [...] grammatical devices such as *on* in French and to a lesser extent *man* in German, which together with the passive (especially in Swedish) are grammatical devices of address pronoun avoidance' [11].

Not only can a T-V grammatical contrast be avoided but it can also be toned down. Instead of a polarized T and V, there will then be a number of intermediate grades. This is what Braun terms 'T and V₁, V₂, V₃' [12]. Along the same line of thinking, Hickey's classification of 'scalar' [13] equally contemplates nuances that cannot be reduced to a simple dichotomic judgement. In fact, the most depolarized of these versions may qualify as an N approach. For instance in French, *Vous* was classed as a 'neutral background' by Roland Barthes [14] and for many it continues to be the pronoun of choice in initial encounters between strangers and between people who want to avoid familiarity [15], thus retaining its place as the 'unmarked or neutral' pronoun [16] [17].

In addition to several N strategies being at work in languages with a T-V grammatical distinction, in some of them another phenomenon may be occurring – one of the pronouns may be gaining ground to the detriment of the other. For decades there may have been claims that one of the two is becoming, or has become, the default pronoun. Examples include Norwegian T *du* (e.g., Braun [18]), Swedish T *du* (e.g., Clyne et al. [19]), German V *Sie* (e.g., Kretzenbacher [20], [21]) and French V *vous* (e.g., Halmøy [22], Warren [23]). This situation, however, cannot be equivalent to the English example of a neutral single pronoun of address whilst both pronouns remain in circulation and, consequently, a pronominal binary subsists where one option will implicitly evoke the other. Reaching for N will therefore be likely to continue via manipulation of the established T-V grammatical system.

One way or another, structural adjustments are normally involved in the devising of N encoders out of a grammatical binary. This includes the implementation of one address pronoun in preference to the other. Having an address pronoun as a single performer, as in English, can therefore be viewed as a radical measure of structural adjustment.

We have examined two main scenarios in N provision. In a language which has a T-V grammatical paradigm, the usual route tends to be managing the existing morphosyntactic elements so as to produce N semantics. In a language – typically English – where morphosyntactic recognition is given to one single pronoun of address, then this form becomes the key player of N semantics in the N-V-T triad.

3. T and V Encoders: Pronominal or Nominal?

In Brown and Gilman's study, T and V approaches are led by a personal pronoun subject as part of a grammatical paradigm. This may be applicable in some cases but not in others, even within the ambit of European languages, the main focus of research in their work.

Address pronouns can be found for instance in French and German (Brown and Gilman [24]). French contributes a convenient example. Its current forms *tu* (T) and *vous* (V) are both morphologically and phonetically recognizable as descendants from Latin *tū* and *vōs*. German also qualifies, with its *du* (T) and *Sie* (V). In these two languages, as in others, there are specific verb endings corresponding to the T and V second-person pronouns. Further references could include, for instance, Russian T-V alternatives [25].

However, particularly for V, some of the so-called 'pronouns of address' are morphemes that derive from a nominal expression and, as such, from a diachronic point of view, do not belong to a paradigm of genuine personal pronouns. For instance, Italian V form *Lei* and Spanish V form *usted* are phonetically compressed versions of, respectively, *La Vostra Signoria*, your Lordship, and *Vuestra Merced*, your Grace. This is originally the result of a vogue in honorific form of address that swept across late medieval Europe and which was also rooted in Latin, where the Roman Emperor used to be addressed as *Uestra Maiestas*, Your Majesty. Brown and Gilman acknowledge the noun-based origin of Italian *Lei* and Spanish *usted* [26], but in the terminology used – pronouns of address – no allowance is made to cater for the nominal input, perhaps discarded as a superseded phenomenon of by-gone days.

Far from being a matter of mere historical interest, the nominal origin of some 'pronouns of address' can still impact in their performance today. The noun element in the source expression attracted the use of third person verb endings applied to second person, a paradigm which can outlive the phonetic erosion of the subject constituent into a pronoun-like morpheme, as is the case with Italian *Lei* and Spanish *usted*. In modern Portuguese, *você*, you, equally comes from a nominal expression, *Vossa Mercê*, Your Grace (Braun [27], Cook [28]); and the retained third-as-second-person mechanism encourages the insertion of a noun subject marker (Cook [29] [30]). For a V effect, *você* can be replaced with *o senhor / a senhora* (the gentleman / lady) – e.g., *O senhor deseja um café?* (Would you like a coffee, sir?, literally, Would the gentleman like a coffee?). This 'pronoun of address' is actually a noun in its own right.

In fact, nouns are often essential contributors to T-V differentiation, as for instance in Japanese [31] and Chinese [32]. They can even be indispensable providers of T and V semantics. This is notably the case in the English language, where nominal T-V alternatives fulfil the role of an absent T-V binary in pronouns of address. In this respect, Clyne, Norrby and Warren comment as follows:

'Contrary to a popular belief among speakers of languages which have a pronominal distinction, the existence of a single address pronoun in English does not make the English address system free from complexity. Indeed, there have been various claims about the ways in which English 'makes up for' its lack of a T/V distinction. [...] Nominal address forms in English are a particularly heterogeneous group, with a range of terms whose use varies according to circumstances such as domain, relationship between speaker and addressee, and various speaker characteristics such as age and sex.' [33]

Nominal forms abound. In the V sphere, *Sir* and *Madam* (or *Ma'am*) are generally used as a polite form of address for respectively a man and a woman (e.g., Oxford Dictionary of English [34]) as a valued member of society. There are also forms to classify the addressee by various specific criteria of social status, for instance *Your Highness* (dignitary attribution), *Prime Minister* (political office), *Captain* (military rank) and *Doctor* (academic level), as can be found in dictionary entries (e.g., Oxford Dictionary of English [35]). For the T sphere, Brown and Levinson quote an extensive list which includes *Mac*, *mate*, *buddy*, *pal*, *guys*, *fellas*, *honey*, *dear*, *duckie*, *luv*, *babe*, *sweetheart*, and others [36]. Familiarizers, such as *mate*, and terms of endearment, such as *darling* and *sweetie*, are also mentioned by other authors (e.g. Leech [37], Formentelli [38]).

Appellation by someone's name operates in V or T (e.g., Gardner-Chloros [39]). Accordingly, choices can be made: *Matthew Jones* may be addressed in V as *Mr Jones* and in T as *Matthew* or, more so, *Matt*; *Amanda Peters*, may be addressed in V as *Miss/Mrs/Ms Peters* and in T as *Amanda* or *Mandy*. The addresser would have used the addressee's surname with a title for V, and for T his/her given name in full or abridged as a diminutive.

Considering the English nominal T-V encoders from a structural point of view, it must be noted that in general they are not embedded in the sentence, or, in Braun's terminology, they are 'free forms', as opposed to 'bound forms' [40]. They tend to share the same syntactic arrangement as a vocative, either in isolation – e.g., *Sir!* (V) or *Mate!* (T) –, or in apposition – e.g., *Yes, sir!* (V) or *Yes, mate* (T). Considering English T-V encoders from a semantic point of view, a significant facet to note is that the noun element performs a classifying function, differently from what happens with pronouns of address, where T-V semantic content is achieved through one pronoun, by inference, meaning the opposite to the other. The inherent semantic content of nouns of address makes them a rich tool of T-V sociolinguistic performance with a wide range of identifying and characterizing nuances. This is particularly noticeable in the T sector, e.g., *mate*, *babe*, etc. Obviously, in addition to 'bound forms', 'free forms' are equally available in languages which have a T-V pronominal distinction, where they can provide extra T-V shades of meaning. The fundamental dissimilarity in English is the need to rely on T-V nominal encoders as a means of

compensating for a single address pronoun.

As discussed above, T-V semantics are not necessarily delivered by pronouns. Trying to reduce T-V encoders to this morphological category results in an incomplete and misleading picture.

4. Vertical Axis and Horizontal Mobility

4.1. Learning from the Past

Brown and Gilman's discussion on 'the pronouns of power and solidarity' [41] opens with a description of the English model of a single encoder, *you*, and closes with the following piece of advice: "Perhaps Europeans would like to convince themselves that the solidarity ethic once extended will not be withdrawn, that there is security in the mutual T." This opening and closure may not always be easy to conciliate.

As summarized by Brown and Gilman [42], English *you* was at one time part of a T-V binary. It occupied the V pole as the singular of reverence and polite distance; and was also the invariable plural. With this role, *you* was the object form corresponding to subject form *ye*. The subject pronoun singular for T was *thou*, with *thee* as its corresponding object form. In today's English, T *thou* and *thee* are no longer in wide use.

Modern English pronoun *you* is, therefore, a V survivor of a former T-V binary. With the removal of the T pole, the T-V construct was undone; and V, not T, has been extended to any addressee, thus serving the 'solidarity ethic'. Therefore, the English example may not support the advice given by Brown and Gilman to Europeans with regard to 'mutual T' which may suggest the promotion of a T pronoun to a single form.

History may also prove that 'mutual T' does not always serve the 'solidarity ethic'. The best known example from Europe may be the French Revolution, in late eighteenth century, when the Committee of Public Safety condemned the use of V as a feudal remnant and ordered a reciprocal T. In the name of 'fraternité', mutual T – French *tu* – was promoted as an all-embracing form of address. This was double-edged. Revolution leaders would be acting within the equalitarian ideal when implementing T reciprocal address in interaction with members of the traditionally lower classes. However, when imposing T on those of high standing in the previous hierarchy, the equalizing effort would become a revolutionary power-driven violation of the formerly established order. The promotion of *tu* lasted for a while, but eventually the T-V duality was re-established. This historical example is quoted in Brown and Gilman's article [43], although it may be another piece of evidence unresponsive of their advice to Europeans.

Closer to our days, the anti-authoritarian movements in European universities in the 1960s and early 1970s have impacted on mode of address but so far not decisively. In relation to French, Calvet reports the spread of *tu* [44] and Coffen the reinstatement of *vous* [45]. However, *vous* hasn't

ceased to go unquestioned as a default option; and there are pressures to use *tu* (Warren [46]). In relation to German, Bayer [47] describes the emergence of two competing systems, one with the traditional default *Sie*, the other with a default *du*, but there are signs of a return to the former (Kretzenbacher [48], Clyne [49]), which is particularly noticeable in the academic sector (Amendt [50]); although default *Sie* has been receiving renewed challenges (Kretzenbacher, Clyne and Schüpbach [51]) but surviving (Kretzenbacher [52]).

The quoted French and German examples have something in common with the English case, that is, the effort to cater for solidarity principles by rethinking a T-V duality. The process is also basically the same, one of the pronouns of address, V or T, is elected to become a reciprocal form across different sectors of society. A major difference, however, may lie in the elected encoder, V or T. With *you*, the English language has selected V, which, when implemented initially out of a T-V contrast, must have appealed to the large majority of people, who would feel upgraded out of the previous non-reciprocal system. Cooperation from the dominant sectors of society may have been facilitated by a discreet displacement – the generalized V was not the subject pronoun but its respective object form, not frontal *ye* but oblique *you*.

English V *you* has been successful and today is used by most Anglophone speakers as a single encoder in replacement for the former T-V pronominal duality. With *tu*, late eighteenth-century French selected T, which would meet with rejection from individuals in traditional posts of high standing; and more recent campaigns have been having mixed results. In twentieth-century German, attempts to promote T *du* have so far led to conflicting T-V dualities. The difficulties encountered by T pronouns in establishing themselves as the default, and eventually single, mode of address are open to more than one interpretation. It could simply be that more conservative speakers do not wish to part with the traditional T-V system. Other possible explanations will be that former V encoders have come to house a new sociolinguistic content which is better suited to changing requirements; or that T encoders are not delivering the solidarity they proclaim to convey.

4.2. Moving into the Future

4.2.1. N for Solidarity

Changes can be expected to take place in the sociolinguistic content of a T or V encoder. This brings us to the topic of how T and V condition, and are conditioned by, social values and cultural developments. The Latin T-V symbols used by Brown and Gilman [53] are representative of asymmetry on a vertical axis, between superiors and inferiors. It would be expected to be so in the language of Rome and also in European languages perhaps at least until the end of the nineteenth century. In the more modern world a new scenario may emerge. As societies become less hierarchical, individuals are likely to move more freely

across group boundaries and sociolinguistic interaction is likely to become more relaxed. As such, the T-V duality may undergo a shift away from its former stratified structure and be redirected from a vertical axis to horizontal mobility. As a result of this evolution, an uncommitted N dimension will become a more pressing requirement in a framework of assessment for pronouns and other forms of address, where T-V encoders, pronominal or other, will need to be re-assessed bearing in mind that they may be playing new roles which are somewhat different from their former ones. (Cook [54])

Indeed, in the less stratified society, the T-V duality calls for review. In the Latin model, V was associated with power, shared by superiors in mutual recognition, or demanded from an inferior who would be imposed T in return. In a more open society, V may be heard as an act of explicit solidarity directed at any stranger independently of his/her perceived walk of life or other dividing line. What I would label 'personal space' is being granted, from which both parties can negotiate whether to stay on reciprocal V or move to reciprocal T. The respect expressed by V is that for one's interlocutor as a fellow human being, not as someone in a position of dominance. In this use of a V encoder, solidarity, not power, is the determining force; and the intended position is one of neutrality (N).

Brown and Levinson consider 'social distance', which they define as 'a symmetric social dimension of similarity/difference' [55]. This will lead to symmetrical language positioning, either with reciprocal T or V depending on the perceived degree of distance; but it may also lead to asymmetrical language positioning, with un-reciprocal T and V where there is a different degree of distance perception between the collocutors. English *you* – a former pronominal encoder for V – bridges across these parameters, in an unequivocal N dimension of solidarity.

Although not as a single address pronoun, in languages other than English a former V encoder may also have come to house a new sociolinguistic content. As discussed in section 2 of this paper, French V *vous* has been classed as neutral (Roland Barthes [56], Halmøy [57]) and both French V *vous* (Warren [58]) and German V *Sie* (Kretzenbacher [59], [60]) as default pronouns. Also interesting is the report that Swedish T default *du* may be receiving a challenge from discarded V *ni* in a comeback of this latter form, now having lost its former hierarchy-related and deferential function, which may be observed particularly in the service sector (Mårtensson [61] and Clyne et al. [62] 2009: 110). This may equally be the case of an old V encoder that now houses new semantics which are more in keeping with contemporary sociolinguistic demands.

4.2.2. T and V Ambiguities

T encoders may not be able to deliver the solidarity they proclaim to convey; and this may be a cause for rejection. Their performance can be ambiguous. They may be expected to serve solidarity but revert to serving power.

Indeed, T encoders seem to be prone to power-driven distortions. Attention has been drawn to dubiousness in T practice. For instance, Chaika [63] points out that in many societies one same form of address is used both for friendly closeness and for ascendancy and control; and also that both intimacy and insult imply little social distance.

This author's view may not be short of evidence available to public knowledge. Taking examples from the English language, there is a widely spread occurrence of T nominal expressions such as *mate*, *dear*, *love*, *honey*, *sweetheart*, *pet* or *love* (e.g., Braun [64], Holmes [65]); and the actual sociolinguistic significance of their practice may be open to interpretation in terms of solidarity and power. Some are frequently heard in contexts where there may be no obvious need to decrease personal space, as for instance in a first, fleeting contact with a service provider or when receiving road directions from a stranger (Clyne et al. [66]) – where the T expression will be used towards the recipient of the service or directions. One may wonder whether the addresser is being friendly or assuming a top-down stance towards the addressee.

In some cases, T ambivalence appears to have become an established practice ingrained in the language. For example, Formentelli [67] points out that the English vocative *mate* can switch from an encoder for camaraderie to a sarcastic use in the role of disarming an interlocutor perceived as aggressive. Also in English, a different example can be found in the use of noun *pet*, the common noun for a domestic or tamed animal kept for pleasure or companionship, in the expression *pet name*, 'a special name used as an endearment' (Chambers Dictionary [68]). Under the false pretence of affection, and perhaps humour, the addresser may be seeking a position of control over the addressee when relating to him/her with a pet name or even more so when calling him/her *pet*.

This said, V encoders too may be vulnerable to power-driven distortions, although to a lesser degree than T encoders. As we have discussed, they can serve a solidarity ethic, with horizontal mobility across societal sectors. However, this performance can be perverted into a power-driven exercise. Such is the case for instance when V is directed at someone who would be expected to receive T on the grounds of close friendship. Here V will not be solidarity-driven social space but Brown and Levinson's 'social distance' (See 4.2.1) and will spell out power-driven rejection, in a vertical axis with T-V poles sarcastically reversed. Examples occur in common practice available to public knowledge, E.g., *Would you like a cup of tea, Madam?* or *Would Ma'am like a cup of tea?* (possibly reinforced with a posture of superiority) so as to highlight someone no longer qualifies as an accepted friend.

As shown in the examples discussed above, nominal encoders are particularly rich tools for ambiguous T and V approaches at the service of asymmetric interaction. It would, indeed, be naïve to assume that power is a superseded agent and forms of address have become inspired solely by the solidarity ideal. As pointed out by

Clegg [69], power claim will persist, for it is present in any society. Also, power itself is a phenomenon that can only materialize in terms of interaction; and its reification depends on ‘anchor points’ in a web for the assertion of ascendancy and control, which once weakened will lead to a new power network [70]. Therefore, where an egalitarian ethic is active enough to impact on a previously established T-V vertical axis, new ‘anchor points’ will be sought in an effort to re-establish the endangered power network. This means that power-driven T-V will not be eradicated but will continue to operate, often through undercover performance. This kind of behaviour may become what is sometimes termed ‘politically correct’, an expression which, as discussed by Cameron [71] can express a humorous acknowledgement of contradiction between one’s proclaimed principles and actions.

In the present section we have focused on factors power and solidarity as they reflect on the semantics of forms of address, pronominal or other. Whilst the T-V dichotomy evokes a vertical axis of asymmetric performance across different strata of society, as in the Latin model of hierarchical interaction, in the more equalitarian society, solidarity is the favoured determinant of address mode, which entails a change of direction from the vertical axis to horizontal mobility across social boundaries. An egalitarian ethic results in a more urgent need for N as a dimension of assessment. The N-V-T triad, however, will not be a static framework of performance. Lively dynamics will be at work where T-V encoders can serve both solidarity and power-driven agency, in the latter case more so T and often covertly.

5. English *You*... and the other Languages

5.1. Possible Misunderstandings

Brown and Gilman defined as ‘familiar’ and ‘polite’ [72] the two distinct approaches in pronouns of address they identified and for which they adopted T and V, respectively, as symbolic designators. These two symbols came to acquire great popularity and are still being used, but what they now stand for may not correspond to their originally intended meaning. Today, T and V may often circulate as designators for ‘informal’ – instead of ‘familiar’ – and ‘formal’ – instead of ‘polite’. The difference may be perceived as no more than a semantic subtlety, but its implications and possible consequences may be worth pondering.

The adjective ‘formal’ can be synonymous with ‘conventional’ and ‘ceremonious’ (e.g., Chambers Thesaurus [73]). Applied to pronouns and other forms of address, it can easily bring to mind non-reciprocal V interaction between superiors and inferiors. As discussed in the previous section, this vertical axis of asymmetric communication, which is identifiable with a highly ranked

society, can undergo a change of direction to horizontal mobility across group boundaries as the approved stance in the less stratified society. Where an egalitarian ideology is at work, ‘formal’ may become an undesirable attribute. Pronouns and other forms of address for general use which are believed to fall into this category may be perceived as obsolete, even stigmatic, and therefore better phased out.

Single English *you* is free of any traces of formality; and it is also a model to which languages world-wide are exposed as a result of the impact of English as a ‘lingua franca’ at a global scale (e.g., Crystal [74], [75]). Since *you* is definitely not ‘formal’, when interpreted within a T-V contrast, it is likely to be perceived, by inference, as ‘informal’. This may influence some speakers of languages with a pronominal T-V distinction who, trying to follow the English example, may feel compelled to seek to implement their T encoder as a single pronoun of address, to the detriment of its V counterpart. Paradoxically, this is neither the route taken to achieve today’s *you* nor its sociolinguistic role. As discussed earlier in the current article, the English single address pronoun originated in V and came to perform as N, i.e., void of ‘formal’ or ‘informal’ connotations; these being left in the care of nominal encoders.

Today’s understanding of T and V dimensions might have been different if these symbols had remained linked to the adjectives with which they were described originally. V might have been regarded as a positive choice if still closely associated with ‘polite’. For the vertical axis, politeness would have been prompted by reverential distance; but, for horizontal mobility, politeness would mean personal space on an equal basis. By the same token, T’s capabilities might have been regarded in a different light if still closely associated with ‘familiar’, which can also mean ‘inappropriately intimate or informal’ (Oxford Dictionary of English [76]). This means that ‘familiar’ can be equivalent to ‘intimate’ and ‘friendly’ but also to ‘impertinent’ and ‘disrespectful’ (e.g., Chambers Thesaurus [77]).

Not only Brown and Gilman’s symbols V and T may have been given a particular bias of interpretation but this may be affecting speakers of languages with a pronominal distinction who may find themselves trapped in a T-V conceptual contrast when trying to work out a way forward better suited to new sociolinguistic expectations. An equivalent to English single *you* will need to be thought out as an encoder whose semantics will qualify for a place within the N dimension.

5.2. Delicate Compromises

When trying to follow the English example as a means of adjusting to today’s sociolinguistic requirements, speakers of languages with a grammatical second-person system may encounter challenges which reflect the issues argued above. This can be easily illustrated with contents from international websites of multinational companies. Indeed, some are yielding food for thought in the way they relate to their target audience (see, e.g., Norrby and Hajek [78]).

Major British retailer Marks & Spencer, with headquarters in London, provides translation from English into other languages. Potential buyers are addressed in V in French, German and Dutch, but in T in Spanish [79]). For instance, English *Sign up to our email newsletter* (N) is translated into French as *Inscrivez-vous à notre newsletter* (V), into German as *Melden Sie sich für unseren E-Mail-Newsletter an* (V), into Dutch as *Meld u aan voor onze e-mailnieuwsbrief* (V), but into Spanish as *Suscribete a nuestra newsletter* (T). In these examples, the languages encoding the English source text into V can be seen to opt for polite social space whilst the language encoding into T can be seen to opt for a familiar, matey tone evocative of conviviality.

As a global ‘lingua franca’ (e.g., Crystal [80], [81]), English is most likely to be present on international websites; but it will not necessarily be the source language as on the Marks & Spencer’s site. Swedish IKEA, a world’s giant furniture retailer, writes its home page in its national tongue, but the site is multilingual. In its position as the source language, Swedish sets the praxis as to the mode of address directed at the potential customer, which is T. The example is followed by a large number of the other languages, but not all. A T approach is adopted, for instance, by Danish, Dutch, German, Italian, Norwegian and Spanish; but French is amongst the exceptions [82].

A comparison between mode of address in the Swedish original and its respective translations can be drawn with quotes from parallel sentences equally present in the source language and the different target languages. This is the case with the invitation to the customer to consult with Anna, IKEA’s Automated Online Assistant [83]. Several translations follow the Swedish T model. However, not all languages join in and some signal non-adhesion in their introductory words. With *Demandez à Anna*, French opts for the traditional paradigm associated with V. Portuguese evades a T or V commitment by using an infinitive in *Perguntar à Anna*; and it also uses a third-as-second-person combined with zero-subject elsewhere in the text. English *Ask Anna* presupposes *you*, the N pronoun of address. (On the IKEA site, see also Norrby and Hajek [84].)

Non-conformity with the Swedish T directive merits some attention. In the samples quoted – French, Portuguese and English – encoding is done grammatically with a V paradigm or a solution is found which in its roots involves a V construction. Accordingly, in French, the original V pronoun *vous* is present but taking updated duties, for social space rather than asymmetric interaction; in Portuguese, third person and null subject are possible thanks to the former nominal V subject-marker *Vossa Mercê*, today phonetically and semantically reduced to pronoun-like *você*; and English single *you* originates in former V pronoun *ye/you*. Of all three, the most independent position is taken by English uncommitted, single *you*. For it to acquire a T slant, in an approximation to the Swedish T directive, a nominal apposition would have to be added, e.g., *you guys*,

which is not the case. On its own, *you* remains an impartial N.

5.3. Solidarity or Power?

Behind the N-V-T mismatches on the Marks & Spencer and IKEA international sites lies the effort to address the customer in what may be felt to be the most desirable manner. This obviously poses problems of equivalence across languages with different sociolinguistic values and encoders, for each one offers a large variety of linguistic means for the expression of a speaker’s personal and social orientation to others through address (Crystal [85]).

Policy and practice are open to interpretation. Interestingly, some languages exhibit variation in the preference taken on the two websites. German and Dutch encode in V, when translating from English N on the Marks & Spencer site, but adhere to T, when translating from Swedish T on the IKEA site. French opts for V on both sites. English remains in N throughout, without any nominal additions that would give single pronoun *you* some T or V colouring. As it can be expected, N-V-T selection in the source language will reflect the social values held and promoted by the company who owns the site, which, in turn, is likely to reflect current sociolinguistic performance at national level in the respective country. N-V-T selection in the target languages will therefore entail an adjustment to the respective sociolinguistic national context.

There are pitfalls in both T and V selections. On the one hand, addressing the customer in T may be perceived negatively as power-driven agency from a mighty provider towards the consumer society. Notwithstanding, there may be countries where T has been elected by national consensus to become the encoder destined to serve an egalitarian ethic. This, however, will not preclude open or covert deviation of T practice, enforcing new power networks. On the other hand, addressing the customer in V may be perceived negatively as an antiquated subservience towards the buyer. Notwithstanding, there may be national sociolinguistic contexts where V functions as a provider of personal space in mutual respect at the service of the equalitarian ideal. This, however, will not guarantee that V will remain exempt from deflection to power-driven vertical asymmetry. In fact, both T and V forms on these websites may be open to speculation – in some cases it may be debatable which factor prevails, solidarity or power. If it’s the latter, one may wonder who holds the power, the buyer as the provider of payment or the seller as the provider of goods and services.

The present section has looked at modern English *you* as a challenge to speakers of other languages. As discussed earlier in this article, a T-V classification is inadequate for the appraisal of this single pronoun of address, which is an uncommitted form occupying N, an area of neutrality. This inadequacy is intensified where symbols T and V are not interpreted in their original sense of respectively ‘familiar’ and ‘polite’ but are presented as an ‘informal-formal’

dichotomy. Deprived of a suitable scheme of assessment, some speakers of languages with T-V grammatical paradigms may have difficulty in appreciating the actual sociolinguistic role of English *you* and how it may relate to their own second-person system.

6. Conclusions

Anyone trying to assess pronouns and other forms of address is likely to be faced with a binary scheme of evaluation, T-V, based on a theoretical model advanced by Brown and Gilman in 1960. The T and V symbols were originally adopted for respectively a familiar and polite approach; but today they may also circulate as designators for an informal-formal dichotomy.

For decades scholarly literature has been drawing attention to limitations in the T-V binary; and in 1997 Cook proposed the addition of N, a dimension of neutrality, for an uncommitted option. Notwithstanding, main stream discussion continues to be carried out within a T-V contrast. This can be a source of confusion for speakers of English and other languages; a source of problems for language practitioners, such as interpreters and translators; and a source of frustration for observers from an academic standpoint.

Inspired in the Latin second-person pronouns *tū* and *vōs*, the T-V duality is evocative of non-reciprocal interaction between different social groups, in a demarcation of unequal status or authority. This practice is typical of a hierarchical society or otherwise stratified societal context. On the other hand, a different scenario emerges where an egalitarian ethic influences mode of address. Then the politically correct posture will be one of reciprocal interaction across group boundaries, in a statement of parity overcoming traditional social divides.

This shift from a power-driven vertical axis to solidarity-driven horizontal mobility may be taking place around the world today and be best served with N, the dimension of neutrality. Languages with a T-V syntagmatic duality may be able to avoid asymmetric interaction through manipulation of their pronominal forms, or some other strategy within their established second-person system. The English language has taken a different route. It has stepped out of a T-V pronominal duality by promoting syntagmatic recognition for one pronoun of address only, which, unmarked by any sociolinguistic shades of meaning, functions as N.

The N dimension has become increasingly more visible as the English language enjoys a privileged position at a global scale; and its unmarked, single pronoun of address is a model that may be impacting on the second-person system of other languages. Yet, sociolinguistic theory has been slow in accompanying this development. An attempt to evaluate the significance of English *you* within the limitations of a T-V binary of assessment is likely to result in misconceptions. The conclusion may be drawn that this

address pronoun cannot be V and, by inference, will have to be T. In fact, English T is encoded not pronominally but by means of a nominal expression, usually as a vocative; and the same applies to V. Furthermore, *you* comes from a V pronoun, not T, and today functions neither as V or T but as N. With more helpful theoretical support, like that found in the tripartite N-V-T framework of analysis, misconceptions can be prevented and a more lucid understanding can be achieved not only for the English case but also for pronouns and other forms of address in languages in general in a global world experiencing XXI century sociolinguistic evolution.

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