

PRONOUNS WITHIN DIRECTIVES
IN EARLY ENGLISH MANUALS
ON CHILD BIRTH

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ABSTRACT

A significant topic in English Historical Linguistics and English Historical Pragmatics is the evolution of the formal/informal second person forms of addressing (Busser 2002, Taavitsainen & Jucker 2003) and its gradual disappearance from the language. However, the use of other pronouns in the address term system seems to have been less studied. We present here a quantification and analysis of the subject pronouns used in the interaction established among master writer, student reader, patient and general public, in three Early English manuals on child birth. Results show that not only second but also the third person pronouns are relevant in directives and that their alternation might be due to pragmatic reasons. Historical studies on ESP like this one may give answer to linguistic choices in PDE scientific writing.

KEY WORDS: English Historical Pragmatics, pronouns, directives, Early English manuals on child birth.

1. INTRODUCTION

The evolution of the English pronoun system is a recurrent object of Historical Linguistics, in its turn Historical Pragmatics has paid special attention to the use of pronouns that can be comprised in address term systems, basically the contrast T/V, that is, the informal/formal pronouns of address such as the well known, *tu/vous* in French. In this line, the *thou/you* forms of Middle English, whose contrast gradually disappeared during the Early Modern English Period, have been the object of thorough works (Busser 2002; Taavitsainen & Jucker, 2003). Nevertheless, other possible confronts, especially when that difference started to blur, seem to have been neglected.

Early scientific textbooks are a good source of information for Historical Pragmatics since they offer some kind of interaction between the master writer and the student reader (Jucker, 2006: 329, Rissanen, 1999: 277). In this type of interaction we find the use of inclusive first and second person pronouns, when the author refers to his/her professional group, as well as uses in which the addressing forms correspond to a third person singular, *he/she*, together with a second person singular. These may indicate a contrast between master and colleague, and master and student. The use of these pronouns as they appear in

directives in Early English manuals on child birth is going to be the object of our study.

For our purpose we have selected three manuals from the years 1612, 1656 and 1699. All three reflect the relationship between their authors, professional surgeons devoted to obstetrics, or midwives, and other practitioners, apprentices or patients.

2. THE TEXTS

Child Birth or, The Happy Deliverie of Women. Wherein is set downe the Gouverment of Women... was originally written in French by James Guillimeau, French king's Chirurgion for Charles ix and Henry iv. *Child Birth* was published in France in 1609 and then translated into English and published in London at least twice, in 1612 and 1635 (Davis, 1998: 292). Our version corresponds to the first one printed by A. Hatfield and is divided into three books. Here, Guillimeau defends the work of the surgeon, especially, to avoid the excessive suffering of women and the newborn.

The Complete Midwives practice, in the Most Weighty and High Concernments of the Birth of Man containing the Perfect Rules for Midwives and Nurses, as Also for Women in their Conception and Nurishing of Children... is the long title of a work that had several versions and editions. The one that concerns us here corresponds to that of the year 1656 written by T.C., I.D., M.S., and T.B., the supposedly initials of Catherine Turner, Dma. Ireland and Mary Stuart (Evenden, 2000: 8) though the complete name of the last author is not known for sure yet. These "practitioners" acknowledge in their preface how indebted they are to Madame Louise Bourgeois, royal midwife of France, who was considered the first midwife to write a treaty on obstetrics in 1609.

A Companion for Midwives, Child-bearing Women and Nurses Directing Them How to Perform Their Respective Offices... written by Robert Barret, Brother of Surgeons Hall, was published in 1699 in London. Barret's pretended main authorities in writing this book were himself and the Scriptures. Though initially addressed to them, Barret makes a heavier criticism of midwives and nurses than that found in the other two books, longing to combine Christian morality with proper practice.

The government, perfect rules, how to perform, are phrases that state the purpose of these volumes which have a primary educational objective that would benefit their presumed readers: surgeons, midwives, nurses and women, addressees who are also mentioned in the title or in the prefaces. Guillemieu (1612: 2) states he gathered all he could "to better instruct the young Chirurgion"; T.C. et al hope their book will be "a great exemplary and Schoole" (1656: 3); Barret, in his turn, says at the end of his preface to the reader that the midwife must always consider the safety of mother and child and for this reason he gives not

only “plain and familiar directions”, but also “the Moral Considerations” of true Christians (1699: 16). Therefore, his main addressees are also professionals looking for more learning, what does not mean the treatises could not be read by the common public.

3. THE USE OF PRONOUNS IN DIRECTIVES

Here we follow Hyland’s definition of directives. These serve to “instruct the reader to perform an action or to see things in a way determined by the writer” (2005:184), they form part of the way in which authors relate to their readers and, as such, form part of what has been called engagement. They are also revealing about the attitude of the author overlapping with another interactional macro-function: stance (Hyland 2005: 176).

Directives are essentially marked by imperatives or modals and, therefore, the second person pronoun is regarded as the most frequent indexical:

The only writings in which directives (imperatives) are likely to occur in abundance are works containing instructions and directions, such as medical recipe collections, cookery books, rules, etc

[...] In Early Modern English the second-person subject of the imperative is more often expressed than in Present-Day English (Rissanen, 1999: 277-278)

Keeping in mind Hyland’s concept of directive, we consider that the presence of other pronouns within these instructions is relevant. In our texts, the second person forms frequently act as indefinite personal pronouns, functioning as *one* and denoting no specific reader. But in the period we have analyzed, *you* has also as counterparts *he* and *she*, which are quite usual in these manuals when addressing apprentice and patient. Third person singular pronouns are used in sentences where the author is not only describing but actually eliciting some kind of action on the part of the apprentice or reader.

On the margins of directives, but within engagement, we find self-mention, through the use of I or the inclusive form, we. Self-mention shows the degree of the author’s conviction about the adequacy of his/her practice or personal innovations and how accepted they seem to be by other professionals.

4. THE USE OF PRONOUNS IN AUTHOR-READER INTERRELATION

We have extracted the number of pronouns used when the authors give instructions to surgeons, midwives, nurses, and women, about their actuation basically in: normal deliveries, complicated births, and taking care of women in child-bed. Preferences for the use of second person or third person have been

registered as well as the number of self-mention pronouns, either *I* or *we*, in order to find any relationship between these and those used in directives.

The table compiled shows the professionals and women addressed in each book together with the pronouns used to refer to them.

TABLE 1: PRONOUNS FIGURES				
GUILLEMEAU (1612) CHILD BIRTH OR A HAPPY DELIVERY (247 PAGES)				
Address.- pronoun	She	He	You	Total
Chirurgeon	—	115	54	169
Midwife	25	—	0	25
Woman	68	—	1	69
Author's self-mentioning	I	We	Total	
	118	54	172	
T.C., ID., M.S. T.B. (1656) THE COMPLEAT MIDWIFES PRACTICE (274 PAGES)				
Address.-pronoun	She	He	You	Total
Chirurgeon	—	9	0	9
Midwife	31	—	135	166
Woman	42	—	2	44
Nurse	8	—	0	8
Authors' self-mentioning	I	We	Total	
	90	19	109	
BARRET'S (1699) A COMPANION FOR MIDWIVES (111 PAGES)				
Address.- pronoun	She	He	You	Total
Surgeon	—	2	0	2
Midwife	11	—	15	26
Nurse	6	—	13	19
Woman	13	—	10	23
Author's self-mentioning	I	We	Total	
	84	2	86	

The importance of the presence of the third person singular, either *he* or *she*, when the authors try to instruct their readers is clear from the figures registered. In the case of Guillemieu (1612) the third person appears as the most frequent form to address his readers. Both chirurgeons and midwives are given instructions indirectly, through *he* or *she*:

- the chirurgeon, after he hath placed the woman... he shall gently put in his right hand, (151)
- after the Midwife hath cut the Nauell, she must wipe and make clean the child (99)

T.C. *et al.* (1656) also shows the same use, though the second person has a higher frequency in total terms:

- she ought then to ask her some questions (80)
- with the head forward he shall gently turn it (113)
- you may give her in the morning, a little syrup (90)

Finally, Barret's (1699) seems to be more balanced:

- you must put some of your fingers between it and the Womb (12)
- he must do it quickly, because delay will certainly be the Death of the Child (36)
- she must turn then to the child (13)

The use of the third person adds more distance between master and student. In the procedure of drawing the child when the head does not come first, Guillemieu (1612: 159), after using *he* for the directives, states:

I have often repeated, this fashion of drawing out the child, for feare least the young Chirurgeon erre, in performing it otherwise; which if he should doe, he will be much troubled in drawing out the head, which may sticke by the way, as I have seen it happen.

Clearly he, as master, is assuming a higher position when addressing the learner as he, but such distancing is not necessarily the same between reader and author. With the use of these pronouns the whole scene is described for the non-professional, general readers, who might have a closer look at the chirurgeon's work and therefore improve their opinion about them. This seems to be the case when the use of an instrument is shown: "he must put between the said head, and flat of the hand an Iron Crochet, such as one as you see here figured unto you" (Guillemieu, 1612: 137)

In those cases where *you* is preferred it is difficult to establish sometimes if the author is including himself, that is, using it for *one*, or addressing directly the

learner. Figures in our two first treatises seem to point to this identification, Guillemeau uses *you* basically for the surgeons, *his* to be colleagues, but never for midwives and only once for women. T.C. et al, whose initials seem to correspond to women, use *you* basically for midwives; in the case of Barret there does not seem to be a clear identification since the number of third and second person are very similar and both referred to midwives and women.

When *you* is used, the directive seems to be stronger, understanding that the instructor is convinced of the action to be taken:

- you must turn him upside downe, which you shall perform if you hold him fast by the buttockes [...] with both hands (Guillemeau, 1612: 153)
- you must observe whether the inflammation tend either to a suppuration (T.C. et al. 1656: 147)
- you must apply a little Plaister (Barret, 1699: 15)

The collocation with the modals *must* or *ought* contributes to a more persuasive interpretation, but these verbs do also appear with third person.

We observe such confidence about the practice described on the side of the author in the increase of the number of the self mention pronouns *I* or *we* and the recalling of previous experiences in the same or next paragraphs where *you* is used in the directive:

- “it hath made me alwaies thinke that this kind of delieveries more troublesome and dangerous [...] But the best way to proceed heerein is [...] he shall put his right hand...” (Guillemeau, 1612: 150)
- Here I must again give you notice, that whenever any such preternatural thing is lodg’d in the Womb, you ought to draw it out (Barret, 1699: 20)

In spite of the similar figures in the use of the first person, there is more coincidence between the two male authors who use *I* or *we* basically for their personal experience or opinion, *I have known/seen*; or for reference to their professional group, *we have seen*.

The book of T.C. et al (1656) shows an increase of the first person singular in its final part when particular cases happening to a midwife, most probably Madame de Bourgeois, are described. This does not allow for clear conclusions, in the interrelation of the first and second person in this book, though figures show a relevant use of *you*, nearly always of an impersonal type.

Notwithstanding the alleged desire to supply help for women, figures show that in the first two works women are hardly ever addressed directly through the use of the second person. In fact, we have found only one case in Guillemeau (1656) referred to the use of a decoction for the breasts: “And when you haue taken it from the fire put thereto a little rose-vinegar. And with this decoction warme, bath your breasts in the morning with a cloth or spung...” (27-28). This

could happen because as established in this text, pregnancy is perceived as “the greatest disease” (81) that a woman can have, and women as patients are shown to be passive, only capable of sending for the midwife when they think the moment has come.

Other directives are given to the chirurgion or midwife through indirect reference to women such as:

- let her take of the powder of white mullen (219)

In Barret’s (1699) there is an apparent change, being the number of third person uses to address women quite similar to that of the second person. The use of *you* in this case corresponds to the section that devotes chapters to women self care:

- if therefore ye be subject to be over loose, you may at Night take half an Ounce of Conserve of Red Roses (69)

For Barret, women seem at least capable of self-medication, but attending to figures they are not the main objective of any of the authors of our works who seem to prefer a more professionalized treatment.

Even though there is a progression from the first to the third author in the way they address women, possibly a more direct approach would change the value of the books published. They would sound less professional and therefore would add little or no help to the respect these chirurgions and midwives were looking for initially. The prefaces to the treatises come to corroborate this idea, Guillemeau claimed for women’s acceptance of the chirurgion as a qualified person to help them, T.C. et al want to offer a better guide for midwives and finally Barret’s intention is to write a “Plain and Familiar Treatise” (1699: 3).

The evolution of the use of the personal pronouns in directives is connected with the purpose of the authors in each case and subject to the historical evolution of pronouns themselves. Our texts cover the first quarter, the middle and the end of the seventeenth century, a period when the *thou/you* contrast was fading.

The lack of formal/informal distinction might have favoured the use of the third person as a method to establish the distance required to obtain respect from the apprentice and general public; therefore, the use of the second person singular is, in the first and second treatises is more of an indirect type, inclusive of the authors who are willing to show their own experiences as those of a collective of professionals. For Barret, at the end of the 17th century, the use of *you* is even more straightforward, closer to the learner and the patient. His use of the third person decreases, because it is out of his interests to establish distance and because such distinction is no more a matter of pronouns.

5. CONCLUSION

This analysis reveals a need for widening the range of pronouns studied in directives. Our treaties show the third person singular is used to elicit an action or opinion basically on the side of the learner as pursued by the instructor. Its function is linked with the evolution of the second person pronouns and the purpose of the text itself.

The first two manuals look for a reassertion of the profession, thus the distancing in terms of space (depicting a situation for general readers) and respect (between master and student) is well established by the third person, whereas the second person appears as a reinforcement of the self mentioning. In the third manual, the latest, second person forms increase attending to the less ambitious objective of its author.

Further diachronic and synchronic research is required to determine the development of pronouns within the discourse of scientific instruction.

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