

Thee, thou no more

When did the English language stop using words like thee, thou, thy, etc.?

I call this “the great pronoun revolution.” It happened in the 17th Century at the same time as English got rid of the distinction between formal and informal forms. Most other languages retain the distinction, though increasingly it’s being dropped in others as well.

Unfortunately, because in English the plural “you” was also the formal pronoun, we also lost the distinction between singular and plural. This can lead to misunderstanding, and ever since the 17th Century we’ve been trying to come up with a solution such as “y’all” in the American South, “youse” in American urban slang and, more recently, “you guys” in American slang. So far none of those has become accepted; though if you use “you” as a singular pronoun in the South you risk causing confusion, if not misunderstanding.

Growing up in New York and then Maryland I had to learn to use “y’all” for the plural. Then, moving to New England as an adult, I had to unlearn the distinction.

<https://www.quora.com/When-did-saying-thou-art-become-saying-you-are>