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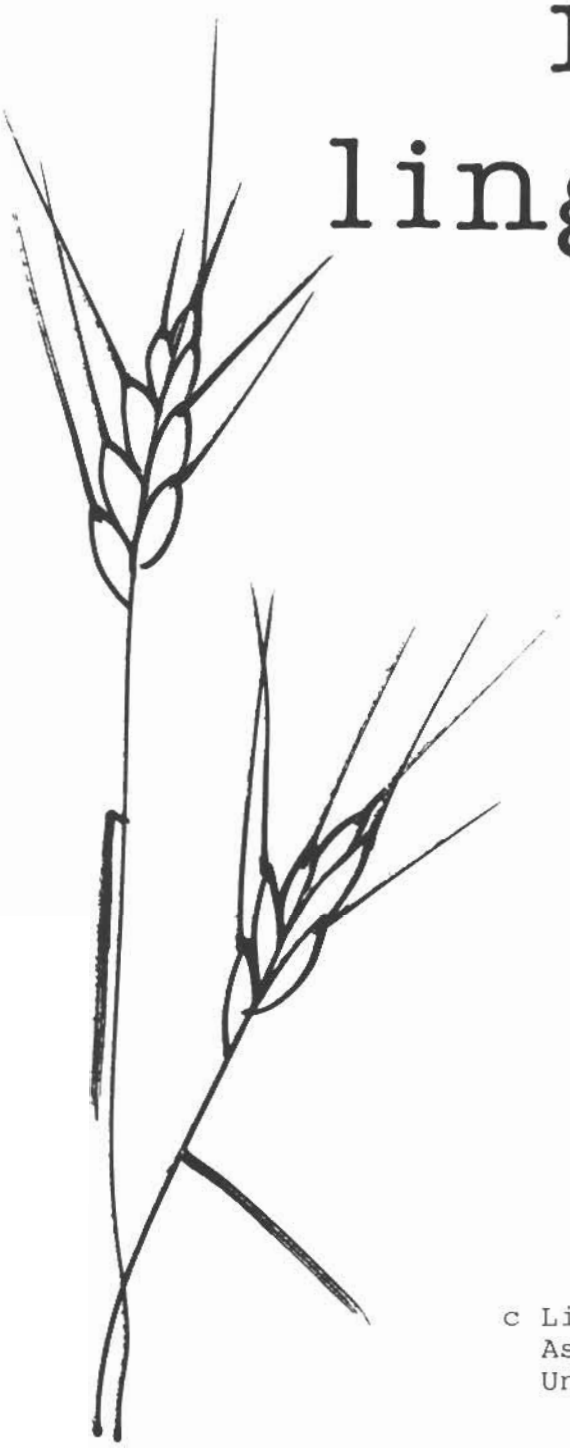

EDITED BY

BETH ABU-ALI
JULIE BRUCH

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IN THE SOCIAL REGISTER:
Pronoun Choice in Norwegian and English

Carl Mills
University of Cincinnati

Abstract: Choice of second-person pronouns can shed light on the intersection of language, personality, and culture. In modern Norway a change has occurred in little more than a generation through which the polite forms De, Dem/Dykk, and Deres/Dykkar have been replaced, in all except commercial, governmental, or ultra-polite speech, by the familiar forms du, deg/dæ, and din. In Brown and Gilman's terms, this change indicates that the dimension of solidarity is more important than that of power in modern Norwegian sociolinguistics, the exact opposite of what the case appears to have been with an earlier, similar change in early modern English.

If we accept Peter Trudgill's (1974: 117) capsule definition of diglossia as:

> a particular kind of language standardization where two distinct varieties of a language exist side by side throughout the speech community (not just in the case of a particular group of speakers, such as Scots or Negroes), and where each of the two varieties is assigned a definite social function,

then other phenomena closely akin to diglossia can arise in speech communities where there exists a prestigious standard variety coexisting with numerous regional or social varieties of the language whose speakers refuse to give them up. Norway and the United States are two such speech communities, although the social and linguistic forces have been quite different in the two speech communities.

In the languages of Europe, pronoun choice can be quite revealing sociolinguistically. As Brown and Gilman (1960: 253-254) in their now classic study put it, there is

> a connection between social structure, group ideology, and the semantics of the pronoun, . . . a man's consistent pronoun style gives away his class status and his political views, . . . and a man may vary his pronoun style from time to time so as to express transient moods and attitudes.

This paper is a preliminary sketch of some social and linguistic consequences of, and causes of variation in pronoun choice in Norwegian and English. Though it has received considerable attention, I shall omit discussion of "singular they," partly because such a

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body of work has been developed by Bodine, Fretheim, Mills, and MacKay that the sex-indefinite third-person pronoun merits a paper by itself, and partly because MacKay's (1981) study merits more careful thought and criticism than I can give it at this time. Accordingly, I shall focus my description on the second-person pronoun in modern Norwegian, Danish, and American English.

The linguistic facts, intuitions, and observations that this paper is based on constitute a mixed bag. Data on Norwegian come from writings by Haugen, from textbooks from courses on Norwegian for foreigners, from direct questioning of native-speaking Norwegian language consultants during the year (1977-78) I was a Fulbright Lecturer at the University of Tromsø, from covert observation of everyday speech in Troms Fylke, from my own experience first as a learner and later as a fluent speaker of Norwegian as a second language, and from folk-linguistic comments volunteered by native speakers, most of whom were not involved in the academic study of language.

Information on Danish pronoun usage comes from a severely limited period of observation in Denmark and questioning of Danish linguists.

Data on English come from my own native-speaker intuitions, from six years' experience in teaching the history of the language, and from 13 years as a participant-observer of pronoun choice in southwestern Ohio.

I must stress the opportunistic--as opposed to systematic--nature of the language samples reported on. The tentative, preliminary nature of these observations can hardly be overemphasized.

The overall linguistic situation in Norway serves as background to these comments on pronoun choice. Modern Norwegian is descended from the Old Norse (or West) branch of the North Germanic languages. Consequently, Norwegian is related to English, though not as closely as are Dutch or German (Pyles 1971). Relationships between English and Norwegian are rendered somewhat complicated by the extensive borrowing of Old Norse words into Old English during the time of the Viking invasions from the late 700's to 1066. One important consequence of the Viking incursions was the introduction, gradual spread, and eventual dominance of the Scandinavian third-person plural pronouns (see Tables 2 and 3 below). The Old Norse language reached its zenith between 1150 and 1350. But from 1380 onward, Norway was increasingly tied economically, politically, and culturally to Denmark, and the Norwegian language entered a period of eclipse. A consequence of the physical and cultural fragmentation and isolation among Norwegians was the development of rather extreme dialect differences.

By the time Norway achieved independence in 1905, a Dano-Norwegian variety had grown up in bureaucratic circles in Oslo and

other cities. Norway's independence was achieved gradually between 1814 and 1905, and as part of a national Renaissance, the rural dialects were codified into a standard language, largely as a result of the efforts of Ivar Aasen. In 1885 Parliament accepted Aasen's New Norse (nynorsk) as an official language, and in 1890 the first primary school using it as a means of instruction opened, although the majority of Norwegians, most of whom by that time lived in the cities, spoke (and continued to speak) either Dano-Norwegian, since renamed bokmål, or the urban popular dialects of Oslo that are in many ways closer to bokmål than to nynorsk (Vikør 1975).

Essentially, these conditions prevail in Norway. There are two national standard written languages, bokmål and nynorsk, both of which must be mastered to a certain extent by all school children. All important documents--textbooks, university examinations, tax forms, etc.--must be available in both languages. Actors, broadcasters, etc., must use one or the other standard language (Vikør 1975).

Alongside the two written languages exist a myriad of local dialects. In many rural areas extreme differences exist between dialects separated by only a small distance. On the island of Tromsøy, for example, an island less than 5 miles long and not over 2 miles broad at its widest, the word for 'snow' changes from sne in the north end of the island to snø at the south end. Furthermore, in the cities, especially Oslo, the popular dialects of the working class differ as much among themselves as they differ from the rural dialects.

Conflict over which forms of the language are to be used in which circumstances is hardly a dry academic matter. Lars Vikør (1975: 17) recounts that

> a frequently quoted anecdote from around 1920 tells about a Russian revolutionary visiting Oslo, where he sees a bloody street fight raging. He asks a passerby: 'Well, how is the revolution going here in Norway?' Answer: 'Right now, we're fighting over how to spell it.'

Battles over which language--bokmål, nynorsk, a fusion of bokmål and nynorsk (samnorsk), the popular urban dialects, or the rural dialects --is to be the Norwegian language continue even today. At the University of Tromsø it is impossible to find an Ikke Røking or Ikke Røkning 'no smoking' sign that has not been defaced to read Ikkje Røyking or Ikkje Røykning, with the note Ikkje Dansken scribbled at the bottom. Similarly, next to each light switch at the University is an adhesive decal with a picture of men and women wearing sweaters each of which has on it one of the seven or eight variants of the first-person singular pronoun all engaged in trying to topple a boulder with jeg, the bokmål word for 'I' over a cliff. On the decal is the slogan Tal dialekt, skriv nynorsk 'Speak dialect; write New Norse'.

The tenacity with which Norwegians cling to their dialects and

the importance they attach to language variation are reflected in the law. More than 6 decades before the Ann Arbor decision said that American schools had to take into account the linguistic background of the pupil, the Norwegian Parliament passed a law in 1917 prohibiting teachers from "correcting" the speech of students--though all students have to learn to read and write in both standard languages--and guaranteeing the rights of pupils to speak their dialects in the schools. As the Norwegian historian, Halvdan Koht (1873-1965) put it:

> the children in the towns shall be allowed to use their own language in school. The teacher shall no longer be allowed to "correct" the lad who speaks the language he has been taught by father and mother--if he does not make mistakes in it. He shall no longer be taught that father and mother use a "plebian" language, he shall not despise his own heritage, he shall not be deprived of the confidence in himself, so that he is afraid to play his due part in society (Vikør 1975: 107-108).

When one considers the tenacity with which speakers maintain their dialects, it is surprising to see that a change in second-person pronoun usage has swept through nearly all of Norwegian society, through speakers of nearly all varieties, in a little over a generation.

Like most Indo-European languages in Western Europe, both standard Norwegian languages differentiate between a familiar and a polite (formal) form of the second-person pronoun. This is expecially common in the singular. Trudgill lists familiar and polite second-person singular forms for French: tu-vous, Italian: tu-Lei, Spanish: tu-Usted, German: du-Sie, Dutch: jij-u, Swedish: du-ni, Norwegian: du-De, Greek: esi-esis, and Russian: ty-vy. In most cases, there are relatively complete paradigms, with forms for nominative, dative, and genitive cases, and in some languages even more cases. It appears that originally the familiar pronouns were the normal second-person singular forms. The polite forms developed, in most cases, from either second-person plural or third-person forms (Trudgill 1974). Familiar second-person forms are usually abbreviated as T and polite forms as V, based on the familiar and polite forms, respectively, in French.

Brown and Gilman, in their pioneering analysis, The Pronouns of Power and Solidarity, established two dimensions that govern pronoun choice. As they put it (Brown & Gilman 1960: 257-258):

> The original singular pronoun was T. The use of V in the singular developed as a form of address to a person of superior power. . . . Differences of power cause V to emerge in one direction of address; differences not concerned with power cause V to emerge in both directions.

> The relations called older than, parent of, employer of, richer than, stronger than and nobler than are all asymmetrical. . . . The relation called 'more powerful than', which is abstracted from these more specific relations, is also conceived to be asymmetrical. The pronoun usage expressing the power relation is also asymmetrical or nonreciprocal, with the greater receiving V and the lesser T.

The other dimension in pronoun choice is solidarity, which Brown and Gilman say characterizes 'relations which are symmetrical; for example, attended the same school or have the same parents or practice the same profession . . .. The solidary T reaches a peak of probability in address between brothers . . .' (Brown & Gilman 1960: 258). The situation has rarely been stable, however. For example, a power relation obviously obtains between parent and child, but there is also a strong solidarity relation present. As Brown and Gilman put it, 'Well into the nineteenth century the power semantic prevailed and waiters, common soldiers, and employees were called T while parents, masters, and elder brothers were called V' (Brown & Gilman 1975: 259).

Table 1 indicates that both standard Norwegian languages follow the normal practice laid out in Brown and Gilman. Furthermore, the second-person plural, which appears to neutralize the familiar-polite distinction, does so by extending, especially in nynorsk, the second-person singular polite forms to the plural.

	bokmål	nynorsk	Tromsdialekt
	subjective case		
first person singular	jeg	eg	~~Æ~~
second person singular	du	du	du
second person singular formal	De	De	
third person masculine	han	han	han
third person feminine	hun	ho	ho
third person common	den		
third person neuter	det	det	det
first person plural	vi	vi	vi
second person plural	dere	de	de
third person plural	de	dei	de/dei
	objective case		
first person singular	meg	meg	m~~æ~~e
second person singular	deg	deg	d~~æ~~e
second person singular formal	Dem	Dykk	
third person masculine	ham	han	ham
third person feminine	henne	ho	ho
third person common	den	henne	
third person neuter	det	det	det
first person plural	oss	oss	oss
second person plural	dere	dykk	dokker
third person plural	dem	dei	dem/dei

	possessive case		
	bokmål	nynorsk	Tromsdialekt
first person singular	min mitt	min mitt	min mitt
second person singular	din ditt	din ditt	din ditt
second person singular formal	Deres	Dykkar	____
third person masculine	hans	hans	hans
third person feminine	hennes	hennar	hennes
third person common	den		
third person neuter	det		
first person plural	vår	vår	vår
second person plural	deres	dykkar	dokker
third person plural	deres	deira	deres/deira

Table 1. Personal Pronouns of Modern Norwegian (After Haugen (ed.) 1974)

As recently as 1937, Haugen (1937: 43-44) says that

> the forms du and dig are used in good society only when addressing a child, a member of one's family, or an intimate friend; usually only to a person whom one might address by his first name. The forms De and Dem are used in all other circumstances. In country dialects, however, this distinction is not made and everyone is usually addressed as du.

Since Haugen wrote, however, a change in pronoun choice has spread throughout Norwegian society, a change that does not yet appear to have spread far into Denmark, and a change which has gone in a direction opposite to that which occurred much earlier in English.

Let us now review the history of English personal pronouns. As one can see from Table 2, the Old English pronoun paradigm was quite elaborate compared to today's. Some aspects of pronoun choice which have since passed out of use are the three-way marking of number--singular, dual, and plural--in first and second persons and the presence of accusative case forms for all persons and numbers. Even a casual inspection shows that there was no T-V distinction in the second person. Instead, we find the second-person singular--du, din, de, and dec, with the occurrence of the dative form de in the accusative case probably signalling that the accusative case was already disappearing--and the second-person plural--ge, eower, eow, and eowic or eow.

Table 3 shows the pronoun paradigm for the heavily creolized (doubly creolized by Viking Old Norse and Norman French) language we call Middle English. Although there appear to be a great many

	nom:	gen:	dat:	accus:
1st pers sg	ic/I	mīn	mē	mec/mē
2nd pers sg	dū	dīn	dē	dec/dē
3rd pers sg masc	hē	his	him	hine
3rd pers sg fem	hēo/hīe	hire	hire	hēo/hīe
3rd pers sg neut	hit	his	him	hit
1st pers dual	wit	uncer	unc	uncit/unc
2nd pers dual	git	incer	inc	incit/inc
1st pers plural	wē	ūser/ūre	ūs	ūsic/ūs
2nd pers plural	gē	ēower	ēow	ēowic/ēow
3rd pers plural	hēo/hīe	hira	him/heom	hēo/hīe

Table 2. Personal Pronouns of Old English
(After Cassidy & Ringler (eds.) 1971)

variants of each form, and although interesting changes are taking place in third-person singular feminine and third-person plural, the general effect, compared to Old English, is one of simplification: the accusative case and the dative case have merged into a common objective case, and the dual number has been lost.

	subjective:	objective:	possessive:
1st pers sg	ich/ic/ik/I/y	mē/me	mīn/mī/mi
2nd pers sg	þū/ thōu/tōu	þē/thee/tē	þīn/þī/thȳ/thy
3rd pers sg masc	hē/he/hee/hā/a	him/hine/hin	his/hise/hies/ hys/hüs
3rd pers sg fem	hēo/heo/hue/hō/ hē/he/ha/hī/hi/ hō/chō/schō/ schē/sche/shē/ she	hire/hir/hure	hire/here/hir/ her
3rd pers sg neut	hit/it/a	hit/it/him	his/hise/hies/ hys/hüs
1st pers plural	wē	ūs/ōūs	ūr/ūre/ōūr/ōūre
2nd pers plural	ē/yē	eu/ōū/ōw/ ōū/yōū	ūr/ūre/yōūr/ yōūre/ōūre
3rd pers plural	þai/þay/thai/ þei/þey/hȳ/hy/ hēō/hei/hei/ hō/ho/hē/he/ ha/a	þaim/thaim/ thame/heom/ hem/hī/hise/ his/hes/hies/ es/hem/hȫm/ ham/him	here/her/hȫr/ heore/hare/hire/ hüre/þeyre/þayr/ thair/thār

Table 3. Personal Pronouns of Middle English
(After Mosse 1968)

It is in the Middle English period that the second-person plural came into use as a set of polite forms, and the older second-person singular forms were reserved for use between intimate equals. The archaic early modern English system, with thou, thee, and thine as T forms and ye, you, and your as both V forms and plural forms,

seems to have developed after the Norman conquest.

But this T-V system did not survive for long in some dialects of Middle English. Although the T-V system has persisted down to the present day, in self-consciously archaic verse, the King James Bible, and the pronoun usage of Quakers, there is evidence that it waned quite early in the developing London standard dialect of the emerging English middle class.

Table 4 contains the second-person singular system that actually appears to have been used in the letters of the Paston family. In Table 4 are examples of the pronouns used by Paston family members to the nobility, by the nobility to the Pastons, by husbands to wives, by wives to husbands, etc. Examples of parent-child and child-parent letters follow the same pattern. No one says thou, thee, or thine to anyone else, at least not in writing. I must stress that these are samples. Conclusive statements on the Pastons' pronouns wait for a concordance that would show every second-person pronoun used in the letters, which fill 2 volumes. But the system in Table 4, identical to the system of modern English except for the since discarded subjective form ye, appears to have been that used in the popular dialects of the 15th-century middle class.

	subjective:	objective:	possessive:
second person sg	ye/ȝe	yow/yov/you/ȝow/ȝou	your/youres/ȝowre

Table 4. Second Person Singular Pronouns, ca. 1450 (From Davis (ed.) 1971)

The Pastons' pronoun system and the modern system (Table 5) indicate how much the English second-person pronoun has been simplified. Today, standard English has only two forms in the second person: you and your(s). The case system has been reduced,

	subjective:	objective:	possessive:
1st pers sg	I	me	my /mine
2nd pers sg	you	you	your/yours
3rd pers sg masc	he	him	his
3rd pers sg fem	she	her	her/hers
3rd pers sg neut	it	it	its
1st pers plural	we	us	our/ours
2nd pers plural	you/you-uns/ yous/youse/ you-all	you/you-uns/ yous/youse/ you-all	your/yours/ you-uns'/ you-uns's/ yous's/ you-all's
3rd pers plural	they	them	their/theirs

Table 5. Personal Pronouns of Modern English

much more so than for other personal pronouns, to a marked

(possessive) form your(s) and an unmarked form you. All distinctions of number have been lost in second-person. While some popular dialects maintain you was - you were and (more rarely) you is - you are distinctions, the standard dialect has evolved to the point where there is a mismatch between syntax--you is always plural--and semantics --you sometimes refers to a single individual.

The interesting thing is that the T-V distinction, when it collapsed, was replaced not by the intimate solidarity forms thou, thee, and thine but rather by the distant power forms ye, you, and your. By early modern English, the 8 second-person singular and plural forms of Old English had collapsed to 3--the Old English second-person plural nominative, dative, and genitive, respectively--forms ye, you, and your--for both singular and plural--among equals and unequals, among family and strangers.

In Norway in approximately the third quarter of the 20th century, the pronoun system was also simplified in the second-person. But in Norway, as opposed to English, the solidarity dimension prevailed. Brown and Gilman say that after the 19th century in Europe this appears to have ben the case. But most speech communities have maintained at least some of the T-V distinction. In Norway, the use of De, Dem, and Deres from bokmål and De, Dykk, and Dykkar from nynorsk has passed almost completely out of everyday speech. Speakers use du, deg, and din or ditt to everyone. According to native speakers from northern Norway, the disuse of the polite forms began in the north and has spread southward until it has prevailed nearly everywhere. As a sidelight, I must add that I was addressed as De in a conversation with the mother of a friend, a woman from a southern rural region. But I must also add that I remarked to myself that the woman's use of the polite forms seemed archaic and stilted to me at the time. Native northerners later corroborated my intuitions. Furthermore, my own use of local Tromsdialekt, particularly the first-person singular AE, instead of bokmål jeg or nynorsk eg, and the second-person plural form dokker, while it aroused a sort of amused tolerance among my Norwegian colleagues at the University, enabled me to establish a close rapport with some of my acquaintances in our apartment building, closer contact, in fact, than that which is usually established among Norwegians who do not work together or go to school together.

While attending the Fourth Nordic Linguistics Conference in Denmark, I noticed that a barber to whom I had been using the familiar forms while he cut my hair consistently used the polite to me. (I hesitate to speculate on what he must have thought of my speech.) At the conference I queried my Danish counterparts on what second-person pronouns they would use. They admitted to some confusion and hesitation, but eventually at least a dozen of them agreed that they would use the polite forms to the manager of the inn at which the conference was being held and to any other older person or any other person obviously possessing high status. The Danish linguists also agreed that they would use the familiar forms

among themselves and to any other people of their age.

In Norway, however, the situation has evolved much further. Sentences A through E in Example 1 on Table 6 are taken from an invented dialogue between two strangers that is used in a Norwegian textbook for foreigners. Sentence 1.F. was spoken by Mette, age 8, in Kroken (Tromsdialekt). The sentences in Example 2, Table 6, also taken from the textbook, represent an area where the polite forms still survive, official transactions. In fact, my Norwegian instructor characterized such use of polite forms as selskapspraket 'business speech' or 'company speech'. An advertisement for a bank, seeking to persuade one to open a savings account, used De, Dem, and Deres. Tellers in the same bank used and received du, deg (Tromsdialect dae), etc., in all instances.

1. A. Er du utlending? 'Are you-2nd-sg-informal (a) foreigner?'
   B. Ja, jeg er utlending. 'Yes, I am (a) foreigner'
   C. Han er norsk. 'He is Norwegian'
   D. Hun heter Randi Berg. 'She is called Randi Berg'
   E. Er det brøren din? 'Is that brother-the-sg yours-2nd-sg-informal?'
   = 'Is that your brother?'
   F. Kor er bilen dokkers? 'Where is car-the-sg yours-2nd-plural'

2. - Har De en ledig plass?
   - Hvor langt skal De?
   - Jeg skal til Harstad. . . .
   - De kan få en køye på første klasse.

   (Both speakers use 2nd-sg-formal)

Table 6. Pronoun Usage in Modern Norwegian
(After Arnestad & Hvenekilde 1974)

To summarize, when the English second-person pronouns were simplified, the simplification favored the power dimension over the solidarity dimension. An independent, and much later simplification in Norwegian appears to have favored the solidarity dimension. Further evidence that solidarity is the key factor in Norway comes from the fact that the change appears to have spread very quickly through nearly all the speech community, a speech community that considers one's dialect worth protecting by law and worth fighting for (literally). The almost universal acceptance of this change is thus all the more noteworthy.

But there is evidence that English, too, has felt the influence of the solidarity dimension with regard to the second-person pronoun.

In the first place, the survival of nonstandard second-person plural forms--you-all, you-uns, and youse--probably reflects the semantic and syntactic impoverishment that has resulted from reducing

the entire second-person paradigm to 2 forms. Charles Fillmore has restated a linguistic truism: "if a language has a lexical item, a part of our understanding of a text containing it is an understanding of the culture or world in which the classifications the word implies are sensible" (Fillmore 1976: 27). Clearly, the concepts carried by nonstandard second-person plural pronouns are important to speakers.

Linguists residing in Cincinnati are fortunate because the city lies in a rich area of social, ethnic, and regional dialect overlap. The city is just within the northern limits for you-all (Marckwardt 1957; Kurath 1949). My own local consultants from as far north as Middletown usually use you-all when addressing two or more people (observation, not elicitation). Directly to the east of the city from the vicinity of Ironton on eastward into Pennsylvania and northern West Virginia the form you-uns is common. It is not uncommon within 50 miles of Cincinnati to be addressed, when in a group, as you-uns. It is also not uncommon to hear the more northerly (and eastern) form youse in the city. In the course of less than an hour one day, I was addressed (again, as a member of a group) as you-uns, youse, and you-all (and you, it must be added) by several of my neighbors in Clifton Heights. Besides a large black community, Cincinnati includes one of the largest urban Appalachian communities in the north. Its status as a major migration conduit and stopping point--and I would interject here that the migrations of Americans in the 1930's, 40's, 50's, 60's, and 70's constitute some of the largest migrations in the history of the planet--make the city a rich dialectological vein that has not yet been seriously mined or assayed.

I would like to close this paper by suggesting that the special survival of second-person plural forms in American English represents, not just a semantic need speakers feel, though it does represent that, but rather a triumph of the solidarity dimension in pronoun choice. Most urban users of you-all, youse, and you-uns are sufficiently bidialectal to use you exclusively when the occasion calls for it. The use of second-person plural persists as a way of establishing group identity and solidarity. Such pronoun choices are as important in the inner city as are comparable dialectal choices in the fishing villages and industrial cities of Norway, though Americans seldom articulate the importance of pronoun choice on the solidarity dimension to themselves or to linguists.

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