Early Modern English Grammar

Pronouns and Verbs

The Second Person Familiar

Modern English has dropped a set of pronouns and verbs called the "familiar" or "thee and thou" forms once used among close friends and family and to children, inferiors, animals, and inanimate objects. These old forms did, though, survive into Elizabethan England and appear frequently in Shakespeare. They correspond roughly to the *tu* forms of the Romance languages, the *ty* forms of the Slavic languages, the *su* forms of Greek, and the *kimi* forms of Japanese. Shakespeare will have characters shift from the ‘you’ to the ‘thou’ forms with purpose.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Singular** | | | **Plural** | | |
|  | **1st** | **2nd** | **3rd** | **1st** | **2nd** | **3rd** |
| Subject [nominative] | I | **thou** | he/she/it | we | you | they |
| Object [accusative] | me | **thee** | him/her/it | us | you | them |
| Possessive adjective [genitive] | my  *mine*\* | **thy**  ***thine***\* | his/her/its | our | your | their |
| Possessive pronoun | mine | **thine** | his/hers/its | ours | yours | theirs |

\*Substitute forms used before a noun beginning with a vowel

Second person familiar verb inflections

Second person singular (familiar): adds the ending **‑est**, **‑‘st**, or **‑st**.

*Examples*: thou giv**est**, thou sing**’st***irregular example:* thou **wilt** hear

*Some irregular verbs:*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *present*: | you | *are* | *have* | *will* | *can* | *shall* | *do* |
| **thou** | **art** | **hast** | **wilt** | **canst** | **shalt** | **dost** |
| *past*: | you | *were* | *had* | *would* | *could* | *should* | *did* |
| **thou** | **wast** | **hadst** | **wouldst** | **couldst** | **shouldst** | **didst** |

The negative of the second person familiar is often formed by adding the word *not* after the verb.

*Examples:* thou art not, thou canst not, thou couldst not

Third person singular verb inflections

The third person singular often substitutes *‑th* for more modern *‑s.*

*Examples:*  she giv**eth** (for she give**s**),   
it rain**eth** every day (for rain**s**).