

The Effects of Grammaticalization, Phonological Change, and Language Contact in the History of Nominative and Accusative English Pronouns

Dr. Aisha Fathi Abugharsa*

Faculty of Arts, University Misurata, Libya

*a.abugharsa@art.misuratau.edu.ly

Received: 17.03.2023

Published: 14.05.2023

Abstract:

This paper addresses language change by studying the changes that affected nominative and accusative personal pronouns and how they were transformed from their Old English forms to their new versions in Modern English. The story of every one of these pronouns is discussed in this study to investigate if the historical changes which affected them were similar or whether every single pronoun has its own story which tells different and unique historical details. The study focuses on three different explanations given for describing the diachronic changes which affected English personal pronouns; grammaticalization and sound or phonological change which are internal linguistic factors, and language contact which is an external factor in language change. The study concludes that every single pronoun has its own history and that there are no clear boundaries between the effect of grammaticalization and of phonological change and the outcomes of contact with other languages on causing changes in English personal pronouns.

Key words: personal pronouns, grammaticalization, phonological change, language contact.

آثار ظاهرة النحوية، ظاهرة التغير في البنية الصوتية، والاتصال باللغات الأخرى على التغييرات التي طرأت على ضمائر الفاعل والمفعول به في

اللغة الإنجليزية عبر التاريخ

د. عائشة فتحي أبوغرسة

كلية الآداب - جامعة مصراتة

الملخص:

تتطرق هذه الدراسة إلى تناول ظاهرة تغير اللغة من خلال تحليل التغييرات التي أثرت على الضمائر الشخصية الخاصة بالفاعل والمفعول به وكيف تم تحويلها من الصيغ التي كانت عليها في مرحلة الإنجليزية القديمة إلى صيغها الجديدة في اللغة الإنجليزية الحديثة. يتم سرد التغييرات التي طرأت على كل واحد من هذه الضمائر في هذه الدراسة للتحقيق فيما إذا كانت التغييرات التاريخية التي أثرت عليها متشابهة أو ما إذا كان لكل ضمير قصة خاصة به تحكي تفاصيل تاريخية مختلفة وفريدة من نوعها.

تركز الدراسة على ثلاثة تفسيرات مختلفة مقدمة لوصف التغييرات التي أثرت على الضمائر الشخصية الإنجليزي: إما النحو أو النحوية والتغيير في البنية الصوتية للضمائر والتي تعد عوامل لغوية داخلية أو الاتصال باللغات الأخرى وهو عامل خارجي في تغيير اللغة. وخلصت الدراسة إلى أن كل ضمير له تاريخه الخاص وأنه لا توجد حدود واضحة بين تأثير النحو والتغير الصوتي ونتائج الاتصال مع اللغات الأخرى على إحداث تغييرات في الضمائر الشخصية الإنجليزية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الضمائر الشخصية، النحوية، التغير الصوتي، اتصال اللغات.

1. Introduction:

The changing history of English pronouns can prove very clearly that change can affect every aspect of language regardless of the fact that pronouns belong to closed class items or function and grammatical words which are more resistant to change than open class words like nouns and verbs. This idea is mentioned by Berg (1998: 221) who says that 'open class words are less resistance to change than closed class items'. He supposes that this is because 'function words [like pronouns] are built up with a minimum amount of interference from other items, [therefore] it can be predicted that the phonological structure of function words should prove relatively stable over time'. Concerning English personal pronouns specifically, Berg (1998: 222)

explains that ‘personal pronouns were extremely conservative in their development, more conservative in fact than open class words in general’.

The system of personal English pronouns is a complete system of inflections which has distinctive forms for all persons, cases, numbers, and genders. This structure would make the pronouns suitable to substitute for all kinds of nouns and noun phrases. Jackson (2002: 201) defines pronouns as ‘a class of words whose members typically substitute for nouns or noun phrases’. Personal pronouns are divided into many classes which are: nominative (subjective), accusative (objective), dative, and genitive. They show a difference between singular and plural and they are also divided into masculine, feminine, and neuter in the third person singular pronouns.

These distinctions in case, number and gender in personal pronouns are based on previous distinctions appeared in Old English (450-1100 AD). In Modern English (since 1500 AD), personal pronouns ‘still largely preserve the distinction of case, gender and number evident in OE’ (Singh, 2005:84). However, as the other parts on which the English language is built, English personal pronouns underwent many changes during the history. Concerning the nominative and the accusative forms, these changes can be noticed clearly if we make a comparison between Modern English pronouns and the way that these pronouns were used in Old English.

This paper discusses the differences between the Old English personal pronoun system and the Modern English one concerning only the nominative and the accusative cases. This may shed light on some pronouns that have been lost over time or to illustrate some differences between Modern English pronouns’ forms and their ancestor forms in Old English. There is also an attempt in this study to investigate the reasons behind these changes to see whether grammaticalization, phonological change, or language contact played stronger roles as reasons behind this phenomenon.

1.1 Research Questions:

The current study is conducted to investigate the following questions:

- 1- Did the development and the change of nominative and accusative personal pronouns happen as a result of grammaticalization and/or phonological change which are internal factors of language change?
- 2- Was this change in English personal pronouns a result of external factors related to language contact?
- 3- Does this change have a regular pattern or does every single pronoun have its own history?

As answers to the previous enquiries, it is hypothesized that:

- 1- Grammaticalization theory and phonological change can be used to describe and analyze some of the changes which affected English nominative and accusative pronouns during history.
- 2- Language contact was also an important factor which led to major changes in English pronouns.
- 3- Language change which affected English pronouns does not have a regular pattern and every pronoun has its own history.

1.2 Literature Review:

Like other natural languages, English language underwent many changes during its history. Many changes happened during the history of English pronouns, which gives a very clear indication of the changeable nature of English language. Having a look at these linguistic changes, we may find that some of the changes happened because of external factors affecting the language, while others happened as internal changes within English language itself (Lass, 1997 & McMahon, 1997).

Concerning the external changes that affected English personal pronouns, Baugh and Cable (1993: 90-103) mention that such changes happened as a result of the contact between English language and other languages at different periods during its history. Lass (1997: 184-185) defines language contact as 'encounters with other languages' which means that it is not true in many cases to say that a language has its 'own internal history'. Such contact might have resulted in borrowing foreign pronouns from other languages into English during history. An example of this kind of borrowing is Scandinavian contact and its influence on the third person plural as Old English borrowed new pronouns from Old Norse to be used instead of the original Old English forms.

The external factors were not simply restricted to borrowing other forms from another language. Sometimes, that contact with the other language was associated with a connection with its community and the way that people in such a community were using the pronouns. The contact with French language and the way that its speakers were using it resulted in the loss of the second person singular pronoun *thou* as will be illustrated later while discussing the history of second person English pronouns.

According to Berg (1998: 221) other changes can be considered to have happened because of internal factors within English language itself. Sometimes the change happened as a result of a process of remodeling or rebuilding within the pronoun system itself such as the use of the dative pronoun *him* as an accusative instead of the Old English accusative pronoun *hine*. Other internal changes occurred on phonological grounds such as the loss of the Old English nominative second person plural *ye* as a result of being identical in pronunciation with the accusative plural *you*. Another internal factor which

might have played a role in the history of English pronouns is the process known as grammaticalization. McMahon (1994: 160) defines this process as ‘the shift of an independent word to the status of a grammatical element’. As a result of this internal operation, words from major lexical categories, or open class words, such as nouns, verbs and adjectives become minor grammatical categories or closed class items, such as prepositions, pronouns and auxiliaries.

In this study, we attempt to trace the history of Modern English nominative and accusative pronouns in order to know whether the changes that affected their Old English forms were because of language contact or because of grammaticalization and phonological change. While analyzing the history of every one of these pronouns, the study will attempt to investigate if these changes have a regular pattern or if every pronoun has its own history.

1.3 Related studies:

Heine and Song (2011) discuss the role of grammaticalization in forming and changing English pronouns during history. They define grammaticalization as ‘the development from lexical to grammatical forms, and from grammatical to even more grammatical forms’ (ibid: 590). In their study, Heine and Song (2011: 588) concentrate on ‘the question of how or to what extent the development of personal pronouns is covered by grammaticalization’. They discuss the fact that personal pronouns are functional categories which were original lexical categories such as nouns or verbs which underwent a number of processes associated with grammaticalization, such as desemanticiation and phonological and morphological reduction (ibid: 591-593). They neglect the role of language contact or the effect of any other internal language change mechanisms in the history of English personal pronouns and after explaining the role of this process, Heine and Song (2011: 617-618) say that ‘the observation made in this paper suggest that personal pronouns are the product of regular processes of grammaticalization change arising in specific contexts’.

In another study carried out by Gelderen (2013), he discusses the different factors that affected the history of pronouns and demonstratives arguing that ‘Old English personal pronouns are not deictic/referential but that demonstrative pronouns have this function’ and that the use of these functional categories was reversed later in early Middle English because of internal and external factors. Gelderen (2013: 195) explains that ‘the internal factors are the shift towards the use of demonstratives before nouns, i.e. the introduction of an article; the external factors are language contact that introduces new personal pronouns. In his discussion of the history of personal pronouns and demonstratives, Gelderen (2013: 199) considers Scandinavian influence as an important external factor which led to changing the behavior of personal pronouns during history.

2. Research Methodology:

This study explores the history of every one of nominative and accusative English pronouns in order to investigate the nature of language change which affected every one of them. It is a descriptive qualitative study based on describing and analyzing the differences between Old English forms and their counterparts in Modern English. The analysis also considers making comparisons between the histories of the different pronouns to investigate the role of grammaticalization and the role of language contact in the changes which affected these pronouns and to investigate the similarities and the differences between these language change scenarios.

2.1 History of first person nominative and accusative personal pronouns:

In Modern English, there are two nominative first person pronouns; singular *I* and plural *we*. There also two accusative forms; *me* for singular and *us* for plural. During history, Modern English first person pronouns lost a very important feature of Old English pronouns; the loss of the dual first person pronouns used for two speakers.

That loss of the dual first person nominative and accusative pronouns is one of the most noticeable differences between Old English and Modern English. In Old English, there was a first person dual pronoun *wit* which disappeared later as explained by Baugh and Cable (1993: 158) who describe this as a result of simplification in English grammar. They say: 'One other general simplification is to be noted: the loss of the dual number.... the forms *wit*, *3it* and their oblique cases did not survive beyond the thirteenth century and English lost the dual number'.

2.1.1 First person singular nominative pronoun *I*:

Modern first person nominative singular pronoun *I* had the form *ic* in Old English. Oxford English dictionary states that this pronoun had slight changes during the period of Middle English (1100-1500 AD). It took the forms *ic*, *ik* in the North and was earlier palatized to *ich* /itʃ/ in the South and the Midlands. By the 12th century, the final consonant began to be dropped before a consonant in the North and the Midlands to be reduced to *i* only. The pronoun was still pronounced *ik* before a vowel and *i* before a consonant in the North in the 4th century, but *I* started to appear alone in the North and the Midlands after 1400c.

On the other hand, *Ich* remained much longer than that in the South, especially before vowels. In the 16th century, it was reduced to *ch* in writing joined with the verbs as in *cham* (I am), *chave* (I have). The pronoun remained in the southern dialects in the forms *ich*, *utch*, *ch*, *che*, or *utchy* until the 18th or the first half of the 19th century according to Oxford English Dictionary. Strang

(1970) explains that the form was first re-lengthened under stress to be pronounced as /i:/ and then developed over time to undergo the shift to the present form /ai/.

These changes which affected the Old English pronoun *ic* mirror the effect of phonological dialect differences, which can be considered as internal changes within English language itself. Strang (1970: 262) states that the weak form /i/ resulted from the dropping of the final consonant in unstressed use. She says that this form 'by 1370 had extended into Standard'.

The history of first person singular nominative pronoun *I* is based on the phonological changes within English, which were the reason behind many changes during the history of English. Pronouns were and are still used in most cases as weak forms which are very sensitive to phonological changes since weak sounds can be dropped easily and lost over time. That may explain what happened to the final consonant in Old English *ic*.

2.1.2 First person plural nominative pronoun *we*:

Old English had the form *we*, *wē* to refer to the first person plural nominative according to Oxford English Dictionary. This form did not undergo any noticeable changes during the history of English and it remained the same in the later periods of Middle and Modern English. Therefore, the fact that this pronoun remained unchanged gives an example of the claim raised by Berg (1998: 224) who says: 'function words [like pronouns] exhibit a high degree of phonological conservatism'.

2.1.3 First person singular accusative pronoun *me*:

Oxford English Dictionary explains that Old English had the form *me*, *mē* for the first singular accusative. Old English also had the form *mec* which did not survive into Middle English. The loss of *mec* might have happened as a result of dropping the final consonant as what happened with the first singular nominative *ic* because of an internal phonological change. The form *me* survived over time to take its place in Modern English.

Freeborn (1998), however, illustrates that the form *me* underwent some changes in pronunciation over time. He explains that *mē* was pronounced with [e:] in Old English and Middle English. Because of the changes that affected long vowels and diphthongs in passing from Middle English into Modern English, the pronoun was changed to be pronounced with [i:] in Modern English as we use it today.

2.1.4 First person plural accusative pronoun *us*:

The pronoun *us* is now used as the first person plural accusative pronoun in Modern Standard English. This pronoun, according to Oxford English Dictionary, had the form *ūsic*, *ūs* in Old English. It seems that it remained

unchanged during the time and survived as *us* later in Middle English and Modern English, which is similar to what was noticed with its nominative form; *we*. The two first person plural forms were stable and continued unaffected by factors that lead to language change, which gives another evidence of Berg's claim (1998: 224) about the phonological conservativeness of function words.

2.2 History of second person nominative and accusative personal pronouns:

One of the noticeable differences between Old English and Modern English is the existence of many second person forms in Old English. Those old forms disappeared so that there is only one second person form in Modern Standard English. One of the clearest differences between Old and Modern English second person pronouns is the loss of the dual pronouns which died out in the 13th century according to Strang (1970) in a similar change with first person pronouns which lost the dual at the same period.

In the earliest stages of Old English, second person pronouns had different forms about which Lass (1987: xii) writes, 'Old English distinguished second person singular and plural pronouns: nominative singular *þū*, dative/accusative singular *þē* (later *thou*, *thee*) vs. nominative plural *gē*, dative/accusative *ēow* (later *ye*, *you*)'. At a later stage, *thou* and *ye* were used as the subject, *thou* for singular and *ye* for plural. For the object, *thee* was used for object singular and *you* for object plural. Strang (1970: 262) explains the way that these forms started to be used instead of the older forms. She illustrates that the initial *þ* is still unvoiced and shows 'a strong tendency to assimilate to a preceding homorganic... consonant'. It seems that because of this tendency, the older forms developed regularly to be changed into *you* and its equivalents as a result of an internal phonological change.

So, what happened to the other forms of second person pronouns that became obsolete in Modern English? Crystal (2004: 307) explains the disappearance of the singular pronoun *thou* by saying 'The first [change] was the emergence of *you* as a singular, noticeably during the second half of the thirteenth century'. The plural pronoun *you* replaced the singular pronoun *thou* because, as Crystal (ibid) and many other researchers think, there was an influence of French language and the way that its speakers used second person pronouns on English. In French, the pronoun *vous* had come to be used as a polite form of the singular *tu*. Singh (2005: 158) is one of the researchers who talked about this phenomenon, stating that '...as in the T/V (*tu/vous*) distinction of the Romance languages, the *thou/thee* [singular] forms came to be used as a term of address to social inferiors and (*ye*)/*you* [plural forms] to social superiors'.

It can be concluded then that the disappearance of *thou* can be considered as a change occurring because of an external factor which is the French influence. As a result of this influence, the plural forms started to be used instead of the singular forms in certain contexts. MuCully and Hilles (2005: 115) talk about this French influence, saying: 'This change seems to have taken place particularly in circles most influenced by medieval French'.

This replacement reflected a very important sociolinguistic factor in language change. As this change happened, *you* was used as a term of respect and *thou* came increasingly to be used with those of lower status, as we can conclude from the written resources that belong to that period. Heine and Song (2011: 600-601) describe this use of plural second person pronouns instead of singular forms as a process of 'plurification' which concerns the use of plural pronouns, 'most commonly of second person plural pronouns to refer to single pronouns... [as a result of] honorification'. By the 16th century, according to Baugh and Cable (1993: 237) all the second person forms disappeared and were replaced by the plural forms and those previous singular forms 'were maintained into the twentieth century only among the Quakers'.

Many researchers agree on the idea that the singular form *thou* remained in certain texts because of the Quakers movement founded by George Fox. The Quakers disapproved the way that second person pronouns singular *thou* and plural *you* were used as an indication of social inequality and unfairness. Crystal (2004: 310) talks about the role of the Quakers and their attempts to save the second person singular *thou*, saying: 'Quakers disapproved of the way in which the singular *you* had become part of an etiquette of social distance, and used *thou* forms to everyone, believing that this better reflected the spirit of exchanges Christ would have had with his disciples'. However, these efforts to save singular second person pronouns were not able to keep them for a long time.

As was mentioned previously, the singular forms of the second person pronouns *thou* and *thee* disappeared because of the socially recommended use of the plural forms instead of them. This explains the disappearance of the singular forms, but what about the plural *ye*? Old English had two forms for second person plural; the nominative plural form *ye* and the accusative Old English plural *you* which is the only second person pronoun that survived to Modern English. Singh (2005: 157) explains how the plural nominative *ye* disappeared, 'By the beginning of the EModE [Early Modern English] period, subject *ye* and object *you* had fallen together in pronunciation as [jə], resulting in what seems to be the indiscriminate use of either pronoun in either function'. We can say here then, that the loss of the pronoun *ye* happened because of an internal phonological change.

Other researchers take a similar view that this change happened later, which is the emergence of the nominative and the accusative forms of the second person pronouns because the two forms *ye* and *you* were often pronounced unstressed as [jə]. Baugh and Cable (1993) explain that this tendency to confuse the nominative and the accusative forms can be seen very early and that in the 14th century, *you* started to be used as a nominative instead of accusative or where *ye* was used for the object. Crystal (2004) mentions that it was during the 16th century when the difference between the nominative and the accusative gradually disappeared and *ye* was totally dropped.

2.3 History of third person nominative and accusative personal pronouns:

In Modern English, third person pronouns show a difference between singular and plural and are divided into masculine, feminine, and neuter in the third person singular pronouns. Heine and Song (2011: 589) affirm, 'if a language has a gender distinction in the first and second person, it has also one in the third person'. However, this is not the case with English pronouns in which there is no gender distinction in first and second person, and this appears only with singular third person pronouns. Plural third person pronouns, on the other hand, are not an exception to this rule that they do not show gender differences.

2.3.1 Third person nominative pronouns:

Nominative third person pronouns are divided into singular and plural. The singular pronouns are divided into a masculine pronoun *he*, a feminine *she*, and the neuter pronoun *it*. The third person pronoun *they* is the plural form of the singular pronouns *he*, *she* and *it*.

He:

Oxford English Dictionary explains that in English, the typical and the original form in all ages has been *he*, from which all the other third person pronouns, nominative and accusative, singular and plural were produced. Old English third person singular masculine pronoun *he* was the base that supplied all the third person pronouns and it remained unchanged during the later periods to be used with the same form *he* in Modern English.

She:

Oxford English Dictionary states that certain parts of the Old English *hi*-stem were lost in all cognate languages from the early periods. The stem was supplied by the corresponding parts of the Old Norse demonstrative base *sya* which extended into English in the 11th century or the 12th century. If this explanation is true, it can be concluded then that the modern form *she* came as a result of borrowing from another language.

The feminine *hio*, *heo* became supplanted by the feminine demonstrative *sio*, *syo* to become the pronoun *sco*, *scho*= *sho* in the North and *scæ*= *shæ* in Midland, which is now *she*. In the South and the West, the forms *ho*, *hoo* survived in literature till the 15th century. *She* has been the only literary English form since the start of printing. Baugh and Cable (1993: 158) explain that the pronoun *she* had the form *heo* in Old English. They explain the change that this pronoun underwent in passing from Old into Modern English saying, ‘The modern form [*she*] could have developed from the Old English *heo*, but it is believed by some writers that it is due in part at least to the influence of the demonstrative *seo*’.

MuCully and Hilles (2005) discuss the history of this pronoun and the hypotheses that tried to explain the origin of the sound /ʃ/ in the Modern English pronoun *she* and how this pronoun replaced the Old English forms. They talk about the opinion that says that it was borrowed from the Old Norse demonstrative pronoun and say that it is so strange that a demonstrative pronoun is borrowed into another language with a different function as a third person singular. They try to find out whether *she* was an adoption of an Old Norse third person pronoun not a demonstrative but find that this is unlikely because Old Norse third person forms start with (*h-*).

They present another explanation which is that the Old English *heo*, *hio* was subject to a language internal change. This hypothesis states that the Old English form comprised a falling diphthong and was changed later to be rising, then phonologically produce a form like *seō* pronounced /sjo:/. In a later phonological change, according to this hypothesis, the alveolar fricative /s/ and the palatal glide /j/ assimilated for the palatal fricative sound in Modern English *she*.

After discussing the two explanations, MuCully and Hilles (2005:268) come to a conclusion that every one of them has weak points. They say, ‘The weakness of the former postulation (‘*she* was a borrowing from ON’) is that it would instance an unusual form of cross-linguistic contact... The weakness of the second postulation... it is hard to see why... the change of an originally falling diphthong to a rising one- could have taken place’. Thus, it is not clear whether the change which produced the pronoun *she* was because of an external factor, which is the contact between Old English and Old Norse, or was a result of an internal sound change within English language itself.

It: (nominative and accusative).

Old English third person singular neuter pronoun *hit* was used as a nominative and as an accusative pronoun. Similarly, Modern third person singular neuter does not have two different forms for accusative and nominative

and the modern pronoun *it* is used for the two positions. Because of a phonological internal factor, the initial consonant /h/ was dropped from *hit* first when it was pronounced unstressed and later in all its occurrences. Oxford English Dictionary illustrates that this change happened during the Middle English period. It is believed that the initial /h/ was preserved in Standard English to a much later period, especially in the North and in Scottish, *hit* is still the stressed form and *it* is used when the pronoun is unstressed.

The change process that occurred during the history of this pronoun is similar to the change process that happened to the Old English first person *ic*. The two pronouns underwent a process of dropping the consonant when unstressed, which resulted in the loss of that consonant in all positions. The only difference is that in the case of *ic*, it was a final consonant and with *hit*, the dropping affected an initial consonant.

They:

The pronoun *they* is the third personal plural nominative in Modern English, the plural of he, she, and it. Old English third person pronouns had their own Old English plurals *hi*, *hie*, *hiȝ*, *heo*, which were replaced between 1200 and 1500 by other Old Norse forms. While talking about the differences between Old English and Modern English pronouns, Singh (2005: 85) states that Modern English pronouns lost the 'OE third person plural *h-* forms, which were replaced by the Old Norse forms *Þai*, *Þeim*, *Þeir(e)*- the ancestors of *they*, *them*, *their*'.

The fact that Old English pronouns were remodeled in Old English and were replaced by borrowed pronouns from Old Norse happened as a result of the contact between Old English and this other language. Trying to explain this influence of Old Norse, Baugh and Cable (1993:158) say, 'The normal development of the Old English pronoun [third person plural] would have been *hi* (*he*), *here*, *hem*.....In the districts, however, where Scandinavian influence was strong, the nominative *hi* began early to be replaced by the Scandinavian form *Þei* (ON) *Þeir*'. The later *they*, *thei*, *thay*, *that* which gradually spread south, started to be used instead of *hi*, *hy*, first in the nominative case and then also in other cases.

2.3.2 Third person accusative pronouns:

Accusative third person pronouns are also divided into singular and plural. The singular is divided into a masculine pronoun *him*, a feminine *her*, and the neuter pronoun *it*. The third person pronoun *them* is the plural of the singular pronouns *him*, *her* and *it*.

Him and her:

During the period of Middle English, many changes happened and affected English pronouns. One of these changes, according to Singh (2005) is the

falling together of Old English accusative and dative first person singular forms such as *hine* and *him*. Such process had already occurred for OE first and second person singular and plural forms. The Southern dialects kept the distinction between the Old English third person accusative and dative for a longer time than the other dialects, but eventually followed the other dialects in emerging the two forms.

Old English *him* was used as the dative singular masculine and neuter of *he*. The dative appeared to have begun to be used for the accusative *hine* in the North and the Midland by 1150 according to Oxford English Dictionary. *Him* became the general literary form by the beginning of the 13th century, but *hin* and *hen* were still used in some south-western writings of the 15th century. In a similar linguistic change, the pronoun *hiere*, *hire*, *hyre* (*her* in Modern English) was used in Old English as an accusative and a possessive genitive and its use as an accusative became clear and absolute in Middle English according to Oxford English Dictionary.

The change that happened can be considered as a kind of internal borrowing or an internal remodeling within the personal pronoun system itself. Concerning *him*, a dative Old English started to be used as an accusative in later stages and with the pronoun *her*, the change happened because a dative/genitive was started to be used as an accusative.

Them:

The history of the third person plural nominative and accusative pronouns is very similar. As was mentioned when discussing the history of *they*, Old English had its own plural third person pronouns which were *hi*, *hira* and *him*, which were replaced by *Pai*, *Per* or *Pam* from Old Norse. We can say then that the plural accusative form *them* came as a result of borrowing from Old Norse into Old English. Freeborn (1998: 153) talks about this borrowing process saying, ‘This borrowing from ON of distinctive forms, all beginning with <th->, began early on in the Northern dialects of ME. It spread southwards, but was not completed there even at the beginning of the 15th century’.

In spite of all the previously mentioned explanations of the language change processes that led to remodeling and reproducing Old English third person pronouns to produce the different forms in Modern English, Heine and Song (2011) insist on the role of grammaticalization in producing and changing third person pronouns during the history. They present three different scenarios to explain this change and they consider all these explanations as a result of grammaticalization. The first scenario presented by Heine and Song (2011: 595) as evidence of grammaticalization is their claim that ‘third person pronouns are frequently created by means of a process where in specific contexts demonstrative pronouns are grammaticalized to third person markers’.

The second scenario is that nouns or noun phrases were grammaticalized into third person pronouns as Heine and Song (2011: 596) claim that ‘the second major historical source of third person pronouns is provided by nouns. Their third explanation of the role of grammaticalization in the history of third person pronouns is their claim that intensifiers are an important source of them. They say, ‘the development from intensifiers to third person pronouns is in fact a process of grammaticalization’ (ibid: 599).

3. Results and discussion:

Different stories and explanations were given to describe the changes that affected nominative and accusative personal pronouns during their journey from Old English to Modern English. As appears from making comparisons between the stories of the different pronouns and as was hypothesized above, it is clear that the kinds of changes that affected English pronouns were diverse, that every pronoun has its own story and unique history. However, this result does not deny the fact that some pronouns have similar stories as was noticed when studying the changes that affected the two first person singular pronouns *I* and *me* and the singular third person neutral pronoun *it*. When making a comparison between their forms in Old English and their Modern English forms, it appears that these three pronouns were affected by an internal phonological change resulted in dropping the final consonants from their Old English versions.

There is also another similarity between the histories of the two first person plural pronouns; nominative *we* and accusative *us*. These two pronouns remained stable and unchanged over time that they kept their Old English forms into Modern English. This gives an example of the issue of the conservativeness of functional categories mentioned above (Berg, 1998) and also gives an example of the fact that some pronouns have undergone very similar changes during their history.

The changes which affected English pronouns were either because of external factors or a result of internal linguistic mechanisms. The external factor which led to some changes affected English pronouns was language contact, either with Old Norse which resulted in many changes in third person pronouns or at a later stage with French language which affected second person pronouns. The internal factors, on the other hand, were mainly two operations happened in the grammatical structure of English (grammaticalization) or in its phonological structure, which caused a number alternations in Old English pronouns to produce their new versions in Modern English.

It was not clear sometimes to find out which factor, internal or external, was responsible for this change. Sometimes, external and internal factors were mixed together to lead to this change as was noticed in the history of second person pronouns. Singular forms *thou* and *thee* disappeared because of an

external factor which is the contact with French language, which led to replacing them with plural forms *you* and *ye*. Later, because of an internal phonological change, the two plural forms were pronounced in the same way, which led to the result that *you* replaced *ye*, and it survived as the only second person pronoun in Modern English.

4. Conclusion:

Any attempt to trace the very remote history of the English language may not be so accurate because it must be based on written evidence since there is no spoken evidence from earlier periods. About such kind of evidence, McCully and Hilles (2005: 262) confirmed that we have to treat such written evidence as ‘an inherently conservative medium, one that does not tell the whole story of innovation and change’.

However, we can learn at least a number of historical facts by studying the history of English pronouns which gives a very good indication of the varying history of English language. After trying to trace the history of Modern English pronouns, it might be concluded that many kinds of changes happened during the different periods of English language, reflecting many internal, external, and sociolinguistic factors which had an effect on the English language over time.

References

- Baugh, A C. & T Cable. 1993. *A History of the English Language*, (4th edn), London: Routledge.
- Berg, T. 1998. *Linguistic Structure and Change: An Explanation from Language Processing*. Oxford: Oxford University press.
- Crystal, D. 2004. *The Stories of English*, London: Penguin Books.
- Freeborn, D. 1998. *From Old English to Standard English*, (2nd edn), Palgrave, London.
- Geldren, E. V. 2013. The Diachrony of Pronouns and Demonstratives. In Lohndal, T. & J.T Faarlind (eds), *In Search of Universal Grammar: from Old Norse to Zoque*, 195-218, Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Heine, B & K. Song. 2011. On the Grammaticalization of Personal Pronouns. *Journal of Linguistics* 47(03): 587-630.
- Jackson, H. 2002. *Grammar and Vocabulary: A Resource Book for Students*, London: Routledge.
- Lass, R. 1987. *The Shape of English: Structure and History*, London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd.
- Lass, R. 1997. *Historical Linguistics and Language Change*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- McCully, C. & S. Hilles. 2005. *The Earliest English: An Introduction to Old English Language*, Harlow: Pearson Education Limited.
- McMahon, A. 1994. *Understanding Language Change*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- *Oxford English Dictionary: A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles*, first published in 1933, reprinted in 1961, 1970, Oxford.
- Singh, I. 2005. *The History of English: a student's guide*, London: Hodder Headline Group.
- Strang, B. 1970. *A History of English*, London: Methuen.