

The Functions and Syntax of Vocative *Y'all*

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Although little credible data regarding the distribution of its use across North America exists, the word *y'all* is a hallmark feature in both African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and Southern White Vernacular English (SWVE) (Bernstein, 2003). Simply put, *y'all* is used as a 2nd person plural pronoun, or something close to it, in some varieties of American English. Discussions of *y'all* are nearly exclusively concerned with *y'all* in pronominal use. Questions about the word abound, concerning its etymology (Montgomery, 1992; 2003; Lipski, 1993), its pragmatic context (Ching, 2001; Montgomery, 2003), and the extent of its plurality (Butters, 2001; Hyman, 2006; Richardson, 1984; Spencer, 1975). Although syntactic analysis of *y'all* has been performed in distinguishing it as not simply a contraction of *you-all*, as is popularly believed (Lipski, 1993), there have been no observations to date that recognise its vocative use as distinct. This is perhaps more of a result of the status of vocatives themselves which, despite gaining some recognition in the field of pragmatics, until recently, have been largely ignored as having functions and syntax that are distinct from a standard NP under CP (Hill & Stavrou, 2013 p. 1-3). In this paper I present a basic syntactic analysis of vocative *y'all* using Hill and Stavrou's (2013) proposed model of the Vocative Phrase (see figure 1). The model assumes Rizzi's (1997) CP split, defining ForceP at the left periphery.

I address the following questions:

1. Can a syntactic description of *y'all* be mapped using Hill and Stavrou's theory of VocP? and
2. If so, what does that description tell us about the status of *y'all* as both a pronoun and as a grammaticalized phrase (*you all*)?

Spoken transcripts were searched for any occurrence of *y'all* in the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) (Davies, 2008-). Context was reviewed and vocative *y'all* and pronoun *y'all* were categorised for comparison. Because the COCA data were relatively limited and the transcripts did not always make the context or intonation clear, I decided to complement the data with data from the television series, *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* (*Brooklyn Nine-Nine*, 2013-). Since the word is widely recognised in the United States and what constitutes a "native" *y'all* user is difficult to measure due to its wide geographical distribution via AAVE, nativeness of users was not a factor considered in data collection, but all data were judged to be felicitous. Transcripts were searched for instances of *y'all*, and context and addressees were noted by viewing the scenes containing *y'all*. Data were categorised in the same way as the COCA data. Due to the limited literature examining *y'all* in a vocative context and the relatively small sample of contextually unambiguous examples revealed in the two datasets, the research presented is exploratory in nature.

In my analysis, I demonstrate that *y'all* is syntactically distinct from plural *you* in more ways than have previously been considered. At the left periphery of the sentence, *y'all* lacks the

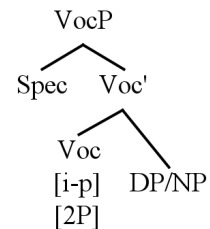


Figure 1: Components of the Vocative Phrase. *[i-p]* refers to the interpersonal feature and *[2P]* refers to the second person feature. Adapted from Hill and Stavrou (2013).

strong disapprobation reading that *you* has when used as a vocative. Additionally, I identify a feature prompting movement, exultation, in sahP. Evidence presented shows that *y'all* is not a full pronoun in the same way that *you* is, and it exhibits difference in how it has been grammaticalized.

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