Historical Perspective on Suffixed Second Person Pronouns: a Corpus-Based Study

Liviana Galiano*

Department of Theoretical and Applied Linguistics, University of Pavia, Pavia 27100, Italy
Corresponding Author: Liviana Galiano, E-mail: Liviana.galiano@unipv.it

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	The present work provides a detailed picture of the forms, frequencies and functions of suffixed second person pronouns (e.g. *yous*) since their first occurrence in English until the 2000s. It is a corpus-based study which aims to expand and refine the already existing definitions of suffixed second person forms in the literature. For the first time in scholarly work, the paper traces the historical evolution of both the frequencies and functions of suffixed second person pronouns and identifies grammaticalisation and pragmaticalisation as the underlying processes of language change of these features. **Key words:** Suffixed Second Person Pronouns, Diachronic Development, Grammaticalisation, Pragmaticalisation, Corpus-based

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to provide a description of how suffixed second person pronouns have been used since they first appeared in the English language. Suffixed second person pronouns are pronominal forms of the second person which are marked by the suffix *-s* or *-z*. Although the *-s/z* suffixation resembles the standard rule for marking plurality on nouns in English, according to the literature (cf. Cassidy 1954; Gramley and Pätzold 1992; Algeo 2001; Corrigan 2010), suffixed second person pronouns such as *yous, youse, yowz, yooz, youz(e), yez, yiz,* and *yeez* have long been used as both plural and singular pronouns.

To the best of this authour's knowledge, there has been no attempt to provide a detailed picture of the forms, frequencies, functions and diachronic evolution of suffixed second person pronouns. Yet, as these forms have lingered in spoken English since they first appeared, it would be useful to gain a deeper understanding of the variety of semantic and pragmatic traits they express, which are often ignored in the scholarly descriptions of second person pronouns, even though they necessarily mirror the expressive needs of the speakers.

This study is a corpus-based investigation on the frequencies and uses of suffixed second person pronouns from their first recorded instance to the 2000s. The chosen corpora are the *Corpus of Early English Books* (1400-1800) and the *Corpus of Historical American English* (1810-2009). The analysis of corpus data is used in order to add empirical support to the description of suffixed second person pronouns. By combining the data on the frequencies, functions, and text genres obtained from the two corpora, the aim is to describe a trend of diachronic development of suffixed second person pronouns. It will be shown that suffixed second person pronouns perform a wider variety of functions than the ones described in the literature and their use is guided by pragmatic reasons besides referential ones. It will also be argued that the ways in which the uses of suffixed second person pronouns develop over time hint at undergoing processes of grammaticalisation and pragmaticalisation (see section 3 below) of the pronouns.

The research questions addressed in the present study are:

a) What are the earliest occurrences of suffixed second person forms? What frequency trends do suffixed second person forms display over time?
b) What functions do suffixed second person forms perform? With what frequencies do the different functions occur? How have the functions of suffixed second person forms evolved over time?
c) Have suffixed second person pronouns been undergoing processes of language change such as grammaticalisation and/or pragmaticalisation?
d) In what types of texts do suffixed second person pronouns occur?

The paper is structured as follows: section 2 is dedicated to the description of suffixed second person pronouns in the literature with a particular focus on the examples provided in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (online, last accessed: March 2020). Section 3 deals with the corpora, the compilation of the datasets and the methodology of the analysis. It also introduces some of the theoretical concepts that are relevant to the interpretation of the linguistic evolution of suffixed second person pronouns, such as grammaticalisation and pragmaticalisation. Section 4, will see a discussion

of the results of the analysis of the frequencies and functions of suffixed second person pronouns as well as the types of texts in which the pronouns occur. Section 5 will present a comparison between suffixed second person pronouns and standard *you*. In section 6, the aim is to show how the development in the functions and uses of suffixed second person forms can be linked back to the processes of grammaticalisation and pragmaticalisation of the pronouns. Finally, some conclusions will be drawn in section 7.

SUFFIXED SECOND PERSON PRONOUNS IN THE LITERATURE

The descriptions of suffixed second person pronouns found in dialect dictionaries, such as the *English Dialect Dictionary* (Wright 1961) and the *Scottish National Dictionary* (Grant and Murison 1976), as well as in linguistic studies on the evolution of the English language (cf. Cassidy 1954; Gramley and Pätzold 1992; Algeo 2001; Corrigan 2010), generally agree on considering these forms, especially *yous(e)*, *yiz*, and *yez* (although other variants such as *yuz, youze*, and *yooz* are also mentioned) as features of Irish origins. What is less clear is when these forms first appeared in Irish English and subsequently spread to other varieties of English. The *Scottish National Dictionary* dates their diffusion back to 1920s. According to *The Cambridge History of the English Language* (2001), *yez* and *yiz* represent a phenomenon of the late 18th or early 19th century in Ireland, and a 19th-century phenomenon in the US, following the Irish immigration waves of that period. The variant *yuz*, on the other hand, is suggested to be a US indigenous development (specifically of the American Midwest as far east as Pittsburgh), originally indicating plurality of reference, and subsequently reanalysed as singular pronoun (Algeo 2001).

The distinction between singular and plural second person plural forms can be traced back to the same differentiation in Irish Gaelic, which is supposed to have simply been (re-)introduced into the English language by the Irish speakers (Algeo 2001). This claim is also supported by Hickey (2010) cited in Corrigan (2010), and Corrigan (2010), who propose a substratist explanation to the origin of the plural second person forms. In other words, the singular/plural distinction which was already present in Irish (*tú* vs *sibb*) was transferred to English "as to create an important morphological distinction in a language which had also formerly possessed one but for which there was no longer any obvious marker" (Corrigan 2010:54).

The *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED henceforth) includes *yous* and *youse* in the same entry where other spelling variants are also mentioned, such as *yowz, yooz, youz, youze,* and *yuz*. They are described as being a regional feature that is mostly typical of Scottish, Irish, American and Australian English. Two different functions are recognized as being performed by suffixed second person forms i.e., singular and plural reference. Instances of *yous(e)*, but not of the other spelling variants, are found in quotations from 19th- and 20th-century written texts ranging from 1835 to 1998, the earliest example being reported in a journal publication (*Dublin Penny Journal*) which features *yous* used as a plural pronoun. The earliest recorded instance of the variant *youse,* according to the OED, is found in a novel by P. G. Wodehouse, *Gentleman of Leisure*, published in 1910, where *youse* refers to a single entity ("Say, *youse* won't want me anymore, boss.").

Among the frontal-vowel variants, *yez* is the one to which the OED dedicates an entry of its own, listing the other variants (i.e., *yiz, yee(z/s), yeas, yaes,* and *yese*) as alternatives to this main form. *Yez* is a pronoun resulting from the suffixation of the personal pronoun *ye* inherited from Germanic and still retained in some varieties of English, especially Irish and Scottish English, and English spoken in northern England. Its bare form, *ye*, was used for both singular and plural reference (cf. for example, Quirk and Wrenn 1955, Wales 1996, Farrell 2020), especially when the referent is the subject of a clause or sentence, but not necessarily (it could also be a direct or indirect object). *Yez* is described as being more typical of Irish English than other varieties. Its first recorded example, according to the OED, is found in R. L. Edgeworth and M. Edgeworth (1802) *Essay on Irish Bulls*, in which the alternatively spelled pronoun *yees* is used for singular reference. The diphthong variant *yeas* appears in another written work by M. Edgeworth (1809) as a part of the formula "*God bless yeas!*" (Ennui iii, in *Tales Fashionable Life*). *Yez* is found only later, in 1828 *Fairy Legends and Traditions of the South of Ireland* by T. C. Croker with plural reference. Fourteen years later, another frequent variant of *yez* i.e., *yiz*, seems to have appeared for the first time in a written text by S. Lover, *Handy Andy*, where the pronoun is used with plural reference as a politeness mark to address a group of "*gintlemin*". What all these texts have in common is a preponderance of dialogue that aims to reproduce everyday interactions, which seems to constitute the preferred context of occurrence of suffixed second person pronouns and confirms their spoken, informal character (see section 4 below).

CORPORA, DATA, AND METHODOLOGY

By drawing on the literature, a list of suffixed second person pronouns was obtained and used as keywords to search the corpora and compile a dataset for analysis. Obtaining corpus data on suffixed second person pronouns is rather challenging: the spoken character of these pronouns prevents suffixed second person pronouns to be found in formal, written texts. In addition, it is difficult to gain access to historical spoken data: the only available material are transcribed dialogues, which are unlikely to be thoroughly faithful to the original spoken production, given that they are the result of manual transcription which is subject to limitations of time and memory. Therefore, the closest option to historical spoken data would be the dialogues of fictional books and plays (cf. Jucker et al. 1999, Jucker 2000), which had to mirror the actual spoken language of the time as closely as possible in order to allow the audience to empathize with the characters.

The corpora of historical English chosen for this study responds to two main research needs: first, the time coverage had to be wide enough to cover the time period from the earliest occurrences of suffixed second person pronouns until present-day English; second, the corpora had to contain a

fair amount of novels and plays, two genres that tend to rely on dialogues, thus increasing the likelihood for suffixed second person pronouns to occur. For these reasons, I have chosen *The Corpus of Early English Books* (1470-1800) (CEEB henceforth) and *The Corpus of Historical American English* (1810-2009) (COHA henceforth). *The Corpus of Early Books* (1470-1800) contains 1.2 billion words from 44,400 English texts published between 1470 and 1800. *The Corpus of Historical American English* (COHA) contains more than 400 million words of texts published between 1810 and 2009. COHA is balanced by genres and sub-genres decade by decade: it contains fiction, magazines, newspapers, and non-fiction. Fiction accounts for 48-55 percent of the total texts in each decade.

The corpora were searched for each of the suffixed second person pronouns considered: *yous, youse, yows, yooz, youz, youze, yez, yiz, yeez, yeas, yese.* The datasets obtained were divided by century of occurrence in CEEB and decades of occurrence in COHA. The occurrences were checked for false positives, such as spelling variants of "yes" (see (1a-b) below) or occurrences written in other languages than English, which were discarded from the dataset.

(1a) With Stentors Voice he makes loud Proclamation O yez! (A28572 CEEB)

(1b) By faith and by Baptism?/Yeas Sir, and by will also. (A11445 CEEB)

Once a refined dataset was obtained, the frequencies of occurrence were calculated and normalized. The analysis of the functions of suffixed second person pronouns was carried out manually by looking at the context of occurrence and at the extended context when the pronominal reference was ambiguous. The information about the text genre and the characters using suffixed second person pronouns in the dialogues was obtained by a combination of the text metadata provided in the corpora and additional research on the setting, plot and characters of the books and plays in which second person pronouns occurred. Finally, the information about the frequencies and functions of suffixed second person pronouns was compared across decades and centuries in order to draw the trends of development of the pronouns (see section 4 below).

The evolution of suffixed second person pronouns over time was linked to the theoretical notions of grammaticalisation and pragmaticalisation. Grammaticalisation is generally defined as the process of language change whereby a morpheme or linguistic item transits from a lexical to a more grammatical status (Kuryłowicz 1975:52). Although the definition and operationalisation of grammaticalisation may vary according to the linguistic approach (cf. for example, Bybee *et al.* 1994; Croft 2003; Langacker 2005; Boye and Harder 2007; Traugott and Trousdale 2010), the process is generally understood as involving some key mechanisms: phonological reduction, semantic bleaching, and reanalysis (Hopper and Traugott 1992; Bybee *et al.* 1994; Haspelmath 1998; Fischer 2007).

Phonological reduction is the mechanism that involves a loss of phonetic substance in a linguistic item, as happens, for example with *I'mma* which is the reduced form of *I'm*

gonna which, in turn, represents the reduced form of *I'm going to.* Semantic bleaching involves the loss of semantic content of a linguistic expression, as happens with the intensifiers *awfully, terribly, horribly* that have lost their traits of "awful, terrible and horrible" and are used in combination with adjectives such as *late, big, small,* etc. (Durkin 2008). Reanalysis refers to the change in the structure and/or class of an expression as well as syntactic and semantic reformulation (Langacker 1977): one example is the shift of the noun *will* to the future auxiliary *will*, which displays a change in both the semantics and word class.

The second process of linguistic change that was taken into account when interpreting the results of the analysis of suffixed second person pronouns is pragmaticalisation. Pragmaticalisation is brought into play when the evolution of a linguistic expression involves the development of new pragmatic functions that concern the management of conversational roles and the expression of the speaker's attitude towards the interlocutor(s) (cf. for example Erman and Kotsinas 1993; Aijmer 1997; Diewald 2011 for a detailed account on pragmaticalisation). Pragmaticalisation describes cases such as the propositional expression *I think* that has evolved into a pragmatic marker with the function of mitigating assertive speech acts (Aijmer 1997:2). In the case of suffixed second person pronouns, pragmaticalisation is used to describe the progressive acquisition of new pragmatic traits and functions that cannot be considered instances of grammaticalisation because of the acquisition rather than "loss" (bleaching) of semantic traits.

SUFFIXED SECOND PERSON PRONOUNS IN ENGLISH HISTORICAL CORPORA

In this section, the findings of the analysis of suffixed second person pronouns in the two historical corpora of English will be presented and discussed. A first subsection is dedicated to CEEB and a second to COHA. Both sections will deal with the frequencies, grammatical and pragmatic functions. The subsection about COHA will also discuss the text genres that make use of suffixed second person forms.

The Corpus of Early English Books

The search for suffixed second person pronouns in the *Corpus of Early English Books* (1470-1800) (CEEB) returned data only for the variant *yous*. Although some occurrences of *youse* and *yez* could be found in the corpus, they are not instances of personal pronouns (see (1a-b) above).

Yous occurs 53 times in the *Corpus of Early English Books* (1470-1800) (0.04 per million words – pmw henceforth). The earliest occurrence of *yous* in the corpus dates back to 1518 and appears in a novel published in London (see (3) below). The occurrences of *yous* are distributed across time periods as follows: 8 instances occur between 1500 and 1599 (0.04 pmw), 36 occurrences between 1600 and 1699 (0.04 pmw) and 2 occurrences between 1700 and 1799 (0.11 pmw). In other words, the frequencies of *yous* remain constant for two centuries (16th and 17th) and increase during the 18th century. Obviously, the inferences made on

the data from the 16th century should be considered as a rough indication of the trends of the use of *yous* since the number of occurrences of the form in this time period is rather low.

> (2) My brother and true fellow/in *yous* all my hope and trust/above them in the world. (CEEB A08484)

By analysing the context of occurrence of the first instance of *yous* in CEEB ((2) above), it can be observed that *yous* is used to refer to the speaker's brother i.e., a singular referent. The function of *yous* in this context seems to mark emphasis, as also suggested by the dislocated position of the prepositional phrase *in yous* to the left periphery of the line. This is the syntactic part of the utterance where pragmatically marked items with an attention-getting function tend to occur (cf. Biber *et al.* 1999, Detges and Waltereit 2002). Therefore, the function of singular-reference *yous* seems to be mainly pragmatic. The analysis of the rest of the occurrences of *yous* in the corpus reveals that *yous* tends to frequently perform two grammatical functions (see Table 1 below): it marks plurality (as in (3a-b) below in which the speaker refers to two men, Nich and Breton) and possession (as in (4a-b) below) both in the form of a possessive determiner (4a below) and a pronoun (4b below).

> (3a) *Yous* in better service: Nich. Breton. TO THE READER. (CEEB A16766)
> (3b) […][F]or in his name I defy you and all *yous* […] (CEEB A21762)
> (4a) I find *yous Counsel* is agreeing with my mind. (CEEB A59294)
> (4b) What have I ere possessed which was not *yous*? (CEEB A27179)

Yous marks plurality most of the times it occurs in the corpus (65.9 percent of the times, see Table 1 above), whereas it is used with singular reference 34.0 percent of the times it occurs in the corpus (see Table 1 above). The difference between the frequencies of occurrence of plural and singular *yous* is statistically significant (p = 0.005), thus indicating a trend of use.

As already mentioned, the function of singular-reference *yous* appears to be pragmatic and, specifically, related with the expression of emphasis and/or politeness towards the interlocutor (see (5a-b) below). In (5a), the speaker is expressing an act of gratitude towards their interlocutor, therefore politeness. The expression of politeness is, here, intended

as the strategies that the speaker uses in order to establish and maintain a good relationship with their interlocutor(s) (Lakoff 1973, Brown and Levinson 1987, Fraser 1990, Kasper 1998, Spencer-Oatey 2000, Watts 2003). In (5b) the speaker is performing an emphatic reference by focussing on a person in particular and asking about his/her identity and, at the same time, probably showing deference towards a person the speaker is not familiar with given the use of the title *Mr*.

> (5a) We thank *yous* Borg. (CEEB A07217)
> (5b) Is *yous* Mr. a Statesman friend? (CEEB A13345)

Using plural pronouns to politely address a singular referent is a common strategy in many languages of the world (cf. WALS, Helmbrecht 2001), for example French *vous* (2PL or 2SG/POL), Southern Italian *voi* (2PL or 2SG/POL), Lezgian (Azerbaijan) *kün* (2PL or 2SG/POL) (Haspelmath 1993:184), Russian *vy* (2PL or 2SG/POL) (Haspelmath 1993:184). The fact that spoken English as well displays the same strategy shows that its pronominal paradigm is typologically similar to the languages that mark the singular/plural distinction on the second person, although the rules of standard written language maintain that the only form of the second person in English is *you*.

Lastly, possessive *yous* represents 47.7 percent of the occurrences of *yous* in the corpus, divided between the two categories of possessive determiner *yous* (22.7 percent of the occurrences of *yous*; see (4a) above) and possessive pronoun *yous* (25 percent of the occurrences of *yous*; see (4b) above) (see Table 1 above).

The Corpus of Historical American English

Covering the period between 1810 and 2009, COHA provides useful information about the variation of frequency of a feature in written texts over the years. Being focused on the American variety of English, other geographical varieties that would be useful to investigate as far as the use of suffixed second person forms is concerned (in particular, Irish, Scottish and Australian English) are not represented. Although diatopic variety is to some extent represented by the characters described in the books and plays, who are often of Irish origin (see, for example, the character of McGee in *The White Moll*), it would be useful to replicate this study on historical corpora representing other geographical varieties of English.

With 534 instances, *youse* in COHA is seven times as frequent as *yous*, which yields a statistically significant difference (p = 0.0001). Its frequencies are highest in 1910s and 1920s as shown in Table 2 below. Before and after these years, the occurrences of *youse* are much less numerous (see Table 2 below).

The first recorded instance of *youse* in COHA dates back to 1873 and is found in a novel by B. T. Campbell *The White*

Table 1. Distribution of the functions of *yous* in CEEB

FUNCTION	TOKENS	%
PLURAL	29	65.9
POSSESSIVE DETERMINER	10	22.7
POSSESSIVE PRONOUN	11	25.0
SINGULAR-REFERENCE EMPHATIC	15	34.0

Table 2 . Frequencies of occurrence of *youse* in COHA (Tokens (pmw))

	1870s	1890s	1900s	1910s	1920s	1930s	1940s	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s
Youse	1 (0.05)	14 (0.66)	30 (1.36)	187 (8.56)	218 (8.72)	15 (0.62)	26 (1.08)	10 (0.41)	9 (0.39)	8 (0.34)	4 (0.16)	3 (0.11)	9 (0.31)

Slave in which *youse* is used with singular reference (see (6) below). The function of *youse* in the question in (6) below seems to be the expression of empathy as well as deference toward the addressee, as also suggested by the addressing title *Miss* which implies that the speaker and the addressee do not share a close relationship.

(6) *Youse* sad, Miss Lisa? (COHA 1 1873 FIC WhiteSlave)

Similarly to *yous*, *youse* is chiefly found in the dialogues of fictional books and plays. The highest frequencies of occurrence of *youse* are found in two novels by the same author, F. L. Packard: *The Adventures of Jimmie Dale*, published in 1917 (133 out of 187 total instances of *youse* for the years 1910s), and *The White Moll*, published in 1920 (103 out of 218 total instances of *youse* in 1920s). In the former, *youse* is a specific feature to the idiolect of a barkeeper in New York. In the latter, *youse* is employed to represent the idiolect of an occasional criminal whose last name, McGee, suggests Irish origins. In both books, *youse* is called to perform plural as well as singular reference. A total of 78 instances of *youse* in 1920s are equally divided between a fictional book by E. O' Neill, *The Hairy Ape*, and its homonymous play.

As far as the functions are concerned, Table 3 below shows how the frequency of occurrence of the functions of *youse* change decade after decade from the first occurrence in the corpus in 1873 until the 2000s. The frequencies are expressed in number of tokens, on a per-million-word basis, and in percentages of occurrence out of the total number of occurrence of *youse* in a particular decade (see Table 3 below). The main functions that were identified for *youse* in COHA are: singular-reference pragmatic marking of emphasis and/or familiarity and informality (see (7) below), plural marking (see (8) below) and attention-getting i.e., a pragmatic function that comprises the linguistic strategies used by the speaker in order to gain the attention of the interlocutor(s) (cf. Levinson 1983, Lambrecht 1996, Sonnenhauser and Noel-Aziz 2013) (see (9) below).

(7) *Youse*'ll have to pay for your fun yerself, or they'll throw yer out. (COHA 3 1892 FIC EpisodeInVanBibbers)

(8) *Youse two* make me sick! (COHA 44 1917 FIC AdventuresJimmie)

(9) Hey, *youse guys*, take it easy! Wait a moment! (COHA 125 1922 Hairy Ape)

The functions are not all mutually exclusive. Grammatical functions and pragmatic functions can overlap. Certainly, one instance of *youse* in a given context cannot be plural and singular at the same time, but it can certainly be plural, work as an attention-getter and be found in a context in which emphasis is expressed.

As can be observed in Table 3 above, *youse* did not occur as a possessive marker in COHA. By comparing the frequencies of occurrence of the functions of *youse* between decades, it is possible to observe that the function of marking plurality is more frequent than singular-reference *youse* except for the decades 1870s, 1910s, 1920s, 1960s, and 2000s. Obviously, the tendencies displayed by *youse* are susceptible of the number of different texts *youse* occurs in. For example, in the 1870s singular-reference *youse* marking emphasis and/or familiarity and informality is the only function expressed by *youse* because all the occurrences belong to the same text in which *youse* is consistently used with the same function. This means that the tendencies displayed by *youse* cannot be considered representative of the uses of the feature in the decade 1870s. The same holds for the decades 1910s and 1920s in which most of the occurrences of *youse* occur in the novels *The Adventures of Jimmie Dale* (135 out of 187 occurrences of *youse* in 1910s) and *The White Moll* (103 out of 218 occurrences of *youse*) where it is consistently used with singular reference. The occurrences of *youse* in the 1960s are only 9, 6 of which belong to the novel *Hall of Mirrors* in which *youse* is used with singular reference for emphatic purposes. Finally, the only decade in which singular-reference *youse* occurs more frequently than plural-reference *youse* independently of the texts it occurs in is the 2000s.

Table 3. Frequencies of the functions of *youse* in COHA

	PLURAL		**SINGULAR/PRAG.**		**ATTENTION-GETTING/PRAG.**	
	Token (pmw)	**%**	**Token (pmw)**	**%**	**Token (pmw)**	**%**
1870s			1 (0.05)	100		
1890s	9 (0.42)	64.2	5 (0.23)	35.7		
1900s	18 (0.79)	59.9	11 (0.48)	36.6	1 (0.04)	6.6
1910s	60 (0.70)	32.6	103 (1.19)	55.0	3 (0.04)	2.0
1920s	79 (0.70)	36.6	120 (1.05)	55.1	26 (0.23)	12.2
1930s	9 (0.36)	60.0	4 (0.16)	26.6		
1940s	5 (0.20)	62.5	2 (0.08)	25.0	1 (0.04)	12.5
1950s	7 (0.28)	77.7	3 (0.12)	33.3		
1960s	1 (0.04)	11.1	6 (0.25)	66.6		
1970s	7 (0.29)	87.5			1 (0.04)	12.5
1980s	3 (0.11)	75.0	1 (0.03)	25.0		
1990s	2 (0.07)	66.6	1 (0.03)	33.2		
2000s	3 (0.10)	33.3	6 (0.20)	66.6		

The function of attention-getting, which is of pragmatic nature in the same way as singular-reference *youse* is, begins to occur in the texts from the 1900s, reaches its highest frequencies of occurrence in the 1920s (12.2 percent of the occurrences of *youse* in the decade) and becomes less frequent in the decades 1940s and 1970s. Attention-getting *youse* is not particularly frequent in the corpus, which, however, might be related to the fact that the speech act of getting the attention of the interlocutor(s) is probably less likely to occur than other more common ones such as assertions or questions. Nevertheless, the occurrence of attention-getting *youse* suggests a further development in the pragmatics of *youse* as the pronoun is used as a tool for managing the conversational exchange (see section 3 above and 5 below).

The query for *yous* in COHA returned 86 hits, the majority of which are found in 1850s (tokens= 34; 2.12 pmw), which is also the time period of the first recorded instances of *yous* in the corpus, and 1900s (tokens= 15; 0.68 pmw) (see Table 4 below).

The high frequency of *yous* in the 1850s corresponds to the frequent use of the pronoun in a fictional book by W. T. Ashton, *Hatchie Guardian*, where *yous* seems to be a specific feature of the idiolect of an Irish character. *Yous* is also particularly frequent in the 1908 novel *Treasure Valley* by M. E. M. MacGregor, where it occurs 13 times in the dialogues, twice in combination with plural nouns such as *youngsters* and *folks*. It is set in the western area of the United States, an area which lives on farming, therefore *yous* is likely to be one of the features which are called to represent a particular social class dialect. After the 1900s, the occurrences of *yous* in COHA tend to become less and less numerous until the 1970s when its frequencies begin to increase again.

As far as the functions are concerned, *yous* in *Hatchie Guardian* is chiefly used with singular reference (70.5 percent of the occurrences of *yous* in the novel) (see (10) below). The second most frequent function performed by *yous* in *Hatchie Guardian* is the marking of plurality (29.4 percent of the occurrences of *yous* in the novel) (see (11) below). Finally, *yous* was observed to occur once as a possessive pronoun (1.1 percent of the times *yous* occurs in the corpus)

(see (12) below). In the rest of the occurrences (tokens = 52), *yous* is used with plural reference.

(10) I see *yous* are a gintleman, if you don't look jist like one. (COHA 13 1852 FIC Hatchie Guardian)

(11) "How the divil did *yous* tumble in there?" screamed Pat, as two persons approached. (COHA 29 1852 FIC Hatchie Guardian)

(12) And don't spake a loud word, for the life of *yous*. (COHA 27 1852 FIC Hatchie Guardian)

As far as the other back-vowel variants of *yous(e)* are concerned, among the seven alternatives listed in the OED, namely *yooz, you'z, youz, yu(s/z), yowz,* and *youze*, only *yus* occurred twice in the whole COHA. Its two instances are found in a play by R. Owens (1965) *Futz*, and are used to characterize the speech of a farmer, Satz, who uses it with singular reference, although singular *yu* is found as well.

Out of the 6 different frontal-vowel suffixed second person forms, only *yez, yiz,* and *yese* occurred in COHA (see Table 5 below). As can be observed in Table 5 below, the most frequent variant is *yez* (431 occurrences), followed by *yese* (13 occurrences), and *yiz* (4 occurrences). *Yez* was observed to be most frequent in the decades between 1880s and 1900s, especially in the 1900s. The occurrences of *yez* become less frequent after the 1930s (see Table 5 below). It is difficult to identify a tendency in the frequencies of occurrence of *yese* and *yiz*, since the few occurrences in the corpus are divided between two very distant decades: the 4 occurrences of *yiz* are divided between the 1850s and 1960s, whereas of the 13 occurrences of *yese* 3 occurred in the 1870s and 10 in the 1970s (see Table 5 below).

As far as the functions are concerned, *yez* was observed to work as a plural pronoun (see (13) below), singular pronoun with pragmatic function of marking politeness (Brown and Levinson 1987) and emphasis (see (14) below) and possessive determiner (see (15) below).

(13) I tell *yez all*, that no candydate need hereafther apply for the Irish vote. (COHA 6 1864 FIC LifeAdventures)

(14) "Good-mornin' to *yez*, sir," said the visitor. (COHA 9 1894 FIC HonorablePeter)

Table 4. Frequencies of occurrence of *yous* in COHA (tokens (pmw))

	1850s	1860s	1870s	1880s	1890s	1900s	1910s	1920s
Yous	34 (2.12)	0	1 (0.05)	0	2 (0.09)	15 (0.68)	5 (0.22)	4 (0.18)
	1930s	1940s	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s
Yous	1 (0.04)	2 (0.08)	1 (0.04)	0	3 (0.13)	3 (0.12)	6 (0.22)	9 (0.31)

Table 5. Frequencies of *yez, yiz,* and *yese* in COHA (tokens (pmw))

	1850s	1860s	1870s	1880s	1890s	1900s	1910s	1920s	1930s	1940s	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s
Yez		6 (0.35)	6 (0.32)	78 (3.73)	73 (3.44)	152 (6.74)	70 (3.09)	2 (0.07)	31 (1.26)	4 (0.16)	5 (0.20)	2 (0.08)	1 (0.04)	1 (0.03)
Yiz	2 (0.08)											2 (0.08)		
Yese			3 (0.16)										10 (0.42)	

(15) I beg *yez* pardon, boys, for the time I tuk to git your dinner; (COHA 1887 FIC AdriftInWilds)

Plural *yez* represents the totality of the occurrences in the 1860s and the majority of the occurrences in the 1870s (see Table 6 below). Between the decades 1880s-1930s, however, *yez* is mainly used for singular reference with the pragmatic function of expressing politeness and emphasis (see Table 6 below). From the 1920s to the 2000s, *yez* becomes less frequent and is chiefly used as a singular-reference pronoun with pragmatic meaning except for the decade 1950s in which it is mainly used with plural reference (see Table 6 below). Despite the low frequency of occurrence of *yez* in the 1950s (tokens = 5, see Table 6 below), its occurrences are found in four different books, therefore I considered the tendencies of use displayed by *yez* in the decade 1950s reliable. Finally, possessive *yez* occurs only in two decades, namely the 1880s and 1930s.

Overall, the data suggest that over time *yez* has been used as a singular-reference pronoun with the pragmatic function of conveying deference and expressing politeness towards the interlocutor, although in its earliest occurrences in COHA *yez* is chiefly used as a plural second person pronoun.

Concerning the text genres, *yez* is typically found in dialogues of fictional novels in which it is used to characterize the language of either Irish characters or North-American ones belonging to the lower social classes such as farmers, mill overseers, etc. (cf. E. S. Ellis (1887) *Adrift in the Wilds or The Adventures of Two Shipwrecked Boys*, P. L. Ford (1894) *The Honorable Peter Stirling and What People Thought of Him*, B. L. Standish's (1900-1903) trilogy *Frank Merriwell's Reward*, *Frank Merriwell's Chums*, and *Frank Merriwell Down South*. The earliest instance of *yez* in COHA is found in a work by C. Graham, an Irish journalist and soldier, *The Life and Adventures, Songs, and Services, and Speeches of Private Miles O'Reilly* (1864), a fictional book in which *yez* is used exclusively with plural reference.

The form *yiz* occurs only four times in the corpus, equally divided into two distant decades from each other i.e., 1850s and 1960s. The diachronic distance also reflects on the functions of *yiz*: in the 1850s the two instances of *yiz* are used with singular reference and express politeness and emphasis (see (16) below), whereas in the 1960s the two instances of *yiz* are used with plural reference (see (17) below).

(16) "I don't know *yiz*, nor even seen *yiz* in my life, unless it's Misther Ladford, there," (emphasising and stretching the words again,) [...] (COHA 1858 FIC NewPriestInConception)

(17) I'm damn glad you're back. Both of *yiz*. (COHA 1962 FIC Play: GiftTime)

Finally, *yese* was found to occur with plural reference slightly more frequently (66.6 percent of the times it occurs in the corpus) than singular reference (33.3 percent of the times it occurs in the corpus) in the 1870s, whereas it is used with plural reference with the same frequency as a singular-reference in the 1970s. In the decade 1970s, *yese* is found to occur as a possessive pronoun (2 occurrences, 19.8 percent of the total number of occurrences of *yese* in the 1970s) (see (18) below).

(18) I'll not stick' em up an inch fer the loikes o' yese. (COHA 1979 FIC BanditHellsBend)

In sum, *youse* started to become more and more common in English when *yous* was already becoming less frequent (i.e., around 1900s-1910s). The trends in the use of *youse* are the opposite than the ones displayed by *yous*: plural-marking *youse* tends to be the most frequent function expressed by *youse* over time, whereas *yous* is most frequently used as a singular pronoun expressing polite address and as a possessive pronoun. Although less frequently, *youse* as well is used as a singular-reference politeness pronoun, and from the 1920s as an attention-getter. However, *youse* never occurs as a possessive pronoun in the corpora. *Yez* was observed to be particularly frequent between the 1880s and

Table 6. Frequencies of occurrence of the functions of *yez* in COHA (tokens (pmw))

	PLURAL		SINGULAR/PRAG.		POSS DET/PRO	
	Tokens (pmw)	%	Tokens (pmw)	%	Tokens (pmw)	%
1860s	6 (0.35)	100				
1870s	4 (0.21)	66.6	2 (0.10)	33.3		
1880s	32 (1.53)	40.8	42 (2.01)	54.0	4 (0.19)	2.0
1890s	21 (0.99)	28.5	52 (2.45)	55.1		
1900s	46 (2.04)	30.6	106 (4.70)	59.1		
1910s	13 (0.57)	18.3	57 (2.51)	67.3		
1920s			2 (0.07)	100		
1930s	6 (0.24)	18.1	24 (0.98)	72.7	1 (0.04)	3.0
1940s	2 (0.08)	50.0	2 (0.08)	50.0		
1950s	4 (0.16)	80.0	1 (0.04)	20.0		
1960s			1 (0.04)	100		
1970s			1 (0.04)	100		
1980s			1 (0.04)	100		
2000s			1 (0.03)	100		

1910s and displays a similar tendency of use as *yous*. *Yiz* was only found in the decades 1850s and 1960s although displaying rather low frequencies. Finally, *yese* first appears in the 1870s and reaches its peak of frequency in the 1970s. Neither *yese* nor *yiz* display any preference for a singular or plural use.

YOU IN COHA AND CEEB

Although the present paper is mainly concerned with the description of the frequencies and functions of suffixed 2PL forms over time, it is useful to have an idea of how these forms compare to the standard second person pronoun *you*.

In both corpora standard *you* is much more frequent than suffixed 2PL forms. Considering the frequency information in COHA, *you* displays 1142 occurrences in the 1470s and its frequencies rise steadily until the 2000s when it occurs 219611 times. Obviously, the standardness of *you* and, consequently, its acceptability in both spoken and written language make *you* a preferred choice over non-standard forms such as suffixed 2PL forms, as mirrored in the frequencies of occurrence. However, when it comes to the functions standard and non-standard second person forms perform in the language, significant differences emerge. As already shown by AUTHOR (in print), over time standard *you* has developed into a preferred form to identify a singular referent or to speak and write impersonally. On the other hand, suffixed 2PL forms are most often used as plural pronouns and markers of emphasis and colloquiality, thus performing a pragmatic functions that standard *you* generally does not perform (see section 6 below).

GRAMMATICALISATION AND PRAGMATICALISATION OF SUFFIXED SECOND PERSON PRONOUNS?

The functions that suffixed second person pronouns have been performing in English since their first occurrences have much evolved in terms of both grammatical and pragmatic marking. It was observed how suffixed second person pronouns were originally used for three purposes: to mark plurality, as a means of polite address, and to mark possession (see section 4 above). According to the data in the *Corpus of Early English Books*, the first occurrences of suffixed second person pronouns (1600-1700), namely *yous* were chiefly used as plural-marked second person pronouns and possessive determiners or pronouns (see section 4 above). Singular-reference *yous* becomes more and more common during the 1850s, whereas the frequencies of plural *yous* and possessive *yous* are drastically reduced (see section 4 above). This tendency looks like an instance of semantic bleaching, as *yous* shifts from being a plural pronoun to being used for singular reference as well. Semantic bleaching is also suggested by the occurrence of suffixed second person pronouns in double-marked expressions (see (19) below), which suggest that the ambiguity of the number of addresses of the pronoun has to be solved by using other markers of plurality such as *all, guys,* and *both* (see (20-21) below). Indeed, *youse guys* occurs 35 times in the corpus and

youse all 11 times; whereas 2 of a total of 6 occurrences of *yez* are instances of double marking.

(19) Let's move, *youse guys*. (1922 FIC HairyApe)
(20) Ain't dat what *youse all* are – apes? (1922 FIC HairyApe)
(21) *Yez both*, dears, are my glory! (1864 FIC LifeAdventures)

If one also adds the change of grammatical category of plural *yous* into a possessive determiner or possessive pronoun which appears to be an instance of reanalysis, it is possible to hint at grammaticalisation as the process of language change underlying the development of suffixed second person forms. As already mentioned in section 3 above, semantic bleaching and reanalysis are two common processes in grammaticalisation (Bybee *et al.* 1994; Haspelmath 1998; Croft 2003; Langacker 2005), although another fundamental clue to grammaticalised items i.e., phonological reduction, could not be observed for neither *yous* nor the rest of suffixed second person pronouns in general.

On the other hand, the use of *yous* as a singular-reference pronoun does not only represent a matter of semantic bleaching. When looking at the pragmatics of singular-reference *yous*, it was observed that its use is strongly related with the expression of emphasis and deference towards the interlocutor, hence politeness (Brown and Levinson 1987). Thus, to the semantic bleaching of *yous* in terms of number- and/or possessive-marking corresponds the pragmatic enrichment of the pronoun, which might suggest that over time *yous* has been undergoing pragmaticalisation as well (cf. Erman and Kotsinas 1993; Aijmer 1997, and section 3 above for a definition). Pragmaticalisation is also observable in the evolution of the second most common suffixed second person pronoun, *youse*. *Youse* is characterized by the development of a third pragmatic function that *yous* did not display i.e., the function of attention getting (see section 4 above).

Unfortunately, the low frequencies of the other suffixed second person pronouns considered do not constitute enough evidence to further support the interpretation of the results in terms of grammaticalisation and pragmaticalisation.

CONCLUSION

This paper was concerned with giving a historical perspective on the evolution of the forms, frequencies and functions of suffixed second person pronouns. The approach adopted was a corpus-based one: all together, the corpora (CEEB and COHA) covered a period between 1500 and the 2000s and allowed to compare the data across centuries between 1500 and 1800 and across decades between the 1810s and the 2000s.

The first occurrence of suffixed second person pronouns in the corpora is represented by *yous* and dates back to 1518. This is earlier than the earliest occurrence of *yous* recorded in the OED which belongs to the year 1835. The first instance of *youse* dates back to 1873 in the corpora, whereas the earliest instance of *youse* in the OED dates back to 1910. *Yous* and *youse* represent the most frequent suffixed second person pronouns in the corpora. The other suffixed second

person pronouns that occur in the corpus are *yiz, yez,* and *yese* whose first occurrences in the corpora date back to the 1850s, 1860s and 1870s respectively. The other variants indicated in the literature (i.e., *yowz, yooz, youz(e),* and *yeez*) did not occur in the corpora considered.

As far as the frequencies are concerned, it was observed that *yous* occurred more frequently between 1700s and 1850s and began to become less frequent from the 1900s. At the same time, *youse* begins to become more and more frequent from the 1900s, reaches its highest frequencies of occurrence in the 1920s and decreases in frequency towards the end of the 1980s. *Yez* was observed to be particularly frequent between the 1880s and 1910s. *Yiz* was only found in the decades 1850s and 1960s although displaying rather low frequencies. Finally, *yese* first appears in the 1870s and reaches its peak of frequency in the 1970s.

Turning to the functions, suffixed second person pronouns were found to perform up to four different functions: two are of grammatical nature and concern the marking of plurality and possession; the other two are of pragmatic nature and concern the expression of politeness and/or emphasis and attention-getting. Although the literature indicated that suffixed second person pronouns could be used as both plural and singular pronouns, the analysis of corpus data shows how singular-reference uses are actually pragmatic uses which have mainly to do with the expression of deference towards the interlocutor (cf. Politeness Theory, Brown and Levinson 1987). What is not mentioned in the literature is that suffixed second person pronouns are frequently used as possessive determiners and pronouns and have developed into attention-getters, which is in line with their emphatic character.

Different forms display different preferences in terms of functions they tend to express: although *yous* and *youse* are generally considered as spelling variants of the same form in the literature, the analysis reveals that besides being used in different time periods, these two forms display different trends of use. Over the decades, *yous* is mostly used as a singular-reference pronoun that expresses politeness towards the interlocutor as well as a possessive determiner and pronoun. *Youse,* on the other hand, is chiefly used as a plural second person pronoun and less frequently as a singular-reference politeness pronoun. *Youse* is also the only form that occurs as an attention-getter. Among the other forms, *yez* displays a similar tendency of use as *yous,* whereas *yese* and *yiz* do not display any preference for a singular or plural use.

Suffixed second person pronouns display instances of semantic bleaching (from plural to singular; the occurrence in double-marked expressions for number) and reanalysis (from personal pronouns to possessive determiners and/or pronouns) which were interpreted as hints towards the grammaticalisation of the pronouns. On the other hand, the development of pragmatic functions such as the expression of politeness and attention getting were seen as clues to the pragmaticalisation of suffixed second person pronouns.

The text genres in which suffixed second person pronouns occurred most frequently are the dialogues of fictional books and plays, which is in line with their spoken character. Corroborating what the literature suggests about their Irish origins, suffixed second person pronouns were found to characterize the speech of Irish characters, as well as lower class and/or uneducated characters.

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