Second Person Plural Forms in World Englishes

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A Corpus-Based Study

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SUMMARY

Raj: "Did he sound like a criminal?"
Howard: "What do you mean?"
Raje: "I don't know, did he say something like 'you guys' or…"
(The Big Bang Theory)

Second person pronouns are one of the linguistic means that have the greatest impact on the definition of our relationship with the "other". They retain significant political power and influence, establish how close two or more individuals are in a social group, define who is *in* the group or *out* of the group. Yet, not many are aware of the variability of second person pronominal forms and their functions in English. This is probably due to the fact that many socially and pragmatically connotated pronouns belong to informal, spoken language, therefore they cannot be found in reference dictionaries and grammars of English. In fact, the Englishes spoken around the world display many ways of addressing others, all equally important in defining and understanding what kind of relationship holds between the speaker and the interlocutors.

This work is an attempt to provide a detailed evidence-based description of the plural forms of the second person pronoun *you*. The analysis of naturally-occurring linguistic data uncovers the importance of these forms in defining social boundaries and expressing what the speaker thinks about the interlocutor(s). The corpus-based research focuses on the similarities and differences in the use of second person plural forms among twenty varieties of English. The corpus (GloWbe) contains 1.9 billion words collected on the web in 2012. The forms I have analysed are the result of both morphological and analytic strategies of number marking: *yous(e)*, *yi(s/z), yus*, *you guys, you all and y(')all, you two, you three, you four, you ones and y(ou)'uns/yin(s/z), you lot* and other '*you* + plural noun phrase' expressions. The aim of the research is provide an empirically informed description of the forms and functions of second person plural forms (2PL forms henceforth) in contemporary English. This is done by combining the analysis of corpus data with the literature on 2PL forms as well as the relevant theories on language change.

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

List of geographical varieties

US – United States
CA – Canada
GB – Great Britain
IE – Ireland
AU – Australia
NZ – New Zealand
IN – India
LK – Sri Lanka
PK – Pakistan
BD – Bangladesh
SG – Singapore
MY – Malaysia
PH – Philippines
HK – Hong Kong
ZA – South Africa
NG – Nigeria
GH – Ghana
KE – Kenya
TZ – Tanzania
JM – Jamaica

IC = Inner Circle
OC = Outer Circle

Forms and Functions

2PL forms – second person plural forms
You NP-PL – *you* followed by a plural noun phrase
2PL form/PL – plural reference
2PL form/SG – singular reference
2PL form/POSS – marking possession
2PL form/POL – marking politeness

2PL form/CONTR – expressing contrast between speaker and interlocutors
2PL form/AG – attention-getter

Other

G – General section of the corpus
B – Blog section of the corpus

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The main aim of the present work is the description of the forms and functions of second person plural forms in World Englishes by means of a corpus-based analysis. The reason for having a work like this is to be found in the fragmentary and partial descriptions of these forms in reference grammars and dictionaries of English (Jespersen 1933, Leech and Svartvik 1975, Quirk *et al.* 1985, Greenbaum 1991, Biber *et al.* 1999, Huddleston and Pullum 2002) which generally do not provide details about the frequencies and pragmatics of second person plural forms and seldom provide information about the geographical distribution. Even more recent corpus-based linguistic studies on pronouns tend not to mention second person plural pronouns (cf. for example Angermeyer and Singler 2003, Biber *et al*. 1999, Erdmann 1978) and when they do, they focus on the quantitative dimension alone: for example, Quinn (2009) compares the distribution of *y'all* and *youse* in the British, American, Australian and New Zealand varieties of English; Kortmann and Schneider (2004), Szmrecsanyi and Kortmann (2011) focus on the frequencies and distribution of the linguistic features (plural second person forms included) that are common to the world varieties of English, leaving out a qualitative analysis of the functions of the forms besides the mere marking of plurality. Similarly, the research based on the International Corpus of English (ICE) has, apparently, never dealt with the uses of second person plural forms in World Englishes so far: see, for example, the work by Farrell (2020) which studies *ye* and *youse* only in the Irish classroom environment and Deuber (2009) who mentions only the form *all you* in an ICE-corpus based study on Caribbean English.

To the best of my knowledge, the present work is the first attempt to provide a corpus-based description of second person plural forms in World Englishes that combines both the quantitative and qualitative dimensions of analysis in order to obtain a detailed, usage-based description of the forms. The picture obtained from the analysis of corpus data will be used to confirm, disconfirm or refine the already existing definitions of number-marked second person pronouns. This will be done by contributing

with information about their frequencies, distribution, semantics, syntax and pragmatics. The perspective of the present study is mainly synchronic, although diachronic information is involved in the outline of the origins and the development of the frequencies of occurrence of the single forms over time. The significance of the findings is tested against a sample analysis of *you* which aims to verify whether second person plural forms have developed different uses from the standard pronoun. Finally, the investigation of second person plural forms also poses some theoretical questions about the possibility for the forms to be undergoing processes of linguistic change such as grammaticalisation, pragmaticalisation and intersubjectification. This expands the scope of the present work beyond the corpus analysis of synchronic data and seeks to make inferences about the processes of language change based on the historical descriptions of second person forms, as well as the theory of relevant diachronic phenomena. The evolution of second person plural forms is also analysed from the perspective of constructionalisation (Traugott and Trousdale 2014), which represents a holistic approach overcoming the issues of determining where grammaticalisation ends and pragmaticalisation begins.

It is well-known that, historically, English used to distinguish between singular and plural second person pronouns (Quirk and Wrenn 1957). Although the linguistic codified difference between singular and plural reference has always lingered in different forms in the regional dialects of English, it was formally lost in the standard variety during its transition into Modern English (Brunner 1963), which saw the establishment of *you* as a single form for both.

Nowadays, the marking of number on *you* in non-standard varieties is carried out through two main kinds of linguistic strategies: morphological and analytic. In the former case, the pronoun *you* is suffixed by means of the marker for making regular plurals in English, i.e. *-s* (e.g. *book* (SG) > *books* (PL)), generating two main spelling forms, i.e. *yous* and *youse*, and several secondary (less frequent) ones, mainly featuring a reduced root vowel, such as *yiz*, *yez*, etc. In the latter case, *you* is immediately followed by a plural or collective noun or a numerical quantifier which suggests a plural interpretation of the pronoun, as happens for *you guys*, *you all*, *you lot*, *you ones*, *you two*, *you three*, etc. Many other second person plural forms can be found in English pidgins and creoles such as *unu*/*una* in West Caribbean and West African varieties, *wuna* in the Barbados, *aayu/alyu* in Eastern Caribbean varieties (Kortmann and Schneider 2004). However, the present work will not engage with these forms as pidgins and creoles of English are not represented in the corpus (GloWbe).

As already mentioned, number-marked second person pronouns are very often neglected or relegated to secondary-importance features when it comes to including them in grammar descriptions. The corpus-based approach adopted in this work reveals that the phenomenon is, instead, very much alive in spoken language, especially in informal and colloquial contexts. Not only do different varieties of English world-wide display instances of number marking on second person pronouns, but it seems that different varieties have developed different forms, sometimes independently of each other: for example, the Irish *yiz* is the result of the suffixation of *you* whereas the Pittsburghese *yinz* is the result of the grammaticalisation of *you ones* (see section 2.1). In addition, thanks to the analysis of the data collected from the GloWbe corpus, it is found that number-marked second person forms are being used to perform further functions than the mere marking of plurality (e.g. expression of possession). Several of these additional functions do not seem to be accounted for in the literature. For example, *The Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English* (Biber *et al.* 1999: 330), whose focus is on spoken language, describes *yous(e)* as follows:

> The dialectal form *yous* is a second-person plural pronoun, filling the gap left by the absence of number contrast for *you* in modern standard English:
> *I am sick to death of* ***yous*** *–* *all* ***yous*** *do is fight and ruck and fight - do you ever see a house like it Albert?* (conv)

In the definition above, only the plural-marking function of *yous* is mentioned, although *yous*, as well as other second person plural forms in English, can also identify a singular referent, mark possession, and work as pragmatic markers of emphasis, politeness (in-group), contrast (out-group) and as an attention-getter.

The results show that there are two main geographically-related trends in the use of 2PL forms: analytic strategies are preferred in the US, whereas morphological strategies are preferred in the European and Australian varieties of English. As far as the uses are concerned, 2PL forms were observed to perform other functions besides number-marking: they can work as possessive determiners and pronouns, singular-reference emphatic markers, and attention-getting devices. The reanalysis of 2PL forms into markers of possession, the semantic bleaching evident in singular-reference 2PL forms, and the instances of phonological reduction observed in the forms *y(')all* and *yin(s/z)*) are seen as clues to on-going processes of grammaticalisation. On the other hand, the significant involvement of 2PL forms in pragmatically charged contexts (mainly

expressing emphasis and politeness) and the similarity of some attention-getting 2PL forms to pragmatic markers are seen as clues to the pragmaticalisation of 2PL forms.

On a theoretical level, 2PL forms offer some insight on the processes of grammaticalisation, pragmaticalisation and intersubjectification. In particular, an alternative view of intersubjectification as a sub-process of pragmaticalisation is proposed. Pragmaticalisation, in turn, is seen as a distinct, independent process from grammaticalisation. The linguistic evolution of 2PL forms is also described from the perspective of constructionalisation (Traugott and Trousdale 2014), which solves the issues related to the definition of the boundaries between grammaticalisation, pragmaticalisation and intersubjectification. Finally, the strong pragmatic character observed of singular-reference suffixed 2PL forms is used to support the theory of morphopragmatics (Dressler and Barbaresi 2015, 2017).

The work is structured as follows: chapter 2 deals with the definition of second person plural forms, the aims of the present work and the research questions; chapter 3 contains a description of the corpus, the data and the theoretical background; chapters 4-7 are dedicated to the analysis of the eleven forms considered in this study; in chapter 8, the results of the analysis of the single forms are brought together and compared in order to highlight the major tendencies in the linguistic behaviour of second person plural forms in World Englishes. Finally, I will draw some conclusions in chapter 9.

CHAPTER 2

SECOND PERSON PLURAL FORMS: DEFINITION, HISTORY, NON-STANDARDNESS

In this chapter, I will provide a description of the linguistic phenomenon of 2PL forms based on the literature and the historical data on the frequencies of the forms (sections 2.1-5). I will also cover some of the theoretical scholarship I draw on to interpret my results, namely the theories of grammaticalisation, pragmaticalisation, intersubjectification (section 2.6) and constructionalisation (2.7). Finally, I will discuss the aims of the present work together with the research questions (section 2.8).

2.1 2PL forms: a definition

Second person plural forms (2PL forms henceforth) are English forms of the second person that are marked for number. These forms are typical of colloquial, spoken language, therefore their use in more formal contexts or written language is generally frowned upon (cf. section 2.3-4 below).

2PL forms can be grouped into two main categories according to the formal strategy used to mark plurality on *you*: morphological and analytic (see table 1 below). Morphological marking of plurality follows the rule of pluralisation of regular nouns in English, i.e. suffixation by the mark *-s*. This process generates forms such as *yous, youse, yis* (and the spelling variant *yiz*), and *yus*. Analytic strategies of number marking on *you* are those in which *you* is followed by a plural-marking expression, and include subcategories such as *you* NP-PL, *you* + cardinal number*, you + all, you + ones* (see table 1 below). The categories *you* + cardinal number and *you* NP-PL are open ones, since, virtually, new members can be added indefinitely: *you* can be followed by any cardinal number or plural noun phrase. However, the frequencies of occurrence of the expressions *you* + cardinal number and *you* NP-PL in the corpus reveal that only a few forms belonging to these categories are consistently used as plurals of *you*: *you two, you three* and *you four* for the former (cf. chapter 5) and *you guys, you people* and *you lot* for the latter (cf. chapter 7). For this reason, the ones listed are also the

only 2PL forms of the categories that will be analysed and described in this study.

Table 1 – Overview of English 2PL forms

Morphological	Analytic	Morphological + Analytic = double marking
You + *-s: yous, youse, yis, yus*	*You* + cardinal number*: you two, you three, you four, (…)*	*Yous(e) two, two yous(e)*
You + *-z*: *yiz*	*You + all: you all, y'all, yall*	*Yous(e) all*
	You + ones: you ones, y(ou)'uns, yinz	-
	You + NP-PL: *you guys, you people, you lot, (…)*	*Yous(e) guys, yous(e) people, yous(e) lot, (…)*

Finally, a third category of 2PL forms considered in this study is the one resulting from a combination of morphological and analytic marking: in other words, double marked 2PL forms, such as: *yous(e) guys, yous(e) all, yous(e) two, yous(e) bastards,* etc. (table 1 above; see section 4.6).

The list of 2PL forms considered in this study was obtained by combining linguistic studies on the second person in English, reference dictionaries and grammars and informal sources such as the Urban Dictionary (cf. sections 2.3-4, below). In an attempt to include as many spelling variants as possible or other 2PL forms that are not mentioned in the sources cited above, I have performed POS-tagged and wildcard searches in the corpus. For example, I searched through the instances returned for the corpus tag for pronouns, i.e. [pron.ALL], as well as the wildcard search *y** which returned any occurrence starting with *y* and followed by any sequence of zero or more characters. The list obtained by POS-tagged and wildcard search was subsequently checked for instances of 2PL forms. As already mentioned in the introduction, since English-based pidgins and creoles are not represented in the corpus (see section 3.1), other 2PL forms such as *(h)unu/una*, *wuna*, *aayu*/*alyu*, and *y(u)aal* (Kortmann and Schneider 2004) were not analysed.

The label 'forms' was chosen because, despite looking like second person plural pronouns, they do not always work as personal pronouns: in some cases, 2PL forms are used as possessive determiners, possessive pronouns and pragmatic markers (see section 2.4, chapters 3-7). The very label 'pronoun' has long been questioned in the literature because of the conception that comes as a consequence of the etymology of the word (from Latin *pro- nomen*) which implies the notion of 'substitution'. As Wales (1996: 3) observes, the first and second person are particularly resistant to being defined in terms of substitution, since it is not easy to define what they substitute for, given the variability of referents they can indicate. The reference of *I* and *you* shifts all the time in conversation (i.e. personal deixis) in order to indicate the roles that the participants are taking at a particular point in the communicative exchange (i.e. the speaker vs. the addressee/listener).

In fact, even the label '2PL forms' is slightly problematic: although these forms mark plurality most of the time (91.8% of the times they occur in the Glowbe corpus - see sections 3.1-2 for a detailed account of the corpus and the data), they are found to be used with singular reference for emphatic reasons (see sections 2.4, 4.4, chapter 6, chapter 7). 2PL forms may work as prototypical plural pronouns, but, similarly to other personal pronouns (cf. Lakoff 1976, Bosch 1983), also have an evaluative and emotive dimension which is seldom accounted for. This corresponds to the fundamental function 2PL forms perform in creating and managing the speaker-hearer relationship and defining social groups, which challenges the long-standing belief (see, for example, Lyons 1977, Heine and Narrog 2011) that personal deictics carry very little semantic content. The creation and widespread use of 2PL forms over the centuries and across regional dialects witnesses the need for the speaker to express meanings that the standard pronoun *you* cannot express. One of the aims of the work is to uncover and raise awareness on the functions and pragmatic uses of 2PL forms besides the most obvious marking of plurality on the second person (for a complete list of research questions addressed in this book, see section 2.6 below).

As will be shown in more detail in section 2.4 below, 2PL forms have been generally put aside in linguistic studies, relegated to footnotes or ignored altogether because of their non-standard character. Even when their existence in certain English dialects is acknowledged (as in Kortmann *et al.* 2004), the approach is quantitative and fails to recognise or highlight the uses and pragmatic functions of 2PL forms. This represents, in my opinion, a substantial loss which does not do justice to the richness of the system of personal deixis in English. Moreover, as a consequence of overlooking regional features, learners of English as a second language are often, if not

always, provided with a distorted, narrower picture of what the pronominal system in English actually looks like, as Wales (1996: 8) already noted. The general tendency is to teach English as if only the standard variety is worth learning and speaking (cf. 2.5 below), despite the fact that the language that is actually used every day rarely complies with the 'standard', especially when taking into account the inevitable variation across geographical areas and as a consequence of sociolinguistic factors such as age, gender, social class and level of education (Labov 1966, Gumperz and Hymes 1972, Chambers 2002).

This partial perspective generally leads to varieties other than British or American English being mostly or completely ignored. In the specific case, to date, the study of English personal deixis has focused on the standard English of the UK and US (as also observed by Wales 1996: xii), leaving out other regional varieties (such as Australian English, Indian English, etc.) which count millions of speakers but that are not recognised the same linguistic importance as British and American English. After all, even the acknowledgement of the linguistic differences between British and American English is a rather recent affair: the first textbooks which demonstrate how the two varieties differ importantly on all levels of language analysis, such as Kövecses (2000), Trudgill and Hannah (2002) and Tottie (2002), date back to the first years of the 2000s. Certainly, the literature does not lack in linguistic descriptions of the world varieties of English, which are made available by linguists such as Filppula (1999) for Irish English, Guy (1991), Hundt (1998), Peters *et al.* (2009), Warren (2012) for Australian and New Zealand English, Gargesh (2006) for South-Asian Englishes, Bautista and Gonzales (2006) for South-East Asian Englishes, Kamwangamalu (2006) and Melchers and Shaw (2011) for South African Englishes, Schmied (2006) for East African English, Omoniyi (2006) for West African English. However, regional varieties of English still tend to be considered as dialects that 'deviate' from the standard represented by British and American English (cf. 2.5 below), as shown by the fact that they are hardly ever mentioned in reference dictionaries or grammars of English (see section 2.4 for a more detailed account; cf. also Wales (2003)).

2.2 Why study 2PL forms?

The importance of the second person in the pronominal system is certainly known because of its fundamental role in the communicative exchange (Wales 1996). Together with first person *I*, which indicates the speaker, the second person refers to one of the two fundamental roles without which no communicative exchange would take place at all: the addressee. Be it

concrete, physically present or only hypothetical, the addressee in English is indicated by *you,* except for reflexive cases in which one is talking to oneself.

If, on the one hand, the second person is essential for interpersonal communication to take place, on the other, how it is used is also a delicate matter of sociolinguistics and politics (Wales 1996). The way a speaker chooses to address his/her interlocutor(s) will affect their relationship, which will evolve as many times as the forms of address change in order to mirror the speaker's attitude towards the addressee(s) and their relationship itself. A straightforward example of how the use of personal pronouns can shape the speaker-hearer relationship is the dichotomy in-group/out-group marking. Languages possess lexical or grammatical ways to define social groups or categories, which are based on many characteristics such as age, gender, social class, political belief, ethnicity, etc. (Keblusek *et al.* 2017). Membership to a particular social group – or the exclusion from it – is recognised and made explicit through a set of "modes" (in Keblusek *et al.*'s words 2017: 2) of communication such as dialect, slang and accents as well as forms of address. English marks inclusivity in the group with dedicated personal pronouns such as *we* and *us,* but also lexically with vocatives such as *mate, buddy, love*, etc. Throughout this study, it will be shown how the second person *you* combines with other linguistic material, e.g. suffixes and noun phrases, into expressions that are used as in-group or out-group markers, i.e. to create and refer to social categories. As already said in section 2.1 above, at first blush 2PL forms appear to mark only plurality on the second person (e.g. *yous(e), you all, you guys,* etc.). However, a more detailed analysis of their use in context reveals a pragmatic, deeply sociolinguistic value of these forms which seems to be often ignored by grammarians and linguists (such as Jespersen 1933, Leech and Svartvik 1975, Greenbaum 1991, Leech 1992), most likely because of their non-standardness (cf. also sections 2.3-4 below on how 2PL forms are described in the literature).

As Wales (1996, 2003) has often pointed out, there is a gap in the study of the new pronominal forms in the world varieties of English. She states (2003: 1):

> The accepted story also ignores the development of new singular and plural oppositions in pronouns and pronominals of address in regional speech, not only within the British Isles, but also, very importantly, beyond them.

The fact that 2PL forms are such a widespread feature in all the varieties of English considered in this work already reveals something about the

cognitive principle underlying their use: 2PL forms are convenient. They are more informative than the standard pronoun *you*, because they overtly indicate the number of addressees and/or that some pragmatic implication (e.g. emphasis, politeness, contrast) has to be inferred (see section 3.4-6). The linguistically explicit codification of the singular/plural distinction is very common among the languages of the world: according to the data available in the World Atlas of Language Structures (WALS, features 34-35A; accessed November 2019), only 28 out of the 291 languages considered do not mark plurality on nominals, and only 9 out of 250 languages do not mark plurality on personal pronouns.

It is surprising, then, that no account has yet been taken of how 2PL forms constitute a linguistic need, and, therefore, deserve some attention. Indeed, plural forms of the second person are widespread in many other languages and are linked with the expression of politeness, the shaping of the speaker-hearer relationship and, ultimately, social classes (e.g. French *vous*, southern dialectal Italian *voi*, etc.).

The main purpose of this work is, then, to raise awareness about the forms and functions of 2PL forms in the world varieties of English (see section 2.6 below for a complete list of research questions). This will be done by combining the results of a corpus-based analysis of 2PL forms into a linguistic description that accounts for present-day use of 2PL forms in 20 varieties of English (see section 2.8 below on the research questions). On a theoretical level, this will help to provide a thorough picture of the paradigm of the second person in present-day English, which turns out to be much richer than traditionally believed. When going beyond Standard English, i.e. "the idealised variety" (Wales 1996: 13), the frequent statement about pronouns being a stable, 'closed class' of items (see, for example, McArthur 1992) can be easily challenged. Indeed, it will be shown how 2PL forms, which are relatively new features (see section 2.3 below), have soon developed a wide range of pragmatic functions.

Furthermore, studying how 2PL forms are used in present-day English also creates new awareness about both spoken English and the mechanisms of language change: for example, I will show in chapter 9 that a detailed analysis of the pragmatics of 2PL forms provides useful insights into the processes of grammaticalisation, pragmaticalisation and (inter)subjectification of personal deixis.

Providing a more detailed, informed description of 2PL forms is also important when it comes to learning English as a second language. For native speakers, the lack of representation of 2PL forms in reference dictionaries and grammars of English can be easily compensated by the fact that they are constantly in contact with its alternative, 'non-standard' forms

of address in everyday interaction. This is a possibility that is seldom available to learners of English who do not live in anglophone countries. Nonetheless, they should be given the whole story: learners should be constantly reminded of the existence of a standard English, but also that it is only one of the many – equally worthy, albeit not necessarily in the same contexts – varieties of English (cf. 2.5 below), and of the substantial differences between spoken and written language as well as how blurred the concept of 'correct' use of language is.

2.3 Historical remarks on 2PL forms in English

Number-marking on the second person is not new to English. When *you* was established as the only standard way of referring to the addressee(s), second person forms in English expressed number, as well as social distance between the interlocutors and politeness (Strang 1970).

In Old English (5th-11th century), *you* was the plural of the second person in the accusative case (*ye* was the corresponding nominative case), while *thou* and *thee* were the nominative and accusative forms respectively for the singular (Quirk and Wrenn 1955). From the 13th century, during the Norman ruling, *you* began to be used in the literature as a singular pronoun of polite address. As a result of its common occurrence in informal, familiar and private speech, *thou* became the pronoun of the immediate and factual present and expressed deep emotions, intimacy and familiarity in Middle English (Hogg 1992: 153), with *you* establishing as the pronoun of public, fashionable and polite address. The uses of the second person pronouns continued to evolve until the 16th and 17th centuries (Early Modern English) when *you* and *thou* ended up expressing, respectively, formality and informality (Mulholland 1967 and Quirk 1971). In Modern English, *you* and *thou* were still considered the unmarked and marked forms of the second person, but *thou* had also become associated with rhetorical and literary registers thanks to its frequent use as pronoun of address in the English translation of the Bible (Wales 1996: 77). In present-day English, *thou* still survives in many dialects. However, in standard English *thou* is now considered an archaic, dialectal, non-standard form, as shows the fact that it is often excluded from reference grammars of English (Leech and Svartvik 1975, Huddleston 1988, Greenbaum 1991).

Over the centuries, many dialects of English have always continued to express the difference between singular and plural *you* by developing a host of new second person plural forms even when *you* became established as the only second person pronoun with both singular and plural reference. It is in Early Modern English, i.e. at the turn of the 16th century,

that forms such as *you all, you two* and *you ones* begin to appear in texts and transcriptions of dialogues. New second person plural forms continued to be created all the way through the 19th century, some of which have become more common over time (e.g. *you guys*) while others (such as *yous(e)*) have lost ground soon after the 1960s (see section 2.3.1 below).

Some information about the origins and geography of 2PL forms comes from the literature. It is generally agreed upon considering *yous(e)* as a feature brought to English by Irish immigrants. Irish speakers might have simply transferred to English the singular/plural distinction that was already present in Irish Gaelic (*tú* vs *sibb*) (Wright 1961, Grant and Murison 1976, Cassidy 1954, Gramley and Pätzold 1992, Algeo 2001, Corrigan 2010). Therefore *yous(e)* and other suffixed 2PL forms are supposed to be found mainly in areas that were the destination of Irish immigration waves which took place between 17th and early 20th centuries, i.e. Britain, Australia, New Zealand and the US. Concerning *y'all,* although not explicitly supported by any literature or evidence, Crystal (2004: 449) claims that it began to be substantially used around the turn of the 19th century in the southern states of the US by African-Americans. The use of *y'all* seems to have rapidly spread among the southern whites of all social classes and to other regions of the US, as black people moved into northern states after the Civil War. However, similarly to *yous(e), y'all* is considered a feature that was brought to the US by the Irish and Scottish immigrants of the 19th century, as is *you'uns* which was derived from the original *you ones* and became a regional feature of the Pittsburgh area in Pennsylvania and Appalachia (Lynch 2008; Montgomery 2006, cited in Johnstone 2013).

In this section I will try to give a general picture of when the different 2PL forms were first mentioned in English texts by drawing on the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) and three historical corpora: the Helsinki corpus (Old, Middle and Early Modern English), the Corpus of English Dialogues (1560-1760) and the Corpus of Historical American English (1810-2000). I will also try to give a brief account of how the frequency of occurrence of 2PL forms has developed over the centuries in order to have an idea of how the different forms position on the timeline. However, as already said in section 2.5, as the focus of this study is mainly synchronic, I will not attempt to get into detail about the functions and uses of 2PL forms over time. Research into the diachronic development of 2PL forms is, nevertheless, needed and constitutes grounds for further development of the present work.

2.3.1 A history of frequencies of 2PL forms

The three historical corpora were searched for all the 2PL forms considered in this study: *yous(e), you two, you three, you four, you all, y(')all, you guys, you people, you lot, you ones, y(ou)'uns, yin(z/s).* The spelling variants of the forms were obtained with wildcard searches and included in the major categories of 2PL forms according to the strategy of number-marking: for example, suffixed 2PL forms such as *yez* and *yiz* that are much less frequent than the forms *yous* and *youse* were included in the counting of *yous(e)*.

The earliest examples of occurrence of 2PL forms in the OED date back to 1541 for *you ones*, 1560 for *you all* and 1586 for *yous(e)*. The rest of the 2PL forms mentioned are found in texts from the end of the 19th century: *you people* in 1898, *you guys* in 1972, *you lot* in 1943, and the grammaticalised forms of *you ones*, namely *youns* and *yinz* were found in texts from 1912 and 2006 respectively. According to the data in the Helsinki corpus, the first 2PL forms recorded in English are *you all* (frequency in Early Modern English = 36.03 pmw), *you two* (21.52 pmw) and *you ones* (4.59 pmw). Similarly, The Corpus of English Dialogues returned hits for *you all* (52.73 pmw) and *you two* (15.2 pmw) but also *you three* (2.78 pmw).

It is in Modern English that 2PL forms seem to spread considerably. Indeed, instances of all the 2PL forms except *you ones,* and *yinz* were found in COHA. Table 2, below, reports on the 2PL forms ordered by frequency of occurrence together with information about the year of first appearance and the evolution of the frequencies until the 2000s. Although COHA offers data for each decade between 1810 and 2000, I have chosen, for ease of reading, to report the registered frequencies of occurrence in four periods: 1810-1850, 1860-1900, 1910-1950 and 1960-2000. All the generalisations made in regard to this data, however, are only indicative of the actual evolution of the frequencies of occurrence of 2PL forms over time for two main reasons: first, the language sampled in COHA comes from written texts, whereas 2PL forms are typical features of spoken language (see section 2.1 and 2.4); second, the only geographical variety represented is American English.

Table 2 – Frequencies of occurrence of 2PL forms in COHA (pmw)

	Year of first occurrence	1810-1850	1860-1900	1910-1950	1951-2000	Mean
You all	1810	20.86	27.73	25.04	23.20	24.88
You two	1810	1.64	6.94	11.93	12.48	9.61
You guys	1910	0	0	2.57	11.34	4.44
You people	1820	0.09	0.69	2.91	4.15	2.41
Y'all	1870	0	0.04	0.62	3.83	1.44
Youse	1870	0	0.45	3.76	0.26	1.34
You three	1810	0.64	1.07	1.33	1.12	1.12
You four	1840	0.07	0.34	0.39	0.31	0.31
Yous	1850	0.62	0.18	0.11	0.16	0.22
You lot	1930	0	0	0.02	0.17	0.06
You'uns	1870	0	0.10	0.05	0	0.04
You/PL		10.58	13.25	22.12	37.25	23.1

The years of first occurrence of the 2PL forms show that the first instances of 2PL forms are those already found in the Helsinki corpus and Corpus of English Dialogues, i.e. *you all, you two* and *you three*. Only *you ones* did not return any hits in COHA, although it was found in the Helsinki corpus. The oldest 2PL forms are also the most frequent in COHA, except for *you three* that is only the seventh most frequent. These forms are soon followed by the appearance of *you people, you four* and *yous* in the texts of the next forty years. Closer to the turn of the 20th century, contracted forms such as *y'all* (> *you all*) and *you'uns* (> *you ones*) begin to occur in COHA, together with a spelling variant of *yous,* i.e. *youse*. Finally, the newest 2PL forms seem to have appeared in the first half of the 1900s, namely *you guys* and *you lot*.