Innovative 2pl.-pronouns in English and Dutch

'Darwinian' or 'Lamarckian' change?

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Both in English and in Dutch the former 2pl. pronoun has (also) become a 2sg. form, giving rise to so-called 'horizontal homophony' (Cysouw 2003). In contemporary varieties of both languages, however, innovative 2pl. pronouns have caused the homophony to disappear. This paper argues that the mere emergence of these pronouns is not a means of restoring the number distinction in the second person. Their rapid diffusion, however, cán be attributed to their non-ambiguous status (*contra* Croft 2000).

1.   Views on language change: 'Darwinian' vs. 'Lamarckian'

There seems to be a discrepancy in which most work in variationist sociolinguistics and mainstream historical linguistics explain language change. On the one hand, explanations formulated in the variationist tradition highlight the tendency in speakers to accommodate to other speakers' language usage (e.g. in situations of language or dialect contact), thereby creating innovations in a language or taking over variants from prestige varieties. On the other hand, mainstream historical linguistic work suggests a plethora of system-internal, 'functional' factors to be relevant, which come in different formats, ranging from parameter settings over markedness constraints to usage frequencies.[2] Hence it is implied that language change is strongly constrained by the structure of the linguistic system. In both disciplines, there is overwhelming evidence for the relevance of, respectively, social and functional factors in language change.

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2 Of course, the term 'functional' carries different meanings in linguistics. I take it here to be a synonym of 'system-internal'.

Hence an adequate theory of language change needs to incorporate both types of explanations, and ideally it also includes a division of labour between social explanations for language change, and functional ones. One recent attempt to provide such a division of labour comes from Croft (2000), who thereby adopts the classic dialectological insight that different mechanisms and tendencies may be at work in the emergence of variants (or 'actuation') and in the diffusion. This is, for instance, pointed out by Weinreich, Labov & Herzog (1968), who distinguish the actuation problem from the transition problem, the former having to do with emergence, the second with diffusion. Croft's (2000) motivation to adopt this distinction comes from evolutionary biology: in the Darwinian view on biological evolution, different mechanisms indeed apply for the emergence of variation, which is essentially random, and for selection, where a 'survival of the fittest'-principle is at work.

Croft's view on language change centers on linguistic utterances, which are defined as tokens or strings of sounds. Hence the utterance (or 'lingueme') is the linguistic equivalent of the gene in biology. Variation emerges through 'altered replication' of utterances, and selection happens as speakers choose to use certain utterances more often than others. In the precise implementation of his utterance-based evolutionary model of language change, Croft departs quite radically from a Darwinian view on evolution. Building on work in the variationist tradition, most notably on Kroch's (1989) Constant Rate Hypothesis, Croft (2000:166) argues that the emergence of variation is not random, but rather driven by functional factors, while diffusion is exclusively motivated by social factors, which are essentially non-linguistic and hence, at least from a linguistic point of view, random. Similar but less strong claims are found in Milroy (1992:201-202) and Labov (1994:598). This view is very reminiscent of what is known in biology as Lamarckian evolution, i.e. evolution in which the mere emergence of variation is driven by the need to adapt to the environment. The view that language change is analogous to Lamarckian evolution has been defended explicitly, for instance by Mufwene (2002). Interestingly, the opposite position has been defended as well: Haspelmath (1999:193), for instance, claims that language change is essentially Darwinian, although it is acknowledged that the emergence of variants is not due to completely random variation, and hence that "the evolution of linguistic structures is in part Lamarckian". In his view, the main mechanism in language change is a selection mechanism, i.e. the tendency in language users to select user-friendly variants more often than less user-friendly ones. Hence not the actuation but the diffusion of a variant over new cohorts of speakers is due to the fact that this variant is more 'fit' than any competing forms.

Theories such as the ones by Haspelmath (1999) and Croft (2000) build on a long tradition to incorporate findings from evolutionary biology in historical linguistics (cf. Lass 1990, Kirby 1999 for recent contributions), or in other historical sciences, for that matter (cf. Dawkins 1976, Dennett 1995). Of course, many objections could be (and have been) raised both against evolutionary-inspired approaches in linguistics and against an utterance-based implementation. Obviously, there are indeed substantial differences between languages and biological species, and this makes a complete parallel between linguistic and biological evolution highly unlikely (see, e.g., Andersen 2005 for discussion). But it cannot be denied that evolutionary-inspired theories have generated many interesting hypotheses about the nature of language change (see Rosenbach, *to appear* for an overview). Hence the more interesting issue for historical linguistics is the fact that these theories present two clearly articulated views on language change, which are essentially irreconcilable. Rather than aiming at contributing to (the criticism to) evolutionary-inspired theories of language change, then, this paper attempts to show that Croft's (2000) claim about the nature of language change is too strong. In order to do so, one of Croft's example cases will be discussed, and it will be shown that his interpretation of the data is rather unlikely.

The precise data under investigation come from the realm of pronominal morphology in English and Dutch, more particularly from the variation that exists in these languages with respect to expressing second person plural. For instance, while Standard English uses the second person pronoun *you* to refer to the second person plural, in regional varieties a plethora of innovative forms is found, including *y'all*, *youse*, *you guys*, etc. In Dutch, the innovative form *jullie* has become the Standard Dutch 2pl. pronoun, replacing older forms such as *jij* and *gij*, which, like English *you*, have become 2sg. forms. In the dialects, other 2pl. forms are found, such as *jelui*, *gullie*, *gulder*, *gieder*, etc. Interestingly, Croft (2000:69) takes the English data as an indication in favour of the view that actuation is driven by functional pressures, while diffusion is not. In this paper it will be shown that this view on the emergence and diffusion of 2pl. pronouns is certainly not accurate for Dutch. In addition, the present data situation for English seems to suggest that in English too it is diffusion rather than actuation which is driven by functional forces.

2.   The Horizontal Homophony Hierarchy

Both in English and in Dutch the present-day second person singular pronoun is historically a plural form that was also used as a honorific. These plural forms, English *you* and Dutch *jij* and *gij*, subsequently extended their use dramatically,

turning the older singular pronouns *thou* and *du* redundant, and neutralising the distinction between singular and plural (see Howe 1996:170-175 and 220-223 for discussion). Neutralisation of a singular-plural-distinction is termed 'horizontal homophony' (Cysouw 2003:299-300). The English and Dutch pattern of horizontal homophony is cross-linguistically rare: in languages that distinguish between the singular and plural in the first and the third person, ambiguity between the second person singular and plural is close to unattested in the languages of the world (cf. Cysouw's 2003 'Horizontal Homophony Hierarchy').

One explanation for this is that the first and the second person are more central in human thinking, i.e. they are less 'marked' than the third person (cf. the 'person hierarchy', as discussed for instance in Croft 1990:136-139). Hence it seems unnatural that the third person would distinguish categories that are not kept apart in the first and the second person.[3] Another explanation can be that it seems rather problematic in a conversation if one cannot distinguish between reference to first person alone or to first person and another referent (addressee or third person), or between one or more addressees, whereas not being able to distinguish between one or more third persons poses less problems, certainly since unambiguous reference to third persons is often achieved by means of non-pronominal items (nouns, proper names).

Whatever be the explanation, the rarity of the horizontal homophony that is found in English and Dutch indicates that paradigms in which the number distinctions are neutralised in the second person but not elsewhere in the pronominal paradigm are avoided. Hence it comes as no surprise that both in English and Dutch new plural pronouns have developed for the second person plural. In section 3, the English forms will be discussed, in section 4 the Dutch ones.

3.   Innovation in English: y'all, you guys, etc.

3.1. *Attested forms in English*

Apart from a rare number of dialects, the vast majority of the varieties of English have lost the old 2sg. form *thou* (and corresponding forms such as *thee* and *thine*), and have replaced it with the former 2pl. pronoun *you*. Subsequently, in many varieties an innovative 2pl. pronoun was introduced. According to

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3 For instance, third person pronouns often show less case marking than first and second person. An exception is gender, the reason being that the gender of first and second pronoun referents is easily retrievable from the context, while this is not always the case when for the third person.

Kortmann & Szmrecsanyi (2004:1154), the emergence of 2pl. pronouns ranks among the most widespread features in worldwide varieties of English: in an overview of 46 varieties, 34 are mentioned in which a special 2pl. form is used. The 2pl. forms in many of these varieties are discussed in detail by Wright (1997) and Hickey (2002). The relevant forms include the following: *ye*, *youse/yez*, *y'all* and *you'uns/yins*. In addition, a number of forms are used that still are clearly recognizable as compounds, viz. *you all*, *you guys*, *you lot* and *you ... together*.

There is quite some variation as to the etymology of these forms. For instance, *ye* is an originally reduced form of *you* which has assumed 2pl. meaning, while its strong counterpart *you* is used for 2sg. (Hickey 2002:349). The form originated in Irish English varieties, where it is still used, and from where it was diffused, for instance to Newfoundland English. In other varieties, again most notably in Irish, *youse* and *yez* are found, both formed by attaching plural suffix *-s* to, respectively, *you* and *ye*. The oldest attestations of *youse* are from 19th century Irish English; according to Hickey (2002:347, 350-351) the form was probably created in Ireland by non-native speakers of English. Today, *youse* is found in many varieties of English, for instance in Irish-influenced dialects in Scotland and England, and in South Africa, Zimbabwe, Australia and New Zealand, all areas that are believed to be influenced by Irish English (see, again, Wright 1997 and Hickey 2002 for discussion). Two forms commonly associated with the United States are *y'all*, a southern form, and *you'uns* (or *yins*), which is used, for instance, in Pennsylvania. The most obvious etymology for *y'all*, which is thought to be of African American origin, seems to be that it is a reduced form of *you all*, another 2pl. expression which is attested extensively in the southern USA (cf. Lipski 1993:45; see also Hickey 2002:360-361 for arguments). According to Montgomery (1992), however, *y'all* does not derive from *you* and *all*, but from *ye* and *all*, a combination frequently found in Irish sources. A similar story may hold for *you'uns* (< 'you + ones'). *You'uns* is thought to be of American origin (Wright 1997:176), but the tendency to attach *'un* 'one' to pronouns and adjectives was also found in Scots (Hickey 2002:357). Whatever be the precise source, it is believed that both the rise of *y'all* and *you'uns* was stimulated by the presence of a separate 2pl. pronoun *unu* (or *una*) in Gullah, Caribbean Creoles or other varieties of English that were spoken by the black slaves in the south (Wright 1997:175). *Unu/una* is believed to be part of the African substrate in these varieties (cf. the use of *una* in, for instance, Nigerian Pidgin; cf. Faraclas 2004:850). Other forms found in Pidgins and Creoles are *aayu* (< 'all of you'), which is found in the Caribbean (Acetto 2004:446), *yupela* (or the dual *yutupela*, < 'you (+ two) + fellow'), found in Tok Pisin (cf. Hickey 2002:363), and the related forms *iufala*, *iutufala* and *iutrifala*

(from Solomon Islands Pidgin; Jourdan 2004:707), and *youfla* (used next to *you mob* in Aboriginal English; Burridge 2004:1117). Probably, even more forms can be found.

Most innovative forms, then, appear to have emerged in contact situations. This is not to say that there are no interesting forms that have emerged in native varieties. Apart from *you all*, the linguistic literature mentions *you lot*, *you ... together* and *you guys*. Unfortunately, serious linguistic research on the etymology and the history of these forms seems to be lacking, but they appear to be quite young. *You lot* and *you ... together* are British forms (cf. Trudgill 2004:147). *You guys* is used in North America. It may derive from a vocative NP. As the parts of these compound forms are still clearly recognizable, it is probably not accurate to consider them pronouns in their own right, although at least *you guys* has certainly grammaticalised to some extent. One argument for this is the fact that *you guys* has become a gender-neutral form for many North American speakers of English. It is well-known that the use of *you guys* is spreading rapidly over the United States (Maynor 1996, Tillery et al. 2000).

3.2. *The emergence of non-ambiguous 2pl. pronouns*

It is tempting to see the innovative 2pl. form as a result of speakers' attempts to fill the gap in the pronominal paradigm that was caused by the neutralisation of the number distinction in the second person, as is indeed done in Wright (1997) and Hickey (2002). A scenario in which the emergence of these pronouns is motivated by horizontal homophony in the second person would turn these pronouns into examples of functionally motivated innovations, in which the mere actuation of a change is due to a system-internal factor. A similar explanation comes from Croft (2000:69-70). In his view, the innovative 2pl. forms are examples of grammaticalisation, which is said to be typical for all 'grammatical' expressions. Hence the innovation is due to the system internal factor that pronouns have 'grammatical' content. Both explanations suffer from drawbacks, however. Although Croft's explanation seems to explain the variety of innovative 2pl. forms that are found all over the world, it is hard to see why such innovations abound in the second person plural, whereas they are much rarer in all other grammatical persons. Hence it seems hard to imagine that horizontal homophony has played no role whatsoever (cf. Wright 1997 and Hickey 2002). Yet there are at least three arguments against an analysis of the forms discussed in 3.1 as examples of changes motivated by an attempt to fill a gap in the pronominal paradigm.

The first argument against such an analysis would be the conclusion from section 3.1, viz. that the majority of 2pl. forms appears to have originated in a

contact situation. Some of the very widespread forms, e.g. *youse*, *y'all* and *you'uns* are even claimed to have emerged as the result of, in Thomson & Longacre's (1985:205) terms, "a tendency on the part of bilinguals to create patterns in one of their languages which are structurally parallel to those found in the other." Hence native speakers of English seem to manage very well without a special 2pl. pronoun. The second argument is related to this: a considerable time gap is observed between the loss of the old 2sg. form and the rise of the new 2pl. form. Indeed both Wright (1997:181-182) and Hickey (2002:357-359) mention periods in which no attempts are found to disambiguate between the second person singular or plural, neither with innovative pronouns, nor with syntagmatic sequences whatsoever, again indicating that horizontal homophony in the second person is far from a powerful trigger for language change. Finally, a number of strategies to compose a special 2pl. form are also used to form other elements. For instance, apart from *y'all/you all*, forms are found such as *we-all/we-all's*, *who-all* or *what-all* (Howe 1996:174), and even *unuaal* (= 2pl. *unu* + *all*; Wright 1997:175). As for *you'uns*, Wright (1997:176) mentions the existence of *we-uns*. Less grammaticalised forms such as *you guys* or *you lot* co-occur with *them guys* or *them lot*. Crucially, the non-2pl. compounds appear not to have diffused in the way the 2pl. compounds did (see, e.g. Maynor 1996 and Tillery et al. 2000 for recent data concerning the increasing use of 2pl. pronouns in the United States).

Especially the last argument makes it hard to see a causal relationship between horizontal homophony and the mere emergence of innovative 2pl. forms. But it strengthens the argument for a scenario in which the diffusion of these forms is influenced by a functional factor. It seems indeed hard to explain the fact that the 2pl. compounds have spread over much larger cohorts of speakers than the other compounds with *all*, *ones*, etc. without making reference to the fact that the former are very useful from a functional point of view. Hence it seems that the diffusion rather than the actuation of the innovative 2pl. forms is driven by system-internal factors.

4.   Innovation in Dutch: jullie, gieder, etc.

4.1. *Non-ambiguous 2pl. pronouns in Dutch*

In Standard Dutch, as in English, the originally second-person plural pronoun (Middle Dutch *ghy*, nowadays *jij* or *gij* 'you') has replaced the former second-person singular pronoun (in Dutch, *du*). Most dialects behave like Standard Dutch in this respect, although some eastern dialects have indeed preserved *du* as the second person singular pronoun. Many dialects have developed a new second person plural pronoun, such as *jullie*, the Standard Dutch 2pl. pronoun. The

precise etymology of *jullie* is a matter of debate (see Goossens 1994:160-161; Vermaas 2002:43; Barbiers et al. 2005:26 and De Vogelaer 2005:110-112, 137-140 for discussion): the first element may derive either from the 2sg. subject pronoun *jij* or the object pronoun *jou*; the second element from *-lie* (< *liede(n)* 'men') or *lui* (< *lude(n)*, which is in turn a phonological variant of *liede(n)*).

In the dialects, many morphological variants of 2pl. *jullie* are found, such as *gieder*, *gulder*, *julder*, etc. ('you (plural)'). The Syntactic Atlas of Dutch Dialects (Barbiers et al. 2005: map 46b) distinguishes no less than 14 different forms in the Dutch language area, not even taking into account phonological differences. Unlike in English, however, these forms in all likelihood derive from a single source: like *jullie*, they are all original compounds of the 2sg. pronoun combined with the noun *lieden* ('men') or a morphological variant. Most of the variation in the present-day dialects originated later on, as a result of different processes. First, the original compounds have undergone reduction, leading to divergence (e.g., *ghi lieden* > *gullie*, *gulle*). In addition, all dialects have severely reduced the number of case forms of the *lieden*-compounds, but there are differences as to the forms that have been preserved, which has been an important source of divergence as well (e.g. forms such as *gulder* derive from the genitive *ghi lieder*, and differ significantly from former nominatives or accusatives). Diachronic data indicate that the compounds on *lieden* have spread from the southwest (i.e. the Belgian provinces of East and West Flanders). Historical sources provide instances of compounds with *lieden* from this region as early as the 12th century (Van Loey 1958, Goossens 2000), an era in which the southwest was a dominant economic region, and a region where intensive contact with French took place. Strikingly, unlike in English the Dutch compounds start appearing in the sources in a time when the 'old' 2sg. pronoun *du* was still extensively used. Among the oldest instances of compounds on *lieden*, instances are found from all grammatical persons, the first, the second and the third. The third person pronouns resemble the second person in that they were ambiguous between a singular and a plural reading in some grammatical cases in Middle Dutch, and even in present-day Standard Dutch, the subject pronoun *zij* may refer both to the third person singular feminine and the third person plural. The 1pl. instances, however, indicate that the compounds have not originated as a means to disambiguate between the singular and the plural. Indeed in the first person there has never been the slightest chance of ambiguity between the singular pronoun *ik* 'I' and the plural pronoun *wij* 'we'.

Although it is clear that the Dutch compound pronouns have not emerged to disambiguate between the singular and the plural, the precise motive for their emergence remains to be determined. Van Loey (1958) suggests that the compounds are calqued on the French reinforced pronouns *nous autres* 'we' and

vous autres 'you (plural)', which were certainly used by the French-speaking elite in 12th century Flanders. Some support for this hypothesis comes from the Walser German dialects that are spoken in Northern Italy. Dal Negro (2004:161) attests instances of pronouns such as *wir andre* 'we' and *ir andre* 'you (plural)', which are also considered calques of French *nous autres* and *vous autres*. The Walser German situation does not provide a complete parallel with the Flemish one, however, since the second part of the Walser German compounds relates much more obviously to the French pronouns with *autres* than in the Dutch case, and, like in French, a third person plural compound seems to be lacking in Walser German but not in Dutch.

4.2. *Diffusion: evidence from dialect geography*

After having emerged in the southwest, the Dutch compound pronouns must have diffused over the rest of the language area. In the contemporary dialects they are indeed found well outside the borders of the Belgian provinces of East and West Flanders. But the area in which compounds are found, differs for each grammatical person. The compounds are rather widespread in the grammatical persons in which they disambiguate between the singular and the plural, even more so in the second person than in the third person. Their distribution is minimal in the first person, where the traditional, non-compound pronoun *wij* 'we' is never homophonous to the singular pronoun *ik* 'I'. Table 1 provides the number of dialects from the Syntactic Atlas of Dutch Dialects (SAND) in which a compound is found (for maps, see Goossens 1994:128,158,187, and Barbiers et al.: map 48b).

Table 1. *Lieden*-compounds in the SAND-corpus

number of dialects with *lieden*-compound in:	(n=267)
1pl.	93 (= 34,83%)
2pl.	221 (= 82,77%)
3pl.	136 (= 50,94%)

Given that the compounds on *lieden* originate in one single region and simultaneously for the different grammatical persons, the differences in geographical distribution must be attributed to the way in which the compounds have spread over the area, i.e. to the greater or lesser success of the diffusion of these compounds. One factor stimulating a wide distribution is a disambiguating effect, which is observed in the second and third person but not in the first. In addition, the fact that the 2pl. compounds are more widespread than their 3pl. counterparts follows from the Horizontal Homophony Hierarchy (Cysouw

2003): since horizontal homophony is tolerated less easily in second person pronouns than in third person pronouns, there is a more urgent need for a non-homophonous pronoun in the second person. Clearly, then, this is a case where the emergence of the pronominal compounds cannot be understood as the result of a dysfunctionality in the pronominal paradigm. The diffusion, however, is driven by regularities in the structure of the pronominal paradigm rather than by social factors. This statement even holds if the fact is taken into account that Standard Dutch has a compound in 2pl. (viz. *jullie*) but not in 3pl. (cf. *infra* for further argumentation).

A further argument in favour of the Darwinian nature of the change can be found when the geographical distribution of the older 2sg. pronoun *du* is considered. Map 1 shows the distribution of the relevant forms.

Map 1. Distribution of 2sg. *du*, 2pl. *jullie*, and other 2pl. compounds
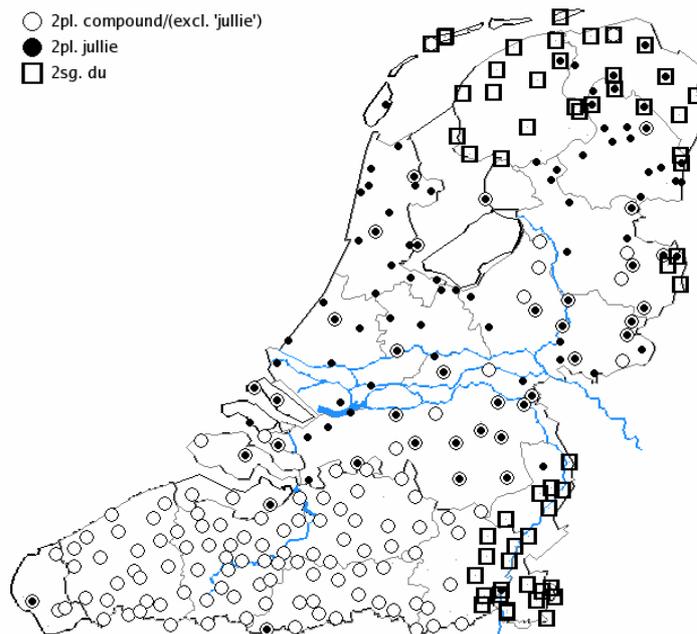
The data on the map are again extracted from the Syntactic Atlas of the Dutch Dialects (Barbiers et al. 2005). The map shows that 2sg. *du* is restricted to the northern and south eastern periphery of the Dutch language area. The 2pl. compounds have diffused over the entire language area, but they are hardly used

in the areas in which 2sg. *du* is kept. There are 12 exceptions to this, in which *du* and a 2pl. compound co-occur. But in 10 of these 12 sampling points, the relevant 2pl. form is *jullie*, making it likely that standardisation is involved (see Goossens 1994:158 for a similar map, from which the same conclusion is drawn). Hence the distribution of the 2pl. compounds over the Dutch language area is strongly determined by the presence or absence of horizontal homophony: almost all dialects in which the erstwhile plural pronoun *jij* or *gij* has replaced 2sg. *du* have adopted a 2pl. compound, whereas almost none of the dialects with *du* have done so.

Map 1 also shows that the 2pl. Standard Dutch form, *jullie*, is of limited importance for the overall distribution of 2pl. compounds: *jullie* is mainly found in the central, Hollandic dialect area on the one hand, and in the north eastern provinces of Drenthe and Groningen on the other hand. In the former area *jullie* is part of the authentic dialects; it co-occurs with, for instance, *zullie*. Hence in these dialects the use of *jullie* cannot be explained as a standardisation effect. In the latter area, the north eastern dialects, standardisation very likely does play a role (cf. the co-occurrence with 2sg. *du*). But even if one would disregard the instances of *jullie* which are due to standardisation, the distributional differences between the compound pronouns in the second and the third person illustrated in table 1 would remain too big to be explained as the result of standardisation. For instance, large areas in the east of the Netherlands have a 2pl. compound at their disposal different from *jullie*, without having a compound form in 3pl. This confirms that the distributional differences between 2pl. compounds and 3pl. compounds relate to the different place of the second and the third person on Cysouw's (2003) Horizontal Homophony Hierarchy (cf. table 1).

5.   Conclusions

Summarising, both in varieties of English and Dutch the number distinction in the second person pronoun has been neutralised and subsequently restored. The current data situation does not allow a complete reconstruction of the relevant diachronic developments, especially because little is known about the factors that have caused the innovative 2pl. pronouns to emerge in English and Dutch. Taking all available data into account, the rise of 2 pl. pronouns in English constitutes a likely instance of a change in which not the emergence but rather the diffusion is driven by their user-friendliness, thereby exemplifying, in Haspelmath's terms, 'Darwinian' change. In the Dutch case, there is even less doubt that such a scenario has taken place. Hence a similar account seems plausible for an obviously very similar development in two closely related languages. The scenario runs as follows: in both languages new 2pl. pronouns

emerge in contact varieties as reinforced pronouns or calques. These innovative pronouns diffuse easily wherever they fill a disturbing gap in the pronominal paradigm, viz. in places with horizontal homophony in the second person. Since the rapid diffusion of the innovative 2pl. pronouns is due to system-internal reasons, the rise of 2pl. pronouns in English and Dutch contradicts Croft's (2000) statement that diffusion is only driven by social forces.

Finally, whatever be the precise scenario in which the innovative 2pl.-pronouns in English and Dutch have diffused, it seems quite clear that in both languages a tendency is observed to comply with the Horizontal Homophony Hierarchy (Cysouw 2003): in both languages a typologically rare type of pronominal ambiguity is avoided. This shows that the Horizontal Homophony Hierarchy is not just a statistical fact about the structure of pronominal paradigms, but that it has diachronic relevance as well.

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