



35 *guys* and *yous(e)* can be found to pre-modify noun phrases and entail a possessive  
36 interpretation (similarly to standard *your*), as in (1a-b) below, or specify the possessor  
37 of a previously mentioned or inferable item (similarly to standard *yours*), as in (1c)  
38 below.

39 (1)

40 a. Wow! Alex *you guys colonial arrogance and mentality* are amazing and astounding.  
41 (LK G)

42 b. If you want to order two cups at the same time, that is *yous choice*. (GB G)

43 c. The choice, as they say, is *yalls*. (IE B)

44 Similarly, forms such as *you all*, *y'all* and *yall* can be found to be marked by the clitic  
45 *-'s'*, which is regularly used to mark possession on noun phrases in English, in order  
46 to create number-marked possessive determiners (see (2) below). In some cases, the  
47 clitic loses the apostrophe and is attached to the pronoun, as in (2b) below, or the form  
48 *yall* is converted into a possessive determiner without carrying any linguistic marking  
49 (see (3) below) as happens with other second person plural forms in (1) above.

50 (2)

51 a. How were all *y'all's weekends*? (US B)

52 b. I realize now that with *yalls comments* that I was for-telling the events here on this  
53 forum. (CA B)

54 (3) It's her life damn it, not yours, deal with *yall own issues*, let her deal with hers [...]  
55 (JM G)

56 In this paper, I will focus on possessive morphology on the plural second person forms  
57 *you all*, *y'all* and *yall*. The research questions I will be addressing concern the  
58 frequency, functions and context of occurrence:

- 59 1. What are the frequencies of possessive *you all/y(')all* in the world varieties of  
60 English? Are there any variety-specific preferences?
- 61 2. Does possession marking occur more frequently on the full form *you all* or the

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<sup>1</sup> English genitive *-'s* is sometimes considered an edge affix, or something halfway between a clitic and an affix. It is not in the scope of the present paper to discuss the grammatical category of genitive *-s*. The reader can refer to, for example, Lowe 2015 for a more detailed account on the issue.

- 62 reduced forms *y'all* and *yall*?
- 63 3. What kind of contexts do possessive *you all(')s/y(')all(')s* tend to appear in?
- 64 4. Is there any semantic preference and/or connotation that is linked with their
- 65 use?
- 66 5. What kind of noun phrases are modified by possessive *you all(')s/y(')all(')s*? Do
- 67 they share any semantic properties?
- 68 6. How do possessive *you all(')s/y(')all(')s* differ from standard *your*?
- 69

70 A corpus-based analysis of the occurrences of possessive *you all/y(')all* shows that

71 these forms are not only used to reflect the plurality of the possessors in a more explicit

72 way than is possible with standard *your*. Possessive *you all/y(')all* tend to be used as

73 in-group/out-group markers as well as tools for expressing the speaker's attitude

74 towards the interlocutors. Moreover, the category of noun phrases pre-modified by

75 possessive *you all/y(')all* comprises items that define the possessors' identities and/or

76 are a product of the possessors' minds. These tendencies of use are not shared by

77 the standard possessive determiner *your*.

78 The next sections in the paper will deal with the corpus, data and methodology

79 (2), some basic information about the forms *you all*, *y'all* and *yall* (3), the frequency,

80 context and noun phrases pre-modified by possessive *you all/y(')all* (4). Finally, I will

81 draw some conclusions in section (5).

82

## 83 **2. Corpus, data and methodology**

84

85 The data was collected from the Corpus of Global Web-based English (GloWbe), a

86 1.9-billion-word snapshot corpus of language collected from the web in 2012

87 (<https://www.english-corpora.org/glowbe/>). I have chosen this corpus for three main

88 reasons: the first, it samples language from 20 different geographical varieties of

89 English<sup>2</sup> enabling comparisons across varieties, which is one of the aims of the present

90 research; the second, its size allows the investigation of less frequent features such

91 as second person plural forms marked for possession; third, the language collected

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<sup>2</sup> The varieties of English sampled in the corpus are arranged according to the countries in which English is a first official language (i.e. UK, USA, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, Australia) and countries in which English is a second official language besides the local first language (i.e. India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Singapore, Malaysia, Philippines, Hong Kong, South Africa, Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania, Jamaica).

92 for the corpus represents a category of language data that is close to spoken  
93 language, yet accessible in written form, i.e. forums, blogs, posts, users' comments on  
94 web pages, etc. This has two main advantages for the present investigation:

95 (1) a higher likelihood of finding data about spoken, informal features such as second  
96 person plural forms and

97 (2) the authenticity of the data, since it is the speakers themselves who produced the  
98 linguistic material instead of it being the result of a transcription process.

99 The dataset of occurrences of possessive *you all*, *y'all* and *yall* was obtained by  
100 simple-querying the corpus six times: once for each combination of the forms *you all*,  
101 *y'all* and *yall* with the clitic 's or -s morpheme, i.e. *you all(')s*, *y'all(')s* and *yall(')s*. The  
102 occurrences obtained were subsequently checked for the instances in which the  
103 combination of *you all/y(')all* with possessive *-(')s* did not represent occurrences of  
104 possessive marking but rather plural double-marking ((3a) below) or informality  
105 marking (see McCumber 2010), as in (3b) below.

106 (3)

107 a. *Y'alls* have your own opinions. (Ghanaian English - GH G)

108 b. Good morning *y'alls*... (South African English - ZA G)

109

110 Looking for instances of possessive marking on *you all*, *y'all* and *yall* automatically  
111 leaves out another category of occurrences: the instances of *you all* that do not  
112 represent the plural of *you* but a combination of *you* and the post-modifier *all* which  
113 entails a universal interpretation of the quantification (see (4) below). When *all* is a  
114 post-modifier of *you*, the pronoun and the universal quantifier *all* represent two  
115 unbound linguistic units, as shown by the fact that *all* can move positions in the  
116 sentence (see (4c) below). In these cases, I expect possession to be marked only on  
117 the pronoun *you*, therefore by means of the standard possessive determiner *your* or  
118 pronoun *yours*.

119 (4)

120 a. My thoughts and best wishes and love are *with you all!* (AU G)

121 b. Thank *you all* for your comments. (ZA B)

122 c. I think it's absolutely amazing what *you* are *all* doing. (NZ G)

123 On the other hand, it is reasonable to assume that genitive –(')s only occurs on *you all*  
124 as plural of *you* as it constitutes a single linguistic constituent in which *you* and *all* are  
125 not separable and the mark –(')s occurs at the end of the constituent (see (3) above).

126 The refined dataset was manually analysed both quantitatively and  
127 qualitatively. Since possessive marking on *you all*, *y'all* and *yall* is not very frequent,  
128 frequencies are expressed both in number of tokens and on a per-million-word basis.  
129 The frequencies of occurrence were compared across varieties of English in order to  
130 obtain information about geographically related linguistic preferences. The qualitative  
131 analysis of the occurrences of possessive *you all*, *y'all* and *yall* involved the analysis  
132 of the grammatical functions (possessive determiners vs. possessive pronouns), the  
133 collocates (3L/3R span and minimum co-occurrence frequency 2), the context of  
134 occurrence, the speaker's attitude and the types of noun phrases pre-modified by  
135 them. The tendencies concerning the speaker's attitude were obtained by counting  
136 how many times possessive *you all*, *y'all* and *yall* occur in either positively or negatively  
137 connotated contexts. Among positive contexts are speech acts that express politeness  
138 or a benevolent attitude towards the interlocutors. Negative contexts include the  
139 instances in which the speaker creates a contrast with their interlocutors by  
140 disagreeing or openly despising them (see section 4.2 below). The instances in which  
141 the speaker does not express their attitude towards the interlocutors were considered  
142 neutral sentences.

143 As far as the types of noun phrases that tend to be pre-modified by possessive  
144 *you all(')s/ y(')all(')s*, the aim is to find out whether there are categories of noun phrases  
145 that are consistently found in co-occurrence with possessive *you all(')s/ y(')all(')s*. The  
146 tendencies found for possessive *you all(')s/ y(')all(')s* will, then, be compared to the  
147 ones displayed by standard *your* and tested statistically in order to verify the  
148 significance of the findings.

149

### 150 **3. *You all* and its reduced forms *y'all* and *yall***

151

152 Using the GloWbe corpus, Author (2020) finds that *you all* is the most common  
153 strategy in English world-wide for marking plurality on the second person pronoun *you*.

154 Plurality is marked by the universal quantifier *all* which also specifies the inclusivity<sup>3</sup> of  
155 the addressees of an utterance (i.e. “all of you, no one excluded”). In the GloWbe  
156 corpus *you all* displays an average frequency of 27.81 per million words ('pmw'  
157 henceforth). Its reduced forms *y'all* and *yall* are overall less frequent in the corpus: the  
158 average frequency of *y'all* is 2.35 pmw and of *yall* is 0.54 pmw.

159 The plural marker *you all* finds its earliest mentions in the literature in 1920s (cf.  
160 Axley 1926-7, Hills 1926-7), although it appears that its origins or semantic values are  
161 not clear (Wales 2003: 15). What is agreed upon, however, is its geographical  
162 distribution: *you all* together with its reduced forms *y'all* and *yall* is strongly associated  
163 with the southern varieties of American English (Wales 2003: 15), the Caribbean and  
164 some North American varieties (Kortmann and Schneider 2011: 224). *You all/y(')all*  
165 forms of address bear a social stigma, probably because these forms (in particular,  
166 *y(')all*) were at first associated with slave language (Wales 2003: 16).

167 In present-day English *you all<sup>4</sup>*, *y'all* and *yall* display different tendencies of use  
168 (Author 2020): while *you all* is mainly used to express inclusiveness and politeness  
169 (respectively 47.4% and 43.2% of the times it occurs in the corpus, see Author 2020  
170 and (5) below), *y'all* and *yall* have drifted apart from the positively connotated tendency  
171 of use of the extended form *you all*. In fact, *y'all* and *yall* have developed a tendency  
172 to occur in negatively connotated contexts in which they express a contrast between  
173 the speaker and the interlocutors (see (6) below).

174 (5)

175 a. Hey and we know it's, short notice, but, we'd love *you all* to come with us. (US G)

176 b. Question...what do *you all* think about buying underwear, pajamas, robes, socks,  
177 etc. (US G)

178 c. Wanted to say hello but *you all* needed to go rest and Ciaran needed his beauty  
179 sleep. (IE G)

180

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<sup>3</sup> See Comrie 1980 for a detailed account of the concept of 'clusivity' and the 'inclusive/exclusive' distinction in personal pronouns.

<sup>4</sup> The study only considered the occurrences of *you all* as plural of *you*. The occurrences of *you* + post-modifier *all* with universal interpretation were excluded from the analysis and the frequency counts as they do not represent instances of plural marking on *you*.

- 181 (6)
- 182 a. No for real, *y'all should* all go find the highest bridge you can find hold hands and  
183 jump. (US G)
- 184 b. *Y'all should* sit you f\*\*\*\*\*g useless hungry asses now. (NG G)
- 185 c. What the hells wrong with *yall*... (IN G)
- 186 d. Honestly *yall* have no taste for talent. (US B)

187

188 According to Author (2020) who analyses the data from the GloWbe corpus, *y'all*  
189 expresses contrast 18.7% of the times it occurs in the corpus and politeness 15.9% of  
190 the times it occurs in the corpus, whereas *yall* expresses contrast 26.2% of the times  
191 it occurs in the corpus and politeness 15.3% of the times it occurs in the corpus, thus  
192 reversing the tendency displayed by *you all*.

193 In principle, therefore, the differences in the uses of the three forms suggest  
194 that they should not be treated as three different orthographic realisations of the same  
195 pronoun. However, given the low frequency of occurrence of possessive marking on  
196 *you all*, *y'all* and *yall* in the corpus, which does not allow for a detailed analysis that  
197 could highlight the differences between the three forms, I have chosen to merge the  
198 occurrences of the three variants together in order to be able to make generalisations  
199 based on the data (except for the section on the frequencies of occurrence, cf. 4.1  
200 below). A future development of this study would need to replicate the analysis on a  
201 larger dataset that would allow cross-variant comparison in order to highlight any  
202 differences in the use of the three possessive pronouns.

203

#### 204 **4. Genitive marking on *you all*, *y'all* and *yall***

205 As already mentioned, the marking of possession on the forms *you all*, *y'all* and *yall* is  
206 carried out by applying the standard rule for marking possession on noun phrases, i.e.  
207 by adding the clitic *-(')s* (Biber *et al.* 1999, Quirk *et al.* 1985, Huddleston and Pullum  
208 2002) (see (7) below).

209

210 (7)

211 a. For *you alls* info; many of the FeD LEOs are experiencing an increasing and  
212 alarming rate of agent suicides. (US G)

213 b. *Y'all's coats* are beautiful and handsome. (CA G)

214 c. And some would look it and say, with no disrespect to *y'all's* job, but would you want  
215 to own a magazine or newspaper today? (AU B)

216 d. I always love to hear *yall's* opinion on things. (PK G)

217 e. Everyday I look forward watching *yalls* daily blogs, they are awesome!!!! (IE G)

218

219 Although genitive marking on *you all*, *y'all* and *yall* in almost all cases generates  
220 possessive determiners, as shown in (7) above, there are a few cases in which it  
221 generates possessive pronouns, as in (8) below. Possessive pronoun *you*  
222 *all(')s/y(')all(')s* represent only 2.23% of the occurrences of *you all(')s/y(')all(')s* in the  
223 corpus.

224 (8)

225 a. The choice, as they say, is *yalls*. (IE B)

226 b. You want to see if my experiences with scientists and science-minded people  
227 diverge or converge with *y'all's*. (US B)

228

229 The conversion of possessive determiner *you all(')s* and *y(')all(')s* into possessive  
230 pronouns may be seen as an instance of reanalysis of grammatical categories:  
231 Langacker (1977: 58), for example, defines 'reanalysis' as a process involving a  
232 change in the structure and/or class of an expression. In the case of *you all(')s* and  
233 *y(')all(')s*, the possessive determiner is reanalysed into a possessive pronoun, thus  
234 changing grammatical category. This might represent a clue to the grammaticalization  
235 of *you all(')s* and *y(')all(')s* which seems to be already suggested by the cases of  
236 omission of the apostrophe and the integration of the clitic –'s into the pronoun itself,  
237 as happens in (7a) above. It may also happen, however, that the speakers use forms  
238 such as *yalls* out of analogy with the standard possessive pronoun *yours*, which can  
239 be seen as being composed of the possessive determiner *your* and the morpheme -s.

240

241



242 **4.1 Frequencies**

243

244 Possessive *you all(')s/y(')all(')s* display an overall frequency of 0.62 pmw in the corpus  
 245 (see Table 1 below). Presumably because their non-standardness and colloquiality  
 246 may lead to avoidance, possessive *you all(')s/y(')all(')s* taken together are expectedly  
 247 much less frequent than standard *your*, which occurs in the corpus 3,257.97 times per  
 248 million words. A relatively small randomised sample of 2000 instances of *your* was  
 249 analysed in order to discern when the standard possessive determiner refers to a  
 250 plural or singular possessor. The result shows that 4.4% (i.e. 143.30 pmw) of the total  
 251 are occurrences of plural *your*, which is still much more frequent than possessive *you*  
 252 *all(')s/y(')all(')s*.

253 The average frequencies of occurrence of possessive *you all(')s/y(')all(')s* in  
 254 World Englishes correspond to 0.051 pmw. Possessive *you all(')s/y(')all(')s* is found in  
 255 14 out of 20 varieties of English (see Table 1 below). American English is the variety  
 256 that displays the highest frequency of occurrence of possessive *you all(')s/y(')all(')s*  
 257 (0.12 pmw) and alone represents the 20.5% of occurrences of genitive *you*  
 258 *all(')s/y(')all(')s* in the whole corpus. This suggests a preference for American English  
 259 to rely on possessive *you all(')s/y(')all(')s* more often than other varieties do, which is  
 260 in line with what is claimed in the literature about the origins and geographical  
 261 distribution of the forms *you all/y(')all* (Axley 1926-7, Hills 1926-7, Wales 2003). On  
 262 the other hand, a very low or nearly non-reliance on possessive *you all/y(')all* is  
 263 displayed by British English (0.014 pmw), Australian English (0.007 pmw) and New  
 264 Zealand English (no instances), which is not surprising given their preference for other  
 265 forms of pluralisation of *you*, such as *yous(e)* (Author 2020).

266

267 Table 1 - Frequency of occurrence of genitive *you all* in World Englishes (GloWbe)

Variety	<b>You all(')s</b>		<b>Y'all(')s</b>		<b>Yall(')s</b>		<b>Total (3 variants)</b>
	# of tokens	Pmw	# of tokens	Pmw	# of tokens	Pmw	<b>Pmw</b>
<i>Australia</i>			1	0.007			<b>0.007</b>
<i>Canada</i>			4	0.031	2	0.015	<b>0.045</b>
<i>Great Britain</i>	1	0.003	4	0.011			<b>0.014</b>
<i>Ireland</i>			2	0.019	2	0.020	<b>0.039</b>
<i>New Zealand</i>							

<i>United States</i>	6	0.015	43	0.111	7	0.018	<b>0.129</b>
<i>Nigeria</i>			3	0.069	1	0.023	<b>0.092</b>
<i>Philippines</i>					1	0.023	<b>0.023</b>
<i>Pakistan</i>			1	0.019			<b>0.019</b>
<i>South Africa</i>			3	0.066			<b>0.066</b>
<i>Kenya</i>			2	0.048			<b>0.048</b>
<i>Tanzania</i>			1	0.028			<b>0.028</b>
<i>Jamaica</i>			2	0.050	2	0.050	<b>0.100</b>
<i>Sri Lanka</i>	1	0.016					<b>0.016</b>
<i>Singapore</i>	1	0.019					<b>0.019</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>0.023</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>0.413</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>0.150</b>	<b>0.627</b>

268

269 Jamaican English displays the second highest frequency of occurrence of *you*  
270 *all(')s/y(')all(')s* (0.101 pmw) after American English (see Table 1 above). This can be  
271 explained, on one side, by the linguistic influence coming from the US and, therefore,  
272 motivated by the geographical vicinity between the two countries; on the other,  
273 Jamaican English is highly influenced by the language varieties of its dominant ethnic  
274 group of African origins (Sullivan 2006). Indeed, some African English varieties in the  
275 corpus also display slightly higher frequencies of occurrence of possessive *you*  
276 *all(')s/y(')all(')s*, namely South Africa (0.066 pmw), Kenya (0.048 pmw) and Tanzania  
277 (0.028 pmw) (see Table 1 above). South-East Asian countries, on the other hand, tend  
278 to not rely on possessive *you all(')s/y(')all(')s*, as shown by the low frequencies of  
279 occurrence in Philippines English (0.023 pmw), Sri Lankan English (0.016 pmw) and  
280 Singapore English (0.019 pmw) as well as the lack of occurrences in other varieties  
281 such as in India, Hong Kong and Malaysia (see Table 1 above).

282 The frequencies of occurrence in Table 1 above also help to answer one of the  
283 research questions concerning the form of possessive marking on *you all(')s/y(')all(')s*,  
284 i.e. whether possessive marking tends to occur more frequently on the full form *you*  
285 *all* or the reduced forms *y(')all*. By comparing the frequencies of occurrence of the  
286 different forms considered (i.e. *you all(')s*, *y'all(')s*, *yall(')s*), it is possible to observe that  
287 possessive marking occurs more frequently on phonologically reduced forms of *you*  
288 *all*: according to the data, the most frequent possessive-marked variant is *y(')all(')s*  
289 (0.413 pmw), followed by *yall(')s* (0.150 pwm, see Table 1 above). *You all* is, thus, the  
290 form that is least frequently marked for possession (0.023 pmw, see Table 1 above).  
291 This tendency possibly responds to a principle of language economy, whereby shorter

292 forms that compact information, such as *y'all(')s*, are cognitively more convenient to  
293 process than longer forms such as *you all(')s* (cf. Zipf 1949, Martinet 1955).

294

## 295 4.2 Context

296 In this section, the context of occurrence of possessive *you all(')s/y(')all(')s* will be  
297 analysed in order to obtain a more detailed picture of the pragmatics of these features.  
298 In particular, I will look at the kind of speech acts *you all(')s/y(')all(')s* are usually  
299 involved in by analysing the collocates as well as the expanded context. Secondly, I  
300 will try to find out whether the contexts of occurrence of *you all(')s/y(')all(')s* are more  
301 frequently positively or negatively connotated. Finally, I will compare the tendencies  
302 displayed by possessive *you all(')s/y(')all(')s* with standard *your* in order to verify the  
303 significance of the findings.

304 Considering the overall low frequency of occurrence of *you all(')s/y(')all(')s* in  
305 the corpus, obtaining information on collocations proved rather challenging. However,  
306 by setting the parameters to 3L/3R span (i.e. 3 words to the left and 3 words to the  
307 right of the node) and minimum co-occurrence frequency 2, I could obtain a list of three  
308 main significant collocates (MI Score<sup>5</sup> > 3 (Hunston 2002)) that are reported in Table  
309 2 below.

310

311 Table 2 – Collocates of *y(')all(')s*

Collocate	MI score	Example
<i>Fault</i>	4.9	(9) below
<i>Thanks</i>	4.5	(10) below
<i>Not</i>	3.7	(11) below

312

313 (9) Always quick to jump and attack without thinking outside the box. Not *y'all's fault*  
314 though. (NG B)

315 (10) My workouts are so much better than even a year ago *thanks to y'all's blogs*. (US  
316 G)

317 (11) I know that is *not y'all's call...* (US B)

318

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<sup>5</sup> The Mutual Information Score (MI) expresses the extent to which an observed frequency of co-occurrence differs from what should be expected. In other words, it measures the strength of association between two words. (Hunston 2002)

319 The noun *fault* occurs with *you all(')s/y(')all(')s* three times, all in the same context that  
 320 is exemplified in (9) above: this can be seen as a negative politeness speech act  
 321 (Brown and Levinson 1987) in which the speaker is trying to absolve the interlocutors  
 322 from a supposed guilt that was previously created. Negative politeness seems to be  
 323 also expressed in example (11) above, in which the speaker is, again, trying to release  
 324 the interlocutors from their responsibility, thus reducing the risk of performing a face-  
 325 threatening act. Finally, in example (10) above, *y'all's* is used in a context of positive  
 326 politeness, in which the speech act of thanking works as an enhancer of the  
 327 interlocutors' face (Brown and Levinson 1987).

328 From the analysis of the three significant collocations of *you all(')s/y(')all(')s*, it  
 329 appears that the plural possessive determiner is used in order to express politeness,  
 330 be it positive (i.e. praise) or negative (i.e. avoid face-threatening acts). However, a  
 331 detailed analysis of the concordances shows that *you all(')s/y(')all(')s* are very  
 332 frequently found in negatively connotated contexts as well (see Table 3 below).

333

334 Table 3 – Connotation of the context of occurrence of *you all(')s* and *y(')all(')s*

Connotation	Speech Act	Tokens	%
Positive	Positive politeness	22	24.4
	Negative politeness	8	8.8
	Other/positive	3	3.3
Negative	Contrast	38	42.2
Neutral	Other/neutral	19	21.1

335

336 Indeed, *you all(')s/y(')all(')s* occur in negatively connotated contexts 42.2% of the times  
 337 they occur in the corpus. The category of negatively connotated context comprises,  
 338 here, those instances in which some sort of contrast between the speaker and the  
 339 addressees is encoded in the meaning of the sentence: it can represent a divergence  
 340 of opinions, a contrast between social categories or groups (e.g. politicians vs. voters,  
 341 employers vs. employees, men vs women, etc.) (see (12a-c) below), or simply express  
 342 a face-threatening act (e.g. command, insult, etc.) (see (12d-e) below).

343

344 (12)

- 345 a. I am going to get out of it and let y'all decide because that is y'all 's job not mine..(US  
 346 B)

- 347 b. Y'all cain't manage education, labour, social services and their allied infrastructures  
 348 as *y'all's public record* over the past 20 years so clearly demonstrates. (ZA G)  
 349 c. To the liberals: there is not slavery in the South, what will be *y'all's excuse* this time?  
 350 (US G)  
 351 d. So quit *y'all's fussing over horses and bayonets* and concentrate on what's  
 352 important! (US G)  
 353 e. I'm not wasting MY time reading all *y'all's dumbass comments!*

354

355 *You all(')s/y(')all(')s* occur in positively connotated contexts slightly less frequently than  
 356 in negatively connotated ones (36.5% of the times they occur in the corpus; see Table  
 357 3 above). Most of the occurrences that belong to this category are expressions of  
 358 positive (see (13a-b) below) and negative politeness (see (13c-d) below), as already  
 359 mentioned above (33% out of 37.6% of occurrences, see Table 3 above).

360

361 (13)

- 362 a. Everyday I look forward watching *yalls daily blogs*, they are awesome! (IE G)  
 363 b. So, ultimately I'm glad I followed *y'all's advice*. (US G)  
 364 c. I'm interested in hearing *y'all's take* on this. (US G)  
 365 d. I'm still making dumb errors, but it's not *y'all's fault*. (US B)

366

367 The difference between the frequencies of occurrence of *you all(')s/y(')all(')s* in  
 368 positively or negatively connotated contexts, however, is not significant ( $p = 0.988$ ).  
 369 Thus, they cannot be classified as strategies of either politeness or impoliteness.

370 Nevertheless, the analysis of a randomised sample of occurrences of *your*  
 371 (2000 occurrences – 100 occurrences per variety of English) shows that possessive  
 372 *you all(')s/y(')all(')s* do display different tendencies of use from *your*: *your* tends to  
 373 occur in neutral contexts 83.6% of the times, whereas possessive *you all(')s/y(')all(')s*  
 374 occur in neutral contexts only 21.1% of the times, yielding a statistically significant  
 375 difference ( $p = 0.0007$ ). In other words, use of possessive *you all(')s/y(')all(')s* is  
 376 marked for attitudinal meaning.

377 What can be concluded by looking at the context of occurrence, therefore, is  
 378 that *you all(')s/y(')all(')s* tend to be used in an intersubjective way (Traugott 2011), i.e.  
 379 as tools for defining roles in conversation and conveying the speaker's attitude towards  
 380 the interlocutors. This is supported by the fact that the majority of the instances of *you*  
 381 *all(')s/y(')all(')s* occur in connotated (either positively or negatively) rather than neutral

382 contexts. Differently from standard *your*, possessive *you all(')s/y(')all(')s* are mostly  
 383 used to express additional pragmatic meaning: they convey politeness, empathy,  
 384 emphasis, and contrast with the interlocutors. As will be shown in the next section,  
 385 possessive *you all(')s/y(')all(')s* also significantly differ from standard *your* in terms of  
 386 categories of noun phrases they pre-modify.

387

### 388 **4.3 Noun phrases pre-modified by possessive *you all(')s/y(')all(')s***

389

390 This section is concerned with the types of noun phrases that are pre-modified by *you*  
 391 *all(')s* and *y(')all(')s*. In other words, I am interested in finding out whether some  
 392 particular categories of nouns tend to occur with possessive *you all(')s/y(')all(')s* more  
 393 often than others. In Table 4 below, the noun phrases are divided into three main  
 394 categories: concrete objects, abstract objects and a variety of other phrases that did  
 395 not fit the first two categories. The numbers in brackets specify how many times the  
 396 possessive determiners and a noun phrase co-occur; when not specified, it means  
 397 that only one co-occurrence was observed.

398

399 Table 4 – Noun phrases pre-modified by *you all(')s* and *y(')all(')s*

Concrete	Head, ugly asses, throats, necks, bones, yellow-belliedness, mouths, stupid butts; Job (3), place, tribe, spelling/pronunciation, coats, neighbourhood, vehicles, word, computers, drinking water
Abstract	Opinion(s) (5), life/lives (4), fault (3), advice (2), mission (2), speeches, relationship, judgment, problem, identity, fussing, point of view, agreement, thoughts, friendship, amusement, take, excuse, call, creative visions, permission, position, conversation, mentality
Other	Comment(s) (6), blogs (4), site (2), conference, show, vote, re-election, weekends, first time, great president, fav moments, provincial meetings, public record, day, info

400

401 The category of concrete objects (Table 4 above) represents 22.1% of the occurrences  
 402 of possessive *you all(')s/y(')all(')s* and includes the items that are most prototypically

403 considered inalienable possession (i.e. body parts, kinship, relations, objects related  
404 with a person's everyday life (Nichols 1988, Roberts 1987, Chappell and McGregor  
405 1996, cited in Siewierska 2004:144)), except for drinking water. However, *you*  
406 *all(')s/y(')all(')s* display a stronger tendency to pre-modify abstract nouns (see Table 4  
407 above) (38.8% of the occurrences of *you all(')s/y(')all(')s* in the corpus). The abstract  
408 nouns pre-modified by *you all(')s/y(')all(')s* all share the characteristic of bearing a  
409 strong relationship with the possessors, as the concepts they refer to are linked with  
410 and define the possessors' identity itself (e.g. *life/lives, mission, relationship, identity,*  
411 *friendship, mentality*) (see Table 4 above). Similarly to concrete nouns such as body  
412 parts, because of their close relationship with the possessors, abstract nouns pre-  
413 modified by *you all(')s/y(')all(')s* as well can be considered inalienable possession.  
414 Even the abstract nouns that do not necessarily shape the identity of the possessors,  
415 such as *opinion(s), fault, advice, judgment, point of view, thoughts*, etc. (see Table 4  
416 above and (14) below), stand in a relationship of cause-effect with the possessors,  
417 who actively and intentionally create their own opinions, judgment, thoughts, etc.

418

419 (14)

- 420 a. When that time comes, *y'all's opinion* would not matter anymore. (NG G)  
421 b. I'm interested in hearing *y'all's take* on this. (US G)  
422 c. But yea I really liked reading this article from *y'all's point of view* because I did not  
423 know it. (US G)  
424 d. That aside, however, *y'all's agreement* on those points is tangential to the pivot i  
425 mentioned. (US B)

426

427 The third category of noun phrases pre-modified by *you all(')s/y(')all(')s* (see Table 4  
428 above, category 'other') includes entities that are less inherent to the possessors. The  
429 most frequent noun phrases belonging to this category are internet-related words such  
430 as *comments, blogs, and site*. Although these can still be seen as 'products' created  
431 by the possessors, their high frequency of occurrence might rather be due to the kind  
432 of language sampled in the corpus which is web-based and, therefore, bound to  
433 display high frequencies of web-related words, rather than being an indicator of a  
434 preference for *you all(')s* and *y(')all(')s* to pre-modify this category of noun phrases.  
435 The rest of the noun phrases belonging to this third category are politics-related (e.g.  
436 *vote, re-election, great president, public record*) or instances of *you all(')s* and *y(')all(')s*

437 used in formulaic phrases, as in (15) below:

438

439 (15)

440 a. I'm glad I made *yall's* day. (TZ G)

441 b. For *you alls* info, many of the Fed LEOs (i.e. border patrol, ICE, etc..) are  
442 experiencing an increasing and alarming rate of agent suicides. (US G)

443

444 Politics-related words might be linked with the social categorisation function performed  
445 by the pronouns *you all/y(')all(')s* which often identify the 'out-group', i.e. the category to  
446 which the speaker does not belong (cf. Keblusek *et al.* 2017 for a detailed account on  
447 in-group and out-group marking). Out-group marking is a structural strategy to political  
448 speech since it needs to constantly delimitate political positions and separate the *we*  
449 from the *them*.

450 When *you all(')s/y(')all(')s* are used in conversational formulas, such as *for you*  
451 *alls info* in (15b) above, the function of the possessive forms seems to be simply  
452 related to the expression of plurality and informality.

453 In order to understand the significance of the tendencies displayed by  
454 possessive *you all(')s/y(')all(')s*, I have analysed a 2000-word sample (100  
455 occurrences for each geographical variety) of randomised occurrences of *your*. The  
456 standard possessive determiner *your* was found to pre-modify prototypically  
457 inalienable concrete entities (such as body parts, kinship relations, etc.) 27.3% of the  
458 times it occurred in the sample. This is a slightly higher frequency of co-occurrence  
459 than the one that was found for *you all(')s/y(')all(')s* co-occurring with the same  
460 category of noun phrases (i.e. 22.1%), which does not, however, represent a  
461 statistically significant difference ( $p = 0.966$ ). *Your* was also found to pre-modify noun  
462 phrases belonging to the category of inalienable abstract entities (i.e. concepts that  
463 are closely related with the identity of the possessors or are created by the possessors  
464 themselves) 12.6% of the times it occurred in the sample. As mentioned earlier,  
465 inalienable abstract entities are the preferred category to be pre-modified by *you*  
466 *all(')s/y(')all(')s* (38.8% of the times they occur in the corpus). By comparing the  
467 categories of noun phrases pre-modified by either standard *your* or *you all(')s* and  
468 *y(')all(')s*, thus, it is possible to observe that the two possessive determiners display  
469 opposite tendencies that are significantly different ( $p = 0.0012$ ).



## 470 5. Conclusion

471 By using the standard rule for marking possession on noun phrases in English, i.e. by  
472 adding -(')s to the plural second person pronouns *you all/y(')all*, the speakers have  
473 found a way of conveying information about the number of possessors. At the same  
474 time, reflecting the non-standard, spoken character of second person plural forms (cf.  
475 Biber *et al.* 1999, Quirk *et al.* 1985, Huddleston and Pullum 2002) such as *you all/y(')all*  
476 from which they derive, possessive *you all(')s/y(')all(')s* also mark informality.

477 The aim of this paper was to find out more information about possessive *you*  
478 *all(')s* and *y(')all(')s* in terms of frequency of occurrence, geographical distribution,  
479 context of occurrence, the connotation in their use and the categories of noun phrases  
480 that tend to be pre-modified by them. The tendencies found for possessive *you*  
481 *all(')s/y(')all(')s* were also compared to standard *your* in order to highlight any  
482 significant difference in the use of the two second person possessives.

483 Differently from *your* which can only work as a possessive determiner, *you*  
484 *all(')s/y(')all(')s* can work as both possessive determiners and possessive pronouns.  
485 Possessive marking tends to occur more frequently on the phonologically reduced  
486 variants *y(')all* than *you all*, possibly responding to a principle of compacting  
487 information for language economy (cf. Zipf 1949, Martinet 1955). Possessive *you*  
488 *all(')s/y(')all(')s* are most common in the US, Jamaica and some African varieties of  
489 English, a distribution that corresponds to geographical, political and ethnic factors.  
490 The context of occurrence of *you all(')s/y(')all(')s* generally bears a connotation that is  
491 slightly more likely to be negative than positive, although an analysis of a larger dataset  
492 than the one used for the present study would be undoubtedly useful in order to verify  
493 whether the preference is significant or not. A first significant difference between  
494 standard *your* and possessive *you all(')s/y(')all(')s* concerns the tendency for the latter  
495 to be mostly used to express additional pragmatic meaning. Possessive *you*  
496 *all(')s/y(')all(')s* convey politeness, empathy, emphasis, and contrast with the  
497 interlocutors. In other words, possessive *you all(')s/y(')all(')s* were found to be used  
498 with a highly intersubjective function that does not characterise standard *your*. The  
499 second significant difference in the use of *you all(')s/y(')all(')s* and standard *your* is the  
500 category of noun phrases they pre-modify: abstract nouns that bear a close  
501 relationship with the possessors in terms of defining the possessors' identity (e.g. *life*,

502 *relationship, mentality, identity*) or that are the direct product of the mind of the  
503 possessors (e.g. *opinion, thoughts, take, point of view*) display a significant co-  
504 occurrence with *you all(')s/y(')all(')s*. This strong, causative bond linking the  
505 possessors and the possessed items was observed to be specific to the use of *you*  
506 *all(')s/y(')all(')s* but not to standard *your*, which most frequently occurs with noun  
507 phrases that indicate inalienable concrete items such as body parts, kinship relations,  
508 etc.. In sum, possessive *you all(')s/y(')all(')s* are used intersubjectively as tools for  
509 expressing the speaker's attitude towards the interlocutors. At the same time, they  
510 point to a strong metonymic bond between the possessors and the possessed item.

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