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Pray in Early Modern English drama

Ursula Lutzky and Jane Demmen

Birmingham City University and Lancaster University

This study seeks to provide new insights into the development and use of *pray* in Early Modern English. The study is based on the sociopragmatically annotated *Drama Corpus*, which combines the drama text samples of three different Early Modern English corpora, comprising a total of 242,561 words from a time span of 1500 to 1760. We investigate the quantitative distribution of the different forms in which *pray* appears during this period, and the influence of the variables of social status and gender. The aim of the current study is consequently to shed more light on the sociopragmatic nature of *pray* forms, and to reach a more profound understanding of their use in the Early Modern English period.

Keywords: discourse marker; Early Modern English; gender; pray; social rank

1. Introduction

In this paper we examine the development and use of *pray* in Early Modern English, using the sociopragmatically annotated *Drama Corpus* (see section 3). The present study thus focuses on a single text type – drama comedy – which, although differing from natural speech in some ways (Short 1996, 173–179), is said to provide constructed “interactive, face-to-face, speech-related data, which has only a minimum of narratorial intervention” (Archer and Culpeper 2003, 43; see also Biber, Conrad and Reppen 1998, 210–211; Culpeper and Kytö 2010). Our aim is to investigate both the diachronic development and social variation in the use of *pray* forms, at a time when they were in the process of grammaticalisation (Busse 2002a, 289).

In their research into speech-related Early Modern English texts, including drama, Culpeper and Kytö (2010, 372–397) note social variation in the use of discourse markers in Early Modern English among speakers of different gender and social rank, although they do not mention forms of the verb *pray*. While Busse (2002a, 187–212) found *pray* to be linked with polite terms of address in Shakespearean drama, our research takes this further by examining *pray* in other contexts and in drama by other Early Modern English playwrights. Brinton (1996, 35) notes that “pragmatic markers are more characteristic of women’s speech than of men’s speech”, though studies of Early Modern English drama which mention *pray* and gender do not show consistent results. Akimoto (2000, 79) found that “men use *pray* more often than women”, whereas Demmen’s (2009, 99–109) analysis showed that female characters in Shakespeare’s plays use *I pray you* more statistically frequently than male characters (coinciding with what Brinton notes, above). However, there were differences in their data: Akimoto’s results were based on drama by Farquhar, dated 1706, whereas Demmen’s were based on drama by Shakespeare, dated slightly earlier (between c. 1589 and 1613). Our analysis, which takes into account the gender and social rank of characters, will help shed new light on these previous findings.

We will also consider the functions of *pray* in our data. *Pray* has been identified as a politeness marker in Early Modern English (Akimoto 2000, 68), particularly in mitigating requests (found by Culpeper and Archer 2008, 74–76) and in reducing imposition and/or increasing deference (according to Jucker 2002, 224). The historical period with which we are concerned was both hierarchical and patriarchal (Nevalainen and Brunberg 2003, 32–38). It is therefore of interest to find out more about the role of the frequently occurring *pray* forms in acknowledging hierarchical relationships between speakers and addressees, by looking at the social ranks of characters in drama who use them. We will also keep in mind that discourse markers may have structural and/or attitudinal functions and that they may operate on several linguistic levels simultaneously (Brinton 1996, 35–40; Aijmer 2002, 38–51; see also Lutzky 2012, 29–41).

In the next section (Section 2) we briefly introduce the concept of discourse markers, their development and functions, and in particular the case of *pray* and its related forms. The *Drama Corpus* is discussed in Section 3. We will present our analysis of the data from the corpus in Sections 4 to 7. In Section 4, a quantitative analysis will account for the diachronic development of the discourse marker *pray* and its variations in form throughout the period studied. Next, in Section 5, we will provide a qualitative analysis of the functions of *pray* in the *Drama Corpus*, with examples. This will be followed

by a sociopragmatic analysis of the influence of social rank (in Section 6) and gender (in Section 7) on the use of *pray* forms. In this sociopragmatic analysis, the interactive nature of discourse markers will be emphasised, in that we take into account not only the social status and gender of the speaker, but also that of the addressee. The important influence of the addressee's gender, in addition to the speaker's gender, was pointed out, for instance, by Biber, Conrad and Reppen (1998, 216) in their diachronic study of the use of emphatics in personal letters of the seventeenth to twentieth centuries by male and female writers. In Section 8 we offer some conclusions.

2. Discourse markers in English and the development of *pray*

The study of discourse markers, not least from a historical perspective, has emerged as an area of growing interest in recent years (Culpeper and Kytö 2010, 367). In this study, we regard discourse markers as “forms with little or no propositional content that are syntactically and semantically optional but have important pragmatic functions on the level of discourse” (Lutzky 2012, 10–11).

Discourse markers typically develop via the grammaticalisation of an open-class word, or indeed a phrase or clause. Essentially, some or all of the propositional content gives way to a function of conveying some aspect of speaker attitude (see e.g. Hopper and Traugott 1993; Brinton 1996, 2006; Andersen 2001). Space does not permit a detailed discussion of the properties of discourse markers here, but see e.g. Brinton (1996, 33–35), Jucker and Ziv (1998, 2–4) and Lutzky (2012, 11–29).

The verb *pray* was first attested in the Middle English period. Traugott and Dasher (2002, 253) state that it is a thirteenth century loanword from the French *preie-*, which superseded Old English *bidd-* (‘pray’) and took on similar performative and epistemic functions (see also Akimoto 2000, 69). *Pray* developed discourse marker functions in the course of the Late Middle English and Early Modern English periods, and followed a grammaticalisation cline which moved from the polite request formula *I pray you/thee* to the reduced forms *I pray* or *prithe* and ultimately to *pray* (Akimoto 2000, 80; see also Iyeiri 2008). This form is marked as archaic in Present-day English. Brinton (2006, 320) sums up its development as follows:

The courtesy markers *pray* (< *I pray you*) and *prithe* (< *I pray thee*) have disjunct-like qualities similar to comment clauses in Modern English; they serve as pragmatic markers of politeness, asserting the sincerity of the speaker (Busse 2002) or they convey “social deictic” meaning and reflect the

speaker's negotiation of the addressee's needs (Traugott and Dasher 2002). Like *I think* forms, they begin as main clauses and develop into parentheticals.

Pray underwent reduction in form, semantic bleaching (of the lexical verb meanings 'to beseech' and 'to ask'; OED s.v. *pray*), strengthening of its new pragmatic functions, and ultimately the routinisation of these functions. *Pray* thus evolved into a discourse marker. However, Brinton (2006, 321) notes that the exact dates of the development of the reduced forms are not certain, pointing out conflicting evidence in the studies of Akimoto (2000) and Kryk-Kastovsky (1998) (and see also Fries 1998).

In their study of requests in Early Modern English drama and courtroom trial proceedings, Culpeper and Archer (2008, 73–76) identify the use of *pray* forms as one of the “support moves” through which a request can be softened or mitigated. However, just over half of their requests featured no support move at all, and they suggest that in the relatively hierarchical social context of the period, speakers of higher social rank in particular would not have routinely needed to mitigate a request (2008, 74). The inclusion of mitigation or politeness in requests, as in the form of a discourse marker like *pray*, is therefore of interest. In our data, dramatists chose to include it in some contexts where it is not a routine social requirement of the period, to indicate some aspect of the relationship between speakers and addressees.

3. Data from the *Drama Corpus*

The genre of drama was found by Culpeper and Kytö (2010, 396) to be a rich source of pragmatic markers. Furthermore, the discourse marker *pray* is noted for its frequency and/or interest in several studies of Shakespeare's plays (Brown and Gilman 1989; Blake 2002; Busse 2002a, 2002b; Demmen 2009), and in other Early Modern English drama (Akimoto 2000). Our analysis of *pray* is based on the *Drama Corpus*, which comprises the drama comedy samples of the *Sociopragmatic Corpus* (1640–1760) (the SPC), the *Penn-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Early Modern English* (the PPCEME), and sub-periods one and two of *A Corpus of English Dialogues, 1560–1760* (the CED). The *Drama Corpus* is a sociopragmatically annotated corpus which is tagged and annotated to denote the social status and gender of both speakers and addressees. It spans the period from 1500–1760 and includes a total of 242,561 words. As noted in Section 1, this corpus comprises only a single text type: drama comedy. Drama is a constructed and fictional genre, but one which is regarded as “speech-related” (see e.g. Archer and Culpeper 2003, 43; Culpeper

and Kytö 2010, 23) or “speech-based” (Biber, Conrad and Reppen 1998, 210), and therefore useful for the study of historical forms of the English language. The *Drama Corpus* includes a range of both male and female characters of different social status.¹

When analysing the *Drama Corpus*, especially for the sociological variable gender, it is essential to remember that the clear majority of its Early Modern English drama samples was composed by men. In fact, the only sample written by a woman is from Mary Manley’s *The Lost Lover*. All of the remaining samples were composed by male authors, apart from one by an anonymous author. Thus the “voices” of the female characters in these plays were mainly created by male writers, and we must remember that their presentation of language use may reflect some gender stereotyping.

While the drama samples of the SPC were already tagged for status and gender, the CED and PPCEME files had to be newly tagged for the *Drama Corpus*, following the conventions of the SPC. As can be seen in example (1) below, each speaker turn was assigned an opening and a closing XML tag which contains, in addition to a speaker and addressee identification tag, information about their social status and gender. If a change in addressee occurred within a single speaker’s turn, a new opening and closing tag was inserted. This allowed the total number of words spoken by and addressed to characters of each status level and gender to be extracted.

- (1) [Hodge] <u speaker=“s” spid=“sHcstevens001” spsex=“m”
spstatus=“5” addressee=“s” adid=“sHcstevens002”
adsex=“f” adstatus=“5”>
Cham agast by the masse, ich wot not what to do
Chad nede blesse me well before ich go them to
Perchance some felon sprit may haunt our house indeed,
And then chwere but a noddie to venter where cha no neede,
</u>
(Stevenson, *Gammar Gvrton’s Nedle*, c. 1553–1563)²

For reasons of consistency, the social status classification developed for the SPC was used in the *Drama Corpus*. When designing this classification, Archer and Culpeper (2003, 47–50) consulted different sources of information, including secondary data, textual evidence (e.g. speaker-identification labels, participant comments, authorial/editorial comments, specific terms of address), and inferential clues (e.g. networks of interaction, patterns of behaviour; see e.g. Archer and Culpeper 2003, 53). The classification comprises six different status levels, numbered 0 to 5, where 0 is the highest rank:

Nobility [status= “0”]
Gentry [status= “1”]
Professional [status= “2”]
Other middling groups [status=“3”]
Ordinary commoners [status=“4”]
Lowest groups [status= “5”]

Having explained the sources of our data, we will now move on to our analyses.

4. Diachronic distribution of *pray* forms

First, we will consider the quantitative distribution of the discourse marker *pray* (all forms taken together). Figure 1 shows the attestation of *pray* in each of the four sub-periods, which span the period from 1500 to 1760. Note that Figure 1 comprises only the discourse marker attestations of *pray* (418 tokens; a further 37 non-discourse marker tokens were excluded), and that the frequencies are weighted per 10,000 words.

FIGURE 1

Figure 1. Sub-period distribution of *pray* (weighted per 10,000 words)

The results, which were found to be statistically significant in a chi-square test at a level of $\alpha=0.05$, indicate that the use of *pray* increased until the third sub-period E3 (1640–1709), when it started to decline. Our results resemble those of Jucker (2002, 214–216), who noted a sharp rise in *pray* attestations in period E3 in the *Helsinki Corpus* samples of fiction, plays and trial proceedings.³ In Jucker’s data, plays were also the only text type in which a rise in *pray* could already be observed in period E2. In their analysis of novels from the Chadwyck-Healey *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* and *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* databases, Tieken-Boon Van Ostade and Cerqueiro (2007, 430–431) found that *pray* increased between their period one (1710–1720) and period two (1800–1810), and then decreased in period three (1890–1900).⁴ In addition, they noticed that “parenthetical *please* appears as a new form in colloquial speech in the early nineteenth century” (2007, 434) and that its use (which according to Chen 1998, 25 is the result of degrammaticalisation) increased between periods two and three, coinciding with the decline in *pray*. While *pray* is still attested as a politeness marker in the nineteenth century, the reduced form *please* (also originally a French borrowing in the Middle English

period) had started to increase and largely replaced *pray* at the beginning of the twentieth century (Akimoto 2000, 79; Traugott and Dasher 2002, 255). Busse (2002b, 31) relates this development to a change in politeness strategies by claiming that “a shift in polite requests has taken place from requests that assert the sincerity of the speaker (*I pray you, beseech you*, etc.) to those that question the willingness of the listener to perform the request (*please*)” (see also Brown and Gilman 1989, 181-182.). The shift from *pray* to *please*, which involves a change in focus from self to other, has therefore been linked to a more general shift from Early Modern English positive politeness to negative politeness and the observation of negative face in Late Modern English and Present-day English (Kopytko 1995, 515; see also Busse 1999). This is, furthermore, reflected in Bax’s (2010, 67) observation that

[t]he current preoccupation with other-face differs materially from historically earlier conceptions. Not only is [...] early modern politeness display primarily a device for self-presentation and self-assertion (with a degree of recognition or enhancement of the addressee’s face as a side effect at best), there is every appearance that earlier on, during the medieval millennium, minding one’s manners was also generally motivated by ‘selfish’ reasons.

Other reasons that have been mentioned for the disappearance of *pray* include: the socio-political context, the secularisation of public life, the religious connotations of *pray*, the loss of *thou* and its stigmatised restriction to the language of the Quakers (see e.g. Kryk-Kastovsky 1998, 52; Busse 1999, 493, 2002b, 27–32; Akimoto 2000, 80). We discuss *please* further in Section 6, when we examine the relationship between social status and the use of *pray*.

Figure 2 shows the distribution of the different forms of *pray* in the *Drama Corpus*. As can be seen, the form *pray* (on its own) is the most frequent attestation in the corpus, followed by *prithe* and *I pray*. In contrast, the more complex forms *pray you*, *pray thee*, *I pray you* and *I pray thee* appear less frequently. Note that in Figure 2 the prototypical spellings of each of the forms of *pray* also include other attested variations in spelling (e.g. *prithe* includes *prythee*, *prethe*, *prethee* and *pr’ythee*).

FIGURE 2

Figure 2. Forms of *pray* (including spelling variations)

In our data, the forms of the discourse marker *pray* appear in all possible positions in a speaker turn, i.e. initially, medially and finally. The most common position of *pray* is within a turn, with half of its attestations appearing in turn-medial position. Of the remaining attestations, about 40%

introduce a turn, whereas only about 10% occur at the end of a turn. *Pray* or *prithe* on their own are not attested at all at the beginning of the Early Modern English period, in sub-period E1 (1500–1569). The use of both forms rises significantly between sub-periods E2 and E3 but subsequently falls in sub-period E4. All of the complex *pray* forms show a rise between sub-periods E1 and E2, but they are no longer attested in the second half of the Early Modern English period, in sub-periods E3 and E4.

5. Functions of *pray* forms

Pray is used as a conventionally polite marker with requests in the *Drama Corpus*. Our findings in this regard thus support the arguments of Kryk-Kastovsky (1998, 49), Akimoto (2000, 68) and Jucker (2002, 224) mentioned in Section 2 above. They indicate that *pray* is used widely, between speakers and addressees of both genders and all social ranks (see also Sections 6 and 7), and that it is multifunctional. In this section, we illustrate some of the main functions of *pray*, using examples from our data.

The parenthetical use of *pray* to introduce a request in the form of an imperative within a turn was a very common structure, accounting for 186 instances out of 418 in the *Drama Corpus*. We use the term “request” in a similar way to Culpeper and Archer (2008, 45), who based their definition on Searle’s (1969) concept of a “directive”, encompassing “both ‘commands’ and ‘requests’ (which can be distinguished by appealing to the power differential between the interlocutors)”. Example (2) below shows a typical use of *pray* in our data, to combine conventional politeness and emphasis of the speaker’s instructions, between a mistress, Lady Thrivewell, and her servant, Closet. Closet has entered a room to announce a visitor to Lady Thrivewell, but cannot now remember his name or profession.

- (2) [Lady Thrivewell] Doe you not know his Name, or Trade?
 [Closet] Yes, I had both eene now, but I have such a
 Head.
 [Lady Thrivewell] If you have lost ’em by the way **pray** go back
 and seeke ’em, or bring you his businesse.
 (Brome, *A Mad Couple Well Match’d*, 1653)

Lady Thrivewell’s social rank is gentry, and her interlocutor is of much lower rank (being a commoner or higher ranking servant), so the direction of use of *pray* in example (2) is downwards. *Pray* politely mitigates Lady Thrivewell’s instruction to the nurse to find out more information about the visitor, hedging

a potential face threat. Despite the difference in their social status, the mistress addresses her servant using the more polite *you*, not *thou*, in example (2).

Similar examples of *pray* mitigating imperative-requests were found between characters of equal social rank, and in an upwards direction in our data. Example (3) below, from the same play, shows an interaction between Lady Thrivewell and a merchant, Mr Saleware, in which both use different *pray* forms. Mr Saleware is again of lower social rank, an ordinary commoner, although of higher status than a servant:

- (3) [Mr Saleware] Craving your pardon Madam, a few words in the behalfe of this poore Kinsewoman of mine, [...] shee has received much injury.
[Lady Thrivewell] How sir **I pray**?
[Mr Saleware] **Pray** Madam read this Letter, weepe not [...]; **pray** read you Madam.
(Brome, *A Mad Couple Well Match'd*, 1653)

In example (3), Lady Thrivewell uses *I pray* following her question to elicit more information from Mr Saleware. Based on Culpeper and Archer's (2008, 76) argument that the most complex form *I pray you* increases the sense of supplication, Lady Thrivewell's inclusion of the *I* pronoun in example (3) shows a higher level of politeness to Mr Saleware, when compared to her use of single *pray* to her servant in example (2). Mr Saleware's repetition of single *pray* strongly reinforces the sincerity of his request to Lady Thrivewell to read the letter he has brought.

Examples (2) and (3) show the instrumentality of *pray* forms in polite encounters. However, *pray* is also used on occasion to augment the sincerity of a speaker's impolite attitude, as shown in example (4). The following exchange takes place at a fair. The character Wasp, a servant with a fairly irritable nature, takes offence when another character, Quarlous, addresses him using a nickname *Numps*.

- (4) [Quarlous] No, I sweare dos't not, Numps: to satisfie you.
[Wasp] Numps? S'blood, you are fine and familiar! how long ha' wee bin acquainted, **I pray you**?
[Quarlous] I thinke it may be remembred, Numps, that? 'twas since morning sure.
(Jonson, *Bartholomew Fayre*, 1631)

Structurally, the use of *I pray you* in example (4) is similar to that of Lady Thrivewell's use of *I pray*, in example (3), in that it conveys the sincerity of the question, cueing a response from the addressee. However, since the rest of

the utterance which precedes it is comprised of impoliteness strategies, *I pray you* reinforces those rather than conveying politeness, as in the previous examples (2) and (3). Wasp's response comprises (in sequence): the repetition of the nickname as a question, an oath, the explicit emphasis of the familiarity with which Quarlous has addressed him, and finally a question indicating they have not known one another long enough for Quarlous to earn the right to use a nickname. The whole utterance conveys his objection to the use of the nickname, the final blow being the sarcastic use of the full *pray* form, which in a polite utterance would convey supplication (Culpeper and Archer 2008, 76). Wasp is in fact of lower social rank than Quarlous, but since he is a typically grumpy and impolite character, his lack of deference is tolerated by other characters as a personality trait where it might otherwise be expected to cause offence. Though *pray* primarily occurs within or at the start of a turn, this is one of several instances in our data in which it occurs at the end of a turn and performs a cueing function, following a question or an imperative.

The next examples involve forms of *prithie*, which has been posited as an in-group identity marker by Brown and Gilman (1989, 183–184). We found that it tends to be used in contexts where speaker and addressee are familiar, and that it often (but not always) has a function of reinforcing social cohesion. In some cases *prithie* does contribute to in-group identity formation, as in example (5) below. In this exchange, Bartley, Wentlow and Ilford are young gentleman acquaintances who are having a somewhat "laddish" conversation about marriage, giving up prostitutes, and their ideal kind of wife. Here, *prethee* is used twice; in both instances it reflects the intimate and informal social context.

- (5) [Bartley] What shall she be, **prethee**?
 [Ilford] No Lady, no widdow, nor no waiting gentlewoman [...]
 [Wentlow] Who wilt thou wed then, **prethee**?
 [Ilford] To any mayd, so she be fayr: To any mayd, so she be
 rich
 To any mayd so she be young: and to any mayde
 [Bartley] So she be honest.
 (Wilkins, *The Miseries of Inforst Mariage*, 1607)

The function of *prithie* is not always related to in-group identity, however, as shown by the following example from our data (6), again between a mistress and her servant (and see also Busse 1999, 489). Lady Hippish enters to find her servant Primrose is upset.

- (6) [Lady Hippish] What's the Matter, Primrose?
 [Primrose] Ah! Madam. Ah! Ah! [Crying.]

[Lady Hippish] What is it? What dost thee mean by this
Blubbering, **pr'ythee**?
(James Miller, *The Mother-in-Law*, 1734)

As Lady Hippish's first question is not successful in eliciting an answer, she reformulates it and adds *pr'ythee*. This comes at the end of the turn and, as in other examples above, reinforces the sincerity of her question, and acts as a cue to prompt a response from the addressee. It is clear from Lady Hippish's role and use of *thee* to address Primrose that she is not building in-group identity, but marking a status difference and familiarity. This exchange contrasts with that in example (2), in which Lady Thriwell addresses her servant using the form *pray* and the more polite pronoun *you*.

Finally, in our data *prithie* occurs with personal names, kinship terms and terms of endearment. Our data also support Busse's (1999, 488) finding that *prithie* often co-occurs with address forms "introduced by positively connotated adjectives". An example is shown in (7).

- (7) [Brisk] I'gad so they will -- well I will, I will, Gad you shall
Command me from the Zenith to the Nadir. -- But the
Deuce take me if I say a good thing till you come. -- But
prithie dear Rogue, make haste, **prithie** make haste, I
shall burst else [...]
[Mellefont] Well, I'll speak but three words, and follow you.
(Congreve, *The Double-Dealer*, 1694)

Example (7) features two male speakers of equal social rank (gentry), and *prithie* introduces an imperative within a turn. Again, it is multifunctional, contributing to address and social deictics, and adding sincerity. Brisk uses *prithie* twice, which emphasises the imperative *make haste*, combining attention-catching and beseeching functions in his address of Mellefont. It also contributes to a sense of familiarity and social cohesion, being used with a term of endearment (*dear*) as well as a jocular term of address (*Rogue*) to Mellefont, indicating a relationship of friendship. Note that Brisk addresses Mellefont with the more polite pronoun *you* not *thee*, in contrast to Lady Hippish and her servant in example (6); Brisk and Mellefont are of the same social rank, whereas Lady Hippish and her servant are not.

Having discussed the quantitative distribution and pragmatic functions of *pray* in the *Drama Corpus*, we will now focus on its use according to social rank, and then gender.

6. Social rank and the use of *pray* forms

Figure 3 presents the distribution of all forms of *pray* (taken together) by social status of the speaker, using the SPC classification (see section 3 above). The frequencies in Figure 3, which were normalised per 10,000 words, show that *pray* is mainly used by the upper ranks: the nobility (group 0) and the gentry (group 1). While *pray* forms are used less frequently by the professionals (group 2) and the ordinary commoners (group 4), the other middling groups (3) and the lowest groups (5) show a rise in attestations. The differences among the six status levels proved to be statistically significant in a chi-square test (at a level of $\alpha=0.05$).

FIGURE 3

Figure 3. Social status distribution of *pray* – speaker

With regard to the social status of the characters using the different forms of *pray* (the range of which was shown in Figure 2, Section 4), our data show no correlation between members of higher ranks using more complex forms and members of lower ranks using more reduced forms. Simple *pray* and *prithie* have the highest density of attestation in the speech of the nobility (group 0) and of the gentry (group 1) (based on weighted frequencies). In contrast, the highest densities of the complex forms *I pray*, *pray you*, *pray thee*, *I pray you* and *I pray thee* are spread over different status level groups. Based on this evidence, our data, consequently, do not support the assumption that *pray* and *prithie* were more colloquial forms compared to the more formal and polite complex forms in Early Modern English (see e.g. Akimoto 2000, 74).⁵ However, other factors like the genre (drama comedy), the situational context, the role of the speaker and the addressee as well as their level of interaction would have to be considered in addition to complexity, when trying to account for the formality of these forms.

The above findings, moreover, indicate that *prithie* might have been interpreted as a monomorphemic word that was no longer associated with the pronoun *thou*. Evidence to support this assumption stems from the fact that *prithie*, which is not attested in sub-period E1, rises between sub-periods E2 and E3 and decreases again in E4, whereas the form *pray thee* is no longer attested at all in E3 and E4 in the corpus. Furthermore, almost 25% of all *prithie* attestations co-occur with the pronoun *you* in the same speaker turn, being addressed to the same addressee. This is a further indication that the discourse function of *prithie* had undergone routinisation (see also Busse 1999, 489–491). Consequently, despite the inclusion of the pronoun *thou* in

the form *prithée* from an etymological point of view, it may not have been perceived as less deferential than the form *pray*.

The fact that *pray* is primarily used by the upper ranks also relates to the observation that it exclusively co-occurs with requests in the *Drama Corpus*. As mentioned in Section 2, Culpeper and Archer (2008, 74) indicate that the scarcity of support moves such as *pray* in their Early Modern English request data underlines the power structure, because of a perceived lack of a need for politeness or mitigation (based on assumed rights and obligations associated with social position and power). Our study does not extend to unsupported requests, which would be more of a direct reflection of the power differential, since it is limited to mitigated requests including *pray* forms. Nevertheless, it is likely that higher-ranking characters would have had more opportunities to make requests (whether mitigated or not), because of their position at the top of the hierarchical structure. Therefore, *pray*, despite its hedging effect, can be seen as a sign of the highest ranks' power over the lower ranks. What is interesting about our data is the fact that all these characters of high social rank use a polite marker in contexts where their high status does not seem to oblige them to do so. We noted earlier in Section 2 that, in dramatic dialogue, such choices are of course imposed by the dramatists in constructing characters in particular ways. It is possible that this is a somewhat idealised or stereotyped representation of the language of polite upper class people (whose patronage of the plays would have been important to the dramatists).

Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg (2003, 154) argue that “many of the concepts and models of present-day sociolinguistics can be applied in diachronic research”, despite the difficulties of working with incomplete historical evidence. It is therefore worth pointing out that the results in Figure 3 also bear a certain resemblance to Labov's (1972, 124–126) findings on hypercorrection, which revealed that lower middle class speakers accommodate to upper middle class groups in their pronunciation of particular sounds like /r/, which function as prestige markers of the highest ranking status groups. As Labov (1966, 151–152.) states, this

cross-over pattern [...] has appeared quite often as a general characteristic of a second-highest status group. Over and over again, we see that in the most formal styles, this group over-shoots the mark of the highest status group. In fact, this quantitative type of “hypercorrection” may be related to one of the fundamental driving forces in linguistic change.

There are also implications for hypercorrection in the use of *please*, whose rise, we noted in Section 4, coincides with the decline in the use of *pray* forms (see Akimoto 2000, 79; Busse 2002b, 28–31; Traugott and Dasher 2002, 255). The form *please* on its own does not appear in the *Drama Corpus* but was only

first attested in the eighteenth century (OED s.v. *please*, adv. and int.). In Early Modern English pragmatic *please* mainly appears in longer constructions of the type *if it please you*, *if you please* and others (compare French *s'il vous plaît*). Examples from our data are given in (8).

- (8) (a) **If it please** your Maiestie to stay with vs, My wyfe shal wayt as
handmaid on your Maiestie
(b) **Will it please** you to sit downe sir.
(c) **doo you please** to sit downe?
(d) Nowe **when you please** let vs go in
(e) **Please you** draw neere
(all examples are from the *Drama Corpus*)

A discussion of the development of parenthetical *please* is beyond the scope of this paper (but see e.g. Chen 1998; Traugott and Dasher 2002; Tieken-Boon Van Ostade and Cerqueiro 2007). We confine our examination to the types of *please* constructions exemplified in (8), used by speakers of different social ranks in the *Drama Corpus*. In total, 115 tokens of *please* (including spelling variations) are attested in the corpus, 58 of which appear in one of the longer constructions from which single *please* has been said to derive. The distribution of these according to social status is given in Figure 4.

FIGURE 4

Figure 4. Social status distribution of *please* - speaker

Figure 4 shows that *please* is used most frequently by the nobility (group 0) and the other middling groups (3). Despite the dip among the gentry (group 1), the social status distribution of *please* resembles that of *pray* in Figure 3. As our data in Figure 4 show, in the Early Modern English period, its use as a pragmatic device by characters in dramatic dialogue is high among the nobility, but the middle and lower ranks are shown as having already adopted this form, with the lower middling ranks even surpassing the nobility in their use of *please*. Consequently, in the case of *please* the claim for hypercorrection is even more pronounced than for *pray*, as the lower-middle class characters go beyond the highest status group in their tendency to use *please*. Considering that the form *please* was introduced into the English language via French in Middle English, it is not surprising that it will initially have been used by the upper classes (who would have been French speakers). Tieken-Boon Van Ostade and Cerqueiro (2007, 439), mentioned in Section 4 above, relate the development of parenthetical *please* as a courtesy marker to sociopragmatic factors, but claim that it was “a change from below, both as

one originating with the lower social orders and as one operating below the level of consciousness". They link the introduction of parenthetical *please* in Late Modern English to the shift from positive to negative politeness and claim that it first appeared in the spoken language of the lower ranks (e.g. servants), subsequently spreading upwards through the frequent use of this negative politeness device in interactions with social superiors (2007, 440). It seems therefore that *please* shifted from being mainly used by the upper ranks after its introduction in Middle English, to being adopted by the middle and lower ranks, who eventually triggered the development of parenthetical *please* in the Late Modern English period.

We return now to *pray* to consider the possible effect of the addressee's social status on its use. Akimoto (2000, 79) argues that the addressee to whom *pray* is directed is important, because the use of *pray* as a courtesy marker is affected by "power/solidarity relationships between speakers" (2000, 82). Figure 5 summarises the direction of use of all *pray* forms in our data between characters of different and equal social rank. The frequencies given are normalised, which is to say that they are weighted to the total number of speech turns in the corpus.

FIGURE 5

Figure 5. Directions of use of *pray* according to social status of speaker and addressee

Our findings above in Figure 3 indicate that *pray* is used more by characters of higher social rank. Therefore, it is not entirely unexpected that Figure 5 shows that *pray* is primarily used in a downward direction, i.e. by a speaker of higher rank when addressing a hearer of lower rank. The second highest use of *pray* is among social equals, and it is least frequently used with an upward direction, i.e. by a speaker of lower social rank when addressing a hearer of higher rank. Split up per sub-period, the results show that the use of *pray* with an upward direction started to decrease earlier (in sub-period E3) than its use among equals or with a downward direction (in E4). In his study of Farquhar's plays, Akimoto (2000, 82) notes that "[a]n inferior often uses *pray* to his superior", but he does not actually quantify the instances of *pray* between characters of different social rank, so no direct comparisons can be made with those in our study.

7. Gender and the use of *pray* forms

The distribution of *pray* forms between speakers of different gender is shown in Figure 6. This shows that men use *pray* about 25% less than women, a difference that was also found to be statistically significant in a chi-square test (at a level of $\alpha=0.05$).

FIGURE 6

Figure 6. Gender distribution of *pray* – speaker

These results fit with Brinton's (1996, 35) observation that women have been said to be more likely to use pragmatic markers than men, mentioned in Section 1, and coincide with Demmen's (2009, 99–109) finding that women in Shakespearean drama comedy use the full form *I pray you* relatively more frequently than men. Our results contrast with Akimoto's (2000, 79) finding that men use *pray* more than women in Farquhar's plays, from a slightly later period. However, the contrast may at least in part be due to a difference in statistical methodology: Akimoto does not say whether his frequencies were weighted according to the total number of words spoken by characters of each gender, as they are in this study and in Demmen's research.

As a chi-square test for association (at a level of $\alpha=0.05$) revealed that the association between speaker and addressee gender was statistically significant, our next step was to take into account the gender of the character to whom the discourse marker *pray* is addressed in the *Drama Corpus*. The results are shown in Figure 7, in which frequencies have again been weighted.

FIGURE 7

Figure 7. Gender distribution of *pray* – speaker and addressee

As can be seen in Figure 7, female characters, who use the majority of the *pray* forms (shown in Figure 6), mainly address them to male characters. Male characters, likewise, predominantly address *pray* discourse markers to fellow male characters. On the other hand, when the addressee is a female character, the distribution of *pray* in male and female speech is almost identical, and about half as frequent as its density of attestation in female-male speech. Consequently, we may conclude from our data in this section that while *pray* occurs more often in female speech, it seems to be associated with male addressees in Early Modern English (at least, as it is represented in drama comedy).

8. Conclusions

Our analyses of data in the *Drama Corpus* in Sections 4 to 7 have revealed some new insights into the use of the discourse marker *pray* and its related forms, as well as adding some confirmation to what has been noted in other research. The results regarding the diachronic development of *pray* (in Section 4) show that its density of attestation increased until the end of the seventeenth century but declined subsequently in our data. Thus, the decline in *pray* coincides with the emergence of parenthetical *please* (see e.g. Akimoto 2000, 79; Traugott and Dasher 2002, 255; Tieken-Boon Van Ostade and Cerqueiro 2007, 434), a shift which has been related to an overall change from positive to negative politeness in the English language (see e.g. Brown and Gilman 1989, 180–181; Kopytko 1995, 515; Busse 1999, 2002b, 31). The most frequent forms in the Early Modern English *Drama Corpus* are the reduced forms *pray* and *prihee*, with the more complex forms appearing less frequently.

Our findings about the functions of *pray* and its related forms (in Section 5) broadly support those of other scholars. It is used as a conventional politeness marker in requests and parenthetically, and has functions in building social cohesion and in moderating the ways characters address one another. Although it is typically employed to add politeness to an utterance, if the rest of the utterance can be interpreted as impolite due to contextual factors, then it is that sense which will be augmented by the use of *pray*, as in example (4).

The results of our sociopragmatic analysis of *pray* in Sections 6 and 7 add to what is known about its role in Early Modern English interactions, specifically in the speech-related genre of drama comedy. Our data in Section 6 clearly show that speakers of higher social rank are more likely to use *pray* than speakers of lower social rank, and particularly to use it towards an addressee of lower social rank. However, this may be because *pray* forms are related to the speech act of requesting (see Culpeper and Archer 2008), opportunities for which are likely to have been greater among the upper social ranks than the lower ones. As stated in Section 2, Culpeper and Archer (2008, 73–76) found that support moves such as *pray* occur in just under half of the requests in their Early Modern English data. Between individual characters (or speakers), the social status of the speaker and/or addressee may therefore have been less important than other factors; for example, the routinisation of *prihee* or the degree of intimacy may have more strongly influenced whether *pray* was used at all, and in what form. There was some evidence for this in the variation between the choice of *pray* and *prihee* between mistresses and their servants (in examples (2) and (6), Section 5). It may be that characters who use forms of *pray* as a support move in making requests are actually playing down

the rights and obligations of their social positions and power, by showing politeness to the lower-ranking addressees.

We noted in Section 6 that the other middling groups and the lowest groups show an increased frequency of *pray* use compared to the professionals and the ordinary commoners, which we interpreted as an indication of hypercorrection. An analysis of the constructions of *please* which later developed into parenthetical *please* in Late Modern English in section 6, revealed that the social status distribution of pragmatic *pray* and *please* is rather similar in Early Modern English. In the case of *please*, however, the lower-middle class speakers supersede even the highest ranks in the marker's density of attestation, which strengthens the claim that this may have been due to hypercorrection (see e.g. Labov 1972). It can be assumed that *please* shifted from being mainly used by the upper ranks after its introduction in Middle English, to being adopted by the middle and lower ranks, who eventually triggered the development of parenthetical *please* in the Late Modern English period. This is also supported by other scholars who discuss the introduction of parenthetical *please* as a change from below (see Tieken-Boon Van Ostade and Cerqueiro 2007, mentioned in Section 6).

Finally, our findings in Section 7 lead us to conclude that while the gender of the speaker is less influential, a male addressee does influence the use of *pray* forms, in both male and female speakers. Our results support the argument of Biber, Conrad and Reppen (1998, 216) regarding the importance of the addressee in language choice by men and women, and the need to consider this in order to account fully for the influence of gender as a social variable when investigating interactional speech. We must point out here that, as stated in Section 3, nearly all the dialogue in the *Drama Corpus* from which our data comes was written by men, and so we cannot discount the possibility that this is a male-oriented, stereotypical perception or representation of the way people of both genders would have used *pray* forms. However, we would concur with the argument of Biber, Conrad and Reppen (1998, 211) that historical drama approximates natural interactional speech, although in an "idealized" form. Our research has added a new and potentially crucial dimension to existing research, which is mainly oriented to the gender of the speaker in evaluating the use of discourse markers.

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1.2. Notes

¹ Compared to the SPC, the *Drama Corpus* spans a longer time period, is bigger in size (the overall word count for the SPC is 219,970) and is restricted to the text type “drama comedy”, not including trial proceedings. For more information on the SPC, see e.g. Archer and Culpeper (2003) or Archer (2005).

² Corpus annotation and coding were removed from the examples cited in this article in order to enhance readability.

³ Note that the *Helsinki Corpus* does not include the sub-period E4 but ends at 1710.

⁴ They analysed data samples from three periods separated by eighty-year intervals.

⁵ Contrary to these findings, Kopytko’s (1988, 50) analysis of the forms of *please* in Shakespearean data showed that “the unreduced forms are, as a rule, used in a polite address of the inferior to the superior member of speech interaction (i.e. *it please(s), if it please, so it please*); on the other hand, the reduced form *pleaseth* is used in the conversation between equals”.

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Authors' addresses

Ursula Lutzky
School of English
City North Campus, Perry Barr
Birmingham City University
Birmingham B42 2SU
United Kingdom

ursula.lutzky@bcu.ac.uk

Jane Demmen
Department of Linguistics and English Language
County South
Lancaster University
Lancaster LA1 4YL
United Kingdom

j.demmen@lancaster.ac.uk

1.5. *About the authors*

Ursula Lutzky is a Lecturer in English Language Studies at Birmingham City University. Her research interests lie in the study of pragmatics, sociolinguistics, historical linguistics and corpus linguistics, and in finding innovative ways in which they can be combined. She has to date focused her research on the study of discourse markers in the history of English, using sociopragmatic corpus annotation to arrive at new insights into their use and distribution.

Jane Demmen is a research student at Lancaster University with interests in historical pragmatics, stylistics and sociolinguistics. She has conducted several corpus-based studies of Early Modern English texts, and is currently undertaking a comparison of the language in Shakespeare's plays and other contemporaneous drama. Previously, she investigated the different stylistic effects created by recurrent word combinations in the dialogue of male and female characters in Shakespeare's plays.