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# The European roots of the present-day Americanism *su merced*

**Abstract:** The allocutive *su merced* ‘His Grace, His Worship’ is currently regarded as a syntactic Americanism. In certain Hispanic American geolects, *su merced* is currently used for second person singular (2P *su merced*) deixis and may denote respect (V address) as well as intimacy (T address). The traditional hypothesis argues that these uses are only found in American Spanish, and that the allocutive *su merced* dates back to the Afro-Hispanic varieties of the colonial period. This chapter establishes, for the first time, the evolutionary connections of the current Americanism with the history of *su merced* usage in Spain. It also explores a new, non-literary database and argues for a new diachronic hypothesis on (2P) *su merced*, from a Pan-Hispanic perspective.

**Keywords:** history of the Spanish language, historical Morphosyntax, T-V distinction, diachrony of *su merced*

## 1 Introduction

Currently, *su merced* is a morphosyntactic feature of American Spanish, especially in the Colombian area (see *Diccionario de americanismos* (DA)). The 21st century, from the pluricentric perspective of the Real Academia Española, has seen two important new developments in the academic status of this second person (2P) form of address. First, the *su merced* form, which Kany had noted as an Americanism (1963: 92–94), has entered into the official grammar (RAE-ASALE 2009: 1257). Second, a new classification of Hispanic forms of address was proposed, which included (2P) *su merced* (Bertolotti 2015; Fontanella de Weinberg 1999 does not mention this form).

Contemporary corpora corroborate the relative currency in America of this address form in certain locations. For instance, CORPES XXI offers American Spanish examples of (2P) *su merced*, which can denote either the maximum (1) or minimum (2) communicative distance:

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- (1) Decidí pasar la alambrada que me encerraba, cuando uno de los hombres de machete que me trajo al campamento apareció. Tenga *su merced* la amabilidad de seguirme. Era un campesino de ojos claros, curtido por el sol. (2003, Venezuela. Pedro Rangel Mora, *El enemigo*, CORPES XXI)

'I decided to cross the fence that enclosed me, when one of the machete-wielding men who brought me to the camp appeared. Would you be so kind as to follow me? He was a light-eyed *peasant*, weathered by the sun.'

- (2) Papá, ¿*su mercé* está seguro de que quiere ir? ¿No es mejor dejarlo para después cuando esté mejor? (2008, Colombia. Triana, *Antología de obras de teatro*, CORPES XXI)

'Dad, are you sure that you want to go? Is it not better to leave it until later when you are better?'

What are the historical roots of these American Spanish uses of (2P) *su merced* as a respectful (1) and intimate (2) form of address? Currently there is no complete answer to this question, given that a thorough history of (2P) *su merced* in European and American Spanish remains unfinished. However, it will be shown that the roots of this current Americanism can be found in European Spanish. In fact, (2P) *su merced* as a respectful form of social address must have been used in the Spanish spoken on the Iberian Peninsula, but today survives only in Hispanic America. The roots of example (1) in today's Venezuela can be traced back to Spain. By contrast, the use of (2P) *su merced* in the family context can be shown to be a particular evolutionary development of Hispanic America. The Colombian example (2), in which a daughter addresses her father as *su mercé*, shows a current drift in this use in Hispanic America towards intimacy. In this regard, *su merced* appears to show a dual function in Hispanic America, analogous to the phenomenon of *ustedeo* (the overarching use of *usted* as a single pronoun of respect and intimacy) in Bogota or Costa Rica. The retrodating of this dual function, however, has yet to be determined. Accordingly, today's scientific perspective does not precisely clarify the question as to when (2P) *su merced* began to be used in Hispanic America as an intimate form of address.

Chronologically, the Spanish American history of (2P) *su merced* is quite imprecise, given that hardly any testimonial evidence has been found of this address form in the colonial era. Previous studies have largely focused on a bicentennial history of the phenomenon, based on literary sources from the 19th and 20th centuries. Starting around 1850, the use of (2P) *su merced* as a respectful form of address first emerges in Hispanic American *costumbrismo* (i.e. literature

of local customs and manners), especially when Black servants address their masters.

Indeed, one of the main hypotheses posits the origin of the current Americanism in the linguistic contact between Spanish and African languages (Lipski 2005). According to this view, the *bozal* (or broken-Spanish) sociolect was the first to incorporate the *su merced* form of address. The label *bozal* refers to the group of Black African slaves and their descendants, who had difficulty speaking Spanish (Lipski 2005: 7). The *bozal* change revolves around the fact that *su merced* is not used to speak *of* the master (canonical use of the third person [3P]), but rather to speak *with* him or her (“non-canonical” use of 2P). Accordingly, the Caribbean would be the primary region in the history of this ethnolinguistic feature of Hispanic America.

In short, the current research outlook generally defends this literary history of the (2P) *su merced* Americanism, as derived from the speech of theatre characters of low socioeconomic status. As a consequence, we still do not know whether non-literary language confirms or refutes this Afro-Hispanic link to the form of address in question, a connection that is found in fiction genres. For this reason, the present study will explore a Hispanic American corpus of historical documents (from the 16th to 19th centuries; see Section 4), and will offer evidence of the non-literary use of *su merced*. In a diatopic sense, the study focuses on the Caribbean area, given that this was the territory usually chosen by the *costumbrista* authors to set their literary instances of Afro-Hispanic uses of *su merced*.

The main objective of this chapter is to trace the entire history of *su merced* in Hispanic America, and to connect it to its European roots, using as data archival documents that offer a wider social and regional perspective than that of the stereotypical 19th century *costumbrista* interpretation. It will present the first evidence of (2P) *su merced* in the colonial era, while chronologically specifying the history of this Americanism.

Section 2 presents the study’s epistemological framework, hypothesis and objectives. This is followed by a bibliographical account of the diachrony of (2P) *su merced*, pointing out the weaknesses of the slavery hypothesis. Section 4 describes the document corpora, and Section 5 offers empirical evidence of *su merced* in the corpora, from a Pan-American perspective. An analysis of this evidence from the Caribbean region is presented in Section 6, followed by the conclusions.

## 2 Epistemological framework, hypothesis and objectives

Conceptually, a form of address is defined as a “linguistic macrostructure, the functioning of which implies the combined use of pronominal, verbal and nominal forms with which the speaker interacts with his or her interlocutor, refers to a third person or signals his or her own reference” (Rigatuso 2008: 354). The key role played by the nominal element in forms of address is often ignored. It has a decisive function in those cases in which a single pronoun handles all uses of the second person deixis, as with the pronoun *you* in contemporary English, in the plural of American Spanish (*ustedes*, example (3)), or in *ustedeo*, i.e. the use of *usted* with intimate friends or family members (see example (4)). In all these cases, nominal elements such as *chicos* ‘guys’ (intimacy) or *señores* (respect) codify the type of personal deixis (example (3)). This same pattern of the plural *ustedes* moves to the singular in Hispanic American regions using *ustedeo*, an instance of which is seen in example (4): the nominal elements *mija* (< *mi hija*) ‘my daughter’<sup>1</sup> and *señor* indicate, respectively, intimacy and respect of a grandmother *ustededeante* ‘who uses *usted*’ when speaking to her granddaughter or to a doctor.

- (3) ¿Qué sitio prefieren, *chicos*? (“intimacy”)/¿Qué sitio prefieren, *señores*? (“respect”)

‘What place do you prefer, kids?/What place do you prefer, gentlemen?’

- (4) Aquí tiene, *mija* (“intimacy”)/Aquí tiene, *señor*. (“respect”)

‘Here you are, little one/Here you are, sir’

The examples show that nominals are used to determine communicative distance. In order to research the deixis of the second person in Spanish diachrony, it was especially useful to combine the morphosyntactic dimension of the forms of address with the parameter of communicative distance. This parameter is

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<sup>1</sup> The *Diccionario de americanismos* (DA) lists *mijo*, *mija* as an allocutive formula applied to three possible recipients: a) a child; b) a friend or companion, and c) a sentimental partner. The three cases fall under the popular or affective type. As to the diatopic distribution, the three uses simultaneously coexist in the usage of three countries: Mexico, Chile and Colombia. Separately, each of these three uses is also currently used in other regions of Hispanic America (DA).

implicitly stated in the classic theory of power and solidarity of Brown & Gilman (1960). According to this first formulation regarding the listener, connections with a greater level of solidarity (symmetrical relations) are codified into forms of address with minimum distance. On the other hand, connections with a higher degree of power (asymmetrical relations) choose forms of address with maximum distance. This study coined the well-known terms “T forms” (+closeness -power) and “V forms” (+distance +power) (Brown & Gilman 1960: 257–259). The analysis in terms of power and solidarity is appropriate for stable binary pronominal systems, such as that found in the French language: *tu/vous* (T form/V form). The same theoretic paradigm, however, shows limitations in other Romance language systems that, through evolution, have distanced themselves from this binary prototype (see e.g. Hummel in this volume; Moyna & Rivera-Mills 2016: 2).

Spanish *ustedeso* serves as an example of extreme pronominal simplification. For these cases, Uber (1985) suggests adapting the parameter of communicative distance, such that the same pronoun functions as the V form (maximum distance) well as the T form (minimum distance). In line with Uber’s (1985) proposal, in this study we propose that *su merced* functions as a V address (1) and as a T address (2) in certain areas of American Spanish.

Historically, *su merced* in solidarity relations (= *su merced<sub>T</sub>*; see (2)) may represent the last evolutionary link of an Iberian-Romance language phenomenon that, from the end of the 16th century (example (6)), affected all honorary pronouns having the “*su* + abstract name” structure. In this study we propose, for the first time, connecting this Hispanic American link with the Romance language “chain” of the same linguistic phenomenon. Accordingly, here we defend the hypothesis that intralinguistic motivations led to the triggering of the change in (2P) *su merced* in different Spanish speaking areas, regardless of the fact that there were African migratory flows and *bozal* speakers in those geographic areas (we will treat this aspect more thoroughly in Section 3).

Before analysing the data, it is important to explain how the “*su* + abstract noun” structure evolved in the Romance language environment within the honorific address paradigm. As is well known, in Romance languages personal deixis is realised through pronouns and nominal groups (RAE-ASALE 2009: 1256). The latter include the honorific title, composed of a title name (e.g. *excelencia*, *señoría*, *merced*) preceded by the possessives *vuestra/su*. This subsystem (possessive *su/vuestro* + abstract noun) specialises in the honorific deixis – in the allocutive (e.g. *vuestra señoría*) as well as the delocutive (e.g. *su señoría*) uses. As such, from the end of the Middle Ages, each title has a form with *vuestra* for the second person (deixis in presence) and another form with *su* for the third person (deixis in absence). As an illustration, in 16th century Spanish, *vuestra excelencia*

‘Your Excellency’ is used to speak *with* a viceroy (2P), while (3P) *su excelencia* is employed to speak *of or about* a viceroy.<sup>2</sup>

All in all, it is possible to notice movements of the delocutive 3P forms towards 2P allocutives in the diachrony of the Romance languages (Coffen 2002; Mazzon 2010). For that reason, honorifics having the “*su + title*” structure can function not only as forms of address for the 3P deixis in absence (conservative use), but also as the 2P deixis in presence (innovative use) in the Romance language environment. In the viceroy examples above, at the end of the 16th and beginning of the 17th centuries, *su excelencia* begins to be used to speak *with* the viceroy (innovative 2P use), and not only to speak *about* the viceroy (conservative 3P use). Table 1 shows how the delocutive forms with *su* (3P deixis in absence) already enter the allocutive environment of forms with *vuestra* (2P deixis in presence) in the Spanish Golden Age.

**Table 1:** *Su merced* in the honorific subsystem (Golden Age).

DELOCUTIVE FORMS (3P)	ALLOCUTIVE FORMS (2P)
<i>Su Excelencia</i> ⇒	<i>Vuestra Excelencia</i> (> <i>vuecencia</i> ) <i>Su Excelencia</i>
<i>Su Señoría</i> ⇒	<i>Vuestra Señoría</i> (> <i>usía</i> ) <i>Su Señoría</i>
<i>Su Merced</i> ⇒	<i>Vuestra Merced</i> (> <i>usted</i> ) <i>Su Merced</i>

This evolution of the honorific paradigm causes forms of address with the “*su + abstract name*” structure to take on a double personality: they preserve their delocutive (3P) status, while assuming a new allocutive (2P) status. With this double deixis, these honorifics become ambiguous forms of address: only contextual elements serve to disambiguate the delocutive or allocutive character of the “*su + abstract noun*” forms. The level of ambiguity is still higher in the specific case of *su merced*, given that historically this form of address has been able to express a triple personal deixis, which we attempt to illustrate in examples (5) to (8).

<sup>2</sup> The legislation of the time determined that the honorific *excelencia* corresponded only to the viceroy in Italian states, while viceroys from the Indies should be addressed as *señoría* – a lower level (Sáez Rivera: 2013). Generally, the colonial documents show two usage guidelines for vice-regal address in 16th century Hispanic America: the legal (*señoría*) and the factual (*excelencia*) (García-Godoy 2019).

- (5) E doña Leonor de Avendaño dixo que *su merced del señor corregidor* había mandado. (1513, Spain. *Notary documents of the San Bartolomé convent*, CORDE)

‘And lady Leonor de Avendaño said that the honourable mayor had ordered.’

- (6) Margarita: Entremos en esta tienda, que es la más rica.  
Mercader: ¿Qué manda v.m., señor caballero, qué ha menester?

Thomás: Yo ninguna cosa; esta señora, muchas.

Mercader: Pues pida *su merced*, que todo se le dará aquí a buen precio.

Margarita: Muéstreme acá algunos tocados, guirnardillas. (1599, Spain. Misheu, *Diálogos gramaticales*. CORDE. See García-Godoy 2011: 237)

‘Margarita: Let’s go into this shop, it is the finest. Merchant: What does the good gentleman command, what does he need? Thomás: I do not need anything, but this lady needs a lot. Mercader: Well, ask then, and you will receive at a good price. Margarita: Show me those headdresses and *guirnardillas*.’

- (7) Padre y S.<sup>or</sup> D.<sup>n</sup> Domingo de Basavilbaso. Padre y muy S.<sup>or</sup> mío, por la adjunta esquela reconocerá *Smd.* el triste estado en q<sup>e</sup> me hallo. (1762, Buenos Aires. Letter from Francisco Antonio de Basavilbaso to his father, *apud* Rigatuso 2009: 85)

‘Father and Sir Domingo de Basavilbaso. Father and sir, by the attached notice, you will recognise the sad state in which I find myself.’

- (8) Mi adorada Blanca: Estoy con la pena de no haber recibido carta de *su merced* [...] me haces, amorcito, mucha falta. (1950, Guatemala. Love letter from Miguel Ángel Asturias to Blanca de Mora. CORDE)

‘My dear Blanca: I am saddened not to have received your letter [...] I miss you, my little love.’

Examples (5) to (8) potentially illustrate the slow gestation of this triple deixis, as set out in Table 2. The starting point (stage A, example (5)) is a delocutive form (deixis 1 = 3P *su merced*) that brings in second person values of respect marked by subscript <sub>v</sub> (deixis 2 = *su merced*<sub>v</sub>), in the social (stage B1, c. 1599; see example (6)), as well as family domains (stage B2, c. 1762, example (7)). From this position, it could finally foster the definitive movement towards the sphere of maximum intimacy (stage C, example (8), deixis 3 = *su merced*<sub>T</sub>, where <sub>T</sub> marks intimacy. This

**Table 2:** Proposed evolution of *su merced*.

<b>STAGE A</b> <b>3P <i>su merced</i></b>	<b>STAGE B1 (social)</b> <b>2P <i>su merced</i></b>	<b>STAGE B2 (family)</b> <b>2P <i>su merced</i></b>	<b>STAGE C</b> <b>2P <i>su merced</i></b>
Deixis 1 “él” (5)	Deixis 2 “vuestra merced > usted” (6)–(7) FORM OF ADDRESSV		Deixis 3 “tú” (8) FORM OF ADDRESST

third deixis can only be found in contemporary Hispanic America, at least since 1950, according to the RAE corpora. Given that conservative (3P) and innovative (2P) uses may have coexisted at certain historical moments, it is not unreasonable to think that some Hispanic geolects simultaneously employed the triple deixis of *su merced*: “él” (example (5)), “usted” (example 7) and “tú” (example (8)).

The history of this phenomenon must be based on these three evolutionary stages. It is important to stress the fact that examples (6) and (7) are evidence of this innovative use (stages B1 and B2) before the 19th century in the non-literary language, and that they all illustrate urban uses by the White elite. Thus, we can cast doubt on the Caribbean slavery hypothesis, which we will describe in the following section, given that it dates the emergence of (2P) *su merced* to an excessively late period (19th century), while also lacking non-literary evidence from before the 19th century.

### 3 From the “external” slavery hypothesis to the “internal” Romance language hypothesis

This section presents two explanatory models covering the origin of the (2P) *su merced* form of address. We will start by analysing the traditional hypothesis which, as noted above, is based on Afro-Hispanic linguistic contact (external factors), and is exclusively contextualised in American Spanish. We then present our new hypothesis, which interprets the same linguistic change as a development within the Spanish language itself (internal factors), in Spain as well as in Hispanic America.

#### 3.1 External factors in the traditional hypothesis

The Hispanic American history of *su merced* remains enigmatic. Although it is claimed that the *su merced*<sub>v</sub> innovation originated with the migratory movements



of Africans to vice-regal Hispanic America, empirically this Afro-Hispanic trait is only seen in literature starting from the mid-19th century (Álvarez-López & Bertolotti 2013). Indeed, without furnishing any historical documentation, it is argued that in the present-day countries of Peru (De Granda 2004: 488–489), the Dominican Republic (Pérez Guerra 1988, 1989), Cuba (Pérez Guerra 1988, 1989) and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico (Álvarez Narario 1982) *su merced<sub>v</sub>* existed due to the slavery system and to the linguistic contact between Spanish and African languages. It is also claimed that in these three countries and commonwealth, the “feudal” form of address *su merced<sub>v</sub>* constituted a sociolinguistic marker of the Black slaves subject to severe social abuse in colonial society. For that matter, it is also posited – from this same study perspective, and without any demonstration whatsoever – that this Black African form of address disappeared from common usage upon the end of slavery in those countries, with the exception of the Dominican Republic (Pérez Guerra 1988, 1989; see Hummel 2010: 305–306).

Accordingly, the slavery hypothesis implicitly assumes that, before the period of political emancipation, Hispanic America only saw the use of *su merced<sub>v</sub>* in markedly asymmetrical relations of power. It is only in the 20th century that new patterns of Hispanic American use of equal power solidarity relations begin to develop (Álvarez-López & Bertolotti 2013: 23). In this way, the old colonial form of address would have “democratised” – a fact that would make it possible to explain the familiar use of *su merced<sub>T</sub>* in solidarity relations of equal power, although the geolects of countries currently using *su merced<sub>T</sub>*, the so-called “países sumercedeantes” (the Colombian and Ecuadorian Andes, Venezuela), would differ from the abovementioned countries in order to contextualise the Afro-Hispanic linguistic contact hypothesis. The latest formulations of this slavery hypothesis ignore or minimise the most recent documented discoveries of 2P *su merced* in the last colonial century. We are referring to documented 18th century evidence of the form of address in slavery, as well as non-slavery contexts in such varied Hispanic American locations as Buenos Aires (Rigatuso 2008), Merida, Venezuela (Obediente 2009, 2010), Cartagena de Indias, Colombia (Gutiérrez Maté 2013: 258) and the Dominican Republic (Gutiérrez Maté 2013: 258).

Despite these advances, there are currently no documented diachronic studies covering the entire history of (2P) *su merced* in Hispanic America, from its colonial origins as a reverent form of address – supposedly linked to slavery (*su merced<sub>v</sub>*) – to the present as an overarching form of address (*su merced<sub>v</sub>* + *su merced<sub>T</sub>*).

The main research gap in prior studies can be found in the colonial era: in the 17th and 18th centuries the innovative use of (2P) *su merced* does not seem to appear in the vice-regal literature. For this reason, the fact that *su merced* in literature only emerges in the post-colonial era in the speech of Black slaves or mixed

heritage (Sp. *mulato*)<sup>3</sup> characters stands out. The hypothesis concerning the slavery origin of the current Americanism is based solely on this Hispanic American contextualisation of the phenomenon, linguistically set in Afro-Hispanic contexts. As previously mentioned, this hypothesis assumes that extralinguistic factors (contact of languages) triggered the change of *su merced* towards the second person. Accordingly, if this contact of languages occurred only in the New World, the genesis of (2P) *su merced* would be historically linked with the Afro-Hispanic varieties in Hispanic America. There this phenomenon would have emerged as an ethnolinguistic feature of the language spoken by the Black slave minority.

This slavery hypothesis, which as we have seen has not been empirically confirmed in the colonial era, is a common denominator in diachronic studies of American Spanish in general, and the Caribbean area in particular. These studies ignore the key fact that the mother country Spain also witnessed the use of the form of address (2P) *su merced* for no less than three centuries (16th to 19th) (Lapesa 2000; García-Godoy 2011).

### 3.2 Internal factors of the new hypothesis

Our hypothesis is based on the fact that the first use of (2P) *su merced* is historically documented in 16th century European Spanish, which we previously mentioned in the bridging example (6) (García-Godoy 2011). The context for this example is a commercial exchange between two strangers (seller-customer dyad), included in a colloquial Spanish conversation. In this early example from 1599, *su merced* is used to speak with a customer (deixis in presence). In these first commercial uses of (2P) *su merced*, there does not appear to be any hierarchical relation between the seller and the customer.

In Spanish Golden Age theatre, however, we begin to see another, different use of (2P) *su merced* in work contexts with asymmetrical relations (servant-master dyads). This use increasingly appears in Spanish literature in the 18th and 19th centuries as a form of address used by White servants (Lapesa 2000). Similarly, literary evidence of (2P) *su merced* in analogous contexts can be found in 18th century Sephardic texts (García Moreno 2004). Moreover, 19th century Hispanic American (Álvarez-López & Bertolotti 2013) as well as Portuguese-Brazilian *costumbrismo* (Alkmim 1996) provide documented examples of the most extreme version of this servitude relation: the slave-master dyad. A look at the wide range

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<sup>3</sup> The Spanish term *mulato* is used in the original citations.

of documented examples of the phenomenon in the Spanish speaking world would indicate that in the first stage of the change, *su merced<sub>v</sub>* only appears in the social environment between strangers (commercial contexts) or between acquaintances with asymmetrical relations (work contexts of White servitude or Black slavery). This first stage of the change is found exclusively in European Spanish from the 16th to 18th centuries (Lapesa 2000), although in the following century the literary context of servitude will spread throughout the Spanish speaking world.

In short, in this section we have seen that there are two opposing explanations for the movement of *su merced* towards the second person in the historical map of the Spanish language. As we have seen, in the New World external factors of language contact are invoked. In the Old World, by contrast, intralinguistic factors are brought in. Delocutives of the (3P) “*su + title*” structure begin to take on their (2P) functional load in the Golden Age, and can also be used as forms of address in a colloquial manner. Consequently, *su merced<sub>v</sub>* in Spain is, in our opinion, the history of a colloquialism that emerges in the 16th century and begins to fade away in the 19th. According to the slavery hypothesis, *su merced<sub>v</sub>* is the history of a *bozalismo* used by the Black minority as a slavery form of address in Afro-Hispanic varieties until the 19th century.

In the following sections, we will examine in more detail the corpora upon which we base our hypothesis of the origin and evolution of *su merced*.

## 4 The corpora

In this study we use two corpora of historical Hispanic American documentation, covering the same time span (16th to 18th centuries), and from identical textual genres (administrative and legal documents, and private letters). The main corpus is CORDIAM (Company & Bertolotti 2015), which comprises a new evidence base of historical, non-literary Hispanic American documents. In addition, we have created an additional corpus specifically for this study. This second corpus brings together a set of documents<sup>4</sup> which have yet to be incorporated into the current version of CORDIAM (see Section 8 on sources).

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<sup>4</sup> Similarly to the main corpus, the additional corpus is made up of archival documents, except the “Crónica Perú” (see references for this document in the “Additional Corpus” section at the end of the chapter). This is the chronicle of the Creole Juan Meléndez, printed in 1681. The first edition of this work was included in the corpus for its relevant linguistic interest: this is where the first historical evidence of American Spanish use of *su merced* at issue was found.

## 5 Evidence of *su merced* in the corpora (16th to 19th centuries)

This section provides an overall Pan-American perspective of *su merced* in the two corpora (see Section 6 for a specific analysis of the Caribbean region). It opens with a count of all occurrences of *su merced* in the new evidence base (Section 5.1) – conservative (3P) as well as innovative (2P) uses. It then separately explores the innovative trend in the corpora and shows the first evidence of the innovative pattern (2P *su merced*, Section 5.2). It closes with an analysis of the proportion of slavery contexts (social and family domains) in which this innovative trend is seen (Section 5.3).

### 5.1 *The double personality of su merced: conservative (3P) and innovative (2P) uses*

The initial evaluation of the occurrences of *su merced* in both corpora shows the omnipresence of the conservative delocutive (3P), clearly predominant in the four centuries under study. On the other hand, the (2P) *su merced* innovation is underrepresented in this new evidence base: in CORDIAM it comprises 2.7 % of the occurrences, although in the additional corpus that figure reaches 7.4% (Table 3).

**Table 3:** *Su merced* in the corpora: conservative (3P) and innovative (2P) use.

	<b>3P <i>su merced</i></b>	<b>2P <i>su merced</i></b>
CORDIAM	97.03% (621/640)	2.7% (19/640)
ADDITIONAL CORPUS	92.6% (253/273)	7.4% (20/273)

Considering the large size of the empirical base studied, the very limited number of instances of 2P *su merced* (39 examples) is telling. All would appear to indicate that this pattern of use that was recommended for the spoken language<sup>5</sup> in 1714 (García-Godoy 2011, 2016) had little impact in the written language tradition.

<sup>5</sup> L'Abbé de Vayrac, in his *Grammaire espagnole* (1714), associates the use of (2P) *su merced* with the spoken language: “surquoi il faut remarquer que quand on l'employe dans les Lettres, on dit *vuestra Merced*, & que quand on l'employe dans la conversation, on dit *su Merced*” ‘where-to it should be added that *vuestra Merced* is used for writing, whereas *su Merced* is preferred in conversation’ (see García-Godoy 2011: 247). In the previous (17th) century, the grammarian

Thus, the Hispanic American history of the phenomenon still remains an enigma. In view of this, these thirty-nine Hispanic American examples represent a true documental discovery for the task of outlining the first non-literary history of (2P) *su merced* based on corpora data.

Note how, empirically, the corpora show that the (2P) *su merced* change occurs alongside the persistent maintenance of the conservative (3P) *su merced* pattern. In the period under study, the coexistence of conservative and innovative uses occurs between the 17th and 19th centuries, if we consider the chronology of the two corpora (Tables 4 and 5).

**Table 4:** *Su merced* in CORDIAM (16th to 19th centuries).

FORM	16TH CENT.	17TH CENT.	18TH CENT.	19TH CENT.	TOTAL	
3P <i>su merced</i>	194/194	78/78	322/341	27/27	621/640	97.03%
2P <i>su merced</i>	—	—	19/341	—	19/640	2.7 %

**Table 5:** *Su merced* in the Additional Corpus (16th to 19th centuries).

FORM	16TH CENT.	17TH CENT.	18TH CENT.	19TH CENT.	TOTAL	
3P <i>su merced</i>	3/3	219/226	21/27	10/17	253/273	92.6%
2P <i>su merced</i>	—/—	7/226	6/27	7/17	20/273	7.4%

It is striking that, for approximately two hundred and fifty years, the coexistence of the conservative patterns together with the neological uses made *su merced* a thoroughly ambiguous form of address in large areas of Hispanic America. Table 6 sets out the geographical origins of (2P) *su merced* in the corpora, which represent nine Hispanic American varieties.

In the history of these nine Hispanic American varieties, the emergence of the innovative (allocutive) form of address does not coincide with a decline in the conservative (delocutive) use of the form— on the contrary. It is logical to think that, in such a prolonged evolutionary state, only the context would provide the keys for disambiguating the personal deixis of *su merced* – a form that is formally third person, but grammatically has a double personality (delocutive 3P and allocutive 2P). For our analysis, the co-reference of *su merced* with other linguistic elements has allowed us to identify the predominant conservative (3P) uses

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Correas had already described the vacillation in the use of *vuestra merced/su merced* as allocutive second person forms (Lapesa 2000: 321).

**Table 6:** Geographical origins of (2P) *su merced* in the corpora.

	CORDIAM	ADDITIONAL CORPUS
Buenos Aires (Argentina)	+	–
Cartagena de Indias (Colombia)	–	+
Havana (Cuba)	–	+
Lima (Peru)	–	+
Merida (Venezuela)	–	+
Mexico	+	–
Santo Domingo (Dominican Republic)	–	+
Santa Lucia (Venezuela)	+	–
Puerto Rico	–	+

vis-à-vis the minority, innovative (2P) uses. The former are found in the corpora, in prototypical form, in duplicate possessive constructions of the *su merced del señor alcalde* type. Uses of the second person, however, are most often found in direct discourse, and are usually combined with highly disambiguating, vocative nominal enhancements such as *su merced + amigo, señor (+provisor, alcalde, padre), mi amo, hermano* ('religious'), *mamita*, etc.

## 5.2 *Chronology of the (2P) su merced change in the corpora: first indications of the innovative trend*

Hispanic American *costumbrista* literature systematically shows (2P) *su merced* as an innovative form of address from 1850, although in the previous century an isolated example of this innovation was already used in the Creole farce *El amor de la estanciera* (García-Godoy 2011). Thus it would seem that the dramatic representations of the allocutive form constitute a phenomenon of the modern era. Yet the non-literary language allows us to pre-date the same phenomenon to the classic period. Examples (9) to (12) present the first documentary evidence found in the two corpora of the innovative trend:

- (9) Amigo, Hermano, perdone *su merced* (le decía) no me hallo con lo que pide, bien sabe Dios, que quisiera darle el hábito. (1681, Lima. Priest → parishioner. *Crónica Perú*. Additional Corpus)

'Friend, brother, pardon me (he said), but I do not have what you want, yet if it were up to me, as God knows, I would give you even the frock that I am wearing.'

- (10) Por fin señor valga el ser *Su merced* Padre y con posibles, o ser yo hijo y sin ninguno; y si todo esto no basta para que consiga el mejorar de suerte, tenga *su merced* piedad de un inocente. (1762, Buenos Aires. Son → father. *Apud* Rigatuso 2009. Also in CORDIAM 2015)

‘Finally, sir, it is a fact that you are a father with economic resources, and I am a son with no resources whatsoever. And if this is not enough, so that with your help I may improve my situation, I beg you have pity, father sir, on an innocent such as myself.’

- (11) *Señor*<sup>6</sup> general don Gav[r]iel Gutierres de Ruvalcava. Mui señor mío por esta le notisio a v.md. cómo el preso que v.md. despachó con los de Soquitlán se huyó de esta cársel timprano [...] Él se fue con grillos y dejó su ropa que se la remito a v.md.: una manta, unos sapatos, el sombrero y su devastimento. *Su merced* verá lo que determina a este otro preso hoy irá a dormir [...] besa la mano de v.md. su humilde criado. (1767, Ojotolapa, México. Governor → general. CORDIAM)

‘Mr. general Gav[r]iel Gutierres de Ruvalcava. My good sir, I hereby inform you that the prisoner that you sent with those of Soquitlán escaped from this prison early [...] He left in shackles, and left his clothes, which I forward to you – a blanket, some shoes, a hat and his provisions. You will see where this other prisoner sleeps today [...] your humble servant kisses your hand.’

- (12) Ilustrísimo Señor vicario [...] Hago presente a *su merced* todos mis trabajos [...] su más humilde esclavo. (1784, Merida, Andean Venezuela. Slave → vicar. *Apud Cartas de Mérida*. Additional Corpus)

‘Illustrious Mr. Vicar [...] I herein present you with my work [...] your most humble slave.’

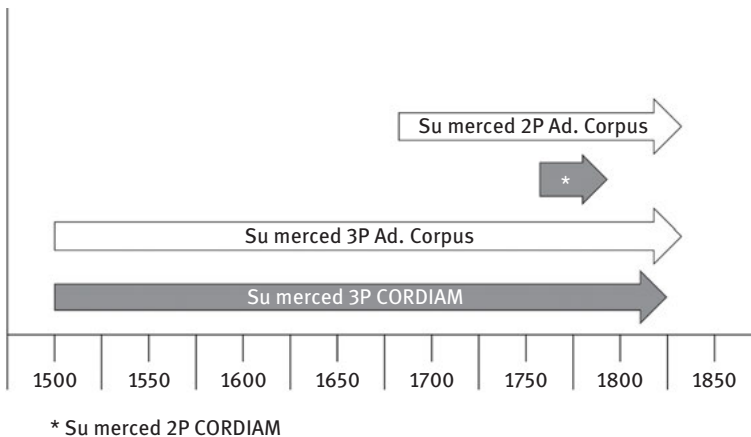
In the historical documents under analysis, the earliest examples of (2P) *su merced* date to the 17th century in the additional corpus (Table 5) and to the 18th century in CORDIAM (Table 4). Note how in the main corpus the innovative trend is quite short lived, given that it hardly amounts to a generation (thirty-three years) in the second half of the 18th century (1762–1795). Yet if we look at the chronological indicators in both CORDIAM and the additional corpus, we find evidence of (2P) *su merced* in Hispanic America from 1681 until 1823. This documented retro-dating

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<sup>6</sup> We use italicized letters to represent reconstructed letters (e.g. *Señor* for Sr, or *merced* for md).

of the innovative form of address substantially modifies the status of previous knowledge.

This would all seem to indicate that the type of source consulted provides different chronologies of the innovative trend. A look at fiction genres clearly indicates the change occurring only in the postcolonial period. However, the non-literary genres show the same phenomenon appearing from the 17th century, in chronicles, letters and witness statements from the colonial era until the period of independence. This new, earlier dating of (2P) *su merced* in Hispanic American usage allows us to venture that the beginning of the change is more synchronised on both sides of the Atlantic than was previously thought. In non-literary language, (2P) *su merced* is an innovation that begins to take its place in European grammar from 1605, while there is evidence of the same innovation in the New World in the same century.



**Figure 1:** Development of *su merced* as observed in the corpora.

### 5.3 The innovative trend in Hispanic America: areas of usage and slavery-related contexts

As previously shown, the additional corpus more fully reflects the diachrony of the innovative phenomenon in Hispanic America (1681–1830). During this time period of approximately a century and a half, (2P) *su merced* is found in the social context. Yet this form of address is historically less common in the family domain; the corpora only provide examples of (2P) *su merced* within families from 1762 until 1830 (approximately three generations). On the other hand, if we count the occur-



rences of the innovative use in those two domains, we see that the corpora provide a greater number of examples in family relations than in non-family social relations.

In light of the appearance of the phenomenon in non-literary language, fiction genres could provide a more skewed perspective of (2P) *su merced* in American Spanish. These literary genres partially represent the “social life” of this form of address in the slave-master dyad, but minimise the “private life” of this innovation in the child-parent relation. As we have seen, the literaturisation of (2P) *su merced* shows a positive correlation between the use of the new form of address and slavery contexts, limited exclusively to the social environment.

However, the new evidence base under study does not confirm this positive correlation, although it does show the use of (2P) *su merced* in the slave-master dyad. Indeed, only the additional corpus offers Afro-Hispanic American contexts of *su merced* (+*mi amo*), yet they comprise only a small minority in the social context (1/13) and do not exist in the family setting (Table 7). A comprehensive examination of all the occurrences of the new form of address in both the family and social contexts shows that there is only one use of (2P) *su merced* in the slave-master dyad (1/39, 2.56 %) in the corpora (Tables 7–8).

**Table 7:** CORDIAM: Social and family context usage. 2P *su merced* in the slave-master / other dyads.

DOMAINS OF USE	16TH CENT.	17TH CENT.	18TH CENT.	19TH CENT.	TOTAL
Social context	—	—	0/1	—	0/1 0%
Family context	—	—	0/18	—	0/18 0%

**Table 8:** Additional Corpus: Social and family context usage. Examples of 2P *su merced* in the slave-master / other dyads.

DOMAINS OF USE	16TH CENT.	17TH CENT.	18TH CENT.	19TH CENT.	TOTAL
Social context	—	0/7	1/6	—	1/13 7.69%
Family context	—	—	—	0/7	0/7 0%

## 6 Diachrony of (2P) *su merced* in Afro-Hispanic varieties: the Caribbean region

In a diatopic, i.e. geographical, sense, the slavery hypothesis has almost always been contextualised in the Caribbean region. From the pioneering work of Álvarez Nazario (1982) until the most recent work of Álvarez-López & Bertolotti (2013),

researchers have stressed that, diachronically, the contact between African languages and Spanish in this geolect triggered some of the morphosyntactic characteristics of this region. These researchers have historically resorted to this extralinguistic process as a linguistic identity element that brings together a region that is dialectally heterogeneous, yet geographically united by the Caribbean Sea.

In the Caribbean region, the development of the institution of slavery and that of the Americanism under study are chronologically quite different, in spite of the fact that earlier studies have magnified the historical parallel between both processes. Moreover, while the historical process covers four centuries (1503–1886), the dialectal phenomenon of (2P) *su merced* in prior studies is basically documented in the last century of that time period. Regarding the Black African usage of (2P) *su merced* in the Caribbean, there are few studies that provide evidence of the historical use in Caribbean locations in the 18th century. The Caribbean retro-dating of (2P) *su merced* is mostly set in the second half of the 19th century, and has a literary source. In this regard, Álvarez-López & Bertolotti (2013) offer the most complete panoramic view of fiction genres (based on Lipski's written legacy), set linguistically in two Caribbean locations – Puerto Rico and Cuba. Evidence is given for a positive correlation in both islands of the 19th century use of *su merced* (and its variants) + *mi amo* among the Black slave population.

In short, these literary uses set in Cuba and Puerto Rico in the second half of the 19th century are the first instances of the slave usage of *su merced* in both islands.<sup>7</sup> Note the fact that slavery existed in that region from the 16th century, and that in the same century the (2P) *su merced* linguistic change appears in the mother country – with no link whatsoever with African migration to the West Indies.

Furthermore, given that the allocutive (2P) *su merced* has not survived to the present day in the Caribbean geolect, the claim is made that the extinction process in the area must be connected to the abolition of slavery. Yet as we know, abolition movements occurred at a different rate in the Caribbean. Slavery was

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7 There are striking differences in the polymorphism of the *su merced* form of address in Caribbean usage between the examples appearing in literary genres and those in the archival corpora under study. Álvarez-López & Bertolotti (2013: 15) document fourteen formal variants in the literature: *su mé*, *su mecé*, *su melcé*, *su mercé*, *su merced*, *su mesé*, *su messé*, *su miecé*, *sumasé*, *sumacé*, *sumelcé*, *sumece*, *sumercé*, *sumesé*. This extensive inventory of literary variants contrasts with the formal stability of the form of address in the non-literary corpora. There, four variants have been documented – two in complete writing forms (*su merced*, *su mercé*) and two in abbreviated forms (*S md*, *S mrd*). Concerning the phenomenon of literary polymorphism in the diachrony of the *merced* honorific, see García-Godoy (2016).

abolished throughout Hispanic America between 1810 and 1850, except in Puerto Rico and Cuba, where it was not abolished until 1870 and 1873 respectively.

In this section we analyse the twenty Caribbean instances of (2P) *su merced* appearing in the corpora, for the five locations listed in Table 9. First, we will explore the innovative uses in the social context, and calculate the percentage of Afro-Hispanic American contexts. Secondly, we will analyse the evolution of (2P) *su merced* in Caribbean family environments. Finally, we will show whether the Caribbean history of *su merced* in areas of late abolition (Cuba) confirms or refutes the slavery-based history of this form of address.

**Table 9:** Caribbean usage of (2P) *su merced* in the corpora.

	CORDIAM	ADDITIONAL CORPUS
DATE/LOCATION	1795/Santa Lucia	1700/Santo Domingo 1762/Cartagena de Indias 1810/Puerto Rico 1829/Havana
NUMBER OF INSTANCES	1	19

## 6.1 *The social context in the Caribbean history of su merced*

In the corpora, the Caribbean region shows the greatest number of innovative instances of (2P) *su merced*, over a period of 129 years (1700–1829). Surprisingly, however, only a minority of these Caribbean instances are documented in the social context. An examination of Table 10 shows that the most extensive corpus (CORDIAM) does not even reflect this social phenomenon in this geolect. Only the additional corpus, albeit in a minority of cases, offers these five instances of the “social life” of (2P) *su merced* in the Caribbean (examples (13) to (17)), dated between 1700 and 1763:

**Table 10:** Caribbean instances of (2P) *su merced* in the social context: slave-master/other dyads.

CORPUS	16TH CENT.	17TH CENT.	18TH CENT.	19TH CENT.	N. OF SLAVE-MASTER INSTANCES
CORDIAM	—	—	0/1	—	0
ADDITIONAL CORPUS	—	—	1/5	—	1

- (13) Señor, pregúntele *su mrd* al licenciado don Francisco de Manzaneda qué viene a buscar a mi casa. (1700, Santo Domingo. Neighbour → graduate. *Pleito1, Santo Domingo*. Additional Corpus)

‘Sir, ask the graduate Francisco de Manzaneda what he is coming to look for at my home.’

- (14) Mi señor, justicia, que me ha venido a matar a mi casa este perrito de este mulatico de Pedro de Almonte, porque habiéndome echado a perder a mi hija Juana Enriques y preservando en su maldad y reprehendiéndola yo y tratando de castigarla por ello, viéndola inquieta, se me apareció este dicho mulato con el machete que *su mrd* le vé. (1720, Santo Domingo. Mixed heritage (Sp. *mulato*) slave of the church → ordinary mayor of Santiago de los Caballeros. *Pleito2, Santo Domingo*. Additional Corpus)

‘My lord, I ask for justice, because this “mulatto” dog Pedro de Almonte came to my house to kill me, because having caused the loss of my daughter Juana Enriques, in all his evil, and my having scolded her and trying to punish her, for that reason, seeing that she was upset, this “mulatto” dog appeared with the machete you see.’

- (15) ¿Qué tiene *su md* mi amo? ¿qué le duele o aflige?  
(1762, Cartagega de Indias, Colombia. Slave → master. *Pleito, Cartagena de Indias*. Additional Corpus)

‘What do you have, my master? What hurts or afflicts you?’

- (16) No me acuerde *su mercé* que tuve mi primer hijo.  
(1763, Santo Domingo. Black slave → mixed heritage (Sp. *mulato*) neighbour. *Crónica, Santo Domingo*. Additional Corpus, II: 109)

‘Do not remind me, sir, that I had my first son.’

- (17) Y dixo al Obispo: “señor vea *su mercé* que son travesuras de Antonillo.”  
(1763, Santo Domingo. Servant → bishop. *Crónica, Santo Domingo*. Additional Corpus, II: 109)

‘And said to the Bishop: sir, see that these are the antics of Antonillo’

The Afro-Hispanic American contexts in Cartagena de Indias and Santo Domingo are unequivocal in three of the five examples. (2P) *su merced* is mostly documented in the speech of Black Dominicans during the period from 1700 to 1763. Yet

it is quite interesting to note that in these historical instances of innovative (2P) usage, interlocutors of different ethnic backgrounds receive the same *su merced*<sub>v</sub> form of address from Black speakers, whether or not they are their masters.

It should be noted that of the five interlocutors receiving the *su merced*<sub>v</sub> form of address, only one fits the slave servitude prototype: “*su merced mi amo*” (example (15); see Table 10). In the other examples, a governor (White), an ordinary mayor (White), a bishop (White) and a simple neighbour (*mulato*) are also addressed with *su merced*<sub>v</sub>, either as a bare form of reference, or in coreference with other elements.

Regarding the social context, the innovative form of address in the 18th century Caribbean would appear to show a “social life” similar to that described in the mother country Spain and in vice-regal Lima a century earlier – interlocutors with or without a hierarchical relation to the speaker can receive *su merced*<sub>v</sub>.

## 6.2 The family context of (2P) *su merced* in the Caribbean

As mentioned earlier, family usage of (2P) *su merced* has only been documented in Hispanic America. The first instances of this innovative use as a form of address from children to parents have been located in the Rio de Plata area in the last colonial century. In fact, in Buenos Aires in 1762, within a patrician family, the children address their father as *su merced* (+ *ilustrísimo*) *señor padre*. This pattern of use among the White population is minimised in fiction genres, in favour of slavery contexts within the Black population.

In the Caribbean region, almost all instances of (2P) *su merced* in the corpora correspond to the family context (Table 11). This innovative use is documented in the Caribbean thirty years after it appears in Buenos Aires. From 1795 to 1830, *su merced* (+ *taita*, *madresita*, *mamita*) as a form of address from children to parents is found in three areas of this Afro-Hispanic region: Caribbean Venezuela (Santa Lucia), Cuba (Havana) and Puerto Rico.

As in the Southern Cone,<sup>8</sup> family usage of *su merced* in the Caribbean also develops in urban environments of the White elite. Afro-Hispanic American contexts are not seen in any of the family uses in the Caribbean.

Examples (18) to (20) are the first instances of the “family life” of 2P *su merced* in the Caribbean region. Here we offer the earliest evidence from both corpora for three Caribbean areas: Venezuela (18), Puerto Rico (19) and Cuba (20).

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<sup>8</sup> The Southern Cone comprises South American countries around and south of the Tropic of Capricorn, traditionally viewed as Argentina, Chile and Uruguay.

**Table 11:** Caribbean instances of 2P *su merced* in the family context: slave-master/other dyads.

CORPUS	16TH CENT.	17TH CENT.	18TH CENT.	19TH CENT.	N. OF SLAVE-MASTER INSTANCES
CORDIAM	—	—	0/1	—	0
ADDITIONAL CORPUS	—	—	0/5	0/14	0

- (18) Tayta, cómo puede decir que es falso, quando *Su merced* sabe que pasó como dije. (1795, Santa Lucia, Venezuela. Santa Lucia Lawsuit: daughter → father. *Apud* Tejera 2006. Also in CORDIAM 2015)

‘Father, how can you say that it is false, when you know that it happened as I say.’

- (19) Muy mi estimada madresita de mi corazón: [...] llegó a mis manos la carta que *su merced* se sirvió dirixirme en contestación de la que mandé con D[on] Manuel. (1810, Puerto Rico, place not indicated, Family letter, son → mother. *Cartas de llamada*. Additional Corpus)

‘My dearest mother: the letter that you sent in response to that which I sent with D[on] Manuel has reached me.’

- (20) Queredísima mamita: [...] Dígame *su merced* si está enteramente bien de la perlesía [...] Abrace *su merced* a mis hermanas. (1830, Havana. Family letter, son → mother. *Cartas familiares*. Additional Corpus)

‘Dearest mommy: [...] Tell me if you are fully recovered from the palsy [...] Give a hug to my sisters.’

From a linguistic point of view, this new “family life” of (2P) *su merced* as a way of addressing parents evolved differently in the first uses in Buenos Aires in 1762 (examples (7) and (10)) and in the Caribbean instances (examples (18) to (20)) from later generations (1830). These idiomatic differences are found, once again, in the nominal enhancements that coappear with (2P) *su merced* – distant (*señor padre*) in the mid-18th century, and close (*mamita*) at the beginning of the 19th. As we know, the change in paternal and maternal appellations (*padre/madre* > *papá/mamá*) that dates to the first Spanish modern age (c. 1780–1835) is seen as a direct linguistic manifestation of the socio-educational change that took place during that time. In that period we begin to see a struggle between these two linguistic variants: a) (*señor padre*)/(*señora madre*) and b) *papá/mamá*. This

last variant (b) represented a far reaching idiomatic innovation at the time, as it implied the definitive abandonment of the kinship terms *padre/madre*, and their replacement by the more prestigious Gallicisms (*papá* and *mamá*).

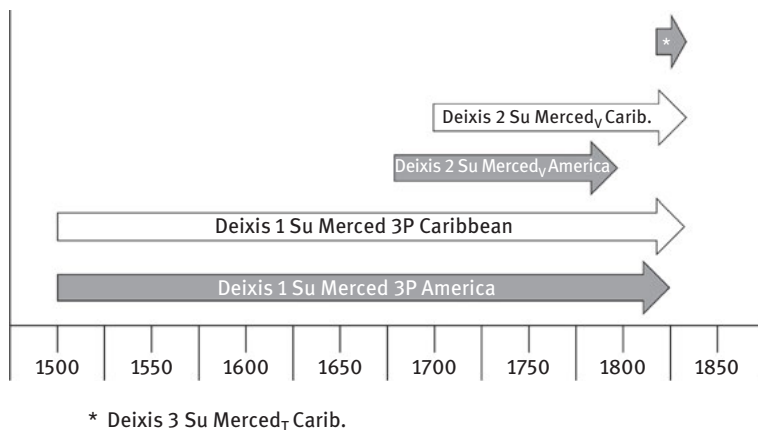
This abandonment highlights the evolution of the family educational model from a pattern that favours the hierarchical parent-child relation towards a new canon that fosters solidarity in the same parent-child relation. This innovation slowly appears in different Spanish speaking areas from the first third of the 19th century: Buenos Aires (Rigatuso 2005: 91–97), New Mexico (Balestra 2008: 82), Spain (Bustos & Iglesias Recuero 2003: 279–280; García-Godoy 2010: 597). In relation to this, there are a number of studies that associate the adoption of the neological nouns *papá/mamá* with the start of using of T-forms of address in the family context: *tuteo* (or the use of *tú*) in Spain (García-Godoy 2010: 604–608) and *voseo* (or the use of *vos*) in Argentina (Rigatuso 2005: 94). The first stage of this change can be dated to between 1830 and 1880 in both locations.

Within this perspective, the Cuban uses of *mamita* + *su merced* (20) could also be regarded as T-forms of address, given that they represent a similar change in the model of education for children in the Caribbean during the same period. It is the children of the White urban Caribbean elite who address their parents with (2P) *su merced* in coreference with the appellations that indicate this educational change in the family context (*mamita*).

Indeed, it is precisely in those areas of the Caribbean that were among the last to abolish slavery where it is possible to document the movement of (2P) *su merced* towards the domain of intimacy. As such, although Cuba continued with slavery until 1873, and Cuban *costumbrismo* only portrays the reverent use of *su merced<sub>v</sub>* in the speech of Black slaves, non-literary language confirms that 19th century Havana was among those Hispanic American locations in which *su merced* could have reached the triple deixis (Figure 2) – (3P) *su merced*, *su merced<sub>v</sub>* and *su merced<sub>T</sub>* – although none of the three have survived to the present.

The new evidence base therefore refutes the effect of ethnic factors on the history of (2P) *su merced* in Cuba. While (2P) *su merced* acts as a socio-racial marker of Black slaves in the Cuban *costumbrismo* of 1850, non-literary language in 1830 Cuba reflects the multiethnic character of the same form of address.

Finally, from the chronological viewpoint, the date of the abolition of slavery in Cuba (1873) clearly emerges as a crucial moment in the final stage of the change – the extinction of the form of address due to the extreme social stigmatisation of the *bozalismo su merced<sub>v</sub>*. Yet the non-literary corpora provide conclusive evidence for another, different reality: Cuba saw both the social use of *su merced<sub>v</sub>* (stage B1) as well as the family usage of *su merced<sub>T</sub>* (stage C) before the abolition of slavery. Cuban *sumercededeante* usage is seen from at least as far back as 1813. These movements of (2P) *su merced* towards the domain of intimacy have come to be regarded



**Figure 2:** The triple deixis of *su merced* in the corpora. The Caribbean region in the Hispanic American context.

as “liberating” evolutions belonging to the postcolonial era. In Hispanic America, however, the seed of *su merced*<sub>T</sub> was crystallising at the same time that the pronouns of respect were also moving towards the domain of informality and intimacy (Calderón Campos 2019; García-Godoy 2015). All of these extreme evolutions, which today distinguish the morphosyntax of American Spanish, begin to be seen at the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th (García-Godoy 2012). The unidimensional American Spanish systems of plural (*ustedes*) and singular (*ustedeo* and *sumercedeo*) address seem to have begun in the late colonial period (with slavery still in place), as the last stage of a phenomenon that originated in Iberian-Romance Spanish.

## 7 Conclusion

Literary and non-literary genres provide evidence for two distinct views of the Hispanic American history of the *su merced* form of address. These two views do not share the same chronology of the change from 3P *su merced* (delocutive) > 2P *su merced* (allocutive), social stratification of the phenomenon, or geographic area.

Chronologically, the literary history of (2P) *su merced* in Hispanic America generally falls into the independence period (from the second half of the 19th century), while the non-literary history dates back to the end of the 17th century – in the midst of the colonial period. From 1681, the corpora offer American



Spanish instances of the same change that was occurring in the mother country during the same century: the movement of the delocutive form to the allocutive domain. During the classic period, the use of *su merced* as the form of address<sub>v</sub> is a Pan-Hispanic phenomenon witnessed on both sides of the Atlantic.

In this first stage of the change – from the mid-18th century – the allocutive *su merced*<sub>v</sub> begins to show certain divergences in colonial Spanish. The differentiating element begins to be seen in the appearance of the same form of address in the family context. From 1762, the corpora used in this study provide instances of how the children of urban patrician families address their parents as (2P) *su merced*. At that time, children still use this as the V-form of address (*señor padre* + *su merced*<sub>v</sub>), but starting in the first third of the 19th century, they use it as the T-form of address (*mamita* + *su merced*<sub>t</sub>). The nominal enhancements are those that historically allow us to identify the seed of this dual deictic of (2P) *su merced* that distinguishes the current Americanism (respectful as well as intimate form of address). In line with this, we find evidence starting in 1823 of *sumercedeo* in Hispanic America. This *sumercedeo* (form of address<sub>t</sub>) is a modern and exclusively American Spanish evolutionary trend, representing the last stage of an Iberian-Romance change witnessed since the 16th century. The dating of this *sumercedeo* as a morphosyntactic Americanism of the late colonial period suggests a new bicentennial history of a phenomenon that has been regarded as contemporary in the literature.

From a diastratic perspective, the American Spanish use of (2P) *su merced* exhibits opposing profiles in different kinds of contexts. *Su merced* is an ethnic (Black speech) and rural marker in Hispanic American fiction genres. By contrast, the historical documents reveal that the colonial use of (2P) *su merced* connects with Pan-Hispanic models of spoken language, as seen from the end of the 16th century in multiracial contexts. The history of the allocutive *su merced* in literary language is one of an ethno-linguistic vulgarism (mostly *bozal*). In non-literary language, however, it is the history of a Pan-Hispanic colloquialism. While diastratic factors determine the change in literary language (the ethnicity of the speaker), diaphasic factors (the colloquial communicative situation) are the most relevant in non-literary language. Therefore, in the historical documentation, listeners of any ethnicity can receive the (2P) *su merced* form of address in commercial and servitude contexts as well as within the family. Literary genres, however, portray only one part of this wide-ranging reality – usage of the form of address by Black slaves in a relation of servitude.

From a Pan-Hispanic perspective, this literary use of (2P) *su merced* by Black slaves could be regarded as the application of the theatrical rhetorical canon to the Hispanic American context. Masters are addressed as such by White servants in European Spanish from the 17th century onwards, while Black slaves use the

same form of address starting in the 19th century. This usage by Black servants does not represent a divergence in colonial Spanish, but rather a mere transatlantic continuity of the same Hispanic literary pattern, which begins in classic comedy and emerges in 18th and 19th century *costumbrismo* on both sides of the Atlantic.

Diatopically, the historical regions of the (2P) *su merced* form of address are unknown. Currently, this overarching form of address survives in Andean Colombia (T- and V-form of address). Yet the origin of the phenomenon is not contextualised in this Andean region, but rather in the Afro-Caribbean gelect. The prevailing diachronic hypothesis connects the institution of Caribbean slavery with the birth of *su merced<sub>v</sub>* in the speech of *bozal* Blacks and their descendents in the West Indies. Yet once again, the non-literary corpora refute this traditional hypothesis, because from the 17th century *su merced<sub>v</sub>* is documented in numerous Hispanic American locations, and not only in the Afro-Hispanic varieties. *Su merced<sub>v</sub>* is evidenced as much in the vice-regal courts of Lima as it is in more peripheral areas (Southern Cone and the Caribbean), in convergence with the innovative trend in the mother country. The corpora also confirm that the Caribbean gelect witnessed the use of *su merced<sub>T</sub>* before the abolition of slavery. For example, in the capital of Cuba – the last Spanish-speaking country to abolish slavery – White Creoles were using *su merced* in 1823, although this phenomenon no longer exists on that Caribbean island.

All this indicates that, in the history of the allocutive (2P) *su merced* form of address, the Old World witnessed only the first evolutionary link of the change (*su merced<sub>v</sub>*, social context), while the New World witnessed the three links of the diachronic chain (*su merced<sub>v</sub>* social > *su merced<sub>v</sub>* family > *su merced<sub>T</sub>*). The Hispanic American use of *su merced*, the historical map of which may possibly have included a greater number of locations than it does today, could have taken shape in regions where standardisation was latest to arrive, with less normative pressure.

## Additional Corpus

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- [*Pleito1 Santo Domingo 1700*] In Gutiérrez Maté 2013, 258.
- [*Pleito2 Santo Domingo 1720*] In Gutiérrez Maté 2013, 258.

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