

# The Third-Person Singular Neuter Possessives in Early Modern English Sermons :

A Sociolinguistic Approach to Language Practices of  
Early Modern English Sermon Writers

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## 1. Introduction

The social meaning of linguistic features affects the language choices of individual speakers and, eventually, plays a significant role in language change (e. g. Nevalainen et al. 2011). Linguistic features, it seems, are given the social meaning based on the salient qualities of their users (Eckert & Labov 2017: 470). The present paper offers an analysis of the third-person singular neuter possessives (*its, of it, thereof*) in Early Modern English sermons and aims to identify the social meaning of the variables in the community of Early Modern English sermon writers, drawing on two sociolinguistic frameworks — *discourse community* and *community of practice*. The major concern of the study is whether professional and religious identities of sermon writers are correlated with the choice of the variants for the neuter possessives. In other words, the present paper will discuss whether the use of particular variables (*its, of it, thereof*) is associated with Early Modern English sermon writers as a whole (represented as a discourse community) and also any particular religious groups (represented as communities of practice). The current analysis is a micro-sociolinguistic case-study with a particular interest on the role of individual speakers with regard to language variation and change. In addition to a better understanding of the development of the third-person singular neuter possessives in the Early Modern period, the present study offers insights into the interaction between language, identity and community, which is a major concern in the field of current sociolinguistics.

Since the beginning of the seventeenth century, the process of the introduction of the now-standard form for the singular neuter possessive *its* is extraordinarily rapid (Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg 1994), taking over the traditional pre-head posses-

sive pronoun *his* and the uninflected form *it*, as well as post-head adverbial expressions *of it* and *thereof*. In the religious genre, however, the new form *its* did not permeate as quickly as in ordinary language. Religious genre is known to preserve peculiar, particularly archaic characteristics: in English religious writings the retention of the second-person singular pronoun *thou* and third-person singular inflection *-th* even until today has been widely noted. Previous studies have suggested that the usage in the Early Modern period exerts a lasting influence on the retention of such archaic forms (Kohnen et al. 2011; Yadomi 2019). The unusual retention of certain archaic forms may be due to the social meaning of linguistic variables in communities of various sizes and types.

Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg (1994) is the first large-scale corpus study discussing the process of the introduction of *its*, as well as the underlying linguistic and social factors. The distributional pattern of three linguistic variables (*its*, *of it*, *thereof*) for the neuter possessive over the course of the Early Modern period based on the Helsinki Corpus — a multi-genre historical corpus — is summarised as follows. In Period I (1500–1570) of the Helsinki Corpus, no instance of *its* is observed. The two postnominal variants *of it* and *thereof* account for about half of the examples: *of it* (46%) and *thereof* (54%). In Period II (1570–1640), *its* is found but only in a very small number (3%). The other variables *of it* and *thereof* both remain major variants with a frequency of over 45% respectively. In Period III (1640–1710), the overall distribution suddenly changes. The new possessive pronoun *its* spreads very rapidly (63%), whereas the adverbial variable *thereof* quickly loses ground (8%). The other variable *of it* also declines, but remains a major variant (29%).

It is widely accepted that the new prenominal variant *its* spread first in use in spoken language (Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg 1994). The distributional pattern varies in different types of texts. Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg (1994) also provide the data for speech-related genres in the Helsinki Corpus. The expansion of *its* in speech-related genres is slightly faster. The decline of *thereof* starts earlier in oral genres; only 20% in Period II as compared with 50% in the overall corpus (Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg 1994: 196). By contrast, *of it* remains a major variant both in the overall corpus (29%) and in the speech-related genres (30%) until Period III. The frequency of *its* in spoken registers in the latter half of the seventeenth century is slightly commoner than the general developmental pattern.

Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg (2003) discuss the transition in the frequency of *its* in Early Modern English letters, drawing on the Corpus of Early English Correspondence. In Early Modern English letters, the development of *its* follows more or less a similar

pace as that found in the Helsinki Corpus; the percentage of *its* out of the total of three major variants is 4% in 1600–1639 and 35% in 1640–1681 (Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg 2003: 63). However, they do not calculate the frequency of the postnominal variants *of it* and *thereof* separately, since their main interest lies in the pace of the introduction of *its* and the social factors related to it. Culpeper & Kytö (2010: 187–190) also show that a very similar pattern for the development of *its* is observed in their corpus of oral texts except for legal genres, viz. plays, fiction and didactic works. However, in trials and witness depositions, the adoption of *its* is twenty years behind, despite their general character of recording dialogues verbatim. They attribute the late adoption of *its* in legal genres to the genre-specific semantic and pragmatic strategies. For the present analysis, the data for the Helsinki Corpus may be assessed as a reference data-set, since it provides distributional pattern for three major variants over the Early Modern period. Stylistic association of the three major variants in Early Modern English is not well documented; *of it* and *its* are considered favoured in colloquial language (Knorrek 1938: 115; Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg 1994: 197), whereas *thereof* tends to be employed in formal genres, particularly in legal language (Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg 1994: 195). Though the variables have been associated with registers particularly in terms of the dichotomy such as formal/informal and literate/colloquial, the social meaning of such variables has yet to be systematically analyzed and discussed.

## 2. Corpus & Methodology

### 2.1 Corpus

The present analysis utilizes two religious genre corpora: The Corpus of English Religious Prose (COERP) and The Corpus of Sermons in Early Modern English (CoSEME). The COERP is being compiled by a research group at the University of Cologne headed by Thomas Kohnen, and aims to include prose from 1150 to the present in various genres in the religious domain such as prayers, catechisms, sermons and religious biographies. The Early Modern part of the corpus has been made available online. The COERP is useful in identifying general distributional patterns in religious genres over time. Kohnen et al. (2011) suggest that in religious genres linguistic changes generally follow the same track, while sometimes significantly lagging behind the data for contemporary letters.

The Corpus of Sermons in Early Modern English (CoSEME; cf. Yadomi 2016) comprises c.1.2 million words of English sermons published between 1572–1692, covering the late Elizabethan and Stuart periods. The authors of the sermons consist of

25 preachers whose social variables are tagged. Tags related to preachers' social background include their life-span, regional background, education, social status and confessional orientations. The CoSEME is a valuable digital source offering linguistic data for idiolects as well as Early Modern English sermons. The texts are drawn from transcriptions of printed resources included in Early English Books Online — an online database containing more than 130,000 digitised pieces of publication between 1473 and 1700 — and compiled for my PhD project (cf. Yadomi 2019). The corpus is designed for sociolinguistic analyses, with a particular focus on language variation and change on three levels of speakers: individual, community of practice and discourse community. Table 1 shows the list of corpus informants over three generations including their lifespans.<sup>1)</sup>

Table 1 Informants of the CoSEME in three generations

First Generation 1530-1564	Second Generation 1565-1599	Third Generation 1600-1630
John Whitgift 1530-1604	Arthur Lake 1569-1626	Christopher Cartwright 1602-1658
Thomas Cartwright 1535-1603	John Donne 1572-1631	Thomas Fuller 1608-1668
Laurence Chaderton 1536-1640	William Laud 1573-1645	Jeremy Taylor 1613-1667
Richard Bancroft 1544-1610	Joseph Hall 1574-1656	Richard Baxter 1615-1683
John Dod 1549-1645	Richard Sibbes 1577-1635	John Owen 1616-1683
Richard Hooker 1533-1600	Thomas Adams 1583-1653	John Tillotson 1630-1694
Lancelot Andrewes 1555-1626	Thomas Hooker 1586-1647	
William Perkins 1558-1602	John Preston 1587-1628	
Henry Smith 1560-1591	Henry King 1592-1669	
George Abbot 1562-1633		

## 2.2 Reconstructing Early Modern English Religious Communities

Language change is transmitted through the interaction of speakers, and its processes are inevitably affected by social forces which originate in the dynamic interaction of communities and their members' identities. Such complex processes result from the social meaning of linguistic features, which affects the language choice of individual speakers and, eventually, plays a significant role in language change (e. g. Nevalainen et al. 2011). Speakers are active agents of linguistic variation and change, and communities are the loci for the making of such social meaning through negotiation: monitoring,

1) Some authors contribute less than 50,000 words due to the scarcity of available texts.

assessment and accommodation/avoidance of certain linguistic features. In order to analyse the process and functioning of the social meaning, the present study draws upon two sociolinguistic notions: *discourse community* and *community of practice*.

The concept of speech community has been frequently used in sociolinguistics, but its definition widely varies. As Patrick (2002) points out, the term has been used rather haphazardly to mean various social groups with different social characteristics. More recently developed notions — discourse community and community of practice — are defined more specifically. Following Swales (1990), Watts (2009) extends the notion of discourse community to include ‘a set of individuals who constitute a community on the basis of their common interests, goals, beliefs, and enterprise as revealed in their oral or written practices’. The most distinctive aspects of the notion of discourse community are *genre ownership* and *maintenance*. As historical sociolinguistic studies have effectively employed, the discourse community may be used for a profession group who owns a particular genre (Fitzmaurice 2007 for Early Modern periodical essay writers; Watts 2009 for eighteenth-century grammar writers). Hence, the Early Modern sermon writers (i. e. CoSEME informants as a whole) may be considered as a discourse community. They had ‘a broadly agreed set of common public goals’ (Swales 1990: 24) and, most importantly, owned and maintained the genre of sermons as well as other religious genres. In order to be a minister, people had to graduate from universities (e. g., Oxford and Cambridge), where they acquired discursual expertise to preach and compose sermons.

However, the discourse community of Early Modern English sermon writers was not homogenous; sermon writers had various confessional orientations and practices. Ministers fiercely argued over ceremonial practices such as kneeling for communion, wearing the surplice and using the cross in baptism. In addition, some ministers did not accept the episcopacy or subscribe to the Articles enforced by the Church of England. Thus, Early Modern sermon writers may be classified into smaller sub-groups, communities of practice, based on their religious identities and practices. According to Wenger, a community of practice must fulfill the following three criteria: mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire (1988: 72–85). Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (1992: 464) define the notion as ‘an aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in endeavor. Ways of doing things, ways of talking beliefs, values, power relations — in short, practices — emerge in the course of this mutual endeavor’. The 25 corpus informants are classified into four communities of practice: Anti-Puritans, Conformist-Calvinists, Moderate Puritans and Radical Puritans. In addition, three generations within the discourse community are

distinguished for analytical purposes, due to the reality that the criteria to identify communities of practice changes over time according to changing situations and policies both within and outside church. The informants, who were born between 1530 and 1630, have been classified by generation, defined here as a span of 30–35 years. Thus, the first-generation preachers are born between 1530 and 1564, the second generation between 1565 and 1599 and the third generation between 1600 and 1630.

Table 2 Early Modern English Religious Communities of Practice over three generations

	Anglicans		Puritans	
	Anti-Puritans	Conformist Calvinists	Moderate Puritans	Radical Puritans
1st Generation (born in 1530-64)	J. Whitgift	G. Abbot	L. Chaderton	T. Cartwright
	R. Bancroft		W. Perkins	J. Dod
	R. Hooker		H. Smith	
	L. Andrewes			
2nd Generation (born in 1565-99)	W. Laud	A. Lake	R. Sibbes	T. Hooker
		J. Donne	T. Adams	
		J. Hall	J. Preston	
		H. King		
3rd Generation (born in 1600-30)	J. Taylor	T. Fuller		C. Cartwright
		J. Tillotson		R. Baxter
				J. Owen

The four communities of practice have been distinguished by the degree of their conformity to the policy of the state and church. Criteria for distinguishing communities of practice include formal subscription to canons and articles, and also observation of practices prescribed therein ; the use of the *Book of Common Prayer* and the surplice at religious services and the sign of the cross at baptism (Stephens 2011). The question of the ecclesiastical enforcement of subscription/conformity changes over time ; during the Early Modern era after the Elizabethan settlement, stricter enforcement was demanded from clergymen by policies enacted by members of the royal family and Church of England officials until the zenith of the Laudians' power in the 1630s (cf. Lake 2000). The classification of Anglicans and Puritans may be problematic, since many of Moderate Puritans, though non-conforming in some respects, still attended Anglican churches. However, they were considered by their peer ministers as 'puritans' and, by this point, the dichotomy of Anglicans and Puritans is employed for analytical purposes. Yadomi

(2019) discusses the classifying criteria and the development of communities of practice in detail.

### 2.3 Data collection

In the present analysis, three major variants for the neuter possessive are considered: the new genitive pronoun *its* and two postnominal paraphrases *of it* and *thereof*. The traditional pronominal variants *his* and *it* are not included in the analysis since they are, though still available, nearly obsolete in the period which the corpus covers. An investigation of randomly selected 2000 examples of *his* from the CoSEME (out of 11100 examples in the whole corpus) shows that only 21 instances (c. 1%) are used for the neuter possessive. As regards the possessive *it*, there is only one instance found in the Early Modern part of the Helsinki Corpus, which covers the period between 1500 and 1710 (Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg 1994: 189). In addition, Lehnert (1958: 23) and the *Oxford English Dictionary* (s. v. *its*, poss. pron.) observe that the first edition of the King James Bible published in 1611 contains only one case of uninflected possessive *it*, which is in the 1660 edition emended into *its* (*of it/its own accord*, Leviticus XXV, 5). For the reasons above, the two postnominal variants will not be considered in the present analysis. The uses of three major variants for the neuter possessive in the CoSEME are illustrated in (1)–(3).

- (1) But so does a thirsty land drink all the dew of heaven that wets **its** face, and ...

(Jeremy Taylor<sup>2)</sup>)

- (2) True religion hath the true fruites **of it**, to keepe himselfe from the lusts of the world, and to visite the sicke, the fatherlesse, and widdowes.

(Thomas Cartwright)

- (3) First, because it doth mortifie and crucifie the flesh; that is, originall corruption, with all the lusts and fruites **thereof**.

(John Dod)

In example (4), *of it* and *thereof* share the same antecedent 'the Lords vine'; thus, the two variants are clearly interchangeable in this context. Such switching between *of it*

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2) The examples in the present paper come from the CoSEME unless otherwise stated.

and *thereof* is not unusual as examples (5) and (6) below demonstrate.

- (4) They were the Lords vine: he brought it out of Egypt, he threwe out the heathen from their places, that it might be planted, hee made room for it, and caused it to take roote, till it had filled the earth, the mountaines were covered with the shadowe **of it**, and the boughs **thereof** were as the goodly Cedars.

(Richard Hooker)

- (5) God would haue the beames of his house Cedar, and the galleries of firre; like King Solomons Chariot; the pillars **thereof** are siluer, the bottome **thereof** gold, the couering **of it**, of purple; the midst **thereof** beeing paued with loue for the daughters of Ierusalem~.

(Thomas Adams)

- (6) Which griefe is set out, by two speciall circumstances; to wit, by the greatnesse **of it**, and by the truth **of it**. The greatnesse **thereof** is declared by two comparisons, which yet are inferiour and lesse then the thing it selfe.

(John Dod)

The present analysis follows the selection criteria adopted by Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg (1994, 2003), which are also used in Culpeper & Kytö (2010). Their criteria are well constructed and may be employed to make comparisons of my data sets with those from previous studies. The new third-person singular neuter possessive pronoun *its* appears in two forms — *its* and *it's* — so both forms are collected and considered. The essential selection criterion for postnominal variants is the definiteness of the preceding noun phrase (NP); instances are left out when they do not have the definite article *the* even though *of it* or *thereof* follows them; hence, '∅ NP *of it*' and '∅ NP *thereof*' are not considered. The formal equivalence is established between '*its*+NP' and 'the NP+*of it* / the NP+*thereof*'. The pronominal adverb *thereof* may refer to both plural and singular referent; only instances for a singular referent are considered for the analysis. Instances of *thereof* which refer to a plural referent as in (7) are left out.

- (7) Let vs get faith and loue in our hearts, and let vs manifest the fruits **thereof** in our liues:

(John Dod)



As in examples (8), (10) and (12) below, *thereof* sometimes means very close to the adverb of place *there*, especially in Bible quotations. These instances are included in the analysis because they are translated into *its* in twenty-first-century editions as shown in (9), (11) and (13).

- (8) I summe up all in the words of God by the Prophet : *Run to and fro thorow the streets of Jerusalem, and see, and know, and seek in **the broad places thereof**, if you can finde a man, if there be any that executeth judgment, that seeketh truth [...]*

(Jeremy Taylor)

- (9) Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in **its broad places**, if you can find a man, if there is any that executes justice, that seeks the truth ; and I will pardon it.

(Jeremiah 5 : 1, *King James 2000 Bible*)

- (10) When I shall receive the Congregation, (*or, when I shall take a convenient time*) I will judge according unto right. The earth is dissolved, (*or, melted*) and all **the Inhabitants thereof** ; I beare up the pillars of it.

(William Laud)

- (11) 2 'At the set time that I appoint I will judge with equity. 3 When the earth totters, and all **its inhabitants**, it is I who keep steady its pillars.

(Psalm 75 : 2-3, *English Standard Version*)

- (12) Labour to serve him, 1 *Ioh.* 2.17. *The world passeth away, and **the lusts thereof**, but hee that doth the will of the LORD abides for ever [...]*

(John Preston)

- (13) And the world is passing away along with **its desires**, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

(1 John 2 : 17, *English Standard Version*)

In addition, as Culpeper & Kytö (2010 : 186) clearly note, the following cases are excluded from the analysis ; ' (a) invariant forms such as quantitative partitives, (b) complex prepositions and other petrified idioms and fixed phrases, (c) *of* as part of a

prepositional object phrase, (d) sentential antecedents and (e) *of* meaning “concerning”. Fixed phrases such as ‘get the better of it’ (Oxford English Dictionary, *better*, adj. II. 8) as in (14) are excluded.

- (14) I wil neuer bee in bondage vnto my corruptions any more ; for grace shall haue the vpper hand of nature, and the Spirit shall master the flesh, and **get the better of it**.

(John Dod)

Examples of (c) ‘*of* as part of prepositional object phrase’, most notably cases where *of it* or *thereof* work as the object of the preceding gerund as in (15-17), are excluded.

- (15) It is most kindly, to take part with Him, in that, which He tooke part in, with us ; and that, to no other end, but that He might make the receiving **of it** by us, a meanes, whereby He might dwell in us, and we in Him.

(Lancelot Andrewes)

- (16) To make now some Use of this Point, and so to conclude, This Doctrine my brethren, is wonderfull sweet and usefull, and therefore I have been somewhat the longer, in the proving and explaining **thereof**.

(Thomas Hooker)

- (17) The first work of the grace of humilitie, is a discerning of the want of humilitie ; the first work of the grace of Faith, is a discerning of the want of Faith, &c. So that there is, I say, a discerning of the want of such and such graces, but that is not all ; hypocrites may sometime see the want of grace, but there is together with a discerning of the want of grace, an apprehension of the excellencie of grace, a hungring and thirsting after the getting **of it**, a high valuing of those that have it, and a constant use of the Ordinances for the obtaining **of it**.

(Thomas Hooker)

Examples (18) and (19), where the antecedent of *of it* and *thereof* is not a specific NP but the previous clause, have been also excluded.

- (18) Demas, and Simon Magus, and Ecebolius, and the lapsed Confessors are

instances of humane craft or humane weaknesse ; but they are scarce a number that are remarked in Ancient story to have fallen from Christianity by direct persuasions, or the efficacy of abusing arguments and discourses. The reason **of it** is the truth in the text ; God did so avoyd hearing sinners in this affair, [...]

(Jeremy Taylor)

- (19) Others haue bin as well conceited of themselues as you, and thereupon haue been bold without any calling or warrant to trauell into strange countries, and being there, to see Images, and to heare Masses, and to vse familiarity with men of all sorts. But what hath been the euent **thereof**?

(John Dod)

### 3. Data & Analyses

#### 3.1 Discourse Community Level

Figure 1 shows the distribution of third-person neuter possessives in the COERP. The development of *its* in religious genres shows a pattern similar to the general distributional pattern from the Helsinki Corpus (Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg 1994) ; the frequency of *its* starts to increase from the first half of the seventeenth century and more rapidly from the 1640s onwards. However, the distributional pattern of *thereof* is strikingly different. The proportion of *thereof* in the COERP is

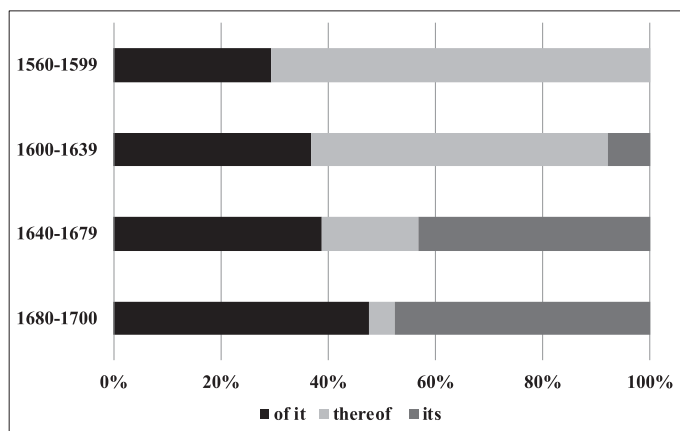


Figure 1 The frequency of third-person singular possessives in the COERP (%)

extraordinarily high until 1640 in comparison with the data from the Helsinki Corpus. However, *thereof* rapidly declines in frequency in subsequent decades; the frequency of *therefore* diminishes to 18% in the middle of the seventeenth century and then 5% in the late seventeenth century. The proportion for the middle of the seventeenth century (18%) is still relatively high compared with the general deployment, but it becomes very low in the late seventeenth century. Hence, the overall trend in religious genres indicates a gradual increase in the frequency of *its* and of *it*, as well as a rapid decline of *thereof* in the seventeenth century.

Figure 2 shows the distribution of third-person singular neuter possessives in the CoSEME in three 40-year periods. In the late sixteenth century, there is no instance of *its*; postnominal variants *of it* and *thereof* account for 100% of the occurrences. In the first half of the seventeenth century, *its* starts to be sporadically found (11%). The use of *thereof* declines in frequency, while that of *of it* increases. After 1640 onwards, the frequency of *its* rises very rapidly as in other genres. It is noteworthy that the decline of *thereof* stops in the middle of the seventeenth century; in fact, the frequency of *thereof* slightly increases in 1640-1679. This pattern is contrary to the patterns in other genres reported in previous studies. In the middle of the seventeenth century, the frequency of *of it* slightly decreases, though its use steadily increases in other genres. Overall, in sermons the three major variants *its*, *of it* and *thereof* all remain major variants until 1679. The proportion of *thereof* for the period 1600-1639 in the CoSEME (20%) is lower than that in the COERP (55%), but the pattern reverses in the subsequent period

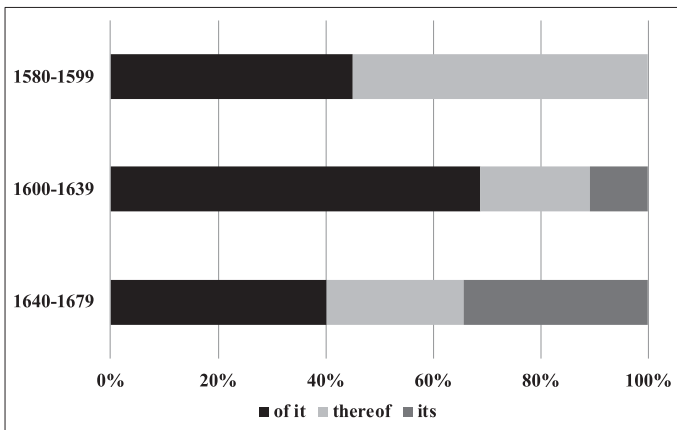


Figure 2 The frequency of third-person singular possessives in the CoSEME

1640–1679 with a frequency of 25% in the CoSEME and 18% in the COERP. This change in the distributional patterns is suggestive.

In terms of the use of *thereof*, two opposing patterns can be observed; compared with the religious genres represented by the COERP, the use of *thereof* in Early Modern English sermons declines faster in the beginning, but remains a major variant longer. This unexpected pattern in Early Modern English sermons may be explained separately. The early decline of *thereof* in English sermons may be related to a textual factor. The proportion of *thereof* in the CoSEME is consistently lower than in the COERP between 1560 and 1639. The low proportion in English sermons in comparison with other religious genres may be due to the colloquial character of sermons specific to spoken genres, in which Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg (1994: 198) report the decline of *thereof* is faster.

The retained use of *thereof* until the late seventeenth century in English sermons may be discussed in terms of the social meaning attached to *thereof*. Yadomi (2019) indicates that the distributional pattern of some linguistic features in English sermons deviated from the general pattern in the middle of the seventeenth century. He then suggests that archaic linguistic features typical of religious genres such as the third-person singular inflection *-th* and the second-person singular pronoun *thou* acquire the specific social meaning around the middle of the seventeenth century. Thus, the present result — a longer retention of *thereof* in Early Modern English sermons — may indicate that *thereof* become socially indexed in the discourse community of Early Modern sermon writers. It is highly likely that the social meaning is induced by the archaic language use in contemporary English bibles. The proportion of *thereof* is, compared with contemporary texts, exceptionally high in Early Modern English bibles: 83% in the Geneva Bible published in 1560 and 77% in the King James Bible published in 1611. The language of English bibles is associated with serious and solemn tone with the use of archaic linguistic features already in the Early Modern period. Thus, the use of *thereof* may be employed for the same effect. Overall, the adverbial possessive *thereof* remain the major variant in liturgical language at least until the late seventeenth century and may be associated with the particular social meaning, representing archaic and solemn tone of the religious genre, in the discourse community of sermon writers. However, this does not necessarily mean that *thereof* become consolidated to the level of authentic religious language as a token of professional and religious identity, considering the decline of *thereof* in the late seventeenth century in religious genres as observed in the data for the COERP. The social meaning of *thereof* may be further explored in the following micro-sociolinguistic analysis, drawing on the notion of community of practice.

3.2 Community of Practice Level

Figure 3 displays the distribution of third-person singular possessives by 25 individual sermon writers. The raw figures for each informant are given in the table in Appendix. There seems to be no apparent correlation between writers' communities of practice and their choice of third-person singular neuter possessives. There is too great a

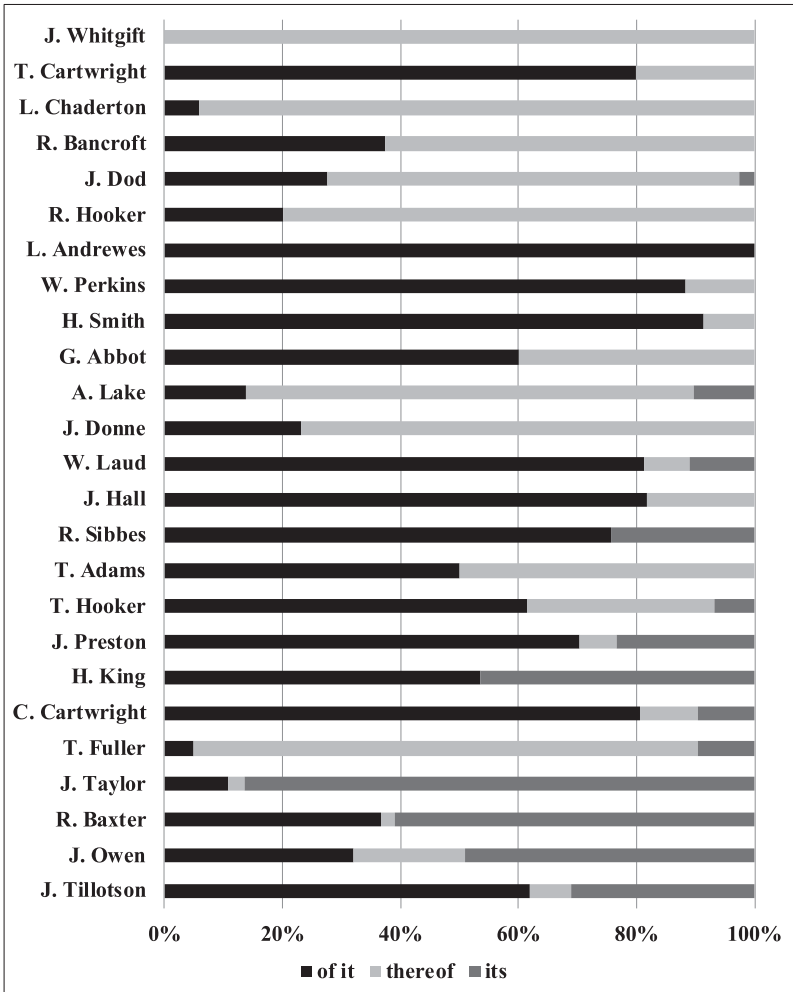


Figure 3 The frequency of third-person singular possessives by individual writers (%)

variation in the choice of third-person neuter possessives among individual sermon writers. The data for individual writers is summarised with regard to each generation below. No instance of *its* in the first generation is found except for only one example by John Dod. Among the second-generation preachers, the use of *its* is sporadically found; six out of eight writers use it to varying degrees. Two Puritan preachers, Richard Sibbes and John Preston, employ it with a frequency of more than 20%. In the third generation, all preachers use *its*, though the proportion varies greatly between individual sermon writers. Jeremy Taylor stands out, using *its* with a frequency of 86%; thus, he is considered to be a progressive user, i. e. conforming to the general usage outside the religious context. In the last generation, the new possessive pronoun *its* is already a major variant; the average proportion of *its* out of three major variants is 45% and all writers except Christopher Cartwright and Thomas Fuller use *its* with a frequency of more than 30%.

The use of *thereof* is also widely varied among informants from the beginning. Among the first-generation writers, some preachers use *thereof* categorically or nearly so. By contrast, other writers such as Lancelot Andrewes, William Perkins and Henry Smith employ *of it* much more frequently. Andrewes' invariable use of periphrastic *of it* is rather surprising, since his preaching has been classified as a learned, metaphysical style (Davies 1986: 195). As mentioned above, the construction *of it* has been associated with colloquial language, whereas *thereof* with more formal style (Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg 1994). In the second generation, the use of *thereof* is still retained in the sermons of authors such as Thomas Adams, Arthur Lake and John Donne. By contrast, two Puritans — Richard Sibbes and John Preston — employ *thereof* infrequently. However, the infrequent use of *thereof* may not be directly associated with Puritans because William Laud, a well-known Anti-Puritan minister, shows the infrequent use. Thus, in the second generation there seems no clear pattern between writers' membership in the communities of practice and their use of *thereof*. In the third generation, most of the preachers use *thereof* with a frequency less than 10%. Only Thomas Fuller and John Owen continue to employ *thereof* frequently. Though a radical Puritan, John Owen might have effectively employed *thereof* to give his sermons a solemn tone. Thomas Fuller is clearly an outlier among the third-generation preachers; his language may be particularly formal compared with other contemporary preachers. When the data for each writer is assessed, the correlation between sermon writers' community of practice membership and their choice of the neuter possessive may not be observed. However, a clearer pattern is noted when the aggregate data for each community of practice is presented.

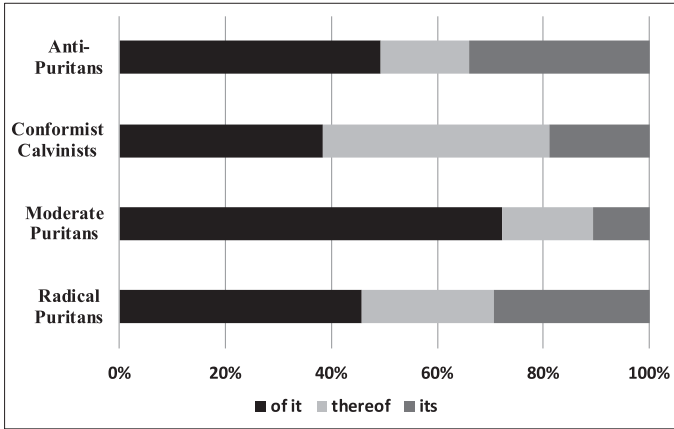


Figure 4 The frequency of third-person singular possessives by community of practice (%)

Figure 4 provides the overall proportion of the three variants for third-person singular neuter possessives by each community of practice. Anti-Puritans show their preference for the new form *its*, whereas Moderate Puritans use it least frequently. This result may indicate Anti-Puritans' progressiveness and Moderate Puritans' conservativeness. The post-nominal adverb *thereof* was most frequently employed by Conformist Calvinists and most infrequently by Anti-Puritans and Moderate Puritans. The frequent use of *thereof* by Conformist Calvinists may indicate their conservativeness in the use of this linguistic feature. Conformist Calvinists' conservative linguistic practice is also observed in their preference for second person singular *thou* and long forms of possessive adjectives *mine/thine* (Yadomi 2019). However, different motivations may lie behind the infrequent use of *thereof* by Anti-Puritans and Moderate Puritans, since their preference for the use of *its* is different. Anti-Puritans' practice — frequent use of *its* and infrequent use of *thereof* — may indicate their preference for progressive linguistic features. By contrast, Moderate Puritans' practice — frequent use of *of it* and infrequent use of *its* and *thereof* — may be explained by their preference for colloquial linguistic features.

Overall, the social meaning of each linguistic variable may be summarised as below. The use of *thereof* is, as discussed in the previous section, associated with religious genre, with an archaic and solemn tone. This result partly corresponds to the formal, archaic association of *thereof* demonstrated in legal writing (Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg 1994: 195). Due to the association with the biblical usage, *thereof* is also



regarded as a conservative usage. By contrast, the periphrastic *of it* is considered to be a colloquial feature (Knorrek 1938: 115; Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg 1994: 197). The use of new pronoun *its* has been also associated with colloquial language, but it may be rather considered to be a progressive form, since the use of *its* is rapidly expanding in the period under consideration. In the religious genre, the use of *its* despite its obvious tendency for the archaic style may be considered as progressive.

Correlation has been observed to some degree between sermon writers' communities of practice and their choice of third-person singular neuter possessives. Anti-Puritans are progressive users because of their frequent use of progressive *its* and infrequent use of conservative *thereof*. By contrast, Conformist Calvinists are conservative linguistic users due to their preference for the use of *thereof*. Conformist Calvinists attempt to conform to the biblical language in their sermons most faithfully with regard to the use of *thereof*. Moderate Puritans' infrequent use of progressive *its* indicates their conservative linguistic preference. In addition, the infrequent use of formal *thereof* and the frequent use of colloquial *of it* both indicate their preference for the colloquial linguistic features. Traditionally, the Puritan plain style preaching has been associated with colloquial language (Mitchell 1932: 26). The pattern — progressive Anti-Puritans and conservative Moderates including Conformist Calvinists and Moderate Puritans — accords to the patterns observed in other linguistic features (Yadomi 2019). The social meaning of *thereof* is advocated most notably by Conformist Calvinists, but members of other communities of practice support this trend to varying degrees.

#### 4. Conclusion

In the present paper, the uses of the third-person neuter possessive — *of it*, *thereof* and *its* — in Early Modern sermons have been classified and examined. In English sermons, the timing of the emergence and the subsequent development of *its* are similar to other genres. However, the use of the post-nominal adverb *thereof* in religious genres is notably different from other contemporary texts. The declining pace of *thereof* in the CoSEME and the COERP is clearly slower than in other genres. The frequency of *thereof* in Early Modern English sermons is high compared with the general usage particularly in the middle of the seventeenth century. Hence, the frequent use of *thereof* may be considered as a distinctive feature in seventeenth-century religious genres, and probably one that become socially evaluated in the relevant discourse community. Such social meaning is likely to be motivated by a desire to imitate the language in contemporary English bibles, in which *thereof* is used much more frequently than in any other contemporary texts. The accommodation to the Biblical usage therefore

encourages the discourse community members to regard *thereof* as a marker of authentic religious language.

The use of *thereof* is given the social meaning associated with the formal and solemn religious register around the middle of the seventeenth century. However, the declining frequency of *thereof* in the late seventeenth century in religious genres observed in the COERP may suggest that the social meaning may not be established to be authentic religious language as a token of professional and religious identity, as demonstrated in the retained use of second-person singular pronoun *thou* and third-person singular inflection *-th* (cf. Yadomi 2019). The unsuccessful development of *thereof* into authentic religious language may be explained thus. A micro-sociolinguistic analysis has shown that certain communities of practice — classified according to writers' religious identity and practice — advocate and advance the social meaning of *thereof* to varying degrees. Anti-Puritans use *thereof* most frequently, whereas Conformist Calvinists employ it most infrequently. Moderate Puritans use *of it* frequently and *its* infrequently, indicating their preference for conservative and colloquial linguistic features at the same time. Among four communities of practice, Conformist Calvinists promote the use of *thereof*, but their endeavour is not fully supported by Puritans. In addition, the distributional pattern with regard to communities of practice is by no means consistent. The great variation in the use of *thereof* among sermon writers may be due to the lack of wide agreement on the retention of *thereof* even among community of practice members. Thus, the social meaning of *thereof* may not be promoted as a community enterprise; rather, it is likely to be advocated by each writer due to their individual desire to retain and incorporate the language found in English bibles.

The lack of wide agreement on the use of *thereof* may be due to the merit for the use of other variants *of it* and *its*. The competing postnominal variant *of it* is associated with colloquial language. Puritans orientate to both conservative and colloquial linguistic features. Thus, their motivation for the use of *thereof* and *of it* is contradicted. Moderate Puritans do not support the retained use of *thereof*. This lack of support by Puritans may be regarded as a major factor behind the unsuccessful development of *thereof* into a part of authentic religious language. The use of new form *its*, in addition to the progressive association, is grammatically functional. Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg (1994) discuss that the pronominal possessive *its* spreads very quickly because the pronominal paradigm lacks the pronominal neuter possessive after the demise of *his* and *it* for neuter possessives: the systemic gap necessitates the advent and the following development of *its*. Overall, the social meaning of *thereof* is temporally observed in Early Modern English sermons around the middle of the seventeenth century, but the social

meaning does not develop into a fixed linguistic feature exerting a lasting influence on the religious language. The social meaning declines because of the conflicting motivations for competing variants. Language variation and change is a complex process involving a range of factors. The effect of the social meaning of *thereof* does not contradict the factors promoting the use of other variants. As the present paper has discussed, the social meaning of linguistic features specific to a certain community may be considered a major factor, though not the sole factor, explaining such a complex process of language variation and change.

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Appendix : The distribution of third-person singular neuter possessives by 25 sermon writers (/50,000 words)

Informants	<i>of it</i>	<i>thereof</i>	<i>its</i>	Total	<i>of it</i>	<i>thereof</i>	<i>its</i>
J. Whitgift	0	5	0	5	0%	100%	0%
T. Cartwright	16	4	0	20	80%	20%	0%
L. Chaderton	1	16	0	17	6%	94%	0%
R. Bancroft	9	15	0	24	38%	63%	0%
J. Dod	11	28	1	40	28%	70%	3%
R. Hooker	2	8	0	10	20%	80%	0%
L. Andrewes	32	0	0	32	100%	0%	0%
W. Perkins	60	8	0	68	88%	12%	0%
H. Smith	21	2	0	23	91%	9%	0%
G. Abbot	12	8	0	20	60%	40%	0%
A. Lake	4	22	3	29	14%	76%	10%
J. Donne	3	10	0	13	23%	77%	0%
W. Laud	52	5	7	64	81%	8%	11%
J. Hall	9	2	0	11	82%	18%	0%
R. Sibbes	28	0	9	37	76%	0%	24%
T. Adams	9	9	0	18	50%	50%	0%
T. Hooker	27	14	3	44	61%	32%	7%
J. Preston	45	4	15	64	70%	6%	23%
H. King	15	0	13	28	54%	0%	46%
C. Cartwright	25	3	3	31	81%	10%	10%
T. Fuller	3	53	6	62	5%	85%	10%
J. Taylor	8	2	64	74	11%	3%	86%
R. Baxter	15	1	25	41	37%	2%	61%
J. Owen	32	19	49	100	32%	19%	49%
J. Tillotson	44	5	22	71	62%	7%	31%
Total	483	243	220	946	51%	26%	23%