Suffixes in Competition:
On the Use of *-our* and *-or* in Early Modern English

MARTA PACHECO-FRANCO & JAVIER CALLE-MARTÍN*
University of Málaga (Spain)

ABSTRACT

This paper presents a corpus-driven analysis of the linguistic competition between the suffixes *-our*/*-or* in Early Modern English. It is conceived as a state of the art to provide an explanation of the development and distribution of these competing suffixes in Early Modern English. The study is based on the distribution of the most common set of words with alternative spellings in the period to investigate the development and the standardisation of the *-our* and *-or* groups. The study offers the quantitative distribution of the suffixes in the period corroborating the participation of phenomena such as linguistic extinction, specialisation, blocking and lexicalisation in the configuration of the contemporary morphological paradigm. The source of evidence comes from the corpus of *Early English Books Online* (Davies, 2017) for the period 1470–1690*.* In addition to this, the study also relies on sources such as the *Evans Corpus* (2011), the *Corpus of Historical American English* (Davies, 2010) and the *Corpus of Contemporary American English* (Davies, 2008)*.*

KEYWORDS: Early Modern English; Morphology; *-our*; *-or*; Standardisation; Suffixes.

1. INTRODUCTION

Present-day English (henceforth PDE) has two distinct orthographical realisations for words such as *honour* and *labour*: the one hereby adopted is typical of British English, and the other, *honor* and *labor*, is representative of American English (Gramley & Pátzold, 2003: 279). This

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*****Address for correspondence**: Marta Pacheco-Franco, Departamento de Filología Inglesa, Francesa y Alemana, Universidad de Málaga; e-mail: mpacheco@uma.es. Javier Calle-Martín, Departamento de Filología Inglesa, Francesa y Alemana, Universidad de Málaga; e-mail: jcalle@uma.es.

suffix has often been described as forming abstract nouns of conditions, although it is no longer productive (*Oxford English Dictionary* [hereafter *OED*], s.v. *-our* and *-or*, suffixes). Despite their similarities in orthography and phonology, the *-or* termination in words such as *emperor* or *doctor* should be considered a different suffix altogether, since it is involved in a different derivational process in PDE: that of agentive nouns. Given that its productivity is limited to items with Latin and Greek terms and/or with bound bases, agentive *-or* is only second to the native derivational suffix *-er* (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002: 1697; Quirk et al., 1985: 1550). Such an unequivocal morphological paradigm is, nevertheless, the result of a long-lasting competition between the Romance suffixes *-our* and *-or*, the former of French origin and the latter of Latin provenance.[1] The origin of this orthographic variation may be traced back to late Middle English when *-our* was not only a highly productive suffix, but also derived agentive nouns; and when *-or* first began interfering with the distributional domain of its counterpart (Dalton-Puffer, 1996: 148–149). These interferences were, nonetheless, sporadic, thus suggesting that the competition would end up in favour of the French form *-our*. However, the countless borrowings from Latin and French during the period, and the pressure of Latinists to base the spelling of English words on their etymon did not allow for the stabilisation of the morphological paradigm (Nevalainen, 2006: 32; Scragg, 1975: 54;). In fact, the sixteenth century saw the proliferation of both suffixes in different domains to the extent that Early Modern English (henceforth EModE) writers would use them interchangeably fostering further spelling divergence (*-owr*, *-owre*, *-ore*). This eventually led to the spread of orthographic fluctuation with items that ought to be outside of the sphere of influence of these two suffixes, as in the case of native words that were neither derivatives nor of Romance origin, such as *neighbour* or *harbour* (*OED*, s.v. *neighbour*, n.; Scragg, 1975: 57). This, to a broad extent, comes to corroborate the lack of orthographic standardisation in the rendering of these suffixes in the Early Modern period.

If adopting Haugen's stages for language legitimisation, at the onset of the Early Modern period, English would be found in the very first phase, i.e. selection (1966: 932). Indeed, variation is found across every linguistic level, thus providing speakers with a wide range of options to choose from, many of which were synonymous and functioned in the same ways. However, this superfluity soon becomes problematic and, "as language does not like to have two words for one and the same notion", competition ensues (Marchand, 1969: 241). The process of linguistic competition is to a large extent a sociolinguistic one, meaning that factors both external and internal to language are at play (Nevalainen 2006: 9). Such competition arises because of the existence of different variables, which is easily resolved by each individual selection. These decisions, which answer to the question of adoption, may change depending on the speaker's sex, age or class (Lass, 1999: 138). However, the eventual dominance and elaboration of one form over the other is not based on single occurrences, but on systematic ones. In the light of this, processes internal to language change arise, which Aronoff (2019: 41–42) illustrates in terms of biology. In the same way that animals sharing nutritional

requirements cannot coexist in one habitat over time, neither can synonymous linguistic structures co-occur in the same distributional domains of a specific language indefinitely. In the end, one must find a different ecological niche, or it will become extinct. Such specialisation and extinction processes are related to phenomena like blocking and lexicalisation in that they may influence language at a micro- or at a macro-level (Aronoff, 1976: 6; Bauer, 1978: 8, 2006: 196). On many occasions, changes pressed on individual words have had an impact on word-formation patterns, especially those which have a high frequency on the language, thus intertwining both levels (Bauer, 2006: 181). Even in considering the claims that this is not necessarily true, enquiring into the evolution of specific words will shed much light on the fate of the entire derivational paradigm.

The present paper analyses the history of the suffixes *-our* and *-or* in EModE to assess the standardisation of the forms both in British and in American English. The study is based on the distribution of the most common set of words with alternative spellings in the period to investigate the development and the standardisation of the *-our* set, i.e. words still spelled with both suffixes in PDE, and of the *-or* set, i.e. words already rendered with the univocal form *-or* in PDE. The suffixes will be described quantitatively, considering their development and distribution until their final configuration in the dominant inner circle varieties of English (i. e. British and American English). The paper is then conceived as a state-of-the-art study to provide an explanation of the development and distribution of these competing suffixes in English.

2. METHODOLOGY

The source material comes from the corpus of *Early English Books Online* (EEBO). This corpus has been chosen because of its quantitative and qualitative features, as it provides a sizeable input for the analysis of linguistic constructions in the period, especially considering the low frequency of the suffixes *-our* and *-or* in combination with some bases in EModE. Its chronology and size turn it into the appropriate source for the study of textual variation over time, providing accurate information about ongoing changes in EModE.

EEBO, developed by Mark Davies (2017) at Brigham Young University, is a 400-million-word collection which contains 30,000 volumes for the historical period 1470–1690. In strictly qualitative terms, in line with other corpora compiled by Mark Davies, the corpus allows the user to investigate the development of a linguistic item in each of the 23 decades in which it is organised, becoming the ideal input for investigation of changes in meaning and usage from a diachronic perspective. This version of the corpus is POS-tagged and facilitates searches not only by lemma but also by part-of-speech by means of a user-friendly interface and an attractive presentation of the results. Mark Davies's tagged version of EEBO has been designed using the CLAWS7 POS-tagger.[2] In this particular case, the instances were

automatically retrieved following a two-stage process. First, the complete set of occurrences of the suffixes -*our* and -*or* were generated to determine the most frequent bases with which these suffixes appeared. Next, the most frequent bases with alternative spellings were selected as the input for our study. Two different lines of research have been pursued in the light of the result in PDE. On the one hand, the -*our* set containing those items allowing both orthographic renderings in PDE, such as *honour* vs. *honor*, *favour* vs. *favor* or *labour* vs. *labor* and, on the other, the -*or* set incorporating those items with a univocal spelling in PDE, such as *emperor*, *author* or *doctor*. The process was not straightforward insofar as it required the searching for the different orthographic renderings of these suffixes (i.e. -*our*, -*oure*, -*ovr*, -*owr*, -*owre*, -*or*) together with the ruling out of the instances beyond the scope of the present research, such as the pronominals *your* and *our*, the numeral *four* and verbs like *pour*, among others. The corpus has eventually provided a total of 1,999,389 instances, 1,334,090 instances with -*our* and the other 665,299 instances with -*or*.

In order to present an exhaustive account of the development of these suffixes, other historical corpora have been employed: the *Evans Corpus* (2011) and the *Corpus of Historical American English*, or COHA (Davies, 2010). The *Evans Corpus*, compiled by the Text Creation Partnership, consists of over 99 million words produced in America in the period 1639–1800. It has been made available in the *Sketch Engine* website (Kilgarriff et al., 2014), which also incorporates tools facilitating the diachronic study of the language. COHA, also developed by Davies at Brigham Young University, displays 400 million words of text written in the period 1810–2000 in the United States. It contains over 100,000 texts including fiction, non-fiction, newspapers and magazine material. Its interface is arranged in a fashion similar to EEBO, thus allowing the user to search by decade, lemma or even by subcorpus.[3] On a final note, raw information was also drawn from the *Corpus of Contemporary American English*, or COCA (Davies, 2008), and the *English Web Corpus*, or *EnTenTen15* (2015). These are composed of 600 million and 15 billion words and are housed at Mark Davies's site and at *Sketch Engine*, respectively. Despite their many tools, these corpora were only used to carry out simple searches.

3. ANALYSIS

Figure 1 presents the occurrence of the twenty topmost frequent terms with the alternative spelling -*our*/-*or* in the corpus (normalised to a text of 100,000 words for the sake of comparison).[4] At first sight, the data do not point to the existence of any suffixal competition in the slightest, at least until the 1680s. The form -*our* clearly dominates throughout the whole period. However, -*or* increases in the sixteenth century and continues to do so during the seventeenth century, the last two decades of which mark the beginning of the conflict, as the Latin form starts gaining ground over its French counterpart. This development can also be

identified in the writings of the time. In his *Elementarie,* Mulcaster (1582: 146) recommends the use of the *-our* spelling, while 55 years later Coote (1637: 25) acknowledges the existence of the two variables and deems them both acceptable. However, there is a discrepancy in the attitudes of grammarians. In PDE the distributional domains of this pair of suffixes are clearly differentiated. Linguists seem to agree that agentive nouns are always spelled with *-or*, whereas abstract nouns of condition may vary depending on geographical factors, i.e. *-our* in British English and *-or* in American English (see Greenbaum & Whitcut, 1988; Huddleston & Pullum 2002; *OED*, s.v. *-our* and *-or*, suffixes; Quirk et al., 1985). This effectively raises the question of what type of nouns are under scrutiny here. Consequently, two major groupings may be distinguished: the *-our* set, which displays those words spelled with both suffixes in PDE; and the *-or* set, those words spelled with this univocal spelling in PDE.[5]
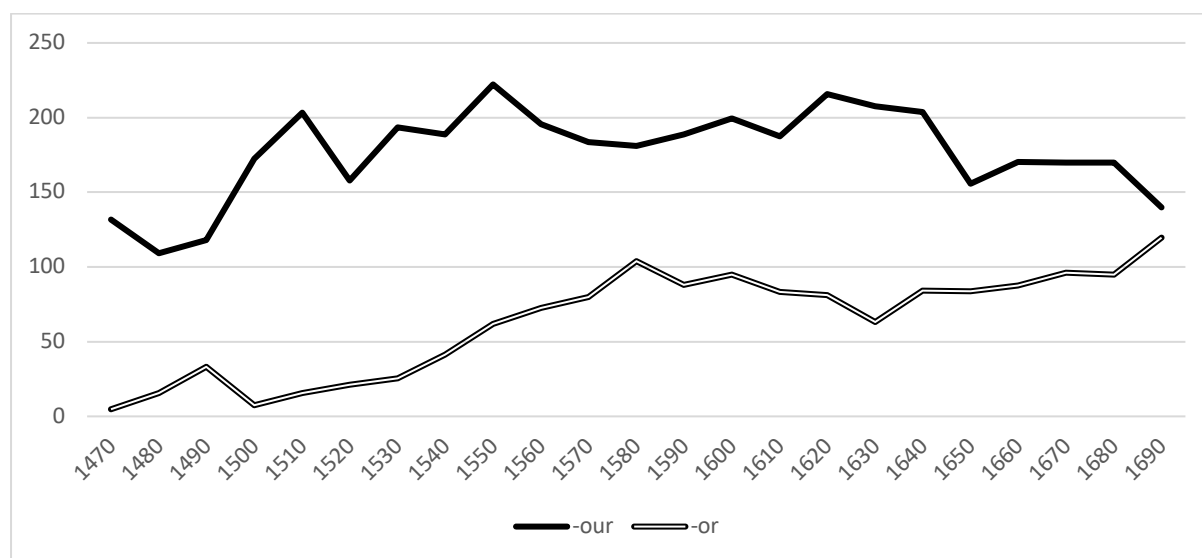

Figure 1. Frequencies of *-our* and *-or* in EEBO (n.f.).

The fact that the *-or* variant is more common in PDE, both because it is a productive suffix and due to its expansion in the American variety in words such as *honour*, does not seem to agree with the outstanding role of the French suffix in EModE. As shown in Figure 1, it may be gathered that these suffixes have followed different paths of development. Sections 3.1 and 3.2 therefore will analyse the distribution of each set independently.

3.1. Words derived with the suffix *-our*

This section focuses on the occurrence of the nouns with the suffix *-our* in PDE. The traditional classification based on a semantic rationale considered all nouns deriving in *-our* to be abstract nouns of condition. Nevertheless, items like *saviour* and *neighbour* do not belong in this group and, on the contrary, they are agentive nouns. However, because of their morphological properties in PDE, these have been considered to follow the same path of development. Figure

2 illustrates the occurrence of both suffixes in combination with these words in the period.
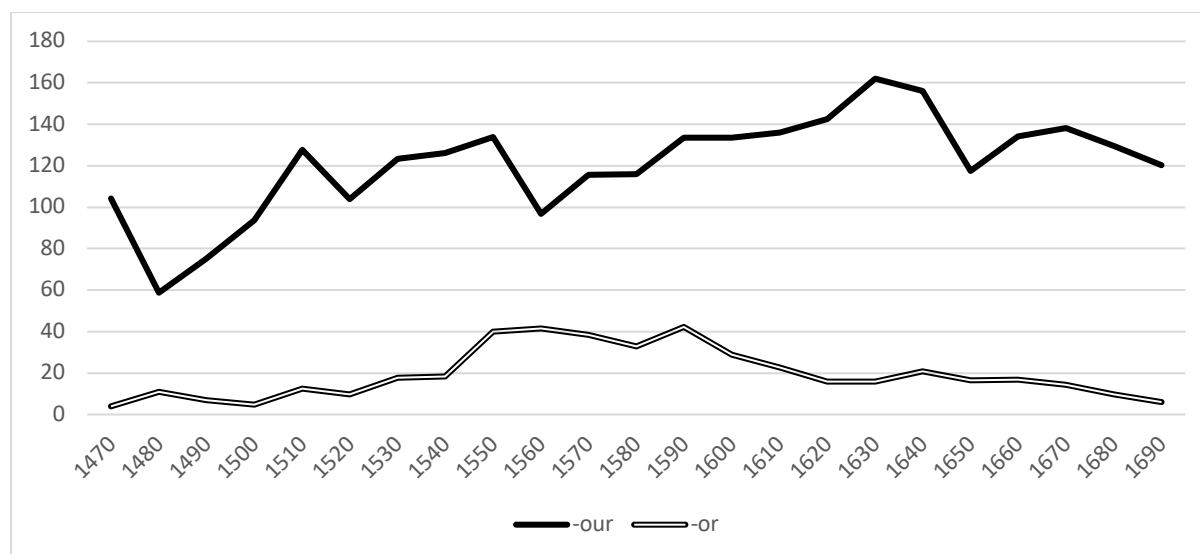

Figure 2. The suffixes *-our*/*-or* in *honour*-type words (n.f.).

The figure shows that the *-our* spelling has been the preferred form in these words over time. Arguments such as the etymological origin of these nouns or their fixed status within the written language may explain such a consistent evolution. Indeed, most of them entered the language either through Anglo-Norman (such as *favour*, *saviour*, *valour* and *humour*), as Latin borrowings (see *honour*, *labour*, *colour* and *succour*) or due to analogous derivation (i.e. *endeavour*). Only one of the words under analysis, *neighbour*, has a Germanic origin.[6] Figure 2 thus suggests that words with the *-our* suffix have not undergone dramatic modifications throughout their history: they remain roughly as they entered the language. Moreover, the fixedness of the *-our* variants becomes a driving force towards standardisation. In quite a predictable manner, the *-or* suffix eventually died out without really challenging its *-our* counterpart. Nonetheless, this is only true for British English.

American English has had its own written standard since the nineteenth century, although it was only institutionalised one century later (Scragg, 1975: 84). According to its spelling system, *honor* and *favor* are the norm, a rendering that Gramley and Pátzold (2003) attribute to a process of regularisation by which all words ending either in *-our* or in *-or* were subsequently spelled with the latter suffix (2003: 280). However, from a historical perspective, the circumstances leading to this regularisation are yet to be examined. Scholars such as Wells (1973) and Scragg (1975) claim that Webster (1806), in *A Compendious Dictionary of the English Language*, was a crucial figure in the creation of a spelling system distinct from the British English standard. Through the principles of uniformity and etymology, Webster presents a proposal that is closely tied to the historical and political circumstances of his time advancing a spelling reform drenched in nationalism (Scragg, 1975: 84). In order to verify this

hypothesis, Figure 3 illustrates data drawn from the *Evans Corpus* and COHA, containing material from 1700 to 1800 and from 1810 to 1850, respectively.
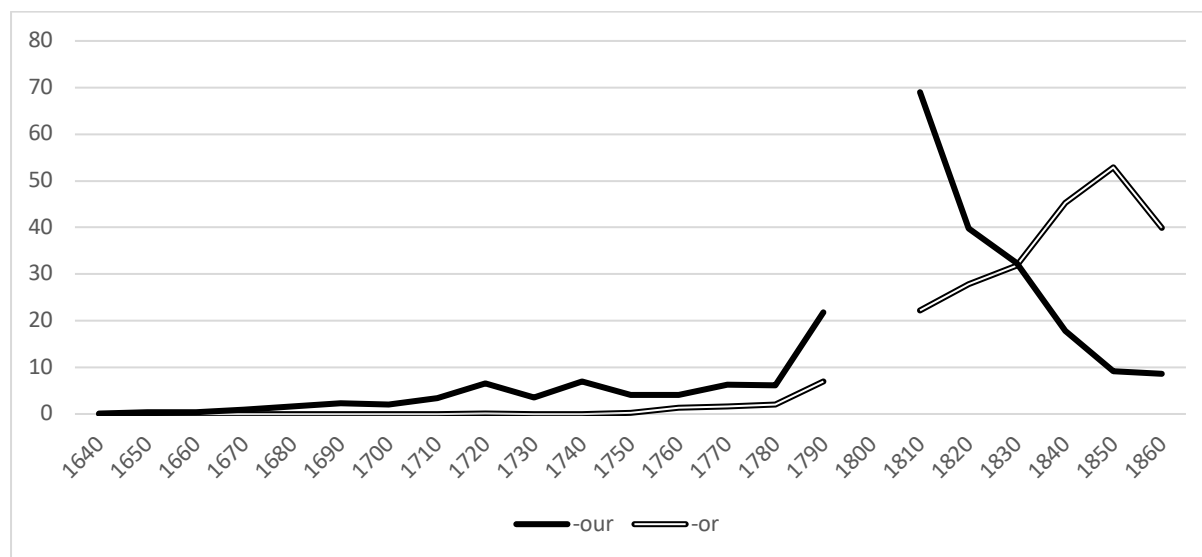

Figure 3. Normalised frequencies of the terms allowing for variation in PDE.

It seems that the publication of Webster's dictionary at the beginning of the nineteenth century did not have a direct impact on suffixal competition. The use of the suffix *-or* started to increase considerably by the 1820s, coinciding with the beginning of the dramatic decline of the suffix *-our*. As the *American Dictionary of the English Language* was published in 1828, and its copies exhausted by the 1840s, Webster's role in the creation of American spelling proves to be decisive, although "his influence […] was not innovative, but regulatory" (Algeo, 2003: 598).

According to our PDE evidence, two different outcomes have been traced for words such as *honour* and *labour* depending on the variety of English, either the American or the British English standard. This answers to a process of lexicalisation that occurs on the grounds of diatopic variation. However, out of the ten words analysed, just two of them present a particular process of development, i.e. *saviour* and *humour*. Their historical developments are affected by the processes of blocking and of semantic specialisation, respectively. In order to provide an overview of these phenomena, the two items will be discussed in detail in subsections 3.1.1 and 3.1.2.

3.1.1. Saviour *vs.* savior

Saviour is an agentive noun of Anglo-Norman origin which seems to have maintained the suffix *-our* since it first entered the language. Even in American English, this form has been preferred over the simplified and regular *savior* (Fowler, 1926: 428; Gramley & Pátzold, 2003: 280); this preference is also traditionally linked to the usage of *glamour* and *honour* in American English. Nevertheless, the preference for *saviour* is not a mere exception, nor is it

related to stylistic decisions as in the case of the aforementioned terms;[7] instead, it is explained in terms of blocking.

Aronoff (1976) describes blocking as the "non-occurrence of one form due to the simple existence of another" (1976: 46). However, there is one further requirement for this process to take place: the term exercising the blocking must be well-established in the system before its competitor enters it. In a period so fluctuating as EModE, words are not strictly fixed. However, *saviour* seems to go against the current. It being a religious term, and religion being the predominant topic in written production across history (Kohnen, 2008: 171), the usage and spelling of *saviour* has been stable for at least five centuries. Indeed, its prevalence in EEBO partakes of this: religious texts constitute more than 30% of the total, and around 70% of the occurrences of *saviour* are found in these texts. Nonetheless, the form *savior* has recently gained ground in contemporary American English, and it has successfully outnumbered its *-our* counterpart in usage. Table 1 therefore corroborates this same state of affairs. Such a shift may be best explained in Portero-Muñoz's (2004) words, who claims that "blocking does not occur with the most productive derivational processes" (2004: 82). As the suffix *-or* is highly productive of agentive nouns, *savior* progressively loses that blocking, thus resulting in the aforementioned phenomenon.

	COCA	***English Web Corpus 2015 (enTenTen15)***
Saviour	190	42,627
Savior	2,350	97,294

Table 1. Raw frequencies of *saviour* and *savior* in *enTenTen15* and COCA.

3.1.2. Humour *vs.* humor

The noun *humour* can be explained as another exceptional case of linguistic evolution, now in terms of specialisation. This process, which is also called niche differentiation, has already been considered on the grounds of diatopic variation in section 3.1. However, the phenomenon of specialisation has been traditionally related to semantics (Bauer, 2006: 182). The evolution of the item *humour* in EModE might have been affected by this. Indeed, Figure 4 below highlights the atypical development of this noun in British English, which does not match those outlined in Figures 1 and 2; and also indicates that there must be another circumstance at play.
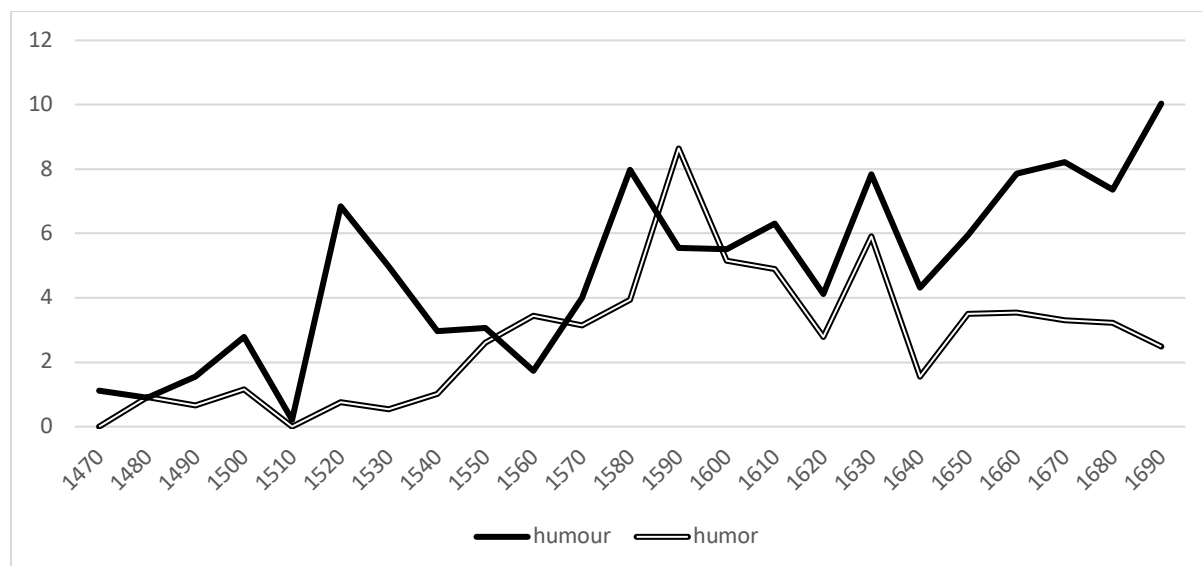
Figure 4. Development of *humour* and *humor* in EModE (n.f.).

The instability of both terms in the EModE period is not common to any of the other words under study. The *OED* does not offer any explanation for such a phenomenon, though its first sense might explain the issue at hand. *Humour* is firstly attested as referring to any of the four bodily fluids that in medieval times were believed to control health. Such a scientific sense of the term effectively frames its development under the inkhorn debate (see section 3.2). Consequently, it remains a possibility that the Latin variant *humor* might have been preferred over the French *humour* to designate this concept; especially so, since the authors would be well acquainted with the classical etymon. Although no literature has been found on the topic, a similar process undergone by *rigour* and *rigor* should be brought to attention. For this pair of words, EModE also presented variation, which has survived into PDE in some British varieties; *rigour* referring to "rigidity of action" or "hostility, harshness", and *rigor* being most frequently used in the phrase *rigor mortis*, with the meaning "the stiffening of a dead body that typically begins (in a human) a few hours after death" (*OED*, s.v. *rigour*, n. I, II; *rigor*, n. 2). Such semantic differentiation may answer to historical usage, since Latin borrowings have always been learned and scientific (Nevalainen, 2006: 37). Consequently, it is likely that *humour* and *humor* also underwent semantic specialisation, though developments in the field of health sciences would eventually lead this pair towards a unique form.[8]

3.2. Words derived with the suffix *-or*

This section focuses on the occurrence of the nouns with the suffix *-or* in PDE. In the same way as was discussed with the suffix *-our*, a semantic classification under the label *agentive nouns* is also controversial. Words like *error* and *liquor* are typically included in such a group, while their meanings along with their evolution are clearly distinct from the others. Figure 6 thus shows the development of the items with both suffixes in EModE.
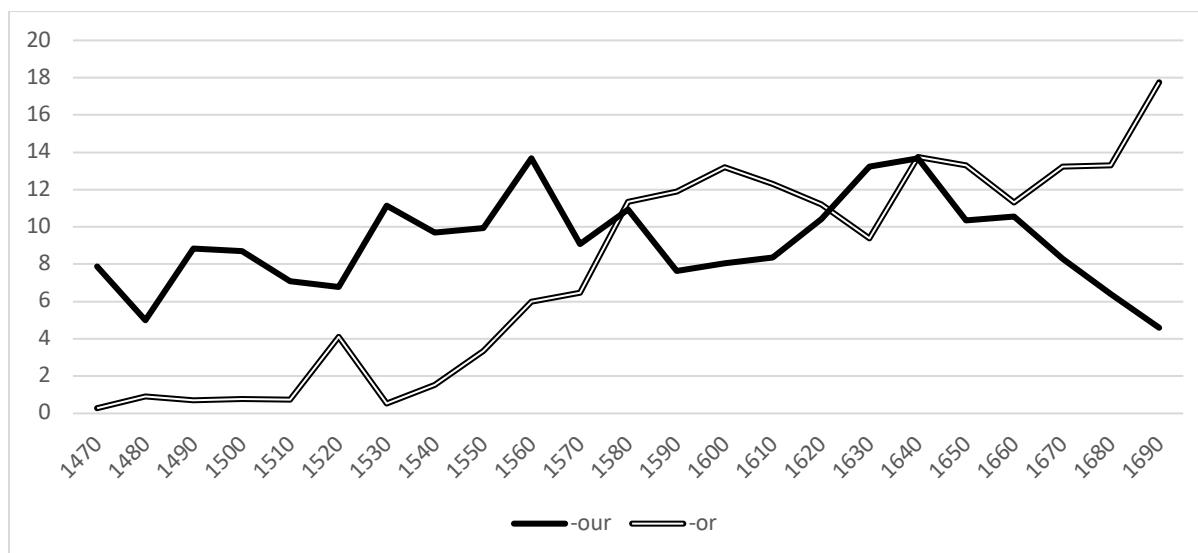
Figure 5. *-our* vs. *-or* in words with *-or* in PDE (n.f.).

The suffix *-our* is clearly the dominant form until the 1570s, the moment when the employment of *-or* rises and surpasses its counterpart for the first time. The two forms coexisted since then with barely the same frequency until the eventual expansion of the Latin form and the progressive decline of the French spelling in the 1640s. In the end, the *-our* suffix disappeared in these items, as per PDE evidence. Interestingly enough, this evolution seems to oppose the views held by Rainer (1988) and Bauer (2006), stating that *-or* was neither the earliest nor the most frequent form. This suggests that the development of these words is not naturally linguistic, but might also be sociolinguistic.

As noted above, EModE sees rising concern towards linguistic standardisation. The fixed system of Latin spelling, the mismatch between the still-changing pronunciation of English and its writing, and the birth of language academies across Europe are often read as determining factors for such an interest (Nevalainen, 2006; Salmon, 1999; Scragg, 1975). Due to the unsuccessful attempts to create an English academy, scholars undertook the task of standardising language. Different proposals arise in this context, some of which are built on phonetic grounds, while others show preference for the system already in use (see Coote, 1637; Mulcaster, 1582). Needless to say, the latter succeeded due to it being more accessible for those who could read and, thus, more profitable for printing houses. However, specific changes were recommended and implemented as following the principles of common use and etymology (Salmon, 1999: 45–46). For nouns like *emperor* and *doctor*, the suffix *-or* must have been endorsed: it was not only the etymon for all of these words, but it also carried the meaning of 'agentiveness' in a distinct manner. Scragg (1975) pinpoints both processes as being "accomplished very shortly before spelling became completely stabilised early in the seventeenth century" (1975: 55). According to the *OED* (s.v. *-or*, suffix, 2), agentive nouns like *emperor* or *doctor* were effectively etymologised, and thus the *-our* suffix was substituted by the Latin *-or*.

Liquor and *error*, in turn, differ from other words in the group since they are not agentive nouns and, as such, they did not follow the same path of development. Despite the semantic shift it has undergone, *liquor*[9] entered English as a noun of condition, in the same way as *error*. Not much information can be found on the evolution of these items, especially for *liquor*. For *error*, the *OED* (s.v. *error*, n.) simply states that terms containing a double, intervocalic <r> were standardised into the *-or* suffix. Figure 6 then illustrates the development of *error*, *horror* and *terror* with both suffixes in EModE, all of which seem to partake of the same trend.

Figure 6. The *-our/-or* competition in *error*, *horror* and *terror*.

The data from EEBO suggest that the suffix *-or* was already dominant by 1650. However, the variants *errour*, *horrour* and *terrour* are attested in the eighteenth century, and, in fact, Samuel Johnson includes them in his dictionary (1755: 718, 1017, 2038). Their eventual standardisation into the *-or* suffix seems to indicate that usage prevailed over the pressures of prescriptivism. In terms of linguistic development, such an outcome may be accounted for on the grounds of semantic lexicalisation. Indeed, the occurrence of these nouns of condition with the suffix deriving agentive nouns can only be understood as being devoid of their morphological meaning. That is to say, *liquor* and *error* are nouns of condition that derived within the paradigm of the suffix *-our*, but were introduced into the derivational system of the suffix *-or* without changing the information inherent in their morphology.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The present paper has outlined the historical development of the Romance suffixes *-our* and *-or* in EModE. The study is based on the twenty most frequent words with these suffixes in EEBO, the *Evans Corpus* and COHA, which have provided us with sufficient data for the analysis of the standardisation of these items. The main conclusions are the following.

In the first place, words such as *honour* and *labour* clearly lean towards the *-our* suffix in the period, thus pointing at the extinction of the *-or* variant. However, as American English was shaped by the end of EModE, such an extinction is reverted and, instead, the *-or* form specialises on the grounds of diatopic variation. In such a context, particular items were found to evolve at a different pace. In *saviour*, we found a blocking agent, while *humour* was analysed as presenting semantic niche differentiation during the period. However, such phenomena were not considered to extend on to PDE. Secondly, words such as *emperor* or *doctor* were observed to undergo a transformation: their spelling is no longer dependent on the French suffix. Instead, they surrender to the Latinisation processes that overcome the English language in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The words *liquor* and *error* were studied individually since they have both experienced semantic lexicalisation. This study may be read as opening a door to future research concerning the codification of these rules in Late Modern English.

Analysing the diachronic development of specific items has indeed clarified the fate of the suffixal paradigm. As the *-our* variant was highly productive by the end of Middle English, many terms entered the EModE period with such a suffix. However, its competition with *-or* effectively limited its derivational force. By the end of EModE, *-our* was no longer an agentive nominal suffix. Such a loss in its distributional domain would eventually entail its loss of productivity. As a matter of fact, *-our* is no longer productive in PDE since nouns of condition are now derived with the native suffixes *-hood* and *-ship* along with the Romance *-ism* (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002: 1701–1704). This suggests that morphological lexicalisation has affected all those nouns that still allow for the *-our* suffix. On the opposite end of the discussion, the EModE period paved the way for the final adoption of *-or*. As it started moving on to the domain of *-our*, the Latin suffix is only the second most productive affix in the derivation of agentive nouns, behind the native form *-er*. Their distributional domains are fixed in PDE, where *-or* is added to Latin and Greek free bases (i.e. *actor*, *survivor*) and to bound bases (i.e. *doctor*); and *-er* to native ones. However, the high productivity of *-er* does not indicate that blocking will ensue on the part of *-or*, an event which is yet to be uncovered. Future research on the topic may shed some light on the prospect of these two forms. As of now, concluding that *-our* has left the derivational paradigm is a safe claim.

NOTES

1 The etymon of the French suffix -*our* is also the Latin form -*or*. Nevertheless, the two variants coexist because -*our* entered English via French, whereas -*or* was directly adopted from Latin (*OED*, s.v. -*our* and -*or*, suffixes).

2 CLAWS (*Constituent Likelihood Automatic Word-tagging System*) has been developed at the University Centre for Computer Corpus Research on Language (UCREL) at the University of Lancaster (Garside, 1987: 30–41; Garside & Rayson, 1997: 179–193; Garside & Smith, 1997: 102–121; Kübler & Zinsmeister, 2015: 192).

3 Although these corpora were used to provide an accurate portrayal of linguistic development, it should be noted that there is a gap of ten years between the periods of both corpora: no data were found for the decade 1800–1810.

4 The ten topmost frequent items for the suffix -*our* are *honour*, *favour*, *labour*, *saviour*, *colour*, *endeavour*, *humour*, *neighbour*, *valour* and *succour*. The terms for the spelling -*or* are *emperor*, *author*, *error*, *governor*, *doctor*, *pastor*, *ambassador*, *liquor*, *creator* and *mediator*.

5 The traditional classification –which was presented in the introduction– has been made on semantic grounds. As such, one could find (1) nouns of condition and (2) agentive nouns. However, as will be discussed in sections 3.1 and 3.2, such a categorisation does not work for all of the nouns under analysis and less so for all of the nouns partaking of either one of these suffixes.

6 *Neighbour* is a compound of the Germanic bases *nigh-*, an adjective meaning 'near', and *boor*, a noun meaning 'peasant' or 'countryman' (*OED*, s.v. *neighbour*, n.). As such, its spelling as -*our* is likely to be due to false analogy. Arguing for semantic lexicalisation, as in the cases of *error* or *horror* (see section 3.2), is not justified since the noun is neither one of condition nor an agentive one.

7 Greenbaum and Whitcut (1988) argue that such spellings are favoured in "certain formal contexts, such as invitations" (1988: 499).

8 As medicine advances and humours are no longer considered determining factors in physical health, the semantic distinction is abandoned and the form ending in -*our* is once more preferred in British English. This roughly coincides with the appearance of the senses of "mood" or of "the ability to express what is funny", which arise in the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries, respectively (*OED*, s.v. *humour*, n. 5a, 9a).

9 The first attested meaning of *liquor* in English is "[a] liquid; matter in liquid state; *occasionally* in a wider sense, a fluid" (*OED*, s.v. *liquor*, n. 1a). It has shifted semantically from EModE into PDE.

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