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A Synchronical and Historical View of the TÚ/VOS option in the Spanish of Montevideo

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I. Introduction

The use of varying forms of the second person is one of the linguistic features that identifies Spanish speaking communities. The presence of a hybrid paradigm that combines the pronominal form TÚ with the voseante verbal form, such as in *si tú me decís eso, por algo será*, has this role for the city of Montevideo¹, Uruguay.

The purpose of this research is to describe the use of this structure of the second person singular in the Spanish of Montevideo. Particular emphasis is placed on its social distribution which has been studied from two different corpora: the DIES-RTV (*Difusión Internacional del español por radio y televisión: unidad y diversidad de la lengua*) and the ADDU (*Atlas Diatópico y Dialectal del Uruguay*). This synchronic perspective is complemented with a historical view that emerges from our investigation in the project *Historia del español del Uruguay*². This project analyzes a large corpus which includes hundreds of documents from the 18th and 19th centuries.

Attitudes towards the use of *tuteo* and *voseo* are also analyzed, particularly through articles from the press and textbooks used in formal education.

II. The synchrony of Montevideo

The people of Montevideo use three out of four possible options to address another person in a non-formal situation - the VT (vos cantas) option is never used:

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<th>(a)</th>
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<th>(b)</th>
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<th>(c)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vos</td>
<td>cantás</td>
<td>Tú</td>
<td>cantás</td>
<td>Tú</td>
<td>cantas³</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(a) Pronominal VOS + verbal *voseo
El Paketon. Es el primer paquete de minutos acumulables. Hablás un montón y se te sobran minutos los *usás después, cuando vos querés.

(b) Pronominal *tuteo + verbal *voseo
(2) University student, female sex. Montevideo.
Si tú me decís eso, por algo será

(c) Pronominal *tuteo + verbal *tuteo.
Tú puedes venir a Bohemios por solo 485 pesos por mes.

It is not unusual to alternate between (a) and (b), but it is also possible for one speaker – within one unique communicative act- to alternate between (a), (b) and even (c), as in example (4):

Reproduction of what Judge Graciela Berro told the students that had thrown stones at the walls and windows of the high school No. 12 building: “Tú tienes cara de inteligente: parecés un traga con esos lentes ... ¿Te parece que estuvo bien tirar piedras contra el liceo?.

The judge is addressing a teenage student. She begins addressing him as TÚ both in the pronoun and in the verb, but she immediately changes to the *voseante verbal form. The combination of the form *tú tienes with the *voseante form *parecés can be explained by two reasons: (1) it is a formal situation in which the judge should not use a form of intimacy or solidarity. She does not choose the pronoun USTED, but the pronoun TÚ. Consequently she chooses a *tuteante verbal form; but (2) she abandons TÚ principally because it is very difficult for a Montevidean speaker to consistently use the *tuteante paradigm.

The hybrid paradigm T-V was first registered by Rona (1967) and next by Kany (1969) and Fontanella de Weinberg (1977). Although none of these authors pursued systematic analysis on the subject, all of them presented the structure T-V as “typical” of Montevideo.

In the early 80’s, Elizalde and Díaz (1981a) and Elizalde and Behares (1981b) began a more detailed analysis of the second person singular address forms in Montevideo.

Elizalde and Díaz presented the structure T-T (*tú cantas) as belonging to the formal style, or even, as being affected. The structures T-V and V-V were the most vital ones. While the latter identifies the Spanish of Montevideo with the Spanish of the Rio de la Plata area, the former differentiates one from the other. This structure T-V is a specific feature that can be found in Montevideo, particularly among speakers from middle and high socioeconomic levels.

After studying the consciousness of use of these forms in three different domains (education, office and industry), Elizalde and Behares (1981b) presented the results of the study of the pronominal and verbal *tuteante and *voseante forms in Montevideo. They concluded that “la norma montevideana usa preferentemente las formas V-V, seguidas por T-V y T-T, no consignándose formas V-T” (1981:419).

The percentage of the structure T-T is higher in the so-called office domain (13.54%) and definitively low in the industry domain (2.98%) in which domain the forms with TÚ are recognized as affected. The structure T-V is interpreted by the authors as a symbol of insecurity in relation with the academic form T-T. It is also seen as a bridge between the formal address form USTED and the address form of intimacy, VOS.

The structure T-V has been classified by Elizalde (1992b:471) as the “Montevidean standard form” due to the fact that this form makes a sociolinguistic distinction between the people of Montevideo and the rest of the country. At the same time, the use of the *tuteo gained such an implicit meaning in the Uruguayan society that the city of Rocha (in the South East of the country) is believed to have the “best” Spanish of the country based on only one morphosyntactic feature: the pronominal and verbal *tuteo (Elizalde 1992b: 769).

As we have seen, the structure T-V is a feature that has been presented as “Montevidean” since the 60’s. Today it is still seen as a feature that characterizes the people of Montevideo but not all of its inhabitants. The social distribution of the hybrid form T-V tends to be concentrated in the upper- middle and upper classes. Besides, it does not characterize the speech of the young generation of these groups but the speech of the eldest one. We can count on two different corpora to support this tendency: the DIES-RTV and the ADDU.

The DIES-RTV is a research promoted by El Colegio de México in the late 90’s. It seeks to describe and analyze regional varieties of Spanish. We used for the purpose of the current research the corpus from Uruguayan media: 60 hours of radio programs that include news, politics and sports.

The small number of address form tokens from this corpus prevented us from making a statistical survey. However, we can state that the corpus shows a widespread use of the pronoun VOS among the middle class, even in formal contexts such as the radio. The pronoun TÚ is registered with *voseante verbal forms.

The ADDU is a project developed by the Instituto de Lingüística of the Facultad de Humanidades y Ciencias de la Educación, Universidad de la República - Uruguay, and the Universität Kiel, Germany. It is a pluridimensional, relational and functional atlas that has around 1000 basic questions on phonetics, lexicon, morphology, syntax and pragmatics. In each of the 75 locations visited, both women and men were interviewed and three styles were registered: reading, conversation and a questionnaire.

The ADDU distinguishes between two sociocultural levels that take into account formal education (low level and high level) and two age groups (GI, the
young generation that gathers people from 18 to 36 years old, and GII, the old
generation, that brings together people with 60 years and more).

The most relevant information was found in the high class neighborhoods of
Montevideo, particularly in those that belong to GII (CaGII, E, Mal-PG). Men
and women from middle-high and high level neighborhoods systematically
answer that they do not use the pronoun VOS: (5) con vos no usamos nada ... el
vos no lo usamos. In all cases they choose the forms with the pronoun TÚ, in
general, in a structure T-V. They even recognized this mixture explicitly: (6)
[usamos] la mezcla de las dos, ¿no es verdad?. El tú con el seguid. It seems as if
the consciousness of the opposition tuteo/voseo is maintained in the pronoun but
it is lost in the verb.

All the forms with the pronoun VOS are identified as belonging to the
people of Buenos Aires: (7) suena mucho más porteño que montevideano. Oíme,
la televisión ... la cultura de la TV. For the people interviewed, the massive
presence of Argentine television works as an explanation for the use of VOS.
Besides, the voseo in the Subjunctive (no vengás) is recognized as a form
belonging to another social group: (8) [no lo usamos] hablando con gente como
uno.

On the other hand, GI (CaGI, E, Mal-Sur) from the same high class
eighborhoods select all through the questionnaire the pronoun V in structures
V-V. When asked about the pronoun TÚ, they state that that is the form to
address someone you do not know very well or someone who is old: (9) si le
hablás a alguien lejano [usás] el tú ...[alguien con quien] no tenés confianza o
una persona mayor.

This social group is conscious that the pronoun TÚ stands in Montevideo as
a form that has a special use in between the more formal USTED and the more
informal VOS. This idea confirms Fontanella’s description. She has stated that
Uruguay presents a pronominal system IIIb (1999:1404) that has three levels of
formality: (1) the pronoun of intimacy, VOS; (2) the pronoun for close
relationships that preserve some kind of distance, TÚ; and (3) the pronoun of
clear distance, USTED.

The information from the middle high and high level neighborhoods
contrasts drastically with the one from the low level areas. In the latter (CbGI y
GII, E, Lez-LaU), the pronoun VOS, in structures V-V, is widespread.

To understand how this current situation arose it is worth remembering
certain historical, cultural and linguistic characteristics of the foundation of what
is now called the República Oriental del Uruguay whose original territory
during the Colonial period received the name of Banda Oriental9.

III. 18th century in the Banda Oriental

The Banda Oriental had a marginal role in the Spanish conquest and
colonization. It attracted the attention of the Crown too late. Only in 1724 did
the foundation process of the city of Montevideo begin, motivated by the
threatening presence of the Portuguese in the region. From a humble origin, the
immigrants shaped a military village since the reasons for the foundation of the
city in the first place were principally military related. In the 18th century
Montevideo was a poor city, meagerly populated, and far from the centers of
power. Consequently, its inhabitants had a low educational level as an
elementary school education was the only level of instruction to which the
children had access. The city had no public libraries or press until the 19th
century.

By the time the colonization of this area started, Spain had already resolved
the TÚ/VOS conflict which was originated in the great changes that occurred in
the Spanish language in the 16th and 17th centuries.

In the 18th century corpus of Historia del español en el Uruguay, TÚ and
VUESTRA MERCED appear for the second person singular: the VOS was
scarcely found. Nevertheless, this treatment must have been more frequent due
to the fact that it already appears more regularly in the documents from the
beginning of the 19th century. This treatment has probably always existed in
these lands but the characteristics of preserved documents of the 18th century do
not allow us to track it. One of the cases is example (10) in which the VOS is
used with a pejorative value, that appears in the speech of criminals.

(10) Criminal process against Joseph Suárez. Testimony of Juan Antonio
Artigas, Alcalde Provincial. Declaration of Antonio Jenes. 18th century,

Y lo que se vieron en dho paraje los dos solos hecho mano a la espada Joseph
suares disiendo Picaro con que vos sos quien andais espiandome Y uiendo me
mis pasos; y me hirio en el braso ysiendo

Various reasons account for the low number of examples. In the first place,
this is a form of solidarity, of intimacy, and, therefore, it will appear only in
informal situations that are precisely the ones that prevail in oral language. It is a
form that pragmatically occurred in face-to-face situations in which the written
language was certainly unnecessary. In the second place, and according to what
Fontanella outlines for Buenos Aires and our corpus seems to confirm, it was not
the form preferred by those of the middle-high strata but by those belonging to the
low strata of society, those that had no access to the written language. If they did
have access, they rarely had the chance to contribute to historical records.

IV. 19th Century

There is more documentation for the 19th century. On one hand, by this time
the population of Montevideo had increased and more people knew how to write.
On the other, there is more or less explicit intention to preserve what is written,
particularly if it belongs to those men that would be the heroes of the young Nation.
In the first years of the 19th century, cases like (11) and (12) are already recorded. In them voseante forms such as debes hacer vos or vos manda appear in contexts of close relationships. Actually, it is observed that within one text the voseante forms alternate with forms that are clearly tuteante forms such as escribele.

(11) Letter from José Artigas [National hero of the Independence war against Spain] to his brother Manuel Francisco Artigas. Dated in the Arroyo de la Cruz, July 9th, 1814.
Mi ras vendedor Hermano: (...) Nada han hecho con haver tomado a Montevideo, si nos sabemos conservar la Campaña de nra. Prov. Así como debes hacer vos en esa. Escribele a todos los Pueblos (...) mira que los hombres lo que tratan es de subyugarnos (...) Toma todas tus medidas de seguridad y habísame qto ocurra (...) No dejes de escribirle a Matias (...) y vos manda a esta tu amado Hermano que verte decea. José Artigas.

(12) Letter from José Artigas to his cousin Fernando Otorguéz. Dated in Belén, April 25th, 1814.
Por Dios Otorguéz, abramos los ojos, he leido tu comunisacion del 21 del Corriente (...) Otorguéz, mi Amigo conjunction que Montevideo lo que quiere es (...) pero mira que los momentos son muy precios y la Causa está en un estado que (...) No, mi Otorguéz, esto llega a lo negro: las circunstancias son apuradas y te digo positivamente que por ningun modo ni pretexto alguno quiero que los buques de Montevideo anden por hay echalos fuera intimales con el mayor rigor (...) Ostilizalos en toda forma que te sea posible y no les permitas cosa alguna (...) todo lo espero de la amistat que me profesas (...).

VOS continues to appear, though only modesty, in situations of closeness, during the 19th century, as confirmed in examples (13) and (14):

(13) Letter from Bernardina Fragoso de Rivera to her husband Fructuoso Rivera. December 1st, 1827. Archivo General de la Nación. Letters from General Fructuoso Rivera to his wife Bernardina (1825-1851). Montevideo. ...no dejes de escribirme p's mas me consume recibo una carta tuya de cuatro renglones, p' desp de dos meses ó tres q' se suele pasar sin tener noticias es un desonsuelo el q' sean tan cortas, aprendé de mi q' todas mis cartas son un pliego aunque esté sinaliento p' escribir

Amija Delmirita le mando un matelico vordado p. el Capellan lleva una vonvilla de plata con unos teñeleques en el medio q' me parecen vien aseselo dar en mi nombre p' q' lo conserbe y le cirva para tomar mate de leche en el Colejio

These examples are part of the correspondence of Fructuoso Rivera, first President of the Republic, with his wife Bernardina Fragoso de Rivera. Note that in over 200 hundred letters preserved, there were only two cases that can be considered voseante.

It calls our attention also that these two voseante cases are imperative forms. A similar situation is found if the voseante forms, also exceptional, of the Artigas' correspondence are analyzed (examples (11) and (12) above). We can suppose then that the entrance door of voseo to the system has been the imperative, the most phatic of the forms of the verbal system, as is also shown by Moyna (1996).

Forty years later TÚ and VOS alternate even in the same communicative act. The following examples (15 - 18) suggest that toward the end of the century the conflict and rivalry of the tuteo and the voseo in the pronominal and verbal forms begin to appear in a more evident way:

Querido hijo: (…) ahora que te escribí / rabia con tanto anhelo vermell separada otra vez de ti sin / tener el consuelo de verte de/ darte un abrazo sabe ["Dios"] por cuán/ to tiempo.

Máximo tu sabes que yo no tengo/ mas amparo que vos

Ahora sigue p' mi higita amada /Antuquita La constestacion: el /abrazo el bezo que medirigies, lo/ herrecido como si bos misma me lo /dieras mi higita (…)

Mi querida herma Eustaquia: con el/ mayor gusto recivi la carta que me/ escrives (…) Terremito una onza de oro para que les des vos misma media onza á tu Tia Eustaquia y la otra media a tu Tia Jacinta

(18) Anonymous to the dictator Máximo Santos (2nd half of the 19th century) (Archivo General de la Nación, Particulares. Box 100. Máximo Santos Archives, Folder 14).
Señor/ Máximo Santos/ Es llegar a esta emencuentor que la que asido miernba es hoi tu muger desde ya te digo que sos un comudo (…) parece imposible que carneros como vos los aigan en este siglo (…) si quierres saber quien soi llo preguntale a tu puta de tu muger (…) dile si se acuerdo cuando a las 2 de la mañana (…) meiasa entrar a su cuarto (…) no puedes tomar la defensiba por una
muger que asido enmbara mia, como te lo pruebo cuantas beses **tu quieras** (...) Dispese que le diga de vos a usted.

But although the **voseo** has continued its expansion, it is still, nowadays, rejected and avoided by some social groups that prefer the pronoun TÚ, as the people interviewed in the ADDU stated.

V. Current language attitudes

What do the **tuteante** forms express? Probably a truism: the role of linguistic attitudes in the linguistic change. The reason why the **tuteo** is still alive stems from the fact that the voseo has always and systematically been rejected for being “improper”, “impure” or even “porteño”. It is worth noting that the Uruguayan educational system, even today, teaches the paradigm YO, TÚ, ÉL, NOSOTROS, VOSOTROS, ELLOS both in Primary and High School.

After analyzing the language textbooks required for Primary School, from 1st to 6th grade, we found that the address form that appeared in 99% of the cases was T-T. The teacher’s voice uses the pronoun TÚ with the **tuteante** verb with no exceptions. The remaining 1%, either T-V or V-V, corresponded to materials from the media and literary productions.

The present textbooks required for Spanish language in High School are not different; their authors address the student with **tuteante** forms (T-T) without exceptions. Occasionally, an explanation about the use of the voseo in Uruguay or Latin America is presented but its use is never seen in the texts. When the verbal paradigms are explained, the voseo forms are not included.

Studies about the teachers’ language in the classroom also show that the VOS is scarcely used in formal education:

**El VOS puede ser considerado subestándar en la clase, y sobre todo no adecuado para su uso en la situación. Por el contrario, un uso sistemático de las formas T-T (...) esencialmente en zona marginada o tugurizadas, puede sentirse como afectada y “estirada”. Es así que la maestra Carla, que trabaja en un cantegril, evita el pronombre TÚ y prefiere las formas voseantes, que son precisamente las que utilizan los niños. Betty, que trabaja con clase media, si bien opta por formas voseantes también utiliza las tuteantes, incluso el pronombre TÚ, siendo un claro ejemplo de la convivencia de estas formas en Montevideo (Gabbiani 2000:153-4).**

TÚ is seen as “better” choice, the “correct” one. In Carla’s case, the VOS accommodation stands for the need to be closer to the students of the “cangeñares”, i.e., the slums.

The censorship attitude towards the **voseante** forms is reflected in comments such as (19), (20) and (21), taken from the press:

**(19) Comments about the use of VOS. In Rosell (1975: 172-3)**

“Interfiere, en el caso de la conjugación rioplatense de las segundas personas, además, la acción educativa, que da formas híbridas –bastante frecuentes en el coloquio diario, por desgracia- como “tú sabés”. Un caso flagrante de este barbarismo, con agravantes, lo hallamos en *Marcha* de 16 de noviembre de 1973: (...) un “tú adviértase” que aparece en letras de molde (...). Cabría un “adviértase vos” o si el pronombre es “tú”, un “tú adviertases”; pero no ese menudencia en que se mezclan incorrecciones sintácticas, prosódicas y fonéticas”.


“Para desenfocarlo de las malas palabras (...) debemos enfocar el cuidado del idioma también a otros aspectos”, said Yamandú Fau [former Minister of Education and Culture]. “Hay publicidad del Estado que utiliza slogans con frases como vos podés. Es opinable, pero me parece que en un idioma tan rico como el nuestro no estaría mal enfatizar que los verbos se conjugan de cierta manera. No me pone irascible pero me parece ser mejor que el Estado diga tú puedes”.


After a Senator from the wing party Frente Amplio had addressed a Senator from the right Partido Colorado with the pronoun VOS, the latter exclaimed: “A mí de vos no me trata ni usted ni nadie. Usted me tiene que decir a mí como la manda el reglamento; a mí me trata de usted, y el vos lo usa para los ambientes en que usted está acostumbrado a frentear”

Nevertheless not all social groups reject the **voseante** forms. On the contrary, this is the form seen as appropriate in certain situations by people that do not belong to the middle high or high social groups. Note that the lyrics of the Uruguayan tango **Niño Bien** criticize a young Montevidean man for being snob. One of the features that characterizes him as a snob is his use of the **tuteante** forms. This language is seen by his peers from low social groups as a way of imitating the speech of the high social groups:

**(22) Niño bien, pretencioso y enrugado/que tenés berretín de figurar;/ niño bien que llevás dos apellidos/ y que usás de escritorio el “Petit Bar”.

Pelandrón que la vas de distinguido/ y siempre hablás de la estancia de papa/mientras tu viejo, p’a ganarse el puchero/todos los días sale a vender Fainá. **Vos te creés que porque hablás de ti,/ fumás tabaco inglés, paseás por Sarandi/ y te cortás las patillas a lo Rodolfo sos un fifí. (Niño bien, Víctor Solíño and Roberto Fontainia, circa 1940.)**

VI. Synthesis and perspectives

From an incipient and extremely familiar voseo in the 18th century, the 21st century commences with a strong presence of **voseante** forms.
Nowadays the voseo is widespread in non formal contexts but not for the higher social groups that tend to keep the TÚ. This form also appears in formal contexts such as the education and “friendly” but not intimate situations.

On the one hand, it is to be taken into account, as it has already been studied for the Spanish language of Buenos Aires (Fontanella de Weinberg 1987), that the verbal voseo use is a change that starts in the lower classes and then is adopted by the higher ones. This is why our examples from the 18th and 19th century refer to contexts of a great deal of intimacy and to speakers of a lower level of education, and even to outlaws, as seen in example (10). The examples of the President Rivera should not confuse us: Rivera, although he belongs to the political class, is not an educated person – he has merely finished the second year of primary school.

It might be said, on the other hand, that the expansion of the voseante forms is still limited if you compare it with what happens in Buenos Aires. This fact is related to the identity ties that join Uruguayans with their neighbors in a fraternal but also conflictive way. No doubt, VOS stands as an element of belonging to the Río de la Plata community, but Uruguayans want to belong to it without merging into it.

These identity factors, strongly related to the educational system's influence, accounts for the fact that the alternance tuteo/voseo has not yet been resolved.

The tuteo forms are currently cornered in the speech of the people from higher strata of the society and in formal situations in which voseante forms are rejected. It is in this retreat of the tuteante forms – or in other words, in this expansion of the use of VOS- in which we can see the direction of the linguistic change.

Notes

1 Montevideo, the capital city of Uruguay, shelters half of the population of the country.
2 This project -henceforth abbreviated HEU- is supported by the Comisión Sectorial de Investigación Científica of the Universidad de la República, Uruguay. It is carried out in the Instituto de Lingüística of the Facultad de Humanidades y Ciencias de la Educación under the supervision of Prof. A. Elizalde. It is part of the major project “Historia del Español de América”, organized by the Asociación de Lingüística y Filología de América Latina (ALFAL).
3 Notice, also, that for the case of Uruguay – in contrast with other regions of America- the verbal voseo is monophthongized. And among the possibilities of the monophthongization the forms detailed in Chart 1 are the ones that are used:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicative</th>
<th>Subjunctive</th>
<th>Imperative</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cantás, comés, partís</td>
<td>cantes, comas, partas</td>
<td>cantá, comé, parti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cantaste, comiste, partiste</td>
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For the verb ser the form SOS is used.

4 From this name comes the adjective orientales which was used to refer to the inhabitants of those lands, and which Argentine people still use presently.
5 Although letters are usually subject to strong self correction, they are still a good historical source for the address format analysis.
6 The expansion of voseo during the first half of the 20th century has been profusely documented by Moyna (1996) through the analysis of theatre and popular song.
7 The form VOSOTROS can still be heard in the possessive forms. It is quite common to hear TV reporters say “en vuestras casas” or teachers and headmasters say “vuestras hijas” in a formal discourse.
10 In this sense, it is worth remembering that the people from the city of Buenos Aires identify the Uruguayans by the presence – sporadic or not- of TÚ and TÍ.

References


(Para que haciendo) Léxico inicial de la construcción. 

Diacronía, Shills and Register Variation with the

Ilinois State University.

MATH DAVIES

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