

Virginia Bertolotti

The loss of *vosotros* in American Spanish

Abstract: The use of a single pronominal and a single verbal form in the second person plural, *ustedes*, is one of the features that distinguishes the Spanish in the Americas from European Spanish, where in the domain of the plural informal *vosotros* still contrasts with formal *ustedes*. However, an explanation for the loss of *vosotros* forms in most communicative contexts in American Spanish has not been yet advanced. Based on a literature review and data from the *Corpus Diacrónico y Diatópico del español de América* (CORDIAM), this chapter proposes a new dating of the loss of *vosotros* and corresponding verbal forms. It also suggests that the characteristics of the pronoun make it a good candidate for being lost, except in ceremonial formal situations.

Keywords: Spanish in the Americas, plural pronouns of address, loss of *vosotros*, diachrony

1 Introduction

The use of only one second person plural pronominal and verbal form of address is a well-known feature of spoken Spanish in the Americas that distinguishes it from European Spanish, in which two pronominal and verbal forms are used. As an illustration, a mother in Hispanic America speaking to her son and a friend of his with whom she is familiar will use a single form of address and say: *Vengan a tomar la merienda, yo la voy a tomar con ustedes* ‘Come (neutral 2nd person plural) and have a snack, I’ll have it with you (neutral 2nd person plural)’. In the same situation, a mother in Spain will say: *Venid a tomar la merienda, yo la voy a tomar con vosotros* ‘Come (2nd person plural) and have a snack, I’ll have it with you (informal 2nd person plural)’, reserving the variants *vengan* and *ustedes* for polite/distant address.

A comprehensive historical explanation is yet to be given to account for two facts. The first one being that, in the Americas, *vosotros* has been virtually absent from situations of *communicative immediacy* since at least the 18th century, which has also been the case of its verb inflections *-ais/-eis/-is* and its pronominal

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paradigm. The second fact is that in the 19th and 20th centuries (as well as in the 21st century) the pronouns and verbs corresponding to the *vosotros* paradigm, which disappeared from everyday life in the Americas, have been used in situations of *communicative distance* but only in a few genres.¹ These uses have a meaning of solemn deference that is diametrically opposed to the meaning of everyday familiarity that *vosotros* and its paradigm have in European Spanish, as the plural of *tú*.

In addition to elucidating these issues, this study makes two more contributions. The first is theoretical and consists of questioning the idea that some systems of address are more balanced than others. The second is historiographical and draws attention to a bias with which address – and certainly other linguistic phenomena – has been analyzed in American Spanish.

Section 2 opens with a brief overview of the state of the art on plural forms of address in Spanish, focusing in particular on American Spanish. Section 3 then presents a working hypothesis and describes the methodology. To substantiate this hypothesis, Section 4 reviews theoretical issues in address and the history of Spanish in the Americas. This is followed in Section 5 by a discussion of data drawn from the *Corpus Diacrónico y Diatópico del Español de América* (CORDIAM) ‘Diachronic and Diatopic Corpus of American Spanish’, which provide evidence that differs from data explored until now. Finally, in Section 6 I summarize the arguments and present the study’s conclusions.

2 State of the art

2.1 Synchrony

The use of plural forms of address is one of the differences highlighted in both language manuals and reference works as distinguishing European Spanish from Spanish spoken in the Americas (see, among many others, Lapesa 1981: 579; Penny 2005: 38, 2004: 222). In this sense, Carricaburo (2015: 12), for example, notes:

La primera distinción que surge cuando se intenta trazar un paradigma pronominal y verbal del español se deriva de una dicotomía de trato para la segunda persona plural que divide por un lado a la Península y por otro a Hispanoamérica y Canarias.

¹ I use the terms *communicative immediacy* and *communicative distance* as developed by Koch and Oesterreicher in the 1990s and 2000s (cf., for example, Oesterreicher 1996 or Koch & Oesterreicher 2007).

‘The first difference observed when describing a pronominal and verbal paradigm in Spanish arises from a dichotomy in the form of address for the second person plural, which sets European Spain apart from American Spanish and the Canary Islands.’

According to the most widely held opinions, the parameters that govern the use of the two plural forms in European Spanish are social and interpersonal distance between the speakers, with less distance determining the selection of *vosotros* and greater distance determining the selection of *ustedes*. Given the overwhelming consensus on this point, a thorough review of Spanish manuals, teaching materials, and reference works is unnecessary. I will only cite here the latest reference grammar of the Spanish language published by the *Asociación de Academias de la Lengua Española* (ASALE) and the *Real Academia Española* (RAE). This grammar describes the distinction between *vosotros* and *ustedes* in the terms expressed above, in many cases qualifying the description with a geographical restriction for Europe. The section on morphology reads:

No se hace distinción entre la variante de confianza y la de respeto en la segunda persona de plural (*ustedes trabajan*), salvo en el español europeo, excluidas la mayor parte de Andalucía occidental y Canarias. (RAE-ASALE 2009: § 4.4 e)

‘No distinction is made between the variant that denotes familiarity and the variant that denotes respect in the second person plural (*ustedes trabajan*), except in European Spanish, excluding most of western Andalusia and the Canary Islands.’

In the section on syntax the text states:

El pronombre de segunda persona de plural *vosotros/vosotras* es la forma común que se emplea en España para el trato de confianza, aunque alterna en Andalucía occidental con *ustedes*. El uso de *ustedes* como forma común para la segunda persona del plural, sin distinción de tratamiento, se extiende a toda América. En Europa se documenta también en las islas Canarias, aunque se ha observado que en las islas de La Gomera, El Hierro y La Palma se prefiere generalmente *vosotros* a *ustedes*, o se da alternancia entre ambas formas para el trato de confianza. (RAE-ASALE 2009: §16.15q)

‘The second person plural pronoun *vosotros/vosotras* is the form commonly used in Spain for familiar address, although in western Andalusia it alternates with *ustedes*. *Ustedes* as a common form for the second personal plural, with no distinction in terms of address, is used throughout Hispanic America. In Europe it is also documented in the Canary Islands, although it has been observed that in the islands of La Gomera, El Hierro, and La Palma *vosotros* is generally preferred over *ustedes*, or else speakers alternate between both forms for familiar address.’

Thus, it is often held that the same parameters that determine the distinction between the plural forms determine the distinction between the singular forms, as set out in Table 1.

Table 1: Second person pronouns in Spain (Carricaburo 2015: 12).

Number	Informality/solidarity/familiarity/ closeness [less social distance]	Formality/power/politeness/ distance [greater social distance]
Singular	<i>tú</i>	<i>usted</i>
Plural	<i>vosotros/as</i>	<i>ustedes</i>

These few references illustrate the view that naturalizes a symmetrical system characterized by the combination of two features – social distance and number – which explain its four forms. In her classic article on the subject, Fontanella de Weinberg (1999: 1402) describes this system as “balanced”, and other studies, such as Lara’s (2010), continue along this line. After studying the use of *ustedes* in western Andalusia, Lara concludes that:

el vacío de diferenciación social que deja la generalización de *ustedes* a todos los casos referidos a una pluralidad de interlocutores puede motivar, a la larga, el nacimiento eventual de nuevas distinciones en la escala de poder. (Lara 2010: 70)

‘the absence of social distinction that is left by the generalization of *ustedes* for all cases referring to multiple addressees may eventually give way to the possible emergence of new distinctions in the scale of power’

A few sentences later, he stresses the idea that a symmetrical system is necessary, arguing: that a lack of distinction will likely give way to an innovation (Lara 2010: 69).

In addition to my own discordant voice, others have recently disagreed with this way of analyzing forms of address and with the need for symmetrical singular and plural forms. Morgan & Schwenter (2016) argue that symmetry in Castilian European Spanish is currently a myth, because the *vosotros/vosotras* form in European Spanish is actually the plural for both the singular *tú* and the singular *usted*, as they note in the following excerpt:

Vosotros is, in fact, the only productive second person plural form for many Spaniards, for whom it serves as the plural of both *tú* and *usted*. Despite the universally expressed view that there exists symmetry in the Castilian system, such that *vosotros* is the plural of *tú* and *ustedes* the plural of *usted*, we show that there is in fact widespread asymmetry from singular to plural, i.e. a person might be addressed as *usted* in the singular while at the same time forming part of a group that is addressed as *vosotros* by the same speaker. (Morgan & Schwenter 2016: 264)

Table 1 is thus modified in Table 2 to reflect the above, with a single form used for the plural (*vosotros*) in Castilian Spanish, as occurs in American Spanish with *ustedes*, both in familiar or socially distant situations.

Table 2: Revision of second person pronouns in Spain by Morgan & Schwenter (2016).

Number	Informality/solidarity/ familiarity/closeness [less social distance]	Formality/power/ politeness/distancing [greater social distance]
Singular	<i>tú</i>	<i>usted</i>
Plural		<i>vosotros/as</i>

European Castilian Spanish and American Spanish would differ in: (i) the form chosen for the plural (*ustedes* in American Spanish, or *vosotros* in (stand-ard) Castilian Spanish), based on the studies by Morgan & Schwenter; and (ii) in the singular. In the Americas, the single plural form *ustedes* combines with five different singular forms (see Table 3). Since the varieties of American Spanish do not select and combine the same singular pronoun(s), we find five different systems of address are in use (Bertolotti 2015: 71).

Table 3: Second person pronouns in the Americas (Bertolotti 2015).

Number	With geolinguistic, social and situational variation				
Singular	<i>Tú</i>	<i>vos</i>	<i>usted-T²</i>	<i>su merced</i>	<i>usted-V</i>
Plural			<i>ustedes</i>		

2.2 Diachrony

2.2.1 The emergence of *vosotros* in Europe

The most thorough study to date on the emergence and spread of *vosotros* in the history of the Spanish language is by García, de Jonge, Nieuwenhuijsen & Lechner (1990). According to these authors, *vosotros* emerged and spread as a result of the communicative advantages it offered: *vos* was highly polysemous and the stressed form *vosotros* allowed for disambiguation (García et al. 1990:

2 Although it exceeds the scope of this chapter, I should note here that I distinguish two social meanings applied to *usted* in the Americas. I use the letter V – from the Latin *vos* – to code the various names given for social deixis indicating differences in *power*, for politeness, and for affective distance. I use the letter T to code the various names given for social deixis indicating symmetrical *power* relations, for non-reverential politeness, and for affective closeness. In both cases, I follow the classic study by Brown & Gilman (1960). The presence, the social variables, and the situations that govern singular forms are complex; they are described in Bertolotti (2015: 31–71).

75–76). In addition to this, they note the temporal predominance of *vosotros* over *nosotros* and the consequences of the tonic nature of *vosotros* compared to the unstressed *vos*.

With regard to dating, through references to grammarians García et al. (1990) observe that the use of *vosotros* had become widespread as early as the late 15th century and that by the 16th century it was the predominant form (García et al. 1990: 66). Years later, Nieuwenhuijsen (2006: 952) insists on the full integration of *vosotros* in the pronominal paradigm as of the 16th century.

There is very little research on the emergence of *ustedes*. However, the emergence of *vuestra merced* has been thoroughly studied and it is dated by De Jonge & Nieuwenhuijsen (2009: 1641–1642) at the end of the 14th century. They point out that the full integration of *vuestra(s) merced(es)* and their grammaticalized forms (*usted, ustedes*) are not firmly established until the end of the 17th century (De Jonge & Nieuwenhuijsen 2009: 1652).

This review of historical studies would not be complete without looking at works that focus on southern Spain. The characterizations of the values of *vosotros* and *ustedes* gathered by Calderón Campos (2015) in an analysis of a historical corpus from the Granada region provide useful insights. From the analysis of CORDEREGRA (Corpus of the Kingdom of Granada), Calderón Campos (2015: 74) concludes:

vosotros es siempre una forma muy directa, usada en situaciones de tensión comunicativa, para insultar o denigrar a los destinatarios [...] o para dar órdenes. En el resto de los casos, se emplea *vuestras mercedes/ustedes*, que era la forma no marcada del plural.

'*vosotros* is always a very direct form, used in situations of communicative tension to insult or belittle the addressees [...] or to issue orders. In all other cases, *vuestras mercedes/ustedes*, which was the unmarked plural form, is used.'

He does not date the emergence and spread of *vosotros* in the Granada corpus.

The study by Fernández Martín (2012) on the loss of the pronoun *vosotros* in western Andalusia is also particularly thought-provoking. She describes the sociolinguistic distribution of *vosotros* and dates the replacement of *vosotros* by *ustedes* to the first half of the 18th century:

Se distinguen diversas pautas en el uso de *vosotros* en español entre 1700 y 1931. A nivel general, los hablantes de un estatus social bajo (rural y urbano) tenían muy limitado el uso de la 2ªPP y, por ende, mucho más el pronominal. Fuera del trato a los hijos, entre esposos, a los hermanos o de una amistad estrecha a los individuos del mismo estatus, dichas formas no tenían cabida. Esta restricción de usos y su carácter marcado revelaba una escasa aparición de la 2aPP/*vosotros*. (Fernández Martín, 2012: 564)

'Several patterns in the use of *vosotros* in Spanish can be distinguished between 1700 and 1931. Generally, for speakers of low social status (both rural and urban) the use of the second

person plural was very limited and, therefore, much more so the pronoun. These forms were not used other than to address one's children or between spouses, siblings, or close friends among individuals of the same social status. This restriction of uses and its marked nature revealed the limited appearance of the second person plural/*vosotros*'

In explaining how *vosotros* was abandoned, she turns to universal issues of address. She says that *ustedes* was more frequent than *vosotros* because of its inclusive and heterogeneous nature, so that *ustedes* could refer to a group in which there were both individuals who were addressed as *tú* and individuals who were addressed as *usted* (Fernández Martín, 2012: 564). I will come back to this below, in the section on theoretical considerations.

2.2.2 *The loss of vosotros in the Americas*

Historical studies on forms of address in the Americas have rarely focused on the history of the plural forms of address. This has already been noted by Moreno de Alba, who, in reference to the elimination of the pronoun *vosotros*, argues that there are no studies that fully account for this phenomenon (2011: 25).

In the bibliography by Fernández & Gerhalter (2017), only 20 entries in more than 1,500 (that is, less than 2%) include the term *vosotros*. Most of these texts are descriptions of the current use of *vosotros* (cf. Almasov 1974; Isaza Calderón 1976; Siciliano 1971, among others) and the diachronic aspect related to the loss of *vosotros* in the Americas is only considered in a few works (cf. Company Company 1997; Domínguez Hernández 2013; Nieuwenhuijsen 2006; Moreno de Alba 2010, 2011; Obediente Sosa 2011, 2013), most of which are examined in this study.

Moreno de Alba points out that an exception to the lack of historical analysis is the study by De Jonge & Nieuwenhuijsen (2009), which he understands offers relevant data regarding “the elimination of *vosotros*”. Contrary to what Moreno de Alba notes, I see no new solid evidence on the history of *vosotros* in American Spanish in the above study, although it does provide excellent diachronic evidence of other forms of address. De Jonge & Nieuwenhuijsen (2009) summarize some of the literature concerning the disappearance of *vosotros* in the Americas that I review and assess here.

First of all, De Jonge & Nieuwenhuijsen (2009: 1607) point to the maintaining of *vos* as a possible cause for the disappearance of *vosotros*, given the high coincidence of the two paradigms. This has also been argued by Fontanella de Weinberg (1999). As a sole argument for the disappearance of *vosotros*, I find this is weak, for three reasons: (1) *vos* is maintained as a singular (not plural) form; *vos* as a plural form also disappeared, just like *vosotros*; (2) part of its paradigm – precisely

the ambiguous forms – has been dropped; and (3) while the loss of *vosotros* has occurred throughout the Americas, *vos* has not been maintained throughout the entire continent.

De Jonge & Nieuwenhuijsen also attribute the decline of the form studied here to its use by not very prestigious speakers, and as an attempt at an explanation they also present the position put forward by Corominas & Pascual (1980–1983: 844):

Corominas (1980–1983: s.v. *vos*) es el único que apunta hacia una explicación del fenómeno cuando señala que el pronombre *boso* del papiamento constituye la única huella de *vosotros* en América. El hecho de que el pronombre sobreviva en el papiamento, o sea el hecho de que fuera usado por los negros, sugiere, según Corominas, que el uso de *vosotros* llegó a considerarse en un momento dado como descortés, motivo por el cual fue rechazado o evitado primero por los blancos y más tarde por toda la población. (De Jonge & Nieuwenhuijsen 2009: 1606)

‘Corominas (1980–1983: s.v. *vos*) is the only one who attempts an explanation of the phenomenon when he observes that the pronoun *boso* in Papiamento is the only trace of *vosotros* in the Americas. The fact that the pronoun survives in Papiamento, that is, the fact that it is used by black people, suggests, according to Corominas, that the use of *vosotros* came to be considered impolite, and for that reason it was rejected or avoided first by white people and later by the population as a whole.’

This argument has little basis given that in the early years of the 19th century *vosotros* and its paradigm were used extensively in national anthems, solemn declarations, and speeches.

In a previous work, Nieuwenhuijsen (2006) rules out the late emergence of *vosotros* as an explanation of its disappearance from the Americas. We must remember that this author dates the full integration of *vosotros* in the pronominal paradigm to the 16th century. She also rules out the idea of the absence of *vosotros* as an Andalusian attribute of American Spanish (Nieuwenhuijsen 2006: 952).

As for establishing when *vosotros* disappeared, Moreno de Alba identifies it as occurring in Mexico in the 19th century (Moreno de Alba 2011: 27). In his historical study about *vosotros*, Moreno de Alba also describes the process of the loss of the pronoun in American Spanish, noting the problems with the available data:

Vosotros tiene vigencia, en el español americano, hasta fines del XVIII, cuando comienza a decrecer, proceso que se acelera notablemente en el XIX. Es probable, aunque por falta de documentación suficiente, no puede comprobarse que se empleara ya con normalidad *ustedes* sobre *vosotros* en los textos americanos de finales del XVIII, pues de otra manera sería difícil de explicar la proliferación de *ustedes* en textos americanos desde principios del XIX, ésta sí plenamente atestiguada en la documentación del CORDE. Esto permite suponer, asimismo, que *ustedes* venía compitiendo con *vosotros*, en lengua hablada, desde el mismo siglo XVIII y que, a lo largo del XIX, acabara por sustituirlo por completo en el registro oral. (Moreno de Alba 2011: 39)

'*Vosotros* remains in use in American Spanish until the late 18th century, when it starts to decline, a process that picks up significantly in the 19th century. While there is not sufficient documentation to prove it, it is likely that *ustedes* was already commonly chosen over *vosotros* in American Spanish texts of the late 18th century, since otherwise it would be difficult to explain the proliferation of *ustedes* in American Spanish texts starting in the early 19th century, a fact that is fully confirmed by CORDE documentation. This suggests, moreover, that *ustedes* had been competing with *vosotros*, in spoken language, from as early as the 18th century and that, in the 19th century, it would eventually replace it completely in spoken language'

Moreno de Alba (2011) observes the late division of the plural space into two in European Spanish, and, almost in passing, notes the numerous values of *vosotros*. According to this Mexican linguist, the *vosotros/ustedes* opposition, in European Spanish, operates from the 18th century (Moreno de Alba 2011: 28). In the 16th and 17th centuries the expression *vuestras mercedes* only competes [...] with *vos* and, especially, with *vosotros*, which, based on the figures he provides, was the preferred form (Moreno de Alba 2011: 29). Thus it is logical that in pre-18th century Spanish texts, the pronoun *vosotros* has both deferential and non-deferential value (Moreno de Alba 2011: 29).

Moreno de Alba's work suggests that there could have been an early single space for the plural, coded by different linguistic forms without a clear-cut closeness/distance division. However, although in the above study the author appears to have perceived this lack of division, he does not develop an explanation for it.

2.2.3 *Remnants of vosotros use in the Americas*

As noted above, the disappearance of *vosotros* is not absolute, since it is used in certain very specific – and therefore greatly restricted – contexts. Various authors have observed this and have highlighted the use of *vosotros* in proclamations, religious discourses, and speeches where reference is made to biblical figures or independence leaders (among them, Almasov 1974: 309; Caravedo 2005: 28–29; Frago 2011: 55 ff.; Moreno de Alba 2011: passim; Obediente 2011: passim; Rona 2014 [1958]: 112).

Caravedo (2015: 28) observes that the designative value of *vosotros* has been inverted and *vosotros* is used in contexts of great solemnity (proclamations, solemn discourses). She attributes this to the fact that it is learned through schooling as a form taken from artificial contexts.³

³ This can be illustrated with an anecdote of a girl in Uruguay who, after attending a ceremony in which she and other schoolchildren had to pledge allegiance to the national flag (an obligation

Frago (2011) documents *vosotros*, verbs with that inflection, and *vuestro* in the 19th century in the Americas. He highlights the importance of this century of independence, in which these forms appear almost exclusively in written language, especially in solemn linguistic contexts and doctrinal, political texts. As reasons for this, he suggests that the educated minority maintained for specific occasions the ancient prestige of the literary and administrative model of the old metropolis (Frago 2011: 69). Moreno de Alba also identifies the contextual restrictions and stylistic uses of *vosotros* in the Americas, but without venturing an explanation. He says that *vosotros* was still used during this century in historical, political, oratory, religious, theatrical texts and in certain contexts (when addressing one's children, when representing the speech of biblical or historical figures).

Obediente (2011) points out that his analysis of manifestos, decrees, discourses, proclamations, harangues, programs for public ceremonies, pamphlets, and brief tracts reveals that the form of address used in Venezuela throughout the 19th century to speak to citizens as a whole was *vosotros*, with some alternations with *ustedes* (Obediente 2011: 277).

The national anthems of Argentina (1), Uruguay (2) and Chile (3) address their intended audiences with forms of *vosotros* :

- (1) ¡Oíd, mortales!, el grito sagrado:
 “¡libertad!, ¡libertad!, ¡libertad!”
 Oíd el ruido de rotas cadenas
 ved en trono a la noble igualdad.
 ‘Hear, mortals, the sacred cry:
 “Freedom! Freedom! Freedom!”
 Hear the noise of broken chains
 See noble equality on the throne’
- (2) Tiranos, *temblad*.
 ‘Tyrants, tremble’

for all Uruguayan six-year-olds), remarked: “They spoke to us as if we were from another country, calling us **ustedéis**”, in reference, surely, to verb endings. The call for children to pledge allegiance to the flag reads: *¿Prometéis respetar y honrar esta Bandera que representa la dignidad, la soberanía y la gloriosa historia de nuestra Patria, la República Oriental del Uruguay?* ‘Do you pledge to respect and honour this flag, which represents the dignity, the sovereignty and the glorious history of our homeland, the República Oriental del Uruguay?’

- (3) *Vuestros* nombres valientes Soldados,
Que *habéis* sido de Chile el sostén,
Nuestros pechos los llevan grabados.

‘In our chests we have engraved your names, brave soldiers, who have been Chile’s support’

These forms were also present in political discourse in the 19th century. This can be illustrated with just one example from 1813, in which an independence leader addresses the representatives of various towns, during a time of strong anti-Spanish sentiment. The example below contains parts of the text in question:

- (4) *Ciudadanos*: el resultado de la campaña pasada me puso al frente de *vosotros* por el voto sagrado de *vuestra* voluntad general. Hemos corrido 17 meses cubiertos de la gloria y la miseria y tengo la honra de volver a hablaros en la segunda vez que *hacéis* el uso de *vuestra* soberanía. [...]. Mi autoridad emana de *vosotros* y ella cesa ante *vuestra* presencia soberana. *Vosotros estáis* en el pleno goce de *vuestros* derechos: *ved* ahí el fruto de mis ansias y desvelos y *ved* ahí también todo el premio de mi afán. Ahora en *vosotros* está el conservarlo. (Near Montevideo, April 4, 1813. José Artigas).

‘*Citizens*: The results of the last campaign and your sacred general vote will have gotten me to lead you. We went through seventeen months of glory and misery. I am so privileged to speak to *you*, on this second occasion in which *you enjoy your* sovereignty. My authority emanates from *you* and it stops in the face of *your* sovereign presence. *You are* fully enjoying *your* rights. *See* here the product of my anguish and wakefulness and *see* here the whole reward of my eagerness. Now *you have* to preserve it.’

As we can see, these examples are never accompanied by an explanation or a hypothesis stating why such remnants exist, except in Frago’s statement about the prestige of the metropolis. The brief illustration in this section raises doubts as to whether the selection of the forms of *vosotros* was in any way related to an old literary prestige associated with Spain. There does not appear to be any firm data to support that claim. Instead there is ample evidence of anti-Spanish political sentiment among the local elites, for example, in their participation in the independence processes.

3 Working hypothesis

As I have shown above, no historical explanation has been provided for *vosotros* that would account for a dual situation in which, in the Americas, on the one hand, *vosotros* withdrew from the space of plurality, leaving it entirely to the more formal *ustedes*, and, on the other hand, *vosotros* was preserved as a very formal pronoun used in certain communicative contexts.

My working hypothesis is that a system with one plural form is not abnormal, despite the widespread assumption that considers the single form system an exception. In fact, there is abundant inter-linguistic evidence for languages using a single pronoun of address for the plural. That is the case of Albanian, Czech, Finnish, French, English, Tagalog, Turkish, and Yiddish, for example (cf. Helmbrecht 2013–45A). I argue that the assumption of abnormality derives from the general tendency to view (standard) European Spanish as the normal variety, with a symmetrical four-space paradigm – two for the singular and two for the plural. The discussion has thus been influenced by a strong research bias that leads us to explore the modes of Spanish spoken in Hispanic America using the categories and usage of Castilian Spanish. In fact, American Spanish has never really had a regulated system with two plural pronouns of address determined by social distance. Rather, it has had a single space for the plural, coded by different linguistic forms without a well-defined closeness/distance division.

4 Theoretical considerations

4.1 Homogeneity and heterogeneity of plural pronouns

Cross-linguistic evidence shows that there are languages with no pronoun distinctions based on distance (English, Irish, Ewe, Mapudungun), others in which such distinctions are binary (Basque, Turkish, Sango, Punjabi), and others that have more than two forms (Polish, Hungarian, Tagalog, and Nahuatl), as documented in *The World Atlas of Language Structures* (cf. Helmbrecht 2013–45A, chapter and map). There are several Romance languages that make no distinction at the level of allocative pronouns between closeness and distance in the plural or reduce it to a minimum (cf. French *vous*, Portuguese *vocês*, Italian *voi*). Nominal forms may also be used to introduce a formal/informal distinction, as for example Pt. *os senhores*. It is noteworthy that *ustedes* stems from such a nominal form: *vuestra(s) merced(es)*.

As for the referentiality of second person plural pronouns, Nowikow (1994) identifies two types: homogeneous (referential) plurality and heterogeneous

(referential) plurality. He defines homogeneous plurality as that in which all class members belong to the same person, that is, *vosotros* is the sum of *tú + tú + tú...* This is the case, for example, of the pronoun *vosotros* used by a Madrid mother addressing all her children at the same time, as in example (2):

- (2) [*vosotros* = *tú + tú + tú*]

Niños, quiero que *vosotros* estéis todos acostados antes de las nueve los días de semana.

‘Kids, I want *you* in bed before nine every week day.’

Heterogeneous plurality occurs when all class members do not belong to the same grammatical person in the speech act, that is, *vosotros* is *tú + not tú* (Nowikow 1994: 285–286), as can be seen in example (3). In this example, a mother speaks to her daughter and refers at the same time to her daughter’s friends (whom the mother would address individually with the familiar *tú* and therefore I mark them as *ella_T/ellas_T*), where the heterogeneity is *tú + ella_T + ellas_T*.

- (3) [*vosotros* = *tú + ella_T ...or ellas_T*]

María, por favor, que alguna de *vosotras* tres me avise no bien lleguen a destino.

‘Mary, would one of *you* please let me know as soon as you arrive at *your* destination.’

In my opinion, heterogeneity could also refer to another situation: the difference in social deixis or respect, in addition to the difference in grammatical person. Besides the addressee, a second person plural may also refer to others who would receive a different form of address to reflect social distance or politeness. In that case, the plural pronoun is not the sum of heterogeneous persons in the speech act, but the sum of entities whose heterogeneity lies in that they are recipients of various forms of address in the singular, that is, considered individually. This heterogeneous plural occurs, for example, if an employee speaks simultaneously to a co-worker – whom he addresses as *tú* – and to his boss – whom he addresses as *usted* – as shown in example (4).

- (4) [*ustedes* = *tú + usted*]

–¿Alguno de *ustedes* quisiera café?

‘Would anyone of *you* want coffee?’

Strictly speaking, we should identify a third type of heterogeneity, which emerges from the combination of the previous two, although it is not relevant for the purposes of my working hypothesis. The *not-tú* can be formed by third persons that, if addressed directly, would receive a distant address (*usted*, in current Spanish). It could be illustrated with the same characters from the previous example, but with an absent boss, who is therefore coded as third person and not second person, as shown in example (5).

(5) [*ustedes* = *tú* + *él_v*]

- El jefe y yo terminaremos este trabajo mañana temprano.
- ¿Alguno de *ustedes* llegará mañana antes de las 7 a la oficina?
- ‘–The boss and I will finish this work tomorrow morning.
- Will any of *you* get into the office tomorrow before 7?’

In sum, forms of address in second person plural can be homogeneous or heterogeneous. Heterogeneity can be determined by “the person – second or third”, “the form of address – closeness and distance”, or by both “the person and the form of address”. Thus, it can be argued that the conditions of use of the plural forms for closeness are more complex than those of the plural forms for distance. That is because there only needs to be one addressee that requires social distance (or a third person requiring a distant form of address) to render inapplicable a not distant plural form (such as *vosotros* in the 17th to 20th centuries).

Based on these ideas, Fernández Martín (2012) explains the generalization of the plural *ustedes* in Andalusia as follows:

El plural *ustedes* era más frecuente por su carácter inclusivo y heterogéneo, frente a *vosotros* exclusivo. Esto quiere decir que *ustedes*+3ª PP era el trato apropiado para aludir a un grupo en el que hubiese sujetos a los que se tutease y se tratase de usted. *Vosotros* exigía que a todos los miembros se los tutease independientemente. (Fernández Martín 2012: 564–5)

‘The plural *ustedes* is more frequent because of its inclusive and heterogeneous nature, in contrast to the exclusive *vosotros*. This means that *ustedes* + third person plural was more appropriate to refer to a group composed of individuals who were addressed with *tú* and *usted*. *Vosotros* required that all members of the group were individually addressed as *tú*.’

These heterogeneities are not reflected in the current plural pronoun of address in Hispanic America, where speakers use a single form (*ustedes*). But they are reflected (or have been reflected) in Castilian Spanish, in which any heterogeneity in the form of address entails (or entailed) selecting *ustedes* instead of *vosotros*. That is, until recently. The study by Morgan & Schwenter (2016) cited above sug-

gests there is a change in progress, with speakers tending to disregard this factor when choosing the plural pronoun.

It can also be asserted that plural forms are *critical* forms of address, as defined by Hummel, who uses the term to describe an inherent feature of address:

Unlike in most linguistic domains, *crisis* is an everyday feature of address. Every time people meet, address is a latent problem that requires a solution. Crisis also affects the very system of address, that is, the verbal, pronominal, and nominal paradigms, especially the (subject) pronominal paradigm [...]. (Hummel, in this volume)

Plurals are, thus, so *hypercritical* because of their complex reference that they became *hypocritical*. They are governed by the parameters of person and social deixis. Speakers must consider both aspects in each of the referents that make up the plurality. This could be one of the reasons for the relative rarity of languages with two second person plural pronouns, as they have highly marked conditions of use, which are so algorithmic as to have a greater processing cost. In any case, I agree with Hummel (in this volume) in that the “plural seems to be perceived as less direct, at least with regard to the individuals who compose the group”.

Some studies have pointed out the lack of distinction between closeness and distance in plural forms of address. In a literary corpus that spans over one century (from 1528 to 1640), Moreno (2006) finds no differentiated uses in terms of closeness/distance for the form *vosotros*. This suggests that during the time in which the Spanish language was massively exported to the Americas *vosotros* did not have a specialized use as a familiar form of address.

Fernández Martín (2012) observes that the lack of differentiation existed as late as the 18th century. She does note, however, that the scope of *vosotros* was limited to certain uses (Fernández Martín 2012: 187), which roughly coincide with those I suggested above for *tú*. Consequently, Spanish speakers leaving Spain for the Americas did not carry with them a specialized use as a familiar form of address.

Based on an analysis of the data provided by CORDE, Moreno de Alba also notes the difficulty in capturing the specificity of the use of *vosotros* in the Americas:

Lógicamente, en textos españoles anteriores al XVIII, el pronombre *vosotros* al que, como dije, poca competencia ofrecían tanto el pronombre *vos* (plural) cuanto el sintagma *vuestras mercedes*, tiene tanto valor deferencial cuanto no deferencial. (Moreno de Alba 2011: 29).

‘Logically, in pre-18th century Spanish texts the pronoun *vosotros*, which, as I said, presented little competition both to the pronoun *vos* (plural) and the syntagma *vuestras mercedes*, has both deferential and non-deferential value.’

4.2 Communication among the first people speaking Spanish in the Americas

To better understand the data from the Americas we need to consider not only the characteristics of plural forms of address, but also the characteristics of how address was regulated in the 16th and 17th centuries. Moreover, an analysis of such characteristics in the American Spanish communicative space, as previously noted by Zimmermann (2011: 14), that is, in the context in which speakers used and heard Spanish modes in the Americas, is also needed. It is important to take into account that, due to both the contact with native populations – the great disseminators of Spanish in the Americas – and the characteristics of the first settlers, conditions for interaction in the Americas were not conducive to familiar address.

The parameters that governed singular address in Spanish in the 16th and 17th centuries, as noted in Bertolotti (2015), were as follows: T-forms or familiar forms required (a) familiarity, closeness, or intra-group situations; (b) situations in which there was no need for regulated respect or any pragmatic need to mark distance; (c) that speaker and addressee knew each other well from an early age; (d) that speaker and addressee be of the same gender, and preferably related to one another; and (e) their use by older generations to address younger generations. Exceptionally T-forms could be used in out-group situations. In such cases, the speaker had to belong to a higher social class than the addressee, and, in general, it was used by masters to address their “familiar” servants. These parameters governed the use of *tú*. In the case of V-forms of address, their use was determined by two parameters: extra-group situations and deference in in-group situations. These parameters governed, roughly speaking, the use of *vuestra merced* > *usted*. All other situations were conveyed through *vos*, and this is one of the reasons for the survival of *vos* in the Americas, as I have shown in Bertolotti (2015). All the situations that were not covered by *tú* or by *vuestra merced* > *usted*, I argue, were covered by *vos*, and, therefore, *vos* was used in contexts of both closeness and distance, in both non-deferential and deferential contexts. Thus, *vos* satisfied most of the communication needs of the speakers regarding address. This explains the generalized presence of *voseo* in the Americas to this day, although with different social and situational distributions, with various social values, and with diverse morphological verbal manifestations.

It is reasonable to assume that the relevant conditions for selecting the singular were not substantially different from the conditions for selecting the plural, and the use of the familiar singular (*tú*) was limited by very strong restrictions. If we consider the conditions for communicating in the Americas, it is not difficult to see that the contexts where *tú* could be used were few and, therefore, the possible uses of *tú* would surely be combined with referents to which *vos* or

vuestra merced > *usted* would apply. Intra-group situations, familiarity, long-lasting acquaintance with one another, and having a shared childhood were conditions that were improbably met among indigenous populations that interacted with Europeans, and even, to a great extent, among Spaniards in the Americas. These conditions were clearly not suitable for familiar address. Therefore, the low possibility of homogeneity in familiar social deixis strengthens the idea that a differentiated plural form of address was unnecessary.

If we combine the two issues discussed in this section (usage conditions for plurals and communication conditions in the Americas) we can easily accept the probability that two plurals were unnecessary (with one of them reserved for closeness) as their contexts of use would be very limited.

5 Analysis of the 16th to 18th centuries

5.1 The corpus

The data are taken from a corpus built specifically to research the history of Spanish in the Americas. CORDIAM-DOCUMENTS is a computerized corpus that consists of collections of texts taken from archives. It comprises four centuries (from 1494 to 1904) and all Spanish-speaking countries of the Americas. More than 3,500 texts were selected by researchers based on careful linguistic and philological criteria. Documents are predominantly characterized by their *communicative immediacy*.

5.2 Evidence from the *CORDIAM* corpus

5.2.1 Quantitative aspects

Let us now look at the information provided by American Spanish data from the 16th and 18th centuries, drawn from the CORDIAM corpus. Data from the 17th century were not included, as leaving out one century provides a clearer picture of change in progress.

A search for *vosotros* (and all its possible orthographical variants) produced 72 matches from the 16th century and eight from the 18th century. The searches for *vuestras mercedes* produced 243 matches from the 16th century and 91 from the 18th century. The contrast between *vosotros* and *ustedes* should be considered with great caution for reasons I discuss in Bertolotti (2010). I show that the

presence of *usted* as a subject is not equivalent to its respective familiar form, and I attribute this to the fact that *usted* is a grammaticalization of an honorific form. Among other consequences, this results in a coincidence in the ending of the third person, which explains the “over-occurrence” for disambiguation. This could mean that the obligation to use *ustedes* was greater than the obligation to use *vosotros*, and this is something that must be taken into account. However, while it might be expected that the presence of *ustedes* as an explicit subject diminished as the grammaticalization process advanced, the data shows that *ustedes* increased its presence.

Again, these data, which are all from the Americas, do not support Moreno de Alba’s claim that *ustedes* begins to predominate only from 1840. The CORDIAM corpus provides evidence that in the 16th century *vuestras mercedes* > *ustedes* was more frequent. Nevertheless, it must be pointed out that Moreno de Alba clarifies his claim by saying that unfortunately the documents in CORDE from the Americas are scarce for some decades, and they are far from being representative of the state of things in each of the various countries (Moreno de Alba 2011: 32).

Clearly, according to the newer data from CORDIAM, *vuestras mercedes*⁴ predominates over *vosotros* as early as the 16th century, and this continues, more markedly in fact, into the 18th century.⁵ Proportionally, the *vosotros/ustedes* ratio moves from 3.6 in the 16th century to 15.3 in the 18th century. That is, in the 16th century there is one instance of *vosotros* for every 3.6 instances of *vuestras mercedes* > *ustedes*. In the 18th century, however, there is one instance of *vosotros* for every 15 instances of *vuestras mercedes* > *ustedes*. It is important to bear in mind that I take these data as a general framework, and therefore rather than insisting on numerical contrast I focus on analyzing the contexts (with their nominal forms) in which each pronoun appears.

There is a single instance of *vosotros* in the 19th century. There are 18 uses of the corresponding verb inflections (*-ais/-eis/-is*) in the same century. All of them appear in formulaic or solemn contexts, which I do not analyze in this study. The *vosotros* form appears in a familiar context and was written by a woman from the countryside:

4 The number of matches results from the sum of the matches from searches for various abbreviations (*mercedes*, *mds*, *mrds*), combined with *vuestras* (or some of its possible abbreviations) and, excluding nouns and proper names, constructions with *sus*. It also includes matches for *vstedes*, *ustedes*.

5 It should be noted that the three periods have approximately the same number of words (around one million) and that in the 16th century there are 718 personal letters while in the 18th century there are only 308.

- (6) {f.2v} *tu padre esta deciando que te bengas/y atribullendo los trabajos /⁵ de sus ijos a los desordenes/de su bida pasada dise que/ci **bosotras padeceis** es por el/desareglo que hubo el Maria [...] la/cr[a]da esta cada bes mas famosa /¹⁰ aquí pasan lo mas del tiempo/porque no nos ayamos cin/eyos *Recibi* esperciones de/todos y se las *daras* a todos/y *manda* a tu mas afetisima /¹⁵ tia que de corazon *te quiere*/Pascuala Alvarez de Martinez/(Year 1816, Uruguay, correspondence, CORDIAM)*

‘Your father is looking forward to seeing *you* here. He considers that the problems of his children are due to their previous life. He says that **you suffer** because of this disorder. Maria, the maid, is increasingly famous. They spend most of the time here in order to keep us company. *Receive* greetings from all of us and *send* greetings to everybody there and *order your* most devoted aunt who loves *you*. Pascuala Alvarez de Martínez’⁶

Based on our data, then, we can argue that the generalization of *ustedes*, or more precisely the shift from the older form *vosotros* to the more modern form *ustedes*, had been underway since the beginning of the incorporation of the Spanish language in the Americas, and not since the 19th century.

5.2.2 Qualitative aspects

In this section, I present a qualitative analysis of the data and their communicative context. I consider social deixis, situation (familiar or social), and context (formal or informal).

The analysis shows that in the 16th century *vosotros* has no restrictions determined by either social deixis, situation, or context. We find the use in an administrative text in which instructions are given, and, therefore, in a text from the formal sphere, as can be seen in example (7).

- (7) no **consyntireys** que los yndios se entremetan entre los españoles A lo menos muchos syno que Antes vayan e esten por su parte haziendoles entender que lo **hazeys** porque no **quereys** que ningun español les haga ni diga cosa de que Resçiban enojo porque metiendose entre **vosotros** muchos yndios pueden ten[d]er çelada para en abraçandose los vnos con **vos otros** salir los

⁶ In the examples and in the translation of examples (6)–(16) I coded pronominal and verbal *tú* or *vos* in *italics*, pronominal and verbal ***vosotros*** in ***bold italics***, pronominal and verbal *usted* (*vmd* and similar) and *ustedes* (*vs. ms.* and similar) underlined.

otros e como son muchos *podriades* correr peligro y pereçer y *dexareys* muy Aperçibidos. (Year 1518, Cuba, administrative text, CORDIAM)

'*you cannot accept* that the Indians mix with the Spaniards, at least not so many of them. You have to convey to them that *you do* that because *you don't want* any Spaniard to do or tell them anything that can make them feel angry. Because mixing with *you*, lots of Indians may set *you up*. Some of them can embrace *you* and others can go out. As they are so numerous, *you could be* in danger, and *you* may die.'

The use of *vosotros* to address parents is also found in family letters, where it alternates with *vuestra mercedes* and abbreviated alternative forms *vsms* as can be seen in example (8), and also with *vmd* [*vuestra merced* abbreviated form]).

- (8) deseados padres salbehos dios/con mas de[j]o de ber a vs ms que no de escriuy~~lles~~/les hago sauer como gloria a dios nuestro señor/estauamos en el peru yo e my hermano/ [...] yo/les ruego/que el vno o [en]tranbos se vengan/ para que aca lleuen algun descanso/para la bejez y de aca podemos prober {f.13} a nuestras hermanas y cuñados/e deudos y sy juan bonyllo nuestro/ primo quisyere benyr *dalde* mys besamanos/e *dezilde* que hare tanto por el/como por qualquiera de *vosotros*/[...] a todos les veso las manos [...] (Year 1568, Panama, correspondence, CORDIAM)

'Dear parents, God save *you*. Although I don't see *you*, I write to *you*. I tell *you*, thank God that my brother and I, we are in Peru. I beg *you* that one or both of *you come* here. So *you* can bring some money here for your old age. From here we can support our sisters and brothers in law and the bereaved. If Juan Bonillo our cousin wants to come, *give* him my greetings and *tell* him that I will do anything for him as well as for any of *you*. To everyone I kiss your hands'

In the 16th century, the plural *vosotros* was also the plural of *vos*, as shown in example (9) in a letter addressed to a nephew.

- (9) sobrino muchas vezes *os* e escripto que *vos* y *vuestra* muger y/hijos *os viniesedes* a estas partes para que gozâsemos/de *vosotros* pues dios nos a dado para poderos haçer/vien y estamos en tierra donde no ay las necesidades/que en españa que lo que dios me a dado todo lo quiero/para *vos* y para mi sobrina. (Year 1590, Bolivia, correspondence, CORDIAM)

'My nephew, I have often written to *you* that *you* and *your* wife and children *should come* here so we can enjoy being with *you*. God has provided for us

so we can help *you*. We live in a land that doesn't suffer the scarcity of Spain. What I have received from God, I want to share with *you* and my niece'

Finally, we find it as the plural of *tú* in a father's letter to his son in example (10).

- (10) hijo/vna carta *tuya* reçibi que parecia mas/cartel de desafio que no carta de hijo a/padre estoy espantado de *ti* y de *tu* madre que *ayas/querido* ser tan contumaçis de no aver querido venir aca/donde ***vuieredes*** dadome a mi descanso y a ***vosotros***. (Year 1570, Peru, correspondence, CORDIAM)

'My son, I have received a letter from *you* (sg.). It seemed more like a challenge billboard than a letter from a son to his father. I am appalled at *you* and *your* mother's stubborn refusal to come here, where ***you*** (pl.) **would have** given me solace as well as receiving it yourselves.'

This broad range of uses is similarly observed in the use of *vuestras mercedes* > *ustedes*. Considering only the extreme ends of the formal-informal continuum, we can see its use in a letter to the Council of the Indies (example (11)), a situation that requires the utmost formality.

- (11) Manjficos señores./Por la carta que va con ésta he escrito tan largo a vs.mercedes, aunque a mi pareçer/corto, y en sumas lo que ha pasado, que temo que ya estaran ynportunados de/leer. (Year 1526, Mexico, administrative text, CORDIAM)

'Magnificent gentlemen, In a letter that I am sending with this one, I have written to you a great deal (although I think it is still a short letter) summarizing what has happened, to the point that I'm afraid you must be bored of reading.'

At the other extreme, we find the use of *vuesas mds* in a family letter to a sister, who is close to the writer in terms of affection and who is addressed alternatively with *vm(d)* and *vos*, pointing to no distinctin in terms of formality (example (12)).

- (12) e querido/hacer esto para que la una u la otra tubiesen bentura/de llegar a manos de vmd [en] [e] qual abiso a vmd de mi/salud y de *buestra* tia ysabel rodriguez de como estamos /buenos y de salud y ansi *bos* suplicamos nos aga/vmd merced [...] *entende* que yo deseo casaros/y poneros [en] cobro de maner[a] que *podays* estar/onradamente yo por no tener hijo ni hija ni parientes/mas llegados que vuesasmds e tenido por/bien y lo tengo de que *bengays* s a estar [en] mi compania/y de *vuestra* tia porque tengo yo y ella con

que poder/remediarles. (Year 1590, Dominican Republic, correspondence, CORDIAM)

‘I did this in the hope that at least one or the other letter would reach you hands. In these letters, I tell you about my health and about *your* aunt Isabel Rodríguez as well, we are healthy. We beg *you* to tell us about your health. *You* have to understand that I want *you* to be married, so that *you can live* honestly. I have no son or daughter or relatives closer than you (pl.). I have wanted and still want for ***you to come*** and stay here with me and with *your* aunt. We can support you (pl.).’

The results of the analysis of *vosotros* in the 18th century are not substantially different in qualitative terms, but there are quantitative differences, as there are only eight matches, as seen above, four of which are found in texts by the same writer. The very limited number of matches allows us, nonetheless, to say that *vosotros* was still used in a broad range of texts, from public announcements (example (13)) to family letters addressed to siblings (example (14)).

- (13) Yo, verídico informante, **os** digo lo/mismo que **vosotros sabéis** por el padre Torres, padre Días, /¹⁰ cabo de escuadra, padre Granado, sargento, y el padre Maldonado,/que éstos no hacen verdadero bautismo, verdadero/sacramento de penitencia, verdadera extremaunción,/ni verdadera missa. (Year 1774, Mexico, legal texts, CORDIAM)

‘As a truthful informant, I tell **you** what **you** already **know** through Father Torres, Father Díaz, squadron corporal, Father Granado, sargent, and Father Maldonado. They don’t baptize honestly, they don’t administer the sacrament of penance, they don’t really give the last rites, they don’t really say mass.’

- (14) Hoy el objeto de mi atención es Andresitto, por sí y su buena madre, a quien tantto debí. Quiero saber si vive con **vosotros**, con su mujer o separados, y el porqué. [...] /Hermanos, desengañémonos que esto puede durar... También *te* escribí (*conttigo* abló Pepe) pregunttando el estado y oficio que seguía el muchacho que está en León, nada *dices*, *haces* bien callar. / (Year 1772, Peru, correspondance, CORDIAM)

‘Today it is Andresitto who needs attention, to whom and to whose good mother I owe so much. I want to know if he is living with **you** (pl.), with his wife or if he is separated and why. [...] Brothers, we have to accept that this can last. I also wrote to *you* (Pepe I spoke to you) asking *you* about

the situation and the occupation of the young man living in León. *You say nothing. You are right to keep quiet.*'

This is also the case with *vuestras mercedes* > *ustedes*, which we find used both in legal reports and in a letter to a brother (examples (15) and (16)) in which dramatic news is conveyed.

- (15) vuestras mercedes/me sean testtigos cómo, aviéndole mandado al gobierno/ que llevase preso a dicho Cárdenas, no quiso ovedezer, lo/qual se justifica puestto que no está en dicha cárzel, antes/sí, como aziendo mofa y donaire de dichos mandattos,/se está, como ven vuestras mercedes, sentado en su puerta./ (Year 1716, Mexico, legal texts, CORDIAM)

'I want you to be my witnessess that, although the government ordered him to detain Cárdenas, he refused to obey, which I can prove because he is not in jail. Instead, he is mocking and flouting the orders he received, he is sitting at his front door, as you can see.'

- (16) Y a San Juan de Sahagún le pido encaresidamente me aiude para poderle mandar alguna cosa y vuestras mercedes se lo rogarán por mí./El cuñado de Pedro de Vega, llamado Manuel, se mantiene aquí conmigo. (Year 1737, Panama, correspondence, CORDIAM)

'I beg San Juan de Sahagún to help me send you something. And I trust you will ask him in my name. Pedro de Vega's brother in law, called Miguel, is here with me.'

This analysis leads to the following five findings:

- (a) It is reasonable to assume that in American Spanish there has always been (as there is today) basically a single space for plurality at the level of pronouns, expressed either through *vosotros* or through *vuestras mercedes* > *ustedes*, but that a *vosotros/ustedes* opposition never took root;
- (b) This "non-division" of the space of plurality is explained by the difficult conditions of a homogeneous plurality that would justify a specialized pronoun of address;
- (c) The "non-division" of the space of plurality is also explained by the very strong restrictions that existed in the 16th and 17th centuries on the use of familiar or closeness forms in Spanish, further limited by the communicative contexts in the Americas;
- (d) It is possible that the use of *vosotros* was abandoned in everyday interaction in the 18th rather than in the 19th century;

- (e) The remnants of *vosotros* use in the Americas can be explained because it is an old form, extinct in common speech and therefore more prestigious. As noted above, in the absence of good reasons to divide the space of plurality, it is reasonable to assume that the use of one of the two forms would decline.

6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored theoretical, historiographical, and descriptive and explanatory issues. First, the theoretical issue involves questioning the idea that some systems of address are more balanced than others, in terms of the regularity of the parameters that explain the use of plural forms of address. I have argued that, due to homogeneity/heterogeneity problems, the divisions between the singular forms do not necessarily correspond to divisions between the plural forms.

Second, the historiographical issue lies in pointing out the research bias in the analysis of address – and most probably other linguistic phenomena – in American Spanish, whereby the Castilian system is taken as the norm. Third, in descriptive and explanatory terms, the disappearance of *vosotros* is not associated with the prestige of the speakers (Corominas' hypothesis); rather, it has to do with the *hypercritical* condition of the plurals in the communicative space of the Americas. I have also argued that a division of the plural based on social closeness and distance never took root in the Americas.

The data studied place the loss of *vosotros* in the 18th century and not in the 19th century (Moreno de Alba's hypothesis). These data correspond with those analyzed by Fernández Martín (2012) on the loss of the pronoun *vosotros* in western Andalusia in Spain.

As for the preservation of *vosotros* in formal discourse, the fact that *vosotros* and *ustedes* were two forms that competed for the space of plurality, with *vosotros* being the conservative form and *ustedes* the innovative form, explains why the former was chosen in formal and solemn contexts.

The explanation provided – namely, that in Hispanic America there was no division between plural address and that forms were contextually specialized – fully accounts for the two facts: loss of *vosotros* with only marginal traces of *vosotros* remaining.

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