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## Sociolinguistic Determinants of Address in Spanish: Colombia Revisited

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### INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

Studies dealing with the relationship between language variation and social stratification or meaning have concentrated on two main aspects: (1) the linguistic aspect—a concentration on the variability of language and the tools to account for these linguistic variables; and (2) the social aspect—studies dealing with the effect that these linguistic variables may have on society, and the possible effect society may have on language.

The present research project set out to determine the social correlates of the variation of the *you* subject pronouns (*tú / vos / usted*) in one of our South American neighbors, Colombia. Of the many possible linguistic variations that may exist in any one given linguistic community, the subject pronouns or address forms are probably the ones that best reflect the social relationships that may exist between speakers, and the corresponding effect of society on the degree or type of linguistic variation. The present investigation analyzed the effect of the speaker's personal background on his/her usage of *tú / usted / vos* (the latter commonly referred as *voseo*), the situational constraints that may be imposed, and the degree to which this particular linguistic variation may exist. Does a lower socioeconomic or educational level result in less *you* variation due to a more traditional social structure? As the speaker's status improves, does this pronoun variation increase with education? Do gender differences reflect a greater or lesser linguistic variation due to the gender roles in the traditional Latin society? The answers to these and many other questions will give us a better picture of this sociolinguistic variation.

### BACKGROUND

The linguistic variation of the *you* subject pronouns is quite widespread in many, though not all, Spanish speaking countries. Charles E. Kany (1945) discusses the history and extent of this variation at some length.

He gives one possible historical explanation for this variation to be a shift of the original *vos*, from a plural form to a singular form, as a possible reaction to the extreme informality of the *tú* form. This resultant form served as a bridge or intermediate step that would not be as formal as the *usted* subject pronoun. This *voseo* offers possibly the greatest degree of divergence between Castilian Spanish and the Spanish of the Americas. Kany briefly described the research on the usage of *vos* in the various regions of our hemisphere and laid the groundwork for the present researcher's interest in this area of linguistic variation. The vast majority of the studies described in his monumental work were based on research that had been done on the pronoun and corresponding verb variations in literary texts and in cursory observations. Constantino Láscaris (1975) devotes a section of his work on Costa Rican life, culture, traditions, and language to the *voseo* found in that country. His treatment of this linguistic variation is quite interesting but quite broad in nature, since the work dealt with many other facets of the country. Again, one finds the descriptions of the address form variations based almost exclusively on data from secondary sources, i.e., literary texts.

Diego Marín (1972:907) conducted a study of 32 Hispanics living in Canada. These informants came from various parts of Spain and Latin America and were asked to respond to their *usted*, *vos*, *tú* usage in a variety of situations or domains. Marín found that the *usted* form was preferred for addressing older people and *tú* was the preferred usage among younger individuals. Uber (1985:389), on the other hand, found that in Bogotá, Colombia the *usted* form was predominantly used among family members and friends. It should be pointed out that the subject population was all middle class and the type of analysis that was done on the data is unclear. Jaramillo (1990:21) concluded in a study of Spanish-speaking residents of Tomé, New Mexico that *tú* was preferred for informal domains and the *usted* form was preferred for formal domains. This is in contrast to the Uber findings in Colombia. Lambert and Tucker (1976:122-142) included a Colombian survey in their extensive study of address patterns in various cultures. The focus of interest here was on determining whether differences in pronoun usage existed due to the sex of the subjects and their religious background. The subjects were all pre-teen Colombian children who were asked their pronoun usage for a variety of situations. The highest number of significant differences was found in the Chi-square values for the Catholic-Jewish comparisons (29), then the male-female Catholic comparisons (22), and finally the male-female Jewish comparisons (4).

Yolanda R. Solé (1970) completed a detailed analysis of the *you* subject pronoun variation among middle class speakers of Perú, Argentina, and Puerto Rico, using direct interview techniques. It was this study that moti-

vated the present researcher to select Colombia as the site for the proposed research project. Solé's selection of the three countries was based on their representation of the three societal types prevalent in Spanish America: a modern society, a traditional society with an aristocratic inclination in transition, and an agrarian society, respectively. Puerto Rico representing the agrarian social structure, demonstrated a more statistical variation of the pronouns than was found in the other two types of societies. Also, in this study more subject variables were included than in the previous studies discussed.

Montes Giraldo (1985) in his compilation of previous studies in *Thesaurus*, discusses a wide variety of topics on the Spanish in Colombia, principally dealing with regional variation. In his discussion of the *voseo* he carefully details the *vos* usage in the various departments. For El Tolima, Huila, and Meta he cites a large number of examples of the use of *vos* in literary texts. In the appendix a number of social factors are included that attribute the use of *vos* in some regions to the "distancing" of the upper from the lower social classes. Also the *tuteo* is considered a type of privileged usage.

Ibagué, the capital of the department of El Tolima, is the site selected for the present study. The site selection is due in part to the investigator's assignment to the Coruniversitaria during a Fulbright Exchange, but principally due to the fact that in this area one can find the use of all three of the subject pronouns in question (Montes Giraldo:1985). El Tolima is located in the southeast of Colombia, with a population of over one million. Its agricultural production is well developed, including cotton, rice, coffee, corn, banana, and yucca. Its industrial production is limited to small factories, principally furniture, leather goods, construction materials, food stuffs, and beverages. Ibagué is situated 213 km. from Bogotá and has a population of over 300,000 inhabitants. It is considered the most important city of this department and the "musical capital of Colombia" (Paredes Cruz:1984:474-475).

The present research project will hopefully add to the present state of knowledge of the *usted/ vos/ tú* variation in a variety of ways. Although literary text analyses have been a valuable research tool in the past studies discussed in this paper, this investigator employs direct speaker interview techniques as the procedure used to gather data about speech that is actually being used today in Colombian society. The present investigator has included many subject social variables in the present study in order to get a broader picture of the social factors that may influence this linguistic variation. Also, the statistical procedures employed in the data analysis in the present study will provide a very detailed presentation of the pronoun variation.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present linguistic analysis was accomplished by means of a questionnaire and direct individual interviews with the people of Ibagué (Tolima), Colombia. The instrument consisted of two sections: (a) the informant's background information and (b) the informant's actual use of *tú*, *usted*, and/or *vos*. The informant background section included questions on the individual's age, sex, marital status, occupation, birthplace, neighborhood, level of education, income, parents' occupation, family origin, etc. The pronoun variability section consisted of questions designed to elicit the pronoun variation depending on the social/situational variation, such as: intrafamilial situations, with close and distant relatives, of frequent or infrequent contact and differences in sex, and with neighbors/close friends of the same, lower, and higher social class as the subjects. The interviews took place in the individual's home, with every effort taken to avoid or minimize any possible distractions. This site selection has obvious disadvantages but it has the very positive advantage of the informant feeling more at ease, informal, and quite possibly less threatened which may yield more true-to-life or spontaneous variation than in a more sterile or formal environment. Besides this researcher's own personal involvement in the actual interviews, a number of assistants were trained to interview informants in some of the less accessible neighborhoods of Ibagué. All of the interviews were coded to later determine if there may have been some minor interviewer distortions of the data. A total of 70 subjects were interviewed over a period of one month in Ibagué, Colombia. The selection of the subjects was based on availability sampling techniques. A Pearson correlational analysis of the informants' responses was performed to determine what interrelationships there may exist between the subject's *usted/tú/vos* variation and their social/background information. As previously mentioned, the subjects responded to a series of questions that covered domains or situations of their usage of the you subject pronouns. In the present report two of those domains will be discussed—Family and Friends/Neighbors of higher, lower, or same social class. The subjects were asked to respond to the frequency of usage of each of the three pronouns on a scale from "Never" (1) to "Always" (5), with particular individuals, i.e. Father, Older Sister, Younger Male Friend of Same Social Class, Older Female Friend of Lower Social Class, etc. This part of the questionnaire consisted of a total of 32 questions. A Pearson correlation analysis of the Ss responses was performed to determine what possible interrelationships there may exist their *usted/tú/vos* variation and the subject's social/background information. The subject variables that could have a reliable coding were included in the analysis of correlation. The level of edu-

cation variables were coded on a scale from one (graduate school) to six (up to sixth grade). The income variables had a range from five to 120 (in 10,000 peso increments). The range in number of children was from none to over three children (a four point scale). A scale of from zero to four was used for foreign languages spoken. The travel abroad had a range of from no travel to more than five places. The social class variable was based on a five point scale which was assigned by the interviewers in the present investigation, with a commentary regarding the basis for this determination. Although the subject variable of occupation yielded some interesting correlations, they will not be included in the discussion of the results, since the coding for this variable was not as reliable as it should be for the statistical analysis.

## RESULTS

Some explanation is necessary for a better interpretation of the results presented in the tables which follow. An abbreviation of the subject's background information was necessary for the preparation of the tables. The birthplace of the subject is presented as Birth S, of the mother as Birth M, and of the father as Birth F. The Par affix is for parents; Sp is for the spouse; and Fam is for the family. Other abbreviations are : FLSpkn for the number of foreign languages spoken, Educ for the level of education achieved, and Inc for the amount of monthly income. The "\*\*\*" and "\*\*" are the LE level of significance for the pronoun variation at the .01 and .05 levels, respectively. The "-" indicates an opposite direction for the variation, for less usage of the pronoun. If no number appears in a table for a particular Subject variable X Situation, it is to be interpreted that no significant variation was found for that particular variable. The present investigator decided that this type of presentation of the results is more valuable than a simple percentage of usage of each pronoun, because the reader is presented here with a statistically significant value or variation, not just a percentage, as has often been the method of presentation of variation. In any case, since the data was obtained in a 1 to 5 scale format, the presentation of percentages is not as productive. Also, at the bottom of each table one finds the valid percentage of the "Always" (5) responses and the "Rarely to Often" (2 to 4) responses. The "Never" (1) component of the percentage of valid responses was not presented in the tables, since these figures can be extrapolated by simple addition and subtraction.

Table I-A Family Situations

	Spouse			Children			Father			Mother			Younger Sister		
	Usted	Tú	Vos	Usted	Tú	Vos	Usted	Tú	Vos	Usted	Tú	Vos	Usted	Tú	Vos
Inc S	-44*						-33*	35*							
Inc Fam		44**		-46*	44*		-49**	51**		-45**	51**				
Educ S-	-59**	65**		-68**	59**					-43*					
Educ Sp		39*		-42*	44*			51*			51*				
Educ Par				-42*	42*			29*			32*				
Class	-53**	65**		-67**	62**		-49**	53**		-51**	59**		-33*	34*	
FLSpkn															
Birth S			72**						59**				-38**	35*	36*
Birth F			50**						33*						
Birth M			57**						49**						35*
% of 5															
Always-	16	68	3	18	59	3	62	22	2	57	20	2	65	31	0
% of 2-4															
Freq-	26	13	3	25	20	6	16	14	2	20	22	2	2	7	2

For Table I-A one can see that the most numerous significant variations were found for the subject's social class, with the higher the social class the more frequent the *tú* usage and the less frequent the *usted* usage for all of the situations. Next in order of influence was the amount of family income, relatively the same as the social class variable except that no statistically significant variation was found for the Younger Sister situation. The subject's and spouse's level of education, as well as the subject's birthplace, were of equal importance for statistically significant pronoun variation -- the higher the level of education the lesser was the usage of *usted*. The birthplace had been coded as either Tolima or outside of Tolima. Therefore the interpretation to be assigned to the influence of the subject's birthplace in this case, as well as future discussions of the birthplace variable, is that individuals born outside of Tolima exhibited significantly more usage of *Vos* for the situations outlined in Table I-A, as well as the remaining tables. Also, for the Younger Sister situation those born outside of Tolima use *tu* significantly more and *usted* significantly less.

The level of education of the subject, spouse, and mother was next in terms of importance of significant correlations with the variation. The correlations are of the same type as previously discussed but one sees a shift or more of a difference in terms of the actual situations. That is to say that there is less commonality of variation X situation. The subject's personal

income did not have as much of an effect on the variation as was expected by this researcher, but the situations (Spouse and Father) and the directions were as expected. The educational level of the parents exhibited minimal number of correlations with the variation, but the direction was again in the same direction—the higher the levels the significantly more was the usage of *tú*. The variable of the subject's sex and the number of foreign languages spoken had the least effect on the pronoun variation with the Spouse situation having a significantly higher usage of *tú* and, interestingly, with females using *vos* significantly less with their children.

The most obvious trend thus far observed for the correlations of Situation X has been that *tú* is used significantly more by those of higher status, with the *usted* usage being affected to a lesser degree. Also the Spouse, Father, and Mother situations had many more cases of significant variation than the other situations dealing with younger people (Children and Younger Sister).

For the subject variables discussed so far and for the remaining discussions, it should be pointed out that with the Pearson correlations the opposite of the effect is also a valid presentation of the results. For example one could describe the subject's education variable effect as being one in which the lower the level of education results in significantly more usage of *usted* and significantly less usage of *tú* in the Spouse situation. Along those same lines, it could be said that those subjects born in Tolima use *vos* significantly less in the Spouse situation.



Table I-B Family Situations

	Grandfather			Grandmother			Older Brother			Younger Brother			Other Male Older		
	Usted	Tú	Vos	Usted	Tú	Vos	Usted	Tú	Vos	Usted	Tú	Vos	Usted	Tú	Vos
Inc S			53*												
Inc Fam-	64**	66**		-50**	51**					-35*	40*				
Educ Par				37*			-50**	52**					-25*	26*	
FLSpkn							64*								
Class														27*	
Birth S		50*					-37*	44*			52**	-31*	31*		
Birth F											44**				
Birth M											54**				
Older			49*												
% of 5															
Always-	68	10	0	78	13	3	67	19	5	70	21	0	74	17	2
% of 2-4															
Freq -	14	19	5	6	13	6	10	2	14	7	9	4	6	11	2

The subject variables found in Table I-B are somewhat different in terms of their effect on the variation from those detailed in Table I-A. The familial background of the subject has more weight, with the exception of the subject's birthplace, than other "personal" variables. The family income and the level of education of the parents determine the most cases of significant pronoun variation. The subject's social class, which showed the most variation in the previous table, and the remaining subject variables showed only a minimal effect on the pronoun variation. Also of interest is the minimal use of *vos* for these particular situations, with the subject's age having an effect in the Grandfather situation and the subject, father, and mother's birthplace having a correlation only in the Younger Brother situation.

Table I-C Family Situations

	Other Male Younger			Other Female Older			Other Female Younger			Of Spouse Male Older		
	Usted	Tú	Vos	Usted	Tú	Vos	Usted	Tú	Vos	Usted	Tú	Vos
Birth S	-33**	32**		-30*	26*							
Birth F											53*	
Birth M	-34**	31*		-35**	31*						58*	
Inc S	-38**	37**									59*	
Class	-31*	31*					-33*	31*			45*	
Educ S		25*					-27*	29*				
Educ Par				-26*	27*							
% of 5												
Always-	69	23	2	72	16	2	70	28	2	86	7	3
% of 2-4												
Freqs-	6	9	2	9	14	2	6	10	2	0	7	3

Table I-D Family Situations

	Of Spouse Male Younger			Of Spouse Female Older			Of Spouse Female Younger			Close Male			Close Female		
	Usted	Tú	Vos	Usted	Tú	Vos	Usted	Tú	Vos	Usted	Tú	Vos	Usted	Tú	Vos
Birth S			53**			48**			48**			35**			
Birth F			51**			52**			49*						
Birth M			56**			52**			55**			39**			2
Inc S						41*			41*					-29*	
Travel					-56*	56*									
Educ S														-44**	40**
Educ Par											-46**	48**		-28*	30*
Female											31**				
Class														-37*	35*
% of 5															
Always-	82	11	4	79	7	3	67	27	3	48	38	1	40	40	3
% of 2-4															
Freqs-	4	4	4	3	0	0	3	3	3	14	14	3	20	19	3

The last two tables dealing with the Family Domain, Tables I-C and I-D exhibit some interesting Subject variable X Situation correlations. The subject, father, and mother's birthplace show more of a correlation with

the Vos usage when dealing with the spouse's relatives, similar to the Spouse and Children situations in Table I-A and the Younger Brother situation in Table I-B. One could then posit that there is a distinction present between the *tú* and *vos* for this subject population, in terms of "blood" relatives versus "other" relations and the age of the addressee; this could extend to a lesser degree to the last two situations in Table I-D— a Very Close Male Friend (not family) and a Very Close Female Friend (not family). The subject's income also exhibits a larger role in the variation than the subject's social class. Also, for the Spouse situation the occupational level did not play any role in significant variation. In summing up the Family Domain, one can see that more subject variables had significant correlations for the "closer" relatives, from Spouse to Other Female Younger, than for the "other" relatives. In terms of specific subject variables, the subject's social class (20), the subject's birthplace (19), Family income (18), Education of parents (14), Mother's birthplace (13), Father and Mother's birthplace (12@), and subject's birthplace (12) had the most statistically significant correlations with the pronoun variation. No significant variation at all was found for the Older Sister situation. Also, no significantly more/less Vos usage was found for the following situations : Father, Mother, Grandmother, Older Brother, and Other Male Family.

**Table II-A Friends / Neighbors**

	Same Social Class												Higher Social Class					
	Older			Older			Younger			Younger			Younger			Younger		
	Male			Female			Male			Female			Male			Female		
	Usted	Tú	Vos	Usted	Tú	Vos	Usted	Tú	Vos	Usted	Tú	Vos	Usted	Tú	Vos	Usted	Tú	Vos
BirthS-	25*			28*			28*											
Inc S										27*								
Educ S										24*	25*							
Educ Par				-31**	32**		-26*	26*										
Female							28*	-25*		29*	-28*					25*	-28*	
Children													-41*	41*				
FLSpkn													54*				-55*	
% of 5																		
Always-	77	11	3	73	14	3	71	16	3	60	21	1	79	13	2	72	15	2
% of 2-4																		
Freqs-	9	9	3	10	9	1	11	10	3	19	16	1	7	6	0	13	9	3

**Table II-B Friends / Neighbors**

	Lower Social Class											
	Older Male			Younger Male			Older Female			Younger Female		
	Usted	Tú	Vos	Usted	Tú	Vos	Usted	Tú	Vos	Usted	Tú	Vos
Birth S			25*			25*			25*			25*
Birth F	-27*		32*	-31*		32*			32*			32*
Birth M			28*	-24*		28*			38*			38*
Inc S						27*						
Female									26*			
Children						39*				28*		-30*
Age	-27*											
% of 5												
Always-	87	9	0	82	8	0	87	9	0	78	12	0
% of 2-4												
Freqs-	8	3	6	11	3	6	6	2	2	11	9	6

The Friends/Neighbors Domain resulted in much fewer instances of statistically significant subject pronoun variation than in the Family Domain even when one takes into account the actual number of questions (12 versus 20, respectively). Also, one can see in Tables II-A and II-B that fewer subject variables (11) had an effect on the variation in this Domain than in the Family Domain (16). A somewhat unexpected variable was responsible for the most variation (8), the Sex of the subject. The S/F/M birthplace was next in importance, being the only subject variables showing correlations with the *os* usage. Some significant variation was found for all four of the situations in both the Same and Lower Social Class, but only for two situations in the Higher Social Class situation. Also interesting to note was that the significant Vos variation was found only in the Lower Social Class situations. The Sex of the subject resulted in a very interesting trend, not only in that it was the subject variable with the most correlations, but that it did not have any effect on significant Vos variation, as it did in the Children situation of the Family Domain.

## CONCLUSIONS

It is somewhat difficult to compare the results of the present investigation with previous studies. This is due to three major reasons : (1) other studies have not included as many subject variables, such as, occupation and education of parents, travel abroad, foreign languages spoken, etc.,

(2) the focus of the present study is on the degree of usage (on a 1 to 5 scale) of each pronoun for particular situations, not on the relative usage of one pronoun versus the others, and (3) the results are presented only when a subject variable has a significant (LE .01 and .05) effect on the usage of a particular pronoun form.

The finding that many more cases of significant *usted/vos/tú* variation were found in the Family Domain (154) than in the Neighbor Domain was in line with the Solé (1970:186) results for Perú. Solé attributes the amount of *tuteo* in that country to the "traditional" nature of that society. The geographical proximity and societal structure of Colombia may account for the similarity of these findings. It is the hope that the present investigation can add more detailed information to this type of variation due to the methodology and analyses performed on the data. The subject variable X Domain contrast of types or degree of effect can be observed where the subject's social class, subject's income and the family income were responsible for 12 to 20 cases of significant pronoun variation in the Family Domain, with those subject variables being responsible for only two cases in the Neighbor Domain. The Neighbor Domain had only two subject variables that had more of an effect on the pronoun variation for this domain than for the Family Domain; the subject's sex (9 to 2) and the Children variable (6 to 0). The finding that the more children the subject had resulted in more usage of *tú* is not as easily explained by the "traditional" theory as does the finding that females used *usted* significantly more outside the Family Domain.

The influence of the power/prestige factor on the *you* variation was quite obvious in the present study, though not necessarily in the area that was expected. It was expected that subject variables dealing more directly with power/prestige (such as, social class, income, occupation, and education) would yield more of an influence on the variation in the Neighbor Domain, especially with those of higher and lower social class. Instead the power/prestige variables yielded much less of an effect in the Neighbor Domain than the other variables, especially true for the birthplace variable. One can still say, however, that overall the most important variables for the *usted/vos/tú* variation were the power / prestige variables.

It is hoped that the present research has shed some light on the effect of social variables on the usage of the *you* subject pronouns in Spanish, specifically in this part of Colombia. The methodology used for the data collection and the analysis employed proved to be quite productive in terms of the detailed nature of the results and should be easily replicable in other countries.

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