

## Perceptions of Second Person Singular Pronoun Use in San Salvador, El Salvador

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### Abstract

El Salvador Spanish evidences a tripartite system of pronoun address, with one formal pronoun, *usted*, and two informal pronouns, *tú* and *vos*. The present study addresses attitudes toward pronoun use in San Salvador through the use of a linguistic questionnaire. The choice of pronoun is not dependent solely on the interlocutor whom the speaker is addressing, but also social factors, such as a speaker's age, gender, and education. Statistical analysis demonstrates that *tú* is reserved for a few specific situations, and may represent an intermediate level of formality between *usted* and *vos*. *Tú* is reported more frequently by older and moderately educated speakers. *Vos*, however, is being advanced by younger, well-educated speakers in both frequency and into pragmatic areas that previously belonged to *usted*. In this way *voseo* in San Salvador may reflect increased informality and a higher use of regional forms reported in many Spanish varieties.

### 1. Introduction

El Salvador has been identified as a region of national *voseo*, or use of the informal second person singular pronoun *vos* and/or its corresponding verb forms, instead of *tú* (cf. Lipski 1988, 1994 and Schreffler 1994). At the same time, studies have suggested that El Salvador is among the regions possessing a tripartite system of pronoun address, with *usted* as the formal pronoun, *vos* as the informal pronoun, and *tú* playing a third role, either as an educated form or occupying an intermediate position between *vos* and *usted* (Lipski 1988, 1994). In order to examine attitudes toward pronoun use in El Salvador, this study will address three primary research questions. First, what pronouns do speakers in the capital city, San Salvador, report using with different interlocutors and in different contexts? This question is addressed via linguistic questionnaires that demonstrate what pronoun speakers feel is acceptable in a given context. Questionnaire data are analyzed quantitatively using multivariate statistical analysis (Varbrul). Second, does *tú* in fact represent an intermediate level of solidarity for speakers in San Salvador? Finally, is *tú* used by upper class speakers as a prestige form within El Salvador as previous studies have indicated (Hernández 2002 and Lipski 1988)? The rest of the article is organized as

follows. Section 2 briefly reviews previous studies on Salvadoran pronoun use. Section 3 describes the methodology and selection of participants. Section 4 details the quantitative and qualitative analysis of pronoun use in different contexts. Section 5 discusses the results of the analyses, with possible explanations for the observed patterns. Finally, Section 6 presents conclusions and areas for future research.

## 2. Previous studies

Pronoun use in general, and *voseo* in particular, have been widely studied across the Spanish-speaking world. Among studies of Latin American pronouns we can cite Henríquez Ureña (1921), Rona (1964, 1967), Zamora & Guitart (1982), Benavides (2003), Rey (1997), Pinkerton (1986), Thomas (2008), Torrejón (1986, 1991), Castro (2000) and Moyna & Ceballos (2008), among many others. Central America and El Salvador, in particular, have received relatively little attention in the literature when compared to other varieties. Salvadoran *voseo* corresponds to Rona's (1967) Type II classification, with final stressed forms ending in *-ás, -és*, forms shared by Southern Cone varieties. In spite of the almost universal use of *voseo*, there has traditionally been a strong condemnation of *vos* on the part of educated Central Americans, based primarily on the absence of that pronoun in prestige dialects, such as Mexican and Castilian Spanish (see Schreffler 1994 for a review of historical attacks on *vos*). In El Salvador, as in many other Central American nations, historically there has been a disconnect between the form used by the majority of speakers (*vos*), and the pronoun taught in schools, used in official government publications, advertisements, and political campaigns (*tú*) (Benavides 2003 and Lipski 1988). The second author of the present study, a native speaker of San Salvador Spanish, confirms that while the use of *vos* in advertisements, etc. has increased slightly, the situation is still largely as described by Lipski (1988) more than 20 years ago. Not surprisingly, this institutional use of *tú* has led to an association between *tuteo* and the upper classes in El Salvador (Hernández 2002, p.105). Likewise, Schreffler's (1994, p.113) informants overwhelmingly responded that *tuteo* was more refined (71%) than *voseo*. This dichotomy has led to diverging trends. First, *vos* is viewed as incorrect or less refined than *tú* by many speakers, who have been taught that only *tuteo* or *ustedeo* belong in the public sphere. Second, this rejection of the autochthonous form *vos* has led some authors and political leaders to adopt *voseo* as a sign of local and regional solidarity, a change also observed in Nicaragua and Costa Rica due to social and political/historical reasons (Lipski 1988, pp.104-105). This is also reflected in the opinions of speakers as shown in Schreffler (1994, p.113), who report that the use of *vos* is more 'friendly' (61%) than *tú* (0%). Thus, the two pronouns seem to diverge on the continuum between 'correctness' (*tuteo*) and 'pleasantness' (*voseo*) (cf. Preston 2004).

Specifically in El Salvador, Páez Urdaneta (1981, pp.79-80) observes that “nacionalmente, el *tuteo*...es raro” but that El Salvador is one of the countries (along with Honduras) where the use of *tú*, “sin ser intenso no deja de ser algo evidente”. Lipski (1988, p.111) argues that the pronoun system in El Salvador is more complex than that of its Central American neighbors, noting that “many Salvadorans of all social classes do employ the *tuteo* with other Salvadorans, under limited circumstances”. Pronoun choice depends on the level of intimacy between two speakers, with *usted* occupying the formal end of the spectrum, placing social distance between speakers, while *vos* is found at the opposite end, used only with trusted friends, some family members, and spouses. *Tuteo*, on the other hand, has been identified as representing an intermediate level of *confianza* (trust or closeness), not as formal as *usted*, but more distancing than *vos*. This tripartite system does not exist for all Salvadorans, but this three-way pronoun use is not uncommon (Lipski 1988, p.112). Schreffler (1994, p.115) found her speakers to be split regarding the intermediacy of *tú*, with 49% explicitly identifying *tú* as an intermediate pronoun, while 43% stated that it was simply another option, without a difference in solidarity/formality. The use of *tú* as an intermediate form has also been found for Guatemala (Pinkerton 1986) and historically in Río de la Plata (Moyna & Ceballos 2008), among other regions.

Previous studies on the Salvadoran pronoun system have focused primarily on what happens when Salvadoran *voseante* speakers come in contact with speakers of *tuteo* varieties, specifically Mexican Spanish in the United States (Hernández 2002, Lipski 1988 and Schreffler 1994; but see Quintanilla Aguilar 2009, which deals directly with speakers in San Salvador). Results of those studies indicate that Salvadoran speakers in the United States shift from *voseo* to *tuteo* as the result of two factors: the feeling within El Salvador that *vos* is incorrect or uncultured, and the general unfamiliarity of most Mexican speakers with *voseo* forms that leads to accommodation. The following sections seek to examine speakers’ perceptions of the use of different address pronouns within El Salvador, removed from the situation of dialect/language contact found in the US.

### 3. Methodology

Data collection was carried out with a linguistic survey modified from Schreffler (1994). The survey contained 33 questions that asked which pronouns speakers prefer to use in different social contexts and with different types of people, followed by more open-ended questions (see the appendix). Not all questions on the survey were used for the present study, since some do not represent true interlocutors, but rather situational contexts, such as prayer. These contexts will be reserved for future research. Removal of those tokens left 20 interlocutors/contexts for analysis. Note that one pragmatic context was kept in the data – the difference between addressing children when the speaker is in a good mood vs. angry. This was done to test the

hypothesis that speaker mood toward an interlocutor also affects pronoun use. As one anonymous reviewer pointed out, to the best of our knowledge no previous study has systematically included pragmatic uses of pronouns in studies of this type.

Data was collected by the second author, a native speaker of San Salvador Spanish. Surveys were conducted with known participants such as family members, friends and neighbors as well as unknown participants. Unknown participants were selected through friends and family as well as randomly in shopping malls, markets, tourist centers, restaurants, etc. The locations of the interviews throughout the city allowed for a good sampling of diverse participants.

The use of surveys to obtain linguistic data can be problematic, in that speakers may answer what they think they say (or should say), or what they think the investigator wants to hear. While we are aware of this potential problem, we maintain that linguistic questionnaires can play an important role in discovering the attitudes toward different forms within a community. So while speakers may tend to underestimate their frequency of stigmatized forms, the pattern of variation will still emerge from the data. Likewise, surveys have several advantages over other possible data collection techniques, especially when trying to elicit specific forms, such as pronouns of address. While it would be possible, and desirable, to record spontaneous speech, it would be difficult or impossible to obtain recordings of all the possible speakers in all the possible contexts captured by a survey.<sup>1</sup> Others, such as Schreffler (1994), have attempted to circumvent this problem by having speakers perform dialogues, with limited success. Schreffler (1994) notes that speakers tended to narrate, rather than act out the dialogues. Therefore, given the difficulty of obtaining pronoun data by other means, a survey represents an important first step in understanding morphological variation like that found in pronoun use.

In spite of the potential shortcomings of linguistic surveys, we have taken steps to ensure that the data for the present study are reliable. First, all of the data was collected by the second author, a native speaker of San Salvador Spanish. Speakers were able to answer the survey questions more freely than would have been possible with an outsider, without having to worry about being judged based on their use of regional norms. Accounting for social differences, the results obtained in this study mirror the second author's own native intuitions about pronoun use, and we are confident that the results of the survey reliably represent speakers' views on pronoun variation in San Salvador. Finally, the use of a survey allows for comparison with previous studies, both within and outside of El Salvador. Therefore, as long as the reader keeps the potential limitations of survey methods in mind, the data obtained can provide useful insight into perceptions of pronoun use in San Salvador.

A total of eighty-four (84) speakers were interviewed. These speakers were divided by gender (54 women, 30 men), age (18-29  $n = 32$ , 30-89  $n = 52$ ), and three education levels (Level 1: no formal education – 9<sup>th</sup> grade  $n = 15$ , Level 2: some high school  $n = 29$ , Level 3: high school graduates/college  $n = 40$ ). For age groups,

speakers were divided into two generations based on common, shared experience (cf. Eckert 1997), in this case the Salvadoran Civil War (approximately 1979-1992). The older group was born before 1979, and therefore grew up before the Civil War; younger speakers were born around 1979 or after, and grew up during the war. With regard to education level, occupations found among level 1 speakers included waiters, mechanics, housewives, fishermen, construction workers, and hair stylists. Occupations for level 2 speakers included carpenters, secretaries, teachers, accountants, and students. Finally, occupations for level 3 speakers included advanced university students, engineers, lawyers, nurses, doctors, and professors.

Survey results were then coded for multivariate statistical analysis (Varbrul), run using Goldvarb X for Windows (Sankoff, Tagliamonte & Smith 2005). Dependent variables (the three possible pronouns) were analyzed vis-à-vis the independent variables (factor groups), representing the social factors of age, gender, education level, placed where they were raised, and the interlocutor being addressed. The significance of factor groups, the ranking of factor groups, and the individual factor weights were determined via two-level binomial analyses.

#### 4. Results

##### 4.1 Pronoun frequencies (*usted, tú, vos*)

First, we examine the overall frequencies of all three pronouns for each factor group (independent variable). Of course, the pronouns are not evenly distributed across the data. Table 1 shows that *usted* is the most frequently reported pronoun (60%), followed by *vos* (28%) and *tú* (11%). *Usted* is reported fairly consistently across social factors, while use across interlocutors varies greatly (4% with older siblings – 98% for several formal relationships). This is to be expected since a majority of speakers, for example, report nearly categorical *usted* with grandparents, doctors and priests. The choice of *usted*, then, seems to be dependent on the interlocutor, and not social factors such as speaker age, gender, education, or place where the speaker was raised.

Factor Group	Factor	% Ud	% Vos	% Tú
Age	31 and up	63	24	13
	18-30	55	36	9
Gender	Male	54	33	12
	Female	64	25	11
Education	Elementary or less	60	27	13
	High School	62	26	12
	University	59	31	11

Place raised	San Salvador	59	30	11
	Other City	61	26	13
	Pueblo	66	23	11
Interlocutor/ context	Mother	98	1	1
	Father	84	11	5
	Older siblings	4	84	12
	Younger siblings	7	81	12
	Grandfather	98	1	1
	Grandmother	98	1	1
	Boy/girlfriend	27	52	21
	Spouse	21	61	17
	Own children – when in a good mood	16	59	25
	Own children – when angry	26	59	15
	Male friend	29	55	16
	Female friend	28	57	15
	Classmates	38	51	11
	Co-workers	62	31	7
	Professors	94	5	1
	Friends' children	43	33	24
	Police officers	94	5	1
	Doctors	98	1	1
	Priests	95	4	1
	Street vendor	91	2	6
	Non-Hispanic friends	54	17	28
	Other Salvadoran out of the country	49	31	20
	Domestic employee/maid	84	12	4
	Other Central Americans	67	20	12
	Non-native Spanish speakers	65	8	27
	Total frequency N=2276	60	28	11

**Table 1. Frequencies for all pronouns**

The situation for the informal pronouns is quite different from that of *usted*, and is dependent to a large degree on social factors. Comparing frequencies for *vos* and *tú*, we see that overall *vos* is favored among younger speakers, while more *tuteo* is reported for older speakers. For speaker gender, men report more *voseo*, while *tuteo* does not show a strong gender difference. Speaker education and place raised do not

show strong results for *tuteo*, but university-educated speakers and those from San Salvador do report more *voseo*. Finally, as expected in a country described as primarily *voseante* (Benavides 2003, Lipski 1994 and Schreffler 1994), *vos* is much more frequently reported across interlocutors than *tú*. In fact, *tú* shows higher frequencies in only three contexts (to address street vendors, non-Hispanic friends, and non-native Spanish speakers).

#### 4.2 Multivariate analysis comparing *tú* and *vos*.

While the results in Table 1 show general tendencies across the data, they do not indicate what factors play a significant role in pronoun selection. For this, we turn now to multivariate analysis (Varbrul) and cross-tabulations. Varbrul requires that all categorical features (knockouts) be removed, since these are features that do not display variation. As seen in Table 1, there are no complete knockouts in the data. There are, however, several near-categorical factors. Guy (1988) (see also Tagliamonte 2006) notes that factors with less than 5% variation should be removed from analysis. In Table X, the near-categorical factors all favor *usted* with frequencies of 95% or greater, and include the interlocutors ‘mother’, ‘grandmother’, ‘grandfather’, ‘doctors’ and ‘priests’. These factors have been removed for the purposes of statistical analysis. Varbrul analysis only allows for binomial cases, so three analyses appear below, comparing each of the pronouns in pairs.

Table 2 presents the results of the binomial up-down analyses. The application value is *tú*, so factors disfavoring *tú* are interpreted as favoring *vos*. Non-significant factors are presented in brackets [ ]. Factor groups are presented in order of effect, with factor weights from high to low within a factor group. In Varbrul analyses, a factor weight between 0-1 is generated. A general rule of thumb is that a factor weight greater than .5 favors the application value (here *tú*), while factor weights below .5 disfavor it.

First, Varbrul analysis determines the significance of each factor group. Next, a comparison of factor weight range for significant factors shows the overall importance of each factor group to the observed variation (Tagliamonte 2006, pp.242-243). Range is determined by subtracting the lowest factor weight from the highest factor weight within a factor group. So in Table 2, the Range for ‘Interlocutor’ is 65 (92-27). The larger the range, the more important that factor group is in explaining the variation. Comparing the ranges across significant factors demonstrates that ‘interlocutor’ is more than twice as important as the next highest factor group, ‘age’ (range = 26), and more than five times as strong as education (range = 12). So while social factors are important in determining the use of *vos* or *tú*, the strongest predictor remains the interlocutor.

Corrected Mean			.25
Log Likelihood			-418.031
Total N			819
	Factor Weight	%	N
<b>Interlocutor</b>			
Non-native Span speakers	.92	78	27
Street vendor	.85	71	7
Non-Hispanic friend	.84	62	37
Other Central Americans	.69	38	26
Children of friends	.68	43	47
Other Salvadoran outside of the country	.67	39	41
Father	.66	31	13
Domestic employee	.53	23	13
Boy/girlfriend	.52	28	60
Own children –when in a good mood	.52	30	67
Male friend	.49	23	57
Professors/Police	.46	20	10
Female friend	.46	21	57
Spouse	.44	22	63
Own children – when angry	.41	21	58
Co-workers	.38	18	27
Classmates	.37	18	50
Younger siblings	.28	13	78
Older siblings	.27	12	81
<i>Range</i>	<i>65</i>		
<b>Age</b>			
30+	.61	34	480
18-29	.35	19	339
<i>Range</i>	<i>26</i>		
<b>Education</b>			
High School	.57	30	280
Elementary	.48	30	143
University	.45	25	396
<i>Range</i>	<i>12</i>		



<b>Gender</b>			
Women	[.53]	29	489
Men	[.46]	26	330
<b>Place Raised</b>			
Other city	[.54]	30	120
San Salvador	[.50]	27	600
Pueblo	[.48]	30	99

**Table 2. Varbrul analysis comparing *tú* and *vos*; application value = *tú***

For interlocutor, *tú* is favored strongly with non-native Spanish speakers (.92), street vendors (.85), and non-Hispanic friends (.84). This agrees with previous studies that have found a general avoidance of *voseo* with non-native speakers (Schreffler 1994, p.113). The reported use of *tú* with street vendors lends weight to the hypothesis that *tuteo* may present an intermediate form between *vos* and *usted*. Vendors are often from the lower social classes, and thus may not always receive a reciprocal *usted* (although as the frequencies in Table 1 indicate, they usually do). The use of *vos* with unknown people may be too intimate, however, so *tú* can be selected as a safe mid-point between the two other pronouns. *Tú* is moderately favored with other Central Americans (.69), children of friends (.68), another Salvadoran outside of the country (.67), and with speakers' fathers (.66). These categories can also be considered intermediate, where a speaker wants to demonstrate some solidarity (e.g. with their fathers) or superior status (i.e. with friends' children) but not the informality that comes with *vos*. Finally, several categories can be considered neutral with regard to *tú-vos*, such as a domestic employee (.53) (who normally receives *usted*), boy/girlfriends (.52), a speaker's children when the speaker is in a good mood (.52), and male friends (.49). The one possible intermediate use of *tú* here is seen in boy/girlfriends, especially when compared to spouses (.44), which favor more use of *vos*. Speakers report using *tú* in more formal dating relationships, while the intimate relationship after marriage may be indicated by a shift to *vos*.

The rest of the interlocutors significantly disfavor *tú*, which in this analysis indicates that they favor *vos*. The four interlocutors with the lowest factor weights (siblings and peers) demonstrate that *vos* is the primary informal pronoun in San Salvador. *Vos* is reported more frequently when parents are angry with their children (.41 f.w. for *tú*), suggesting that *vos* can also be used to (re-)establish a dominant position within a relationship, such as when children are misbehaving, compared to the more neutral pronoun choice when parents are happy with their children (.52). Finally, an interesting result is seen for the combined factor professors/police officers (.46). These two factors were combined due to extremely

low token frequency for informal pronouns (5 tokens each), given that the most usual pronoun with these interlocutors is *usted*. They also exhibited nearly identical behavior in the original analysis. A decision was made to keep them in the analysis as a combined group because they capture some important outlier behavior. In other words, a small minority of speakers interviewed report that *vos* is an acceptable pronoun with teachers and police officers, perhaps conveying an attitude toward these interlocutors, or maybe due to age or social class considerations – police officers are often young and uneducated, for example. Definitive answers require further research in the area of variation in formal contexts.

Regarding speaker age, speakers over age 30 report higher use of *tú* (.61). These speakers were born or grew up before the Salvadoran Civil War. Speakers younger than 30, who grew up during or after the Civil War, report significantly less *tú* (.35), and therefore more *vos*. Major socio-historical events, such as wars or revolutions, may impact salient linguistic features, such as attitudes toward pronoun choice.<sup>2</sup>

The last of the significant factors is speaker education. Speakers with a high school education report the highest frequencies of *tú* (.57). Speakers who only attended elementary school are more neutral, slightly favoring *vos* (.48), while university educated speakers show the lowest *tú* (.45). These results contradict some previous studies, which indicate that *tuteo* is primarily used among the educated upper-classes (Hernández 2002, p.105). Here, it is the middle education group that most favors *tú*. This u-shaped distribution suggests that *tuteo* is dependent on education to some extent, while at the same time its reported use among middle social groups can be indicative of hypercorrection towards a perceived correct form (see Milroy & Gordon 2003, p.39). In other words, university educated professionals may have the social confidence and freedom to employ more *vos*, without the danger of being mistaken for a lower class or rural speaker. This possibility will be addressed further in Section 5.

Finally, while neither gender nor place raised plays a significant role in the variation between *tú* and *vos*, the factor weights do indicate some trends that should be explored further in future research. Women show a tendency to report more *tú* ([.53]), consonant with findings that women adhere more closely to prestige forms (Labov 2001). This finding also agrees with the small preference for *tuteo* by women shown in dramatic works from the Río de la Plata region (Moyna & Ceballos 2008, p.73) Additionally, *tuteo* seems to be a primarily urban factor, as speakers raised outside of cities report less *tú* (see Lipski 2002 on the spread of forms from larger to smaller cities in Latin America). Moyna & Ceballos (2008, p.76) found a similar pattern of rural *voseo* and urban *tuteo* historically in Argentina and Uruguay.

## 4.3 Comparisons of other pronouns

While the focus of this study is on the variation between *tú* and *vos*, analyses of the other pronoun pairs provides insight into the role of the informal pronouns in San Salvador. A comparison of *tú-usted* and *vos-usted* is discussed only briefly here. Results of multivariate analyses are presented in Tables 3 and 4.

Corrected Mean		.14	
Log Likelihood		-433.131	
Total N		1023	
	Factor Weight	%	N
<b>Interlocutor</b>			
Older siblings	.95	77	13
Younger siblings	.91	62	16
Own children – when in a good mood	.90	61	33
Spouse	.83	45	31
Boy/girlfriend	.82	44	39
Own children – when angry	.78	37	32
Friends' children	.78	36	55
Male friend	.77	36	36
Female friend	.77	35	34
Non-Hispanic friends	.76	34	67
Other Salvadoran out of the country	.71	29	55
Non-native Spanish speakers	.71	29	72
Classmates	.64	22	40
Other Central Americans	.51	16	64
Co-workers	.41	10	49
Street vendor	.29	6	80
Father	.25	5	75
Domestic employee/maid	.21	4	73
Professors	.07	1	79
Police officers	.07	1	80
<b>Place Raised</b>			
San Salvador	[.52]	23	698
Other City	[.49]	22	167
Pueblo	[.42]	19	158
<b>Gender</b>			
Men	[.55]	26	331
Women	[.48]	20	692

<b>Age</b>			
Older	[.52]	23	699
Younger	[.46]	19	324
<b>Education</b>			
University	[.51]	22	451
High School	[.49]	22	383
Elementary	[.49]	23	189

**Table 3. Varbrul analysis comparing *tú* and *usted*; application value = *tú***

Corrected Mean		.37	
Log Likelihood		-607.284	
Total N		1390	
	Factor Weight	%	N
<b>Interlocutor</b>			
Older siblings	.98	96	74
Younger siblings	.95	92	74
Own children – when in a good mood	.86	78	60
Spouse	.84	74	66
Own children – when angry	.80	70	66
Female friend	.78	67	67
Boy/girlfriend	.77	66	65
Male friend	.76	66	67
Classmates	.69	57	72
Friends' children	.56	43	62
Other Salvadoran out of the country	.51	39	64
Co-workers	.44	33	66
Non-Hispanic friends	.33	24	58
Other Central Americans	.32	23	70
Domestic employee/maid	.18	12	80
Father	.16	11	80
Non-native Spanish speakers	.15	10	57
Professors	.07	5	82
Police officers	.07	5	83
Street vendor	.04	3	77
<i>Range</i>	<i>.94</i>		

<b>Age</b>			
Younger	.63	51	537
Older	.42	37	853
<i>Range</i>	<i>21</i>		
<b>Gender</b>			
Men	.61	50	491
Women	.44	39	899
<i>Range</i>	<i>17</i>		
<b>Education</b>			
Elementary	[.54]	41	246
University	[.53]	46	649
High School	[.44]	40	495
<b>Place Raised</b>			
San Salvador	[.51]	45	978
Other City	[.48]	39	215
Pueblo	[.46]	35	197

**Table 4. Varbrul analysis comparing *vos* and *usted*; application value = *vos***

First, the choice between *tú* and *usted* is based solely on interlocutor; no other factors were found to be significant. The fact that no other social factors studied here play a role in the *tú-usted* spectrum indicates that it is primarily related to issues of politeness, power and distance.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, the lack of significance of speaker factors suggests that it may be an artificial distinction for many speakers that is learned in school, follows textbook patterns and is reinforced through the media and cultivated interaction.

Second, three factors were found to be significant for the choice of *vos* or *usted*. In addition to interlocutor, speaker age and gender are significant factors. Younger speakers and men in particular are less formal than older speakers and women, as evidenced by their increased use of *vos*, including in contexts that previously would have required *usted*. The possibility that this represents a change in progress is addressed in Section 5.

#### 4.4 Attitudes towards pronoun use

In addition to the questions of pronoun use with specific interlocutors addressed above, participants were also asked a series of yes/no questions regarding pronoun use. Speakers were invited to add comments.

Regarding pronoun use and gender, a majority (65%) indicated that the use of *vos* by a man when speaking to a woman was not appropriate. *Voseo* between women, however, was viewed positively (84%).

Overall, speakers were split regarding the use of *tú* between two men. 51% said that it is appropriate, while 41% said it was not. Each gender did not answer equally, however. Men responded by a margin of two to one that it was not acceptable for men to *tutearse*, while women did not have such a negative reaction. This coincides with Quintanilla Aguilar's (2009) detailed attitude findings; while he did not find a significant difference between genders regarding *tuteo* among men, the trend was for women to view it less negatively. Comments given here may indicate why this is the case: 'no es normal'; 'suena extraño'; 'entre hombres se escucha muy raro'; 'se oye amanerado'. Importantly, many of the adjectives used to describe male *tuteo*, such as *amanerado*, *raro*, or *extraño* often imply homosexuality in El Salvador. While Quintanilla Aguilar (2009) did not find a connection between male *tuteo* and effeminateness, the comments here suggest that the general avoidance of *tú* by men may be due, at least in part, to the fact that *tuteo* is perceived as characteristic of female speech, and as such may carry homosexual connotations when used between two men. Pinkerton (1986) and Fitch (1998) found similar results regarding perceived female speech for Guatemalan speakers and Colombian speakers, respectively.

Only a small minority of speakers (14%) indicated that the use of *voseo* is *mal educado*. Again, these results agree with Quintanilla Aguilar (2009), who found an increase in approval of *voseo* across generations. Various comments from the present study reflect a conscious awareness of the social uses of *voseo*, both within El Salvador and in other countries, although one speaker does describe the use of *vos* as 'una mala costumbre'. Most of the comments, however, were positive towards *voseo*: "no, porque los argentinos son educados y usan el *vos*", "depende de la cultura, edad o sexo", "no, el *vos* significa el grado de confianza que hay entre la otra persona", "no, es un modismo", "depende con quién lo ocupe."

Speakers were also split regarding the use of *vos* in schools, which have traditionally taught at least a superficial *tuteo*. A little more than half (53%) felt that *voseo* should be taught and used in schools, with some speakers noting: "es necesario... todos hablan así"; "sí, porque el uso del *vos* es autóctono, es algo propio del país". The other 47% of speakers, who felt that *vos* should not be taught or used in educational spheres, made comments such as: "no, porque no es correcto"; and "no es necesario". This agrees with previous studies, such as Quintanilla Aguilar (2009, p.370) who found that 40% approved of not teaching *vos* in schools.

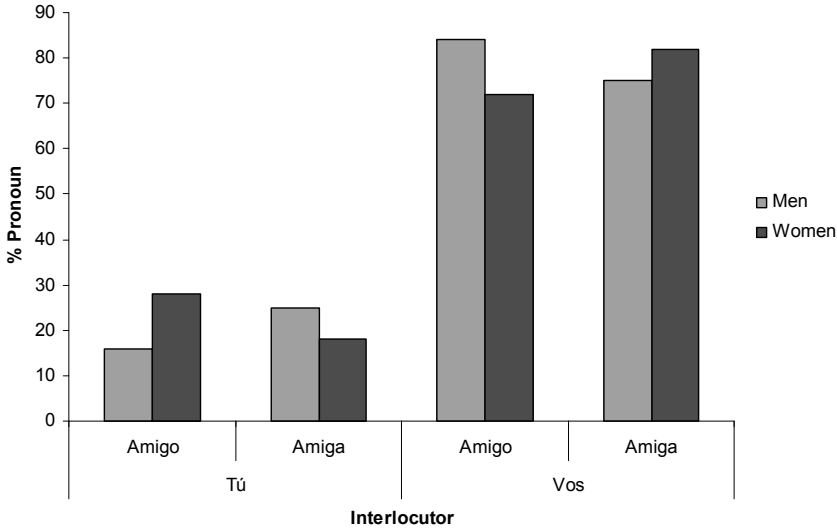
Finally, additional comments speak to the role of *tú* as a prestigious form for some speakers, partially mirroring Quintanilla Aguilar's (2009, p.365) finding that the use of *tú* between two men, for example, indicates higher levels of education or courtesy (but see again the discussion above). One speaker noted that *tú* is used "para personas que conoces pero quieres tratarla [sic] de una manera más fina". A

young speaker states that he only uses *tú* to make himself look better in order to impress girls: “no uso el pronombre *tú* a menos que quiera caer bien con una bicha [girl]. Lo uso para aparentar a una muchacha”. This statement confirms the observation of Hernández (2002, p.106), who states “many speakers in El Salvador perceive *tuteo* as a more educated or “uppity” morphological choice...” In spite of some speakers’ perception of *tú* as a more refined form than *vos*, others do not see *tuteo* as something worth emulating: “no uso *tú*, sólo para bromear y molestar entre familia, es decir para burlarme de quienes lo usan.”

## 5. Discussion

The data presented above indicate that pronoun choice in San Salvador, or at least speakers’ attitudes toward pronoun choice, involves the complex interaction of various social factors, and that there are very few cases that demand the use of one pronoun or another with 100% consistency. As we have seen, the most important consideration in determining perceptions of pronoun use is the interlocutor with whom one is speaking. Formal *usted*, for example, is, for the most part, reported according to pan-Hispanic standard norms, with interlocutors that for reasons of age, status, occupation, or education are in a superior social group than the speaker, or who are unknown.

The choice between *tú* and *vos* is more complicated, and involves not only the interlocutor, but also the speaker’s age, gender, and education level. *Vos* is perceived as appropriate when speaking with people of equal status, such as siblings, spouses, friends, classmates, and co-workers (with whom *usted* is also employed, depending on the relative status between employees). *Tú*, on the other hand, is appropriate in several contexts that could be considered intermediate, when some modicum of formality or distance is desirable, but without necessarily reaching the level of *usted* (see also Pinkerton 1986). For example, the children of friends and neighbors, while in an inferior social position, are not of course as close as one’s own children, with whom *vos* is overwhelmingly employed. Although not selected as a significant factor, men and women report differences in pronoun use depending on the gender of their interlocutor. Figure 1 shows a cross-tabulation of speaker gender and friend interlocutor gender (*amigo* vs. *amiga*).



**Figure 1. Cross-tabulation of speaker and interlocutor gender**

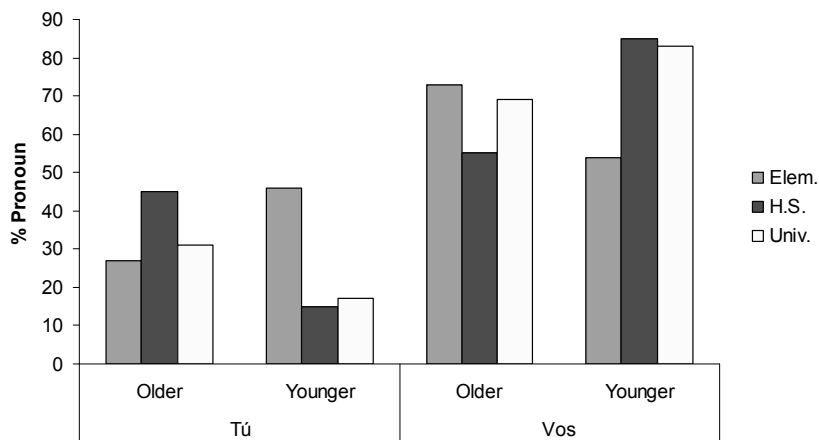
Both men and women report lower rates of *tuteo* when speaking to the same gender (16% for men, 18% for women) than when speaking to the opposite gender (25% for men speaking to women, 28% for women speaking to men). The frequency of *voseo* conversely rises when speaking to the same gender. This finding agrees with previous studies that have found a gender discrepancy with regard to pronoun use. Pinkerton (1986, p.694) notes that “*tú* functions mainly as an intermediary step [in Guatemala] in relations between males and females”. Likewise, Moyna & Ceballos (2008, p.81), following Solé (1978, p.947), note that “*el tuteo se emplea en casos en los que el voseo podría interpretarse como inapropiado o descortés; establece una cortesía intermedia, evitando la rigidez y distancia del usted sin dar lugar a acusaciones de impropiedad sexual o atrevimiento.*” So the use of *tuteo* between speakers of different genders allows a respectable distance to be maintained, even if those speakers are considered friends. This finding is also reflected in the change from *tú* to *vos* with boy/girlfriends and spouses seen above.

As mentioned previously, there is an avoidance of *voseo* overall with non-native speakers of Spanish, based perhaps on the knowledge that these speakers are not likely to have studied the forms of *vos* and will be more comfortable with *tú* (Schreffler 1994, p.113). Another possibility is that linguistic insecurity on the part of some Salvadoran speakers regarding *voseo* leads to the increased use of the (perceived) more prestigious *tuteo*. Previous studies have noted that attitudes toward



linguistic forms may result in linguistic insecurity among Salvadorans in contact with speakers of other types of Spanish (Hernández 2002, p.105 and Lipski 1988, p.103). Here, Salvadorans may be unsure as to the correctness of *voseo*, and thereby accommodate to even non-native speakers of Spanish.

The analysis above also revealed that age and education are important factors in determining attitudes toward pronoun use. Previous studies have indicated that increased rates of *tuteo* are found among more highly educated speakers. Given the overwhelming use of *tú* in education, government, and public announcements and advertising, Hernández (2002, p.105) states that the high rate of *voseo* among educated speakers in his study is unexpected, arguing that “there is...a strong association of *tuteo* with upper socioeconomic levels of Salvadoran society”. The present data indicate, however, that a positive evaluation of *tuteo* only corresponds to more education and, one would assume, higher socioeconomic class for speakers over the age of 30. Among younger speakers, the opposite is true, as more educated young speakers report increased use of *vos*. Results of a cross tabulation analysis of age and education are shown in Figure 2.

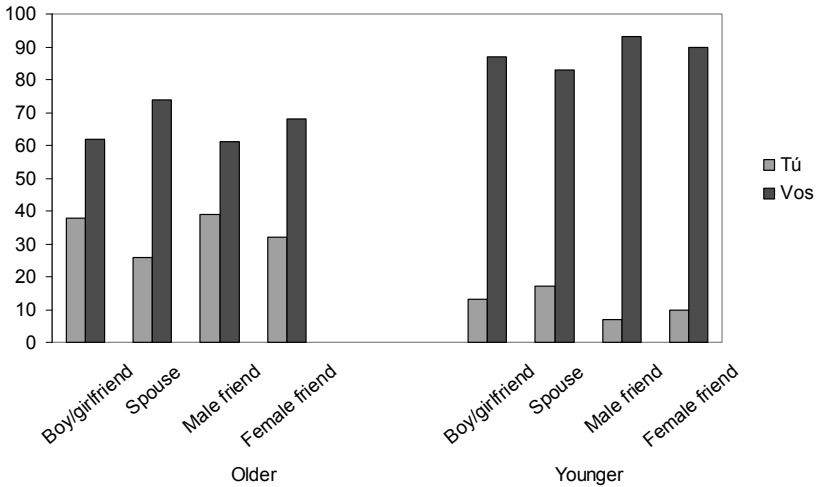


**Figure 2. Cross-tabulation of speaker age and education level.**

These results are unexpected in light of previous work on Salvadoran Spanish that show a correlation between *tuteo* and increased education, but make sense when one considers the social freedom that accompanies higher social class. That is, speakers with more education are secure in their social status, and thereby may be more comfortable using a regional, yet traditionally stigmatized and prescribed pronoun with speakers they consider friends. Less educated speakers, on the other hand, may be in some sense hypercorrecting their (reported) speech in order to

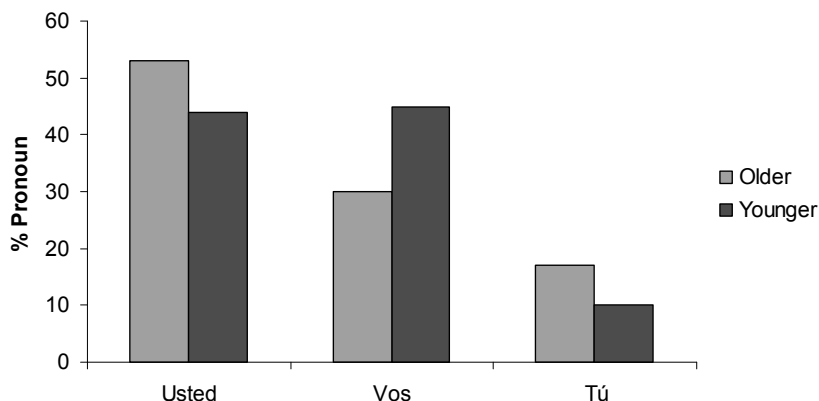
conform to what they perceive to be the standard pronoun, in this case *tú*. Future research is needed to confirm this hypothesis.

Figures 3 and 4 trace reported pronoun use across apparent time in the present study. Figure 3 shows a cross-tabulation of speaker age and ‘friend’ interlocutors; that is, interlocutors that would be considered intimate or close in personal relationships.



**Figure 3. Cross-tabulation of speaker age and ‘friend’ interlocutors**

A move from *tú* to *vos* for younger speakers in these contexts is clearly evident. The question remains, however, whether younger speakers are in general more informal, or only with regard to the *vos-tú* continuum. Figure 4 presents apparent time frequencies for all three pronouns.



**Figure 4. Apparent time frequencies for all pronouns; all interlocutors**

These frequencies and the Varbrul analyses above suggest that younger speakers are, on the whole, more informal with respect to their pronoun use than older speakers. Future research is required to determine if this represents a change in pronoun use, or if the observed tendencies are due to age grading, where speakers will adopt more formal modes of speech as they grow older (Labov 1994). If this does represent an extension of *vos* into new contexts, it may be the expression of local or regional solidarity by younger speakers via previously stigmatized forms, similar to what has been found in other regions of the Spanish-speaking world (cf. the crypto-prestige reported by Lipski 1988, pp.104-105, in Nicaragua and Costa Rica; also see Holmquist 2003, 2005, Michnowicz 2008, 2007, Pérez Guerra 1989, Toribio 2000, Torrejón 1986 and Valentín-Márquez 2006; cf. also Tabouret-Keller 1997, Wolfram & Schilling-Estes 1995). This use of *vos* would agree with Páez Urdaneta (1981, p.143), who notes that *voseo* is employed to express identification with a generational group, social class, region, and in-group membership. Another factor may be the Salvadoran Civil War (approximately 1979-1992). The youngest speakers, born between 1978 and 1988, grew up during the height of the conflict. It has been argued that civil conflicts of this sort, rooted in communist/socialist ideologies, can play a role in the changing use of pronouns of address (cf. Lipski 1988, pp.104-105 for *voseo* in Nicaragua). Future studies in real time are needed to address this question.

## 6. Conclusions and areas for future research

We now return to the primary research questions outlined at the beginning of this article. First, we have seen that the present results in large part confirm the findings

of previous studies on Salvadoran Spanish pronoun use undertaken in the United States. There are, however, some important differences, particularly in speakers attitudes toward the extension of *voseo* to contexts previously reserved for other pronouns, the reported increased frequency of *vos*, especially among younger speakers, and the apparent change in prestige of *tuteo* among well educated younger speakers in San Salvador. The comparison of age and education level indicates that *voseo* is being extended by young, well educated speakers. Interestingly, it is younger Salvadoran speakers in the United States that are leading the move to *tuteo* due to contact with Mexican Spanish (Schreffler 1994), while within El Salvador it is young speakers that are increasing the use of *voseo*. In this way, immigrant and domestic varieties of Salvadoran are diverging. Within San Salvador, the present results suggest that young Salvadorans may be demonstrating the same trend seen throughout Latin America of applying crypto-prestige to autochthonous, stigmatized forms.

Second is the question of whether a tripartite pronoun system exists in San Salvador Spanish, and if so, what role does each pronoun play. The present results demonstrate that for some speakers, *tú* can represent an intermediate level of intimacy/solidarity, for example the children of friends and the subtle shift from *tú* with boy/girlfriends to *vos* with spouses. In this way San Salvador Spanish shows the same three-way distinction found by Pinkerton (1986) in Guatemala.

Third, *tuteo* does show some evidence of being a prestige form for educated speakers, but only those over a certain age. For younger speakers, *voseo* appears as the default pronoun for many interactions.

Future research on pronoun use should incorporate conversational data to the extent possible, as speakers may answer a survey with the pronoun they think they (should) use, rather than the pronoun they actually employ (see Schreffler 1994). Another possibility would be to have speakers listen to recorded samples using each of the pronouns and respond with which one sounds most natural, Salvadoran, etc. Likewise a longitudinal study in San Salvador is required, to determine if the pattern of increased *voseo* among younger speakers observed here is truly the result of change instead of a pattern of age grading. Finally, as the differences found for speaker mood when addressing children suggest, speaker attitude toward an interlocutor can be a deciding factor in pronoun selection, and should be explored further. As the present study has demonstrated, pronoun choice as reflected by speakers' reported use and attitudes, is an extremely complex process, constrained by a number of social and contextual factors. This work has sought to provide further insight into pronoun selection in San Salvador, but this is clearly an area worth of further research, both within El Salvador and beyond.

## Acknowledgments

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## Notes

1 As an anonymous reviewer correctly pointed out, role-plays are another method that could be employed to obtain samples of address form in speech, although one could also argue that role-plays do not represent natural speech, and in many ways mirror many of the difficulties presented by survey data. For example, Félix-Brasdefer (2007) found that role-plays approximate real speech data, but do not capture fully the range of forms used in conversation. As Félix-Brasdefer (2007, pp.178-179) makes clear, no form of data collection is without problems, and different methodologies can and should complement one another in order to obtain a more accurate picture of the variation at hand.

2 See Lipski (2008) for increased *voseo* in Central American literature and the Sandinista policies of increasing official *vos* in Nicaragua.

3 Thank you to an anonymous reviewer for clarifying this discussion.

## Appendix

### Questionario

Edad: \_\_\_\_\_ Sexo: masculino \_\_\_\_\_ femenino \_\_\_\_\_

Profesión u oficio: \_\_\_\_\_ Nivel de educación: \_\_\_\_\_

Lugar de nacimiento: (departamento, ciudad, municipio, cantón)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Lugar dónde fue criado: (departamento, ciudad, cantón)

\_\_\_\_\_  
¿Ha vivido en otros países o ciudades? \_\_\_\_\_ ¿Dónde? \_\_\_\_\_

Por favor, indique cuál pronombre, (*vos*, *tú*, *usted*) usaría, en las siguientes situaciones:

- 1 con su mamá \_\_\_\_\_
2. con su papá \_\_\_\_\_
3. con sus hermanos / as mayores \_\_\_\_\_
4. con sus hermanos / as menores \_\_\_\_\_

5. con su abuelo \_\_\_\_\_
6. con su abuela \_\_\_\_\_
7. con su novio o novia \_\_\_\_\_
8. con su esposo o esposa \_\_\_\_\_
9. con sus hijos, cuando está de buen humor \_\_\_\_\_
10. con sus hijos cuando está enojado/a \_\_\_\_\_
11. con un amigo \_\_\_\_\_
12. con una amiga \_\_\_\_\_
13. con sus compañeros \_\_\_\_\_
14. con sus compañeros en el trabajo \_\_\_\_\_
15. cuando reza (con oraciones memorizadas) \_\_\_\_\_
16. cuando hace oración personal \_\_\_\_\_
17. con un trabajador en la calle \_\_\_\_\_
18. con los profesores \_\_\_\_\_
19. con los hijos de su amigo, amiga o vecinos \_\_\_\_\_
20. con la policía \_\_\_\_\_
21. con el médico \_\_\_\_\_
22. con el padre (cura) \_\_\_\_\_
23. con un vendedor de la calle \_\_\_\_\_
24. para insultar, (cuando está enojado) \_\_\_\_\_
25. cuando escribe una carta de amor o poema \_\_\_\_\_
26. con un amigo no hispano \_\_\_\_\_
27. con un compatriota en el extranjero \_\_\_\_\_
28. con una empleada doméstica \_\_\_\_\_
29. con un compatriota centroamericano \_\_\_\_\_
30. para hablarle a los animales. \_\_\_\_\_
31. con extranjeros (cuya lengua no es español) \_\_\_\_\_

Por favor responda a las siguientes preguntas:

1. Cree que el uso del pronombre *tú* es una forma más refinada y respetuosa que el uso del pronombre *vos*.

sí \_\_\_\_\_ no \_\_\_\_\_

2. Cree que se usa el pronombre *vos* porque es más íntimo, amistoso y sencillo.

sí \_\_\_\_\_ no \_\_\_\_\_

3. ¿Cuál pronombre cree que es mejor usar con personas desconocidas?

*vos* \_\_\_\_\_ *tú* \_\_\_\_\_

4. ¿Cuál pronombre cree que es mejor usar con personas conocidas?

*vos* \_\_\_\_\_ *tú* \_\_\_\_\_

5. ¿Cree que es apropiado que los hombres usen el pronombre *vos* para dirigirse a las mujeres?  
 sí \_\_\_\_\_ no \_\_\_\_\_
6. ¿Cree que es apropiado usar el pronombre *tú* entre dos hombres?  
 sí \_\_\_\_\_ no \_\_\_\_\_
7. ¿Cree que es apropiado usar el pronombre *vos* entre dos mujeres?  
 sí \_\_\_\_\_ no \_\_\_\_\_
8. ¿Cree que si una persona usa el pronombre *vos* no tiene una buena educación?  
 sí \_\_\_\_\_ no \_\_\_\_\_
9. ¿Cree que se debe de usar el pronombre *vos* en las escuelas?  
 sí \_\_\_\_\_ no \_\_\_\_\_
10. ¿Cree que los extranjeros deben a aprender a hablar español usando el pronombre *vos*?  
 sí \_\_\_\_\_ no \_\_\_\_\_

En general, ¿cómo decide cuando tratar a la gente de *tú*, *vos* y *usted*?

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