The changing system of Costa Rican pronouns of address: *tuteo, voseo, and ustedeo*
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Abstract

The present study examines the reported use of three forms of address (*tú, vos, usted*) in Costa Rican Spanish. Previous studies have indicated three phenomena of interest: 1. *Usted* is used with [+solidarity] interlocutors (Moser, 2010b); 2. While *tuteo* has been historically absent, some studies suggest an increase in *tuteo* use among young speakers (cf. Quesada Pacheco, 2010); and 3. Older studies indicated that younger speakers were increasing their use of *vos*, the default informal pronoun in Costa Rica (cf. Vargas, 1974).

Based on surveys with 209 participants, the present results indicate an increase in *ustedeo* among younger speakers, a result that contradicts earlier studies. Correspondingly, reported *voseo* is decreasing among younger speakers. Possible explanations for this pattern include the socio-political history of Costa Rica, as well as a linguistic reaction against the influx of *voseo*-using Nicaraguan immigrants in recent decades. Finally, no clear evidence of expanding *tuteo* is found, at least for the survey data analyzed here. Further data and conclusions are discussed.

1. Introduction

Previous research has identified Costa Rican Spanish as possessing a binary system of pronouns of address, with *vos* as the familiar pronoun expressing solidarity, and *usted* as the

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1 The authors wish to thank the audience at *Spanish Linguistics in North Carolina 2013*, the editors and the three anonymous reviewers for their feedback on this article. All errors remain ours.
polite pronoun indicating power and status (Agüero, 1962; Villegas, 1963; Vega González, 1995; Moser, 2010a)\textsuperscript{2}. This balance, however, is complicated by two additional phenomena. First, some studies indicate that younger speakers are increasingly using \textit{tú} in speech, thereby adding a third option to the system of address (Vega González, 1995; Moser, 2003; Rojas Blanco, 2003; Quesada Pacheco, 2010). And second, Costa Rican speakers frequently use \textit{usted} in contexts that would require \textit{tú/vos} in other varieties. That is, \textit{usted} can function both to indicate distance as well as intimacy (Vargas, 1974; Quesada Pacheco, 1996; Moser, 2010b). The present study seeks to provide insight into the three possible forms of address, by means of a linguistic questionnaire distributed to 209 participants in Costa Rica. Results are contextualized within the socio-historical background particular to Costa Rica, as well as compared with results from studies of other varieties of Spanish.

\section*{2. Pronouns of address in Costa Rican Spanish}

Pronouns of address have been widely studied across Spanish dialects, with the majority focusing on \textit{voseo}, the use of the 2nd person singular pronoun \textit{vos}, instead of or in conjunction with \textit{tú} (Rona, 1967; Fontanella de Weinberg, 1979; Páez Urdaneta, 1981; Cisneros, 1998; Benavides, 2003; among others). Due to a series of complex changes in the pronominal system of Golden Age Spanish that led to the rise of \textit{usted} as the default \textbf{V} pronoun and the concomitant disfavoring of \textit{vos} in Spain and in regions of Latin America that maintained close contact with the Peninsula, \textit{voseo} was relegated to marginal areas of the Spanish Empire. Factors such as the time period of colonization and the isolation of each colony from the linguistic innovations taking place in Spain led to areas such as Central America and parts of the Southern Cone being

\textsuperscript{2} Brown \& Gilman (1960) refer to these uses as \textbf{T} (solidarity) and \textbf{V} (power), based on the Latin/French pronouns \textit{TU} and \textit{VOS/VOUS}. With respect to the Costa Rican system, \textbf{T} refers to \textit{vos/tú}, while \textbf{V} refers to \textit{usted}.
classified as regions where the use of *vos* is the norm today (Benavides, 2003). In some of these areas, such as much of Central America (Baumler-Schreffler, 1994; Lipski, 2004; Michnowicz & Place, 2010), parts of Uruguay (Weyers, 2009), and Chile (Torrejón, 1986, 1991; Stevenson, 2007; Bishop & Michnowicz, 2010), *vos* coexists alongside *tú*, as part of a tripartite system of pronouns. In these varieties, *tú* and *vos*, while overlapping to some extent, are often used with different interlocutors or to express subtle differences in *confianza*, or trust, between speakers. However, other regions, such as Argentina and Costa Rica, are described as having essentially binary pronoun systems, where the choice is between *vos* and *usted*, at least in the spoken language (Agüero, 1962; Villegas, 1963; Vega González, 1995; Moser, 2010a). In Costa Rican Spanish, the verbal morphology of *vos* generally corresponds with Rona’s (1967) Type C (final stress - *hablás, comés, vivís*), although some speakers are beginning to alternate these forms with Type D (penultimate stress, corresponding to the conjugation of *tú* forms - *hablas, comes, vives*), an innovation that further complicates the pronominal system in Costa Rica, blurring the lines between *tuteo* and *voseo* (Moser, 2008; 2010a).

Regarding *tuteo* (the use of the pronoun *tú* with the corresponding verbal morphology), early studies of Costa Rican Spanish report that this form is considered pedantic, affected, effeminate, or a marker of foreignness (Agüero, 1962; Vargas, 1974; Solano Rojas, 1995). In fact, early research either reported no use of *tuteo* at all (Gagini, 1893; Quesada Pacheco, 1981), or did not feel that *tú* was important enough to warrant inclusion in the analysis of Costa Rican pronouns (Mathieu & Palma, 1980). *Tuteo* is used in writing in schools, but traditionally has not entered the speech of most Costa Ricans (Solano Rojas, 1995). Vargas (1974, p. 10) outlines several possible reasons for the lack of *tuteo* in Costa Rica, including isolation during the colonial period, the lack of large urban centers that would have supported a strong upper class
oriented to Peninsular norms, and a more egalitarian social order as compared to many other Spanish colonies. Regardless of the explanation behind the historical lack of *tuteo*, some more recent studies have reported an increase in *tuteo* among some younger speakers, presumably as the result of exposure to foreign media and entertainment, or written instruction in the schools (Vega González, 1995; Rojas Blanco, 2003; Quesada Pacheco, 2010). Moser (2003; 2008; 2010a), suggests an alternative explanation for increasing *tuteo*, including analogy with other oblique pronominal forms as well as an “intrasystemic change in *voseo*”, specifically the possible shift from Type C to Type D *voseo* outlined above (2010b, p. 690). Thus one question that arises is whether reports of increased *tuteo* refer specifically to the pronoun *tú*, or to the verbal morphology alone, which for some speakers may correspond with either *tú* or *vos*.

At the same time, some studies have indicated an increased use of *voseo* as well among younger speakers. Vargas (1974) explains that *vos*, primarily in competition with the V pronoun *usted* in Costa Rica, is considered “more modern and natural than *usted* in various relationships” (p. 30, our translation). This mirrors trends found in other regions, where the T pronouns are displacing the V pronouns as part of a general move from a power semantic to a solidarity semantic, as speakers “reinterpret power-laden attributes so as to turn them into symmetrical solidarity attributes” (Brown & Gilman, 1960, p. 258; see also De Jonge & Nieuwenhuijsen, 2012, p. 254).

Complicating the picture is the existence of “the other *usted*”, which “is employed in relationships of great intimacy and closeness. With respect to its form, it is identical to the first one [the traditional, formal use of *usted*]; what varies are the situations in which it is applied” (Vargas, 1974, p. 28, our translation - see also Moser, 2010b). This intimate use of *usted*, often referred to as *ustedeo* (Quesada Pacheco, 1996; Moser, 2010b) serves to distinguish Costa Rican
Spanish from the rest of Central America (Lipski, 2004, p. 249), but has been reported in some other areas of Latin America (principally in some dialects of Colombian Spanish (Uber, 1985; Lipski, 2004; De Jonge & Nieuwenhuijsen, 2012)). Uber (1985), for example, argues for a continuum of usted (V) – tú (T) – usted (T) in Bogota Spanish, where tú occupies a middle ground between [+power] usted on one end, and [+solidarity] usted on the other. Although the exceptionality of ustedeo is frequently commented on, Moser (2010b, p. 688) observes that this extension of usted to intimate contexts presents a parallel development to the Latin American use of ustedes as the only plural pronoun of address, a trait which distinguishes Latin American Spanish from most Peninsular varieties, which display the opposition vosotros–ustedes in the plural. Additionally, Solano Rojas (1995) suggests that the use of usted as a default pronoun avoids problems of linguistic insecurity regarding pronoun use in Costa Rica. Specifically, she points to a conflict that speakers must address when choosing one of the T pronouns: tuteo is often required in writing, but not accepted in speech, while voseo is the norm in speech, but generally is not treated as prestigious in school and formal contexts. Usted, on the other hand, “does not present a conflict of social values, and although it does not express some necessary connotations, its use does avoid having to make a decision regarding the other two possible variants” (p. 52 - our translation; see also Murillo Rojas, 1995; Moser, 2010b for a description of other ways in which usted historically could have obtained its present status as default).

Thus the picture that emerges from previous studies is one in which vos is the default T pronoun, tú has historically been absent but is now increasing in use, and both of these T pronouns are infringing on the semantic domains traditionally reserved for usted. At the same time, the presence of the “other usted” also places this pronoun in competition with the
prototypical T forms. The present study seeks to further examine the reported use of the three forms of address in Costa Rica. Specifically, we seek to answer two main research questions:

RQ 1: Is tuteo increasing among younger speakers, as has been indicated by some previous research (Vega González, 1995; Rojas Blanco, 2003; Quesada Pacheco, 2010)?

Following previous studies, we hypothesized that the survey data would indicate an increase in tuteo among younger speakers, although the overall frequency would not be high (Thomas, 2008).

RQ 2: Are younger Costa Rican speakers expanding the use of the T address forms (voseo in particular) at the expense of usted, as has been suggested for Costa Rica (Vargas, 1974), and reported for many other varieties of Spanish (De Jonge & Nieuwenhuijzen, 2012; Bishop & Michnowicz, 2010; Michnowicz & Place, 2010; Calderón Campos & Medina Morales, 2010)?

Again, following previous work on Costa Rican Spanish, as well as on general trends in the evolution of pronoun systems around the Spanish-speaking world, we hypothesized that the results would reveal less reported usted among younger speakers (see Thomas, 2008).

To briefly preview our results, no solid evidence of an increase in tuteo among the youngest speakers was found. Instead, the youngest speakers show significantly higher rates of ustedeo, contrary to our hypotheses and the previous research outlined above.

3. Methodology

Data was collected during two trips to Costa Rica, utilizing a survey instrument in which participants were asked to indicate which form of address they would use with a variety of interlocutors. Data was collected using both a paper survey, as well as an online survey. In
addition to demographic data, the survey included 30 questions, using 15 distinct interlocutors, each with a common and an uncommon verb (based on Davies, 2006), in order to account for possible frequency effects. Rather than provide an open prompt for pronouns, each item had a choice of three verbal conjugations (*voseo*, *tuteo* and *usted*), and participants chose the single form that they would employ in a given context. All verbs were in the present indicative tense. (See the appendix.) The survey ended with an open-ended question that asked participants how they decide which form of address to use. Due to space limitations, the results of the open-ended question, which support the quantitative results presented, will not be discussed in detail.

A total of 229 surveys were collected during two summer study-abroad visits to Costa Rica in 2011 and 2012. The surveys were distributed through a university professor’s contact list, or shared with students, acquaintances, home-stay families, restaurant owners, etc. A total of 20 surveys were excluded from the analysis, either because of blank demographic data or because the respondent was not from Costa Rica. Thus a total of 209 surveys were included in the final analysis. Participants were not compensated for their participation.

The use of surveys of this type can be problematic. Participants may respond with what they think they say, or with what they consider correct. Most recent studies, however, take survey data as insight into speakers’ attitudes towards certain forms (Thomas, 2008). Studies have shown that, while speakers may over/underestimate the frequency of use, the pattern of use is (more or less) accurately portrayed (Bishop & Michnowicz, 2010; Lamanna, 2012). Thus the present results should be interpreted in this light.

In addition to *interlocutor*, four other independent variables (factor groups) were analyzed: age, region of origin, and gender, as well as verb frequency. As a majority of the surveys were distributed through networks at a university, most of the participants are either
college students or college graduates. Therefore, social class was not considered in the present analysis. For speaker age, respondents were divided into three groups: 18-23 (college age), 24-30 (young adult), and 31+ (adults). As the surveys were conducted principally around the university, younger speakers dominate in the data, with a mean of 29 years, and a range from 18-61 years. Finally, due to small token counts from some outlying regions, for the purposes of analysis region was divided into San José vs. Other.

The primary statistical analysis was conducted using Goldvarb X (Sankoff, Tagliamonte & Smith, 2005), with supporting analyses (conditional inference trees) run in R (R Core Team, 2013 - more details below). Goldvarb X was chosen primarily due to the slash (/) function that allows for data to be excluded from one factor group in the analysis without having to exclude the entire token (Tagliamonte, 2006, p. 180-181). For example, if a participant filled out the entire survey, but left their gender blank, the completed data could still be analyzed, with that survey excluded only from the gender factor group.

The Goldvarb tables present three main “lines of evidence” (Tagliamonte, 2006, p. 235) that are useful in understanding the variation in pronoun preference among participants: the statistical significance of factor groups (independent variables), the relative strength of each factor group (range), and the factors (levels) that favor or disfavor the realization of a particular form (the application value), as seen in the factor weights. In Varbrul-type analyses, a factor weight over 0.5 is generally considered as favoring the application value, while a factor weight

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3 As an anonymous reviewer correctly points out, a binary division between San José and the rest of the country represents an oversimplification of the sociolinguistic context of Costa Rica, but one that is necessary in the present data to allow reliable quantitative analysis. Additionally, we are working under the assumption that language change usually begins in cities, before expanding to other areas (Trudgill, 1974). See also Lipski 2002 for the importance of cities in change in Latin American Spanish.
less than 0.5 generally disfavors it. Factor weights around 0.5 are considered neutral with respect to the application value.

To examine the intersection of variables, cross tabulations and conditional inference trees were run. A conditional inference tree\textsuperscript{4} “provides estimates of the likelihood of the value of the response variable...based on a series of binary questions about the values of the predictor variables” (Tagliamonte & Baayen, 2012, p. 159). Conditional inference trees have the advantage of being “able to depict the subtle interactions in the data using a hierarchical display” (Tagliamonte, 2012, p. 153), and can handle overlapping (collinear) data in the same analysis (Tagliamonte, 2012, p. 152).

3. Results

3.1 Multivariate analysis

Overall results across all interlocutors and social groups showed an overwhelming preference for usted in the survey data. These overall rates do not differ substantially from those reported in other varieties of Central American Spanish (cf. 11% tú, 60% usted, and 28% vos in El Salvador (Michnowicz & Place, 2010))\textsuperscript{5}. Given that many speakers, regardless of dialect, report almost categorical use of formal usted with some interlocutors, this similarity is to be expected.

\begin{tabular}{lcccc}
Tú & Usted & Vos \\
\hline
\end{tabular}


\textsuperscript{5} As an anonymous reviewer points out, the possible leveling of verbal morphology between vos and tú for some speakers (Moser, 2008; 2010a) blurs the lines between tuteo and voseo in this study, given that the survey asked about verb forms rather than pronouns. This was done to avoid the possible stigmatization of the pronoun itself, rather than the verbal morphology, that has been found in some other varieties (Benavides, 2003). Additionally, comments made by participants in the open-ended question make it clear that many of them are avoiding tuteo (“En Costa Rica no hablamos de tú” is a common response on the survey). Finally, the main finding of this article, as will be seen, is the rise in ustedeo among the youngest speakers, a result which is unaffected by the possible leveling of tú and vos.
We now move on to examine each of the factor groups (independent variables) in order of importance, as indicated by range\(^6\) (Tagliamonte, 2006). As each pronoun was compared individually to the others in the analysis, the tables that follow synthesize data from three separate runs (tú vs. others; vos vs. others; usted vs. others). We begin with interlocutor, the primary variable driving pronoun selection.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interlocutor – Tú</th>
<th>FW</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Interlocutor - Vos</th>
<th>FW</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Interlocutor – Ud.</th>
<th>FW</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Child</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>Friend</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>41.9</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>Boss</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>81.9</td>
<td>331</td>
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<tr>
<td>Child of friend</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>Child</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>40.6</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>79.5</td>
<td>322</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy/girlfriend/spouse</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>24.6</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Boy/girlfriend/spouse</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>38.9</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>Older employee</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>78.2</td>
<td>316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>Child of friend</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>32.3</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>Foreigner (Other)</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>72.3</td>
<td>295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brother/sister</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>Classmate/co-worker</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>31.2</td>
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<td>Stranger of same age</td>
<td>.61</td>
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<td>16.6</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>Brother/sister</td>
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<td>29.1</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>Grandparent</td>
<td>.60</td>
<td>70.0</td>
<td>284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Younger employee</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>Younger employee</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>63.3</td>
<td>255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreigner (Spanish)</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>Foreigner (Spanish)</td>
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<td>Foreigner (Spanish)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>.49</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>.48</td>
<td>20.1</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>Younger employee</td>
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<td>251</td>
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<tr>
<td>Foreigner (Other)</td>
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<td>15.2</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>Stranger of same age</td>
<td>.41</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>Brother/sister</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>54.1</td>
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<td>Grandparent</td>
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<td>14.3</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>Grandparent</td>
<td>.41</td>
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<td>Classmate/co-worker</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>52.8</td>
<td>215</td>
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<tr>
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<td>.45</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Foreigner (Other)</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Child of friend</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>42.1</td>
<td>171</td>
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<tr>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>Older employee</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Friend</td>
<td>.31</td>
<td>39.9</td>
<td>217</td>
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<tr>
<td>Older employee</td>
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<td>11.4</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Boss</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Boy/girlfriend/spouse</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>36.5</td>
<td>148</td>
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<tr>
<td>Boss</td>
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<td>9.7</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Professor</td>
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<td>7.4</td>
<td>30</td>
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<td>136</td>
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<td>Range</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td>49</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Summary of multivariate analyses for factor group - Interlocutor.

A comparison of the hierarchy of which factors favor and disfavor a particular pronoun permits us to see the interplay of address forms in Costa Rican Spanish (Tagliamonte, 2012).

Unsurprisingly, the two prototypical T pronouns, tú and vos, overlap to a great extent with

\(^6\) Recent scholarship has questioned the validity of using range to determine the relative strength of factor groups when those groups contain more than two factors (Kapatsinski 2012). For the present study, the order of factor groups was confirmed using Random Forest Analyses, a method that ranks the factors in an analysis in order of importance (Tagliamonte 2012).
respect to favoring interlocutors. Both of the T pronouns are essentially mirror images of the hierarchy for the formal pronoun, usted. Thus usted is favored with interlocutors in a [+power], [+distance] or [+respect] relationship to the speaker. These results also confirm previous reports of ustedeo in Costa Rican Spanish (Quesada Pacheco, 1996; among others). Although [-power] [-distance] interlocutors, such as children, boy/girlfriends/spouses, and friends all disfavor the use of usted relative to the other interlocutors, a comparison of percentages across runs indicates a high frequency of usted for these interlocutors, who would receive a T pronoun in many other varieties. For example, with friends, vos and usted are reported at similar rates (42% and 40%, respectively).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tú</th>
<th>FW</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Vos</th>
<th>FW</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Ud.</th>
<th>FW</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>24-30</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>31+</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>18-23</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>62.0</td>
<td>2822</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31+</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>24-30</td>
<td>.56</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>31+</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>54.3</td>
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<td>736</td>
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<td>21.8</td>
<td>992</td>
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<td>474</td>
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<td>Range</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Range</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Input: 0.153; Log likelihood: -2770.968; Chi-square/cell: 1.0396; p-value = 0.029

Table 3. Summary of multivariate analyses for factor group - Speaker Age.

The next factor group is the age of the participant. Age exerts a similar effect on both of the T pronouns, and a somewhat stronger effect on usted. Of note is the fact that the only age group that favors tuteo in the present data is the middle group (although still at a limited 21%). Both older speakers and younger speakers reported tú with identical rates of 16%, and disfavored the pronoun equally in the analysis. This overall result, then, argues against the adoption and promotion of tú by the youngest speakers, at least in the present data.

Related to this discussion is the result that the youngest speakers also disfavor vos, and are the only group to favor usted. One possible explanation for the high rate of reported usted for young speakers is age grading (Chambers, 2009, p. 200). Due to their age, and the strong
[respect] dynamic at play, young speakers may simply be in subordinate positions to more interlocutors. If this is the case, and the favoring of *usted* by younger speakers is driven solely by the *interlocutor* with whom they are speaking, then we should see an increase in *usted* only for interlocutors in a position of [+power], [+distance], and/or [+respect]. Interlocutors in equal or subordinate positions, such as friends and children, however, should evince a different pattern. As can be seen in the cross tabulation data in Figure 1, age grading does not account for the favoring of *usted* by young speakers. In fact, the largest discrepancies between younger speakers and other age groups are found with the [+solidarity/-power] relationships. This result suggests that younger speakers are advancing the use of *usted* across a wide-range of contexts, to the detriment of the prototypical T pronouns, thereby extending the extant Costa Rican preference. Possible explanations for this pattern will be addressed in the discussion.

![Figure 1. Frequency of *usted* by relationship with interlocutors.](image)

In order to confirm this pattern statistically, an additional analysis was performed that compared *usted* to the prototypical T pronouns, this time with only [+solidarity/-power] interlocutors included in the analysis (friend, *compañero*, boy/girlfriend/spouse, siblings, children, and parents). The significant factors for this analysis are found in Table 4.
Table 4. Summary of multivariate analysis for Ud.; [+solidarity/-power] interlocutors only.

Three of the independent variables were chosen as significant when considering only family, friends, peers, and children: interlocutor, age, and gender. Parents, who could be considered [+power] in some instances, receive usted the most out of these interlocutors, but we also note that usted is also favored with siblings and co-workers relative to the other interlocutors included in the model. Even with the most disfavoring interlocutor, children, usted is still reported 34% over the other pronouns. Table 4 also provides further statistical support for the patterns seen in Figure 1. The youngest speakers are the only ones to favor usted in these [+solidarity/-power] contexts. Finally, gender, which was not a significant factor when all interlocutors were considered, displays significant differences, with men reporting significantly more usted than women. The combined statistical effect of age and gender suggests an ongoing
change in progress leading to an increase in *ustedeo*. This possibility will be further addressed in the discussion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tú</th>
<th>FW</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Vos</th>
<th>FW</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Ud.</th>
<th>FW</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>328</td>
<td>San José</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>1038</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>[ns]</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>1053</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San José</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>690</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>373</td>
<td>San José</td>
<td>[ns]</td>
<td>59.6</td>
<td>2549</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Range</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Input: 0.153;
Log likelihood: -2770.968;
Chi-square/cell: 1.0396;
p-value = 0.029

Input: 0.211;
Log likelihood: -3137.675;
Chi-square/cell: 1.2087;
p-value = 0.007

Input: 0.605;
Log likelihood: -3848.330;
Chi-square/cell: 0.7783;
p-value = 0.000

Table 5. Summary of multivariate analyses for factor group - Region.

Returning to the complete model with all interlocutors, the last factor chosen as significant (only for *tú* and *vos*) is the region the participant is from, analyzed here as the binary factor ‘San José’ vs. ‘Other’ because of the small token counts from speakers from each outlying region. In the present data, speakers from San José slightly favored *vos*, while speakers from other areas of the country (but living or working in San José) marginally favored *tú*. Not surprisingly, given the reported preference for *usted* nationally and its near categorical use with some interlocutors, *region* was not a significant factor for this pronoun.

The remaining two factors analyzed, *speaker gender* and *verb frequency*, were not significant independent predictors for any of the pronouns in the overall model. As such, *verb frequency* will not be discussed further. As we have seen, *gender* does become important when considering the increase in *ustedeo* with [+solidarity/-power] interlocutors.

3.2 Conditional inference trees

In addition to the main effects analyses presented above, a series of conditional inference trees was performed, in order to provide a more detailed picture of how the significant factors above interact with one another to determine pronoun usage. Conditional inference trees identify
where the significant divisions in the data occur, and represent those divisions as a binary branching tree, with plots at the bottom nodes showing the relative frequency of the two levels of the dependent variable (in Figure 2, for example, *tú* vs. *vos*) (Tagliamonte, 2012). It should be noted that in R, there is no function that corresponds to the slash (/) function in Goldvarb, due to the way in which the data is processed by the software (see Roy, 2011 for a detailed description). Therefore, surveys with missing data were excluded from the conditional inference trees analysis. In order to minimize data loss, the conditional inference trees were run with only the social factors *age, region*, and *gender*.

Figure 2 compares the two informal pronouns. The most significant factor is found in the first branching at the top of the tree. Here, the primary factor is *region*. Following the tree to the right, toward node 7, we see that for speakers from San José, *age* is the only significant factor, with middle and younger groups reporting more *tú* than older speakers (nodes 8 and 9). This result can be interpreted as lending support to claims that *tuteo* is increasing among younger speakers (Vega González, 1995; Rojas Blanco, 2003; Quesada Pacheco, 2010), at least in San José. Returning to the top of the tree and following the branch to the left, we see that for speakers that live outside of the capital (*O(ther)'), *gender* is a significant factor, with *age* only significant for men. Interestingly, following the tree up from node 4, we see that the highest rates of *tuteo* are reported by men of middle and older groups living outside of San José. Younger men from ‘other’ regions reported significantly less *tú*, about the same amount as women from ‘other’ regions and middle and younger speakers from San José.
Figure 2. Conditional inference tree - *tú* vs. *vos*. Codes – Region: S(an José), O(ther); Age: Y(ounger), M(iddle), O(lder); Gender: M(ale), F(emale)

Figure 3 presents a comparison of the two predominant pronouns in Costa Rica, *vos* and *usted*. The primary split is age, with younger speakers reporting significantly more *usted* than other groups ($p < 0.001$), as seen above also. Among middle and older groups, region is the next significant factor, with age and gender significant predictors for speakers living outside of San José. Although with this many divisions in the data, some of the nodes are based on few surveys (node 6 in particular), and therefore should be viewed with caution, the overall result that the younger speakers, independent of other social factors, report significantly more *usted* is robust (more than 3700 tokens), further confirming the Goldvarb results above.
4. Discussion/Conclusions

We now return to the research questions and the hypotheses laid out at the beginning of this chapter. Based on previous studies, we hypothesized that there would be direct evidence of an increase in *tuteo* among the youngest speakers in our survey data. As seen in the results, this hypothesis was not directly confirmed. College-age speakers as a group significantly disfavored the use of *tú* on the survey, and young adults (age 24-30) were the only age group to statistically favor *tuteo*, and even these speakers report only 21% *tú*. Only when comparing *tú* and *vos* alone (Figure 2) do we see some potential evidence for a slight increase in *tuteo*, as younger and middle groups from San José patterned together, both reporting more *tú* than older speakers from the capital (nodes 8 and 9, Figure 2). Still, when compared with the middle and older groups from outside of San José (node 4, Figure 2), the young *capitalinos* show much lower rates of *tú*. 

Figure 3. Conditional inference tree - *usted* vs. *vos*. Codes – Region: S(an José), O(ther); Age: Y(ounger), M(iddle), O(lder); Gender: M(ale), F(emale)
These results represent a possible reversal in the increase of *tuteo* found in earlier studies. At the same time, the answer to this research question also depends on one’s definition of “younger”. Given that many early studies of Costa Rican pronouns of address do not report any *tuteo* at all (Gagini, 1893; Quesada Pacheco, 1981), the fact that this form registers on the present survey demonstrates that in that sense, there has been an increase, although not led by the current younger generation (see Thomas, 2008). Future research should examine Moser’s (2010a) observation of the possible shift in *voseo* morphology from Type C to Type D, and what effect this might have on pronoun leveling in Costa Rica.

The second research question asked if younger Costa Rican speakers were abandoning the use of *usted* in favor of one of the *T* pronouns, as has been found in a wide range of Spanish dialects around the world. We hypothesized that the survey data would reveal that younger speakers were following the general trend in Spanish of less *usted* use. Again, this hypothesis was not confirmed. In fact, quite the contrary, as the reported use of *usted* increases among younger speakers, even with interlocutors that would normally receive a *T* pronoun. Young men in particular seem to be leading the increase of *ustedeo* to [+solidarity/-power] contexts. A cross-tabulation of age and gender shows only a 2%-3% gender difference among older and middle group speakers, while among the youngest speakers this difference widens to 12% (41% *usted* for women, vs. 53% for men). More research is needed to determine why men may be leading this change (see below).

The increased use of the *V* pronoun among younger speakers is the opposite trend from that found in many other dialects, where younger speakers are increasing the use of *vos* or *tú* at

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7 Although we cannot rule out that the shift in *voseo* morphology could have played a role in our results, the comments on the open-ended question on the survey make it clear that many of the participants do not consider *tuteo* to be appropriate in Costa Rica, although some note that it is beginning to be used by some. More research is needed.
the expense of *usted* (see De Jonge & Nieuwenhuijsen, 2012). This has not only been found to occur in Spain and South America (Calderón Campos & Medina Morales, 2010; Bishop & Michnowicz, 2010), but also in other regions of Central America. Figure 4 compares reported pronoun use and age groups for Costa Rica (present study), and for El Salvador (Michnowicz & Place, 2010). *Tuteo* shows the same trend in both countries, although at higher rates in Costa Rica. Of interest, however, is that *vos* and *usted* present mirror images of one another in the two countries - while *vos* is increasing and *usted* decreasing in El Salvador, the opposite is true in Costa Rica. If the high rates of *usted* in Costa Rica already served to linguistically distinguish *ticos* from their Central American neighbors (Lipski, 2004, p. 249), the current trend of increasing *usted* also serves to expand the linguistic distance between varieties, at least as far as pronouns of address are concerned.

![Figure 4. Comparison of address forms by age groups - Costa Rica (present study) and El Salvador (adapted from Michnowicz & Place, 2010).](image)

As age grading has been ruled out (see Figure 1) as a primary factor in these results, we are led to ask what could account for this unique increase in the supposedly formal pronoun by
younger speakers in Costa Rica. We propose two possible, interconnected explanations for these facts. These are: A) the lack of a disruptive socio-cultural event that would overturn social norms, including linguistic uses, thereby leading to the elevation of an informal pronoun (i.e. vos) to a default position; and B) social pressure resulting from increased immigration from neighboring Nicaragua, which, due in large part to the social upheaval of the civil war in that country, is a strongly voseante country. These possibilities will be outlined below.

First, social upheavals, like cultural revolutions, civil wars and dictatorships, have been argued to affect pronoun selection. In Chile, the V pronoun usted came to be associated with the strict social order imposed by Pinochet (Bishop & Michnowicz, 2010), and in Spain tú takes over as the unmarked pronoun following the fall of Franco and the transition to democracy (Calderón Campos & Medina Morales, 2010). In other words, the fall of a (right wing) dictatorship and the subsequently more egalitarian democracy can have the effect of pushing (younger) speakers away from the trappings of the old order, including linguistic marks of formality, as part of the move to a solidarity-based system (De Jonge & Nieuwenhuijsen, 2012; Brown & Gilman, 1960). Importantly for the present discussion, a left-leaning socialist regime can also have a similar effect, with the difference that the move to informal pronouns occurs during the regime, rather than after. This is the case in Nicaragua, where following the Sandinista revolution of the 1970s and 1980s, vos came to represent solidarity and equality, resulting in the almost total dominance of voseo in both the private and public spheres (Lipski, 2004, pp. 160-161). Thus, one of the major catalysts for changes in address pronoun systems is a cultural upheaval that lends overt prestige to a formerly intimate pronoun, licensing its use in an increasing gamut of contexts.

As is well known, Costa Rica has avoided much of the social disturbances that have plagued much of the rest of Latin America, and Central America in particular. In fact, Costa Rica
has a history of overcoming the odds and returning to social stability following tumultuous periods. For example, the Costa Rican Civil War of 1948 can serve as a point of comparison between Costa Rica and other Central American nations. This 44-day civil war had the unusual outcome of resulting in both the abolition of the army and the establishment of a democratic government (see Rankin, 2012 for details). The continued preference for *usted* may be due, in part, to the lack of a major social event that would have fundamentally changed the dynamic in Costa Rica, resulting in a change in language use - the overall stability of Costa Rica may be reflected in increased stability in the pronominal system. *Usted* may still be the default pronoun for many speakers, since no event has occurred that would serve as the catalyst to demote it vis-à-vis the informal pronouns.

While this social stability may explain the continued preference for *usted* in Costa Rican Spanish, it does not account for the observed increase in *ustedeo* among younger speakers. One possible explanation for this trend lies in the very different sociolinguistic histories of Costa Rica and its neighbor to the north, Nicaragua. As reviewed above, Nicaragua is known for the prevalent use of *voseo* in most contexts, in a way that can make them appear overly forward to speakers of other dialects (Lipski, 2004, p. 313). In fact, the use of *vos* in Nicaragua was recognized explicitly by one of the participants in the present study: “In Nicaragua, they use a lot of *vos*”. Importantly, in the decades since the beginning of the civil war in Nicaragua, Costa Rica has received waves of immigrants from that country. As seen in Figure 5, this immigration peaked in the 1990s, when the younger speakers in the present study were born. By 2005, this
trend had leveled off, with Nicaraguan immigrants making up approximately 7% of the population (Marquette, 2006, p. 2)\(^8\).

![Graph showing Nicaraguan immigration to Costa Rica](image)

Figure 5. Nicaraguan immigration to Costa Rica. Source: Year of arrival reported by Nicaraguan immigrants, *Censo nacional de población y vivienda* (INEC, 2000; 2011).

Sandoval García (2004) argues that Costa Rican national identity is in large part constructed in opposition to Nicaragua and Nicaraguans. Nicaraguan immigrants are blamed for rising crime rates, and even for disease outbreaks (Sandoval García, 2004, pp. 6-7). According to that author, the term “nica works through different ethnic markers, denoting dark-skinned, poor, violent people who do not speak “standard” Spanish…” (pp. 143-144). For many “…being Nicaraguan has become an offense in and of itself…” (Sandoval García, 2004, p. 127).

Importantly, language plays a crucial role in distinguishing Costa Ricans from the “Other”, instantiated in the “nica” immigrants. Alvarenga Venutolo (1997, p. 19) found that young Nicaraguan immigrants to Costa Rica often change their accent to avoid discrimination, and a Costa Rican describes Nicaraguans as “rude” “*groseros*” when discussing their language (see

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\(^8\) Census data (INEC, 2000; 2011) shows that between 1990 and 2011, more than two hundred thousand Nicaraguan immigrants entered Costa Rica (with likely more entering illegally), which had a total population of 4.5 million in 2011.
also Alvarenga Venutolo 1998, p. 63, where she describes a “growing xenophobia” in the face of Nicaraguan immigration). A Nicaraguan immigrant, discussing the unfair treatment received from the native Costa Ricans, states “…it is not fair that they even make fun of our words” (Sandoval García, 2004, p. 123). The negative view of Nicaraguan Spanish (under the umbrella term “accent”) is clearly visible in a quote from a web site, cited by Sandoval García (2004, p. 154): “…they [Nicaraguans] are used to violence and horrible crimes; then when they arrive here they do the same, and criminality and mugging rise. And the worst is their accent” (emphasis added). Language, then, is labeled as one of the worst characteristics of the Nicaraguan immigrants - speakers who, of course, bring with them their widely known preference (overuse from an outside perspective) for vos. In this way, voseo, may become an iconized proxy for the perceived negative characteristics of the “nica” immigrants (see Kroskrity, 2004, for an overview of language ideologies and the construction of identity).

Thus in order to distinguish themselves linguistically from the stigmatized immigrants, young ticos, men in particular, may be adopting higher rates of usted as a sign of Costa Rican identity - as they are pushed away from the most frequent T pronoun option available to them (vos) by its connection to the immigrant community9. In this way, young Costa Rican speakers may be extending a pre-existing preference for usted, thereby becoming “hyper-Costa Rican”. A single linguistic form can be sufficient to serve as a marker of in-group identity (Tabouret-Keller, 1997), and previous research has found that forms of address are one highly salient manner in which speakers can distinguish themselves from groups identified as “Other” (see

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9 The question remains of why younger speakers do not simply move to more tuteo, given that this T option would also serve to distinguish themselves from Nicaraguan immigrants. As mentioned in footnote 5, the comments on the open-ended question make it clear that many Costa Ricans do not consider tú to be an authentically “Tico” option. This idea also appears in social media (see the Facebook group “En contra de los ticos polos que hablan de TU” (https://www.facebook.com/pages/En-contra-de-los-ticos-polos-que-hablan-de-TU/808143549198369?sk=timeline). Thank you to an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out.
Elizaincín, Macuori & Bertolotti, 1997 on *tuteo vs. voseo* in Uruguay; Johnstone, 1999 on *y’all* as a southern marker in US English). Additionally, the presence of “the other *usted*” (Vargas, 1974) gives Costa Rican speakers an “easy out”, creating a pattern that distinguishes them from the rest of Central America, and much (but not all) of the Spanish-speaking world.

Future research should examine the use of address forms among the Nicaraguan immigrants in Costa Rica, to determine what types of accommodation or maintenance may be involved in the construction of identity among immigrants (cf. Hernández, 2002; Rivera-Mills, 2011 for Salvadorans in the United States). Additionally, the present results should be supplemented with oral data from a wide range of Costa Rican natives, including especially speakers of older generations, as well as adolescents. A wider range of social classes should also be included in future study, which would allow for a more nuanced understanding of changes taking place in Costa Rican pronouns. Finally, the gender difference in *ustedeo* among younger speakers should be further explored via interactional studies between native Costa Ricans and immigrant groups to shed light on why men may be leading this change. The system of address forms is in flux in Costa Rica, and future study will help to chart the directionality of the observed changes and the role they play in expressions of identity.
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Appendix A - Survey

Encuesta: Costa Rica ¡Gracias por su participación!
Edad: __________
Sexo: __________
Profesión: ____________________________________________________________
Nivel de educación: ______________________________________________________
Lugar de nacimiento (ciudad/país): __________________________________________
Dónde vive ahora (ciudad/país): _____________________________________________
Las ocupaciones de sus padres: ______________________________________________

**********Por favor, ponga un círculo alrededor del verbo que usaría en las siguientes situaciones:

1. Con su compañero/a de trabajo/Universidad: ¿Quieres/Querés/quiere ir a comer?
2. Con su abuelo/a: ¿Bañas/bañás/baña al perro en la ducha?
3. Con un amigo/a: ¿Siempre pierdes/perdés/pierde las llaves?
4. Con un/a profesor/a: ¿Mientes/mentís/miente a los estudiantes?
5. Con un niño/a: ¿Sientes/sentís/siente alegría cuando asistes/asistís/asiste a la escuela?
6. Con un/a empleado/a de mayor edad: ¿Enciendes/encendés/enciende las luces?
7. Con su novio/a o esposo/a: ¿Escribes/escribís/escribe la respuesta?
8. Con un/a desconocido/a de su edad: ¿Crees/creés/cree en la magia?
9. Con un niño/a: ¿Dónde cenas/cenás/cena?
10. Con su madre o padre: ¿Tienes/tenés/tiene hambre?
11. Con un/a extranjero/a (cuya lengua no es español): ¿Hablas/hablás/habla el chino?
12. Con un amigo/a: ¿Fumas/fumás/fuma?
13. Con su compañero/a de trabajo/Universidad: ¿Rezas/rezás/reza en la iglesia?
15. Con un/a empleado/a de menor edad: ¿Dejas/dejás/deja las llaves en la oficina?
16. Con su hermano/a: ¿Pisas/pisás/pisa la hormiga?
17. Con su jefe: ¿Encuentras/encontrás/encuentra los papeles?
18. Con un/a extranjero/a (cuya lengua es español): ¿Bailas/bailás/baila en la discoteca?
19. Con un/a hijo/a de su amigo/a: ¿Dibujas/dibujás/dibuja los retratos?
20. Con su madre o padre: ¿Apagas/apagás/apaga las luces?
21. Con su jefe: ¿Calientas/calentás/calienta la comida?
22. Con un/a extranjero/a (cuya lengua es español): ¿Sabes/sabés/sabe dónde está la plaza?
23. Con un/a desconocido/a de su edad: ¿Odiás/odiás/odia las verduras?
24. Con un/a empleado/a mayor edad: ¿Vives/vivís/vive en la cuidad?
25. Con un/a empleado/a menor edad: ¿Trepas/trepás/trepa las montañas?
26. Con su abuelo/a: ¿Puedes/ podés/puede ayudarme?
27. Con su novio/a o esposo/a: ¿Escoges/escogés/escoge el restaurante?
28. Con un/a extranjero/a (cuya lengua no es español): ¿Siembras/sembrás/siembra las flores?
29. Con su hermano/a: ¿Levantas/levantás/levanta pesas?
30. Con un/a hijo/a de su amigo/a: ¿Llegas/llegás/llega a la fiesta a tiempo?

**********¿Cómo decide si va a usar vos, tú o usted con otra persona?