

**Address in Portuguese and Spanish**



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Studies in Diachrony and Diachronic Reconstruction

Edited by

Martin Hummel and Célia dos Santos Lopes

**DE GRUYTER**

Veröffentlicht mit Unterstützung des Austrian Science Fund (FWF): PUB 611-G30.

Gedruckt mit Unterstützung der Prof. Dr. Hugo-Schuchardt'schen Malvenstiftung



ISBN 978-3-11-069026-2

e-ISBN (PDF) 978-3-11-070123-4

e-ISBN (EPUB) 978-3-11-070185-2

DOI <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110701234>



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**Library of Congress Control Number: 2020935642**

**Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek**

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available on the Internet at <http://dnb.dnb.de>.

© 2020 Martin Hummel and Célia dos Santos Lopes, published by Walter de Gruyter GmbH, Berlin/Boston.

The book is published with open access at [www.degruyter.com](http://www.degruyter.com).

Typesetting: Integra Software Services Pvt. Ltd.

Printing and binding: CPI books GmbH, Leck

[www.degruyter.com](http://www.degruyter.com)

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María Marta García Negroni and Silvia Ramírez Gelbes

# Prescriptive and descriptive norms in second person singular forms of address in Argentinean Spanish

*vos, usted, tú*

**Abstract:** In this chapter, we analyze and compare the use of second person singular terms of address (*vos/usted/tú*) in Argentinean mass-consumption audiovisual and printed texts from two different periods (1960 and 2015). Using the distinction between prescriptive and descriptive norms (axiological and objective in Blanco 2000), we show that the paradigm of the former has changed over the last fifty years and now overlaps with the latter. However, there is still a gap between both norms: the use of *tú/contigo* and the *voseo reforzado* (“double” *voseo*) in present subjunctive. We propose an explanation for both phenomena in terms of social proximity and symbolic identity.

**Keywords:** Argentinean *voseo*, prescriptive norm, descriptive norm, audiovisual corpus, social proximity, symbolic identity, *vos, usted, tú*, “double” *voseo*

## 1 Introduction

Considered a vulgar form of address throughout Hispanic America during the 19th and early 20th centuries, the use of second person singular pronoun *vos* (*voseo* in Spanish) was criticized by advocates promoting normalization – standardization throughout Spanish-speaking areas – who favored the use of second person singular pronoun *tú* (*tuteo* in Spanish) over *vos*. This position has been supported by well-known authors, such as Andrés Bello, who claimed:

El *vos* de que se hace tanto uso en Chile en el diálogo familiar, es una vulgaridad que debe evitarse, y el construirlo con el singular de los verbos una corrupción insoportable.

(Bello 1945 [1847]: 339 § 234)

‘The pronoun *vos*, widely employed in Chilean colloquial conversation, is a vulgarity that must be avoided, and constructions including it together with the singular form of a verb are an unacceptable corruption.’

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**Note:** We would like to thank José Negroni for his careful reading of the English version of this chapter.

Normalization turned out to be successful in Chile and Peru, but it did not have a decisive impact on Argentinean Spanish. In Argentina, the National Council of Education (*Consejo Nacional de Educación*) required over the years that primary and middle school teachers address their students by the pronoun *tú* (Kurlat 1941). However, no native Argentinean speaker would nowadays employ the pronoun *tú* or present indicative/imperative *tú* forms to address a compatriot in any communicative situation characterized by trust, intimacy, informality and familiarity (García Negroni & Ramírez Gelbes 2004, 2010). This has been the situation at least since the 1960s.

In this chapter, we will analyze the use of second person singular terms of address (*vos/ usted/tú* forms) in Argentinean mass-consumption audiovisual and printed texts from two different periods. Firstly, we will explore the use of second person singular forms in a 1960s corpus (which includes the Argentinean film *La patota* starring Mirtha Legrand in 1960, political TV programs, presidential interviews, newscasts, cooking shows and magazines). Secondly, we will compare these results with those obtained from a contemporary corpus (which includes the latest version of *La patota* starring Dolores Fonzi in 2015, political TV programs, interviews with the current president, newscasts, cooking shows and magazines).

According to Blanco (2000), two types of norms must be distinguished: objective (or descriptive), and axiological (or prescriptive). Objective norms are defined as the culturally established and socially validated realization of the abstract possibilities of a certain linguistic system. Prescriptive norms, on the other hand, correspond to the current model of exemplary language usage in any community and every prescription concerning it. The main hypothesis in this chapter is that the prescriptive normative paradigm has changed over the last fifty years and now corresponds to the descriptive norm. After giving a brief historical account of second person singular forms of address in Argentinean Spanish, we will attempt to confirm our hypothesis by analyzing some corpus-derived examples.

## 2 Brief historical overview: from Latin *vos* to Argentinean *vos*

As is widely known and from an epistemological point of view, Spanish *tú* has its roots in Latin second person singular pronoun *tu*. In Latin, there is originally no T-V distinction (Brown & Gilman 1960: 254). Spanish *vos* stems from Latin second person plural pronoun *vos*, which started being used in the 4th century to address the emperor, who embodied two roles simultaneously: the emperor of the Western Roman Empire (based in Rome) and the emperor of the Eastern



Roman Empire (based in Constantinople). Contemporary pronoun *vos* is therefore connected with power from a historical point of view as *pluralis maiestatis* ('royal we'). It is also the case that "plurality is a very old and ubiquitous metaphor of power" (Brown & Gillman 1960: 254). As time went by, the *vos* employed to address the emperor was assimilated by the nobility. Nobles began to employ *vos* among themselves and were addressed by *vos* by lower classes.

By the 16th century in Spain, *vos* was so widely used that it started losing its capacity to discriminate among different situations. This encouraged the resurgence of a substitute for conveying formality and social distance, *vuestra merced*, which eventually became *usted*. According to different specialists, such as Fontanella de Weinberg (1999), the use of *vos* at that time was restricted to two very different scenarios. On the one hand, *vos* was a specific term for symmetrical communication between peers and asymmetrical interchanges between parents and children, or between uncles/aunts and nephews/nieces. On the other hand, it maintained "su valor de fórmula de respeto de alta formalidad en lo que en la época se conocía como su "uso antiguo", ya que conservaba el valor característico de *vos* en la Edad Media" 'the status of a respectful and formal term of address, which was considered "old-fashioned usage" at that time since it was close to the use of *vos* in the Middle Ages' (Fontanella de Weinberg 1999: 1412). Given that *vos* was becoming polysemic, the social strain of avoiding ambiguity encouraged the reassertion of *tú* in intimate, familiar contexts and *vuestra merced* in highly respectful and formal contexts.

This novel pronominal usage travelled from Spain to Mexican and Peruvian viceroyalties. The use of *vos* as a term of address, established in Hispanic America since the 15th century, prevailed in those areas far from the viceregal courteous norm, where "faltó una clase social celosa de sus privilegios culturales" 'there was no social class protective about its cultural privileges' (Di Tullio 2006: 48). However, *vos* was uprooted from viceroyalty centers Mexico and Lima, "donde la lengua tenía un alto grado de estandarización" 'where language was highly standardized' (Fontanella de Weinberg 1999: 1414).

In fact, the overall use of *vos* in Hispanic America was progressively stigmatized, and during the 19th and early 20th centuries its use was criticized and considered vulgar. In present-day usage, however, in some Spanish-speaking areas both familiar terms of address *tú* and *vos* are employed to address a singular interlocutor, though rarely on an equal basis. In some regions, for example, in Chile, the use of *vos* forms – pronominal ones particularly – is limited and usually stigmatized, whereas the verbal and pronominal *tú* paradigm is considered the standard variety. In other areas such as Argentina, the pronominal *vos* paradigm no longer carries the stigma, and despite the criticisms, the *vos* paradigm is currently accepted as part of Argentine linguistic norms – both prescriptive and

descriptive – and it is generally employed by Argentinean speakers. An illustrative example is the radio advertising slogan of the Argentinean women’s magazine *Para Ti* in the late 1980s: “*Para Ti* quiere decir para vos” ‘*Para Ti* means for you’. The slogan is a play on words: the name of the magazine means ‘for you’ in Spanish but employs *ti* (oblique case for the *tú* paradigm) instead of *vos*. The use of *ti* in the magazine name was a “translation” of a formula crystallized by the prescriptive norm – not by the descriptive one – into Argentinean variety.

Nevertheless, the composition of the *vos* paradigm in Argentinean Spanish is not homogeneous. Indeed, second person familiar terms of address are realized by *vos* forms as much as by *tú* forms if we look at the whole paradigm. In the next section, we will consider this mixed *vos* paradigm in Argentinean Spanish.

### 3 The mixed *vos* paradigm in Argentinean Spanish

Table 1 sets out the pronominal paradigm for *voseo*.

**Table 1:** Pronominal paradigm in present-day Argentinean Spanish.

Oblique	Genitive	Accusative and dative	Nominative and vocative
<i>vos</i>	<i>tuyo</i>	<i>te</i>	<i>vos</i>

Examples (1) to (6) illustrate this paradigm, with pronominal and verbal *vos* forms highlighted.<sup>1</sup> The examples were all retrieved from Argentinean sources (CREA, Google sites, mass and social media, literature, ethnographic personal corpus), both oral and written. *Vos* forms appear in nominative (examples (1) and (6)), vocative (example (2)) and oblique (examples (3) and (5)). *Tú* forms appear in accusative (example (4)), dative (example (5)), and genitive (example (6)). Examples (4) to (6) show the coexistence of *vos* forms (pronominal and verbal) with *tú* forms: *sos* and *te* (example (4)), *sabés*, *te* and *vos* (example (5)), and *vos*, *hacé* and *tuya* (example (6)).

- (1) Si *vos te vas*/Mi amor, si *vos te vas*/Nada más/Podemos decirnos, mi amor.

‘If you go away/My love, if you go away/Nothing else/can we say to each other, my love.’

(Piero, *Si vos te vas*, <http://www.musica.com/letras.asp?letra=1285562>)

<sup>1</sup> All the examples keep their original spelling – e.g. in example (5) written accents in *sabés* (verb ‘know’) and in *cómo* (interrogative pronoun ‘how’) are missing.

- (2) Eh, vos, que *hacés* ahí/pegado contra la pared como una mosca/che, vos, que no *te movés*, no *te movés*/con esta música.

‘Hey, you, what are you doing there/stuck to the wall like a fly/hey, you, who ain’t moving, ain’t moving/with this music.’

(Memphis la blusera, *Como una mosca*, <http://www.musica.com/letras.asp?letra=825272>)

- (3) Para vos lo peor es la libertad. Para vos lo peor es la libertad.

‘The worst thing for you is freedom. The worst thing for you is freedom.’

(Sumo, *Viejos vinagres*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X4xwKh1fpFw>)

- (4) No puedo hacerlo, *sos* mi dios/*te* veo, me sonrojo y tiemblo/qué idiota *te* hace el amor.

‘I can’t do it, you’re my God/I see you, I blush and tremble/Love makes you such an idiot.’

(Bersuit Vergarabat, *Unpacto*, <http://www.musica.com/letras.asp?letra=116007>)

- (5) *Sabes* como *te* dicen a vos...

‘You know what they call you’

(Taringa.net, <http://www.taringa.net/comunidades/humortaringa/1265546/Sabes-como-te-dicen-a-vos.html>)

- (6) *Vos* *hacé* la *tuya*, yo hago la mía, y cuando quieras hacemos la nuestra.

‘Do what you want, I do what I want, and when you feel like it, we do what we both want.’

(Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/frasesforfree/posts/249434588506642>)

There are some very specific contexts in Argentinean Spanish where *tú* forms can also be employed for the second person singular nominative case and in prepositional phrases acting as modifiers (*ti* and *contigo*). Thus, when speaking to a foreigner (example (7)), in prayers (example (8)) and in poetry and songs (example (9)) *tú* forms may be found.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Rizzi (2002) includes *tú* as one of the three variants in the current Argentinean Spanish pronominal system (i.e. *tú*, *vos* and *usted*) and mentions the use of *tú* forms in funeral services, religious prayers, children games and some literary texts.

- (7) Yo tengo algunas coincidencias *contigo* respecto del diagnóstico que *haces* en algunas cosas.

‘I share certain similarities with you concerning the assessment you make in some things.’

(From Salta governor, J.M.Urtubey, to the Spanish journalist Pilar Rahola, in *Almorzando con Mirtha Legrand*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VpOaGOTxLxs>, 15 November, 2015)

- (8) Dios te salve, María, llena *eres* de gracia./Bendita *tú eres* entre todas las mujeres.

‘Hail Mary, full of grace./Blessed art thou among women.’

(Hail Mary, prayer)<sup>3</sup>

- (9) Después de *ti* ya no hay nada/ya no queda más nada, nada de nada./Después de *ti* es el olvido/un recuerdo perdido, nada de nada.

‘After you there is nothing left/there is nothing left, nothing at all./After you, there is oblivion/a lost memory, nothing at all.’

(Lerner, A., *Después de ti*, <http://www.musica.com/letras.asp?letra=27995>)

Similarly, in contexts where the familiar term of address *vos* could be felt too informal, some speakers may employ *tú* forms (example (10)) instead of *usted*, since they consider the latter too formal.

- (10) Estoy de acuerdo *contigo*. ‘I agree with you.’  
(ethnographic personal corpus)

This was the case for the speaker of example (10), a university professor who after his lecture on the national elections in 2015 answered *Estoy de acuerdo contigo* ‘I agree with you’, to an interlocutor (a senior businessman) he had never met before. Once the conference finished, the professor was asked why he chose to use *tú* forms. He replied that he didn’t want to be rude, which he felt he would have been if he had used *usted* – in a university context where most people employ a general *vos* – or *vos*, which he considered could be understood too intrusive or even daring.

<sup>3</sup> Even though this is quite formulaic, in 1999 notebooks for clergymen the formulaic treatment “vosotros” (*La paz esté con vosotros* [May peace be with thou]) was changed into *ustedes* (*La paz esté con ustedes* [May peace be with you]), which suggests that only some formulae are changed.

According to Wainerman (1976: 5–6),

Si actualmente en una tienda no somos tratados de vos sino de usted, sentimos que se nos percibe tan terriblemente viejos, y respetables, como para no merecer el tratamiento informal.

‘Nowadays, if a shop attendant addresses us by *usted* instead of *vos*, we believe they considered us so terribly old and respectable that we cannot be addressed by an informal term of address.’

However, the use of *vos*, which has expanded over recent years, can still be considered excessively intimate in some contexts.

With regards to the verbal paradigm, present indicative and affirmative imperative forms take the stress on the last syllable (in Spanish, *formas agudas*), so that they belong exclusively to the *vos* paradigm, as in examples (11) and (12).<sup>4</sup>

- (11) Cuando *vos empezás* a decir que habría que encontrar la unidad, yo entonces veo cosas muy hermosas pero muertas, flores disecadas y cosas así.

‘When you start saying that unity should be found, I then see beautiful but dead things, dried flowers and things like that.’

(Julio Cortázar, 2004 [1963], *Rayuela*, Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho, p.86).

- (12) *Descubrí* el teatro. *Viví* el teatro. *Vení* al teatro.

‘Discover the theatre. Live the theatre. Come to the theatre.’

(<http://www.venialteatro.org/>)

In the case of other tenses, such as *pretérito perfecto simple* (example (13), similar to English simple past) and *futuro simple* (example (14), similar to English construction *will* + bare infinitive), standard verbal *vos* forms cannot be distinguished from verbal *tú* forms, even though they co-occur with *vos* nominative (see Table 2 below). However, there are two observations to make about the simple past (*pretérito perfecto simple*) and the present subjunctive for *vos*. Firstly, the simple past with *vos* has lost its etymological verb-final -s in standard Argentinean Spanish. According to different authors (Di Tullio 2006; RAE-ASALE 2009: 193, 208, among others), this loss may be due to the stigma that has been associated with the addition of a final -s in the *tú* simple past form.

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<sup>4</sup> In Spanish, words can be classified according to stress placement. Those words that take the stress on the last syllable are called *agudas*, those that take the stress on the penultimate syllable are called *graves* and those that take the stress on the syllable before the penultimate are called *esdrújulas*.

- (13) *Vos dijiste* que Redrado era un golpeador y ahora volviste con él.

‘You said Redrado was a [wife-]beater and now you are back with him.’  
(Heated argument between Luciana Salazar and Yanina Latorre, <https://www.primiciasya.com/yanina-latorre-luli-salazar-vos-dijiste-que-redrado-era-un-golpeador-y-ahora-volviste-el-n1173772>)

- (14) *Vos sabrás* lo que hacés arriba del escenario, pero abajo, siendo yo el técnico [...]

‘You may know what to do on stage, but here, being myself the one in charge’  
(Tinelli’s warning to Soffritti, TKM, <https://www.mundotkm.com/ar/hot-news/589801/el-reclamo-celoso-de-marcelo-tinelli-gaston-soffritti>)

Secondly, the present subjunctive reveals a distinctive feature: when employed along with the pronoun *vos* (explicitly or implicitly), it can take the stress on the penultimate syllable (*formas graves*) which is typical of *tú* forms, as in examples (15) and (16), or on the last syllable (*formas agudas*) which is typical of *vos* forms, as in examples (17) and (18). This also occurs in the negative imperative form. We call this latter form *voseo reforzado* (García Negroni & Ramírez Gelbes 2003, 2004).

- (15) Yo no quiero que vos *pienses*/Que esto es el final.

‘I don’t want you to think/That this is the end.’  
(Los enanitos verdes, *Detrás de las ruinas*, <http://www.letrasdecanciones.fm/los-enanitos-verdes/detras-de-las-ruinas#yo-no-quiero-que-vos-pienses>)

- (16) No te privaste de nada, buchón. Pero ahora la pagás.... No *mientas*.

‘You didn’t miss a thing, snitch. But now you will pay for it... Don’t lie.’  
(César Aira, “El criminal y el dibujante”. *Relatos reunidos*, 2013, Barcelona: Mondadori, no pages)

- (17) Igual, me chupa un huevo lo que vos *penses*<sup>5</sup> [*sic*].

‘Anyway, I don’t give a damn about what you think.’  
(Facebook. Concert gig, <https://www.facebook.com/Igual-me-chupa-un-huevo-lo-que-vos-penses-283802138310302/>)

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<sup>5</sup> The correct spelling would be *pensés*.

- (18) ¡No *mintás* más, Perro! ‘Don’t you lie again, Perro!’  
(*Diario del fin del mundo*. Ushuaia, <http://www.eldiariodelfindelmundo.com/noticias/leer/50672/no-mintas-mas-perro.html>)

Table 2 sets out the familiar second person singular verbal paradigm of Argentinean Spanish.

**Table 2:** The familiar second person singular verbal paradigm of Argentinean Spanish.<sup>6</sup>

	Typical <i>tú</i> forms	Typical <i>vos</i> forms
Present indicative	----	<i>empezás; querés; venís</i>
Present subjunctive	<i>empieces; quieras; vengas</i>	[ <i>empecés; querás; vengás</i> ]
Imperative	----	<i>empezá; queré; vení</i>
Simple past	<i>empezaste; quisiste; viniste</i>	[ <i>empezastes; quisistes; vinistes</i> ]
Future	<i>empezarás; querrás; vendrás</i>	-----

As it can be seen from Table 2, there are only four typical *vos* tenses. Whereas the present indicative and imperative are completely accepted as correct and do not compete with any alternative, typical *tú* forms may alternate with *vos* forms in the simple past (*pretérito perfecto simple*) and present subjunctive: as the latter are not registered in the *Diccionario de la lengua española (DLE)*, they are presented in square brackets in the Table.

## 4 Prescriptive and descriptive norms: historical context

As has already been mentioned, Blanco (2000) sets out two norms: the prescriptive or axiological norm, and the descriptive or objective norm. She defines the latter as the culturally established and socially validated realization of the abstract possibilities of a certain linguistic system. In other words, the descriptive norm is associated with how language is actually used at a given time as part of inherited habits (cf. Coseriu 1962), and it can be studied from a descriptive per-

<sup>6</sup> The forms in square brackets are not registered in the *Diccionario de la lengua española*, and they are stigmatized, but they are the etymological *vos* forms in the simple past and present subjunctive.

spective. Blanco describes the prescriptive norm as including speakers' ideas of correct usage, the current model of standard language usage in a community and language prescriptions.

The prescriptivist perspective has exerted its influence on communication and educational public policies in Argentina. In 1934, for instance, the Instructions for Broadcasting Stations (*Instrucciones para las Estaciones de Radiodifusión*) were developed by Agustín P. Justo's *de facto* government. These instructions explicitly banned some Spanish varieties, such as *lunfardo* (Argentinian slang, which originated in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in the City of Buenos Aires due to immigrants' influence), *cocoliche* (Italian immigrants' creole, spoken in the City of Buenos Aires in the late 19th and early 20th centuries), *gauchesco* (spoken mainly in the Argentinean, Uruguayan and South-Brazilian countryside by peasants and *gauchos*, during colonial and postcolonial times) and *rioplatense* (spoken mainly in Buenos Aires, Rosario and Montevideo, and characterized by the use of *vos*). This ban was based on the idea that these varieties were not "in good taste". In 1943, the head of Telegraph and Post (*Correos y Telégrafos*) sent a memo in this regard, demanding the avoidance of 'every word belonging to slang and every idiom distorting the language that are so common in colloquial language, such as *salí*, *andá*, etc'<sup>7</sup> (Article 8, quoted by Vitale 1999).

General Edelmiro Farrell's *de facto* government developed these instructions further and in 1946 the *Manual de Instrucciones para las Estaciones de Radiodifusión* 'Instruction Manual for Broadcasting Stations' was published. This manual would be replaced by a less restrictive law during General Juan Domingo Peron's government. However, in 1957, during the Liberating Revolution (*Revolución Libertadora*),<sup>8</sup> this manual would be again replaced by its original form. Furthermore, these norms were echoed in public education of the time. For example, the National Council of Education banned the use of *vos* in every school under its government (Kurlat 1941; Vitale 1999). This meant that teachers had to address their students with *tú* and had to teach pronominal and verbal paradigms excluding *vos* forms.

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7 In the original: "toda palabra del argot o bajofondo y de los modismos que desvirtúan el lenguaje y son tan comunes en el decir corriente, como *salí*, *andá*, etc."

8 This is the name given to the dictatorship that overthrew Juan Domingo Perón's constitutional government.



## 5 Corpus analysis: changes in prescriptive and descriptive norms from 1960 to 2015

The 1960s corpus we analyze here includes (a) examples where there is a gap between the prescriptive norm and the descriptive norm of the time;<sup>9</sup> (b) examples where the gap is closing between both norms; and (c) examples that do not respect the prescriptive norm.

The 2015 corpus, on the other hand, seems more homogeneous with regards to the identification of norms. Indeed, the recommendation of the Academia Argentina de Letras in 1982<sup>10</sup> and the standardization of the *vos* paradigm meant that the use of *vos* became part of the prescriptive norm in Argentina.

### 5.1 1960s: Gap between the prescriptive and descriptive norms

The 1960s corpus illustrates a certain respect for the prescriptive norm promoted by official spheres. The use of *tú* forms, both pronominal and verbal, and the limited direct address of the interlocutor are considered here as an illustration of the gap between the two norms.

Even though the use of *tú* (pronominal and verbal forms) is limited, it is employed, albeit non-systematically, and with a supplementary meaning: it contributes to the construction of specific scenarios. The use of *tú* in example (19) indicates an assumed, socially detached respect (it is the nursemaid who addresses the child with *tú*, demonstrating at the same time the close affective bond she has with the child who she has brought up).

#### (19) Nursemaid to Paulina

—Paulina, *tienes* que tomar el té. No *puedes* estar sin comer nada.

‘—Paulina, you have to drink the tea. You must have something to eat.’

(*La patota*, film directed by D. Tinayre, 1960)

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<sup>9</sup> 1960s TV programs on the Internet (e.g. *El amor tiene cara de mujer*, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RhgnlUUwLMs>) can be visited for verification. Even though the objective norm also included the use of *tú*, it was restricted to written language, e.g. letters from parents to children, poems or songs. In oral language, this usage was even more limited, and it was restricted almost exclusively to elementary school teachers, due to ministerial guidelines (see Rizzi 2002).

<sup>10</sup> As Carricaburo (2016) states, in 1982, the Argentinean Academy of Letters was the first academy in Hispanic America to accept the use of *vos* as an educated norm.

In examples (20) and (21), the use of *tú* contributes to the construction of a highly intersubjective and emotive situation, as in melodramas from previous decades.<sup>11</sup>

(20) Alberto to Paulina

—Hay algo que no te deja resolver, Paulina, no sé qué. Una explicación, un extravío, algo que está en tu subconsciente. ¿Cómo *puedes* aceptar eso? ¡Ni siquiera pensarlo! Traer al mundo un hijo de no *sabes* quién... Nunca me separaré de *ti*.

‘—There is something that doesn’t let you solve this, Paulina, and I don’t know what it is. An explanation, a deviation, something in your subconscious. How can you accept that? No way! Having a child when you don’t know who the father is... I will never separate from you.’

(*La patota*, film directed by D. Tinayre, 1960)

(21) Paulina to her father

—Te quedaste solo muy joven y no buscaste otra mujer. Mamá murió al nacer yo. ¿*Piensas* que yo te la quité? ¿Que soy culpable de su muerte?

‘—You have been alone since you were very young and you didn’t look for another woman. Mom died when I was born. Do you think I took her away from you? Do you think I’m responsible for her death?’

(*La patota*, film directed by D. Tinayre, 1960)

In example (22), the *tú* forms maintain the original structure of the proverb alluded to (*Dime con quién andas y te diré quién eres*)<sup>12</sup> despite the construction of a familiar scenario between the participants (the reader and acquaintances alluded to) in the quoted discourse.

(22) *Dime* qué hilo *usas*... ¡Y te diré como *coses*!

‘Tell me what kind of thread you use... And I will tell you how you sew!’

(*Mucho gusto* magazine N° 176, June 1961)

<sup>11</sup> One example is the film *La pródiga*, starring Eva Duarte in 1945 (available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oeo26wYArYM>, last accessed 31 January, 2017).

<sup>12</sup> Literally, “Tell me who you hang out with, and I’ll tell you who you are”, that corresponds to the standard English proverb “Birds of a feather fly together”.

The same respect for the prescriptive norm can be observed in the limited direct address of the interlocutor found in some of the examples, at least when compared to similar present-day situations. Pairs of hosts on TV shows, who addressed their audience with *usted* or *ustedes*, tended not to use the second singular form to each other in the 60s (cf. *Telenoche*, newscast of Canal 13).<sup>13</sup> We argue that this strategy is an attempt to follow the still prevailing prescriptive norms in the *Instructions for Broadcasting Stations*. Nowadays, *vos* forms are employed extensively in interactions among broadcast journalists.

## 5.2 1960s: Prescriptive norm closer to descriptive norm

The 1960s corpus includes some examples where the two norms become closer, relating to the use of *usted* and illustrated in examples (23) to (28). They show the extended use of *usted*, which corresponded to both the prescriptive and descriptive norms. The use of *usted* was extended to many different kinds of interchanges and situations. In the selected examples the use of *usted* reveals an acknowledgment of the social distance between interlocutors, either because of a lack of familiarity or to indicate social hierarchy.

(23) Headmaster to Paulina

—¿De modo que *usted es* la Srta. Vidal?

—Sí, señorita.

—¿*Usted es* católica?

—Sí, señorita.

—Me alegro.

‘—So, you are Miss Vidal?

—Yes, Miss.

—Are you a Catholic?

—Yes, Miss.

—I’m glad to hear that.’

(*La patota*, film directed by D. Tinayre, 1960)

<sup>13</sup> An example of what is said here can be observed in <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oYg2s8LORc> (1966). Even though one of the hosts uses *vos* and *¿no te parece?* or the first name of the addressee, it is clear they tend to avoid the second person singular (verbal and pronominal) throughout the newscast.

- (24) Student to Paulina  
 —*Usted es la que pone las reglas.*  
 —‘You are the ruler here.’  
 (*La patota*, film directed by D. Tinayre, 1960)
- (25) Para que a *usted le digan siempre “¡Qué bien coses!”*, *realice* todas sus costuras con hilos PBT.  
 ‘So that everybody tells you “How well you sew!”’, make all your seams using PBT thread.’  
 (*Mucho gusto* magazine N° 176, June 1961)
- (26) Argentinean cook Doña Petrona to assistant and host:  
 —Ana María, por favor, ¿les *pasa* los ingredientes?  
 —Juanita, por favor, ¿me *levanta* la manga?  
 ‘—Ana María, would you give them the ingredients, please?  
 —Juanita, would you roll my sleeve up, please?’  
 (*Buenas tardes, mucho gusto*, TV show for housewives, 1962)
- (27) Argentine TV host Andrés Percivalle to the bar’s owner:  
 —¿*Usted está* contento de que este bar sea un centro de reuniones para estudiantes?  
 ‘—Are you happy with this bar being a meeting point for students?’  
 (*Telenoche*, newscast of Canal 13, 1966)
- (28) A journalist to the president:  
 —¿Qué significa para *usted*, Sr. Presidente?  
 ‘—What does it mean to you, Mr. President?’  
 (Interview with president Lanusse, along with his family in 1971)

We want to stress that, as in example (22), the use of *tú* in example (25) creates a familiar, intimate scenario (Maingueneau 1999), in opposition to the main advertising text that only employs *usted* to address the audience (readers). This form is much less used in present-day discourse, as we will show below.

### 5.3 1960s: Deviations from the prescriptive norm

Finally, we include some examples that do not fit the prescriptive norm of the time: the use of *vos* in examples (29) and (30) and *voseo reforzado* or *subjuntivo agudo* (subjunctive verbs with the stress on the last syllable) in examples (31) and (32).

(29) Paulina to his father:

—Lo que *vos hacés* es como el suicidio.

—¿Por qué no te *olvidás* de que fuiste juez? Me *tratás* muy duramente a veces.

‘—What you are doing is like committing suicide.

—Why don’t you forget your days as a judge? You sometimes treat me so harshly.’

(*La patota*, film directed by D. Tinayre, 1960)

(30) Argentine TV host Andrés Percivalle to a student, during an interview at don Celestino’s bar:

—Y *vos*, ¿qué *estudiás*?

—*Mirá*, yo estudio Derecho.

‘— And, what do you study?

—Well, I study Law.’

(*Telenoche*, newscast of Canal 13, 1966)

(31) Alberto to Paulina:

—He sido humillada, pero nunca... (llora)

—Por favor, Paulina, no *llorés*! Perdoname, te hago hablar de eso y te hago sufrir. Si te hubiese acompañado esa noche... Tenés que perdonarme.

‘—I have been humiliated, but I never... (she cries)

—Paulina, please don’t cry! Forgive me, I’m making you talk about it and I’m making you suffer. If I had joined you that night... You have to forgive me.’

(*La patota*, film directed by D. Tinayre, 1960)

(32) From one gang member (*patota*) to another:

—Contá ¿qué hace? Dale, Y ¿te gusta?

—Dame, no sabe, yo te cuento.

—No te *avivés*. Vos ya miraste.

‘—Tell me, what is she doing? Come on, do you like it?  
 —Give it to me, I’ll tell you about it.  
 —Don’t be a know-it-all. You have already watched it.’  
 (*La patota*, film directed by D. Tinayre, 1960)

As can be seen, the 1960s corpus illustrates usage that did not suit the prescriptive norm from the time, such as the use of pronominal and verbal *vos* forms, typical of informal or intimate contexts.<sup>14</sup> Examples (29) and (30) exhibit typical *vos* forms of address (i.e. present indicative and imperative). Examples (31) and (32), on the other hand, reveal subjunctive forms with stress on the last syllable (typical *vos* forms or *formas agudas*). Even nowadays, many Argentinean speakers consider the latter forms incorrect but they occur in some contexts in alternation with typical *tú* forms or *formas graves* (stressed on the penultimate syllable) as will be shown below.

We have already suggested in previous studies (García Negroni & Ramírez Gelbes 2003, 2004) that subjunctive *formas agudas* must be regarded as a case of *voseo reforzado*. In fact, if typical subjunctive *tú* forms with the stress on the penultimate syllable (*formas graves*) are considered part of the *vos* paradigm – as they can be employed along with pronominal *vos* forms (cf. *vos amás*, *amá* (*vos*), *vos amaste*, *vos amarías*, *vos ames*), typical subjunctive *vos* forms with the stress on the last syllable (*formas agudas*) should be interpreted as double *voseantes* (“doubly” belonging to the *vos* paradigm). In fact, these forms are not only employed along with pronoun *vos*, but also take the stress on the last syllable, which is typical of present indicative and imperative *vos* forms. Just as last-syllable stress in enclitic constructions<sup>15</sup> (cf. *dámelo* vs. *dameló* ‘give it to me’ vs. ‘give it to *ME*’), this “double” condition of the present subjunctive represents a stronger and closer bond between speaker and hearer by diminishing the social distance between them.

#### 5.4 2015: Towards a convergence of prescriptive and descriptive norms

The 2015 corpus demonstrates that the use of *vos* has increased significantly, without underestimating those scenarios where other forms of address are

<sup>14</sup> We should bear in mind that the Academia Argentina de Letras did not recommend the use of *vos* in every sphere of Argentinean high culture language until 1982.

<sup>15</sup> The Spanish imperative requires postponing object pronouns. This position is called *enclitic*.

employed. This increase has led in particular to a decline in the use of *usted* and to an even greater reduction in the use of *tú* (close to become extinct), although the latter can still be found in the very specific situations we have already mentioned.

The following examples are organized from the smallest gap between prescriptive and descriptive norms to the greatest. The convergence of norms is manifested by the use of *vos* forms and *usted* forms in informal and formal contexts respectively (bearing in mind that informality is expanding in present-day exchanges). Examples (33) to (38) illustrate the use of *vos*.

- (33) The person in charge of the educational program to Paulina:  
 —*Vení así la saludamos.*  
 ‘—Come here, to welcome her.’  
 (*La Patota*, directed by S. Mitre, 2015)
- (34) A student to the person in charge of the educational program:  
 —*Vos sos el Rubi?*  
 ‘—Are you the Rubi?’  
 (*La Patota*, directed by S. Mitre, 2015)
- (35) *Ahorrá tiempo. Comprá tus entradas en TuEntrada.com*  
 ‘Save time. Buy your tickets at TuEntrada.com’  
 (*La Nación* magazine, 30 April, 2016)
- (36) Argentinean cook Narda Lepes to the audience:  
 —*Te la presento. Tal vez, la conocés como jengibrillo.*  
 ‘—I introduce it to you. Maybe you know it as *jengibrillo* [ginger + quince].’  
 (*Tres minutos con Narda*, cooking TV show, Fox, 2016)
- (37) Argentinean TV journalist María Laura Santillán to another journalist (Santo Biasatti):  
 —*¿Y? ¿Qué tal? ¿Estás contento?*  
 ‘—So? How are you? Are you happy?’  
 (*Telenoche*, newscast from Canal 13, 2016)
- (38) Argentinean TV host Santiago del Moro to the audience:  
 —*¡Hay tanta actualidad, tanto para discutir! Un programa apasionante, cargado de información, cargado de voces, cargado de informes, por supuesto. Y vos que sos el/la protagonista de cada noche, muy buenas noches.*

‘—There is so much news, so much to discuss! A fascinating show, full of information, full of voices, full of reports, of course. And you are the one starring every night, good night.’

(*Intratables*, political TV show, Canal América, April 2016)

Even though these examples do not show how frequently *vos* is used, the form clearly occurs in most contexts in the 2015 corpus, in every situation examined and with all kinds of interlocutors, irrespective of their age or social background. This is illustrated in the shift in similar situations from *usted* to *vos* from the 1960s to 2015, as shown in examples (23) compared with example (33) or example (24) compared with example (34), and in the shift from limited direct address of the interlocutor to *vos* in TV newscasts as in example (37).

However, as examples (39) to (42) show below, the use of *usted* has not disappeared. Let's take, for instance, the film *La Patota*. Although some uses of *usted* in institutional, formal contexts were found in the latest version of the film (2015), this term of address is exclusively restricted to four scenes, one of which is presented in example (39), between a policeman and Paulina.<sup>16</sup> The rest of the scenes (i.e. between Paulina and her father, her boyfriend, her rapist, the doctor, the psychologist, the person in charge of the educational program, etc.) always include the reciprocal use of *vos*.

(39) Commissioner to Paulina, in the lineup:

—Señorita Vidal, están las personas para el reconocimiento. *Usted conoce el procedimiento*. Cuando *esté* en condiciones, por favor.

‘—Miss Vidal, the people for the lineup are here. You know the procedure. When you are ready, please.’

(*La Patota*, directed by S. Mitre, 2015)

Restricted as they are in everyday use, *usted* forms still remain in some formal contexts: certain advertisements addressed to older addressees (example (40)), media talks with foreign or older people (example (41)), and interviews with certain representatives of the government. Example (42) is revealing because the exchange displays the tension between the previous relationship both interlocutors have (marked by *vos* forms) and the current political position of the interviewee (which calls for the use of *usted*).

<sup>16</sup> The other three scenes with *usted* forms are between the commissioner and Paulina's father (the judge), between one of the students and his teacher, and between Paulina and a Government officer cross-examining her.



- (40) BATIMAT. Expovivienda. *Agéndela!* 1 al 4 de junio 2016 La Rural. *Pre-acredítese* sin cargo en [www.batev.com.ar](http://www.batev.com.ar)

‘BATIMAT. Expovivienda (home exposition). Put it in your diary! 1st to 4th of June 2016. La Rural. Register yourself for free at [www.batev.com.ar](http://www.batev.com.ar)’

(*Clarín* journal, 13 May, 2016)

- (41) A journalist to an interviewee:

—Pilar, *déjeme* decirle, que afortunadamente en la Argentina desde antes de este gobierno han existido medios opositores al oficialismo.

‘—Pilar, let me tell you that, fortunately, in Argentina before this government media opposed to the ruling party have existed.’

(*Intratables*, political TV show, Canal América, November 2015)

- (42) A journalist to the president:

—Bueno, es la primera vez que *lo* entrevisto como presidente. Y además, en realidad, no *lo* puedo tutear, porque estoy entrevistando al presidente de la República Argentina. Me es hasta raro, porque yo a *usted* lo conozco de la época de Boca.

‘—Well, this is the first time I have interviewed you as president. I actually can’t address you by *vos*, because I’m interviewing the Argentinean president. It’s strange, because I know you from the Boca days.’<sup>17</sup>

(*Animales sueltos*, political TV show, 21 July, 2016)

Even though they are not very frequent, the 2015 corpus has examples of alternation between *usted* and *vos* in the very same scene and produced by the same speaker, whenever he or she feels there is a change in the situation. In example (43) the shift marks a change in the audience (the speaker addresses the teacher but now in front of students), and in example (44) the change is provoked by the intimacy of the topic (the speaker reveals the name of her rapist to Paulina).

- (43) The person in charge of the educational program to Paulina, in front of students:

—Profesora, *se los* dejo.

‘—Miss, I leave you with them.’

(*La Patota*, directed by S. Mitre, 2015)

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<sup>17</sup> The President of Argentina was previously the president of Boca Juniors Football Club, and the comment refers to that period.

In previous scenes, when the students were not present, *vos* forms were employed – see example (13).

(44) Ciro's former girlfriend to Paulina:

—Me dice la Laura que *usted está embarazada...* *Mire, señora, yo no la conozco bien pero me imagino lo que usted está pasando.* Si quiere que hable con la policía o que *le* salga de testigo o algo...

El que *te* violó a *vos* es el Ciro. Es el más grande de todos. No va a la escuela. Trabaja en el aserradero. Yo salí con él un par de veces.

‘—Laura told me you're pregnant... Look, lady, I don't know you well, but I can imagine what you're going through. If you want me to talk to the police or to act as witness or anything...

The one who raped you is Ciro. He is the eldest. He doesn't go to school. He works in the sawmill. I went out with him a couple of times.'

(*La Patota*, directed by S. Mitre, 2015)

As a comparison, within the 48 scenes of 1960s version of *La patota*, *vos* forms were employed in 55% of dialogues and *usted* forms, in 48%. These figures show that, in practice, *vos* and *usted* were almost equally employed. This compares with the latest version of the film (71 scenes), where the use of *vos* rises to 82% and the use of *usted* drops to 15% – six times less than *vos*. Moreover, the same characters' linguistic choices in similar scenes (e.g. Paulina and the headmaster/ the person in charge, the doctor and Paulina) shift from *usted* to *vos* from one version to the other.

Although these figures relate to only two examples of one audiovisual genre, they can be analyzed along with the other audiovisual examples. In the 1960s, *usted* forms prevailed in TV cooking shows, TV political programs, print advertisements and in presidential interviews, either because of being generally chosen or because of limited direct address. This contrasts to 2015, where *vos* forms are the most frequent in all these contexts, even for addressing a president or the TV audience.

## 5.5 2015: Prescriptive norm farther from descriptive norm

The 2015 corpus also includes a few uses of *tú* and *voseo reforzado* (subjunctive forms with the stress on the last syllable) which exhibit a gap between the prescriptive and descriptive norms, as illustrated by examples (45) and (46) respectively.

- (45) A TV host to the interviewee (a foreigner):  
 –Para recordarte, para acordarme de *ti*.  
 ‘—To remember you, to remember you.’  
 (*Intratables*, political TV show, Canal América, November 2015)
- (46) Boyfriend to Paulina:  
 –Yo quiero que *hagás* lo que tengas ganas, pero que estés cerca de mí.  
 ‘—I want you to do whatever you like while you stand by me.’  
 (*La Patota*, directed by S. Mitre, 2015)

These examples deserve a different approach. Example (45), where an Argentinian addresses a foreigner, is a good example of the persistence of the old prescriptive norm. This phenomenon has already been studied from different perspectives and by several authors (see, among others, Bein 1999; García Negroni & Ramírez Gelbes 2010; López García 2006; Ramírez Gelbes 2011). Argentinian speakers' perceptions of their own linguistic variety are typical of a substandard dialect, even though they do not consciously devalue it. This is why Argentinian speakers may switch from *vos* to *tú* forms when addressing a foreigner as if they believed they would not be properly understood.

On the other hand, example (46) is a subjunctive “double” *vos* form. Although it is not included in any grammar book or academic dictionary, this form conveys a closer intimacy – sometimes emphatic, sometimes aggressive – with the addressee. Indeed, while the use of *vos* indicates that interlocutors share a symbolic identity, the use of this subjunctive form (typical *vos* form or *forma aguda*) clearly reinforces the social proximity and reduces the symbolic gap between them, even physically – interlocutors get closer, either in a warm hug or in a physically hostile way.

## 6 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have demonstrated that the prescriptive normative paradigm of second person singular terms of address has been changing over the last fifty years in Argentina. Even though the chosen corpora (1960s and 2015) were collected from mass media, we consider them representative of the relationship between speaking norms in each period.

The paradigm that underlies the use of *vos/usted/tú* and limited direct address of the interlocutor in the first corpus differs considerably from that in the

second corpus, which exclusively favors the use of *vos* in most contexts. In other words, a gap between the objective or descriptive norm – *vos* in familiar, intimate contexts and *usted* in respectful contexts marked by greater social distance – and the prescriptive norm – use of *usted/tú* and limited direct address of the interlocutor – was noted in the first corpus, whereas in the second corpus, the two norms were clearly becoming more closely identified. This identification between norms shows that the use of *vos* constitutes the main variant in most contexts, which has also been accepted, belatedly, by the Academia Argentina de Letras.

That said, there are two present-day examples that reveal a gap between the two norms. The first is the use of *tú* to address a foreigner or a compatriot, in order to convey greater social distance than the use of *vos* would convey but less than the use of *usted*. The second is the use of the present subjunctive with the stress on the last syllable (*forma aguda*), that responds to an attempt to reinforce social proximity and symbolic identity.

One last word concerning both corpora. There has also been a change in the frequency of use of the different terms of address that belong to the descriptive norm (*vos/usted*). Whereas in the 1960s corpus *vos* forms were employed similarly in proportional terms to *usted* forms, in the 2015 corpus the relative use of *vos* has increased significantly. The Argentinian president's response to the journalist quoted in example (42) is an eloquent illustration of this shift:

(47) Yo te desafío, a ver si lograrás aguantar “no tratarme de vos” hasta el final, porque, después de tantos años de conocernos, para mí, se te va a escapar. [...] Bueno, pero convengamos que es una decisión tuya. Para mí es lo mismo: el respeto no pasa por si se tutea o no se tutea.

‘I challenge you to keep on “not addressing me by *vos*” until the end; because, after so many years of knowing each other, I’m sure you won’t be able to do it. [...] Well, let’s agree that it’s your decision. For me, it’s the same: respect is not about addressing someone with *vos* or *usted*.’

(*Animales sueltos*, political TV show, Canal América, November 2015)

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