



Generic options: Variable use of *vos* and *uno* in Patagonia Spanish (Argentina)

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ABSTRACT

The distribution of *vos* 'you' and *uno* 'one' in generic messages is studied in a corpus of female speakers of Spanish (Argentina). The question was how it is possible that the form *vos*, so clearly defined as the pronoun to refer to the interlocutor, could have an impersonal reading, alongside the indefinite pronoun *uno*, which seems much more fit to do the job. The alternation between the generic use of the forms *vos* and *uno* cannot be, in our view, the result of chance nor a merely stylistic tool, but corresponds to the communicative strategies that speakers utilize in each and every context. This paper studies the different factors that play a role in the selection of each of the pronouns.

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1. Introduction

In this paper, we will study the distribution of *vos* 'you' and *uno* 'one' in generic, impersonal messages, i.e., in which no specific referent is meant for the referred pronoun:

- 1) en aquel momento **uno** no alcanzaba a ver todo lo que se venía (MBR)
'at that moment, **one** didn't get to see all that was coming'
- 2) **vos** no sabías dónde mirar porque si **mirabas** acá, **mirabas** la mamá del otro y si **mirabas** adelante **tenías** a tu suegra (MBR)
'**you** did not know where to look because if **you** looked here, **you** saw the other's mother, and if **you** looked ahead, **you** had your mother-in-law'

In order to understand the use of these variables, we have gathered a corpus, consisting of interviews of female speakers of Spanish in Patagonia (Argentina). Of these interviews, all impersonal messages which showed use of *vos* 'you (sg.)' and *uno* 'one' were selected and analyzed.

A first basic question to ask was how it is possible that the form *vos*, which is defined as the pronoun to refer to the interlocutor, could have an impersonal reading. The indefinite pronoun *uno*, on the other hand, seems much more fit to do the job, in view of its form, which refers to a third person. But in spite of this, in all impersonal messages taken together, the informants showed a preference for *vos*: 73%, vs. 27% of *uno*. The fundamental basis for this study is the idea that each form has a different (but stable) meaning that may contribute to different messages (cf. Diver, 2012a, 2012b).

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This study, therefore, has a double perspective: on the one hand, it analyzes linguistic variation, and on the other, it views language as a means of human communication. This double approach is based on the conviction that, as far as pronouns are concerned, variation of use implies ‘two (or more) different ways to indicate the same referent’ (García, 1985, 1997). The goal of the analysis is to explain when and why each one of the forms is used, and, above all, ‘how much and when which structure is being used’ (García, 1995: 55). This approach offers a methodology that has qualitative and quantitative aspects, in accordance with a ‘socio-functional-cognitive’ view on language as presented in, e.g., Martínez (2009): 259.

In our view, the alternation between the generic use of the forms *vos* and *uno* cannot be the result of chance nor a merely stylistic tool; rather, the choice between these forms corresponds to the communicative goals that speakers have. This study aims to understand the factors that play a role in the selection of these two pronouns in the generic messages that speakers have in mind.

In this article, we will first present related literature on this topic, including the traditional account of the generic use of the pronouns *vos* and *uno*, and we describe a series of variationist studies with respect to this problem. We then discuss some theoretical and methodological matters related to the problem, indicate the general, stable meanings for the forms. After that, we will present our hypothesis for the particular message group, and describe our corpus, followed by both qualitative and quantitative analyses of the data. Finally, we offer our conclusions.

2. State of the art

2.1. *Uno* and *vos* in traditional grammars

In at least four Spanish grammars, attention is given to the pronouns *vos* and *uno* and their alternation, even though they are not always conceptualized in this way: Gili Gaya (1943), Marín (1972), Alarchos Llorach (1984) and the official grammar of the RAE (2010).

After giving a general presentation on the personal pronoun, Gili Gaya (1943) explains what he means by the ‘subject pronoun’. In his view, all subject pronouns are ‘unnecessary’ because of the ‘clarity of the verb endings’ that indicate them (203). In the case of the first and second person pronouns, their explicit use has ‘emphatic’ value, and means ‘particular insistence in underscoring the subject’. The author illustrates this by saying that ‘to say *yo canto* ‘I sing’ is drawing the hearer’s attention that it is exactly me, myself, and not someone else, who is performing the action’ (204). For the third person, on the other hand, Gili Gaya claims that there may be ‘ambiguity’, given the fact that there are many third persons available, whereas the first and second persons are clearly defined by the interlocutors. The use of the indefinite pronoun *uno* is treated, not so much as a way to hide the speaker, but as a means to provide an alternative for reflexive constructions in which *se* is not available:

Con los verbos reflexivos no puede usarse el se impersonal ni el pasivo. Se sustituye entonces por el indefinido uno, una, solución análoga a la del empleo de one, que adopta el inglés en casos parecidos: Se acostumbra uno a todo; uno se atrevería a hacer lo mismo; se despeina una con ese viento. Obsérvese que la variación del género del indefinido uno, una, depende del sexo de la persona que habla, lo cual indica cierta participación en el sujeto impersonal y, por consiguiente, una ligera determinación. No es obligatoria, sin embargo, la forma femenina. Una mujer puede decir se conmueve uno con esas escenas. (78)

‘With reflexive verbs, impersonal *se* and the passive cannot be used. In these cases, it is changed for the indefinite *uno, una*, a solution analogical to ‘one’, that English uses in similar cases: ‘one is used to anything; one would dare to do the same; one’s hair is ruined with the wind’. Notice that the gender of indefinite *uno, una*, depends on the gender of the person speaking, which indicates certain participation in the impersonal subject and, consequently, a slight determination. However, the female form is not compulsory. A woman may say ‘one (*uno*) is troubled by these scenes.’ (78; all translations in the present paper are ours, BdJ)

In other words, according to Gili Gaya (1943), in principle, the impersonal use of *uno* seems to have the same function as impersonal phrases with *se* ‘himself/herself’, that is, to ignore the agent or the producer of the action whenever the speaker has lost interest in that entity (76).

In another traditional account, Marín (1972) identifies two types of forms of address: the ‘proper ones’, that is, the forms the speaker uses to address the second person; and the ‘substitutes’, among which he describes those with which the speaker uses to refer to himself:

Como el Nos mayestático, el nosotros de modestia o el de coparticipación (plural sociativo), y los sustantivos de humildad como vuestro siervo, servidor, las formas humorísticas como este cura, los gitanismos menda y mangue, las perífrasis como el hijo de mi madre o de mi padre, las fórmulas notariales: el infrascrito, el abajo firmante, etc. La pérdida voluntaria de la propia personalidad se busca en fórmulas como uno, tan repetido en el coloquio (1972:152).

‘Like the royal ‘We’, the modest ‘we’ or its participating use (associative plural), and the humility nouns like your servant, humoristic forms like ‘this priest’, gypsyisms like *menda* and *mangue*, periphrastic phrases like ‘the son of my mother’ or ‘father’, official formulations like ‘undersigned’, ‘yours truly’, etc. The voluntary loss of the own personality is looked for in formulations like ‘one’, so frequently used in oral speech (1972:152, emphasis ours)

Another phenomenon mentioned by [Marín \(1972\)](#) is the existence in Spanish of the so-called ‘deliberate disagreement’ (§9.6):

Esto sucede cuando el hablante se inmiscuye en la acción del oyente: ¿cómo estamos? por ¿cómo está Ud.? o ¿cómo estás? En realidad, para el hablante, no hay discordancia, sino transmutación de persona gramatical (1972:111).

‘This happens when the speaker intrudes in the action of the hearer: ‘how are we?’ for ‘How are you’ [polite and familiar versions, the authors]? In reality, for the speaker there is no disagreement, but transmutation of grammatical person’ (1972:111).

As the previous quotes show, the author identifies the existence of variable uses. In the first of the two quotes above, it is indicated in the use of grammatical persons regarding the auto reference, and in the second one even in the first person. However, the phenomena are not mentioned or described as such, but they are given as examples of exploitations in discourse, i.e., there is no reference to their meanings but only to their effect on the message ([Diver 2012a](#)).

[Alarcos Llorach \(1984\)](#) points out that the lexical meaning of the personal pronouns, in spite of the variability of their referents according to each speech act ‘is always fixed and constant, just like any linguistic unit: it is reduced to mean each one of the three recognizable persons in the situation of speech’ (1984: 72).¹ This conception of a single meaning of the linguistic sign is very similar to the framework adopted in this study. However, this grammar claims variable uses of the pronouns is in relation to the third person *uno*. The author claims that:

Se utiliza también para señalar la indeterminación del sujeto explícito junto a verbos pronominales: Siempre se arrepiente uno tarde. La referencia de uno puede apuntar a la primera persona cuando el hablante diluye su propia responsabilidad sustituyendo el personal yo: Uno prefiere abstenerse, Es que no sabe una a quién atender (en lugar de Prefiero abstenerme, Es que no sé a quién atender). [...] El papel esencial de uno consiste en la singularización de un objeto cualquiera de entre los de la clase designada por el sustantivo, o bien de una porción o variedad cualquiera de lo que denota este” (1984: 123).

‘[Uno] is also used to signal the indetermination of the explicit subject in combination with pronominal verbs: Always one [uno] is sorry [se arrepiente] late. The reference of one [uno] may point at the first person when the speaker is watering down their own responsibility by exchanging it for personal I: One [uno] prefers to abstain, Because one [una] does not know who to turn to (instead of I prefer to abstain, Because I don’t know who to turn to). [...] The essential role of one [uno] consists of singling out any object between those of the class indicated by the noun, or of a part or particular variety that it denotes’ (1984: 123).

[RAE \(2010\)](#) states that the personal pronouns designate the participants in discourse. This property, according to the authors, limit their lexical content, converting them into deictic categories: ‘the form they adopt is different according to if they refer to the speaker (I), the hearer (you), or neither of these (he, she)’ (2010: 299).² They are to be seen as definite elements, characteristics they share with the definite articles and the proper nouns. According to this grammar, the relation held by the pronouns, especially the first and second person pronouns, is very narrow, in view of the fact that neither of them can be seen as substitutes for other expressions, but instead indicate their referent in an unmistakable way (299).

As far as the indefinite pronoun *uno/una* is concerned, this grammar postulates that ‘*uno/una* presents generic uses that in principle may refer to any individual. This form appears with predicates that express experiences, ideas or feelings of the speaker that are supposed to be transferrable to others’ (290).³ Nevertheless, further on it says that ‘logically, the generic interpretation is not obtained when the pronominal uses of *uno* and *una* refer exclusively to the speaker’ (291),⁴ but this idea is not further developed. Apart from the generic use of *uno*, the RAE mentions that there are unspecified uses of the personal pronouns when these are interpreted as generic, ‘as may occur with *tú* ‘you (sg.)’ or with the second person verb ending when they adopt the meaning of *uno* ‘one’ or of anybody’ (291),⁵ in examples like ‘In this job, if you don’t help yourself, don’t expect others to help you’ or ‘When you get an opportunity, don’t let it get away’.

The traditional grammars discussed so far, do not give clear answers to the questions presented here so far. Some, like [RAE \(2010\)](#), offer hypotheses for the meanings of the forms, others are less clear; [Marín \(1972\)](#) proposes a single meaning for the forms. This study aims at providing explanations for the distribution of the forms in a particular corpus. Variationist studies may provide more insight in the use of these forms in discourse.

2.2. *Uno and vos in Spanish: contributions of variationist studies*

Within the CSL framework, the basic theoretical approach adopted in this study (cf. 3. below), there are only a few mentions of impersonal uses of *uno* (cf. [García, 1975:15–20](#) and [2009:146](#)). In other variationist studies, the variable uses of *tú*

¹ “es siempre fijo y constante, como el que caracteriza a toda unidad lingüística: se reduce a significar cada una de las tres personas reconocibles en el coloquio” (1984: 72).

² “la forma que adoptan es diferente según se refieran al hablante (yo), al oyente (tú) o a ninguno de los dos (él, ella)” (2010: 299).

³ “uno/una presenta empleos genéricos que aluden en principio a cualquier individuo. Esta forma aparece con predicados que expresan vivencias, ideas o sentimientos del hablante que se suponen extrapolables a los demás” (290).

⁴ “como es lógico, no se obtiene la interpretación genérica en los usos pronominales de uno y una referidos exclusivamente al hablante” (291).

⁵ “como ocurre con tú o con la flexión verbal de segunda persona cuando adquieren el sentido de uno o de cualquiera” (291).

and *uno* are described as ‘impersonal’, ‘generic’ or ‘defocalizing’ (cf. González and Lima, 2009; Hugo Rojas, 2011; Guirado, 2011; Encinas Quintana and Ortiz Ciscomani, 2013; Cabello Peña and Infante Miguel, 2013; Hurtado and Gutiérrez Rivas, 2016; Posio, 2017). These studies –mainly from the research field of sociolinguistics– do conceptualize the studied forms in terms of variation but are not oriented to find a basic meaning in order to explain the distribution of the forms under focus. In other words, the search for independent variables is not meant to find their contribution to the selection of the forms, and therefore, their (invariant) meanings, as already observed in García (1985), but just as mere correlations. In her view, variationist studies are not interested in explanations for the observed frequencies of the forms, but only in the mechanisms of quantitative analysis. For García, the problem with these studies is that it ‘is clear that the linguistic significance of the variation plays second fiddle’ (1985: 213).

The present study is based on the theoretical and methodological view that eschews the dichotomy between qualitative and quantitative approaches, and instead focuses on the significant contribution of the meaning of the linguistic sign and its coherence in context (Martínez, 2017). Moreover, as will be shown, these principles determine the distributions of linguistic signs in all speech communities, including the one, studied here.

3. Theory and methodology

The research presented in this paper is inspired by the principles of the Columbia School of Linguistics (hence: CSL), cf. a.o. García, (1975); Contini-Morava, 1995; Diver, 2012b; Huffman (1997); Reid (1991); and as implemented in analyses by García (1985, 1988, 1995, 1997); Martínez (2000, 2004); Mauder and Martínez (2007) in relation to linguistic variation as a key phenomenon in order to understand language use.

CSL holds a radically functional conception of language structure and use, parting from the basic assumption that the main function of language is communication. According to this perspective, the goal of linguistic analysis is to explain the (distributional) facts of linguistic forms or signals, assuming basic, stable meanings for the observable linguistic forms. Language users are intelligent beings who infer the meanings of these linguistic forms according to the intended communicative message. In García’s words:

La sintaxis es, en principio, libre e infinita, y lo que construye no son (por mucho que les pese a los formalistas) principios absolutos de (no) combinabilidad, sino la posibilidad de derivar/inferir un mensaje coherente (o sea, relevante) de una combinación dada en un contexto dado (cf. Sperber y Wilson, 1986) (1988: 7).

‘Syntax is, in principle, free and infinite, and what it constrains are not (in spite of the formalists) absolute principles of (no) combinability, but instead the possibility to derive/infer a coherent (or relevant) message of a given combination in a given context (cf. Sperber and Wilson, 1986) (1988: 7)

In CSL, the basic structural unit is the sign –a signal paired with a meaning—and the theory postulates that each language has its own semantic categories. The analytical problem for CSL is to determine the identity of these signal/meaning pairs in a particular language. This goal is achieved by studying the proposed signs in real communication, i.e., testing a meaning hypothesis in each and every message in which the signal is used:

The purpose of hypothesizing a particular meaning is to come to an understanding of the distribution of the signal associated with it. The signal, of course, is not distributed at random in our use of the language to communicate, and what causes its particular departure from a random distribution appears to be its meaning and the way in which that meaning is exploited for the production of messages. [...] the fundamental procedure for testing the hypothesis is an evaluation of the extent to which the hypothesized meaning appears plausibly to contribute to the total effect of the message. (Diver, 2012a: 54).

The meaning of the linguistic sign is necessarily the same in all contexts and therefore cannot change from context to context (García, 1985). Linguistic forms have a unique and invariable meaning and their contribution to communication is constant. Meanings are hints for the construction of particular messages, and their contribution to them is more imprecise than the intended messages themselves. In this way, the totality of the message exceeds overwhelmingly the sum of the meanings that constitute them (Diver, 2012a: 52).

From this theoretical point of view, the explanation of language structure and the use of its forms is to be sought in the analytical results on the basis of a methodology that brings together qualitative and quantitative analyses in order to arrive at solid conclusions. This route implies both a case-to-case analysis of authentic examples in context, and at the same time, quantitative evidence of the qualitative observations over a larger stretch of text; in other words, the quantitative analyses demonstrate that the individual utterances are not just felicitous examples selected by the analyst, but are systematic instances of a larger pattern (Sabar, 2018: 20–23). It is this pattern, the generalization, that is of interest to linguistic analysis.

García’s position in particular is that variation is motivated, i.e., the choice between two or more opposing forms reflects different ways in which a speaker may represent a certain scene. But this is not the same as William Labov’s conception of language variation, which holds that ‘Social and stylistic variation presuppose the option of saying “the same thing” in several different ways: that is, the variants are identical in referential or truth value, but opposed in their social and/or stylistic significance’ (1972: 271); García proposes that the concept of ‘saying “the same thing” in several different ways’ be replaced by ‘referential equivalence’ (García, 1997: 30). This implies that if two or more linguistic forms are in mutual variation, they

may be representing a certain event from different perspectives even if these two or more terms are referentially equivalent. And thus, it cannot imply that the different options mean the same; they represent different cognitive perspectives on the same scene:

“una premisa básica de la lingüística cognitiva es que toda categorización presupone el perfilamiento de una situación, o sea, la selección de ciertos rasgos que se destacan contra el fondo de las demás características (MacLaury, 1991). Esto sugiere que la variación en la expresión con la que se describe la “misma” realidad, básicamente refleja diferentes perspectivas por parte del hablante [...] La variación en la expresión lingüística refleja un distinto perfilamiento cognitivo de la realidad descrita” (García, 1995: 55)

‘A basic premise of cognitive linguistics is that all categorizations presuppose a characterization of a situation, i.e., the selection of certain characteristics that are salient with respect to other ones (MacLaury, 1991). This suggests that the variation in the expression with which the “same” reality is described, basically reflects different perspectives by the speaker [...] The variation in the linguistic expression reflects a different cognitive characterization of the described reality’ (García, 1995: 55)

The present article studies the motivations of choice between the forms *vos* and *uno* in generic contexts and will demonstrate that this choice is based on the contribution of the invariable general meanings of the forms to the intended message. Both forms (*uno* and *vos*) are tools that can be selected by a speaker to help achieve their communicative goals in each and every specific context (type).

Accordingly, all appearances of *vos* ‘you’ and *uno* ‘one’, when used to communicate impersonal messages, were collected in the selected corpus in order to be analyzed further.⁶ In the qualitative analysis, each and every example is considered to see if the hypothesized meaning of each form can account for its appearance in the reported discourse. In the quantitative analysis, numeric correlations between the forms, as representing the meaning hypothesis, and other semantic characteristics in the text are sought. Ultimately, the results were statistically validated using chi-square (χ^2) and Odds Ratio (OR) measures.

4. Basic meanings of the forms

As noted earlier, we propose that the forms *vos* and *uno* each signal an invariant meaning, which contributes to the ongoing communication each time the forms are used. Our position, inspired by Diver (2012a) and other studies, is that the meaning of grammatical forms, signaled in every instance of their use, is constant and invariable. The proposed meanings for the forms under study are:

vos → reference to the hearer/interlocutor

uno → one (non-plural)

If the basic meaning of the form *vos* is ‘reference to the hearer/interlocutor’, then the use of this form in the generic messages studied here should lead to an interpretation like ‘you in my place’, since the speaker wants to incorporate the hearer into the situation that is being reported. On the other hand, if the basic meaning of *uno* is ‘one’, then the interpretation of this meaning in generic messages regarding one’s own experiences would be ‘(some)one like me’. The distinctive characteristic of this form is its indefinite value, since *uno* has no specific referent in its meaning. *Vos*, on the other hand, is definite and points to the hearer.

In sum, the proposed interpretation⁷ for the forms in this particular group of messages with a generic communicative function is:

Generic *vos* → ‘you in my place’

Generic *uno* → ‘(some)one like me’

Seen in this way, *vos* ‘reference to the hearer’ and *uno* ‘one’ are different alternatives for the speaker to connect their personal experience with the communicative situation. In the first case, using *vos*, the speaker disconnects themselves from the scene and projects their experience to the hearer/interlocutor. In the case of *uno*, the self-reference is watered down to another possible referent, similar to themselves.

What our corpus shows⁸ is that speakers use the forms studied here, in order to clarify and color their own experiences. In 3), an example is presented where both forms occur:

⁶ For the precise characteristics of the corpus, cf. section 5.

⁷ We prefer not to speak of the generic MEANING of the forms, but instead of a generic INTERPRETATION. For reasons of theoretical logic, the term ‘meaning’ will only be used for the basic meaning of the forms, the use of the forms in different (groups of) contexts leading to different interpretations. Since we are dealing with a specific group of messages, we are logically speaking of a specific interpretation of the basic meaning, that may be the result of their use in this group of messages. Speaking of a different, or specific, meaning of the forms would lead to the theoretical undesired situation of having more meanings for one form. We will return to this issue in the conclusions.

⁸ For the precise characteristics of the corpus, cf. section 5.

- 3) *Yo después empecé a trabajar, muchos años después, en el hospital de Viedma. Yo a ella me la crucé un par de veces, ella llevaba a su mamá y sí. Nos saludamos así como con mucha... bueno, con cierta complicidad y simpatía, pero ninguna de las dos dijo nada, ¿viste? Yo ni siquiera grabé su apellido que a mí no me costaba nada, porque uno en el hospital... uno labura con los apellidos, vos vas... no se me ocurrió. O decirle: podemos juntarnos un día, a charlar de lo que nos pasó” (CL, 96–97)*
 ‘I then started to work, many years later, in the hospital of Viedma. I met her a couple of times, she would bring her mother and so. We greeted each other with much... well, with some complicity and sympathy, but neither of us said anything, you see? I didn’t even register her last name, which would be no effort at all, because **one** in hospital... **one** works with last names, **you** would... it didn’t occur to me. Or say to her: we could meet one day, to talk about what happened to us’

‘I then started to work, many years later, in the hospital of Viedma. I met her a couple of times, she would bring her mother and so. We greeted each other with much... well, with some complicity and sympathy, but neither of us said anything, you see? I didn’t even register her last name, which would be no effort at all, because **one** in hospital... **one** works with last names, **you** would... it didn’t occur to me. Or say to her: we could meet one day, to talk about what happened to us’

In 3), the communicative function of *uno* is especially clear: the speaker, who was working in a hospital, is generalizing the administrative job of writing down last names in a register because it is a procedure followed by her, and not only by her, but also by all workers in the hospital, and thus the use of *uno* is the most appropriate of the two. However, when she starts to use impersonal *vos*, she breaks off the utterance, supposedly because there is nothing for the interlocutor to sympathize with.⁹

In 4), on the other hand, the speaker is clearly looking for commitment by the interlocutor: she is talking of her own experience as an exile immigrant and the things she could and could not do:¹⁰

- 4) *para trabajar en el INA vos tenías que tener residencia porque en Costa Rica hay Inopia, vos no podés hacer un trabajo que puede hacer un costarricense o tener un trabajo que puede hacer un costarricense y entonces... y para que te quedes un costarricense tiene que poner un bien mueble en garantía, por si vos cometés algún delito (MBor, 163)*
 ‘in order to work at the INA **you had** to have a residence permit because in Costa Rica there is *Inopia*, **you cannot** do a job that can be done by a Costa Rican or have a job that a Costa Rican can do and then... in order for **you to be able to stay**, a Costa Rican has to give a good in warranty, for if **you commit** any offence’

According to the hypothesis presented here, these options allow the speaker to connect their personal experience to more generic contexts, responding to different communicative needs. In order to generate empathy, when they want to make an appeal to the interlocutor, to invite them to put themselves in the speaker’s place, they will use *vos*. On the other hand, when the speaker wants to water down their own reference, pretending vagueness in this respect, for example in order to reduce their own responsibility for the reported event, *uno* is the best option. Because of *uno*’s lack of identifying a referent, it indicates that the speaker is not the only possible one for a given event, judgment or experience. In Sections 5 and 6, it will be shown that these systematic interpretations of the general meanings indeed show a pattern in the group of generic messages studied here.

5. The corpus

This study was carried out using a corpus of interviews called *Mujeres y Dictadura en Río Negro* ‘Women and Dictatorship in the Río Negro province’ (Rulli et al., 2021). This is a multimodal corpus consisting of 19 interviews, conducted between 2017 and 2020 by members of an interinstitutional and interdisciplinary group of researchers whose main objective was to recollect the testimony of women who lived under the last military dictatorship in the province of Río Negro, Argentina. One of the central objectives of the corpus was to create an oral corpus of the Patagonia variety of Spanish.¹¹

Mujeres y Dictadura consists of a single discourse genre (conversation) and a specific subgenre (in-depth interviews/oral history). The topics of the interviews are always related and similar and they are therefore relatively uniform. All the texts were generated by asking the interviewees to recollect some of their personal experiences. They can all be characterized as semi-structured interviews that not only enter into the particular experiences of the women in relation to the way of living during the last dictatorship, but also to offer a closer view of their life experiences. The topics covered included education, political attitudes and participation, family planning, and the main obstacles and limitations that they were confronted with as women during the regime.

In our study, all instances of *uno* and *vos* in were taken from six interviews, not only the pronominal forms but also the instances in which no subject pronoun was used but the referent was observable in the verb endings of the 2nd personal singular and the oblique forms *te* ‘(oblique) you’ in contrast with *le/a uno* ‘to one’.¹² The compilation of data was stopped when a number of almost 200 cases per informant was achieved in order to be able to execute a significant quantitative analysis. The total number of collected cases is 177; Table 1 gives full details of the sample.

⁹ In fact, this instance was not recorded in the corpus, because the utterance was cut off, and no further context is available for good analysis, cf. 5. The corpus.

¹⁰ A specific law for immigrants.

¹¹ For all technical details of the corpus, cf. Rulli et al. (2021).

¹² The third person singular verb form was not considered for being an unmarked verb ending, and showed no instances of the relevant reading.

Table 1

Overview of the interviews in the sample: total duration and registered cases of each of the forms. Source: interviews taken from the *Mujeres y Dictadura* project.

Informants	Duration (minutes)	Extension (words)	uno/a	vos	Total N
Mbo	137	20440	12	40	52
MTC	69	10306	4	15	19
CC	148	27201	9	26	35
GE	96	14555	5	19	24
CL	61	10718	18	23	41
Mbr	98	10608	1	6	7
TOTAL	609	93828	48	129	177

6. Analysis

In order to test if the proposed hypotheses on the generic interpretations of the forms indeed show a pattern in our corpus, both qualitatively and quantitatively, a number of tests were executed in which both types of correlations with certain factors are expected as a result of the meaningful relation between the interpretations and the presented factors. The investigated factors are:

- Persistence in the context
- Temporal relations: past and present tense
- Case (degree of activity)

First, the meaningful relation between the investigated factor and the generic interpretation of the forms will be explained qualitatively, using individual examples in context, taken from the corpus, followed by a quantitative control in the whole sample, in order to demonstrate that the examples are representative of a general pattern, and not mere felicitously selected instances.

6.1. Persistence in the context

In view of the fact that normally, a speaker will consistently search for commitment for their interlocutor and will therefore be more inclined to continue this search, *vos* is quite likely to be repeated. On the other hand, repeatedly watering down their own role in the reported experience is less likely to occur, so it can be expected that in the investigated message type, *uno* is less likely to be repeated. In 3), repeated below, we see a repetition of *uno*, but only once, whereas in 4), also repeated below, as we have already seen, the repetition of generic uses of *vos* is much more intense:

- 3) *Yo después empecé a trabajar, muchos años después, en el hospital de Viedma. Yo a ella me la crucé un par de veces, ella llevaba a su mamá y sí. Nos saludamos así como con mucha... bueno, con cierta complicidad y simpatía, pero ninguna de las dos dijo nada, ¿viste? Yo ni siquiera grabé su apellido que a mí no me costaba nada, porque uno en el hospital... uno labura con los apellidos, vos vas... no se me ocurrió. O decirle: podemos juntarnos un día, a charlar de lo que nos pasó" (CL, 96–97)*
 'I then started to work, many years later, in the hospital of Viedma. I met her a couple of times, she would bring her mother and so. We greeted each other with much... well, with some complicity and sympathy, but neither of us said anything, you see? I didn't even register her last name, which would be no effort at all, because **one** in hospital... **one** works with last names, **you** would... it didn't occur to me. Or say to her: we could meet one day, to talk about what happened to us'
- 4) *para trabajar en el INA vos tenías que tener residencia porque en Costa Rica hay Inopia, vos no podés hacer un trabajo que puede hacer un costarricense o tener un trabajo que puede hacer un costarricense y entonces... y para que te quedés un costarricense tiene que poner un bien mueble en garantía, por si vos cometés algún delito (MBor, 163)*
 'in order to work at the INA **you had** to have a residence permit because in Costa Rica there is *Inopia*, **you cannot** do a job that can be done by a Costa Rican or have a job that a Costa Rican can do and then... in order for **you to be able to stay**, a Costa Rican has to give a good in warranty, for if **you commit** any offence'

In 4), we see the speaker referring to her working experience during her exile. She went to Costa Rica during the seventies and refers to a law in that country for jobs that are difficult to cover, the so-called *Inopia* Law. In these years, the interviewee worked in the Costa Rican scientific system under this law and explains to the interviewers the rules of this law for foreigners who are working in the country. Noteworthy is that both, interviewee and interviewer, are Argentinian women, so in principle, both the communicative values of '(some)one like me' and 'you in my place' are applicable here. But obviously, there is a high degree of commitment to be expected by the interlocutor, so logically, *vos* is chosen in all three instances: (a) *para trabajar en el INA vos tenías que tener residencia* 'in order to work at the INA **you had** to have a residence permit', (b) *vos no podés hacer un trabajo que puede hacer un costarricense* '**you can't** do a job that can be done by a Costa Rican' (c) *para que te*

quedes, un costarricense tiene que poner un bien mueble en garantía ‘in order for **you to be able to stay**, a Costa Rican has to give a good in warranty’.

In 5) and 6), below, we see a similar pattern: in 5) we see a repetition of 2nd person verb endings and oblique pronouns, asking of the interlocutor to imagine this most awkward situation in which University students found themselves during dictatorship. In 6), on the other hand, a single use of *uno* is shown, indication of a personal experience that was common for many individuals at the time:

- 5) *El documento era parte del cuerpo, porque salir sin documento, era imposible. Y cuando entrábamos a la Universidad, estaban los matones de Remus Tetu, que lideraba la triple A de Bahía Blanca, era la que le otorgaba los recursos económicos. Eran hombres fornidos, con traje gris y armados y mostraban el arma permanentemente. **ibas** caminando por el pasillo y **te** paraban de golpe, **te** sacaban todos los papeles, **te** palpaban y **te** dejaban seguir” (GE, 226)*
 ‘Your ID was part of our body, because going out without it was impossible. And when we would enter University, members of Remus Tetu’s gang would be there, the leader of the Triple A of Bahía Blanca, which was the provider of economic resources. They were armed, strong men, with a grey suit and they would show their weapons permanently. **You** would go walking through the hallway and they would stop **you** all of a sudden, they would take all **your** papers, they would search **you** physically and they would let **you** go’
- 6) *Como mujer, el más fuerte impacto no es, no es todo el horror que la última dictadura significó para para todos nosotros, ¿no?, sino la pérdida, es decir, las cosas que todos los días, aunque **uno** no crea, están presentes, y además porque de alguna manera, eh, mi núcleo más afectivo, más fuerte, de pertenencia siguen siendo los compañeros que hoy están vivos (Mbor, 140)*
 ‘As a woman, the greatest impact isn’t, isn’t the horror that the last dictatorship meant to us all, no?, but the loss, that is, the things of every day, although **one** can’t believe it, are there, and moreover because in some way, eh, the most intimate and strongest inner circle I belonged to are the friends that are still alive today’

Example 5) shows uses of *vos* similar to 3). The speaker explains to the interviewer what it was like to be a female University student in the beginning of the seventies in the city of Bahía Blanca, a couple of years before the last military dictatorship, when the *Alianza Anticomunista Argentina* (commonly known as the “triple A”) was already operative. In this fragment, the informant describes the violent actions of the gang of Remus Tetu at the University of Bahía Blanca. Also here, we see a recreation of a sequence of actions in which the interviewer is expected to imagine himself in the position of the interviewee: (a) *ibas caminando por el pasillo* ‘**You** would go walking through the hallway’, (b) *te paraban de golpe* ‘they would stop **you** all of a sudden’, (c) *te sacaban todos los papeles* ‘they would take all **your** papers’, (d) *te palpaban* ‘they would search **you** physically’, and (e) *te dejaban seguir* ‘they would let **you** go’.

On the other hand, 6) shows an isolated instance of *uno*. This pronoun is not repeated in the nearby context. The choice of *uno*, in contrast with the clear relation with the interlocutor that is constantly being indicated by *vos*, is motivated by the personal, albeit impersonal, relation indicated by *uno*. The speaker refers to the biggest impact in her life produced by the dictatorship, which is ‘the loss’, a loss that is there each and every day, although ‘**one** cannot believe it’. There are no specifications in this part of the interview. There are no specific losses indicated here, but in another part of the interview the informant says that she has had quite a number of losses, particularly the loss of an unborn baby. The speaker presents these present losses like something hard to believe in general, especially for (someone like) her and continues to talk, now about herself in the following discourse. This co-occurrence of the I and ‘one’ is very coherent in the light of the generic interpretation of ‘one’, presented here.

It is notable that *uno* and *vos* pattern differently with respect to whether the form is repeated within a stretch of text. *Vos* clearly shows greater contextual repetitions than *uno*, that hardly shows any persistence. It appears that the greater persistence of *vos* allows the speaker to include the hearer in the argumentation, creating more empathy from the hearer for the perspective of the speaker. This strategy makes creative use of the possible generic interpretation in the sense that the persistent use of the pronoun seems to make clear that the hearer is not the referent in a strict sense. Generic use of *vos* eliminates the two-role situation between the speaker and the interlocutor, precisely because the speaker maps their own experience onto the interlocutor, insisting on the reference to the hearer by means of a REPETITION. This repetition expands itself and seems to have, therefore, more illocutive force. *Uno*, on the other hand, is unidentified, whereas *vos* indicates an identification and its contextual spread enhances this identification.

In Table 2, this qualitative interpretation is reflected in the quantitative distribution of the forms in the investigated corpus. Persistence of the form is measured by searching for repetitions of *vos* and *uno* respectively, in a range of 10 words before or after each registered form.

Table 2
Contextual persistence of *vos* vs. *uno*.

	<i>vos</i>	<i>uno</i>	total
Persistence	78/97%	2/3%	80/100%
No persistence	51/53%	46/47%	97/100%
OR: 34,5 X ² : 46,08 p < 0,001			177

As can be seen in Table 2, in contexts where there is persistence of a generic form in the context, there is a clear preference for the use of *vos*: 97%. In situations where there is no persistence of the form, there is no clear preference for either one, but obviously with a relative preference for *uno*, with 47% in contexts without persistence, vs. 3% in contexts with persistence. This should not surprise, because there is no specific reason for *vos* NOT to occur alone, just like *uno*, but there is communicative reason for *vos* to be repeated in the context.

When we look at the only two cases of *uno* being repeated in the context, it is clear that both instances may be interpreted as reflection of the hypothesized message, but their repetition is only that, a mere repetition, cf. 3), here repeated in 7):

- 7) *Yo después empecé a trabajar, muchos años después, en el hospital de Viedma. Yo a ella me la crucé un par de veces, ella llevaba a su mamá y sí. Nos saludamos así como con mucha... bueno, con cierta complicidad y simpatía, pero ninguna de las dos dijo nada, ¿viste? Yo ni siquiera grabé su apellido que a mí no me costaba nada, porque uno en el hospital... uno labura con los apellidos, vos vas... no se me ocurrió. O decirle: podemos juntarnos un día, a charlar de lo que nos pasó”* (CL, 96–97)
 'I then started to work, many years later, in the hospital of Viedma. I met her a couple of times, she would bring her mother and so. We greeted each other with much... well, with some complicity and sympathy, but neither of us said anything, you see? I didn't even register her last name, which would be no effort at all, because **one** in hospital... **one** works with last names, **you** would... it didn't occur to **me**. Or to say to her: we could come together one day, to talk about what happened to us'

In 7), *uno* appears in co-occurrence with *vos*. The reference with the speaker, *yo*, is very clear, because the context deals with the speaker's actual work. The reference to the speaker is also repeated many times, also in oblique pronouns (e.g., *no se me ocurrió* 'it didn't occur to **me**'). She is obviously talking about her own experience. The extrapolation of her experience (registering last names in hospital as an administrator) to a more generic situation therefore logically takes place using *uno*, without a need to project this experience onto the interlocutor. As far as its repetition is concerned, the context seems to indicate a mere retaking of discourse and not persisting in the referent of *uno*.

Interestingly enough, the speaker also once uses *vos* as if to explain to her interlocutor how last names are normally registered: *vos vas... 'you would...'*. However, this utterance is aborted, because the implication of the interlocutor might be irrelevant, moving directly to the statement that she never thought of it, a reference to '(some)one like me' being much more relevant to this situation than 'someone like you'.

The factor of repetition appears to be a very strong one, since it is not only reflected in the great preference for *vos* in repetitions in the context, but also, and moreover, in the OR score of 34,5 and the X² test of 46,08 with a corresponding $p < 0,001$. For these reasons, the next factor, verb tense of the corresponding event, will be tested in the remaining group of cases, where no repetition of the forms is concerned, because of the fact that repetition of the form may have overruled other possible factors of influence.

6.2. Verb tense of the corresponding event

In 8) an experience in the past is shared in the conversation. In this sense, it is very similar to 2), where a past experience in the imperfect tense is shared with the interlocutor. It also reminds the relevant factor studied in 6.1, repetition of the form in the context, which is also observed in 4), but not so much in 8):

- 8) *A [la cárcel de] Rawson fui un montón de veces. Era cada cuarenta y cinco días, cinco días seguidos. Íbamos con otras compañeras. Nos alojábamos... Impresionante el pueblo de... de Rawson y de Trelew. ¡Cómo nos contuvo a las mujeres! Incluso eh, hacían, hacían requisas de las pensiones. Y... y bueno, entraban a las habitaciones, revisaban todo, te sacaban toda la documentación, qué se yo. Y la gente nos... nos acompañaba. A nosotros... a mí, no me tocó nunca. Pero, acompañaban cuando había requisas. Y bueno, íbamos con Chiqui y Mirta (CC, 294).*
 'I went to Rawson [prison] on many occasions. That was each 45 days, 5 days in a row. We would go with other female friends. We used to stay... Most impressive, the village of... of Rawson and of Trelew. This support meant a lot to us women! They would even, eh, they would search the lodging houses. And... and well, they would enter the rooms, check everything, they would take your IDs, whatever. And the people, they would accompany us. To us... to me, it never happened. But, they would accompany us when there were searches. And well, we would go with Chiqui and Mirta'

Both in 4) and 8), we see that the reported experience is presented in imperfect tense accompanying generic use of *vos*, albeit just one instance in 8): oblique *te* 'your', which obviously cannot indicate the ID of the interviewer. In 8), the interviewee tells how the visits to the Rawson prison were, where her husband was held as a prisoner. She would travel from the city of Viedma to Rawson –some 500 km–together with other women who also had their husbands imprisoned there. They would stay a number of days in the village to be able to visit at the indicated hours. The way the experiences are told is such that the interlocutor is put in the perspective of the speaker—who indeed lived the events she is telling.¹³ But above all, the strategy to use the imperfect tense—the simple past verb tense that presents supportive, situation-like events, cf. De Jonge, 2019—allows the interlocutor to position herself in the presented perspective, as if she were going along with the presented events: 'we would go with other female friends [to the prison]', '[the militaries] would search the lodging houses', '[they would] check everything', 'they would take your IDs', '[the people] would accompany us'. The oblique use of *vos* (*te*, translated as the possessive pronoun 'your') includes the interlocutor in the event, even though she wasn't (couldn't have been) there. In 5), the same phenomenon was observed, a repetition of imperfect tenses, accompanied by a repetition of oblique¹⁴ references to the interlocutor, in search for her empathy towards the atrocities committed by the repressive forces: *ibas caminando por el pasillo y te paraban de golpe, te sacaban todos los papeles, te palpaban y te dejaban seguir* 'You (*vos*) would go walking through the hallway and they would stop you all of a sudden, they would take all your papers, they would search you physically and they would let you go'.

¹³ This information is known to one of the authors.

¹⁴ We will return to the oblique forms as a relevant factor below, in 6.3.

Example 9), on the other hand, presenting a number of present tenses, has a curious beginning, starting off with oblique *te* as a generic use of *vos*, but the speaker changes her strategy and turns to *uno*:

- 9) *los años de militancia gremial te dan perten... o sea, uno se siente que pertenece a algo, que está en un ámbito de lucha de algo. Eh, yo pertenezco a la gremial interna lucho por... y eso, más que la pérdida del trabajo en sí, el golpe duro fue, eh, que le pasó a la mayoría de los trabajadores del país. Eh, fue esa cosa de no tener pertenencia, del individualismo. No había lazo de solidaridad posible, porque mientras uno está en un sindicato, en un gremio, en una asociación, hay redes solidarias. Eh, bueno, fue eso, fue el fin de la solidaridad. La década del '90, la imposición (–) terrible, tajante del individualismo ¿no? (GE, 128)*
 'the years of being an active union's member give **you** bel... that is, **one** feels that **one** belongs to something, that **one** is in an ambience of fighting for something. Eh, I belong to the union's internals I fight for... and things, more than the loss of work in itself, that was a strong blow, eh, that happened to most of the workers in the country. Eh, it was this thing of not belonging, of individualism. There was no possibility of solidarity bonds, because as long as **one** is in a syndicate, a union, an organization, there are networks of solidarity. In the 90s, this terrible (–) heavy pressure of individualism, right?'

After the interruption, she continues using generic *uno*, first in an explicit pronoun and then twice in the verb ending (*pertenece* 'belongs', *está* 'is'). Not surprisingly, the speaker continues talking about herself and her membership of the union, with which she clearly identifies (*yo pertenezco, lucho por...* 'I belong, I fight for...'). She then returns to the use of *uno* when she claims that being a member of a syndicate is the opposite of individualism because the former offers social networks. In both instances, the speaker recurs to *uno* when referring to experiences the interlocutor knows that define her personal identity. These definitions –all personal– are coherently presented in present tense, the most egocentric tense, since it is always the speaker's present. The speaker extrapolates her experience to report on a certain state of affairs, in order to generalize what might happen to 'someone like her' under certain circumstances.

6.2.1. The past

As we have seen in 4) and in the rest of the corpus, generic use of *vos* is exploited in order to extrapolate the speaker's experience towards a more emphatic attitude, as to invite the hearer to 'posit herself in the speaker's place'. For this reason, it can be expected that this attitude may be associated to past events that extrapolate the circumstances (imperfect past) of the speaker onto the hearer. In other words, it can be expected that *vos* will show a relatively higher occurrence with events told in the imperfect past tense in contexts where the speaker is reporting on their own experiences but presents *vos* as the agent of the selected verbs. This would then be a literal (iconic) way to put *vos* 'you' in the place of *yo* 'I'. The imperfect past tense, as we know, is the past simple tense whose main function is to indicate supportive events in the past, as a background that may supply the circumstances for other, crucial events (de Jonge, 2000, 2019). These imperfect past events are therefore ideal for the interlocutor to identify themselves to the circumstances the speaker wants to narrate. Before presenting the quantitative results in Table 3 (below), first the expected qualitative correlation with the present tense and *uno* will be discussed.

6.2.2. The present

On the other hand, as we have seen in 9), and also in many other fragments of the corpus, a higher relative frequency of *uno* is to be expected when the associated verb is in the present tense. As has been said, *uno* refers to 'someone like me, the speaker', and is the most egocentric member of the couple that is being studied here. What is being generalized, in these cases, is the individual known experience, i.e., 'mine'. And in view of the fact that the present tense is the most egocentric tense –being the speaker's tense of the present situation—this is the expected place for *uno*.

In Table 3, the quantitative results of the qualitative predictions under 6.2.1 and 6.2.2 are shown.

Table 3

Tense and generic pronouns.

	Vos	Uno	total
Imperfect past tense	30/70%	13/30%	43/100%
Present tense	20/42%	28/58%	48/100%
Other tenses	1/17%	5/83%	6/100%
OR: 3,23 X ² : 6,4 p < 0,025 ^a			97

^a The statistical tests represent only the two top rows; the third row is given only in order to account for the totality of the corpus, but the total numbers (6) are considered to be neither qualitatively, nor quantitatively relevant. These are cases in which the forms appear with other tenses, or without a verb form.

Table 3 shows that the qualitative correlations that we have just presented indeed correspond to a systematic pattern: of all imperfect past tenses in the corpus of generic messages, 70% shows use of *vos*, whereas of all generic messages in the present tense, a relative preference for *uno* is observed (58%). So, it seems that the emphatic character of *vos* is indeed exploited in background descriptions in the past, whereas the more egocentric character of *uno* is more in its place in present contexts.

However, there are some apparent counterexamples, in which the respective pronouns appear with the least expected verb tense. But, as will be shown in 10) and 11), also these examples are in line with the general meaning hypothesis.

- 10) *Después, en la época de la dictadura como en... en realidad uno no sabía ya qué inventar, se formó un grupo que se llamó Inacayal que era de... digamos, no, no tenía afiliación partidaria ¿no? pero estábamos todos digamos, gente que de alguna manera quería hacer algo y bueno, y se, se formó Inacayal. La directora del Goodwill me invitó y yo empecé a participar* (MBro, 185)
 'Later, in the times of the dictatorship, since in... in fact **one** didn't know any more what to do, a group was created that was called Inacayal that was... let's say that they didn't have a political affiliation, right?, but all of us that were there, say, were people that in one way or another wanted to do something, and so, Inacayal was created. The director of Goodwill invited me and I started to participate'
- 11) *Participé en la puesta en marcha de la Ley de Innovación Tecnológica que fue tan importante para el desarro... para la inversión de tecnología en el país. [...] Después me presenté en un concurso y gané la Dirección Nacional, se presentaron sesenta personas, la Dirección del Fondo Tecnológico Argentino y Juan Llach era el Secretario. Yo siempre me río porque Juan es un tipo... como ser humano es... es un gran ser humano, **vos podés** coincidir o no con lo que él piensa pero como... de adentro él es una persona muy noble* (MBor, 165)
 'I participated in the implementation of the Law of Technical Innovation that was so important for the develop... for the investment of technology in our country. [...] Later, I applied for a position and I got a position as a Director in the National Board, sixty people applied, the Board of the Argentinian Technical Foundation and Juan Llach was the Secretary. I always have to laugh, because Juan is a guy... as a human being he is... he is a great person, **you** can agree with him or not with what he thinks but as... down deep inside he is a very noble person'

In 10), we see that the speaker selects *uno* with a verb in the imperfect past tense. If she would have selected *vos*, she would have been looking for involvement in the past circumstances by the hearer. However, as can be seen in the further context, she is focusing on the involvement of herself in the group of militants, with similar attitudes as herself, cf. 'they', 'us'. Therefore, *uno*, a generic form focused on the speaker, is more appropriate here than *vos*.

In 11), we see quite the opposite. The interviewee mentions the human capacities of Juan Llach, the then Secretary of National Economic Planning. The background information she is talking about is not on the past circumstances but rather about her personal, present impression of him. Using generic *uno* would present this impression once more from her own perspective, which is already clear ('he is a great person'), but it is far more logical to look for involvement of her interlocutor by choosing *vos*, as she tries to advance possible doubts her interlocutor might have: '**you** can agree with him or not' is clearly more inclusive than '**one** can agree with him or not'.

Examples 12) and 13) show that *uno* and *vos* are also used with other verb tenses. 12) shows an example of *uno* with a simple past tense (one of the 5 reported cases in Table 3) and 13) shows the only case of *vos*, also with a simple past tense.

- 12) *Sí, qué se yo, miraditas, a los once años, doce, miradita, qué se yo, un beso si es que te lo dabas con alguno, ¿no? En ese momento... nada, o sea así, por lo menos es lo que yo viví ¿viste? Después bueno, un poquito más adelante ya uno empezó a exhibirse más. Por ahí algún amor en Buenos Aires o algo de eso...* (risas) En Buenos Aires, sí. (CL, 90)
 'Yes, well, glances, when I was eleven, twelve, a glance, well, maybe a kiss that you gave someone, right? At that time... nothing, or at least that's how I lived it, you see? Afterwards, well, a little later **one** started to explore a bit more. Some lover in Buenos Aires or something like it... (laughter) In Buenos Aires, yes.'
- 13) Ent: *Cómo era esa... Si nos podés contar un poco más... ¿cómo era esa vida cotidiana, esa... esa militancia?*
 MTC: *¿De la militancia? Y... la militancia, ¡uh! Estábamos en todo.*
 Ent: *¿Cómo se desarticuló, no? Porque nos mencionaste que ya cuando llega el Golpe se desarticula, ¿no? Si nos podés profundizar...*
 MTC: *La desarticulación se fue produciendo lentamente. Hasta que quedamos solos. Nadie vino y te avisó nada. O sea que la desarticulación se produjo porque, viste como cuando vos estás haciendo algo, y cada vez va menos gente y, después ya no va más nadie. Entonces te vas, esa fue la desarticulación.* (MTC, 248)
 Int: *How was that... Could you tell us a bit more... how was daily life, as a... as an activist?*
 MTC: *As an activist? As activists, ah! We were everywhere.*
 Int: *How did it dissolve? Because you told us that when the dictatorship it dissolved, right? If you could tell us a bit more ...*
 MTC: *The dissolution went quite slowly. Until we were all alone. Nobody came and told you anything. That is, the dissolution took place because, you see, when you do something, and each time less people come, and then later nobody would come anymore. Then you leave, and that was the dissolution.*

In 12), the speaker is telling about her first love affairs in her childhood and talks about the innocence of first glances and an occasional kiss. Then she continues with *uno* and a verb in the simple past, indicating an event in focus, a main story line (de Jonge, 2000, 2019), so she is not talking about a background situation, for which the imperfect past is used, but a generalized personal experience, for which *uno* is the more logical option in view of its closer relation to I, the speaker, and not so much to the interlocutor, who also happens to be of another generation.

Example 13), on the other hand, is the only instance in which a form of *vos* is selected with a verb that is not in present or in past imperfect tense. In this case, again it is a simple past tense, with 'nobody' as a subject, and not *vos*, which is present as oblique *te* here. The speaker relates about the dissolution of the group of activists she belonged to during the Coup in Bariloche (Río Negro). She could have said 'Nobody came and told **one** anything', but *vos* 'you' seems to be the better option, maybe because the more passive role is less compatible with *uno*, which is closer to the speaker than *vos*.

The degree of activity of the referent, expressed in the grammatical role is the following factor that will be investigated in the following section. If our line of reasoning is correct, then it could be expected that generic *uno* is inherently seen as more active than generic *vos*, because in general, events identified with the speaker are more central than events identified with other participants (de Jonge, 2000a: 9). In this line of reasoning, also generic pronouns that are more easily related to the speaker, should be more easily related to an event as a participant in focus, a subject, than a generic pronoun that is less related to the speaker, such as *vos*.

6.3. Case (degree of activity)

In order to see how this factor may be relevant to the use of the generic pronouns, cf. 14):

- 14) CC: *En Bahía Blanca la requisita era muy, muy estricta, había que desvestirse. De hecho cuando llevaba a los chiquitos tenía que sacarles toda la ropa, los pañales, todo. Toda la ropa. Eh... si uno estaba indispuesta tenía que mostrar hasta el, el apósito. Eh, re vejatorio.*
 Ent: ¿En Rawson también tenían las mismas características?
 CC: *En Rawson no te desvestían, pero a mí me tocó una vez que entró una mujer y me tocó. Eh, me me me metió la mano y me miró de tal manera que yo me largué a llorar* (CC, 295)
 'CC: In Bahía Blanca the body search was very, very strict, it was necessary to undress. In fact, when I brought the kids, I had to take out all of their clothes, diapers, everything. All their clothing. Uhm... if **one** had her period, one had to show even the, the sanitary towel. Uhm, super offensive.
 Int: Did Rawson have the same characteristics?
 CC: In Rawson they didn't undress **you**, but it happened to me once that a woman came in and touched me. Uhm, she put her hand inside of me and looked at me in such a way that I started to cry.'

Example 14) illustrates the difference indicated in the end of Section 6.2.2 between the exploitation of *uno* and *vos* in relation to the degree of activity. In this example, the speaker is using *uno* ('someone like me') in relation to having her period. Interestingly enough, the speaker uses the non-feminine form *uno*, even though there is a female equivalent of the pronoun and the reported event is clearly part of the feminine realm. But since the generic pronoun *uno* is unmarked with respect to gender, and the marked form would imply greater personal implication, it is not surprising that most female referents choose the unmarked form *uno* instead of *una*. Selecting *vos* would even be less appropriate, not only because the speaker is clearly referring to a personal, embarrassing situation, but also because the interviewer, her interlocutor, is male. But when the speaker passes to the fragment in which she has to take her clothes off, she passes to *te*, the oblique form of *vos*. When talking about her period, she herself is the origin of the action, and therefore, the generic form closest to herself, *uno*, is the most appropriate form, but when she is talking about actions imposed by the others, like taking her clothes off, she is passive and looks for empathy of her interlocutor, and therefore selects oblique *te*. Table 4 shows that 14) is not just a good illustration of the principle, but is indeed representative of a general pattern:

Table 4
Degree of activity of the generic pronouns.

	Vos	Uno	total
Subject pronoun, verb ending	75/63%	45/37%	120/100%
Oblique case	53/100%	0/0%	53/100%
Object of preposition	1/25%	3/75%	4/100%
OR:10,46 X ² : 19,1 p < 0,001 ^a			177

^a Also here, the statistical tests represent only the two top rows; the third row is given only in order to account for the totality of the corpus, but the total numbers (4) are considered to be neither qualitatively, nor quantitatively explicable. These are cases in which the forms appear with prepositions, showing the nominative form of the pronoun, but being not coreferential with the verb ending.

As the results show, Table 4 confirms the expectations. Indeed, *uno* never appears in oblique case (0%); the only occurrences other than subject are three instances of object of a preposition, cf. 17) and 18) below. *Vos*, on the other hand, does occur frequently in oblique case (100% of all oblique cases are *vos*, and 43% of all 123 cases of generic *vos* are oblique), as well as in nominative case, either as a full pronoun, or as verb ending. So, in the most active situations, nominative, we find both *vos* and *uno*, but in less active, oblique cases only *vos*, just as expected. And even when the oblique form of *uno* is the expected form from a syntactical point of view, *vos* is selected systematically, cf. 15) and 16):

- 15) *en algunos casos por enfermedades y en algunos casos también como consecuencia de, de padecimientos de, de la dictadura es decir, uno no tiene idea de cuánto daño interior te, te, te pueden, te pueden hacer* (MBor)
 'in some cases because of illnesses and in some cases also as a consequence of, of sufferings due to, to the dictatorship that is, **one** doesn't have any idea of how much internal damage they may do to **you**'
- 16) *Y después, caí en la cuenta de que uno de los compañeros que aterrizó en segundo año más o menos era mucho más grande que nosotros. Si nosotros teníamos, ponele, promedio catorce o quince, ponele, él tenía como veinte. Y, además, sabemos que estaba... se estaba entrenando para policía o se estaba preparando en la Escuela de Policía, porque él aparte lo decía. Estaba estudiando en la escuela de policía, ¿qué venía a hacer con nosotros en el colegio? Uno en ese momento era tan inocente que no te lo preguntabas. Porque si él estaba estudiando para policía, ¿qué hacía metido con nosotros?* (CL)
 And later, I realized that one of the students that joined us unexpectedly in second year was a lot older than us. If we were, on average, say, fourteen or fifteen, he was about twenty. And moreover, we knew he was training to be a police officer or he was preparing himself at the Police Academy, because he also said so. If he was attending the police academy, why did he go to school with us? **One** at that moment was so innocent that you wouldn't even ask **yourself**. Because, if he was studying to become a police officer, what was he doing among us?

And finally, in 17)–20) the four cases are given in which the forms appear as an object of a preposition, first three with *uno*¹⁵, and then the only one with *vos*:

¹⁵ It is noteworthy that in 17) and 18), both instances of *uno* are accompanied with the oblique form *le*. But since these forms necessarily appear with a *uno*, and never without it, these instances were not classified as oblique cases of *uno* (cf. Table 3), but instead only as object of a preposition.

- 17) *Nos pasó algo muy particular. En mi casa, por ejemplo, mamá era recontra antiperonista porque parece ser que al papá lo habían dejado sin trabajo, y mi papá no no era, no era político. De todas maneras, pensar que la mujer participara en política, jamás. Y las chicas, por supuesto, tampoco. Era una gente muy solidaria, no eran caritativos, con la concepción de que la caridad en definitiva es darle al otro lo que **a uno** le sobra ¿no?, sino solidario en el sentido de acompañar, de ayudar, de compartir. Eso fue muy lindo de mis padres (CC, 50)*
 Something peculiar happened to us. At home, for example, mother was very much *antiperonista* because it appears that they had left my father unemployed, and my father wasn't, wasn't into politics. In any case, no way that my mother would ever participate in politics, never. And the girls, of course, also not. They were very solidary people, not charitable, with the idea that charity in the end is giving to the other what is of no necessity to **one**, right?, but solidary in the sense of accompanying, of helping, of sharing. That was very nice of my parents'
- 18) *Claro, evidentemente algún problema tenía. Un tipo muy conocido, eh, y trabajó mucho para potenciar mi culpa. Yo era la responsable de la muerte del bebé y además que la organización a la que yo pertenecía éramos casi la peor lacra. Pero lo que yo no puedo entender, cómo una militante con cosas claras y demás, seguí yendo tres o cuatro sesiones a que ese tipo me martirizara, ¿qué le pasa a **uno** por la cabeza, no? (MBor, 287)*
 'Of course, obviously he had some problem. A very well-known guy, eh, and he did a lot to enhance my guilt. I was the responsible of the death of the baby and moreover, the organization to which I belonged, we were almost the worst of the worst. But what I do not understand, how can a militant woman with clear ideas and so on, I went to three or four sessions so that this guy could torture me, what goes through **one's** mind, right?'
- 19) *Y se levanta Contreras con una pistola, me pone la pistola acá [indica la sien], de verdad, gatilla incluso, acá, ¿viste? Y salta otro y dice: pendeja de mierda, o sea, no te hagas la boluda, habló. Así que, bueno, ahí la verdad que me apretaron mal, igual yo mucho no les podía decir, y además qué les voy a decir, qué les iba a decir, así que... pero, bueno, también preguntaban acerca **de uno** siempre, de otra gente, de mis hermanos siempre (CL, 93).*
 And Contreras stands up with a pistol, he puts the pistol here [indicates her temple], really, with the cock, here, you see? And another one jumps in and says: shitty bitch, or, don't play stupid, speak. And so, the truth is that they treated me badly, but I didn't have much to say to them, and moreover what am I going to say to them, what could I say to them, so... but, well, they also would always ask about **one**, of other people, always about my brothers and sisters'
- 20) *Esto... no sé cómo se llama... de las redes sociales, que la gente dice cada cosa que uno dice: 'no puede ser'. Deciden denostarte **a vos** y te transforman en una especie de monstruo al que te atribuyen cosas que no pueden mostrar, que no, pero no importa, ya está instalado, eso es como que es así (MBor, 168)*
 'This... I don't know what it's called... the social media, that people say anything that one says: 'it can't be'. They decide that they will offend **you** and they transform you in some sort of monster to which they attribute things to you that they cannot show, no, but it doesn't matter, it's already there, that is as if it is true'

In 17)–19) we observe uses of *uno* very much connected to I, the speaker. The generic use of *uno* in all three cases clearly refers to 'some**one** like me'. In 17), *uno* refers to 'one of my family'; in 18), the speaker is clearly talking about herself, since she is talking about her doubts about herself when continuing the consults with a psychologist who was clearly mistreating her. Her doubts are expressed in the phrase 'what goes through **one's** mind?', but the context makes clear that with *one* she means herself. Also in 19), the person closest to *uno* is the speaker herself: she says that in the interrogatories it was common that they would ask about '**one**, other people, *my* brothers and sisters'. In spite of the more general pattern, here the referent of *uno* is the more passive one, as opposed to what we have seen in 12) and 14), but these are all situations where the interlocutor has no experience and is less likely to be chosen as the generic referent. The less expected use of *uno* is probably a way to mitigate the personal experience of the speaker, a way to take more distance.

The situation in 20), however, is one where the interlocutor may have personal experiences, and therefore, use of generic *vos* is not surprising. The example starts with a nominative use of *uno*, with the verb *decir* 'to say'. But then she describes a situation where others start insulting the referent on social media, a situation where it is logical to look for empathy by the interlocutor, since these experiences may be shared by both.

7. Conclusions

First of all, this study has shown that two forms that are used to convey similar, generic messages are not just two different ways to say the same thing (as in Labov's description of variation), but indeed present different communicative intentions in discourse: generic *vos* is a way for the speaker to look for commitment by the hearer, whereas generic *uno* is used to generalize or downgrade the responsibility of the speaker for a certain event.

Moreover, this study makes a contribution to the knowledge of a special group of speakers of an Argentinian variety of Spanish. The fact that the preference for *vos* vs. *uno* in generic contexts allows us to notice that putting the focus on the hearer is very relevant for this particular linguistic community. Having two alternatives, one of drawing the interlocutor's attention to put himself in the place of the speaker (a more definite reference), and the other of watering down a reference to be more vague or less definite, the community under focus seems to be more inclined to indicate the relevance of the hearer. Future research could be directed to the distribution of these pronouns in other Spanish speaking communities.

But more importantly, what we also have tried to do in this paper is to show that an analysis, based on an invariant, stable MEANING of a linguistic sign may lead to an insightful analysis of the INTERPRETATIONS of these forms where these forms appear to have a different meaning than the basic one. From the analysis it is clear that the basic meaning is still related to the specific interpretations of generic uses, and therefore, there is no need to posit a separate meaning for this particular use of the forms under study. Thus, there is good reason not to speak of the generic MEANING of the forms, but instead of a generic INTERPRETATION. This paper is making a systematic distinction between the constant semantic contribution of a form (its meaning) and the interpretations of utterances.

And therefore, for reasons of logic, the term 'meaning' should only be used for the basic meaning of any linguistic sign, and the use of the sign in different (groups of) contexts should be addressed as the form having different interpretations. So, whenever we are dealing with a specific group of messages, like the generic ones we have been dealing with here, we should logically be speaking of a specific interpretation of the basic meaning, as the result of its use in a particular group of messages. Speaking of different meanings of individual linguistic signs would lead to the theoretical undesired situation that the analyst

would have to refrain from a basic one-to-one relation between form and meaning. The fundamental distinction between meanings and interpretations of meanings makes possible a coherent semantic analysis of linguistic signs.

Declaration of competing interest

We, the authors, declare that there's no financial/personal interest or belief that could affect the objectivity of the results presented in our submission. To our best knowledge, there are no existing competing interests.

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