

# Somos Españoles aquí

Dialect as an index of pride and cultural difference in Buenos Aires

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## Abstract

A dialect is linked to social identity and a distinctive scheme of cultural values, and in this paper I show that the traits of the Buenos Aires dialect are linked to the characterization of its citizens as ‘snobby.’ Specifically there are two key traits that do not appear as standardized aspects of any other South American country’s *habla culta*, or chosen national dialect. These are the *vos*, a pronoun that completely eclipses the *tu* as the standard second-person singular; and the pronunciation of *sheísmo*, wherein the double L is a voiceless post-alveolar sibilant fricative, and is pronounced as the “s” sound in “mission.” This paper will examine films, prescriptives, utterances, metadiscourse and individual survey data in order to analyze these particularities of *rioplatense* Spanish and their implications in production and perceptions of Argentinian culture.

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During my preparation for a semester abroad in Buenos Aires, Argentina, I was provided with contradictory descriptions of the country that was about to become my home. Depending on who was telling the story, I was headed toward one of two places. The first of these was the cosmopolitan “Paris of South America,” an anomalous European city hidden inside the ‘third-world,’ home to Jorge Luis Borges and fine wines. The other description was less appealing, and was most often utilized by someone who had lived elsewhere in Latin America. This Argentina was a prejudiced, snobby and anachronistic place, one that did not fit in with its neighboring countries but was not allowed equivalence with ‘first-world’ Europe and the United States that it so longed to be a part of. One ethnographer goes as far as proclaiming that middle-class, twentieth century *porteños* (residents of Buenos Aires) see themselves as “Europeans lost on a Latin American continent” (Bass, 2008).

This second vision was often accompanied by the question “why would you go *there* to study Spanish?” A Spanish teacher even called the *rioplatense* dialect (a term referring to the River Plate region of Buenos Aires and Uruguay) “useless,” mocking the Italian cadence to their accent and their pronoun of choice, the *vos*. Upon learning about the Argentinian pronoun system, one commenter on a website for informal language tutoring remarked, “So *rioplatense* is just Bourgeoisie Spanish!” General consensus seemed to be that the region’s dialect, from its pronominal system to its unique double L sound, was markedly idiosyncratic and was somehow related to the snobbish and even racist nature of Argentinian national identity. As soon as I arrived in Buenos Aires, my program held a “*rioplatense* bootcamp” to train us in speaking like a *porteño*. It quickly became apparent that their form of *castellano* (the preferred term for Spanish in Argentina) was a mark of pride for *porteños*, and in my first few weeks there my host mother would repeat my neutral Spanish accent in a teasing tone, pointing out the differences.

I will be examining the metadiscourse surrounding the *rioplatense* dialect, as reflected in the popular film culture, literature, grammar, register prescriptives, and other tokens of metadiscourse in an attempt to understand the link between their language and the particular notion of “whiteness” or “Europeanness” that pervades Argentinian identity. The data I compiled comprised pronoun tokens in films, dictionaries dating from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, historical discourse on language from letters, literature and theater, linguistic studies from the past century and modern attitudes on language through survey data and online grammar forums.

A dialect is broadly defined as regional speech patterns, and I will use it as such. Many linguists have identified the link between dialect and social status, as well as dialect’s ability to index a distinctive scheme of cultural values. Sociolinguistic pioneer Gumperz goes so far as to

say that there is no division between social and linguistic categories, because just like words and utterances, social status and role are “abstract communicative symbols” dependent on context (Gumperz 1972:15). One’s chosen manner of speaking is therefore governed by environmental stimuli and knowledge of the addressee as well as the speaker’s own cultural background.

There are several traits of a dialect that can index its associated cultural values. I have identified code-switching, honorifics and the discourse surrounding register maintenance as integral to understanding what it is about the way that Argentinians speak that is classified as pretentious. Varying levels of competence in the use of a particular dialect are indexical of a speaker’s class and level of education. This phenomenon is identified by Gumperz and Blom in their study on code switching amongst speakers of *Ranamål* and *Bokmål* in Norway, as well as by Agha in his examination of Received Pronunciation (RP) in Britain (Blom 1972, Agha 2007). This practice is defined by alternating between registers, or levels of formality employed within a dialect. *Rioplatense* broadly refers to the region encompassing the province of Buenos Aires as well as parts of Southern Uruguay, but there are distinguishable differences across this region. For example, *rioplatense* speakers from Bahia Blanca in the South of the Buenos Aires province are described as *bonaerense* speakers, a demarcation that is often synonymous with mispronunciation within the city of Buenos Aires. Certain registers are valued precisely for their ability to conceal a speaker’s geographic origins, and competence in using and comprehending the standard speech of the upper class enables social mobility and career advancement. A continuing trope around the discourse of *rioplatense* is this ability of certain linguistic traits to mark a speaker as provincial, such as the difference between those who use the *sheismo* pronunciation and those who use the *zheismo* pronunciation. Negative register discourse has

historically centered on rural speech habits as well as the urban dialects that arose during peak immigration to the region.

Hill puts forth several provocative questions about the nature of racism in language, and in particular which kinds of discourses can “count” as racist. Drawing on Urcioli’s study of the bilingual Puerto Rican population in New York City, Hill examines the bilingual speaker’s necessity for orderly distinction between the public and private sphere, and their anxiety over proper maintenance of English in the public sphere (1998:682). I show that racialized discourse in Argentina has a bifurcated origin; first during the construction of the nation state which was comprised of genocide, and later at the turn of the twentieth century when 52% of the capital city’s population were immigrants. After examining the discourse surrounding and history of values associated with certain speech acts I hypothesize that rigorous maintenance of the formal register by lower class, as well as non-urban speakers in Buenos Aires, has an underlying classist discourse.

Honorific usage carries many different meanings and intents. It can be effacing or elevating for speaker or addressee; one can use an honorific term in order to elevate the addressee or one can choose a non-honorific in order to elevate oneself. Theories on the development of an honorific system often center on the hierarchy within an existing royal structure, like much of the scholarship on the highly developed Javanese honorific system. In her examination of honorific usage in several different languages, Irvine instead posits that it is much more related to the domestic power relations rather than the sociopolitical ones. Comparing the vast Javanese system with the two registers within Senegalese Wolof, Irvine also emphasizes that honorific registers and non-honorific registers are not simply isosemantic parallels, meaning that a register is more than just its pragmatic value (1998:62-65). The

metapragmatic discourse of a language is just as valuable, if not more, in understanding social hierarchy. The idea that a register is tied to one denotation prohibits the study of register relationships (Irvine 1998:56-64). Similar to Wolof, my data shows that *rioplatense* has two distinct registers and that the employment of the more formal register in certain contexts can carry honorific intent. Many dialects in diverse languages are encoded with honorifics, and by identifying this trait in *rioplatense* I am placing their formal register within the larger discussion of honorific language.

In the case of *rioplatense*, I would like to look at discursive practices and grammatical patterns that mark cultural difference rather than efface it, primarily ones that mark *porteños* as European in contrast with the rest of South America and even with the more remote regions of Argentina. I plan to primarily draw from films and look at tokens of the word *vos* in order to identify attitudes towards various speakers and addressees in the popular imaginary. I will also examine the variant form of ‘*yeísmo*’ that occurs in the Rio de la Plata region, also known as ‘*sheísmo*’ or ‘*zheísmo*.’<sup>1</sup> This phenomenon describes the groove fricative pronunciation of the double L letter in Argentinian *castellano*; in this practice the word “*ella*” would be heard as “*ey-sha*.” This pronunciation idiosyncrasy blurs the intelligibility of the *porteño* accent even further than the *vos*, because it creates incidental homophones that affect intention and meaning (for example, the utterance “*cayó*” (he fell) and “*calló*” (he was silent) are pronounced identically).

## **Methodology**

Through research into historical context and development as well as the examination of

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<sup>1</sup> I did not track this trait in films because my lack of fluency makes it difficult to distinguish between the “sh” and “zh” sounds

the honorific register in films and literature as artifacts of enacted representation, I have attempted to understand the origins and implications of Argentinian identification with Europeanness, as well as notions of urban, upper-class superiority. I have watched twenty films from the last thirty years, the majority of which were made in Buenos Aires. I recorded pronominal encounters in these films, assuming that a preterite, imperfect or future conjugation was *voseo* unless there was a specific indication of *tuteo*. I examined each of these tokens for pronoun, verb form, inflection, gender and implied or explicit social status of speaker and addressee and context.

Screenwriters for the most part intend films to be realistic portrayals of dialogue interactions between people in the region that they are representing. Patterns throughout this data should illuminate general perceptions and attitudes towards speech in the greater Buenos Aires area, who is imagined to speak in what way, and who merits being spoken to in a specific manner. Woolard paraphrases Silverstein, saying “to the extent that speakers conceptualize language as socially purposive action- we must look at their ideas about the meaning, function, and value of language in order to understand the degree of socially shared systematicity in empirically occurring linguistic forms. (1998:4).” Through this logic I use actual speech acts as well as discourse on dialect in order to understand the social structure of the Buenos Aires community and perceptions of the relationships within that structure.

Through twenty films and 900 tokens of pronoun usage, I have been able to get a small slice of discourse patterns in the Rio de la Plata region, as well as the ideologies surrounding this discourse. Secondary sources provided further information on the topic, over the last century multiple linguists have focused all their attentions on the linguistic oddities produced in this region. So prevalent is the pronominal discussion in this field that they have created verbs for



addressing a person with the *tu* or the *vos*, “*tutear*” and “*vosear*.” I also examined what Agha refers to as “artifacts that disseminate normative discourses,” in this case everything from early dictionaries and prescriptives for speech and writing of Argentinian Spanish to modern day grammar forums in order to find tokens of reported speech and language attitudes (Agha 2007:213).

I also utilized data from several surveys of *porteño* acquaintances in order to enrich the information gathered from films. The survey recipients were asked to comment on their pronoun system, pronunciation and the differences that these markers create between their speech and the Spanish from other regions. I was also interested in responses about the linguistic interchange between Spanish and other languages, particularly indigenous ones. The discourse surrounding the linguistic pedigree of *rioplatense* is indicative of identity construction among *porteños*.

### **Grammatical structure of the Argentinian dialect**

The pronoun system of Argentina is comprised of *tu*, *vos*, and *usted* as singular second person pronouns and *ustedes* as the sole second-person plural pronoun. The *voseo* is unequivocally the preferred form of informal address, though in Argentina it has developed as a grammatical hybrid with the *tu*. The form is comprised of *voseo* verbal forms in the present indicative and the positive imperative, with all other tenses using the *tuteo* verbal form but the *vos* pronoun (Hughson 2009:82). Rather than adopting the reflexive form that corresponds to the *vos*, *os* (following the reflexive form of the *vosotros* pronoun), the *voseo* uses *te*, which is the reflexive in the *tuteo*. For example, a reflexive verb such as *dormirse* is conjugated as *te dormís* rather than *os dormís*. The proliferation of *ustedes* as the sole plural second person pronoun in all

America can be attributed to the confusion between *vos* and *vosotros*. The preposition for a direct object is structurally interchangeable, either *ti* or *vos*, though in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Argentina the *vos* has almost entirely eclipsed the *ti* (for example, “*tengo algo para vos*”). The same process has occurred with the circumstantial complement; traditionally in South America *contigo* is used, though more recently Argentina has adopted *con vos*. Further complicating this hybridization, certain regions in Northeastern Argentina have created an entirely new form, *con ti* (Rojas Mayer 2008: 26). The hybridization can also be noted in the negative imperative form. While positive imperative is always in the *voseo* form, the closeness of this form with the *tuteo* (a diacritic on the final syllable is the only distinguishing factor) leads to the coexistence of the two forms. Fontanella de Weinberg puts forth the hypothesis that form hybridization is at the root of the *tú/vos* alternation, because there was a lack of two distinct systems between which a speaker had to choose. Rather than an explicit communicative option, speakers were provided with this hybrid that encompassed multiple referents.

The disappearance of the future tense is another interesting anomaly in *Rioplatense* Spanish, and one that I saw regularly in conversations while in Buenos Aires. Rather than using the common future conjugation, *porteños* almost exclusively rely on the *ir+a+infinitive* construction to express an action that is occurring in the future. For example, rather than “*mañana comeré almuerzo*” (tomorrow I will eat lunch), they will say “*mañana voy a almorzar*” (tomorrow I am going to eat lunch). Vidal de Battini cites the disappearance of the future tense as a nation wide occurrence, not just in the rural regions towards the North where she first notes the pattern (1964:65). The *voseo* is therefore never invoked in the future tense, though it is not uncommon for the *ir+a+infinitive* construction to include the *vos* pronoun.

The accent mark is necessary in the orthographical marking of the *voseo* verb form because Spanish accent rules dictate that the second to last syllable is naturally accented in the absence of diacritics. Through this method, an addressee can identify use of the *vos* without the inclusion of the pronoun itself. Pro-drop is very common in Spanish the world over and also occurs in Argentina, because the verb form implies the referent qua address choice. In the case of the *vos*, the lack of irregular root change and the stressed final syllable expresses this. Roughly one fourth of recorded pronouns included the pronoun rather than using pro-drop, in various contexts. According to my source data, utilizing the pronoun itself can have several different implications. Calling attention or adding stress to a phrase commonly requires use of the pronoun. An example of this appears in the 2001 film *La Ciénaga* (The Swamp), when a drunkenly belligerent upper-class woman orders her maid to stop lifting her off the floor by yelling “*dejàme, vos!*” The addressee is apparent in the imperative conjugation, but she uses affect and the impersonal pronoun in order to express distaste and frustration. Another use of the *vos* is as affectionate or intimate name replacement. A common greeting phrase between close friends in the Rio de la Plata area is “*Che, vos*” wherein the *vos* is a nickname like “pal” or “friend” in English. In the 2009 film *Plan B*, two characters developing a romantic relationship from a friendship use this particular expression of *vos* when one tells the other “*te veo en 3-D, a vos*” (I see you in 3-D). Although the verb (*ver*) already carries a pronominal indicator, the repetition is exemplary of the *vos* standing in for a name or affectionate term.

### **Ethnographic and linguistic history of Argentina**

Over one third of Argentina's population resides in the province of Buenos Aires, which is the center of the *rioplatense* linguistic region. The autonomous city of Buenos Aires is home to a large and influential proportion of the nation's population, serving as the economic, political, and cultural capital while also setting linguistic trends. Language is an integral factor in the long-standing tension between *la ciudad* and *las provincias*, and while both the lexical and phonological aspects I have chosen to investigate exist everywhere in Argentina, there is by no means uniformity across regional dialects. Consistent migration back and forth between the capital and *el interior* does little to soften the rural/urban dichotomy.

During my time in Buenos Aires, my born-and-bred *porteño* host sister Luchi was planning a wedding with Marcos, a man from *el interior* who worked as a cattle appraiser for a company based in the capital. The two of them loved to tease one another and one evening after Marcos had returned from *las pampas* on business Luchi asked me, “¿cómo suena su acento?” (how does his accent sound?) She and her mother Cristina began to imitate it, though to my untrained ear the two accents sounded virtually identical. Perhaps they were mimicking vocabulary only found outside of the capital, or a variant on the *rehilado* double L that I will discuss later. However affectionate their teasing, Luchi and Cristina were marking his speech as foreign to their own, the undeniable prestige dialect of the country since its inception. In the colonial era, proper usage of *rioplatense* signified closeness as well as legibility to the royal court and the *criollo* elite. The struggle between the interior and the city for cultural dominance and political power was central to the long period of civil war following independence. While the linguistic developments of the two opposing entities are inextricable, there is enough geographical disparity that each has a distinct history and unique factors contributing to their difference.

Historiography of the nation often characterizes pre-colonization Argentina as a “depopulated desert,” traversed by “nomadic and barbarous hunters.” In actuality some half a million lived in the lands between the River Plate, the borders of the Incan empire and the rainforests of today’s Brazil (Bartolomé 1985:40). Detailed records of pre-colonization languages for this region do not exist; the only of these that survive come through priests and colonizers who noted their names and where they were spoken. Quichua provided a lingua franca for the evangelization mission and served as the primary mode of communication between the indigenous people and the Spanish (Rojas 1985:124-127). It is still widely spoken today in the Northern provinces, and beginning with the moment of colonization it has contributed to the Spanish vocabulary in the region and across all of South America.

The second, more permanent settlement of Buenos Aires was founded in 1580 after several attempts thwarted by attacks from the native populations. The largest cities of modern Argentina were initially settlements along the road to Cuzco, a much more profitable viceroyalty of the Spanish crown. The linguistic structure of *rioplatense* was firmly based in social hierarchies during this formative colonial period. A system of honorifics had developed in colonial society, similar to the ones that existed elsewhere in Latin America. *Peninsulares* (the original Spanish settlers to the region) were treated with name intensifiers and modifiers, intended to manifest respect. These honorifics were also extended to the *criollos*. *Indios* and *negros* were excluded from these terms and instead had descriptive modifiers, the method used by the elite to differentiate them from one another (Rojas 2008:28-32).

The process of post-colonial nation building in Argentina was largely comprised of genocidal campaigns towards the native populations and lax immigration policies geared towards attracting Europeans to the country. Throughout the eighteenth century, the relatively affluent

port of Buenos Aires maintained tense relations with these populations, though intermarriage was common and the indigenous languages of Quechua, Quichua, Mapuche and especially Guaraní lent several words to the lexicon of the pampas (the vast farmland of central Argentina). Anecdotally, the word “*gaucho*,” the solitary cowboy of the pampas that became a romanticized national icon, comes from the Quechua word “huachu” meaning “orphan”, though an 1890 vocabulary published in Buenos Aires claims that it is actually of corrupted Spanish derivation. (Granada 1890:35) This attitude of lexical purity went alongside the ethnic cleansing that was occurring at the time in the so-called Conquest to the Desert, a series of wars against the Indian populations of the Pampas, Patagonia and Gran Chaco regions (Bartolomé 1985:40). The result of this conquest was the decimation, but not extinction, of indigenous populations throughout these regions. Despite the fact that they had not been completely extinguished, this “invisibilization” of the *indios* became integral to nation building ideology (Gordillo 2008:3). This process resulted in the relegation of indigenous peoples to a past imaginary, a “wild and destructive force” that had to be eliminated for the birth of a nation. Until the late twentieth century, *los indigenos* were legible to the state only through their value as wage laborers, organized under state policy into *reducciones* or forced labor settlements.

During the *conquista al desierto*, state-encouraged immigration primarily from Southern European countries began ‘whitening’ the population. Prominent Argentinian intellectuals like Juan Bautista Alberdi and Domingo Faustino Sarmiento glorified the process, their writings influenced by social Darwinist and positivist Europeans. They saw the flood of immigration as key to their country’s modernization (Helg 1990:38). These Argentinian intellectuals of the period readily provided justification for *la conquista*. Still cherished as an Argentinian literary classic, Sarmiento’s *Facundo* focused on the dialectic between civilization and barbarism,

upholding Buenos Aires as the progressive, modern space in contrast with the barbaric *desierto* (1852). He was reacting against the heavily militarized *caudillo* political system that had emerged in the provinces and posed a real threat to Buenos Aires sovereignty. Sarmiento explicitly outlined and valorized the oppositions that characterized this dichotomy: Buenos Aires was superior to rural areas, a consolidated government was favorable as opposed to a confederation of independent provinces, educated society rather than ignorant masses, and fair skin rather than dark skin (Joseph 2000:341-342). Well into the next century, textbooks emphasized a “cultural homogeneity” to the Argentinian population that Gordillo and Hirsch equate with a sense of Europeanness (2008:10).

Aside from the progressive governments of President Hipólito Irigoyen, most of the governing regimes in this early twentieth century period were highly conservative and attempted to foment the white character of the nation. Their policies encouraged European immigration but also placed heavy restrictions on this new working class mostly comprised of Italians and Spaniards, fearful of “foreign ideologies” such as communism, socialism and anarchism (Gordillo 2008:5). These conservative politicians began to reject immigration as the solution to Argentina’s “civilization problem,” and instead proposed an alternate history where the formerly “barbarous” *gauchos* and *criollos* were the descendants of true Argentinian culture. They feared a “gringocracia” at the hands of European immigrants during the period. Thus the civilization and barbarism dialectic carries contradictory interpretations, and these interpretations were crafted and employed by politicians of the twentieth century depending on their intention.

Evidence of this paradigm shift comes in the form of linguistic prescriptives from the era. Daniel Granada published the *Vocabulario Rioplatense Razonado* in 1889, when there was already a high rate of European immigration to Argentina. In his introduction he describes the

defeat of the indigenous peoples in the land by the “resolute Spaniards” who had come to create a new nationality. Perhaps he did not see the parallels between that historic moment and his current one, but his documentation of “well-reasoned” *rioplatense* seems to be the preservation of a cultural artifact on the verge of alteration. Just twenty years after the publishing of the Buenos Aires vocabulary, the 1911 *Diccionario de Argentinismos* decries the “Andalusian propensity” of the “ignorant plebeians” to mispronounce the double L (Segovia 1911). Many of the newly acquired aspects of the Argentinian language are categorized in this dictionary under a section entitled “barbarisms.” This attitude shift reveals a growing resentment towards Spanish immigration, one that was foreshadowed by Sarmiento when he lamented the fact that Argentina had thus far only attracted Spaniards, a people whose brains he claimed had been “atrophied by five centuries of the Inquisition” and who sunk even further in his estimation through their practices of intermarriage in South America (Helg 1990:40). The *Diccionario* goes on to describe Buenos Aires as much more forward thinking and cosmopolitan than other South American metropolises, and attributes this to its contact with Northern European regions.

Peninsular Spanish was not the only European language to come into contact with Argentinian castellano. Both Italian and German had substantive effects on had through borrowed words joining the lexicon and the gaining prominence of what Vidal de Battini calls the *tonada Italiana*, a new structure of intonation that closely mirrored the Neapolitan accent (1964). The hybrid of Italian and Spanish slang spoken by the dockworkers in the poor immigrant neighborhoods of La Boca and San Telmo became known as *lunfardo* (a slang word that initially denoted “thief), a lexicon that was heavily reproduced in songs and poetry of the period. Rojas Mayer identifies this *lunfardo* as speech characteristic of the lowest sociocultural level in Buenos Aires, a discrete entity separate from the *gauchesco* or *campesino* speech found



in the provinces. A more recent linguistic study examines evidence that the modern Buenos Aires intonation derives directly from Italian intonation, because the historical moment of accent divergence from other Spanish varieties coincides with peak Italian immigration (Colantoni 2004:117).

Pride in Italian heritage was expressed in the transgressive space of the *cocoliche*, a dance still practiced in Argentina's Carnival in which immigrants mimicked themselves pretending to be authentic Argentinian gauchos. This convoluted chain of cultural representation is indicative of which aspects of the Argentinian reality were to become integral to modern notions of *la Argentineidad*. Immigrants appropriated the '*cultura gauchesca*' in an attempt to reverse racialized discourse against them, renovating the figure of the typically *criollo* or mixed-raced *gaucho*. Parodic in nature, these performances were an attempt to prove assimilation and woo the favor of the *porteño* elite. The use of this cultural icon enabled rapid acceptance by their audience, performing on their own terms but "cajoling" their *porteño* audience with the overarching theme of nationalism (Siegel 2000:61). The *cocoliche* represents a strange intersection of a deeply ingrained xenophobia and an equally strong fascination with and desire for European immigration. The spheres in which immigrants were able to display their cultural heritage were what Hill refers to as 'licensed,' a clear example of the cleansing 'ethnification' process that she refers to in present day Puerto Rican communities in New York City (Hill 1998:682). By placing them within the controlled cultural sphere of theatrical 'folklore' and heritage celebration, *porteños* could make the impinging immigrant population seem less threatening.

Beyond the colonial imposition of Quichua, several indigenous languages were in linguistic contact with the *castellano* of Argentina. Mapuche (or Araucano) had the most

influence in the regions of intense commercial and cultural interchange across the Chilean border, both to the South in Patagonia and the North in the provinces of Salta and Jujuy. Notably much of this shared vocabulary does not appear in the official Spanish Academy dictionary, and if it does is labeled a *chilenismo*. The Guaraní-speaking region of modern Paraguay was particularly influential because of Paraguayan immigration to Argentina, and because of Jesuit and Franciscan missionaries who chose the intersection between Brazil, Paraguay and Argentina as their headquarters. Rojas Mayer identifies several aspects of Guaraní that have geographic influence extending beyond these bilingual regions, including nasalization of vowels, and a particular “musical” intonation which she says is often incorrectly attributed to the influence of Italian.

Responding to a survey question about the indigenous linguistic influences on *castellano* in Argentina, one Buenos Aires university student originally from the province of Córdoba had the succinct answer of “*nada*.” While it is true that these languages had minimal influence on Spanish beyond arcane phonemic traits and a small regionally dependent vocabulary, the dismissive attitude towards the multilingual character of the nation seems consistent with the Gordillo and Hirsch’s logic of “invisibilization.” Hirsch studies the Guaraní in the Salta province and their province-wide bilingual education program implemented in 1992, examining language resurgence as a political tool in the indigenous representation struggle. The Guaraní population in Argentina is a result of massive immigration from Bolivia beginning in the late nineteenth century and intensifying during the Chaco War between Bolivia and Paraguay in the mid twentieth century. The program has begun to cultivate a pan-Guaraní sentiment across national borders, and the community has also opened up interethnic dialogue with other indigenous groups in the Northeast region (Hirsch 2003:94-96). I cite the case of the Guaraní as an example

of a modern linguistic community in Argentina that I believe is completely outside *porteño* national identity, and one that precludes the notion of Argentina as a ‘European’ country.

The regionally oriented dialectic between civilization and barbarism persisted, albeit more subtly, throughout the twentieth century. Drawing primarily on ethnographic work done in 1995 and 1996, Galen Joseph examined notions of whiteness and Europeanness among the middle class in Buenos Aires and discovered contradictory understandings of Argentina as European, yet excluded from the ‘first world.’ Joseph identified a racial discourse in this community’s fixation on global perceptions of Argentina’s “seriousness.” Joseph understands this concept of seriousness to directly index what Pierre Bourdieu calls the “cultural capital” necessary to attract foreign investments and advance in the global hierarchy of nations. Through this logic, she finds this question of “seriousness” to be encoded with a racialized anxiety of the “Latin Americanization” of Argentina (2000:344-348).

The most interesting example she examines is middle class perceptions of president Carlos Menem, who assumed the presidency during economic crisis of the 1990s and applied neoliberal policy to stabilize the country. While his economic restructuring was financially beneficial to middle class *porteños*, many of them used this discourse of seriousness to criticize him, and focused much of their mockery on his “provincial” accent that identified him as from the racialized *interior* rather than Buenos Aires. The president became a subject of ridicule when he attempted to take on *porteño* attributes, abandoning his *caudillo* costume his figure as governor of La Rioja had intended to draw strong parallels with the central caudillo character in *Facundo* and undergoing several plastic surgeries (2000:354). One interviewee went as far as to describe a picture of Menem, his daughter, and Bill and Hillary Clinton as “*dos personas y dos indios*,” excluding the darker-skinned Menem and his daughter from white, North American

personhood (2000:350). Menem himself is not of indigenous descent, although he can be characterized as outside the European racial ideal as the son of Syrian immigrants who arrived to La Rioja province in the 1910s.

In the 2004 film *Buena vida delivery*, a young man in the suburbs of Buenos Aires is seriously struggling after the 2001 economic collapse. He begins a romance with a gas station attendant and for a short while at the beginning of the film it seems as if the two of them can overcome the outright misery that their fellow Argentinians are suffering through, at least one of them is employed and they even have the opportunity to emigrate to Spain as many did during the crisis. Without warning her family arrives from the provinces, announcing that they will be staying with them for just a few days, and the protagonist is welcoming towards them. The father is a highly ridiculous character, with an exaggerated provincial accent and lofty, nonsensical business ideas. From here arrival the film's events spiral, the father opens a donut store within the protagonist's apartment and disregards his quiet, industrious plans. It ends in violence, with the protagonist hiring a criminal to forcibly evict the provincial father, and then being robbed and beaten by the thug. Intended as a comedy, when looked at through Joseph's lens of "seriousness" the existential anguish of the middle-class of Buenos Aires becomes more apparent.

This anxiety was also heightened by the loss of the Falklands War, accompanied by a fear that the British perceived Argentinian as *indios* when in fact they thought themselves to be the "whites of this part of the world" (Joseph 2000:361). While I never encountered anything so blatantly racialized in my experiences, though I was often curious about the common nickname of *negro* or *morocha* (dark hair or skin, specifically on a female) that was applied to the darkest-skinned member of a young group of friends. This practice, while perhaps not intended to denigrate, certainly upholds whiteness as the norm. This modern ethnographic examination of

Buenos Aires may seem peripheral to the question of language. I however see parallels between this aforementioned racialized anxiety and the metadiscursive reflections in conversation, survey and film that specifically emphasize the Europeanness, Italianness or Spanishness of *porteño* Spanish while refuting substantive interchange with Quichua, Guaraní and other indigenous languages.

### ***Voseo and Sheismo***

I consider the *voseo* and the *sheismo* as the two most obvious distinguishing factors of Argentinian *castellano*, as they are the two features most noticeable to a both Argentinian and non-Argentinian Spanish speakers. The diachronic adaptation of these features throughout the country, historical attitudes towards *vos* and *sheismo*, and most importantly the historical attitudes towards the speakers utilizing them are reflective of national character and give insight into how Argentinians think about themselves and the way they speak. The *voseo* has deep linguistic roots across South America and can be traced through its many stages. The strong social stratification during the colonial period was not conducive to the timely diffusion of a linguistic innovation. An advance, such as the adoption of *voseo*, began with members of the viceregal court and slowly spread downwards through the strata and out of the capital. This does provide a significant length of time from which once can find source data for the diachronic investigation of a linguistic trait. The *sheismo*, however, did not appear until the post-colonial era and the rapidly destabilizing social system as well as advances in media and travel meant that there is a shorter period with less documentation of the trait's adoption (Fontanella de Weinberg 1995:1). The *voseo* can be tracked through literary resources, while linguists have to rely on

previous studies or written discourse to access the phonological speech patterns necessary to track the *sheismo*.

### **Diachronic transformation of the *voseo***

The *voseo* is a second person singular pronoun and accompanying verb form. It originated in Spain in the fifteenth century, primarily as an informal address between equals in the upper classes and a derogatory address from a member of the upper class towards a member of the lower class. While its use is proliferated throughout Latin America, it has only gained predominance over the *tu* in Argentina and Costa Rica. Linguists refer to these areas as “stable *voseante*” regions. The Rio de la Plata did not become an official vice royalty of the Spanish crown until 1776, more than a century after Alto Peru and Nueva España, now Mexico. Central America and the Northern regions of South America had more prolonged and intense economic relations with the Spanish Court during this period, and as such their lexicon and grammar developed alongside peninsular Spanish. The reigning aristocratic spirit of Spain in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries necessitated honor titles such as *don* (sir) and *vuestra merced* (your grace), the latter of which shortened to *usted* and replaced the *vos* as the preferred title of honor. Golden Age Spanish author Juan de Luna reported in 1619 that the *tu* was for children and expressing familiarity or love, while the *vos* was exclusively for addressing vassals and servants (Rojas Mayer 2008:23).

The *vos* endured in the Rio de la Plata despite acquiring these negative social connotations in Spain and throughout the viceroalties that had greater contact with the Spanish court (Benavides 2003:613). Rojas Mayer notes derogatory usage of the *vos* in Chilean literature

during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, describing *vos* as an injurious and offensive word when directed towards an addressee who deserves a higher social treatment (2008:23). A 1907 study on the language of Bogotá in relation to language of other South American countries describes the use of *vos* by rural *caballeros* as a vulgarity that diminishes any aspect of respect towards god and king, and the author pleads with these speakers to instead revert to uniform use of the *merced* or *usted* form. Many regions of Central and South America vacillated between the *tu* and the *vos*, and they existed in conflict almost everywhere until the beginnings of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when the Royal Spanish Academy (RAE in Spanish) began to proliferate the *tuteo* in the university centers and those places that had more peninsular contact (2008:24). As such, the *vos* represents a central point of divergence from peninsular Spanish and is perhaps an iteration of an Argentina that identifies more strongly with its diverse European roots than its exclusively Spanish colonial beginnings.

Initially considered an archaism that only took root in ruralities, the *vos* became entangled in political ideology of the 19th century in Argentina. A war between *federales* and *unitarios*, those who advocated for independent and strong province governments versus those who wanted to consolidate power in the national government. Juan Manuel Rosas, head *caudillo* of the *federales*, adopted the *vos* as part of his campaign of “plebeianization” in an attempt to promote his pastoral, land-owning image. This early anti-bourgeois association with the *vos* actually represented a false paradigm, as Rosas’ true interests lay with his wealthy mercantile supporters in the port of Buenos Aires (Carricaburo 1999:491). Despite this disingenuous intent, many linguists in the past fifty years have identified Rosas as the link between plebeian and high-class speech. Carricaburo cites Rosenblat as emphasizing the fact that although Rosas may have been key in the proliferation of the *vos*, he used it only for intimacy and in public speech

exclusively used the *tu* form (1999:54). After the defeat of Rosas, the *vos* served to orient the geographic origin of a speaker and to delineate between city and countryside dialect. This pattern, along with the rest of the language, was entirely subverted by the waves of immigration at the turn of the twentieth century (1999:491). When free and obligatory education was instated in an attempt to standardize communication, the *tu* was chosen as the norm second person singular pronoun. This was followed by a widespread adoption of the *vos* by those who considered themselves native *Argentino*. Immigrants, particularly those from Italy, quickly sought to assimilate into Argentinian society and used *criollismo* and other tokens of nationalism as the model for their behavioral and speech patterns (1999:492). Although the *vos* was widely adopted, it remained indexical of lower education levels well into the twentieth century. Use of the *tu* was considered to be the choice for universal intelligibility; Jorge Luis Borges who underwent European education in Argentina chose the *tu* in his literary work in order to avoid alienating non Argentinian Spanish speakers (1999:408).

Lapesa posits that while the widespread *voseo americano* can be indicative of an indifference towards vulgarity, the *vos* is a token of “*tratamiento de confianza*” (form of address for confidence) and is actually representative of the positive cohesive social leveling guiding the construction of a new community (1970:531). I found this hypothesis to be supported by several interviewees, one who defensively asserted that the *vos* was not “snobby.” Rojas Mayer hypothesizes that the modern *vos* does not serve any socially separatist purposes, but in fact gained popularity as the barriers between interlocutors such as age, role and status became gradually imperceptible, evidenced in the tendency of the *vos* to fill spaces that had traditionally pertained to more respectful pronouns (Rojas Mayer 2008:27). Hughson aligns Argentinian pronoun data with Brown and Gilman’s hypothesis that the solidarity semantic gained



prominence over the power semantic in twentieth century Western European languages (Hughson 2009:83).

In my analysis of several Argentinian films from the last several decades, I have not found this hypothesis to be entirely true, and in fact would argue that “proper” use of the *usted* in formal situations rather than the *vos* remains indexical of speaker and addressee age and social role. This interpretation of the *voseo* as the pronominal choice of a society progressing towards equality is put forth by several Argentinian linguists, and perhaps in comparison with past standard usage this trend can be legitimately identified, but only to the extent that the *voseo* is no longer the linguistic tool through which class status is reified.

Hughson cites Wainerman’s 1976 diachronic study of theatrical works from Buenos Aires as evidence of the Brown and Gilman thesis in Argentina, with a substantial decrease in asymmetrical address relationships and an overall increase of informal symmetrical address relationships. Prior to this, Wainerman published a comparative synchronic study of pronoun usage in the small Northern town of Catamarca and in Buenos Aires, and although the overall trends corroborate the later diachronic findings, Hughson downplays several results in the haste to justify her thesis. In both the rural and urban environments, there was a greater frequency of asymmetrical usage and a lower frequency of symmetrical *vos* usage in the lower classes. Age and status were also very important factors in the reported choice of pronoun. Even within the family in Catamarca, an age discrepancy was marked with an asymmetrical *vos/usted* usage (Hughson 2009:81-86). In my research I found that this trend persisted several decades after Wainerman’s study, the 2003 film *Historias Minimias* portrayed a rural town in Patagonia featured an elderly character who was exclusively addressed with *usted*, responding to the addressee with the *vos* in every situation except complete lack of familiarity. Hughson presents

the relationship between the rural hamlet and Buenos Aires as a teleological development model, with the presumption that the less modern rural space would “catch up” to the city. While one instance of its continuation does by no means imply permanence, the endurance of this trait speaks to deeply entrenched models of power and formality in address usage.

In her discussion of the *bonaerense rehilamiento* (a sibilance in the dialect spoken in the South of the Buenos Aires province), Fontanella de Weinberg puts forth the theory of linguistic change in relation to social stereotypes, which seems relevant to my present day parsing of the *vos*. She posits that when a linguistic variable ceases to vary, becoming a stable constant, it loses its social significance (Fontanella de Weinberg 1995:3). While a concrete answer to this would require more extensive study, I am tempted to agree with her in regards to the *voseo*. Its widespread and constant usage relieves it of the indexical burden of class stratification, and there are few current attitudes towards the *vos* that imply derogatory intention dependent on the status of the speaker or addressee.

Carricaburo concludes her monograph on the Argentinian *voseo* by saying “although it does differentiate us from other Spanish speakers, it [*vos*] does not impede communication with the rest of Latin America, nor the world.” While she advocates a language of openness and communication, she is unable to avoid emphasizing the sense of difference that permeates Argentinian *castellano*. In a questionnaire response, a university student expressed to me that the *porteños* are proud to have a “linguistic separation” from distinct regions within the country as well as the rest of Latin America, and in turn this pride makes the dialect “*aun más* separatist,” leaving this last word in English as if for emphasis. Several other responses spoke to the distinctive nature of their dialects, though almost all were insistent on mutual comprehension

across national borders.

### ***Tuteo and voseo variance outside the Rio de la Plata region***

The *vos* form of address is in no way unique to Argentina, though it is one of the only stable *voseante* countries. The linguistic regions where *vos* is still in conflict with *tu* give us the most interesting data on modern perceptions of the *vos*. In a 2009 study on the demise of the *tú* in favor of the *vos* in Montevideo, Uruguay, Weyers describes the modern *vos* as having an ‘ambiguous perceived propriety,’ because of regional variations and competition with the academic standard of the *tú*. Despite this ambiguity, he concludes that in regions where the two are in competition, use of the *vos* carries implications of class solidarity but is used only with certain audiences due to questions of propriety. Weyers also cites use of the pronoun *tú* with the *vos* verb form as well as the inverse of this practice (t/v, v/t) (2009:831). Hughson marks this mixed pronominal *voseo* as indicative of speakers failed attempts to conform to the Montevidean norm of both pronominal and verbal *voseo*. She also notes that speakers from Montevideo attribute their norm to the “Argentinisation” of their country via the media and tourism, which also accounts for their adoption of the phrase *che* (Hughson 2009:87). In some cases, like that of Nicaragua, the refusal to formally acknowledge use of the *vos* is highly contested, and it took a social revolution for the pronoun to be publicly sanctioned (Weyers 2009:830). In Bolivia modern use of the *voseo* is dependent on the social standing of the speaker; the *tuteo* is for the more educated while the *voseo pronominal* or the *vos* pronoun paired with the *tuteo* verb form (*vos cantas* rather than *vos cantás*). This habit can be observed in the Northern regions of Argentina bordering Bolivia, such as Tucumán, Salta and Jujuy (Rojas Mayer 2008:26).

Dissemination of the *vos* in South America takes on many different forms, and in some places it is almost entirely absent. In cases such as these, if it does exist it often pertains to ‘interior’ regions of a country, those far from urban centers. Rojas Mayer presents the example of Colombia, saying that a highly educated *antioqueño* will immediately switch from the *voseo* to the *tuteo* when they visit the capital city of Bogotá. Hughson finds a similar pattern in El Salvador, where speakers will avoid the pronominal *vos* in an urban setting. She also cites Bauemel-Schreffler’s 1994 study on the El Salvadoran forms of address in which 71% of informants felt that the *vos* was less refined than the *tu*, while 61% said that the *vos* was friendlier (2009:66). Both Vidal de Battini and Rona posit that there is substantial *tu* usage in the extreme Southern regions of Argentina, Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego. Rona attributes this to the proximity to the Chilean *tuteo*, because the *tu* is dominant in the majority of Chile (Rona 1967:98).

Hughson presents interesting data on the pronominal choices of Argentinian immigrants to Australia that reveals their desire to be perceived as European. She surveyed first and second generation Spanish-speakers in Australia in order to determine the presence of English on their Spanish pronominal usage. An overwhelming majority of her Argentinian informants switched exclusively to the *tuteo*, while speakers from countries where the *voseo* is not the unequivocal standard tended to adopt a system of pronominal switching between the two (Hughson 2009:276-279). While there are many factors at play here, in particular the position of native speakers of the non-dominant language in a multilingual environment, I interpret this Argentinian adherence to the peninsular standard to be further evidence of striving towards being perceived as European.

## Historical and ethnographic context of “Sheismo”

Another glaring difference in the *rioplatense* register is the fusion of the “y” and the “ll” and the pronunciation of them both as “sh.” International variance in the morphemes “ll” and “y” is referred to as “yeismo,” but the two variants within the Rio de la Plata region have come to be known as “sheismo” and “zheismo,” depending on whether the phoneme is voiced or voiceless. In *sheismo* the double L sound is pronounced with a sibilance, so that a main thoroughfare in Buenos Aires, *Calle Callao*, is pronounced “cay-shey Cay-shao.” In *zheismo*, a practice generally occurring outside Buenos Aires in both the North and South regions, the post-alveolar fricative is voiced rather than voiceless.

Venezuelan politician and writer Andrés Bello wrote in his work on the maintenance of *castellano* in South America that all *americanos* in his acquaintance were unable to avoid bad habits such as the *yeismo* (Bello 1850). If attitudes towards the *yeismo* were already resoundingly negative, within Argentina the tendency towards *zheismo* and *sheismo* was seen as an even worse bastardization. Fontanella de Weinberg identifies the first appearance of *zheismo* in the final decade of the eighteenth century, spoken by a comedic character of mixed Spanish and Portuguese descent. Throughout the nineteenth century it appears in orthographic markings, and several commentaries on it begin to emerge. Juan Cruz Varela, a *porteño* politician and journalist, noted the *zheismo* in a stage actor in 1826 and denounced it as a “pronunciación viciosísima” (Fontanella de Weinberg 1995:2). Sarmiento revealed early opinions of “*zheismo*” when he wrote, “a pronunciation that pertains solely to the middle-class can be considered a vice.”

Guitarte and Fontanella de Weinberg debate to what extent the *zheismo* was widespread across the whole country. This debate takes as its primary source the letters of Juan Manuel Rosas, *caudillo* of the Buenos Aires province from 1829 to 1852. Guitarte argues that use and pronunciation of these letters was not normalized during this period, and also cites the practice of overcorrection of pronunciation errors in orthography (1992:549). Fontanella de Weinberg counters her teacher and mentor Guitarte about just how widespread the *zheismo* trait really was across Argentina, arguing that many rural regions retained at the least an alternation between *zheismo*, *sheismo* and *yeismo*. Fontanella de Weinberg argues that at the time of her study even in the interior of the province of Buenos Aires (of which the autonomous city of Bs As is the capital) there could be found pronunciation of this morpheme entirely lacking in sibilance (1995:14). Drawing from Labov, Weinrich and Herzog she states that the generalization of a linguistic change across region is neither uniform nor instantaneous, and that a rurality will develop slower and in a course independent from a large metropolis (1995:12). This urban-centric representation of linguistic patterns is perhaps at the center of the notion of racial superiority that I sense as rampant in Argentinian culture. Fontanella de Weinberg signals this as a larger generalization to which linguists of the country often fall prey, in an attempt to prove which variance of a dialect is the most prominent across the entire country (1995:9).

Prior to the twentieth century, the *zheismo* was common to the city of Buenos Aires. Not until the mid-twentieth century, when supporters of Juan and Eva Perón began migrating to the capital city, did the voiceless *sheismo* become a trait of Buenos Aires *habla* (Honsa 1965:279). The voiceless trait, therefore, became associated with a colloquial dialect that indexed both geographic origin and status within the social structure. Young women seem to have been at the vanguard of this shift. In the late 1970s Fontanella de Weinberg showed that they were

increasingly using the voiceless phoneme, while males of the same age cohort reported mixed usage of *sheismo* and *zheismo* (1978:45). In his 2008 linguistic study Chang showed that among the younger generation of participants this voiceless variation *sheismo* was almost invariably the phonetic choice. The study also recorded their attitudes towards either variation, and found that the younger generation now categorized *zheismo* as “provincial” and “unsophisticated” (2008:62). These attitudes provide yet another example of the rural/urban dichotomy dictating metadiscourse.

In About.com education forums on Spanish Language, a student requested information about the use of *yeismo* and *sheismo* in South America, receiving varied responses from both students and native speakers of Spanish. A non-native speaker responded, “among all the Latinos I have known, I have never heard that sound. The only j-sound I’ve heard came from Argentina.” The next response was quick to defend, beginning their post with “Well, Argentinians are Latinos too.” This exchange is a prime example of how idiosyncratic pronunciation sets Argentina apart from the rest of the continent. The speaker in this case reveals himself to be Colombian, perhaps expressing the frustration with consistent global attitudes associating Argentina with being “non-Latino” or, as I believe they want to be perceived, European.

### **Pronoun usage in Argentinian films**

I watched twenty films dating from between 1985 and 2011, the majority of which were set in the city of Buenos Aires. Five of these films were from various regions outside the capital, including remote regions within the Buenos Aires province and rural areas in both the North and South of Argentina. This enabled me to examine contrasting speech patterns between the city

and the *interior*. For each film I recorded pronoun usage with respect to the gender, status and role of both speaker and addressee, as well as any environmental indicators and contexts that could inform pronoun choice. I am acting with the understanding that cultural values are locatable in discursive practice and acknowledging film dialogue as a form of metadiscourse, wherein the screenwriter imbues the script with their particular set of linguistic and cultural values (Agha 2008:190). Similarly to the practice of self-reported speech patterns in a linguistic study, film dialogue is a representation of the speech and address patterns of a particular group or region. It is important to recognize the limitations of this analytic method. While the linguistic imaginary is a productive area of metadiscourse, it is by no means a literal representation of speech patterns. The range of my study is also quite small, and non-systematic in the time periods it represents due to the relative inaccessibility of the larger canon of Argentinian cinema. However, the small slice of data I collected roughly aligns with linguistic studies of the region as well as casual discourse surrounding the *habla culta* of Argentina by native speakers.

Pronoun	Frequency
Vos	632
Usted	268
Tú	8

Fig. 1 Total pronominal tokens recorded in film viewing

Examination of the source data in Figure 1 unequivocally shows that *vos* is the second person singular pronoun of choice. Several films forego all other pronouns entirely, and every encounter between characters is conducted in the *voseo*. The *vos* certainly extends beyond situations of close intimacy, and is regularly used in relatively formal environments. Despite the



unquestionable dominance of the *vos* over the *tú*, the *usted* still has a strong presence in *rioplatense*, appropriate to a myriad of contexts and addressees. The pronoun *tú* is remarkably absent, almost never appearing in the films that I analyzed.

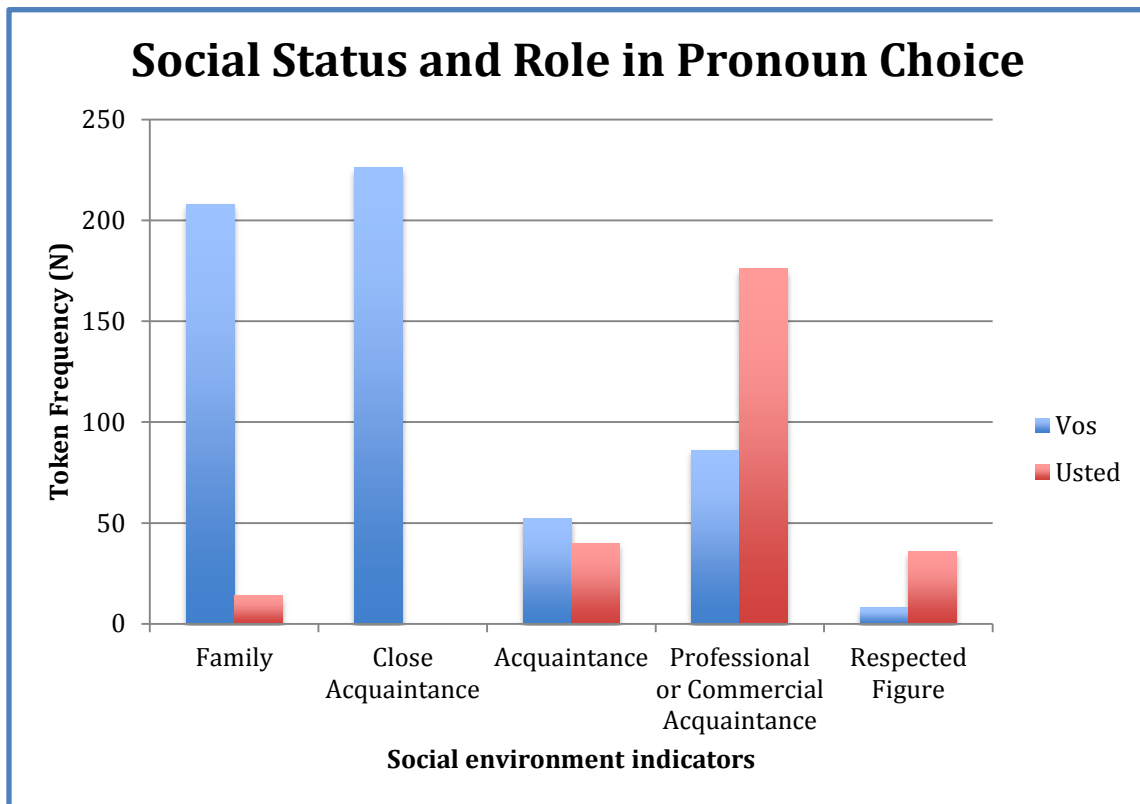


Fig. 2: Graph of varying levels of intimacy and formality versus pronoun choice, described in text

Figure 2 shows *vos* and *usted* pronoun token usage broken down by environment, ranging from the very intimate to the very formal. Two of these environments displayed *vos* as the overwhelming majority. The ‘family’ group refers to any pronoun usage between of blood relatives of any degree. As exhibited by the graph, *vos* is the majority pronoun choice in this environment. The few instances of *usted* were examples of elder deference outweighing familial intimacy, most often between a grown adult and their elderly parent. The category ‘close

acquaintance' is defined by clear markers of friendship or a long period of intimate acquaintance. The *usted* is entirely absent in this category, although the rules dictating formal and informal usage most likely extend to this category and my data excludes tokens of it by happenstance of not encompassing a relationship like the age deference within a family environment that overrides familiarity.

The latter three environments displayed nearly equal *vos* and *usted* usage or majority *usted* usage. The distinguishing factors between 'close acquaintance' and 'acquaintance' are a clear lack of intimacy, or the first meeting between two characters occurring in the time frame of the film. If the two characters developed an intimate relationship during the film, their later interactions were categorized as 'close acquaintance.' The majority of speakers in this environment chose the *vos*. The ratio in this case was fifty *vos* tokens to forty-two *usted* tokens, showing that this space is one of ambiguous formality<sup>2</sup>. The data shows that the choice between the two is context dependent and less dictated by social norms in this environment. The broad category of 'professional or commercial acquaintance' encompasses professional colleague as well as public interactions within the consumer or service sphere. This environment mainly evokes *usted* usage, more than sixty percent of the tokens. The category 'respected figures' refers to the presence of an addressee who merits social respect. In many of the recorded tokens this figure was a Catholic priest, though it also encompasses political and military figures and elderly addressees who are not related to the speaker. The pronoun of choice was overwhelmingly *usted*. Exceptions to this where the *vos* was chosen were often related to an acquaintance relationship with these figures which merited the *usted* in public but the *vos* in private, in two particular

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<sup>2</sup> See Table 1 in appendix

instances a speaker changed registers when speaking to a Catholic priest within a confessional but addressed them with formality when meeting them in public.

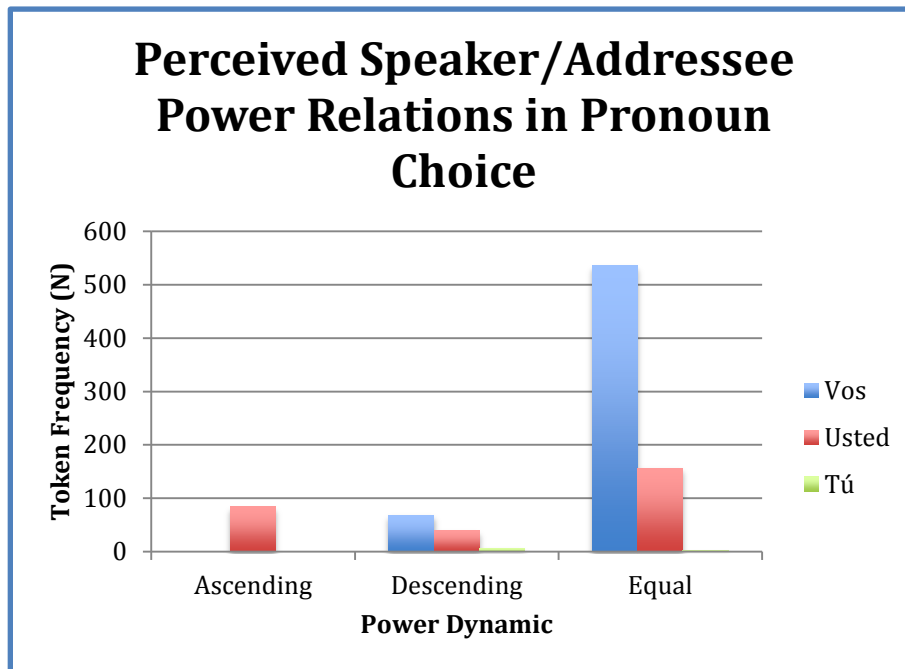


Fig. 3

Figure 3 represents the same source data, with respect to the level of “power” held by the addressee. By power I am referring to a set of referents that include literal rank within an organization or institution, the existence of employer and employee relationship, class markers and age discrepancy meriting deference. The most predictable result of this data analysis was the pronoun choice in the occasion of equal perceived power between speaker and addressee. This was overwhelmingly conducted in the *voseo*. In instances of descending address relationship, where the speaker is represented as having more power than the addressee, slightly more than half of the speakers chose the *vos*. This is not significant enough to merit a correlation to the previous derogatory connotation of the *voseo*, though in certain cases the choice of the less formal pronoun did have disrespectful intention. Perhaps most interesting is that there was no

recorded instance of an ascending *vos* address, no speaker who was represented as having less power than their addressee used the *vos*. I believe that this speaks to the rigorous maintenance of the formal register by the lower class, and also to entrenched notions of high-class privilege meriting respectful language.

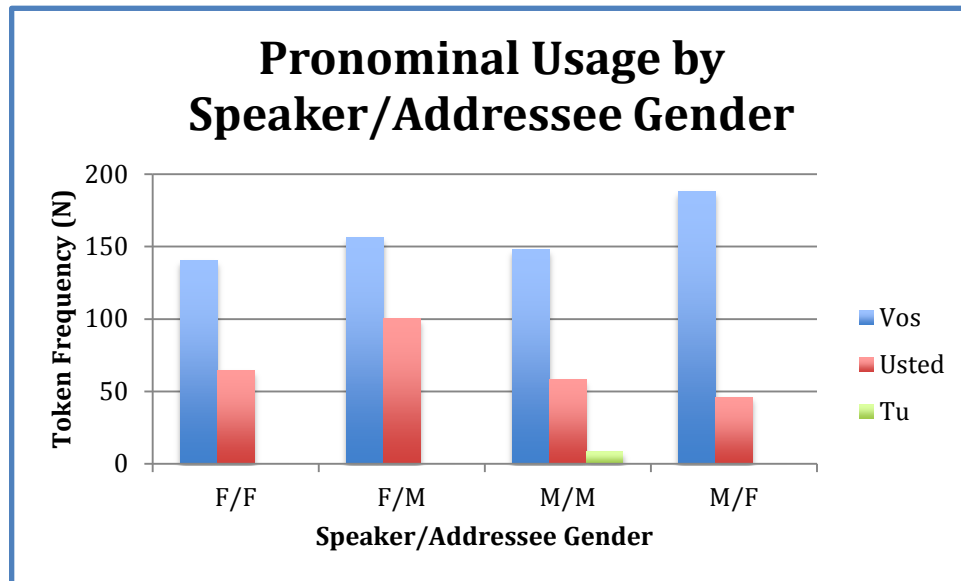


Fig. 4

Figure 4 analyzes the source data with regards to the gender of both speaker and addressee. In both equal and opposite gender communication, *vos* was the preferred pronoun of address. Perhaps the most interesting piece of gender analysis of the data is that these films choose to portray females as more likely to utilize the formal pronoun regardless of addressee gender, and they were twenty percent more likely to use the *usted* when addressing the opposite gender.

#### Further analysis of source data and exemplary pronominal encounters

Symmetrical *vos* usage is most often indicative of intimacy within a casual environment. Family members almost exclusively use the *vos* with one another. This would appear to support the generalization that the *voseo* is used for intimacy or informality. Neighbors most often use the *voseo*, like in *Plan B* when the neighbor who shares their patio admonishes the two main characters to stop smoking in a shared space. This fact can transcend social boundaries as well, as in *Cama Adentro* (Live-In Maid) when the maid addresses her employer's daughter with the *voseo*. The examples that I will use in following paragraphs are relevant because of this complete symmetric *voseo* prevalence; usage of anything other than this pattern is always clearly intentional. Several films, many of them lower budget and not intended for intellectual scrutiny, utilized the *voseo* exclusively, perhaps because there were no power, social or gender dynamics that the screenwriter felt were worth highlighting by switching registers.

Asymmetrical *vos* and *usted* usage in a speaker/addressee exchange is often related to discrepancy in power dynamic. The film *Soy tu aventura* (I Am Your Adventure) opens on a job interview conducted by a prim, well-dressed woman in a software company. The applicant is the protagonist, described in the initial script description as "wearing his finest clothes but still shabbily dressed." She does not address him with any second person singular pronoun until the moment that he reveals he doesn't have a high school degree, after which she seems to use the *vos* for effect in addressing him, as he becomes more and more uncomfortable under her scrutiny. The *vos* can be indexical of several factors in both addressee and speaker. In this case it is signaling a class discrepancy between the successful *senora* and the ne'er-do-well Damian. This pattern appears in several of the other films as well. The *vos/usted* combination can also be indexical of a large age discrepancy between speaker and addressee. This is also occasionally an exception to the *voseo* within families, in the case of young adults speaking to older family

members. In the inverse, sometimes use of the *usted* implies speaking down to the addressee, often in a work environment. Questionnaire responses on the proper usage of *usted* rather than *vos* signal the respectful *usted* as necessary when addressing those significantly older than you. Two responses said that it would only be necessary if the addressee were an *anciano*, or elderly person, while two others said it was correct for any addressee older than the speaker. In the film *Hijo de la novia*, visitors to a nursing home consistently use *usted* to address the patients, and in a moment of particular formality the protagonist of the film even uses *usted* to address his mother, who normally receives the *vos*.

There was some evidence of *vos* and *usted* switching within the same speaker/addressee relationship. In the film *Un novio para mi mujer*, uptight Tana has a part time job as a radio announcer. From her initial job interview with her employer for this position, there is mutual *voseo* use within the office. However, while she is on-air, Tana uses *vos* to address callers and listeners, but *ustedes* to address to the other announcers on-air with her. This strange alternation seems to imply an intention to give the appearance of a more formal environment, and is perhaps a manifestation of Tana's desire to legitimize her position at this very non-prestigious local radio station. This character repeatedly expresses that she detests when new acquaintances affect intimacy, perhaps expressing the opinion of the screenwriter that indiscriminate *voseo* is in some way disingenuous.

When the *voseo* appears in situations that would normally necessitate the *usted* it is often for expressing urgency or aggression, perhaps reverting to the vulgarity of its origins. In *La sonámbula* two police officers violently break down the door of a bathroom and begin questioning the people they find in there, addressing them with *vos*. Whereas normally a routine investigation such as this one would require the *usted*, at least at the outset, the urgency that they

feel and the aggression accompanying their words is emphasized by the use of *voseo*. In the 2009 film *El secreto de sus ojos* (The Secret In Their Eyes) a middle class office worker and the man accused of killing the worker's wife consistently use *usted* in the proceedings of the case, until a moment of anger and catharsis when they begin screaming at each other and both utilize the *vos*. Twenty-five years later, after the trial unfairly acquitted the killer, we find that the husband has kept this man in a cage for punishment over these years. Whereas now there is no structure dictating that the killer maintains the *usted* for appearance sake, he uses it in his plea for freedom to the investigator who helped the husband track the killer down. These are all examples of register switching between *vos* and *usted* for affect rather than speaker or addressee deference.

Symmetrical *usted* usage is most often generated by mutual intention of politeness, the register between two people who are meeting for the first time, or in a formal interaction of anonymity where the content of the information is more important than the relationship between speaker and addressee. A first interaction between two strangers in a structured work or commercial environment is almost always accompanied by the use of *usted*. In general, jobs that require higher education levels such as upper-level education, medical professionals, legal professionals and military or government positions all demand the use of *usted*. This extends to the interactions of those holding these positions with outsiders, such as their clients or people from whom they are getting information. However, well-acquainted colleagues within these realms will use the *voseo* amongst one another, with varying intentions. Most often it is just an expression of casual intimacy, though it can occasionally be utilized in an unequal *usted/vos* alternation, from superior to inferior. In *El secreto de sus ojos* two subordinates in a government office emphasize use of the pronoun *vos* and its verb form, seemingly in an attempt to express their competition and mutual dislike. Neither have a title that formally demands honor, they both

work for the same judge, but one is clearly more successful. The employee who is less successful seems to use the *vos* as a reminder that they are on the same social level. When the protagonist of this film is overheard flaunting protocol by one of his superiors, he quickly begins to *usted* towards this superior, receiving the *vos* in return. This film has several interesting examples of the choice between *vos* and *usted* being dependent on the context and environment rather than speaker or addressee. The protagonist, an investigator in the homicide unit within a court house, goes to a crime scene and walks in with the police officer with whom he is acquainted, referring to him as *vos* and utilizing the *voseo* verb form. After walking into the scene of the crime and examining the cadaver for a few moments, the mood of the scene has entirely changed and there is a new level of severity brought to their interactions. As such, when the police officer leaves to go and inform the deceased's loved ones, the protagonist uses *usted* to say that he wants to accompany him. Film scenes involving the Catholic Church often had mutual *usted* usage, where Priests and other laypersons respond with the *usted* when formally addressed by parishioners and visitors. In *Hijo de la novia* the protagonist (as in so many of these films, portrayed by Ricardo Darín) begins arguing with a priest over whether or not he will marry Darín's elderly father and mother, the latter of whom has alzheimers. Despite the heated nature of the argument, the two retain relatively hushed tones because they are in the nave of a church, and they never deviate from *usted* even once they devolve into insulting one another.

The 2004 film *Cama adentro* presents an exaggerated example of mutual *usted* usage. While the country is still reeling from its 2001 financial collapse, upper class Beba is attempting to maintain appearances by retaining her live-in maid Dora although she is the only one left in her house and she has no money with which to pay her. The two of them exclusively use *usted* with one another, while each reverts to the *voseo* with other close friends or family members.



Both address Beba's daughter with the *vos* pronoun and verb forms, and yet there is never a loss of the cold wall of formality between the two of them. This film exemplifies habitual pronoun use, Beba is unable to stop using the *voseo* with her ex-husband even though the two of them had a bad divorce and no longer share an intimate friendship. By the end of the film, Beba and Dora are implicitly moving in together to Dora's house in a distant suburb of the capital city, and yet even outside the social strictures of Buenos Aires they do not switch to the less formal register. Perhaps due to the choice of the *tuteo* in twentieth century education practices, the *tú* is still occasionally in context to signal an authority figure speaking to an always-younger addressee. In one scene in the script of the 1998 Argentinian film *La Sonambula* (The Sleepwalker) the screenwriter explicitly states "Santos addresses him with the *tú*, in the manner of an adult speaking to an adolescent." In the next scene, Santos is addressing the same character but he uses the *vos* as an expression of urgency; rather than savoring his authoritative position he finds it imperative to convey instructions and so he adopts the more common *vos*. In the two films that I saw with classroom environments portrayed, teachers exclusively utilized the *vos* with their students, and in fact the only time *usted* appeared in these films was when they were formally addressing the parents of children when they needed to discuss problematic or sensitive events. In one fascinating moment in the film *La Historia Oficial*, a father addresses one of his sons with the *vos* and the other with the *tú* as a way to express his disappointment in the man his son has become. His son has become involved in the military dictatorship of the early 1980s and the family is slowly learning of his involvement with the *desaparecidos*, tens of thousands of missing citizens who had been kidnapped by the government. Although the son pleadingly addresses him with the *vos*, the father barks back and continually uses both the pronoun and the *tuteo* verb form.

*Tú* is also utilized to mark a speaker as foreign to Argentina, even if they are from a region that has identified colloquial or intimate *vos* usage. The 2001 film *Bolivia* is a drama about immigrant restaurant workers in Buenos Aires, depicting the obstacles and racism that one man from La Paz encounters working at a cafe in the affluent Recoleta neighborhood. He uses the *tú* and *vos* interchangeably, though directly after his arrival he only uses the *tú*. In one degrading moment his boss adopts the *tú* to mock him, when in all other instances he had used the *vos* to address him. The protagonist is visibly darker-skinned and *indio* featured than his boss or the café patrons; the only face similar to his is the half Paraguayan waitress who works with him. Over the course of just a few weeks, he begins to adopt the *vos* to address patrons in the restaurant. This is an ideal moment for expressing the lack of class indicators present in the *rioplatense voseo*. Had this movie been made in a time period when the *tú* and the *vos* were both acceptable informal forms of address, I am sure that the screenwriter would have chosen whichever was more degrading in order to further express the blatant racism of the men who frequent the café. They refuse to remember his nationality, calling him *el peruano*, and are disingenuous and unkind to him at every turn.

I have found a considerable amount of information on the *voseo*, some of which could be representative of what Alonso Amado calls the *nivelización* of Argentina, or trend towards the erasing of social boundaries within the culture. These theories often link the necessity of such a process to the immigration of the early twentieth century (Amado 1943). I argue that many of their dialect idiosyncrasies were actually developed specifically in order to maintain class boundaries, and that any ensuing *nivelización* was a reaction on the part of those sectors of the population attempting to assimilate by mimicking high-class *culto* speech patterns. I believe also

that these theorists have overlooked the ways in which the *usted* is still integral to the Argentinian dialect, upholding these social borders that they claim the *voseo* has eroded.

## Conclusion

In the century following independence from Spain, Argentina undertook the process of completely eliminating its indigenous population and rapidly ‘whitening’ through European immigration. Despite their eagerness to accomplish modernization through this whitening process, initial *criollo* reactions to these immigrants were not resoundingly positive. The firm roots of the *vos* and the *zheísmo/sheísmo* can perhaps be traced to this period, when Argentinians clung to their idiosyncratic pronunciation and address form to counter the waves of peninsular Spanish immigration to the region. Despite the elites decrying the degradation of their language by immigrants, *rioplatense* underwent rapid change between the years of 1880 and 1910, converging with the Italian intonation and acquiring massive amounts of Italian and peninsular Spanish vocabulary.

The *vos* was deeply entrenched across Argentina prior to this immigration. During the nineteenth century *vos* transformed from a rural archaism to the primary second-person singular pronoun. Rosas used the *vos* as a method of manipulating his political image, linking himself to a rural lineage of *caudillos* in opposition to the *porteño* elite. Despite this image, Rosas’ true support came from his wealthy Buenos Aires connections, and this ultimately contributed to the *vos* becoming standard usage amongst the Buenos Aires upper class. Rosas’ position in the history of Argentina is an interesting one, as he straddles the divide between the *ciudad* and the *interior*, perhaps proving that the opposition is not so diametric as discourse implies. Whether or

not that is the case, the history of the *vos* has a place in the dialectic posed by Sarmiento between the civilized and barbaric, because initially it carried archaic and backwards connotations due to its rural proliferation. Following the Brown and Gilman model of pronoun evolution from power towards solidarity, much of the academic linguistic discourse surrounding the *vos* posits that it indexes an emerging egalitarian society where address pronouns do not stand in for social status. My analysis of *vos* and *usted* usage showed that a lower class speaker addressing a member of the upper class is more likely to use the *usted* than the *vos*, and that an upper-class, power-wielding never uses the *vos* to address someone who is less than their equal. This data disproves the theory that the *vos* pronoun indexes equality.

The *sheismo* and *zheismo* present a twentieth-century example of the elite judgment of rural speech. *Zheismo* was first noted in Buenos Aires and elsewhere in the country at the end of the eighteenth century. At this point, *zheismo*, *sheismo* and *yeismo* (the fused morpheme without sibilance) could all be identified in diverse regions across the country. To this day there is no nation-wide uniform pronunciation, though in the last fifty years the city of Buenos Aires has rapidly acquired the *sheismo* after the massive migration to the city and modernization that occurred during the presidency of Juan Perón. A linguistic study in 2008 revealed youth attitudes towards the now out of vogue *zheismo*, showing that they found it provincial and less sophisticated.

Analysis of the geographic distribution of the *voseo* across Latin America resoundingly shows that Argentina is not the only country to favor this pronoun, but it stands alone in fully embracing and visibly performing its *vos* usage. I believe this represents a particular need of the residents of Buenos Aires to express their national identity as distinctive from the shared Andean and Colonial past, whether or not this desire is racialized. The maintenance of their linguistic

uniqueness is a source of pride for *porteños*, and the standardization of their dialect as reflected in a number of their films is a valuable method of controlling reactions to and perceptions of the way they speak. The *vos* and the *sheismo* are no longer isosemantic indices for class status, but their histories reveal a deep, regionally habituated preoccupation with class. Modern discourse on the ever-evolving dialect reflects a community that is very analytical, if not critical, of their country's history, and I believe that there exists an acute interest in perceiving their highly unique way of speaking as a reflection of the country's path toward both stability and equality.

This project has generated many research questions that could be pursued in the future. The one that I find to be most compelling is further regional and supranational comparison of these traits that are so definitive to *rioplatense* Spanish. Primarily I find that I still have no answer to the question of why the *vos* superseded the *tú*, and what conditions in Argentina made this possible. I would also be interested in a diachronic study that contrasted several countries' formal language registers in order to determine if there is a general trend towards the disappearance of *usted*. That was not the case in my findings, though the claims of egalitarian pronominal systems within Argentina make me curious as to the state of register maintenance across all of South America. The persistent rural/urban dichotomy also raises interesting questions about a more thorough regional study across Argentina in order to learn to what extent *rioplatense* actually sets national norms. My brief examination of pronoun usage by gender also raised an interesting question about female speakers' likelihood to default to the formal register.

In the Argentinian Yahoo Answers forum one poster asked a question about the origins of *sheismo*, describing it as a pronunciation that both differentiated *porteños* from other Argentinian speakers and also *nos caracteriza*, "characterizes us." This is exemplary of the kind of metadiscourse I encountered frequently in my time in Buenos Aires as well as throughout my

ensuing research process. The younger generation did not seem as preoccupied with their European roots but they were certainly very aware of the fact that their language differentiated them from the rest of South America. Members of the older generation, however, clung to the idea of being European; during my stay my host mother told me “somos españoles,” which translates simply to “we are Spanish”; the director of my program boasted that during his travels as a young man his nickname was “el Italiano,” because to non Argentinian Spanish-speakers he sounded as though he was speaking Italian.

Towards the end of my writing process I spoke with a Spanish professor of mine about this research. He happens to be from Galicia, Spain, and has never been to Argentina, but he told me with some distaste that he had no plans to visit. When I asked him his thoughts on the way they speak in Buenos Aires, he equivocated for a moment and told me that while he loves Italian, he didn't like the sound of the Italian-influenced accent. Argentinians just sounded “snobby” to him. Even when heard by those they are attempting to emulate, the connection between Argentinian *habla* and their pretentious *identidad* is inescapable.

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## Appendix

Table 1 for Fig. 2 Social environment stimuli in pronoun choice

	Vos	Usted	Vos/Usted Ratio
Immediate Family	208	14	208/14
Close Acquaintance	226	2	226/2
Acquaintance	52	40	52/40
Professional or Commercial Acquaintance	86	176	86/176
Respected Figure	8	36	8/36

Table 2 for Fig. 3 Perceived power of addressee in pronoun choice

	Vos	Usted	Tú	Vos/Usted Ratio
Ascending	0	84	0	0/84
Descending	68	40	6	68/40
Equal	536	156	2	536/156

Table 3 for Fig. 4 Speaker/addressee gender and pronoun usage

	F/F	F/M	M/M	M/F
Vos	140	156	148	188
Usted	64	100	58	46
Tú	0	0	8	0
Vos/Usted Ratio	140/64	156/100	148/58	188/46