Variation and the acquisition of *pronouns of address*: 
The case of Spanish *tú* and *usted*

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The phenomenon

- The personal pronouns *tú* and *usted* (you [sg] and you [pl]) have been traditionally called informal, for the former, and formal for the latter.
- Variation in the use of personal pronouns, particularly of the second person, is attributed to the *deixis* which is an area of pragmatics that refers to the linguistic system of indices that mark relationships generally from the egocentric perspective of the speaker (Koike, Pearson & Witten, 2003).
- There are four types of *deixis* in this area which are: spatial (e.g., here, there), temporal (e.g., now, later), personal (e.g. I, you), and social (e.g., honorifics) (Fillmore, 1975 in Koike, Pearson & Witten, 2003).
The phenomenon

- Koike, Pearson and Witten (2003) clearly state that there are no published studies on *deixis* and the acquisition of Spanish as a second language.
Previous Studies L1

- Brown (1975) reported the responses of 59 Mexican-American undergraduate students to a questionnaire of usage. She found that students reported using the pronoun *usted* with family members, and that there was no difference in their responses attributed to gender. She concluded that the authority or permissiveness in family relationships merits special attention.
Previous Studies L1

- Schwenter (1993) reported the responses of 40 participants (20 Spanish and 20 Mexicans) to a 56-question questionnaire of usage of the Spanish pronouns of address. Participants’ age ranged between 26 to 50 years of age.

- Schwenter’s (1993) results consistently show that social factors such as age, gender, and social class affect the selection of tú and/or usted with other individuals. Mexicans, on the other hand, rely more on the notion of familiarity with the interlocutor that is the degree of familiarity the speaker has with the interlocutor either in their regular life or in the course of the conversation.
Schwenter (1993) also found that there is more flexibility in the choice between *tú* and *usted* among Spaniards and that Mexicans do not allow the social identity of the interlocutor to govern the choice between these pronouns.

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Uber (2000) analyzed 360 minutes of recorded data of Puerto Rican Spanish. Participants were all adults native speakers of Spanish. The data were recorded from everyday business interactions and it was divided into 180 minutes in offices and 180 minutes in sales-related situations.

Uber (2000) found, in her quantitative analysis, that the form of address depends greatly on the degree of familiarity among the speakers.

Power, according to Uber’s (2000) results, has not disappear as a semantic determiner of address because she found some uses of usted directed to the boss or the boss’ boss which indicates that power is still governing the use of this pronoun.
Uber (2000) found that *power* and *solidarity* were factors in the choice of forms of address. She found that *power* could be manifested by differences in age, profession, or perceived position between the speakers involved in the conversation. *Solidarity* could refer to the degree of *familiarity* or intimacy between the speakers.
Previous Studies L1

- Rossomondo studied the responses of 77 Madrileños (citizens from Madrid, Spain) (30 males and 47 females) to a 76-item questionnaire which asked for the selection between tú and usted given a particular interlocutor. Participants’ age range between 18 and 65 years.

- As for familiarity, speakers received the usted form less with acquaintances than with strangers. One important contribution of Rossomondo’s (2002) work is the finding that neither gender clash nor whether or not the interlocutor is female contributed significantly to the choice between tú and usted; and the fact that, in her study, participants reported that the “modo de ser”, or personality, of the interlocutor as contributing to their decision (p. 127).
Previous Studies L2

- Beltz & Kinginger (2002) studied the acquisition of pronouns of address and how awareness can play a role in their acquisition. The authors presented two case studies one is a learner of French as a second language (age 19) and the other is a learner of German as a second language (age 21).

- Results showed that *no claims could be made about the precise nature of learners’ awareness of the forms, nor that it could be asserted that the rules for their use were learned or acquired entirely and that these rules became unproblematic and permanently available for the learners’ use*. 

2003-They studied the acquisition of German pronouns of address through telecollaborative language learning by fourteen English speakers whose ages ranged between 18 and 23 years old (6=m/8=f) with sixteen native German speakers of approximately the same age. The English speaking participants were all students of fourth-semester college German whereas the German speaking participants were all studying to become English teachers enrolled in a teacher education seminar (2=m/14=f).

found that the fact that the majority of the US students mixed both T and V in their correspondence, often within the same clause appears to suggest that their choice of forms could not be motivated only on the basis of the perception of a power differential relating to the interlocutor.
Based on their findings, Beltz & Kinginger (2003) suggest three types of development:

- **Abrupt development**: inappropriate use of T/V before peer assistance, but appropriate use of T/V after peer assistance. (Tom’s grammatical system for du and Sie was in place prior to the critical moments he experienced in telecollaboration, but no his sociopragmatic system for the T of solidarity (p. 634))

- **Gradual development**: A student experiences gradual development with respect to the T of solidarity if the relative percentage of V uses before peer assistance is greater than the relative percentage of V uses after the peer assistance, but has not decreased abruptly to zero (p. 634)

- **Persistent Variation**: it occurs when the relative percentage of V uses after peer assistance is greater than the relative percentage of V uses before peer assistance (p. 638).
Previous Studies L2

- Rehner, Mougeon & Nadasdi (2003) studied the acquisition of French pronouns of address of the first person plural form (nous / on [we]). They studied the data collected through semi-directed Labovian interviews and a questionnaire from forty-one high school students. All participants were speakers of English who were studying in an immersion school, did not speak French at home, and were form different language backgrounds. Their ages ranged between 15 and 17 years old.

- Rehner, Mougeon & Nadasdi (2003) found that immersion students did not prefer the formal variant nous but they preferred the more frequently form on.

- Similar to studies on variation in L1 languages, the authors found that female and middle-class students make greater use of the formal variant nous than their respective counterparts.
The Research Questions

1. Do learners of Spanish as a second language use the pronouns of address following native speakers rules? If so, is variation in usage present in their interlanguage?

2. Do social variables influence the use and/or variation of these pronouns? If so, which social variables influence their usage?

3. What pragmatic variables influence the use and/or variation of these pronouns?

4. Does an overt pronoun of address in the prompt sentence influence the use of these forms?

5. Does personality influence the choice of address forms?
Participants

- 79 Native Speakers of English
  - Age 17-35 y/o
  - Different levels of proficiency

- 10 Native Speakers of Spanish
  - Graduate Students
The Instrument

- Electronic Discourse Completion Task
- Contexts
  - Text & Audio
  - Video (silent)
Variables

- **Dependent**
  - Participant choice (tu, usted, either)

- **Independent**
  - Pragmatic
    - Amigo
    - Extraño
  - Formal dress
  - Informal dress
    - Familiarity
    - Mode of dress
Variables

- **Linguistic**
  - Overt pronoun
  - Covert pronoun
  - Saludo
  - Pregunta

- **Social**
  - Gender
  - Age
  - Education level
  - Spanish proficiency
  - Income level
  - Spanish contact
  - Visit to Spanish Country
  - Length of visit
  - Purpose of visit
  - Where from
Variables

- Psychological
  - Character’s (in video)personality
  - Participant’s personality
    - Measure by the NEO-FFI (Five-Factorial Inventory)
Analysis

- VARBRUL
  - GoldVarb_2001 for Windows
Results

- 1172 tokens
- Usted (as the default value)
  - Five factors resulted significant at the .010 level for the selection of “usted”
    - Character’s personality
    - Familiarity
    - Mode of dress
    - Over or covert pronoun
    - Where from
Results

- Usted
  - Character personality
    - $e = 0.423; \quad i = 0.590$
  - Familiarity
    - $e = 0.658; \quad a = 0.317$
  - Mode of dress
    - $f = 0.569; \quad i = 0.400$
  - Pronoun
    - $a = 0.459; \quad p = 0.541$
  - Where from
    - $m: 0.499; \quad e: 0.395; \quad w: 0.564; \quad s: 0.679$
Results

- Tú (as the default value)
  - Five factors resulted also significant at the .016 level for the selection of “tú”
    - Character’s personality
    - Familiarity
    - Mode of dress
    - Over or covert pronoun
    - Personality of the participant
Results

- **Tú**
  - Character personality
    - e = 0.577; i = 0.411
  - Familiarity
    - e = 0.311; a = 0.717
  - Mode of dress
    - f = 0.441; i = 0.586
  - Pronoun
    - a = 0.542; p = 0.458
  - Participant’s personality
    - i: 0.383; e: 0.513
Results

- A difference was found between the analyses of usted and tú

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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Results

- Different factors were significant when the answer was “either” at a .017 level of significance
  - Familiarity
    - $e = .610$; $a = .372$
  - Level of Education
    - $s = .429$; $f = .614$; $p = .488$; $g = .646$; $j = .384$
  - Contact with Spanish
    - $l = .506$; $m = .525$; $v = .120$
Results

- A difference was found between the analyses of usted and tú

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Native Speakers

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1. Do learners of Spanish as a second language use the pronouns of address following native speakers rules? If so, is variation in usage present in their interlanguage?

- Yes, from early stages of interlanguage, learners are able to demonstrate choice of pronouns of address similar to the choice made by native speakers.
  - Yes, there is variation among learners and this depends on pragmatic, social, linguistic, and even psychological variables contrary to what has been study so far.
2. Do social variables influence the use and/or variation of these pronouns? If so, which social variables influence their usage?

- Yes, social variables such as place of birth/upbringing seem to influence learners' choice of pronouns of address at least in the case of the “usted” form.
3. What pragmatic variables influence the use and/or variation of these pronouns?

- Familiarity with the interlocutor seem to be the most influential variable to both learners and native speakers.
- Mode of dress seem to influence the choice too. We need to tease out formal wear and formal situations and conduct a cultural perception test of what formal dressing constitutes. These results are preliminary.
Discussion & Conclusion

4. Does an overt pronoun of address in the prompt sentence influence the use of these forms?

- Yes, the presence or absence of the pronoun in the prompt sentence seem to play a role in the selection of both tú and usted. In the selection of tú where the absence of the pronoun helped the selection of this form, this might be because the tú form of address is the form that is included in the textbooks and it is encouraged to be used in the classroom. Students are more familiar with this form, but when the pronoun usted is present they tend to choose it showing native-like behavior drawing from the rules they already know or come with about the address forms.
Discussion & Conclusion

5. Does personality influence the choice of address forms?

- Yes. For both tú and usted, personality of the character seem to influence the choice made by the participant both native and nonnative alike.

- The personality type of the nonnative participant seem to be also influential when the choice is the informal pronoun of address
  - When dealing with the formal pronoun, the place of birth of the nonnative participant seems to influence the choice of pronoun.
References