

Child Acquisition and Language Change: *Voseo* Evolution in Río de la Plata Spanish

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1. Introduction

Voseo may be defined as the use of the pronoun corresponding to the etymological second person plural (*vos* vs. *tú*) and its corresponding verbal inflections (*tenés* vs. *tienes*) to address a singular interlocutor. Although no longer present in Peninsular Spanish, it is spread over about two thirds of Hispanic America, often in complex social and regional variation with its standard counterpart, *tuteo*.¹ *Voseo* has long been recognized as one of the distinguishing traits of Río de la Plata Spanish (henceforth RPS) and has received the attention of a number of authors (cf., for example, Bertolotti & Coll, 2001; Fontanella de Weinberg, 1970, 1971, 1976, 1977, 1987, 1992, 1993, for a diachronic perspective; and Behares, 1981; Bertolotti & Coll, 2001; Elizaincín & Díaz, 1981; Fontanella de Weinberg, 1979; Planells, 1985; Siracusa, 1972, for synchronic analyses). The present-day pronominal and verbal paradigm of *voseo* in RPS is stable but mixed, the outcome of a process of competition between both second person forms.

Previous work (Moyna & Vanni Ceballos, 2008), has considered the effect of sociolinguistic variables on the process of shift to *voseo*. It concludes that the generalization of *voseo* at the expense of *tuteo* was not uniform across social strata. While the rural and urban lower classes, especially men, were *voseo* users, the acceptability of this form among the bourgeoisie was problematic. In that class, the older generation used *tuteo* while the younger generation, especially the women, adopted *voseo* more willingly and thus spearheaded the process of change in the local prestige norm.

However, the interplay of social variables does not tell the whole story. In particular, it fails to account for the order in which the verb forms favored *voseo* over *tuteo*, starting in the imperative, spreading to the present indicative, and lagging behind and eventually receding in the present subjunctive. It is claimed here that the sequence of the shift has all the hallmarks of a language change resulting from first language acquisition: it was completed fast, independently of social variables, and followed a sequence parallel to L1 acquisition order. More specifically, this work shows a plausible scenario of how a combination of factors related to each form's saliency and learnability may have operated to result in the attested order of change, whereas notions of paradigmatic simplification fail to account for the facts.

The structure of the paper is as follows. Section 2 presents the theoretical assumptions by establishing a distinction between language change fashioned by adults and language change fueled by children acquiring their first language. Section 3 presents two separate sets of data. First, it summarizes the contemporary second person verbal paradigm in RPS and the historical evolution leading up to its current configuration (3.1). Second, it presents data from the acquisition of verbal morphology by Spanish native speakers (3.2). Section 4 shows how the parallels between historical and acquisition data can be accounted for by applying the theoretical notions in 2 (4.1). It also exposes the shortcomings of an alternative account based only on increased paradigmatic simplicity (4.2). Section 5 concludes the paper and summarizes some outstanding issues.

2. Theoretical assumptions: Nature and nurture in language change

Underlying this work is the presupposition that language change is the result of the combined effect of social and individual factors. Social factors include any changes in linguistic ecology between one period and the next which are fueled by external social changes. These may include contact

between speakers of different varieties due to conquest, migration, or both. They may also involve changes in the power structure which may alter prestige relations and lead to the generalization of heretofore non-prestige forms. Social factors have been successfully invoked to explain several changes in the history of Spanish (Penny, 2000, Ch.3, 2006; Tuten, 1999, 2003). In the specific case I am examining, contact between an urban prestige *tuteante* dialect and a rural vernacular *voseante* variety as a result of urbanization and internal migration during the 19th century is undoubtedly at the root of the process of *voseo* generalization. Additionally, the arrival of large contingents of non-Spanish speaking immigrants in the area throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries – most notably, several massive waves of Italians – can be hypothesized to have had a deep impact which is yet to be adequately assessed.

However, social changes affecting adult populations are not alone in explaining language change. Children raised in mixed linguistic environments play a unique role by reinterpreting their input as they acquire language. In other words, change results from an entire generation of children acquiring an individual grammar (or I-language, Chomsky, 1986) different from that of the adults in their community. Intergenerational change is thus tightly related to L1 acquisition, including not just the type of input in the environment but also the mechanisms and rates of input processing.²

When child acquisition was first proposed as a motivator of language change, it was assumed to proceed instantaneously when a child received certain cues from the input (Lightfoot, 1989). In this hypothesis, known as degree- \emptyset learnability, the triggers for acquisition were assumed to be present in main clauses only (or, in later versions, in main clauses and certain operators on the left of the embedded clause). Lightfoot is a proponent of the continuity hypothesis, i.e. the view that the features of universal grammar (UG) are present in child grammars all along. If they fail to emerge in child language, it is due to extra-linguistic developmental limitations of learners (memory, attention span, etc.). There is an opposing view according to which children's grammars mature gradually, and new features of UG are acquired in stages. In fact, some of these proposals claim that children may go through intermediate stages which are not grammatical in adults and which later need to be unlearned (e.g. the root infinitive stage, Hoekstra & Hyams, 1998). Regardless of how they are ultimately accounted for, observable data show that the increase in the complexity of child language is systematic. Children acquiring the same L1 follow similar paths in their evolution from child to adult grammars. They go through similar stages and do so in roughly the same chronological order.

Let us now turn to the historical data for *voseo/tuteo* replacement in RPS, followed by data on the acquisition of verb forms by Spanish-speaking children which show the sequence of acquisition of mood in Spanish-speaking children.

3. The data

3.1. Historical data

3.1.1. Contemporary *voseo* in RPS

The present paradigm of *voseo* in RPS exhibits little internal variability and virtually no competition from alternatives. It constitutes a stable local norm of informal address for all strata of society, regardless of age, gender, social affiliation, and speech context (Fontanella de Weinberg, 1992). For the sake of clarity and succinctness, in what follows only the evolution of verb forms is considered, focusing exclusively on the prestige norms of Buenos Aires and Montevideo (Lipski, 2002). As Table 1 shows, the imperative and present indicative have adopted *voseo* categorically (Siracusa, 1972, for Buenos Aires; Behares, 1981, for Montevideo). The present subjunctive exhibits two possible forms (*cantes/cantés*), related to the different functions of the subjunctive as a subordination marker (*no creo que cantes* 'I don't think you sing PRES SUBJ') and as a negative imperative (*¡no cantes!* 'no sing IMP!') (Fontanella de Weinberg, 1979). Stress-final *voseo* forms are restricted to the second use (*¡no cantés!*), in particular to marked, imperious commands that convey anger or impatience (Behares, 1981, p. 37; Fontanella de Weinberg, 1979, p. 77). Finally, in the preterite there is a sociolinguistically motivated alternation, with forms distinguished by the absence or

presence of a final *-s*. This trait is not unequivocally the result of *voseo*, however, since it can be explained as an analogical extension of second person inflectional *-s* to the only tense that lacks it in standard Spanish. This is supported by the fact that final *-s* forms are present in a number of non-standard varieties where *voseo* cannot be adduced (cf. Lapesa, 1981, for Peninsular varieties; Moreno de Alba, 1978, for Mexico). In all other tenses/moods there is no difference between local *voseo* and standard *tuteo*, either because the dialect exhibits the same forms as standard Spanish (e.g. future *comerás* instead of *comerés*) or because there is syncretism between *tuteo* and non-diphthongized *voseo* forms (e.g. subjunctive preterite *comieras*).

	cantar	temer	partir
Imperative	cantá	temé	partí
Pres. Indicative	cantás	temés	partís
Pres. Subjunctive	cantes (cantés)	temas (temás)	partas (partás)
Preterite	cantaste(s)	temiste(s)	partiste(s)

Table 1. Verbal paradigm for contemporary RPS *voseo*.

The discussion that follows excludes forms which exhibit no variability or cannot be unequivocally linked to *voseo*, and thus focuses only on the imperative, the present indicative, and the present subjunctive.

3.1.2. *Voseo* in RPS before 1880

The system of second person singular address that was brought over to America by the Spanish settlers was pragmatically ambiguous, with *vos* and etymologically plural verb forms used as a highly formulaic formal address and also as familiar address among equals (Fontanella de Weinberg, 1993, p. 147).³ In its informal usage, it overlapped with familiar *tú*, which led to alternating use of pronouns within the same discourse and to mismatches between pronouns and accompanying verbs. To add to the confusion, the second person plural verb forms were undergoing a series of phonological and analogical changes that led to multiple forms with the same value, e.g. imperative *tené*, *tened* ‘have 2S IMP’ present indicative *tenéis*, *tenés*, *tenís* ‘have 2S PRES.’ This profusion of forms was unstable. In areas with strong ties to the Peninsula and continued influence from standard norms (New Spain, Peru) *tuteo* eventually prevailed and *voseo* receded (Páez Urdaneta, 1981). However, in more marginal and isolated regions *voseo* and *tuteo* coexisted before the emergence of clear patterns. Because in numerous tenses phonetic evolution had resulted in syncretism between *tuteo* and *voseo* verbs, the solutions often exhibited a certain degree of paradigmatic merger (Lapesa, 1970a, p. 520).

From its very inception, with the founding of the main towns in the region (Buenos Aires 1580, Montevideo 1724), the Río de la Plata was one of those marginal areas of *voseo/tuteo* coexistence. For Buenos Aires specifically, a series of illuminating articles by Fontanella de Weinberg (1971 and later dates) trace the process that resulted in the modern norm. Through the analysis of correspondence and literary works, the author shows the uninterrupted existence of *voseo* in RPS from colonial times, when it alternated with *tuteo*. For example, in the earliest decades of the 1800s evidence of verbal *voseo* appears exclusively in the imperative, and even in that form its use isn’t categorical, as shown in (1c).

1. Data from Fontanella de Weinberg (1971:504-5)
 - a. *Procurá* *servir en cuanto puedas a R* [...] (#26, 1816)
Try-VOS IMP serve as soon as you can to R
“Try to serve R as soon as you can”
 - b. *Creedme* *que estoy temblando* (#32, 1817)
Believe-VOS IMP that am trembling
“Believe me that I am trembling”

- c. *Visitalo* *dadle* [...] *y sirvelo* (#25, 1816)
 Visit-VOS IMP him, give-VOS IMP him [...] and serve-TÚ IMP him
 “Visit him, give him [...] and serve him”

Fontanella de Weinberg concludes that the upper class of Buenos Aires had in place a second person system similar to that of present-day RPS, and attributes examples of *tuteo* to the pressure of normative education, limitations in her sample, and inconsistent spelling (Fontanella de Weinberg, 1971, p. 508). Yet, in later studies (Fontanella de Weinberg, 1987), she acknowledges that differences in *voseo* across verbal and pronominal forms actually do reflect order of adoption. Although her qualitative studies do not present relative frequencies of competing forms, they show that the shift to *voseo* starts in the imperative and later affects the present indicative (Table 2). Rural varieties show a similar evolution, with more initial oscillation but a faster shift.⁴ The subjunctive is not included in her tabulations, probably because of its low frequency. In spite of their limitations, these qualitative data show an unequivocal sequence of replacement (imperative > present indicative).

	Imperative	Pres. Indicative
<i>Rural RPS</i>		
1800 – 1830	V ~ T	V ~ T
1830 - 1850	V	V ~ T
1850 - 1880	V	V
<i>Buenos Aires</i>		
1800 – 1850	V ~ T	T (V)*
1850 – 1880	V	V ~ T

* *Voseo* only in verb *ser* ‘to be’: *sois*

Table 2. *Voseo/tuteo* alternation in RPS before 1880 (data from Fontanella de Weinberg, 1971, 1987).

3.1.3. *Voseo* in RPS after 1880

The qualitative analysis for the first period can be corroborated and refined with quantitative data from 1880 to the present, obtained from popular plays written between 1880-1911 and from a study based on personal interviews with speakers from Buenos Aires (Siracusa, 1972) (Table 3).⁵ All verbs in the imperative, present indicative, and present subjunctive present are considered if they exhibit different *voseo* and *tuteo* forms. In the table, the ages of the speakers are unified by estimating their year of birth (real or fictitious).⁶

The trends in Table 3 are compatible with the earlier qualitative data. The imperative deepens its tendency to prefer the *voseo* variant earlier than either of the other two verb forms. Those born after 1850 prefer it overwhelmingly (80%), while for those born at the turn of the century the change has run its complete course and there is practically no alternation at all. The present indicative forms follow, becoming virtually categorical for the following generation, born between 1916 and 1935. The subjunctive present follows a different path, however. For those born before 1850, the choice between forms is virtually random (*voseo* 49.7%, *tuteo* 50.3%), and one would have expected a parallel albeit slightly delayed increase in *voseo* over time (constant rate effect, Kroch, 1994). Yet, in the following generations *voseo* recedes, so that for the youngest group considered it is under 20%, or solidly *tuteante*.

	Imperative	Pres. Indicative	Pres. Subjunctive
<i>Plays</i>			
Born before 1850	75.9 %	65.4 %	49.7 %
Born 1850-1880	80.9 %	77.4 %	44.5 %
<i>Interviews*</i>			
Born 1890-1915	99.4 %	92.9 %	25 %
Born 1916-1935	99.8 %	99 %	20.2 %
Born 1936-1945	99.1 %	99.9 %	16.9 %

* Data from Siracusa (1972)

Table 3. *Voseo* percentages in RPS after 1880.

The data above pose several puzzles.⁷ The first one is how the process of consolidation of the second person paradigm could happen so fast, in roughly one century. The second issue is why imperatives spearheaded the process of *voseo* adoption, with the present indicative following. The last question is why *voseo* didn't generalize to the subjunctive present. In what follows, I provide a summary of acquisition data which will later allow me to propose a scenario which can account for the historical sequence.

3.2. Acquisition data

Children acquiring Spanish as their first language parallel the pathway of *voseo* adoption in their acquisition of the second person paradigm. In other words, they first learn imperative forms, followed by indicative forms, and finally, subjunctives. Studies on the acquisition of verbal morphology in a variety of languages agree that the imperative is the earliest form acquired by small children, as early as 1;4-1;5. In Spanish this precedes the formation of miniparadigms which marks the onset of the pre-morphological stage (Aguirre, 2003, p. 5). Imperatives are then one of the main three verb forms produced during the pre-morphological stage, together with third person present indicatives and infinitives (Aguirre, 2003, p. 7; cf. Kilani-Schoch, 2003, p. 273, for French; Noccetti, 2003, p. 359, for Italian). It could be questioned whether it makes sense to characterize these forms in terms of adult grammar, since their appearance precedes the development of inflectional categories. However, there is semantic and syntactic evidence to support the view that they are indeed imperatives. Children use them accurately with volitional meaning and, in the few instances when they are employed with clitics, the latter appear correctly placed to the right of the verb (Montrul, 2004, p. 113) (2).

2. Data from Salustri and Hyams (2006) and Montrul (2004)

- a. *Ajuda'm.* *Catalan*
Help-IMP me
"Help me."
- b. *Mettilo.* *Italian*
Put-IMP it
"Put it."
- c. *Témelo [% tráemelo]* *Spanish*
Bring-IMP me it
"Bring it to me."

This strongly suggests that the imperative-looking form is in fact an imperative, and as such, occupies a position on the Force Phrase (FP) on the left periphery of the clause (Rizzi, 1997), which allows for its deontic interpretation. The fact that acquisition of verbs on the left periphery precedes that of main verbs suggests a layering within the main clause. In other words, the degree- \emptyset domain is

more internally complex than in Lightfoot's original formulation. One way to explain the advantage of the leftmost topicalized or fronted constituents in acquisition is that they have more perceptual saliency. Other factors identified to favor acquisition of imperatives are morphological simplicity and semantics derivable from context (Aguirre, 2003, p. 20). It should be noted that high frequency in the input cannot be adduced as a cause for early acquisition. While Romance-speaking children do overuse the imperative in the earliest stages (peaking at about 40% at age 2;0-2;4), adults do not provide an equally imperative-laden input (according to Salustri & Hyams, 2006, imperative frequency in child-directed speech is at most 15%).

The emergence of the indicative is related to the acquisition of the Inflectional Phrase (IP), which is the locus of obligatory subject-verb agreement. In that regard, studies of acquisition of Spanish and related languages such as Catalan have shown that children produce finite verbs with person contrasts very early (Bel, 2001). First and third person are produced frequently and virtually simultaneously (between 1;7 and 1;9), while second person comes a little later and is the least frequent in child language samples (Montrul, 2004, p. 105).

The morphological subjunctive emerges a little later than imperative and indicative, by age 2. Most studies note that the imperative negative uses of the subjunctive are correctly mastered earlier. Thus, for example, López Ornat (1994) shows that negative imperatives emerge at age 1;7-1;8 (3a), with some incorrect replacement of the subjunctive by the indicative still at age 1;10 (3b). It takes some more time for the child to extend the subjunctive paradigm to adverbial clauses and verbs that subcategorize for the subjunctive (4). Other studies (Blake, 1983; Padilla, 1990; Pérez-Leroux, 1998) report that the complete mastery of the non-matrix subjunctive in the various semantic and syntactic contexts takes a great deal longer, until age 5-7 (Montrul, 2004, p.130).

3.

- a. *Que no te bañes tú.*
That no you-REFL bathe-SUBJ you
"That you don't bathe."
- b. **No supa* *guauguau.* [Adult: *No chupes.*]
No lick- 3S PRES IND doggie [Adult: no lick- 2S PRES SUBJ]
Don't lick me, doggie.

4.

- a. *me lo voy a comer todo cuando me levante*
me it go-1S IND PRES to eat all when I me-REFL get up-1S SUBJ PRES
"I'm going to eat it all up when I get up."
- b. *voy a dejar a la gente que entre*
go-1S IND PRES to let to the people that enter-3S SUBJ PRES
"I'm going to let the people come in."

To summarize, then, order of acquisition of the second person paradigm follows a path that starts very early in the imperative, continues in the indicative, and is completed much later in the subjunctive. Let us now see how this developmental sequence may have affected the history of *voseo/tuteo* competition in RPS.

4. Discussion

4.1. L1 Acquisition order and language change

The data for the earlier periods in Table 2 suggest that the children born into the RPS variety of the early 19th century, whom we will call the first generation, received a mixed input throughout the second person paradigm. This was a result of dialect mixing due to the continued influx of Spanish speakers from a number of different dialectal backgrounds during the colonial period (Fontanella de Weinberg, 1987). It resulted in massive quantities of doublets, i.e. two forms for the same meaning, which posed a challenge in terms of cognitive load and favored leveling through reduction of the

number of allomorphs. As noted in Kroch (1994), over time doublets tend to suffer one of two fates. Either one of the two forms is eliminated (*walked* ~ *welk* ‘walk PRET’ > *walked*), or the two forms survive with different functions or meanings (*fit* ~ *fitted* ‘fit PRET’ > *fit* ‘fit PRET INTR,’ *fitted* ‘fit PRET TRANS’).

In the case of *voseo/tuteo*, children possibly opted for one form over another, starting on the earliest second person verb form acquired, i.e. the imperative. Anecdotal witness accounts corroborate this. For example, Juan Cruz Varela, a local poet who lived in the first half of the 19th century, decries errors frequent in the speech of Buenos Aires, thus: “It is very widespread among us, but particularly among the children, to lengthen the last syllables of imperatives, and even to add a letter to them, and to say, for example, *tomá* instead of *toma*; *corré* instead of *corre*; *vení* instead of *ven*.” (cited in Fontanella de Weinberg, 1971, p. 497, translation and emphasis mine).

How could this selective preference for *voseo* in the imperative be explained? Recall from Section 3.2 that the features of morphological simplicity and perceptual saliency offer advantages to acquisition. If we assume an even distribution of *voseo* and *tuteo* variants in the adult input, *voseo* imperative forms have an edge over their competitors in the process of acquisition, since they are completely regular and always end in an open, perceptually salient syllable (the long syllable that so peeved Cruz Varela). Whereas children acquiring a *tuteante* imperative form encounter irregularities such as diphthongizing vowels (*contar* – *cuenta* ‘tell IMP’) and shortened forms (*salir* – *sal* ‘go out IMP’ *poner* – *pon* ‘put IMP’ *tener* – *ten* ‘have IMP’), those who opt for a *voseante* imperative face no such complications (*contar* – *contá*, *salir* – *salí*, *poner* – *pone*, *tener* – *tené*). I propose that the overregularizing tendencies of children, normally countered and eventually eliminated by consistent counterevidence in the adult input, went mostly unnoticed and unchecked in a variety where regular and irregular alternatives coexisted.

Assuming the above is correct, when the children of this first generation had their own children, the second generation received a mixed input in the present indicative and the subjunctive, but had robust evidence in favor of *voseo* in the imperative. After acquiring these forms in the earliest stage of verbal morphology acquisition, they would have had a morphological basis on which to continue the process of doublet elimination in the following second person verb form learned, i.e. the present indicative found in main clauses. In opting between the *tuteo* and *voseo* variants, they could now use *voseo* imperatives as an anchor, and their final stress as a new second person marker: *cantás* ‘sing 2S PRES.’ In more embedded positions, i.e. subordinate clauses, the input received was not only mixed but also much smaller. This led to continued random use of subjunctive forms.

It can be surmised that third generation children received from their parents robust *voseo* input in the imperative and the present indicative, but a random mix in the present subjunctive. All other things being equal, one would have expected the process of *voseo* generalization to extend to this new context (constant rate effect, Kroch, 1994). However, in the subjunctive this generation did an about-face and moved in the opposite direction, contradicting expectations that the stress-final endings acquired in the main clause would generalize to embedded verbs. Unexpectedly, these children dealt with the presence of doublets not by elimination of *tuteo* variants but by semantic specialization. This was possible due to the existence of distinct uses of the subjunctive, i.e. as an irrealis marker (*No creo que cantes bien* ‘I don’t think you sing SUBJ well’) and as a deontic marker (*¡No cantes ahora!* ‘Don’t sing now!’).

Order of acquisition is also reflected in the final outcome of the semantic split in the subjunctive. It may be recalled from Section 3.2 that the negative imperative is the first function in which the subjunctive morphology is applied correctly. Again, *voseo* preference patterns with early acquisition, since *voseante* forms became specialized and restricted to these early deontic uses. On the other hand, only *tuteo* forms are possible in embedded clauses, where acquisition of the subjunctive is delayed considerably. Since now *voseo* and *tuteo* forms meant different things, this halted the generalization of the former into the subordinate contexts of the latter.

Questions remain about the history of the *voseo/tuteo* subjunctive split. For example, contrary to expectations, it is not the case that in deontic uses the subjunctive exhibited an earlier preference for *voseo* forms; rather, the specialization seems to have come about through a more marked dispreference for *voseo* forms in the non-matrix uses (Table 4). Another issue is why *voseo* forms are not categorical in the deontic uses of the subjunctive today. If they were, the *voseo* subjunctive forms would have

reached 100% in the deontic meanings, but this is not the case. Additionally, there is still no satisfactory explanation for the fact that *tuteo* subjunctive (*cantes*) is unmarked and can be used with no restrictions, whereas *voseo* subjunctive (*cantés*) is exclusively used in the most pragmatically marked contexts of imperative command. Part of the problem is that this particular form is hard to trace due to lack of reliable data. Previous historical studies don't record the subjunctive forms at all (Fontanella de Weinberg, 1971, 1987) or do not clearly tease apart its variants according to semantics. All that can be concluded from the present data is that *voseo* decreases both in deontic and non-matrix contexts, over time, more markedly in the latter. New data collection and analysis is necessary in order to clarify this particular issue.

	Deontic	Non-matrix
Born before 1850	46%	58.5%
Born 1850-1880	42%	54.5%
Born after 1880	23%	2%

Table 4. *Voseo* percentages in the subjunctive present according to semantic value (data from plays 1886-1911 and Fontanella de Weinberg 1979)

4.2. *The complications of simplicity*

Lack of space prevents me from addressing at great length alternatives that explain *voseo* choice exclusively as a consequence of increased paradigmatic regularization. It must be noted, however, that there are almost insurmountable problems with the notion of simplicity. The first one is that neither *voseo* nor *tuteo* variants appear as obviously simpler by any objective external measure. It is true that *voseo* eliminates many root alternations (*contar* 'tell-INF' ~ *tú cuentas* vs. *vos contás* 'tell-2S PRES'), but it is equally true that it puts the second person out of step with the remainder of singular forms, by displacing columnar stress in the verbal paradigm to the right in all verbs, and additionally, by eliminating the common root form in irregular verbs (*cuento*, *cuentas*, *cuenta* vs. *cuento*, *contás*, *cuenta* 'tell 1S, 2S, 3S PRES IND').

Even if we arbitrarily opted for elimination of root allomorphy as the therapeutic effect sought by the shift to *voseo*, it would have to be proved that greater occurrence of *voseo* did indeed bring about greater paradigmatic simplicity. Additionally, because *voseo* adoption in the imperative consistently outpaces that in the present indicative and subjunctive, paradigmatic regularization in the former would have to be shown to be faster than in the latter two. The available data show that this is simply not the case (Table 5).

Table 5 shows the effect of regularization by mood, tabulated for data obtained from the plays used in Section 3.1. It can be seen from the data that regularization does not consistently correlate with *voseo* adoption. For example, in the imperative, there is little difference between the two age groups in their choice of *voseo* and *tuteo*, and whatever difference there is does not correlate with increased regularity. The increase in *voseo* use from one generation to the next is of 8% for regular verbs, 4% for irregular verbs, and a mere 2% for verbs where use of the form brings about paradigmatic regularization. In the present, the percentage of *voseo* increase in cases of paradigmatic regularization is 16%, smaller than that for irregular verbs (21%), where *voseo* has no therapeutic effect. In the subjunctive, where *voseo* recedes rather than gaining ground, increased paradigmatic regularity does not offer any additional staying power. In this case, it is the regular verbs that retain *voseo* more than either irregular verbs (a drop of 28%) or verbs where *voseo* regularizes the paradigm (a drop of 11%). These facts contradict the hypothesis that *voseo* was motivated by its regularization of the second person.⁸

	Regular				Irregular				Regularized			
	T	(n)	V	(n)	T	(n)	V	(n)	T	(n)	V	(n)
<i>Imperative</i>												
1850-80	19.9	(86)	80.1	(347)	3.2	(1)	96.8	(30)	20.3	(41)	79.7	(161)
< 1850	27.3	(117)	72.7	(311)	7.1	(5)	92.9	(65)	22.4	(47)	77.6	(163)
Total	23.6	(203)	76.4	(658)	5.9	(6)	94.1	(95)	21.4	(88)	78.6	(324)
<i>Present Indicative</i>												
1850-80	27.0	(72)	73.0	(195)	14.0	(6)	86.0	(37)	19.6	(50)	80.4	(205)
< 1850	33.5	(78)	66.5	(155)	35.1	(20)	64.9	(37)	35.5	(109)	64.5	(198)
Total	30.0	(150)	70.0	(350)	26.0	(26)	74.0	(74)	28.3	(159)	71.7	(403)
<i>Present Subjunctive</i>												
1850-80	53.3	(56)	46.7	(49)	52.9	(9)	47.1	(8)	60.8	(31)	39.2	(20)
< 1850	53.0	(53)	47.0	(47)	38.9	(7)	61.1	(11)	50.0	(23)	50.0	(23)
Total	53.2	(109)	46.8	(96)	45.7	(16)	54.3	(19)	55.7	(54)	44.3	(43)

Table 5. Effect of verb regularity, irregularity, and increased regularization on *voseo/tuteo* alternation over time.

5. Conclusions

This paper has shown that the order of replacement of *tuteo* by *voseo* in RPS correlates with the order of appearance of forms in child language, with the earliest forms in acquisition also the earliest to shift historically. The replacement started in the imperative, whose saliency was enhanced by its position at the leftmost edge of the clause. *Voseo* forms had a perceptually salient phonological structure and morphological transparency, which favored early acquisition. The shift then extended to the present indicative, still within the degree- \emptyset domain of the main clause, and reached the subjunctive last. The stabilized RPS paradigm resulted from changes in which each generation of children extended the input of the previous generation to a new syntactic context, until the semantic complexity of subjunctive halted complete generalization and led to specialization of forms.

This work shows that a plausible account of a given morphological change requires an explicit distinction between the role played by adults and children. Up until now, studies of language change in Spanish that make reference to differences between first and later generations (Penny, 2000; Tuten, 1999) are vague about exactly why these two groups should behave differently. They claim as an overarching motivation for change the notion of increased simplicity of the linguistic system in processes of accommodation and adjustment. This paper proposes that simplicity is in fact a consequence of universal constraints imposed by children learners. Child grammars offer a testable and independent metric of the relative learnability of structures, so studies of acquisition offer a promising tool to shed light on many instances of past change.

There are several outstanding issues to consider in *voseo* adoption in RPS. The first one is the need to systematically distinguish regular lexical verbs from special verbs which are semantically empty or morphologically defective (*ser* 'to be,' *estar* 'to be,' *haber* 'aux. have,' *ir* 'to go'). Some of these (*ser* and *ir*) spearheaded the change in certain domains (Wanner, 2003), whereas others (*haber*)

never shifted, so a more fine-grained analysis should consider them separately. Another issue is the possibility of generalizing this explanation to the rest of the *voseo* paradigm, i.e. the pronouns. The prediction from this work is that order of adoption of *voseo* pronouns should also proceed in the order of appearance in child grammar, from left to right (subject > object of preposition).

Finally, this account makes typological predictions about expected *voseo* configurations, since it assumes an implicational scale of replacement. In cases where change operates by the unbridled effect of children's learning in situations of dialect mixing and koineization, then the historical sequence imperative > present indicative > present subjunctive is always expected. The logical possibilities are thus paradigms where *voseo* appears in imperative alone, in imperative and indicative, or in all three. Other combinations, such as *voseo* in present indicative and present subjunctive but not in imperative, or in present subjunctive but not in present indicative or imperative, are ruled out. By and large, this prediction seems to square with existing data (cf. for example, highland Bolivian Spanish, where *vos* is normally combined with *tú* verbs except in the imperative, Páez Urdaneta, 1981).⁹ One exception is Chilean diphthongized *voseo*, where *voseante* present indicative and subjunctive (*cantái* 'sing 2S PRES IND,' *cantís* 'sing 2S PRES SUBJ') with *tuteante* imperatives (*¡canta!* 'sing IMP') (Piñeros & Campos, 2007). This exception would not be problematic if it can be proven that the social preconditions necessary for koiné formation were not present in Chile at some point in the evolution of the form, or that the process of child-fueled change was somehow halted by pressure from above. In any case, quantitative historical information is needed, since existing work is mostly qualitative (Weeks, 2005).

Notes

¹ As one of the most characteristic features of Spanish American dialects, it has been studied extensively in the past (cf. Páez Urdaneta, 1981; Rona, 1967, for some synchronic panoramic descriptions).

² Whether and how much adult grammars change throughout the lifespan is a matter of current debate. It has been shown in longitudinal studies of aging populations that adults do in fact change their idiolects over the course of their lives, in the direction of adopting innovations (Sankoff & Blondeau, 2007). The fact that adults tend to participate to some degree in the language changes of their own communities constitutes a special case of dialect contact. The adult population is pushed in the direction of change through adjustment with the younger speakers. More research is needed, however, to determine whether changes in adult grammars over the lifespan are deep and systematic, involving actual parameter resetting, or superficial and haphazard, and subject to variability, analogic extension, hypercorrection, and so on (cf. Uriagereka, 2006).

³ Spanish *vos* and its corresponding plural verbs have antecedents in Latin, where they constituted a form of respectful address. This use can still be found in Old Spanish (e.g. *El Cid*). However, in later periods the form lost much of its deferential value, to the point where it was replaced by other polite formulas (e.g. *vuestra merced*) and started competing with *tú*. Readers interested in more detailed diachronic studies of *voseo* from its Latin antecedents to its spread in America are directed to Cuervo (1893); Henríquez Ureña (1977); Lapesa (1970a, 1970b, 1981 §96.2, §132); Lloyd (1987, p. 359); Páez Urdaneta (1981); and Penny (1991, pp. 124-125), among others.

⁴ Only patchy information can be obtained about Montevideo, the other city on the Río de la Plata, but there is some evidence of a similar but later evolution (cf. Bertolotti & Coll, 2001; Elizaincín, Malcuori, & Coll, 1987, pp. 57-64; Rizos Jiménez, 2000).

⁵ For more information about the plays used as sources, cf. Moyna & Vanni Ceballos (2008).

⁶ For the plays, the older generation represents people over 40 around the turn of the century, and thus estimated to have been born before 1850. The younger speakers, on the other hand, are assumed to have been born after that date. For the interviewees in Siracusa's work, date of birth was established by subtracting age from 1972, the year the study was conducted.

⁷ The data analysis is complicated by the fact that the variable under study is informal and one of its variants stigmatized, both of which conspired to make it infrequent in the writing of the scanty literate speakers. In this regard, the coincidence among multiple sources (authentic and literary, oral and written) can be regarded as a strength. It is true that none of the sources by themselves is ideal, but the fact that they confirm each other suggests that the pathway of change proposed is essentially correct. Regarding the oral data, one reviewer cautions specifically against assuming that the data from older speakers in Siracusa (1972) faithfully reflects the patterns of use in their youth. This is undoubtedly true: studies in real time have shown that older adults do in fact adopt some features of younger generations (Sankoff & Blondeau, 2007; cf. note 2 above). We should assume, therefore, that the levels of *voseo* for the older speakers in Siracusa (1972) were possibly higher than in their youth, which provides even further evidence of *tuteo* use in the earlier part of the 20th century.

⁸ In fact, a closer look at the data reveals the impact of very frequent irregular verbs on the *voseo* shift. For example, in the imperative, the suppletive imperative of *ir* ‘to go’ (*andá*) constitutes most cases of irregular *voseo* forms and is thus in large part responsible for the shift (93 out of a total of 101 irregular imperatives, or 92%). In the present, all the tokens of irregular *voseo* forms correspond to another highly irregular frequent verb, *ser* ‘to be’ (*sos*), which therefore spearheads the change. Therefore, *voseo* adoption was favored by the shift in some highly frequent verbs rather than by an across-the-board simplification. Again, the effect of frequency can be well accounted for within the paradigm of language change through acquisition, since forms that appear more frequently in the input are learned first.

⁹ I have to thank an anonymous reviewer for this observation.

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