



Not just you: The construction of radio audiences through second-person choice in Peninsular Spanish



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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the choice among the second-person paradigms of Peninsular Spanish in the speech of radio broadcasters. The basic hypothesis is that each grammatical person has a unique meaning that affects the discursive and cognitive construction of nonspecific radio audiences, that of the speaker's contextual identity and the kind of relationship established between them. It is found that plural *ustedes* is dominant in all programs where speakers highlight professional facets of their identity, and where the transmission of information has primacy. In turn, singular *tú* is preferred in music programs, where broadcasters tend to highlight personal identities and suggest interaction with individual addressees. Both choices are shown to be respectively associated with two different models of media communication.

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1. Introduction: grammatical persons as communicative choices in the media¹

The category of person is among the most basic and pervasive ones in human languages (Siewierska, 2004: 1–5). It stems from the grammaticalization of communicative roles just as it helps to allocate them, identifying those participants who are responsible for discourse, those intended to receive it and/or any others external to the communicative exchange. By formulating a first-person grammatical element, someone will be claiming the status of 'speaker', just like by using second-person ones anyone else will be turned into the 'addressee'. Such allocations will have the effect of bestowing sets of communicative rights and duties on the individuals in question. The choice among grammatical persons for the construction of the participants is currently the subject of a growing body of research from discursive-pragmatic, sociolinguistic and cognitive perspectives (e.g. Aijón Oliva, 2017; Posio, 2016; Serrano, 2017, 2018b, c).

The present study is concerned with the choice among second-person grammatical paradigms in European Spanish media discourse. In its standard form, this variety has four different sets of morphematical elements allowing for a second-person characterization, which are represented in Table 1 through their respective subject pronouns. The classification contemplates two partially different persons—to be respectively labelled *prototypical* and *displaced*—and numbers—singular and plural. The displaced second person results from the use of third-person morphemes to encode addressees (RAE, 2009, §4.4d–e). Having developed its own stressed pronouns (*usted*, *ustedes*) and particular functional patterns, it is generally described as different from both the prototypical second person and the third one (see further Sections 3.2, 3.4).

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Table 1
Overview of second-person paradigms in Peninsular Spanish and conventional translations to English.

	Prototypical	Displaced
Singular	tú 'you'	usted 'you+'
Plural	vosotros, -as 'you all'	ustedes 'you all+'

It is worth noting that a typologically close language such as English, in its standard variety, has only 1 s-person paradigm—*you*. However, Table 1 proposes different conventional translations to be used in the English versions of the examples, with the compound *you all* serving as an indicator of all plural forms, and the [+] symbol of all displaced ones.

The analysis will focus on the choice among second-person paradigms as a way to construct different kinds of audiences in equivalent interactional contexts, namely those where a radio broadcaster addresses his/her audience. These are cases of referential nonspecificity where speakers talk to a virtual human contingent whose expected dominant psychosocial features shape the notion of *target audience* (Kelley and Jugenheimer, 2008, p. 59) and whose actual composition can only be approximated through surveys and marketing techniques, but whose influence on the linguistic behavior of media professionals can hardly be overstated.

Radio broadcasting speech has been approached from a variety of pragmatic and sociolinguistic perspectives. Bell's studies (1984, 1991, 2001) showed how linguistic variables subject to psychosocial evaluation in a community could be used by broadcasters in order to respond to a particular target audience—or, from a more dynamic perspective, to construct that very audience. Linguistic choices have also been viewed as stylistic resources to develop personal and professional self-identities, as well as corporative ones for the companies broadcasters work for (Coupland, 1985, 2001, 2007, pp. 172–175). As regards the construction of the participants through grammatical elements marked for person, Xiang's (2003) study delves into the complexity of 'the self' in radio discourse, where different references—ranging from the individual speaker to a variety of human groups and corporations—tend to overlap. In turn, 'the other' is an even more complex notion in this domain. Speakers may explicitly address specific people with whom they are interacting, but who may be acting as representatives of wider, absent groups—or *referees*, in Bell's (2001) terms. Besides, the audience of the program will always be present as an implicit addressee that can become explicit just by its indexation through deictic grammatical forms.² As advanced, it is the latter cases that will constitute the main interest of the present study.

In contexts of nonspecific audience indexation, the 4 s-person paradigms can be approached as variants in the usual sense, i.e. their individual occurrences across texts can be submitted to quantitative and qualitative analysis. Indeed, the choice between *tú* and *usted* to address others has been the subject of an enormous body of research (see Blas Arroyo, 2005, ch. 9; Hummel et al., 2010; Fernández and Gerhalter, 2017). It concerns the identity of addressees just as much as the contextual self-identity speakers intend to construct. Raymond (2016b: 661–663) shows that, while treatment choice has been viewed as a matter of identity *status*, i.e. as determined by more-or-less fixed social features of the participants, it can at the same time be used as a resource for the development of identity *stances*, i.e. the features of identity that are made interactionally relevant in a given context. When selecting some grammatical paradigm to index others, speakers will be defining a shared system of communicative rights and duties for all participants including themselves (Aijón Oliva, 2012). We will thus analyze a feature of grammatical choice—second-person verbal morphemes of four different sets—as a semiotic resource that helps construct radio audiences, but that simultaneously affects the self-presentation of speakers themselves and the configuration of radio programs as communicative contexts.

The basic hypothesis is that the four choices considered are hardly synonymous or interchangeable, as traditional approaches to variation and choice would have it; rather, each one entails the construction of a particular meaning at all possible semiotic levels, including the pragmatic and cognitive ones (see Section 3). Through their particular combinations of person and number features, these choices make it possible to construct the audience in different ways—as either 'individuals' or 'groups'—just as speakers themselves—as either 'close' or 'distanced' from the audience—and the very textual genres where they appear—as either 'interaction-' or 'information-oriented'. Therefore, a view of grammatical choice is adopted whereby it constitutes a resource for the dynamic construction of participant identities and of context as a whole (Goodwin and Duranti, 1992; Erickson, 2011; Raymond, 2016a,b).

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2 briefly exposes the features of the corpus analyzed and the methodology to be employed, based on the combination of quantitative and qualitative evidence. In Section 3, the Spanish 4 s-person paradigms are further discussed, synthesizing their respective discursive-cognitive meanings and the most significant pragmatic repercussions of their use. Section 4 is devoted to the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the choice among the paradigms by broadcasters in different radio programs. In Section 5, the results are jointly discussed and put in connection with two different prototypical modalities of radio communication. Finally, Section 6 summarizes the conclusions and suggests some directions for further research.

² A well-known classification of interlocutor roles includes, together with that of *addressee*, those of *auditor*, *overhearer* and *eavesdropper* (Bell, 1984, pp. 159–160). Even if they can all influence linguistic choice and discourse construction, when analyzing person forms it is necessary to primarily consider the reference the latter are intended to denote in a given utterance—in our case, the explicit addressee or audience.

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