Study Abroad, Immigration, and *Voseo* in the Twenty-First-Century Classroom

Robert D. Cameron  
*United States Military Academy at West Point*

**RESPONSE**

*El Voseo*: A Call to Action

Jean W. LeLoup  
*United States Air Force Academy*

Barbara C. Schmidt-Rinehart  
*Ashland University*

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Robert D. Cameron
United States Military Academy at West Point

Abstract: Although millions of speakers of Spanish employ voseo, the twentieth century did not see a single article published in Hispania that suggested incorporating instruction on voseo into the language classroom. In contrast, the twenty-first century has already seen three articles published in Hispania that have suggested teaching voseo. At the same time, trends in study abroad and immigration are increasing links between the United States and three voseante nations. This essay investigates the field’s evolving treatment of voseo, with a special focus on Hispania’s first 100 years, and argues for the need to incorporate voseo into the twenty-first-century classroom.

Keywords: Argentina, Costa Rica, El Salvador, study abroad/estudiar en el extranjero, teaching Spanish as a foreign language/enseñanza de español como lengua extranjera, teaching Spanish as a heritage language/enseñanza de español como lengua de herencia, vos, voseo

Introduction

In the inaugural issue of Hispania, the journal’s founding editor states that Hispania’s mission is to improve the teaching of Spanish in schools, colleges, and universities. He adds that it is imperative that future teachers of Spanish have “a complete and sympathetic understanding of the history and culture of Spain and Spanish America” (Espinoza 1917: 19). Despite estimates from the first half of the twentieth century that voseo (use of the second person singular pronoun vos and corresponding verb forms in familiar address) was present in two-thirds of Spanish-speaking America (Capdevila 1940) and used by approximately half of Latin American speakers of Spanish (Kany 1945), it would be more than two decades after Hispania’s debut before Hilton (1938) would publish the first article in the journal to acknowledge the existence of voseo. It would be another eleven years before Mallo (1949) published the first article in Hispania to note the absence of voseo in foreign language curricula. Although stopping short of proposing that voseo be taught, Mallo criticizes the field for believing that voseo is “una modalidad lingüística de calidad inferior” (41). The following year, Hispania published Lechuga’s (1950) scathing critique of voseo, in which he describes correctly many of the vos verb forms and their distribution, but labels them an “abominable corrupción” (116). Thirteen years later, in the fiftieth anniversary issue of Hispania, Canfield (1967) acknowledged the work of linguists who had persisted against the belief that “millions of Latin Americans spoke a ‘bad sort’ of Spanish” (912). In so doing, he cites the countries and regions in which voseo is reported and provides examples of vos morphology in a descriptive, rather than a prescriptive manner.

Arguments against teaching voseo include the notion that observed sociolinguistic and morphological variation make this form of address too complicated to teach. However, this justification may seem less convincing if one delves deeper into the types and distribution of voseo and considers how they relate to emerging trends in study abroad and immigration. Before doing so, the following section considers briefly the history of voseo.
History of Voseo

The second person singular pronouns tú and vos are known to have existed in Spanish since Medieval times (Fontanella de Weinberg 1977), yet the use of vos has undergone significant change, as has the vos paradigm. Having been used for centuries as the pronoun of respect, it was during the sixteenth century that vos began to take hold in Spain as a pronoun of familiarity and solidarity (Benavides 2003; Fontanella de Weinberg). By the end of the eighteenth century, tú had prevailed as the pronoun of familiar address in Spain and in parts of Latin America that maintained closer contact with the Peninsula. In contrast, vos prevailed in areas of Latin America that were more economically, politically, and culturally isolated from Spain and the power centers of Mexico and Lima, such as Central America and the River Plate region (Benavides).

Although aspects of the vos and vosotros paradigms were identical at the beginning of the colonial period, vos ultimately took on many characteristics of the tú paradigm. For example, the pronoun os has been replaced with te, and the possessives vuestro(a) and vuestros(as) have been replaced with tu(s), tuyo(a) and tuyos(as) in all voseante regions (Fontanella de Weinberg 1977; Lipski 1994). Despite this convergence, differences emerged in the verbal paradigm, which are discussed in the following section.

Types and Distribution of Voseo

Rona (1967) was the first to propose three types of voseo: those in which verbs marked present indicative are diphthongized, those in which they are monophthongized, and Chilean voseo. Diphthongized vos forms, such as vos hablás and vos tenéis, which were in wide use in Spain at the beginning of the colonial period (Carricaburo 1997), are reported to remain the norm in Western Panama (Quilis and Graell Staizola 1989) and Zulia State, Venezuela (Páez Urdaneta 1981). Páez Urdaneta, Lipski (1994), and Benavides (2003) maintain Rona’s assertion that Chilean voseo constitutes its own category and further differentiate between two types of voseo: regional and national. In countries with regional voseo, such as Panama and Venezuela, tuteo is the dominant form of familiar address. In contrast, national voseo refers to countries in which voseo is more prevalent than tuteo nationwide (or in the majority of the nation) and across many segments of society.

Eight countries are reported to have national voseo: five in Central America (Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua), and three in South America (Argentina, Paraguay, and Uruguay). According to Ethnologue (Lewis, Simons, and Fennig 2015), the L1 Spanish population of these eight countries totals 65,955,000. Crucially, all eight nations employ monophthongized present indicative vos forms. Examples of how these and other vos forms differ from tú forms are considered in the following section.

Differences in Verb Morphology for Tú and Vos

Salient differences exist between the tuteo and national voseo paradigms for present indicative and imperative forms. Table 1 illustrates these differences with regular verbs across the three verb classes.

Note that in all cases, vos forms are stressed on the final syllable, whereas tú forms are not. In addition, whereas regular present indicative tú forms employ the morpheme -es with both -er and -ir verbs, vos forms distinguish between these verb classes, employing -és and -ís, respectively. Similarly, whereas regular tú imperative forms employ the suffix -e with both -er and -ir verbs, vos conjugations also maintain a distinction between these verb classes: -é with -er verbs, and -í with -ir verbs.

Another salient difference across the paradigms is that, unlike many tú forms, vos conjugations do not undergo a stem-change. Table 2 illustrates this difference with present indicative
and imperative forms across three types of stem-changing verbs. In addition to the absence of a stem-change, note that the vos forms maintain the distinction between verb classes outlined in Table 1.

After having considered briefly the history, types, and distribution of voseo, the following section will consider the evolving treatment of voseo in the literature, with a special focus on Hispania’s first 100 years.

The Evolving Treatment of Voseo

By this author’s count, over the course of the twentieth century, 26 articles were published in Hispania that mention the use of vos as a familiar form of address. Although several of these articles made important in-roads into understanding voseo (e.g., Pinkerton 1986; Torrejón 1986; Villegas 1963), none proposed teaching voseo. Indeed, the absence of voices in twentieth century Hispania advocating for the teaching of voseo mirrored the absence of voseo in textbooks used in foreign language courses in the United States, as documented by Mason and Nicely (1995).

In contrast to the twentieth century, in only the first sixteen years of the twenty-first century, thirteen articles were published in Hispania that mention voseo, including three that advocate teaching voseo. Pearson (2006) describes projects and materials that can be used to draw learners’ attention to vos morphology in a class on Spanish dialectology. Kingsbury (2011) suggests having learners investigate voseo as an extension activity in the teaching of Argentine literature. Shenk (2014) proposes examples of meaning-based activities that instructors can use to teach voseo in the intermediate language classroom. In so doing, she couches the need for such instruction within the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages’ objectives for Communication, Cultures, Comparisons, and Communities.

Although members of the AATSP are for the first time publically advocating for the inclusion of voseo in the classroom, it has been demonstrated that voseo remains largely absent in Spanish foreign language textbooks in the United States (Cameron 2012; Shenk 2014), as well as in Spanish heritage language textbooks (Ducar 2006). Internationally, researchers have also

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Table 1. Present indicative and imperative forms with regular verbs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb Classes</th>
<th>Infinitive</th>
<th>Present Indicative</th>
<th>Imperative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-ar</td>
<td>hablar</td>
<td>hablas</td>
<td>habla</td>
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<tr>
<td>-er</td>
<td>comer</td>
<td>comes</td>
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<td>-ir</td>
<td>vivir</td>
<td>vives</td>
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<tr>
<td>-ir</td>
<td>vivir</td>
<td>vives</td>
<td>vive</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Present indicative and imperative forms with stem-changing verbs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stem-change</th>
<th>Infinitive</th>
<th>Present Indicative</th>
<th>Imperative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>e → ie</td>
<td>cerrar</td>
<td>cierras</td>
<td>cierra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o → ue</td>
<td>volver</td>
<td>vuelves</td>
<td>vuelve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e → i</td>
<td>pedir</td>
<td>pides</td>
<td>pide</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
demonstrated and challenged the absence of voseo in textbooks that are in use in second/foreign language programs in Costa Rica (Sánchez Avendaño 2004), Spain (García Aguiar 2009), and China (Song and Wang 2013).

The lack of instruction on voseo in the United States is an issue of increasing importance due to at least two factors: trends in study abroad and trends in immigration. To this end, the following section addresses US undergraduates’ participation in study abroad in Costa Rica and Argentina—two of the eight countries with national voseo, and in which the monophthongized vos forms outlined in Tables 1 and 2 are the norm (Benavides 2003; Lipski 1994; Páez Urdaneta 1981).

**Voseo and Trends in Study Abroad**

Since 1998, Costa Rica has been one of the ten most popular study abroad destinations in the world for US students. From 1998–2011, Costa Rica was the third most popular study abroad destination in the Spanish-speaking world, and since 2012, has been the second most popular destination (Institute of International Education 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016). Use of tú is reported to be stigmatized in Costa Rican Spanish (Agüero Chaves 1962; Marín Esquivel 2012), which displays covariation primarily between vos and usted in familiar address (Hasbún Hasbún and Solís Hernández 1997; Moser 2008; Solano Rojas 1997).

Since 2007, Argentina has consistently ranked among the five most popular study abroad destinations in the Spanish-speaking world for US students, and from 2012–14, was the third most popular destination (Institute of International Education 2012, 2013, 2014). This increased interest in Argentina is reflected in the AATSP’s first study-abroad scholarship in that country, which was announced in 2015. As noted by Lipski (1994), Carricaburo (1997), and Benavides (2003), voseo is the norm across all segments of Argentine society.

In addition to the trend of US students participating in study abroad in countries with national voseo, census data reveal an increase in the number of voseantes living in the United States. In the following section, attention is turned to recent trends in immigration, specifically as they relate to the nation’s growing Salvadoran population.

**Voseo and Trends in Immigration**

By 2000, El Salvador had become the second Spanish-speaking country to join the list of the ten most popular nations of origin of the US foreign-born population, ranking ninth in that census year (Kandel 2011). Data from the 2010 Census demonstrate that Salvadoran migration to the United States has continued to increase. This is evidenced by the fact that El Salvador has now become the sixth most popular country of origin of the nation’s foreign born population, and that Salvadorans are the dominant Latino/Hispanic group in Maryland and the District of Columbia (Ennis, Ríos-Vargas, and Albert 2011). Although it has been reported that Salvadoran Spanish employs a tripartite system of address, in which tú, vos, and usted are in use in familiar address, it is hypothesized that tú is used to signal an intermediate-level of trust, whereas vos is used to indicate maximum trust and to reduce social distance (Lipski 2000; Michnowicz and Place 2010).

**The Future of Voseo in the Twenty-first-century Classroom**

The trends in study abroad and immigration discussed in the previous sections have at least two implications for the twenty-first-century classroom: preparing students who will be studying abroad in a country with national voseo, and in preparing future teachers of Spanish. These implications are elaborated upon in the following sub-sections.
Preparing Students for Study Abroad

At the same time that instruction on vos eo remains largely absent in language textbooks, a trend that appears to be emerging is that of researchers creating and making publically available materials that can be used to teach vos eo. In addition to such articles by Pearson (2006) and Shenk (2014) published in *Hispania*, Cameron (2012) offers meaning-based input and output activities designed for teaching present indicative vos forms in a study abroad context in Costa Rica. Given that fact that Costa Rica has ranked as a top-ten study abroad destination for US students since 1998, and based on findings in Cameron (2014) that vosi imperatives are the verb forms most present in print advertising in neighborhood grocery stores in Costa Rica, it may be beneficial for students to receive instruction on these forms prior to their arrival in that country. To this end, the following is offered as an example of a meaning-based, matching activity that targets vosi imperatives and creates an opportunity for students to learn about some of the experiences that Costa Rica has to offer. The activity is followed by the answer key.

1. ___ Aprendé . . . a. . . a las Corridas de Toros en Zapote.
2. ___ Asísti . . . b. . . a bailar el swing criollo costarricense.
3. ___ Hacé . . . c. . . el Parque Nacional Manuel Antonio.
4. ___ Visítá . . . d. . . el pati, el pan bon, y otras comidas afro-costarricenses.
5. ___ Probá . . . e. . . planes para visitar la Basílica de Nuestra Señora de Los Ángeles.

Prefering Future Teachers of Spanish

As trends in study abroad and immigration are increasing links between the United States and at least three vosante nations, now is perhaps a good time to revisit Espinoza’s (1917) vision for future teachers of Spanish as it relates to vosantes. To this end, I propose that more teacher preparation programs include a course on Spanish dialectology as part of their degree requirements, and that any such course include a unit that covers the history, types, and distribution of vos eo. Rather than continuing to ignore vos eo in the classroom, or argue that observed sociolinguistic and morphological variation make it too complicated to teach, I suggest that the field acknowledge this variation, and at the same time, focus on the many cross-dialectal similarities that students and teachers of Spanish in the United States are increasingly likely to encounter. The following are among the points that faculty designing any such unit may wish to include: 1) tú and vos have existed in Spanish for centuries; 2) vos was once the pronoun of formal address, but over the course of two centuries, changed to become one of familiar address; 3) the diphthongized present indicative verb forms that were in wide use in Spain at the beginning of the colonial period are reported to persist in some regions, but have become monophthongized in most vosante regions; 4) Chilean vos eo constitutes its own category; 5) there are eight countries with national vos eo, in which approximately 65,955,000 L1 Spanish speakers employ the same present indicative and imperative forms; and 6) these nations include two of the most popular study abroad destinations for US students and one of the ten most popular countries of origin of the US foreign-born population.

Conclusion

In the inaugural issue of *Hispania*, Espinoza (1917) defines the journal’s mission as the improvement of the teaching of Spanish in schools, colleges, and universities. It is the sincere hope of the author that this essay serves in some way to increase learner success when studying abroad in vosante nations, and in keeping with Espinoza’s vision, to help in the preparation of
teachers of Spanish who will have a complete and sympathetic understanding of the Spanish-speaking world.

WORKS CITED


Response to “Study Abroad, Immigration, and Voseo in the Twenty-First-Century Classroom”

El Voseo: A Call to Action

Jean W. LeLoup
United States Air Force Academy

Barbara C. Schmidt-Rinehart
Ashland University

Keywords: pre-service FL teacher education/formación pre-servicio de maestros, Spanish curriculum/currículo de español, study abroad/estudiar en el extranjero, teaching Spanish as a foreign or second language/enseñanza de español como lengua extranjera, vos, voseo

Robert Cameron’s article on the voseo examines quite a timely subject and exhorts the profession to step up and pay attention to this much-neglected form of address. The article is very appropriate for the centenary edition of Hispania as it provides a review of the literature germane to this topic over the last 100 years. The article speaks to the evolution of the journal itself as well as directly addressing its readers on a matter of key curricular importance today.

Moving Forward

Cameron provides a history of the voseo that is succinct and inclusive without losing readers who are non-linguists. By narrowing the focus to three countries, he is able to provide salient statistics about each one in terms of the most popular destinations of US students studying abroad and/or immigration patterns to the US, thus generating a strong rationale for the inclusion of the voseo in the Spanish language curriculum in US classrooms. If our students are traveling primarily to Argentina and Costa Rica for language study, and if they are encountering increasing populations from El Salvador on their home turf, it behooves them to learn to use the form of address prevalent in those countries. Said competence is both communicative and cultural and is among the foundational tenets of second language acquisition theory as well as the ACTFL proficiency guidelines and World-Readiness Standards (ACTFL 2012; National Standards 2015). To effect this, the voseo must consistently become a component of Spanish language education in the United States. While vosotros is regularly included in all US Spanish textbooks (Spain having a population of more than 48 million people), the voseo is systematically ignored even though speakers daily using the voseo in Latin America number in excess of 65 million (CIA 2016). This is a curious omission, indeed, because the profession has touted the importance of sociolinguistic appropriateness for almost four decades.

It is also time to abandon the cry of “it’s too difficult for our students.” The voseo is no more complex than any other subject/verb paradigm already being taught. At the very least the voseo needs to be acknowledged in Spanish textbooks as a living and frequently used form in areas where our students are quite likely to travel and study.
Concomitant with the inclusion of the *voseo* in the Spanish curriculum is the addition of this topic in future teacher preparation programs, be it through a specific dialectology course as Cameron suggests or, at the very least, a deliberate focus in one of the major’s required Spanish courses. The ACTFL/CAEP Teacher Preparation Standard 2 requires that preservice FL teachers internalize the rules for sociolinguistic and pragmatic knowledge—including politeness and the formal/informal dichotomy. The use of the *voseo* figures largely in this standard.

**A Few More Steps**

The table of verb forms provided is useful; however, the present subjunctive and negative command forms are omitted. All forms of the *voseo* could readily be included in US textbooks of Spanish and thus taken in their stride by students accustomed to dealing with such grammatical patterns.

While Cameron offers an example of one isolated activity that may help to introduce students to the *voseo*, truly this form needs to be included in all contextualized communicative activities on a regular basis so that students see it as how millions of Spanish speakers address each other on a daily basis. Classroom FL professionals need to give the *voseo* its due, just as is done with *Ud.* and tú.

The inclusion of immigration data to the United States, albeit a bit extraneous, could also be construed as a way for Spanish teachers to concretize for their students the need to learn the *voseo* even if not studying abroad. Students in many areas in the United States already “pick up” a lot of Spanish from their native speaker acquaintances. Seeing the *voseo* appear in a prevalent way in their textbooks legitimizes the speech of their community and prepares them for real-world communication.

**Conclusion**

Cameron’s article makes an important contribution to the literature on the *voseo* with its extensive bibliography, succinct history, and recommendations for incorporation of the form in the US Spanish curriculum. The profession would do well to take notice and begin immediately to implement the *voseo* in the Spanish curriculum.

**NOTE**

1The authors acknowledge that they both contributed equally to this essay.

**WORKS CITED**