Central American Spanish in the United States: Some Remarks on the Salvadoran Community

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I. Latin American immigration to the United States is certainly not a new phenomenon, but the geographical areas of Hispanic America which are represented by the major migratory trends have shifted over time, although always set against the constant background of immigration from Mexico. The major population shifts have come from Puerto Rico and Cuba, respectively, but in recent years the immigration from Central America is giving every indication of eventually attaining the same proportions as the Caribbean groups (Peñalosa 1984). Economic reasons have been the prime motivating factor, but political pressures in the convulsed Central American region are playing an ever more important role in stimulating the northward migration of economically stable family units. Since there is no common border between Central America and the United States, and since many families arrive by air or by sea, there is a greater tendency to settle in geographically delimited population clusters, which then form centripetal nuclei attracting further immigration. The largest areas of Central American population in the United States include the Honduran colony in New Orleans, and the Nicaraguan and Salvadoran colonies in Los Angeles (Peñalosa 1984). Miami is also

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experiencing a large influx of Central Americans, as are Chicago and Houston; in the latter city, in addition to numerous Hondurans, Guatemalans and Nicaraguans, there is a massive immigration of Salvadoran refugees, through clandestine channels, whose numbers are estimated at well over 100,000.

It is common for Central American immigrants, like their fellow Latin Americans, to settle in cities with large Spanish-speaking populations; this follows both from the geographical location of such cities, which usually represent the southern border of the United States and/or a major airline terminus, and from the desire to live in a minimally foreign environment. While the Central Americans who move to the already established colonies at first interact principally with their compatriots, it is not long before the inevitable contact with other Hispanic Americans and American-born Hispanics takes place, with the resulting transculturation and expansion of social horizons of all groups involved. Traditionally, the majority of Central Americans immigrating to the United States represented the professional classes, those with funds to travel and establish themselves in the United States. The lower middle classes have also come in large numbers, particularly to the major cities, while members of the lower working classes, particularly from rural regions of Central America, have not as frequently been represented. As a result of the economic status of the Central Americans living in the United States, contact with their home countries was frequent and all-pervasive, and Central Americans routinely sent their children to be educated in the United States, often to live with family members already in this country.

The recent large-scale political turmoil in Central America is bringing new waves of immigration to the United States, not only from the privileged classes, but also, in increasing numbers, from members of the lower-middle and lower working classes, including the peasantry, who by whatever means escape the violence, destruction and instability of their homelands and seek a haven in the United States. Of these groups, the one in most urgent straits is the Salvadoran, for their country is undergoing the most bloody prolonged civil war in the history of Central America. Wealthy Salvadorans flee the likely possibility of death or injury and loss of their property; middle class citizens flee to reestablish small businesses in other nations rather than risk certain ruin in El Salvador; left-leaning intellectuals and professionals flee to avoid falling into the hands of the police intelligence system, aided by a program of anonymous denunciations and 'death squads,' which cast a pall of uncertainty and fear over large segments of the citizenry. Peasants flee the country following destruction of their villages by Vietnam-style scorched-earth tactics, after having had home and family destroyed by confrontations between military forces and guerrillas, or after having failed to find a safe haven in the neighboring areas of Honduras and Guatemala. As a result, the cross section of Salvadoran émigrés is very broad, as is the political spectrum, ranging from fierce right wing to revolutionary left wing, passing through a neutralist/isolationist desire for peace at any price.

At the same time, these Salvadorans are making their presence felt as a social force, a refugee group to be dealt with, a political action current which must be handled cautiously by government agencies, and a

further source of Hispanic identity in the United States. In the latter vein, it is imperative that the social, cultural and linguistic situations of the Salvadorans in the United States be studied, particularly that of the most recent arrivals, generally being those in most urgent need of orientation, social services, jobs and the opportunity to integrate themselves into the American life around them. At present, an undetermined but large number of Salvadorans are in this country under questionable circumstances, with no slowdown in the rate of immigration forecast in the immediate future.

In view of the significant linguistic differences separating the Central American dialects as well as the differences between the Central American dialects and those of Mexico and the Caribbean, it is of interest to trace the patterns of linguistic interaction which arise as the result of contact between Central Americans and other Hispanics who reside in the United States. Such studies will shed further light on the complex phenomenon that is United States Spanish, at the same time illustrating the patterns of adaptation and modification which characterize all Hispanic groups faced with a heterogeneous linguistic environment. The following remarks will be directed at a single cross section of Central American Spanish in the United States, the recently arrived Salvadoran community, taking advantage of the existence of large communities in the southwestern United States, and of fieldwork recently carried out in Central America.

II. Salvadorans in Houston comprise a stable although small nucleus of residents of twenty years or more duration, and a much larger superstructure of recent immigrants, whose maximum period of residence does

not exceed three to five years. It is difficult to estimate the number of Salvadorans in any major American city, since the immigration continues unabated and the undocumented status of most immigrants entails a lack of accurate demographic data; in Houston, the 100,000 mark has been surpassed even by the most conservative estimates. There is no single geographic center for Salvadoran residents in Houston; originally they tended to live in the large Mexican-American neighborhoods, but more recently groups of Salvadorans have moved into the hundreds of apartment complexes which constitute the majority of Houston's low and middle income housing throughout the city. There is not a large degree of coherence in the community, since the political divisions which are tearing apart the nation of El Salvador have also been carried over to the immigrant community, which represents both landed families intent upon preserving the status quo and peasants and/or leftist intellectuals who openly sympathize with the Farabundo Martí rebels. The former group more often congregates with Cubans and Nicaraguans of similar persuasion, of which Houston contains a significant number, while the latter group has more inherent unity, and is also in solidarity with Mexican-American political and labor movements, with both groups often attending the same public meetings and demonstrations. Those Salvadorans whose immigration status is not problematic are becoming integrated into the social and political life of Houston, but the majority of Salvadorans continue to live a more marginal existence.

Any investigation into the current conditions of the Salvadoran community in the United States is hampered by the inevitable suspicion, fear, reluctance and at times resentment, which has resulted from

conflicting movements in El Salvador and the often less than charitable treatment which homeless Latin American immigrants receive in this country. Even those Salvadorans with legitimate immigration status almost invariably have family members still in El Salvador, have a political or judicial question pending in that country, or have already experienced an unfortunate confrontation with authorities, either in El Salvador or in the United States. Consequently, it is extremely difficult to encourage Salvadorans to participate in interviews, inquiries and surveys, to answer any questions regarding their lives in this country or in Central America, or to comment on any negative experiences that they may have suffered; this difficulty is compounded by the presence of tape recorders, microphones, notebooks and the like. During the past five years, I have been able to make contact with various segments of the Salvadoran community in Houston; as a result of these contacts and the ambience of confidence which is beginning to surround the activities of various entities of the University of Houston, I have been able to collect data regarding the linguistic situation of Salvadorans in this country. The following remarks are to be considered preliminary, as well as tentative, since the panorama of the Salvadoran communities in the United States is constantly evolving, as their members interact with other Hispanic groups, with Anglo Americans, and with authorities of the Salvadoran and United States governments.

While a large number of Salvadorans have been informally interviewed, in the course of conversations and meetings, thirty informants were chosen for the present report, representing the professional class, the middle class (small business owners in the majority), and the

lower working class (peasants and laborers). Each was interviewed for between thirty minutes and one hour, and the interviews were taped and subsequently analyzed. No individual was asked to give a name or other details which would permit positive personal identification on the tapes, and all subjects were aware of the nature of the project and its potential impact on Hispanic residents of the United States.

In order to effect a comparison between Salvadorans in the United States and in Central America, to determine possible patterns of evolution within the United States Hispanic communities, it was necessary to interview Salvadorans in their own country, or those who had been out of the country for only a short time. These materials were collected in two phases; the first consisted of in situ fieldwork conducted in early 1981, while the second phase consisted of interviews with Salvadoran refugees arriving for the first time in southern Texas. A total of fifteen Salvadorans were interviewed for this phase, five from each of the three socioeconomic groups mentioned above. Six were interviewed in El Salvador and nine in Texas; of the latter group, none had been in the United States for more than a week, and some had arrived only a few hours prior to the interviews. In addition, none had spent more than two to three weeks crossing Mexico. In all cases, men and women were interviewed in approximately equal proportions, and the age range of the informants was 20-57 years.

In terms of cultural identity as Central Americans and/or Salvadorans, solidarity with El Salvador is strongest in the lower working classes, being nearly unanimous. Solidarity is less strong among middle class immigrants, and even less so among professionals, many

of whom prefer to be regarded as at least partially Americanized. Solidarity with El Salvador was always manifested in the interviews during discussions of the world soccer cup or the need to bring peace to El Salvador, but beyond these universally accepted topics, responses varied widely. Of the working class, all ten subjects considered themselves as identified primarily with El Salvador; in the middle class seven considered themselves first and foremost Salvadorans/Central Americans, while in the professional class the number dropped to four. This is also correlated with choice of neighborhood and especially with immediate neighbors. The lower working class immigrants live in predominantly Hispanic neighborhoods, or in areas with high proportions of Hispanics living in apartment complexes. Middle class immigrant families also tend to live in areas with high Hispanic concentrations, while the professional classes have abandoned the large Hispanic areas of Houston, which in general are not considered desirable, although several live in suburban neighborhoods with a rather high proportion of Latin American professionals.

Houston is like other southwestern United States cities in that any Latin American, particularly one evincing mestizo features, is automatically identified as 'Mexican,' and protestations to the contrary are generally to no avail. As prejudice against Mexicans and Mexican Americans runs high in Texas, most non-Mexicans are explicit about insisting on their nationality, although for all practical purposes the results are nil, since the prejudice originally directed at Mexicans is easily and frequently extended to other Latin Americans. Nearly every Salvadoran resident in Houston has had the experience of being taken for a

Mexican. Of the working class residents, a very high percentage work with Mexicans, and nearly all Salvadoran immigrants patronize stores and restaurants where Mexicans and Mexican Americans are found in large numbers, attend theaters where Mexican films are shown, and when coming into contact with a clerk, cashier, telephone receptionist or other employee who speaks Spanish, nearly always find that such individuals are of Mexican origin.

On a personal level, Salvadorans of all socioeconomic groupings feel no negative emotions toward Mexicans or Mexican Americans, but rather regard them as fellow Hispanics. At the same time, Salvadorans aspiring to acceptance in Anglo-American society are quick to perceive the stigma attached to being Mexican and spare no attempt to highlight the differences that separate Mexicans and Salvadorans. Another aspect of this situation is the Salvadoran laborer who is working under illegal conditions; although many Mexicans in Houston work under similar conditions, the presence of Mexican workers is in itself not sufficient to trigger migratory investigations or raids, whereas a Central American may be singled out for presentation of documents and declarations of citizenship or migratory status. Therefore, most Salvadoran laborers, while trying to maintain their cultural identity as Salvadorans, at the same time try to fade into the background of the Mexican and Mexican-American labor force, in the hope that the current will carry them along; such is usually the case.

The questions of identification and differences vis-à-vis Mexicans are strongly felt in language usage. Salvadoran Spanish differs in several major respects from the dialects of Mexican Spanish most commonly heard

in Houston. In the lexical dimension there are numerous differences, as well as countless *modismos* peculiar to each group. In the syntactic dimension, Salvadorans share many of the peculiarities of Central America, while on a phonological level, Salvadoran Spanish exhibits striking differences from the most common Mexican speech patterns, as will be detailed below.

When Salvadorans of all classes were asked if they could understand Mexican Spanish readily, all answered affirmatively, but among the least educated Salvadorans, it was frequently remarked that repetition was often necessary because of differences in vocabulary, including extensive use of Anglicisms in the United States setting. In no instances were such problems insurmountable, since most such words fall into the category of household items or job-related terms. While the Nahuatl influence was historically strong in El Salvador as well as in Mexico, time and other intervening factors have created differing vocabularies with respect to many basic concepts (Schneider 1961-63, Lipski 1985*c*).

All the Salvadorans interviewed in Houston were asked to comment on their impression of available services and public media in Spanish, and their own use of these. Their opinions of Houston's Spanish language popular music radio stations were generally favorable, since the programming differs little from that found in Central America. Opinions regarding Houston's two Spanish-language newspapers were not nearly as favorable, since both papers were judged to be provincial in the extreme, limited in news coverage, and almost exclusively devoted to news affecting Mexico (and to a lesser extent, Cuba). The only remarks dedicated

to Central America deal with political violence, and there is no coverage of the resident Central American communities in the United States. Moreover, the publisher of one of the papers is a violently right-wing Cuban, whose editorial policy is considered offensive by many of the Salvadorans, even those not in active opposition to the current government of El Salvador.

When asked to comment on the quality of Spanish used in the public media in Houston, all the Salvadorans stated that it was quite acceptable, although obviously Mexican in flavor. The same opinion was not extended to the spoken Spanish of public employees, since the general impression (not always factually accurate) is that these were Anglo-Americans who had learned only a few words of Spanish, or Hispanic Americans who mix English and Spanish to such an extent that they are nearly unintelligible to Salvadorans. Those Salvadorans with children were adamant in stating that if bilingual education including an active Spanish component were to be provided, they would object to their children being taught Spanish with such a high proportion of Anglicisms and English grammatical patterns. From the standpoint of objective observations, these statements were often hard to reconcile with the speech of the Salvadorans themselves, since even those who had lived in Houston for only a short time had already assimilated a large quantity of Anglicisms, particularly in work- and government-related domains.

The Salvadoran community in the United States is of too recent origin for significant differences to have emerged between Salvadoran and Salvadoran-American Spanish. Nonetheless, since this group is well on the way to rivaling the Cubans for the position of the third

largest Hispanic group in the United States, and given that little accurate information is available on the peculiarities of Central American Spanish, I will offer some general remarks on the principal characteristics of Salvadoran Spanish, including some quantitative phonological data, and also including one case where daily contact with other Hispanic groups in the United States is already producing linguistic modifications among Salvadorans resident in this country.

III. The five Spanish-speaking Central American republics exhibit a great amount of linguistic diversity among themselves, and yet there exist certain common characteristics which may be used to define the entire group as opposed to the Mexican area to the north and the Panamanian/Caribbean region to the east and south. Perhaps the most noteworthy feature of Central American Spanish is the all-pervasive use of the second person familiar pronoun *vos* instead of *tú,* which appears in Mexico, the Caribbean, Spain and much of South America.[1] The *voseo* is the norm in all of Central America, in all regions and in all social strata, although the connotations and official attitudes vary regionally as well as diachronically, and consistent use of *tú* is regarded as foreign and pretentious when used among Central Americans who have not lived extensively outside of this area. Morphologically, the standard Central American *voseo* paradigm is:

present indicative:	hablás	comés	decís
present subjunctive:	hablés	comás	digás
imperative:	hablá	comé	decí
future:	hablarás	comerás	dirás
preterite:	hablastes	comistes	dijistes

The use of *voseo* forms in the subjunctive stands in contrast to at least the educated speech of the Río de la Plata region. The corresponding clitic pronoun is *te* in all cases (*sentate, ponete, vestite),* while the tonic form is *vos (esto es para vos*). The indicative form of *ser* is the nearly universal *sos,* while the future forms maintain the suffix vowel *a,* except in a few marginal regions which maintain the archaic suffix *és.* The perfect tense utilizes *has* + past participle, although some marginal areas of El Salvador continue to use the archaic forms *habés* or *habís.* Historically, these forms have always prevailed in Central America, and yet there has traditionally been a learned reaction against the *voseo,* which has been considered vulgar, plebian, anti-literary and a barrier to Central American aspirations to higher culture, principally because such forms had long since disappeared from Peninsular dialects. One may find such condemnations in the works of grammarians, linguists, novelists, poets, journalists and politicians,[2] and poetry and prose by Central American authors, even when set among the Central American proletariat or peasantry, has nearly always employed a *tuteo* which is totally at odds with linguistic reality. Official announcements, as well as commercial advertisements, political slogans, religious announcements and the like, have similarly standardized the *tuteo,* when not using *usted,* as have hymns, anthems and prayers. The latter case is curious, since many Central Americans of humble origin, when formulating personal petitions and prayers, address God and the Virgin Mary as *vos,* while officially learned and recited prayers use either *tú* or *vosotros,* with the latter form also being used by many parish priests, whether or not they are of Central American origin (traditionally many have been from Spain or from other Latin American nations). The

dichotomy between the official position and the everyday environment has created an insecurity or inferiority complex which Haugen (1968) has termed 'schizoglossia,' particularly evident when Central Americans speak with Spaniards or Latin Americans from other areas, even those which also employ some variant of the *voseo.* Typical comments include 'we don't use the correct forms,' or 'we shouldn't use those words.'

Recently, however, the popular attitudes toward the *voseo* have been shifting in Central America, due largely to the efforts of writers and popular leaders representing nationalistic sentiments frequently aligned with leftist political tendencies. This is most noteworthy in the stories and novels written in the past two decades, among which may be mentioned the following: El Salvador: Roque Dalton *(Pobrecito poeta que era yo)*; Salvador Cayetano Carpio *(Secuestro y capucha)*; Manlio Argueta *(Caperucita en la zona roja)*. Nicaragua: Sergio Ramírez (*¿Te dio miedo la sangre?*); Fernando Silva *(El vecindario)*. Honduras: Ramón Amaya Amador (*Cipotes)*; Roberto Castillo (*Subida al cielo*); Horacio Castellanos Moya (*¿Qué signo es usted, niña Berta?*). Costa Rica: Carlos Luis Fallas *(Mamita Yunai)*; and the novels of Fabián Dobles and Quince Duncan. Guatemala: Virgilio Rodríguez Macal (*Guayacán)*. On official levels, Central America still maintains the *tuteo,* together with the more common *usted,* with only Sandinista Nicaragua having adopted the *voseo* as a symbol of Central American individualism. One may now see billboards and slogans such as *Nicaragüense, cumplí con tu deber,* while some visas, stamped in passports, bear the slogan *Nicaragua espera por vos,* and letters sent out to *compañeros,* both Nicaraguan and foreign and on

official stationery, now routinely employ the *voseo,* whereas only *usted* would normally be appropriate following official protocol. Only Costa Ricans, with few major political upheavals to their record, seem most comfortable with the *voseo* among more cultured speakers, while at the same time employing *usted* with a greater frequency than is found in the other Central American republics.

Naturally enough, when Central Americans travel to other Latin American countries or interact with Mexicans, Cubans and Puerto Ricans in the United States, one of the first points of linguistic culture shock is the *voseo,* for the situation is non-symmetrical. While the Central Americans are familiar with the *tuteo,* if only passively, most other Latin Americans, especially those with little formal education, are thoroughly baffled by the *voseo,* and find it alternately strange, humorous or even offensive. The Central American, in turn, may react in a variety of ways, ranging from complete suppression of the *voseo* in order to more readily integrate into other Hispanic communities, to an aggressive maintenance of *vos,* symbolizing individuality and desire not to lose cultural identity. Whereas the speakers of Mexican or Caribbean dialects rarely suffer linguistic modifications upon coming into extensive contact with Central Americans, the same is not true of the numerically inferior latter group, since the pronominal system experiences a number of pressures, resulting in a more complex hybrid system identical neither with the Central American nor with the Mexican/Caribbean standards of United States Hispanics. Let us therefore briefly examine the case of Salvadoran Spanish in the United States, together with one other case of Central American Spanish as used in

this country, by way of illustrating possible patterns of interfacing arising from multicultural contacts within Hispanic society in the United States.

Initially, in the surveys conducted in Central America as part of a more far-reaching dialectological project, attention was directed both at the forms of the *voseo* used in specific areas and the circumstances in which they are employed. After inquiring as to the specific forms of the *voseo* in various tenses and moods, the question was posed as to what circumstances characterize the use of *vos* as opposed to *usted*. Although the Central American isthmus is quite homogeneous regarding the morphology of the *voseo*, there do exist differences in usage, and these differences may have repercussions in the linguistic interaction of Central Americans with other Hispanic groups in the United States. Therefore, data will also be included from another Central American group which was part of the area survey, Honduran Spanish. For the purposes of this survey it was possible to take advantage of the large Honduran community in New Orleans. Since most Hondurans in New Orleans trace their roots to the north coast of Honduras (La Ceiba and San Pedro Sula) rather than from the Tegucigalpa area, data from the former cities were included in order to effect comparisons, although my extensive linguistic surveys of Honduran Spanish turned up no significant regional variation with respect to use of the *voseo*. For the present remarks, fifteen Hondurans resident in New Orleans and fifteen residents of San Pedro Sula, Tela and La Ceiba were used as informants, evenly divided among the three socioeconomic classes which form the basis for the Salvadoran sample. The demographic details are essentially the same, although the

sociopolitical situation of Hondurans in the United States is considerably different from that of Salvadorans, since the former are a relatively affluent and politically non-problematic group which have fully integrated themselves into New Orleans life.

In studying the *voseo,* the first case was the form used by children to parents. In nearly all working class families and in older generations of the professional classes, *usted* predominates, whereas younger generations of middle and upper class parents are increasingly tolerant of *voseo* from children to parents, grandparents and other older individuals. An interesting situation occurs in the treatment of children by parents, since in most of Central America parents normally address children as *usted* in early years, until five to seven years of age, so that the children learn the respectful forms of address first. This usage is invariable in those families which demand the *usted* from their children, but even in families which eventually tolerate *vos* from children to parents, it is customary for the latter to use *usted* with smaller children. Naturally, the *usted* also reappears with older children when the need to reprimand is foremost.

Among Central Americans who have spent considerable time in the United States, the custom of using *usted* with small children is on the decline, as is the use of *usted* from children to parents. Some familiar form is normally employed in both situations, the nature of which varies.

Fellow students of all ages routinely use the *voseo,* although some university students may use *usted* in situations where greater distance or formality might be called for. Normally, professional colleagues use *usted* when no strong friendship is indicated. The same is

substantially true for Central Americans residing in the United States, with the difference that the familiar form is nearly exclusive among students, even at the university level. All Central Americans agree that the strongest insults employ *vos;* not only is the familiar form universal for insults throughout the Spanish-speaking world, but the additional popular connotation carried by *vos* underscores the element of disrespect or derision. The common gesture variously known as the *higa* or *guatusa* is frequently accompanied by the imperative *tomá* (Cuadra 1974, 236-40). Central Americans living in the United States are equally consistent in their choice of familiar forms for insults and provocations, but this consistency is diminished with respect to the *voseo,* since *tuteo* forms also occur.

It has occasionally been observed, among the Spanish dialects of Latin America, that the *usted* forms, while normally conveying respect as well as a certain distance, may also be used to convey feelings of extreme intimacy, as well as affection. The best known cases are those areas of Colombia where the *usted* forms are used in nearly all cases, with *su merced* being reserved for situations of great intimacy or affection (Ruíz 1982), but Bolivians, especially from the lowlands, have indicated that among very close friends or family members the *usted* form implies greater affection and intimacy than the *tú* or *vos* which are normally used among friends or colleagues.[3] Some Paraguayans claim to make a similar distinction, although external observations do not as often bear out these claims. In any case, a point of interest in the survey was to determine whether similar distinctions exist in the Central American areas under study. The results are mixed and somewhat confusing, since speakers' self-conscious

responses do not always coincide with linguistic reality, and it is difficult for the outside observer to be privy to situations of extreme intimacy that might trigger a pronominal shift. However, some tentative remarks may be offered. Among Salvadorans, only a small number, exclusively among the upper class, claim to make this distinction, employing *usted* among spouses or lovers in moments of extreme intimacy. This treatment would never be extended to other family members. United States Salvadorans exhibited no such inclination, even among the most recent arrivals, and evinced surprise at the question itself, unanimously assuring that they had never encountered such a situation. Significantly, Hondurans living in Honduras present greater diversity. Most Hondurans over the age of about 40 claim to make no shift to *usted* in situations of intimacy or love-making, although most admit to having heard such usage, generally ascribing it to 'affectations' of modern youth. Among younger Hondurans, those of the middle and upper classes all indicate that such usage is on the increase, although some claim not to employ the distinction themselves, feeling that it is somewhat affected. Younger working class Hondurans rarely make the shift, some are not even aware of its existence, and all feel it to be *cursi.* United States Hondurans do not normally make this shift, regardless of demographic situation, which suggests both a recent date of this phenomenon within Honduras and the lack of a transfer mechanism from Honduras to the Honduran community in the United States.

Another interesting aspect of pronominal variation in Central America and among Central Americans in the United States is the possibility of a three-way division, involving *usted, tú* and *vos.* Beginning with residents of

Central America, the question of the *tuteo* was raised from several different perspectives. The first involved asking directly when *tú* would be used, if ever. Hondurans of higher social standing indicated that *tú* should 'always' be used, but admitted that in practice it rarely appears spontaneously. Working class Hondurans never use *tú,* although all recognize the forms, through popular slogans, radio and television, official announcements, and school lessons. The question was then asked as to which form would be used if the need were felt to create an advertisement or slogan with a second person pronoun. Normally only more educated/professional speakers could adequately respond to this question, and all indicated that *tú* would be used. When asked why the more frequent *vos* would not be appropriate, speakers replied that it was too vulgar, plebian and even 'incorrect.' Next, the question of poetry was raised, including love letters, odes to the nation or its flag, etc. Uniformly, *tú* was preferred, even in letters to a loved one who would be addressed as *vos* in face-to-face interactions. This is a clear reflection of traditional literary and epistolary models, and will undoubtedly change among younger generations who refuse to uphold artificial distinctions between written and spoken styles.

The key question was then asked as to what form would be used with a Spanish-speaking non–Central American with whom a familiar pronoun would be used. Here considerable consternation was evident, especially among speakers who had had little contact with foreigners. Working class speakers indicated that the *voseo* would be more common, although some stated that they would try to use *tú* to avoid confusion. At the same time, all felt that the *voseo* would be more

easily understood by a Latin American, regardless of country of origin, than by a North American or European who had learned Spanish as a foreign language. Objectively, this is fallacious, since there are many resident North Americans and Europeans in Central America who use the *voseo* naturally, while many Spaniards and Latin Americans are thoroughly confused when first encountering the *voseo*. Upper class Hondurans more often use the *tuteo* right from the start to foreign visitors, more frequently with non-Hispanics but even with Latin Americans from other countries, and invariably with Spaniards, for whom a certain awe is still felt in Central America. Only those informants who expressed an aggressive nationalism indicated that they would use the *voseo* regardless of the interlocutor. Most speakers felt that the *tuteo* would be more courteous as used with speakers from other countries, but an underlying sentiment of uneasiness and fear of ridicule may also have been present.

The data from Honduras are typical of Central America, and with few variations also characterize Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Guatemala. El Salvador, however, is more complex with respect to pronominal usage, and hence Salvadorans resident in the United States may be expected to produce a somewhat wider range of variants when communicating with other Hispanic groups. In general, Salvadorans coincide with Hondurans in their use of *tú* in poetry, love letters, official pronouncements and religious messages, and interactions with foreigners, both Hispanic and non-Hispanic. However, the latter cases are more ramified, for many Salvadorans of all social classes do employ the *tuteo* with other Salvadorans, under limited circumstances. The general distinction is one of intimacy and

confidence, with the *tuteo* occupying an intermediate position between the *usted,* which is formal and distancing, and the *voseo,* which is reserved for *amigos de confianza,* close family members and spouses. This three-way distinction is not found among all Salvadorans, but it is a common pattern of pronominal usage.

Among Central Americans in the United States, the *tuteo* is gaining ground rapidly, due to obvious pressures from other Spanish-speaking groups with which Central Americans come into contact. All Hondurans and Salvadorans surveyed in this country indicated that the *tuteo* is virtually the only form used with other Spanish speakers, as well as with Spanish-speaking Anglo-Americans. Those Central American students enrolled in Spanish classes, whether Spanish as a foreign language or some sort of 'bilingual' program, scrupulously avoid the *voseo,* even if this usage prevails in the home environment. At home, among Hondurans and Salvadorans in the United States, the *voseo* enjoys a significant superiority over the use of *tú,* but the numerical margin is considerably less than in the respective countries of origin, except among the most recent arrivals. In response to the question of which form would be used with other members of the same ethnic community in the United States, the *voseo* forms turned out to be somewhat more common, while in response to the question of which form would be used when visiting the respective countries of origin or when speaking to a visitor recently arrived from these countries, the *voseo* margin increased significantly.

In practical terms, Honduran Americans are well on the way to converting the bipartite *vos-usted* distinction characteristic of Honduras into a three-way system *tú-vos-usted,* in the United States environment. The *tuteo*

is most frequent with non-Hondurans, in public interactions where the Spanish language is used among various Hispanic groups, and in written correspondence, while the *voseo* continues to enjoy more popularity among Hondurans in their daily interpersonal interactions.

Salvadoran Americans have begun to extend the already nascent tripartite pronominal system found in El Salvador by adding a dimension to the *tú-vos* distinction. Originally involving solidarity or trust, this distinction also entails, in the United States setting, the dimension of Salvadoran/Central American vs. other Hispanic groups. However, the first consideration will prevail in most cases where a non–Central American is accepted as a close friend or spouse.

The current situation among Central Americans established in the United States, as sketched above, is not stable, but rather represents a dynamic state of flux, as immigration from Central America continues and the interface between Central Americans and other Hispanic groups broadens. The introduction of additional pronominal variables involving the *voseo* places further pressure on the interaction via the Spanish language of diverse ethnic groups. It is extremely unlikely that Cubans, Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, Colombians or other Hispanic groups in the United States will actively acquire the *voseo* as a result of contact with Central Americans, although the passive repertoire will undoubtedly be enriched by exposure to new modes of expression. The reality of daily interaction with groups using the *tuteo*, however, is resulting in an expansion and enrichment of the Central American linguistic inventory, in a fashion which adds further facets to the already elaborate linguistic mosaic of United States Spanish. Table 1 summarizes the principal points of

pronominal usage among Salvadorans and Hondurans in Central America and in the United States (Houston and New Orleans, respectively).

Table 1: Summary of Central American Pronominal Usage

CONTEXT	El Salvador	Salvadoran in U.S.	Honduras	Honduran in U.S.
children to parents	U (V)	V	U (V)	V
parents to children	U + V	V	U + V	V
close friends	T/V	T/V	V	V (T)
fellow student	T/V	T/V	V	V (T)
professional colleague	T/V (U)	T (V)/U	V (U)	V (T)/U
insult	V	V (T)	V	V (T)
lovemaking	V	V (T)	V/U	V (T)
official usage	U/T	U/T	U/T	U/T
love letters/poetry	T	T	T	T
Hispanic friend	T (V)	T	T (V)	T
Anglo friend	T	T	T (V)	T
compatriot in U.S.A.		V (T)		V (T)
compatriot in Central Am.		V		V

Legend: T = *tú;* V = *vos;* U = *usted.* Forms in parenthesis indicate very limited use. Forms added by + indicate recent trends. Forms added after / indicate alternate usage, depending upon contextual variables.

IV. Turning to the phonological dimension, Salvadoran Spanish presents several noteworthy features which set it apart from other Spanish dialects commonly found in the United States. One characteristic of the Salvadoran dialect, as compared with the relatively conservative northern and central Mexican dialects, is the weakening of several consonantal articulations, and the consonant most readily associated with these processes is /s/. Northern and central Mexican dialects are among the relatively few Latin American Spanish dialects where syllable and word-final /s/ is systematically retained as a sibilant [s] (Canfield 1981, Lipski 1984). El Salvador ranks toward the middle of the scale regarding erosion of /s/, above the Caribbean nations, Panama and Nicaragua, but the contrasts with Mexico are nonetheless strong (Canfield 1960, Lipski 1985*a*). Table 2 presents data regarding pronunciation of /s/ among the three Salvadoran groups under discussion. In each category, approximately fifteen minutes of interview material was transcribed for each informant. Data from other Central American dialects are included for purposes of comparison, representing in each case the capital cities, using informants of at least secondary level of education. For each country ten informants were utilized as a sample, providing approximately thirty minutes each of interview material. The Guatemalan data are nearly identical to those representing the Mexican dialects most frequently heard in Houston. For additional comparison, data regarding Cuban and Puerto Rican Spanish are included, based on other published studies, and correlated by transcriptions from my own collection of taped interviews.[4]

From these data it may be seen that Salvadoran Spanish more closely approximates the Caribbean

Table 2: Realization of /s/ in several Spanish dialects

DIALECT	sC			s#C			s##			s#V			s#v		
	[s]	[h]	[ɸ]	[s]	[h]	[ɸ]	[s]	[h]	[ɸ]	[s]	[h]	[ɸ]	[s]	[h]	[ɸ]
El Salvador (high)	55	44	1	10	71	19	86	12	2	44	47	9	28	69	3
El Salvador (mid)	52	42	6	10	65	25	62	29	9	43	48	9	26	72	2
El Salvador (low)	50	41	9	9	58	33	48	42	10	40	41	9	26	71	3
Honduras	63	34	3	19	58	23	83	15	2	90	10	0	61	38	1
Nicaragua	13	83	4	2	86	12	35	59	6	28	70	2	7	90	3
Costa Rica	92	8	0	69	29	2	96	4	0	98	2	0	96	2	2
Guatemala	93	7	0	70	28	2	97	3	0	100	0	0	99	1	0
Cuba	3	97	0	2	75	23	61	13	26	48	28	25	10	53	37
Puerto Rico	3	92	5	4	69	27	46	22	32	45	32	23	16	53	30

Legend: C = consonant; V = stressed vowel; v = unstressed vowel; # = word boundary; ## = phrase boundary

dialects with regard to pronunciation of /s/ and indeed, when asked which of the Spanish dialects commonly heard in Houston came closest to their own in terms of pronunciation, most Salvadorans indicated Cuban, despite the fact that they felt greater cultural (and lexical) ties with Mexico. An additional feature of Salvadoran (and Honduran) Spanish which separates this dialect from Mexican Spanish is the frequent aspiration of word-initial and word-internal intervocalic /s/ *(la semana* [lahemana], *el presidente* [elprehidente]). This phenomenon occasionally occurs elsewhere in Latin America, but does not reach systematic proportions outside of this Central American region (Lipski 1983*b*, 1985*a*). Table 3 gives comparative data for Honduran and Salvadoran Spanish; these data contrast with nearly categorical retention of sibilant [s] in the other dialects shown in Table 2. The overall effect of spoken Salvadoran Spanish, particularly for the Mexican speaker, is a phonetic flow which is at times difficult to relate to the more familiar Mexican patterns.

Also characteristic of Salvadoran and other Central American dialects of Spanish is the velarization of word-final /n/, sometimes resulting in the nasalization of the preceding vowel and loss of the final nasal consonant (Canfield 1981, Lipski 1983*a*, 1985*a*, 1985*c*), as shown in Table 4. This characteristic does not impede communication with speakers of other dialects, and is not always consciously identified by either Salvadoran or Mexican speakers, but is nevertheless present as part of the overall identification of the Salvadoran dialect, which in this respect is more similar to the other Central American dialects, as well as to those of the Caribbean.

Table 3: Realization of intervocalic /s/ in El Salvador/Honduras

DIALECT	V#sv			V#sV			Vsv			Vsv		
	[s]	[h]	[ϕ]	[s]	[h]	[ϕ]	[s]	[h]	[ϕ]	[s]	[h]	[ϕ]
El Salvador (high)	96	4	0	99	1	0	90	10	0	99	1	0
El Salvador (mid)	92	8	0	99	1	0	89	11	0	95	5	0
El Salvador (low)	87	13	0	98	2	0	88	11	1	96	4	0
Honduras	79	21	0	99	1	0	81	18	1	91	9	0

Legend: # = word boundary; V = stressed vowel; v = unstressed vowel
Examples: V#sV *(la semana);* V#sV *(la sala);* Vsv *(casa);* VsV *(pasar)*

Table 4: Realization of word-final /n/ in El Salvador

GROUP	n#V			n##		
	[n]	[ŋ]	[ϕ]	[n]	[ŋ]	[ϕ]
high	12	75	13	5	60	35
mid	11	74	15	4	55	41
low	6	71	23	2	52	46

Examples: n#V *en agosto;* n## *muy bien*

With respect to other phonetic characteristics, Salvadoran Spanish is more closely aligned with the Mexican dialects represented prominently in the United States. Intervocalic /y/ is weak and frequently disappears in contact with /i/ *(silla, gallina)* or following /e/ *(sello)*. Syllable-final /r/ is trilled or very occasionally dropped. Intervocalic /d/ is resistant to deletion, although /d/ is normally dropped in word-final position. Salvadoran Spanish, in keeping with general Central American patterns, maintains an occlusive pronunciation of /b/, /d/ and /g/ after non-homorganic consonants: *alba* [alba], *algo* [algo], *arde* [arde]; in most other Spanish dialects, these consonants are given a fricative pronunciation in the same contexts, and in the Caribbean Spanish dialects these consonants are weakly articulated, and may fall intervocalically (Canfield 1960, 1981; Lipski *b*). These similarities and differences result in a close linguistic identification of Salvadoran Spanish with Mexican Spanish as spoken in major United States cities, thereby reinforcing cultural ties and common socioeconomic situations. With the exception of the *voseo* patterns, Salvadorans rarely have to modify their linguistic production when speaking to Mexicans, nor do they frequently experience difficulties in understanding Mexican Spanish speakers. The same is evidently not true in interactions involving Salvadorans and Caribbean Spanish speakers.

V. The preceding data are quite limited, as a result of the precarious situation of the Salvadoran community in the United States, the lack of viable background studies which may be used as a point of reference, and the constantly evolving nature of the political situation in El Salvador. Nonetheless, it is evident from the

preceding remarks that the Salvadoran community is on the increase in the United States, and is becoming politically and socially more aware, as more members acquire legal immigration status, learn English, become socially and economically more mobile, and begin to participate fully in the life of the United States outside of limited Hispanic American neighborhoods.

The problem of assimilating and accommodating a group which by and large has had no extensive prior contact with the United States is rendered acute by the large number of Salvadorans who continue to immigrate to this country. In addition to the inevitable cultural shock, many experience a linguistic shock which results from immersion in a predominantly Mexican (or Cuban or Puerto Rican) community, and the large number of unfamiliar English and even Spanish terms needed to survive in the United States. The overall impact of Central Americans in the United States will be in direct proportion to the number of immigrants, but all available facts point to the need to recognize the existence of Central Americans, particularly Salvadorans, as a distinct subset of the Hispanic community in the United States, a subset which has a different background and different needs, and which at the same time will make new contributions to the formation of linguistic patterns of United States Spanish.

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NOTES

1. For a general descriptive and historical presentation of the *voseo* in Latin America, albeit somewhat inaccurate in the case of Central America, cf. Páez Urdaneta (1981), Rona (1967), Chart (1943).

2. Cf. the following examples: Láscaris (1977, 168-88) is mildly critical. Agüero (1960*a*, 87f; 1960*b*: 448) and Arroyo (1971, 714) are also mildly critical but mainly descriptive. Mantica (1973, 55) is merely descriptive, whereas Membreño (1982, 20-45) is more critical, and cites the criticisms of Bello (1903, 113). Another vocal critic of the *voseo* was Cuervo (1885), who amended the criticism to a descriptive note in subsequent editions of this work. Valle (1948) and Batres Jáuregui (1892) also adopt a critical attitude toward the *voseo.*

3. I have personal evidence of this treatment in recorded materials representing the speech of Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia, and Bolivians from other lowland areas have reported similar usage to me.

4. See Terrell (1978, 1979) for the Cuban and Puerto Rican data. For other comparative data, see Lipski (1983*a*, 1983*b*, 1984, 1985*a*, 1985*b*, in press, forthcoming).

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