

Tú, Usted and the construction of male heterosexuality in young, working class men in Tolima*

JOSHUA JAMES ZWISLER**
Universidad del Tolima, Colombia
jjzwisler@ut.edu.co

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* Artículo de investigación.

** Estudió sociología y filosofía en la Universidad Macquarie de Australia, una especialización en investigación social y política también en la Universidad Macquarie y una maestría en lingüística aplicada de la Universidad Monash, también de Australia. Actualmente, trabaja en la Universidad del Tolima donde enseña lingüística general, sociolingüística y análisis del discurso. Sus áreas de investigación incluyen la Identidad Lingüística, Sociolingüística, Lingüicidio y Lenguas Indígenas. Código ORCID: orcid.org/0000-0003-2299-0837

Abstract

This article examines the relationship between the use of the pronoun *tú* among working-class men and the perceived homosexuality of its use. In Colombia, the use of *tú* and *usted* among men is often a carefully considered linguistic choice, one that is tied to sexual identity and gender. While statistical studies have been done looking at this trend, prior research had not examined the reasoning behind this choice. In modern sociolinguistics and sociology, heterosexuality is not seen as a fixed aspect of a person's being, but as a social identity that is managed through discourse. Embarking from Social Identity Theory, this research used a series of 20 extensive ethnographic interviews in Tolima, Colombia to explore the connection between heterosexuality and pronoun selection. After analysis using grounded theory, the article examines the idea that it is not homosexuality but heterosexuality that is constructed through careful pronoun use and that heterosexuality is actually a delicate construction. In this context, the article concludes that the sociolinguistic function of *tú* and *usted* is to serve as contextualization cues for the social distance required for men's heterosexual social identity.

Key words: T-V distinction, heterosexuality, homosexuality, social identity, sociolinguistic identity

Tú, Usted y la construcción de la heterosexualidad masculina en hombres jóvenes, de clase trabajadora en Tolima

Resumen

Este artículo examina la relación entre el uso del pronombre *tú* entre hombres de la clase trabajadora y la homosexualidad percibida de su uso. En Colombia, el uso de *tú* y *usted* entre hombres es una elección lingüística cuidadosamente considerada —es una elección que viene vinculada con la identidad sexual y género—. Mientras sí hay estudios estadísticos acerca de este fenómeno, la investigación anterior no ha examinado el razonamiento que existe tras esta elección de pronombres. En la sociolingüística y sociología moderna, la heterosexualidad no es vista como un aspecto fijo del ser de la persona como una identidad social que se maneja a través del discurso. Embarcando desde la Teoría de Identidad Social, esta investigación usó una serie de 20 extensas encuestas etnográficas en el Tolima, Colombia, para explorar la conexión que hay entre la heterosexualidad y la elección del

pronombre. Después de analizar los datos usando el muestreo teórico, este trabajo expone la idea de que no es la homosexualidad sino la heterosexualidad la que es construida por el uso cuidadoso de pronombres y que esta última es una construcción delicada. En este contexto, el artículo concluye que la función sociolingüística de *tú* y *usted* constituye señales de contextualización para la distancia social requerida de la identidad heterosexual social de los hombres.

Palabras clave: Distinción T-V, heterosexualidad, homosexualidad, identidad social, identidad sociolingüística.

Tu, Vous et la construction de l'hétérosexualité masculine chez de jeunes hommes travailleurs à Tolima

Résumé

Cet article examine le rapporte entre l'utilisation du pronom *tu* entre les hommes de la classe ouvrière et l'homosexualité perçue de son utilisation. En Colombie, l'utilisation de *tu* et *vous* entre hommes est un choix linguistique soigneusement considérée –c'est un choix qui est lié avec l'identité sexuelle et de genre–. Tandis qu'il y a des études linguistiques sur ce phénomène, la recherche précédente n'a pas examiné le raisonnement qui existe après ce choix de pronoms. Dans la sociolinguistique moderne, l'hétérosexualité n'est pas vue comme un aspect fixe de la personne, en tant qu'identité sociale qui est conduite à travers le discours. En embarquant dès la Théorie de l'Identité Sociale, cette recherche a utilisé une série de 20 longues enquêtes ethnographiques à Tolima, Colombie, pour explorer la connexion existant entre l'hétérosexualité et le choix du pronom. Après l'analyse des données, en utilisant l'échantillonnage théorique, ce travail expose l'idée que ce n'est pas l'homosexualité mais l'hétérosexualité, celle qui est construite par l'utilisation soigneuse des pronoms et que cette dernière, est une construction délicate. Dans ce contexte, l'article conclut que la fonction sociolinguistique de *tu* et *vous* constitue des signes de contextualisation pour la distance sociale requise de l'identité hétérosexuelle sociale des hommes.

Mots clés: distinction T-V, hétérosexualité, homosexualité, identité sociale, identité sociolinguistique.

***Tú, Usted* ea construção da heterossexualidade masculina em jovens, Homens da classe trabalhadora em Tolima**

Resumo

Este artigo examina a relação entre o uso do pronome *tu* entre homens da classe trabalhadora e a homossexualidade percebida de seu uso. Na Colômbia, o uso de *tu* e *você* entre homens é uma escolha linguística cuidadosamente considerada —é uma escolha que vem vinculada com a identidade sexual e gênero—. Apesar de que haja estudos estatísticos acerca deste fenômeno, a pesquisa anterior não tem examinado o raciocínio que existe por trás desta escolha de pronomes. Na sociolinguística e sociologia moderna, a heterossexualidade não é vista como um aspecto fixo do ser da pessoa como uma identidade social que se administra através do discurso. Embarcando desde a Teoria de Identidade Social, esta pesquisa usou uma série de 20 extensas sondagens etnográficas em Tolima, Colômbia, para explorar a conexão que há entre a heterossexualidade e a escolha do pronome. Depois de analisar os dados usando a amostragem teórica, este trabalho expõe a ideia de que não é a homossexualidade senão a heterossexualidade a que é construída pelo uso cuidadoso de pronomes e que esta última é uma construção delicada. Neste contexto, o artigo conclui que a função sociolinguística de *tu* e *você* constituem sinais de contextualização para a distância social requerida da identidade heterossexual social dos homens.

Palavras chave: Distinção T-V, heterossexualidade, homossexualidade, identidade social, identidade sociolinguística.

Introduction

"No teach', I don't use tú – That's for faggots"

This investigation began with that homophobic comment from a student in class that made me think. Spanish is not my mother tongue and during my Spanish learning I had heard that men use *tú* less and I had not really thought about the possible homophobic connotations of its use. But, here I had a sociolinguistics student openly declaring that the use of *tú* among men not only was infrequent – but that it was an open sign of homosexuality. Spanish is a T-V language and the T-V distinction is not known for discriminating sexuality (Brown & Gilman, 1960; Castillo & Marín, 2009; Hughson, 2009) but this is exactly what the student was proposing. What's more is that student is not alone in proposing this – learning resources also suggest this (Navarro Gala, 2000).

Centro Cervantes, the international body governing Spanish language testing, makes mention of this stating that *tuteo* is considered homosexual among men (Navarro-Gala, 2000). Online, the same comment abounds. If one performs even a cursory revision of the different language on-line learning fora about the Spanish language, the topic of the T-V distinction arises and with it, the question of *tú*, *usted* and heterosexuality e.g. SpanishD!ct (<http://www.spanishdict.com/answers/169511/to-t-or-not-to-t>). The answers, while always varied, almost always include someone among their number explaining that men should not use *tú* among themselves in conversation as this would be perceived as homosexual behavior. The justification for said explanation always runs along the same lines: that *tú* is a feminine word. The same happens in pages dedicated specifically to grammar: the use of *tú* among men is seen as homosexual as *tú* is feminine in quality (e.g. <http://www.alwaysspanish.com/2013/02/tu-or-vos-culture-dilemma.html>). While one would hope for a deeper analysis of the 'feminine' quality, none is ever given and one is left with the question of '*how is it possible that a gender neutral pronoun is construed as feminine or homosexual?*'

As a T-V language Spanish possesses personal pronouns for the second person that discriminate according to the social distance between interlocutors. Traditionally, this means that there will be one pronoun for a person with whom the speaker shares a close, personal relationship – the *t* pronoun (from the Latin 'Tu'), and a pronoun for whom the speaker maintains a more distanced or formal relationship – the *v* pronoun (from the Latin Vos)

(Brown & Gilman, 1960). In Spanish, the T-V pronouns are *tú* (t-form) and *usted* (v-form) (for the singular), and *vosotros* (t-form) and *ustedes* (v-form) (for the plural) – *Tú* and *vosotros* are used to show closeness, while *usted* and *ustedes* are used to show a more distanced relationship. Given that immediate function of the T-V distinction to indicate the social relationship between interlocutors, the function as a marker of sexuality should be understood not as a direct semantic quality of the T-V words but more as the ways words are used to construct the social identity of sexuality.

Sexuality, while considered a central tenet of personal identity, is now being examined by the social sciences not as a fixed part of the person but as a social identity that is constructed through discourse and social artifacts (Cameron & Kulick, 2003). Language plays a key role in the production of social identity and just as the study of language as gives us insight into the nature of identity, so does the study of identity provide us with insights in the nature of language. While the supposed link between the T-V distinction and homosexuality has been analyzed in some cursory or numerical studies (see: Castillo & Marín, 2009; Marín Esquivel, 2012), no study to date has examined how the T-V distinction is used to create and manage sexuality as a social identity. Here I will argue to the contrary of previous studies in that the T-V distinction does not encode homosexuality but that it is actively used to construct a social heterosexual identity, and in doing so examine how Spanish affords us a unique and interesting opportunity to examine the nature of this identity and in doing so, examine the nature of language as well.

Literature Review

As mentioned above, the concept of a link between the production of sexual social identity via the T-V distinction has yet to be examined in depth. The T-V distinction is common among Romance languages and Spanish is no exception. As previously mentioned, the T-V distinction is an aspect of language that discriminates between the use of two or more pronouns according to the social relationship between the speakers. While this relationship often refers to the closeness and confidence between speakers (Larousse, 2006); the T-V distinction, as noted by Warren (2006), evolved as a mechanism of showing power differentials in a relationship. For their part, Brown and Gilman (1960) note that while in most romance languages the T-V distinction has moved from a pure display of power difference to an acknowledgement of the level of confidence among the speakers, it can still be used to mark difference in social power levels. In a more recent analysis, Soler-Espiauba (1994) noted that in academic and grammatical writing, the use of *tú* is known for shown camaraderie, social distance and intimacy. However, she writes that her research shows subtle differences in the use of *tú*. *Tú*, she posits, shows five characteristics in modern use: 1) that it is the exclusive pronoun used inside families with the exception of rural families,

2) that its use is growing among youth – who now tend to use *tú* exclusively, 3) that it is used once the speaker has become part of a social group, 4) that it is used when the speaker shows something in common with the listener, and 5), that is used in psychological exchanges such as commercializing products and flirting.

As will be seen below, sexuality and gender are considered different phenomena. Gendered use of T-V pronouns is well studied (Instituto Caro y Cuervo, 1983; Hughson, 2009; Mestre de Caro, 2011), and while the Spanish T-V distinction in regards to sexuality has been approached by various studies in the past but none have provided satisfactory reasoning behind the association of *túteo* with homosexuality (or lack of heterosexuality). While the studies have not been carried out in the context of Colombia, research has taken place in many other hispanophone countries, which share cultural context with Colombia. For instance, Solano (1985) performed a sociolinguistic study in Costa Rica analyzing the pronominal forms in a school in terms of social distance and 76.6% of her participants opined that the pronoun *tú* among men was considered effeminate and homosexual. Similarly, Navarro Gala (2000) (Spain) in an article about Spanish foreign language teaching also notes that *tú* use among men is often a sign of homosexuality but never enters a deeper analysis of the association. More recently, Mustelier (2007) (Costa Rica) in a study of sex, age and pronoun use signaled that there may be a relationship between sexuality and pronoun use, but noted that a conclusive tie between the factors would require further study. Finally, Castillo and Marín (2009) (Costa Rica) also show a direct link between sexuality and pronoun preference with homosexual men preferring *tú* and heterosexual preferring *usted*, but lack deeper reasoning behind the phenomenon stating that pronoun use was based in stereotyping.

Quintanilla Aguilar (2009) (El Salvador) in a study of the personal pronoun patterns of both men and women found that both sexes considered the use of *tú* by men to be homosexual behavior. Agreeing with Quintanilla Aguilar and also in El Salvador, Michnowicz and Place (2010) note that the use of *tú* among men is perceived as being homosexual or effeminate among men due to the stereotype of *tú* being a woman's word. Furthering this, Marín-Esquivel (2012) in a study in Costa Rica directly asking homosexual and heterosexual men about their pronoun use found that among heterosexual men only 6.9% used *tú* with frequency, compared to 53.6% for homosexual men - thus providing very convincing statistics about the phenomenon. While providing excellent numerical support for the relationship between pronoun and sexuality, no further analysis into the nature of the relationship has been provided. Thus we can see that while research abounds regarding the use of *tú*, *usted* and their supposed link to homo-/heterosexuality, we can also see that

no study to date has explored the mechanisms behind the association and how pronouns are used to construct sexual social identities.

In regards to social identity, one can understand it from a linguistic perspective following the work of Henry Tajfel. Tajfel (1978) asserts that our identities can be divided into two: a personal identity composed of those unique traits belonging to the individual, and a social identity which is composed of our group memberships and, to this, Ochs (1996) adds our reputations, roles and relationships to this composition. Furthering adding to this, Cohen (2000) poses that not all aspects of our identity are salient in every moment, but are reliant on context in order to be pronounced, and Simon (2004) states this depends on the aspect we want to show as shared or apart – also dependent on context. Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004) pose that our identities are never fixed but form a collage of disparate identities that are melded together, via language, to create a coherent narrative. This role of language in creating our identities is pivotal as noted by Rajagopalan (2001) who asserts that language is a political tool used to flag allegiance to a group and to separate oneself from others. Agreeing with this, Jaspal (2009) writes that language is a robust ‘marker’ of identity and that language displaces all other markers of group membership.

In terms of how language is used to create or manage identities, Gumperz (1992) created the concept of contextualization cues. Language, he asserts, is used to foreground and background certain markers of group belonging within a discourse and discourse dependant identities. This means that interlocutors would look for contextual presuppositions within the discourse and remodel common understandings according to the presuppositions. However, this requires that the interlocutors be cooperative agents, looking for a common end in the communication because, when absent, the construction of identity in discourse will fail (Hall, 2011). Hall also states that identity is co-constructed using language as interlocutors navigate their identities according to the discourse relationship between them, a theme approached by Ochs (1996). He stated that, while language is a socio-historical product, it is also an instrument that speakers may use either to repeat social forms and meanings in interaction or to create new forms according to their interaction.

Sexual identity, be it heterosexual or homosexual, in recent history has been seen not as an essential biological aspect and is seen as separate from gender as it refers to the configuration of how one identifies oneself in terms of sex, whereas sexuality refers to the attraction to others. While homosexuality has been the subject of studies since the 1980s, heterosexuality has only been put under the lens of inquiry since the 90s (Kulick, 2000). Until the 1990s, heterosexuality was not considered an acted identity and was considered unmarked in terms of linguistic variables (Eckert, 1995). This new examination of heterosexuality, particularly male one, stated the heterosexuality was considered the norm

as a result of hegemonic masculinity – the most dominant public masculinity – which as a set of social norms dictates that heterosexuality and homophobia are the base for heterosexuality to be built upon (Donaldson, 1993). In a similar vein, Cameron (1997) stated that heterosexuality, far from being a stable personality factor, is constructed through contextual discourse, and that male heterosexuality, and as a result hegemonic masculinity, is constructed through the active opposition to and disparaging of male homosexuality.

More recent research also agrees with these scholars. Schwartz (2007) poses that heterosexuality is seen as an all-or-nothing identity with no possibility of flexibility. This occurs even though research suggests that sexuality is relational according to context – a point which aligns with the research of LaMarre (2007) who says that heteronormativity is constructed in obvious ignorance to the complex array of sexualities. Kiesling (2007) concurs, as he maintains that male heterosexuality is performed as a set of social norms, which are enacted in opposition to male homosexuality and the feminine. In terms of language, Kiesling also tells us that male heterosexuality through verbal active, which is indexically masculine: dominant speech, use of expletives, hierarchal verbal behavior and competitive speaking. Given this research, we have a picture of how male heterosexuality is constructed in active opposition to homosexuality and that it is enacted through discourse and this may be what is at play in terms of *tú* and *usted*.

Methodology

Rationale

To understand the reasoning behind heterosexual identity creation and maintenance, a purely numerical study would not suffice as what is being sought is not a tendency but the reasoning behind the usage of a variable (Becker, 1996). As a result, it was decided that semi-structured ethnographic interviews would be applied. Ethnography is the study of cultural practices, having its roots in anthropology and in linguistics ethnographic studies examine how linguistic practices are used to form cultural reality (Dörnyei, 2007). Being that social sexual identity construction is a cultural practice constructed through linguistic means, ethnographic interviews would provide the perfect means with which to understand the mechanisms by which the T-V distinction is used to create a heterosexual identity.

Design

Ethnographic interviewing, while benefiting from planning and structure, also benefits from flexibility that allows the interviewer in explore new lines of questioning as they appear during the interview (Fontana & Frey, 2005). The interview was designed a flexible semi-structured which would treat the subject along three lines of questioning:

- The first one involved getting some basic information about the participant and exploring how the participant used *tú* (keeping in mind that at no point was a participant to be asked about their sexuality),
- The second line explored how the participant understands the use of *tú* in groups and, in particular, how they would react to same-sex (be it male or female) use of the pronouns.
- The third line explored heteronormativity in pronoun use by exploring why men could or could not use either *tú* or *usted* in different circumstances.

Ethics

An investigation into sexuality and language use is always going to be fraught with ethical dilemmas, particularly in the case where the instrument of choice is an ethnographic interview. Given that it would not be appropriate (as it would cause discomfort) to ask possible participants their sexuality (and less so in the street), it was decided that the participants would not be asked about their sexuality. In addition, given that the interviews may elicit opinions which could be chauvinistic or less than favorable in the eyes of society, the data write-up would involve the use of pseudonyms so that the interviewees could not be identified. Also, in order to ensure that the participants knew exactly what would occur in the interview and data analysis processes, they were given a document explaining the research and were asked to sign a consent form thus guaranteeing that all participants not only consented to the interviews but that they know exactly what was expected of the interviews and how their information would be used in the future.

Participant Recruiting and Interviewing

Based on the expected length of the interviews, it was decided that twenty men would be interviewed. To keep relative consistency of the sample and eliminate age and region as variables, it was also decided that all of the men would be from Tolima and aged between 18–30. The twenty participants were chosen at random in and around the University of Tolima in Ibagué, Tolima, Colombia. This is a public university in the department of Tolima in the centre-south of Colombia and its students are generally from the working class. Once a participant was chosen, he was asked his age and whether he was from Tolima or not. If he met these criteria, he was given an explanation form and a consent form. After reading and filling out the forms, the interview was given and recorded.

Data Analysis

Once all of the interviews were conducted, the interviews were transcribed using the Du Bois transcription convention which encodes discourse and subtle speech data. This convention is a method of audio transcription that includes symbols for pausing, tone and other para-linguistic features and it was chosen for its ease of use and the great level of detail it can provide (Du Bois, 2006). The data was then analyzed in terms of both overt content in relation to male use of *tú* and *usted*, and heterosexuality; and covert content that was shown through paralinguistics (shown in the transcriptions). The analysis method used was Grounded Theory an inductive ethod developed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in 1967 that works ‘in reverse’ to other methods and in described in Dörnyei (2007). The data was first ‘open coded’ to look for general currents in reference to sexuality, gender and T-V usage. The data was then ‘axial coded’ to look for connections between the the different categories and for categories that emerged as a result of said connections. The final stage of the analysis was ‘selective coding’ were one category which has become more salient than the others is marked as the core category in order to find the connections and causal links that produce that category – and the category chosen can be seen in the results below.

Results and Analysis

Generalities of male *tú* use

The twenty men who were interviewed were all undergraduate students at the University of Tolima. When asked about their social class, all but two (who self-classified as middle class) self-classified themselves as either working class or upper working class. It is important to note also, that while not asked directly, all participants alluded to their heterosexuality at some moment during the interviews. The ages of the participants can be seen in the table below:

Table 1. Participant Ages

Age	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
Number of participants	0	2	1	1	3	4	3	3	0	0	1	2	0

The twenty interviews produced consistent results along the three lines of questioning which will be explored in parts: the nature of the T-V distinction in Tolimense men, and the T-V distinction and sexuality.

In order to identify the nature of the pronouns used in Tolima, it was necessary to ask the participants which pronouns they used and with what frequency. While there are three T-V pronouns in Colombian Spanish (*tú*, *vós* and *usted*), it is unusual to hear *vós* in

Tolimense Spanish. However, in order to understand if it was a variable, all participants were asked whether they used *vós* and is so, with what frequency they use it. Coincidentally, not one of the young men used it. Indeed the universal sentiment was that the use of *vós* was not a characteristic of Tolimense Spanish and many of the participants (13) went as far as to say it was either ugly or a sign of bad education.

‘Ui no, yo no usaría eso. Suena feo.’

- Participant, 24 years old.

Of the participants, only one admitted to using *tú* frequently and equally among men and women. A further seven admitted to a restricted use of *tú* (with female family members only) whereas four used *tú* when flirting or with partners (but not with friends). The remaining eight never used *tú* – not even with family members.

And here we get an immediate negation of Soler-Espiauba’s (1994) claim that the use of *tú* is almost universal among youth as only one participant in twenty claimed *tú* use among friends. It should be made clear here that in all cases where *tú* was not used, that the pronoun *usted* (the V-pronoun) was used. The results of *tú* use tell us a lot about how the participants perceived the use of *tú* and *usted*, several themes emerged the most salient being: confidence, social distance, class and education, and sexuality.

Table 2. Basic classification of *tú* use

<i>Tú</i> use	Number of participants
Uses <i>tú</i> frequently (with men and women)	1
Uses <i>tú</i> infrequently (only with female relatives/partner)	7
Uses <i>tú</i> infrequently (only when flirting but not with family)	4
Never uses <i>tú</i>	8

Confidence as a quality of *tú* was expressed by all of the participants and this finding ties in closely with social distance and the solidarity explained by Soler-Espiauba and Brown & Gilman (1960). All of the participants stated that the use of *tú* involves a high degree of confidence between the speakers and that the relation between the interlocutors would need to be particularly close. However, this definition of pronoun use is contradicted by the fact that not even half of the participants used *tú* with their parents, siblings or other family members. The reason behind this was quite simple and always the same: they were

not educated by their parents to use *tú* and this implies that their parents don't use *tú* with their children. Those who do use *tú* in family situations also noted that they tended to use *tú* with female relatives and outside of the family with their (female) partner – but more on that below when we look at gender. What this use of *tú* indicates is that while the participants understand that *tú* requires close relationships, in their closest of relationships (those of the family) they contradicted themselves and failed to use the pronoun. This brings us to another point of contention with the literature related to this topic. Brown and Gilman imply and Soler-Espiauba openly states that *tú* should be the pronoun of exclusive use in the family unit. Nevertheless, here we have city-dwelling youth who, while understanding the pronoun, never use it with any family member and indeed were never taught to use it.

The use of *tú* to convey confidence is also fraught with complications. Chief among these complications is the impression that *tú* use is a signing of flirting or suggesting some kind of hidden interest. Agreeing with Soler-Espiauba (1994), the use of *tú* is seen to have psychological implications related to intention. While 19 of the 20 participants stated that the use of *tú* among women was without interest, the use of *tú* between members of the opposite sex requires careful reading. In the case of a woman using *tú* towards a man, 11 participants suggested that this may mean that the woman is flirting – particularly in the case where the woman does not know the man and social distance would require *usted*. However, the other participants extended that given that (they believe) women tend to use *tú* among themselves, it is natural that they use *tú* with men. Opposite to this, though, one has the case of a man using *tú* with a woman - if the woman is not a family member or an extremely close friend, all participants stated that the use of *tú* would be a sign of the man flirting or showing some kind of interest in the woman (similar to Soler-Espiauba, 1994; Quintanilla Aguilar, 2009; and Marín Esquivel, 2012). The use of *tú* between men will be dealt with below.

Before dealing with inter-male use of *tú*, it is essential that another important theme be spoken about and that theme is class. Class is an important theme in the literature of *tú/usted* and it also emerged as an important theme here. Brown and Gilman (1960) noted that the use of *tú* was more prevalent in the upper classes of society and this was reflected in this study. As mentioned in the methodology section, the University of Tolima where the study took place is known for having students from the working class, and the sample reflected this – only one participant identified himself as not be from the working class but from the upper middle class. This identification as such affected the results produced. All participants (even the upper-middle class participant) mentioned that the use of *tú* in Tolima was linked to the upper classes and the level of education which one had or desired to show.

'Mi primera impresión es que son de la clase alta...'

Participant, 21 years old

'Si un hombre tutea con una mujer es porque tiene un interés o es de la clase alta'

Participant, 29 years old

'El usted es como para el estrato tres para abajo <1.0> para la clase trabajadora'

Participant, 22 years old

As the comments above testify, class difference is seen as being a critical factor in the use of *tú-usted* in men. The reasoning behind this, according to the participants, is that the upper class is educated differently and is educated to show closeness prohibited in the working class:

'Con hombres me siento incómodo porque el tuteo significa mucha cercanía. De pronto por la educación de ellos <1.0> por la cultura de ellos. Para hacerles diferentes a nosotros'

Participant, 19 years old

As noted in the comment about, young working class men are not educated in the use of *tú* and thus they believe that the use of *tú* among men from different social classes is meant to mark being superior to the working class. This lack of education in the use of *tú* comes from the household though and those participants who never used *tú* stated that they were not educated to do so at home as children and that as adults they now lack the facility to use the pronoun. However, when in contact with men who use the pronoun *tú*, this lack of education results in the immediate recognition of class difference among the men (similar to the study of Soler-Espiauba in Spain (1994) and Warren (2006) who worked with the T-V distinction in French). This thus leads us to the use of the pronoun *tú* among working class men.

Tú: Gender and Sexuality

'Voy a ser muy sincero. Si yo veo dos hombres tuteándose, generalmente, generalmente voy a pensar que son homosexuales <1.0> que tiene ese gusto.'

Participant, 19 years old

‘Se ve como algo gay’

Participant 28 years old

‘Es como gay, sé que no viene con ninguna intención pero así es’

Participant, 20 years old

‘Entre dos hombres el tuteo significa que tienen mucha confianza o una relación sexual’

Participant, 25 years old.

‘Tendría cierto pensamiento que de pronto son gays’

Participant, 25 years old

‘Se ve muy homosexual’

Participant, 22 years old

‘Porque uno tuteando un hombre a otro hombre le va a creer raro’

Participant, 21 years old

The comments above are only a few chosen from a large list showing a very prominent theme. As mentioned in the preceding section, according to the working class, the use of *tú* among men in the higher social classes is considered a normative part of interpersonal communication and particularly among friends. Among working class men, the use of *tú* among men is a question laden with significant social pressure, in particular pressure relating to the social formation of masculinity and heterosexuality. As mentioned in the above section, only one participant used *tú* freely and frequently among men and women (and this was the upper-middle class participant), whereas the other 19 participants (95%) did not ever use *tú* with other men. When queried about their *tú* use, almost all of the participants (18 of 20) made reference to homosexuality and the use of the pronoun and, agreeing with Michnowicz and Place (2010), the use of *tú* was consistently seen as ‘*raro*’ (strange) – a euphemism for homosexual. Indeed, 10 participants used this adjective to qualify inter-male use of *tú*. In terms of sexualized use of *tú*, the pronoun’s use can be understood in four broad categories: the supposed femininity of *tú*, the use of *tú* for flirting and the social distance implied by *tú*.

'El tuteo es como para dirigirse a una persona más delicada'

- Participant, 19 years old

'Uso el tú cuando estoy hablando con una persona delicada y uso el usted cuando estoy hablando con una persona no tan delicada'

- Participant, 21 years old

'El uso del tú es tierno, como las mujeres'

- Participant, 25 years old

'...entre dos mujeres ya lo vería más normal ya que, que ellas son más llevadas a usar el tuteo porque son más, más <1.0> qué le digo <1.5> hemos llegado a verlo como femenino'

- Participant, 29 years old

'Son estereotipos que las personas creen que uno que lo usa es como <1.0> delicada, entonces si un hombre lo usa automáticamente creen que es gay'

- Participant, 25 years old

According to Solano (1985) and Michnowicz and Place (2010), the perception of the use of *tú* and femininity was touched upon by the majority of the participants. Five of the participants stated that the pronoun *tú* should be directed towards 'delicate' people and when pressed about the meaning of 'delicate', the meaning 'feminine' was given, thus linking *tú* usage with women. Other participants also linked *tú* usage with femininity linking the pronoun with tenderness and the closeness identified with inter-female relationships. This reputation of femininity prohibits heterosexual men from using the pronoun *tú* as a man using a 'feminine' pronoun would result in the man being seen as homosexual: men, as some of the participants said, are required to use 'rough' and distant language as this is a sign of masculinity –

'Un hombre debe hablar brusco. Un hombre no puede ser brusco con una mujer pero debe ser brusco con otro hombre'

- Participant, 25 years old

‘el beneficio (del tú) es buscar el amor romántico’

- Participant, 28 years old

‘Porque cuando un hombre le tutea a otro hombre es que le tiene un interés’

- Participant, 19 years old

‘No tuteo con hombres porque creen que estoy coqueteando o faltando el respeto’

- Participant, 23 years old

This also ties in with the use of *tú* as a means of flirting also returns as a means of prohibiting the pronoun among men. Five of the men mentioned that the use of the pronoun *tú* among men could still be construed as a sign of flirting or sexual interest. This can be as an extension of the same meaning given to the use of *tú* by working class men to women – the closing of social distance is related to flirting and sexual intention. Thus, it is extended that if one working-class man uses *tú* to another man he is acting in a way that shows sexual interest in the other party.

‘Con hombres me siento incómodo porque el tuteo significa mucha cercanía. No solo de amigos, tal vez de algo más’

- Participant, 21 years old

‘...que tienen una relación bastante cerca y que de pronto son gays’

- Participant, 25 years old

The comments above are typical of the answers given by eighteen participants about social distance and social distance is of vital importance in understanding the reasoning behind the non-use of the inter-male *tú*. Inter-male relationships between heterosexual working-class men in Tolima are built upon distance, and the social heterosexuality of these relationships is constructed through ‘masculine’ speech. An important aspect to this idea is that heterosexual men cannot have a perceived social distance in discourse similar to that maintained in inter-female discourse or in male-female discourse as this is perceived as being homosexual. Being thus, in recognizing the implicit social distance is using *tú* instead of instead, working-class men opt for *usted* to create the distance (even in inter-familiar communication) that is necessary for the creation of public heterosexuality.

Discussion

There is a strong link between the T-V distinction and the enacting of working-class male heterosexuality. Only one in twenty (5%) Tolimense men used *tú* with frequency, a statistic similar to those provided by Marín-Esquivel (2012) for Costa Rican men, and eighteen in twenty (90%) believed *tú* use among men to be indicative of homosexuality – a much stronger statistic than that of Solano (1985). The comments and reasoning given by the men involved in the study confirmed all of the prior studies and articles implying a link between pronoun use and homosexuality. In addition, the mechanisms behinds this phenomenon can be explained using the information elicited during the interviews.

From the interviews, it appears that among working-class men in Tolima, heterosexuality is constructed through speech. This finding seems to confirm Cameron's (1997) and Kulick's (2000) assertions when they maintain that heterosexuality is not an inherent quality but a socially constructed identity. The proposition posited by the participants that social distance is needed to appear heterosexual is key in this argument. If language were immaterial to the acceptance or perception of heterosexuality, the T-V distinction would not appear as a threat to the speaker's perceived heterosexuality. Being that language can threaten the existence of heterosexuality, we can therefore assert that heterosexuality is a social identity and not part of our personal identity as described by Tajfel (1978) and Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004). To further this argument, it is worthwhile pointing out that the majority of the participants felt uncomfortable using or receiving the *tú* pronoun in situations where that identity would be salient. As Cohen (2000) and Simon (2004) mention, social identity is constructed or threatened only in contexts that require the salience of said identity. Heterosexual identity among men from Tolima, as appears to be suggested from the interviews, is not constructed with or threatened by women but in contexts that involve other men – thus confirming heterosexuality as a social identity mediated by language.

Given that we can now assert that heterosexuality is a socially constructed identity, it remains for us to further elucidate the particular conception of heterosexual identity presented by working-class men in Tolima. The heterosexual identity in question here bears all of the hallmarks of Donaldson's (1993) hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity as described by Donaldson is the socially dominant set of norms for conducting heterosexual identity and relies upon the active opposition to homosexuality (conceived as a threatening identity) and femininity (associated to homosexuality and women). The reasoning provided by the young men in this study appears to confirm this view. The men in the study noted that close relationships shown by pronoun use and subsequent verb conjugation were representative of women and female social identity, and made an immediate link between

this identity and homosexuality when a man uses the pronoun *tú* to another man. Believing homosexuality to equate to femininity, homosexuality is set up as the threatening Other to heterosexuality and being so, heterosexual men seek linguistic means to separate themselves from that threatening other – homosexuality.

The role that the T-V distinction plays in the production and maintenance of hegemonic masculine heterosexuality is an interesting one. As mentioned above, masculinity is constructed through discourse and any construction must in reality be co-constructed; this means that the forms that are produced must be recognizable by both parties of the communicative act (Hall, 2011). As hegemonic masculinity requires a significant social distance between male interlocutors, the T-V distinction becomes enormously important in the reproduction of social norms and forms in terms of contextualization cues. Such cues are words or structures that foreground or background certain identity markers within a text (Gumperz, 1992). Interlocutors look for these cues to model and remodel contextual understanding and relative identity positions.

Tú and *usted* are contextualization cues of many kinds in Spanish – power relations, formality and degree of familiarity are the most common of these. However, among working-class heterosexuals, *tú* and *usted* are also used to contextualize the sexual relationship between men. *Tú*, as a contextualization cue, contextualizes a situation where trust is implicit among the interlocutors and where an intimate (but not explicitly sexual) relationship is present whereas *usted* cues a context where the speakers maintain a forced social distance. Being that hegemonic masculine heterosexuality must be built in contrast to the perceived feminine, hegemonic masculine heterosexuals will actively cue forced social distance and eschew cues that may imply intimacy – especially among peers. As a result, among working-class men who bear this social identity, *usted* becomes a contextualization cue for heterosexuality and *tú* becomes a contextualization cue for closer relationships that are either feminine or homosexual.

Conclusion

The use of *tú* and *usted* among men is a complex phenomenon. Many factors influence how, when and with whom they are used. Relative social position and due respect affect their use along all social spectra – including the pronouns' use by women. However, among men there is a strong difference in usage when divided by class. Middle and upper class men use *tú* freely among themselves, but working-class men face a prohibition in *tú* use, particularly when they wish to maintain the public guise of being heterosexual.

Among working-class men in Tolima, Colombia the words *tú* and *usted* are not only contextualization cues for social position and relation but also cue social sexual identity. Contrary to common opinion, sexuality is not a fixed state but a socially constructed identity that is managed through discourse and, in the case of working-class men from Tolima, the T-V distinction is a contextualization cue for sexual orientation. Hegemonic masculine heterosexuality, which is the norm among working-class men in Tolima, is expressed through opposition to perceived feminine and homosexual behavior. This study appears to indicate that the use of *tú*, while having no inherently feminine or homosexual qualities, is perceived as such by working-class men as they discursively construct their sexuality in opposition to short social distance and perceived intimacy among peers. As such, working-class heterosexual men in Tolima avoid the use of the pronoun *tú* in favor of the pronoun *usted* which contextualizes forced social distance among peers and a supposedly more masculine tone of speech.

Accordingly, it appears that my student was right when he made that overtly homophobic remark in class. While he may have expressed his sentiment in an offensive manner, given his social class, it would be impossible for him to maintain his social identity as a heterosexual man and use the pronoun *tú* with another a man. However, as the participants themselves noted, society is becoming more open and in the future, my student's heterosexuality may not be pinned to his pronoun use and may not even be questioned. But this process will require educator's to realize the way in which the T-V distinction is being used to reproduce homophobic attitudes and chauvinistic ideas. This itself opens the door to further research into how education can modify mother-tongue linguistic attitudes and identities, and into how changing social and sexual identities are modifying sociolinguistic norms. For the sake of reducing homophobia in class and in greater society, this is research which we need to start immediately.

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Appendix 1: Basic Interview Questions

In this appendix, one can find the basic questions that were used in the interviews. It must be kept in mind though that as this was semi-structured ethnographic research additional questions would have been added in the situation and as such are not listed here.

First line of questioning:

¿Es del Tolima?

¿Qué edad tiene?

¿Usa el tuteo?

Si lo usa:

¿Con quién y en cuáles situaciones?

¿En cuáles situaciones definitivamente no usaría el tuteo?

Si no lo usa:

¿Por qué no lo usa?

Second line of questioning:

¿Cuáles personas por lo general tutean?

¿Cuáles no?

¿Con quién se puede y no se puede tutear?

¿Cómo reaccionaría usted si un/a hombre/mujer le tuteara/usteara?

¿Por qué?

¿Cómo percibiría el tuteo entre dos hombres/dos mujeres/un hombre y una mujer?

Third line of question:

Purely situational.