

# *Medellín Cuenta con vos:* The changing role of *voseo* in written communication

*Medellín Cuenta con vos:*  
El papel cambiante de *voseo*  
en la comunicación escrita

## Abstract

*Voseo*—the linguistic phenomenon of using subject *vos* and/or its corresponding verb forms and complements—is common in speech in Antioquia, Colombia, but it is non-normative for writing. Nonetheless, written *voseo* has a burgeoning presence in public in Medellín and has become the preferred form of address of the new mayoral administration (2016). Given the intimate link between language and culture, and Medellín’s 21<sup>st</sup> century transformation, it is logical that an increase in the prestige of Medellín on the national and international stage could result in increased prestige for its local dialect, emphasizing here the regional *voseo*. This study analyzes the Facebook posts of the Alcaldía de Medellín for its first seven months (January-July, 2016). The author read and documented the 667 messages posted during that time. Each use of an address form was documented for the data presentation. The monthly totals of address forms show a growing trend of *voseo* usage and a decline in *tuteo* and hybrid forms. This increased use of *voseo* is examined through the lens of language change. For a language change to occur, some agent of change must introduce it. We propose that the Alcaldía de Medellín could possibly be the required agent that would marshal in a linguistic change, resulting in increased prestige for colloquial *voseo* in writing.

## Resumen

*Voseo*—el fenómeno lingüístico en que *vos* y/o sus correspondientes formas verbales y complementos—es común en el habla de Antioquia, Colombia, pero no es normativo para la escritura. Sin embargo, el *voseo* por escrito tiene una presencia naciente en público en Medellín y ha llegado a ser la forma de tratamiento preferida por la nueva alcaldía de la ciudad (2016). Dado el lazo importante entre lengua y cultura, más la transformación actual de Medellín,

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## Palabras clave

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es lógico concluir que un aumento en el prestigio de Medellín a nivel nacional e internacional pueda resultar en un aumento en el prestigio de su dialecto, enfatizando el voseo regional. Este estudio analiza los mensajes de Facebook de la Alcaldía de Medellín durante sus primeros siete meses de gestión (enero-julio, 2016). Los 667 mensajes que fueron posteados durante este periodo fueron leídos y analizados por el autor. Cada uso de formas de tratamiento fue documentado para la presentación de datos. Los totales mensuales de uso de formas de tratamiento indican un incremento en el uso de voseo mientras el uso de *tuteo* y otras formas híbridas se disminuyen. Examinamos el incremento de voseo desde la perspectiva del cambio lingüístico. Para que un cambio se realice, algún agente tiene que introducirlo. Proponemos que la Alcaldía de Medellín podría ser el agente requerido, resultando en un incremento en el prestigio hacia el voseo por escrito.

## Introduction

*Medellín Cuenta con vos* appeared on the Facebook page of the Alcaldía de Medellín (City Hall, used here and throughout with its official name) on January 1, 2016, the inauguration day of Mayor Federico Gutiérrez Zuluaga. The new seal was soon seen on billboards throughout the city, having been integrated into the coat of arms that represents Antioquia's capital city. As a mayoral candidate, Federico Gutiérrez Zuluaga advertised that he was "*aliado con vos*". As Mayor, his *Medellín Cuenta con vos* represents his administration and the city officially. Change is in the air, as one would expect with a new administration. Linguistic change seems to be in the air, as well. In Medellín, the colloquial *vos* that is so common in *paisa* speech, but is generally considered non-standard for writing, currently enjoys a prominent public role in the Alcaldía's written communication.

Seeing written examples of *vos* in the public domain (like advertising or governmental *comunicués*) prior to Mayor Gutiérrez's election was not unheard of. Weyers (2016) shows that written *vos* has a growing presence in public spheres, particularly in the advertising of specific local goods and shops. Moreover, prior to the start of the current mayoral administration, *vos* was used in some city government *comunicués*, albeit minimally (Weyers, 2016). To repeat, change is in the air. It appears that written, public *vos* has an increasing presence in the Alcaldía's communication with its citizens. The current study is borne of that perceived change.

Is the use of written *vos* changing in Medellín? If so, what are the implications of such a change? In short, why should we care? These are the three questions that guide the current study. It is based on observations over a three-year period. Specifically, it builds on a previous study (Weyers

2016), where it is shown that the data from the previous city administration (Mayor Aníbal Gaviria 2012-2015) indicated a subtle increase in written vos in official domains. In little more than seven months into the current Gutiérrez mayoral term, we find a robust, increased use of official vos that appears to lay the groundwork for a potential language shift.

In this article, we discuss the role of vos in Medellín; the relationship between linguistic forms and cultural identity; and the cultural implications that are represented by a language shift. The study centers on official governmental communication and is guided by the inextricable relationship between language and culture (Fishman, 1960; Hymes, 1974). Given the 21<sup>st</sup> century transformation of Medellín, it follows that Medellín's linguistic norm (here, we focus on vos) may likely enjoy increased prestige as a marker of its enhanced standing. An expanded role for a non-standard form constitutes a language shift; a shift ultimately becomes permanent as a language change. Language shifts do not occur organically; rather they are initiated by some agent of change who introduces them. In that light we propose that the Alcaldía de Medellín, headed by Mayor Federico Gutiérrez Zuluaga, could be the agent of a potential language shift, ushering in an expanded and normative role for written voseo in public domains.

## Medellín's voseo

Before we continue, it is necessary to define the focus of our study. Vos is a pronoun of second person address that denotes intimacy or solidarity. It is also a prepositional pronoun (e.g. *para vos*). Voseo is the linguistic phenomenon that refers to the use of vos and/or its corresponding vos verb morphology. Since Spanish is a null subject language, the explicit use of a subject is not necessary with verb forms: *sos*, *podés*, *vení*, etc., are sufficient to express: (a) the semantic meaning of the verb, (b) the grammatical subject, and (c) the verb tense. As such, when we refer to vos here, the reference is to the pronoun's explicit use, as in *Medellín Cuenta con vos*. Voseo is used to reference the linguistic phenomenon in general. Note that the same criterion applies to *tú* / *tuteo* and *usted* / *ustedeo*.

The Spanish that arrived to the Americas in the 15<sup>th</sup> century consisted of three singular forms of address: *vos*, *tú*, and *vuestra merced*. Vos and tú were used in similar domains (at times interchangeably) of informal address (Cf. <http://dle.rae.es/?id=c3xtZ5J>), while *vuestra merced*—an honorific borne of vos—marked social distance in exchanges that required it. *Vuestra merced* eventually simplified to *usted*. Given its origin as an honorific, it uses third person morphology. Vos and tú use second person singular morphology.

Vos was lost from use in Spain around the 17<sup>th</sup> century for reasons that are unclear (Penny, 2000). Its destiny in the American colonies was determined by the degree of contact American regions had with Spain. When vos ceased to be used in Spain, México and Perú quickly followed suit, given their status as centers of colonial power in the Americas. In those areas that were far from a power center, such as Central America (distant from México) and the Río de la Plata region (distant from Lima), vos remained, and continues to characterize the norms of address in those regions. This pattern of loss or maintenance of vos, as it relates to direct contact (or otherwise), is discernible when we focus our attention locally, that is, on Colombia. In Spanish colonial times, Cartagena de Indias was Spain's most important Caribbean port, and its contact with the motherland was continual. At the same time, Bogotá became the viceregal capital of New Granada, again assuring direct contact with Spain and its linguistic innovations. Medellín and Cali (and the surrounding regions) are distant from Cartagena and Bogotá. As such, their geographic isolation saw minimal contact between and among these cities, which explains the persistence of vos in Antioquia, Valle del Cauca, and bordering areas when it disappeared from usage elsewhere.

Beyond geography, colonial social structure played an important role in the persistence of vos in Medellín and throughout Antioquia. Colonial Bogotá had a hierarchically divided society, reminiscent of other Spanish American cities in which *peninsulares*, *criollos*, *mestizos*, and indigenous peoples occupied clearly marked castes. As such, we find that *usted* became a prominent and necessary linguistic feature of *bogotano* speech due to the social distinctions that typified the capital (Millán, 2011). Colonial Medellín, on the other hand, was not hierarchical. Since there was no significant indigenous population in the Aburrá Valley, there was no slavery in Medellín. Instead, colonial *medellinenses* were generally of the same social class. The solidarity that vos conveys solidified its use in Medellín as a marker of an egalitarian society and therefore as a marker of local identity (Montes Giraldo, 1967).

Social contexts determine the appropriateness of specific linguistic features. At the same time, whether language is oral or written, factors into what is considered acceptable by the participants in a communicative event. In the case of second person singular address in Medellín, the choice between vos and tú, along with the perceived appropriateness of them, is governed by these factors. As we discussed, vos has a long history in Medellín, and its use in oral communication by and among *paisas* (that is, the people of Antioquia) is commonplace (Jang, 2010; Montes Giraldo, 1967). Vos conveys social closeness as well as regional identity (Jang, 2013; Montes Giraldo, 1967). That vos is a marker of identity is particularly evident in its use in *costumbrista* literature (Villa Mejía, 2010). Research and participant observation show that vos is generalized among all speakers, irrespective of their social class

(Montes Giraldo, 1967). At the same time, *vos* is considered non-normative for official, written domains. For writing, *tú* is prescribed as most appropriate (with the exception of *costumbrista* literature, as referenced above). *Tú* is considered the normative form of address in educational and professional written domains (Weyers, 2016). That *vos* appears in official, written, public domains, and forms an integral part of the Alcaldía's voice in communicating with the public, is seen as idiosyncratic, and is the crux of the current study.

The Alcaldía's increasing use of written *vos* in official comunicués seems to ascribe that vernacular form a more normative function than we might expect. It seems clear that the Alcaldía has chosen to increasingly address its citizens with the local *vos* in an effort to develop a strong bond with them. In so doing, it also suggests that the Alcaldía is assigning increased prestige to the non-normative form of address. Moreover, that *vos* is used by a governmental entity suggests the possibility that the Alcaldía may become the agent of a language shift, were one to occur. It is impossible to state that this is indeed the case since this is a phenomenon in progress. Still, if there is a language shift in progress, it is likely promulgated by the Alcaldía and borne of cultural change in Medellín. As we will discuss in the next section, the relationship between language and culture is intimate, and a language change is a prospective byproduct of a cultural change.

## Language and culture

Scholars have long maintained that language and culture are inextricably linked. A group's thoughts, memory, and traditions are expressed in its language. Conversely, the way a group uses its language to communicate is one of the many expressions of its culture (Saville-Troike, 1989). Historical antecedents show that language changes often result from some change in a group's history and its consequent sense of identity (Labov, 2001; Milroy & Milroy, 1985). Indeed, we find three examples in the Spanish-speaking world that show how forms of address shifted as a result of some cultural (oftentimes political) change.

In post-Franco Spain, we find that Spaniards quickly switched from *usted* usage to *tú* in many of the domains that officially required formality under the dictatorial regime (Molina, 1993). Nicaragua, whose linguistic profile was reminiscent of Medellín's in its official acceptance of standard *tú* in official domains and widespread use of *vos* in informal ones, switched to an officially sanctioned standard voseo following the socialist revolution that transformed that society in the 1970s (Lipski, 1994). The most vivid example of pronoun shift is found in Argentina, where until the 1950s, *tú* was the prescribed pronoun of educated speech and *vos* was considered vulgar. It

was around the 1950s that politicians (notably, Juan and Eva Perón) began to use the colloquial form of address in official domains. Intellectuals, writers and artists (particularly Quino, the creator of *Mafalda*) followed suit, elevating *vos* to the level of acceptance in Argentine Spanish it currently enjoys (Fontanella de Weinberg, 1990-1991). In these three cases, we find that an official entity (political leader or group) acted as the catalyst to spur a shift from one form of address that was considered standard or “correct” to another had been considered non-standard. In short, a cultural change led to a linguistic change in Spain, Nicaragua, and Argentina.

Medellín’s 20<sup>th</sup> century history was difficult at best, and excruciating at worst. The turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century ushered in an era of renewed promise. As the Urban Land Institute (ULI) acknowledged in naming Medellín the World’s Most Innovative City in 2013, “[f]ew cities have transformed the way Medellín has ... in the past 20 years” (“City of the year”, 2013). Medellín’s national and international standing has increased; consequently, pride in Medellín and all aspects of *paisa* culture is palpable in the city and the region. It appears that *paisa* culture is experiencing increased prestige, as Medellín continues to market successfully its human, technological, and natural resources on the world stage. Given the relationship between culture and language, it is reasonable to expect that aspects of *paisa* speech—in this case, we emphasize *vos*—might enjoy a similar increase in prestige.

As we refer again to historical antecedents, the similarities are noteworthy. In Spain, the death of a tyrant inspired linguistic change; in Nicaragua, a social revolution that broke with the restraints of the past inspired linguistic change; and in Argentina, the recognition that colloquial speech is representative of local culture resulted in a linguistic change. Medellín shares some elements of these histories, having experienced a dramatic social change and currently, as we report here, experiencing an increased use of the vernacular in official, governmental domains. Of course, Medellín is neither the capital nor Colombia’s largest city, so any changes locally seem unlikely to have national impact. Still, it appears possible that locally, Medellín’s *voseo* could become less stigmatized as it is used in official, written domains in the city such as we observe at present.

We have proposed previously that the Alcaldía de Medellín could reasonably serve as an agent of language shift. Such a proposition is based in Language Change theory. Labov (2001) shows that language change is known to take place when there is some change in social networks in a speech community. Language change can originate in the upper class of society and filter to the lower class, or the change might occur in the opposite direction, resulting in a non-standard form becoming standard (p. 31). In the latter case, the

non-standard often has “powerful primitive processes on its side which the standard dialect, in its conservatism, has repressed” (Chambers, 1995, p.252). Language change is generally introduced by some leading exponent of fresh and vibrant changes (Milroy & Milroy, 1985, p.348). Consequently, the resulting linguistic tide spreads to the wider speech community, as all members in the socioeconomic hierarchy are inevitably swept up in the surge (Labov, 2001, p.31).

We find in Medellín that written *vos* has a growing presence in public domains, specifically in official written communiqués from the Alcaldía de Medellín. In the following section, we will examine the Alcaldía’s use of *vos* in writing, and describe how its evolution over a short period of time suggests that a language shift may be underway.

## Methodology

This study examines the forms of address used in the Alcaldía de Medellín’s Facebook posts during the first seven months of the Gutiérrez mayoral administration. Facebook was chosen for a number of reasons. Primary among those reasons is that the Alcaldía de Medellín integrates all its communiqués across advertising and social media platforms, so the same message that is found on a public billboard, for example, appears first on Facebook, the Alcaldía’s web page, and other digital platforms before appearing on paper in a public venue. Additionally, Facebook serves as a warehouse for all official messages. Moreover, Facebook messages are archived, allowing for easy consultation for the purpose of this and similar studies.

The Alcaldía posted 667 Facebook messages from January 1, 2016 (the date on which Federico Gutiérrez Zuluaga took office) through July 31, 2016, marking the first seven months of the Mayor’s administration. Typical Facebook posts consist of at least two parts: the original message addresses the topic at hand, and is typically accompanied by an attached photograph, a video, or a digital poster. The digital posters consist of professionally produced artwork and text that often appears on billboards and flyers. All 667 messages were read and documented. Each of the posts was categorized according to the form(s) of address that it contained: *tú*, *vos*, *usted*, a combination of these, an unidentifiable form of address (e.g. verb forms like *estás* and *vas* correspond to *tú* and *vos* and cannot be identified by subject if a tonic pronoun is not present), or no form of address (e.g. statements like ‘*Medellín is beautiful*’ or ‘*The festival is underway*’ do not address the reader). The categorization of a particular form of address took into account the use of a subject or prepositional pronoun and/or the use of a null subject verb form. For example, ‘*acordate*’

and 'cuenta con vos' were categorized equally as *voseo* usage. Moreover, hash tagged phrases like #PorVosMaestro and #MedellínCuentaConVos were registered as using a form of address (here, vos).

As we see in Table 2, hash tagged slogans visually form part of the written message. Although it may seem like the hash tagged city slogan (or other hashtags) is devoid of semantic value, its juxtaposition with the body of the main message draws the reader's eye to the hashtag as part of the written message. The only time the city's slogan was not included in the documentation of the data is when it appears as part of the city's coat of arms in a digital watermark (see Figure 1) at the bottom of the communiqué. In those cases, *Alcaldía de Medellín Cuenta con vos* as part of the coat of arms is not visually juxtaposed with the written message; instead, it stands alone in the bottom sector of the production. Recall that the data is visual, and proximity of a hash tagged slogan to the main message, compared to the spatial distance between the message and the watermark city insignia, creates a divergent environment which draws the reader to the former more readily than the latter.

All of the documentation and categorization was done by hand by the researcher to maintain consistency. Only original posts from the Alcaldía de Medellín were considered. That is, a post that was shared from another page was removed from consideration, since it had a different writer and it did not speak officially as City government. For example, Mayor Gutiérrez has an active personal Facebook page, but the messages that are shared from his page on the official Alcaldía de Medellín page are considered personal and not the official voice of the city.

## Results

Of the 667 messages posted during the period of time under consideration, 431 distinct messages that directly address the reader as *tú*, *vos* or a combination of those two forms were identified. Table 1 shows the breakdown of how the Alcaldía used forms of address in its Facebook posts over the seven-month period. The data in Table 1 originates from a hand count of the posts, followed by the calculation of a mathematical average for the occurrences.

Month (2016)	Total number of posts	Total number of 2nd person singular	Tú n (% of total 2nd person singular)	Vos n (% of total 2nd person singular)	Mixed tú and vos n (% of total 2nd person singular)	Undetermined 2nd person singular n (% of total 2nd person singular)
January	47	31	7 (22.6%)	7 (22.6%)	15 (48.4%)	2 (6.4%)
February	26	21	1 (4.8%)	7 (33.3%)	10 (47.6%)	3 (14.3%)
March	43	23	8 (34.8%)	9 (39.1%)	6 (26.1%)	0
April	122	84	36 (42.9%)	28 (33.3%)	14 (16.7%)	6 (7.1%)
May	113	72	35 (48.6%)	18 (25.0%)	12 (16.7%)	7 (9.7%)
June	136	83	31 (37.3%)	43 (51.8%)	7 (8.4%)	2 (2.4%)
July	180	117	15 (12.8%)	93 (79.5%)	7 (6.0%)	1 (0.9%)

Table 1. Occurrence of address forms in Alcaldía de Medellín's Facebook posts

The first noteworthy trend we find in Table 1 is that the Alcaldía de Medellín used Facebook sparingly in its first three months in office. From April onward, we find a significant increase in activity in postings, averaging from April to July 138 posts per month, an average of 89 which use some form(s) of second person singular forms of address. Since the data from April to July is comparable and representative of actual posts (at the time of writing), we will focus much of our discussion on the trends that emerge over that period of time.

A second noteworthy trend we find in Table 1 is the mixed use of *tuteo*/voseo in the same message, reported in the penultimate column of the table. In January and February, the combined use of both second person singular forms is predominant, accounting for nearly half of the posts that featured a form of address. The reason for the high levels of mixed use early in the administration is that the Alcaldía established an early pattern of posting messages that used *tú* and *tuteo* verb forms followed by a hashtag that uses *vos*. As stated, *Alcaldía de Medellín Cuenta con vos* was integrated into the city's official seal on January 1 (see Figure 1).



**Alcaldía de Medellín**  
**Cuenta con vos**

Figure 1. Medellín's official seal, introduced 1 January 2016.

Consequently, #MedellínCuentaConVos is used frequently in the Alcaldía's social media posts, and is included in the data we analyze for the reasons outlined above. On January 1, for example, we find, "Gilberto Castaño se compromete a ser más respetuoso, ¿Y **tú**? #MedellínCuentaCon**Vos**", which combines *tú* and *vos* juxtaposed in the same post. A sample of other hashtags that feature *vos* and appear in posts with *tuteo* forms appear in Table 2.

Date of post (2016)	Hashtag	Full text of mixed <i>tuteo/voseo</i> forms
14 April	#ContamosConVos	El museo Casa de la Memoria se une a la convocatoria de estímulos para el Arte y la Cultura. #ContamosCon <b>Vos</b> para que <b>te sumes</b> [tú] a esta iniciativa.
19 April	#LaTierraCuentaConVos	Con jornada del Día sin Carro, Medellín celebrará el día de la Tierra. <b>Encuentra</b> [tú] toda la información haciendo clic aquí <a href="http://bit.ly/23WFC2T">http://bit.ly/23WFC2T</a> #LaTierraCuentaCon <b>Vos</b>
26 April	#ConVosRadio	Con Jaime Enrique Gómez vamos a hablar de prevención en caso de sismos en en #Con <b>Vos</b> Radio. <b>Conéctate</b> [tú] y <b>participa</b> [tú] con tus preguntas para resolver dudas a través de Telemedellin Radio, #MedellínCuentaCon <b>Vos</b>
15 May	#PorVosMaestro	<b>Publica</b> [tú] una foto o video como homenaje a tu maestro en tus redes sociales, <b>cuéntanos</b> [tú] <b>quién</b> es y por qué te cambió la vida utilizando la etiqueta #Por <b>Vos</b> Maestro
24 May	#FedericoCuentaConVos	La seguridad es un tema que nos interesa a todos, por eso no <b>te pierdas</b> [tú] este jueves 26 de mayo #FedericoCuentaCon <b>Vos</b> a las 8:00 p.m. a través de Telemedellín Aquí te Ves para que <b>te enteres</b> [tú] de cómo va Medellín en este y otros temas de ciudad.
16 July	#EmpleoParaVos	#EmpleoPara <b>Vos</b> 2.128 vacantes para la alcaldía de Medellín en niveles asistencial, técnico y profesional. En próximos días <b>visita</b> [tú] la página de la Comisión Nacional del Servicio Civil <a href="http://www.cnsc.gov.co">http://www.cnsc.gov.co</a> para conocer las vacantes.

Table 2. Examples of *tuteo* texts with *voseo* hashtags.

In other instances, the mixed usage of *tuteo/voseo* forms is simply that, a mix of forms. For example, from the end of January throughout most of February, there was an active campaign to engage the citizens of Medellín in local discussion groups about the city's current and future direction. Multiple posts invite citizens from different sectors of the city to attend the public forum, with this tag line repeated in each invitation: "*Contamos con tus ideas. Puedes [tú] ingresar a [www.mimedellin.org](http://www.mimedellin.org) y contarnos cómo te soñás [vos] a tu ciudad*" (first appeared 31 January 2016).

Our focus in this study is the use and growth of *voseo*, and it is studied by comparing it to *tuteo* and mixed *voseo/tuteo* usage. The raw data from Table 1 was entered into Word's Chart template to convert it to a line graph for a more visual presentation. The results are found in Figure 2, which is used to facilitate our discussion of the evolving use of *voseo* in the Alcaldía de Medellín's posts.

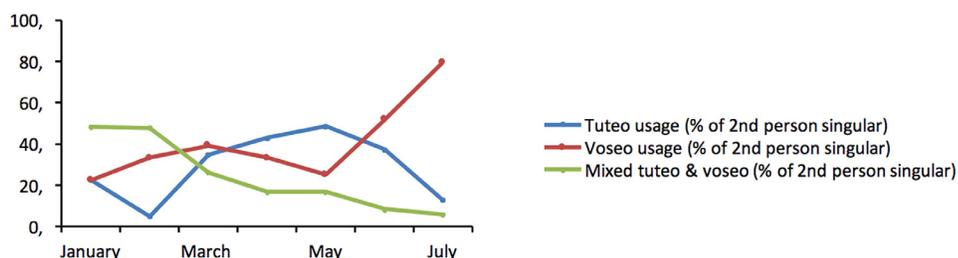


Figure 2. Alcaldía de Medellín's use of address forms (%) by month (2016).

Figure 2 shows a clear downward trend for the mixed use of *tuteo* and *voseo* (green line): in January and February, nearly 50% of posts with address forms used a mix of *tú* and *vos*; by the end of July, that percentage dropped to 6%. Given our previous discussion of the conditions that result in this mixed use, it would seem that the Alcaldía applied a conscious, continuous strategy to eliminate the vacillation between address forms. Such a decrease would suggest a type of leveling in the use of *tuteo* and *voseo*: if the mixed use steadily decreased, we should expect a complimentary steady change in *tuteo* and *voseo*, as the posts reflect more consistent use of one form of address over another. We can only speculate on the cause of the consistent downward trend of mixed *tuteo/voseo*.

The unsteady "rise and fall" pattern of *tuteo* and *voseo* usage from January until April—particularly the sharp decline in *tuteo* usage in February and the decline in *voseo* usage from March to May—is a curious situation that

is not readily explained. In visual terms, with reference to Figure 2, it would seem to imply that the new mayoral administration was in a transitional phase, working to find its voice as it worked on establishing a cohesive communication strategy. (Efforts to contact the Alcaldía to confirm this possibility were unsuccessful.) Recall that the first three months of 2016 saw limited use of social media; April 2016 marks the first month for which the number of Facebook posts nearly tripled the average of January-March. Furthermore, *voseo* usage shows a steady increase in the first months of the Gutiérrez administration, which is due in part to the consistent use of the newly minted *#MedellínCuentaConVos*.

A notable occurrence that lends justification for the increase in *tuteo* and decrease in *voseo* usage from March-May is a preponderance of cultural events in the city, the posts for which are descriptive and followed by *tuteo* imperative verb forms that invite citizens to attend. For example, for city sponsored competitions, we find: “**Participa** [tú] *tu talento en la producción audiovisual y participa* [tú] *en las #ConvocatoriasMedellín. Conoce* [tú] *toda la información...*” (17 April 2016). Similar *tuteo* imperatives are identified regularly in posts and have a strong presence in the period under discussion: *participa, conoce, inscríbete, ánimoate, consulta, agéndate, recuerda, ingresa, conéctate*, among others.

The steady increase in *voseo* usage from May forward (Figure 2) is due in large part to a progressive shift from *tuteo* imperative forms. A post from 15 April 2016 marks the first occurrence of a *voseo* imperative: “**Seguí** [vos] *en vivo la transmisión de la entrega de la Medalla al Mérito Femenino a través de Telemedellín Aquí Te Ves.*” Perhaps that first usage was considered experimental; a second *vos* imperative does not appear until several weeks later in a mixed *tuteo/voseo* environment: “**Acordate** [vos] *que en este día de la Madre ella espera que vos llegués bien a casa para celebrar contigo* [tú]. **Portate** [vos] *bien, #ElFútbolCuentaConmigo*” (4 May 2016).

*Portate* [vos] *bien* is widely used in current posts and public advertising (see Figure 3). The *voseo* imperative was introduced to encourage respectful behavior during soccer games, following a violent episode of a fan fight that broke out in March: “**Acordate** [vos] *que la fiesta del fútbol la vivimos en paz sin importar el resultado del partido*” (19 May 2016). It was subsequently incorporated into Mother’s and Father’s Day posts; it appears on road signs to warn drivers that security cameras monitor their speed at certain intersections; and its more recent use involves encouraging respectful driving habits, like using turn signals. The frequent usage of *Portate bien* from May onward contributes to the overall environment of a strong surge of *voseo* usage in the Alcaldía’s communications.



Figure 3. *Portate bien* as seen in public spaces and online

Figure 2 illustrates a rapid upward trend of voseo usage in the last months under consideration. While *tuteo* imperatives were predominant in earlier posts, there has been a shift to voseo imperatives in addition to an increase in *vos* as a preferred address form for the public/reader. In late June, the Alcaldía posted an invitation to potential stargazers: “¿**Te animás** [vos] si te invitamos a viajar a las estrellas? **Vení** [vos] al Planetario de Medellín” (22 June 2016). On the same day, a talent competition reminiscent of #ConvocatoriasMedellín (see above) was announced, this time using voseo forms: “**Vos** también **podés** ser una mujer joven talento #MujeresSeguras, **ingresá** [vos] y **enterate** [vos]...” (22 June 2016). Finally, Medellín’s most important cultural event, the annual Feria de las Flores, was announced on 28 June 2016, with its tagline, “*Hecha para vos*”, and related posts with the same tagline increased as the opening date approached.

Table 1 and Figure 2 show that the Alcaldía’s use of voseo forms to address the reader of its comunicués has increased notably in the last three months under consideration: May 2016 saw 25% usage, which increased to 52% in June, and to over 82% in July. We previously speculated that the administration’s first months in office seemed to demonstrate that it was developing a uniform communication strategy and experimenting with

finding its voice. Based on the data shown here, and particularly on the strong upward trend of *voseo* to the detriment of *tuteo* and mixed *tuteo/voseo* usage, it appears that the Alcaldía has found its preferred voice in the local *voseo* that is idiosyncratic of *paisa* speech and culture.

## Conclusion

This study was inspired by personal observations in Medellín over a period of three years. In that time, we noticed that *vos*—the colloquial local form of address that is widely used but considered nonstandard—seemed to have an increased public life. This became more apparent during the 2015 mayoral campaign and the initial months of the Gutiérrez administration in 2016. That the Alcaldía de Medellín would regularly use *voseo*, beginning with its slogan *Medellín Cuenta con vos* and continuing to texts that exclusively use *voseo* forms, opens the door to a possible language shift. In this case, the potential shift would result in increased prestige for the colloquial form *vos*. This study remains in progress since the identification of a language shift requires more than seven months' data and, more importantly, it requires the benefit of history. Still, based on what we observed and have presented here, it seems likely that the Alcaldía will continue to use *voseo* publicly. Will that increased usage affect in some way the dialect of Medellín by bestowing some level of prestige on written *voseo*? The evidence to date does not allow for such a conclusion.

A note about the changes we discovered in the forms of address in the Alcaldía de Medellín's posts is necessary. One might make a cogent argument that the changes we find in the final months under consideration are due to a change in personnel in the Alcaldía's communications department. There is more *voseo* used in July than previously because of that new person, one might reason. Moreover, we might look at mixed *tuteo/voseo* usage as the product of orthographic errors and/or poor editing. There could be some veracity in those stances. It seems unlikely, however. If the pattern of usage were not so clearly identifiable (recognizing the unexplained "rise and fall" we find in Figure 2), that might be the case. The steady decline in *tuteo/voseo* usage, coupled with the steady increase in *voseo* usage from May-July points to a conscious effort.

Considering the important relationship between language and culture, it is rational to propose that the increased use of the local vernacular by the city government is connected to the city's augmented reputation on the national and world stage. Medellín has transformed significantly in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. *Paisa* culture consequently enjoys increased prestige. Language and culture are intimately linked. Assuming the continual upward trend of

Medellín's renovation, it is possible that elements of the city's vernacular—here, the cultural marker that *vos* is for *paisas*—would enjoy a similar surge in prestige and acceptability. We know that language shifts result in permanent language changes; a shift requires that some agent initiate it. Should the Alcaldía de Medellín be that agent of change, we might expect that *vos* will become more prestigious. It will take years to measure the potential impact that the increased use of written *vos* in public domains has on its level of acceptability. At present, it is clear that the Alcaldía de Medellín has instituted a change in the way it communicates with its citizens. Future research will determine if its citizens bestow greater acceptability on the colloquial form of *paisa* speech as a result.

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