

Spanish *usted* as an Imposter
Chris Collins, New York University
Francisco Ordóñez, SUNY Stony Brook
December 12, 2020

Abstract: Across dialects, Spanish uses the third person forms *usted* and *ustedes* to refer to the addressee. In this squib, we propose an imposter analysis of these forms in the framework of Collins and Postal 2012.

Keywords: imposters, camouflage, *usted*, *ustedes*, ghosting, impoverishment

1. Introduction

Across dialects, Spanish uses the third person forms *usted* and *ustedes* to refer to the addressee. In many dialects of Iberian Spanish, the use of *usted* and *ustedes* correlates with formality. In some Latin American Spanish dialects, the use of *ustedes* is the only option for second person plural reference. In those dialects, there are no morphologically second person plural forms (such as *vosotros* ‘you.pl’).

An illustration of the relevant pronouns is given below for Iberian Spanish:

- (1) a. Vosotros habláis
 you.PL speak.2PL
 “You are speaking.”
- b. Ellos/Ellas hablan
 they.MASC/they.FEM speak.3PL
 “They are speaking.”
- c. Ustedes hablan
 you.PL speak.3PL
 “You are speaking.”

Sentence (1a) illustrates the 2PL subject pronoun with 2PL verb agreement. Sentence (1b) illustrates the 3PL subject pronoun with 3PL verb agreement. Sentence (1c) shows that *ustedes* gives rise to 3PL verb agreement, even though reference is to the addressee.

In this sense, *ustedes* is an imposter, according to the definition in Collins and Postal (2012: 5):

- (2) An imposter is a notionally X person DP that is grammatically Y person, $X \neq Y$.

A few examples of imposters from English are given below:

- (3) Imposters referring to the speaker
 - a. This reporter fully believed the documents were genuine.
 - b. You won’t have Nixon to kick around anymore.
 - c. Yours truly has tried to present his readers with a diverse variety of viewpoints.

- (4) Imposters referring to the addressee.
- a. Would the baroness like more wine?
 - b. How is my sweetheart tonight?
 - c. Would little Jimmy like another ice-cream cone?

In example (3a), *this reporter* is a 3SG DP, but it refers to the speaker. In (4a), *the baroness* is a 3SG DP, but refers to the addressee.

In this paper we will analyze *usted* and *ustedes* as imposters. In section 2, we present the details of our imposter proposal. In section 3, we give distributional evidence distinguishing *usted* and *ustedes* from pronouns. We show that in all cases *usted* and *ustedes* pattern like imposters, not pronouns. In section 4, we give evidence from coordination for our analysis. Section 5 discusses anaphora. Section 6 discusses Latin American Spanish. Section 7 discusses pronouns without antecedents. Section 8 is the conclusion.

2. Proposal

We propose that in all dialects of Spanish *usted* and *ustedes* are imposters in the sense of Collins and Postal 2012 (for other studies of imposters in Spanish, see Dudley 2014 and Vazquez Rojas 2014).

In particular, we analyze *usted* as follows:

- (5) Structure of *usted*
 [DP D [TÚ *usted*]]

In this structure, there is a null 2SG pronoun TÚ that is embedded in a 3SG DP whose head noun is *usted* (see Collins and Postal 2012 for a precise structural proposal). Crucially, an overt 2SG pronoun *tú* (or *vos*) is found in all dialects. As with proper names, the determiner is null.

On the imposter analysis, the reason why *usted* refers to the addressee is because of the presence of the null 2SG pronoun TÚ. The reason why *usted* shows 3SG verb agreement is because of the 3SG head noun.

The structure of the plural *ustedes* is parallel, except there is an additional plural morpheme:

- (6) Structure of *ustedes*
 [DP D [TÚ *usted*]-s]

The plural morpheme forms the semantic plural of TÚ, but syntactically it merges with the 3SG [TÚ *usted*]. In this case, *ustedes* refers to a plural addressee, but agrees in 3PL with the verb.

Our analysis of *usted* represents synchronically and structurally the historical development of the form. *Usted* (*ustedes*) derives from the form *vuesa merced* (*vuestas mercedes*) “your mercy” (“your mercies”) which was used in the 15th century. It was used in formal, polite contexts and agreed with the third person forms of the verb. It is still used in certain parts of Colombia. According to Rey (2005) it underwent the following phonological evolution:

- (7) *Vuesa merced* > *Vuesamerced* > *Vuesamced* > *Vuesasted* > *Vuested* > *Vusted* > *Usted*

Forms like *vuesa merced* “your mercy” resemble the camouflage forms such as *your majesty* (referring to the addressee), which are analyzed in Collins and Postal 2012 and Collins, Moody, Postal 2008. In camouflage there is an overt second person possessor, which is not present in imposter forms:

- | | | | |
|-----|----|---|--------------|
| (8) | a. | Would your Majesty like tea on the veranda? | (camouflage) |
| | b. | Would Madam like tea on the veranda? | (imposter) |

In both of the sentences in (8), the subject is 3SG, but only in (8a) is there a possessor referring to the addressee. For Spanish speakers, *usted* is not perceived as involving an overt possessor anymore (even though diachronically it evolved from *vuesa merced*). Therefore, we analyze *usted* as an imposter and not as camouflage.

There is one difference between *usted* and *ustedes* and most other imposters. A form like *Madam* is ambiguous. It can refer either to the addressee or to a non-participant. In other words, the form *Madam* is only optionally an imposter. The forms *usted* and *ustedes* have no other uses. They are always imposters. In this sense, *usted* and *ustedes* are like *yours truly* in English which only refers to the speaker (see Collins and Postal 2012: 12), and has no non-participant use.

3. Distributional Evidence

In our analysis, *usted* and *ustedes* do not have the structure of ordinary pronouns. Rather, they are imposters. Supporting this analysis, there are a number of ways in which *usted* and *ustedes* are distinguished from pronouns, having instead the syntactic distribution of imposters and camouflage.

Fernández Soriano (1999) and *Nueva Gramática de la Lengua Española* (2009) (‘New Grammar of the Spanish Language’) point out that *usted*, contrary to *tú*, can appear in postverbal position in imperatives without being interpreted as contrastive. *La Nueva Gramática de la Lengua Española* (2009: 2561) also suggests that camouflage and imposters are parallel to *usted* in their distribution:

- | | | | | |
|-----|----|--|---|-----------------------|
| (9) | a. | Coge
pick.up.2S
“Pick up the dish!” | *tu/TÚ
you/YOU | el plato!
the dish |
| | b. | Coja
pick.up.3S
“Pick up the dish!” | usted/USTED
you/YOU | el plato!
the dish |
| | c. | Coja
pick.up.3S
“Your lordship, pick up the dish!” | su señoría/ SU SEÑORÍA
your lordship/YOUR LORDSHIP | el plato!
the dish |
| | d. | Coja
pick.up.3S
“Madam, pick up the dish!” | la señora/ LA SEÑORA
madam/MADAM | el plato!
the dish |

The same pattern occurs in the plural:

- (10) a. Coged *vosotros/VOSOTROS el plato!
 pick.up.2P you.PL/YOU.PL the dish
 “You (pl.) pick up the dish!”
- b. Cojan ustedes/USTEDES el plato!
 pick.up.3P you.PL/YOU.PL the dish
 “You (pl.) pick up the dish!”
- c. Cojan sus señorías/SUS SEÑORÍAS el plato!
 pick.up.3P your lordships/YOUR LORDSHIPS the dish
 “Your Lordships, pick up the dish!”
- d. Cojan las señoras/ LA SEÑORAS el plato!
 pick.up.3P madams/MADAMS the dish
 “Madams, pick up the dish!”

Similarly, Fernández Soriano (1999) indicates that the form *usted* is able to appear in declarative clauses after the auxiliary or verb without being contrastive. We observe that the same pattern is found with camouflage and imposters:

- (11) a. Te irás *tú/TÚ acostumbrando al clima.
 CL.2 will.2 you/YOU getting used to the climate
 “You will get used to the climate.”
- b. Se irá usted/USTED acostumbrando al clima.
 CL will you/YOU getting used to the climate
 “You will get used to the climate.”
- c. Se irá su señoría/ SU SEÑORÍA acostumbrando al clima.
 CL will your lordship/YOUR LORDSHIP getting used to the climate
 “Your lordship will get used to the climate.”
- d. Se irá la señora/LA SEÑORA acostumbrando al clima.
 CL will madam/MADAM getting used to the climate
 “Madam will get used to the climate.”
- e. *Se irá Juan/JUAN acostumbrando al clima.
 CL will Juan/JUAN getting used to the climate.
 “Juan will get used to the climate.”

The same pattern holds in the plural:

- (12) a. Os iréis *vosotros/VOSOTROS acostumbrando al clima.

- CL.2P will.2P you.PL/YOU.PL getting used to the climate
 “You will get used to the climate.”
- b. Se irán ustedes/USTEDES acostumbrando al clima.
 CL will you.PL/YOU.PL getting used to the climate
 “You will get used to the climate.”
- c. Se irán sus señorías/SUS SEÑORÍAS acostumbrando al clima.
 CL will your lordships/YOUR LORDSHIPS getting used to the climate
 “Your lordships will get used to the climate.”
- d. Se irán las señoras/LA SEÑORAS acostumbrando al clima.
 CL will madams/MADAMS getting used to the climate
 “Madams will get used to the climate.”

As another diagnostic, *usted*, camouflage and imposters have in common that they do not have to be doubled by clitics as indirect objects. There is a contrast with pronouns, which require doubling in all instances (see also Nueva Gramática de la Lengua Española, page 1245).

- (13) a. *(Te) prometo a ti que mañana vendré.
 CL.2 promise.1 to you that tomorrow come.FUT.1
 “I promise you that I will come tomorrow.”
- b. (Le) prometo a usted que mañana vendré.
 CL.3 promise.1 to you that tomorrow come.FUT.1
 “I promise you that I will come tomorrow.”
- c. (Le) prometo a su señoría que mañana vendré.
 CL.3 promise.1 to your lordship that tomorrow come.FUT.1
 “I promise your lordship that I will come tomorrow.”
- d. (Le) prometo a la señora que mañana vendré.
 CL.3 promise.1 madam that tomorrow come.FUT.1
 ‘I promise lord that I will come.’
- e. (Le) prometo a Juan que mañana vendré.
 CL.3 promise.1 to Juan that tomorrow come.FUT.1
 “I promise Juan that I will come tomorrow.”

The same contrasts can be replicated in the plural:

- (14) a. *(os) prometo a vosotros que mañana vendré.
 CL.2P promise.1 to you.PL that tomorrow come.FUT.1
 “I promise you that I will come tomorrow.”
- b. (Les) prometo a ustedes que mañana vendré.

CL.3 promise.1 to you.PL that tomorrow come.FUT.1
 “I promise you that I will come tomorrow.”

c. (Les) prometo a sus señorías que mañana vendré.
 CL.3 promise.1 to your lordships that tomorrow come.FUT.1
 “I promise to your lordships that I will come tomorrow.

d. (Les) prometo a las señoras que mañana vendré.
 CL.3 promise.1 to madams that tomorrow come.FUT.1
 “I promise to Madam.pl that I will come tomorrow.

Prenominal possessors are pronouns in Spanish. Neither *usted* nor imposters nor camouflage can go in prenominal position. This data clearly shows that *usted* and *ustedes* do not have the distribution of pronouns in Spanish.

- (15) a. tu casa
 2SG house
 “your house”
- b. su casa
 3SG house
 “his house”
- c. *usted casa
 you house
 “your house”
- d. *su señoría casa
 your lordship house
 Intended: “your lordship’s house”
- e. *Juan casa
 Juan house
 Intended: “Juan’s house”

The same pattern holds in the plural:

- (16) a. vuestra casa
 2PL house
 “your house”
- b. *ustedes casa
 2PL house
 Intended: “your house”
- c. *sus señorías casa

your lordships house
Intended: “your lordships’ house”

- d. *los hombres casa
 the men house
Intended: “the men’s house”

usted patterns like camouflage and imposters with respect to doubling in possessive structures (in the dialect of the second author and more generally in Iberian Spanish according to the Nueva Gramática de la Lengua Española page 1358). While pronouns cannot be doubled, *usted* can. We observe that imposters and camouflage can also be doubled.

- (17) a. tu libro (*de ti)
 2SG book of 2SG
 “your book”
- b. su libro (de usted)
 3PS book of you
 “your book”
- c. su libro (del señor)
 3PS book of lord
 “Lord’s book”
- d. su libro (*de Juan)
 3PS book of Juan
 “Juan’s book”
- e. su libro (*de él)
 POSS book of 3SG
 “his book”

The same pattern appears in the plural. The examples are not as good as the singular. However, there is a clear contrast with *vosotros* in this respect.

- (18) a. vuestros libros (*de vosotros)
 2PL books of 2PL
 “your books”
- b. sus libros (de ustedes)
 3PL books of you.PL
 “your books”
- c. sus libros (de los señores)
 3PL books of the lords
 “Lords’ books”

- d. sus libros (*de los niños)
3PS books of the boys
“the boys’ books”
- e. sus libros (*de ellos)
3PL book of 3PL
“his books”

The results of this section are summarized in the chart below:

(19)		Pronoun	Usted/ Ustedes	Imposter/ Camouflage	Proper Noun
a.	Post-V				
	Imperative	Stress	Yes	Yes	N/A
b.	Post-V				
	Declarative	Stress	Yes	Yes	No
c.	Clitic				
	Doubling	Oblig.	Opt.	Opt.	Opt.
d.	Pre-N				
	Possessor	Yes	No	No	No
e.	Possessor				
	Doubling	No	Yes	Yes	No

The data show five constructions in which *usted* and *ustedes* have a distribution that clearly distinguishes them from pronouns. Remarkably in all five of these constructions, *usted* and *ustedes* pattern like imposters and camouflage. For example, although pronouns can occupy the prenominal possessor position, neither *usted/ustedes* nor *imposters/camouflage* can do so.

On the other hand, there are also constructions where *usted* and *ustedes* have a distribution that clearly differentiates them from non-pronominal DPs. For example, possessor doubling is possible with *usted*, *ustedes*, imposters and camouflage, but not with non-pronominal DPs. And the postverbal declarative position can host *usted*, *ustedes*, imposters and camouflage, but not non-pronominal DPs. The challenge is to explain these differences in terms of the structures that we have proposed for imposters. We leave this for future work.

4. Coordination

Even though *usted* is 3SG in Iberian Spanish, there is striking evidence from conjunction for our proposal that *usted* contains a second person pronoun. The following sentences show that if one of the conjuncts is 2SG then the verb agreement and bound pronouns are 2PL:

- (20) Tú y Juan pensáis en vosotros mismos
you and Juan think.2PL in you.PL same.PL
“You and John are thinking of yourselves.”

(21) Tú y Juan os ayudáis a vosotros mismos
 you and Juan CL.2PL help.2PL to you.PL same.PL
 “You and John are helping yourselves.”

(22) *Tú y Juan piensan en sí mismos
 you and Juan think.3PL in si same.PL
 Intended: “You and Juan are thinking of yourselves.”

(23) *Tú y Juan se ayudan a sí mismos
 you and Juan CL help.3PL to si same.PL
 Intended: “You and Juan are helping yourselves.”

Since *usted* is 3SG, it is unsurprising that if one of the conjuncts is *usted*, the verb agreement and bound pronouns can be 3PL:

(24) Usted y Juan piensan en sí mismos
 usted and Juan think.3PL in si same.PL
 “You and Juan are thinking of yourselves.”

(25) Usted y Juan se ayudan a sí mismos
 usted and Juan CL help.3PL to si same.PL
 “You and Juan are helping yourselves.”

The surprising fact is that for some speakers (including the second author of this paper) if one of the conjuncts is *usted*, the verb agreement and bound pronouns can also be 2PL:

(26) Usted y Juan pensáis en vosotros mismos
 usted and Juan think.2PL in you.PL same.PL
 “You and John are thinking of yourselves.”

(27) Usted y Juan os ayudáis a vosotros mismos
 usted and Juan CL.2PL help.2PL to you.PL same.PL
 “You and John are helping yourselves.”

As noted above, *usted* is grammatically 3SG, and so is *Juan*. But strikingly, in these examples the coordinated subject [usted y Juan] gives rise to 2PL subject verb agreement, and is the antecedent for the 2PL *vosotros* in (26) and the 2PL reflexive clitic *os* in (27).

In Collins and Postal (2012: 112), the Conjunctive Coordinate Person Agreement Constraint allows the coordinated subject in (24-27) to either be 2PL or 3PL, because of the presence of the imposter *usted*. In fact, similar facts can be found with the coordination of English imposters and camouflage structures:

(28) a. Jerome and Daddy are enjoying ourselves/themselves on the beach.
 b. Your Majesty and the foreign minister should devote yourselves/themselves to soothing the barbarians.

In (28a), *Daddy* is an 3SG imposter being used to refer to the speaker. The coordinate structure subject can bind either a 1PL or a 3PL reflexive. In (28b), *Your Majesty* is a 3SG camouflage DP referring to the addressee. The coordinate structure subject can bind either a 2PL or a 3PL reflexive.

It should be noted that even though the second author of this paper (from Catalonia) finds (26-27) to be acceptable, there is variation among speakers, depending on region. An informal Facebook survey showed that speakers generally reject sentences like (26-27), but there are some Spanish speakers from different parts of Spain who accept them. For the speakers who reject them, we think it is due to the fact that the formal features of *usted* clash with the informal 2PL inflection. We believe that these sentences would also be acceptable in Andalusian Spanish, spoken in the south of Spain, but we have not been able to study that dialect systematically.

The data in (26-27) is consistent with the study of Morgan and Schwenter (2015: 3) who show that: “Despite the universally expressed view that there exists symmetry in the Castilian system, such that *vosotros* is the plural of *tú* and *ustedes* is the plural of *usted*, we show that there is in fact widespread asymmetry from singular to plural, i.e. a person might be addressed as *usted* in the singular while at the same time forming part of a group that is addressed as *vosotros* by the same speaker.” In other words, for many Spanish speakers *vosotros* is not confined to informal reference, but is now being used for both formal and informal reference. See also Morgan and Schwenter 2020.

Coordination in the examples of (26-27) is crucial. The 3PL *ustedes* never gives rise to 2PL verb inflection and bound pronouns on its own (the sentences below represent the judgments of the second author):

- (29) *Ustedes pensáis en vosotros mismos
 ustedes think.2PL in you.PL same.PL
 “You are thinking of yourselves.”
- (30) *Ustedes os ayudáis a vosotros mismos
 ustedes CL.2PL help.2PL to you.PL same.PL
 “You are helping yourselves.”
- (31) Ustedes piensan en sí mismos
 ustedes think.3PL in si same.PL
 “You are thinking of yourselves.”
- (32) Ustedes se ayudan a sí mismos
 ustedes CL help.3PL to si same.PL
 “You are helping yourselves.”

There are other contexts in which a coordinate structure with *usted* can be the antecedent for second person clitic. A 3rd person reflexive clitic on the infinitive controlled by the object containing the coordination is not possible if that coordination contains *usted*. (33a) contrasts with two 3SG DP’s coordinated in (33b):

- (33) a. *Yo hablé de [usted y Juan]_i después de PRO_i haber-se ido.
 I spoke about usted and Juan after of PRO having-CL left

Intended: “I spoke about you and Juan after you left.”

- b. Yo hablé de [Pedro y Juan]_i después de PRO_i haber-se ido.
 I spoke about Pedro and Juan after of PRO having-CL left
 “I spoke about you and Juan after you left.”

This pair indicates that there is a clash between the impostor *usted* and the third person reflexive in the infinitive. Observe that the sentence (33a) can be rendered grammatical with the 2PL reflexive instead:

- (34) Yo hablé de [usted y Juan]_i después de PRO_i haber-os ido.
 I spoke about usted and Juan after of PRO having-2PL left
 “I spoke about you and Juan after you left.”

Once again, the example in (34) shows that a coordinate structure with *usted* as one of its conjuncts can determine 2PL agreement (in this case, via control of PRO) (see Collins and Postal 2012: 96, on imposters and agreement mismatches in control).

5. Anaphora

There is evidence from anaphora that *usted* patterns in the same way as imposters and camouflage constructions. First, when *usted* is the matrix subject, and it binds an embedded null subject pronoun, the embedded null subject must be third singular. This data is unsurprising since on our analysis *usted* is a 3SG imposter:

- (35) a. usted₁ piensa que pro₁ es inteligente.
 you think.3S that is.3S intelligent
 “You think that you are intelligent.”
- b. *usted₁ piensa que pro₁ eres inteligente.
 you think.3S that are.2S intelligent
 Intended: “You think that you are intelligent.”

The same pattern holds with camouflage:

- (36) a. su señoría₁ piensa que pro₁ es inteligente.
 your lordship think.3S that is.3S intelligent
 “Your lordship thinks that he is intelligent.”
- b. *su señoría₁ piensa que pro₁ eres inteligente.
 Your lordship think.3S that are.2S intelligent
 Intended: “Your lordship thinks he is intelligent.”

But the parallel is even more systematic. A matrix *usted* can bind an embedded *usted*, but neither *tú* nor *el* (capital letters show that stress is needed):

- (37) a. usted₁ piensa que USTED₁ es inteligente.
you think.3S that YOU is.3S intelligent
“You think that you are intelligent.”
- b. *usted₁ piensa que TU₁ eres inteligente.
you think.3S that YOU are.2S intelligent
Intended: “You think that you are intelligent.”
- c. *usted₁ piensa que EL₁ es inteligente.
you think.3S that HE is.3S intelligent
Intended: “You think that you are intelligent.”

The exact same pattern is replicated with camouflage:

- (38) a. su señoría₁ piensa que USTED₁ es inteligente.
your lordship think.3S that YOU is.3S intelligent
“Your lordship thinks that you are intelligent.”
- b. *su señoría₁ piensa que TU₁ eres inteligente.
Your lordship think.3S that YOU are.2S. intelligent
“Intended: Your lordship thinks that you are intelligent.”
- c. *su señoría₁ piensa que EL₁ es inteligente.
Your lordship think.3S that HE is.3S intelligent
“Intended: Your lordship thinks you are intelligent.”

The most surprising data in the above paradigms is (38c). Since *su señoría* is a 3SG camouflage construction it should be able to bind the 3SG pronoun EL. We leave exploration of this fact to further work.

6. Latin American Spanish

Although most of this paper has concerned data from Iberian Spanish, we take a brief detour into Latin American Spanish in order to show how our analysis would extend to other dialects.

In the present tense verb paradigm below, Latin American Spanish exhibits a syncretism between 2PL and 3PL (Embick 2015: 26):

- (39) Latin American Spanish Present Tense
hablar ‘to speak’
1SG hablo
2SG habla-s
3SG habla-Ø
1PL habla-mos
2PL habla-n
3PL habla-n

Embick (2015: 27) proposes to analyze this syncretism in terms of the following Distributed Morphology vocabulary item:

- (40) $[-1, +\text{PL}] \leftrightarrow -n$
(Embick 2015: 27)

According to Embick (2015: 27): “...the exponent $-n$ is inserted into two nodes that are distinct in terms of their system features; thus, it is found with both the second person plural and third person plural agreement morphemes.”

However, while this analysis works for the paradigm in (39), it does not account for the pervasive syncretism between 2PL and 3PL in Latin American Spanish. Harris (1998: 31) describes the pervasive syncretism in this way:

- (41) “Unlike standard Iberian, Latin American dialects systematically lack second person plural morphology: every semantic/syntactic second person plural item is realized overtly with third person plural morphology. This generalization is all-inclusive, covering not only all verb inflection but also nominative and object-of-proposition pronouns; long and short possessive adjectives and pronouns; accusative, dative, and reflexive clitic pronouns; etc.”

Embick (2015: 154) (see also Harris 1998 and Arregi and Nevins 2018) propose to analyze the pervasive syncretism in Latin American Spanish in terms of morphological impoverishment:

- (42) $[+/- 2] \rightarrow \emptyset [_, +\text{pl}]$

As Embick (2015: 154) puts it: “The effect of this rule is to make second person plural morphemes $[-1, +2, +\text{pl}]$ and third person plural morphemes $[-1, -2, +\text{pl}]$ identical prior to Vocabulary Insertion: both become $[-1, +\text{pl}]$ after Impoverishment. Thus, the Vocabulary of Spanish cannot make any reference to values of $[2]$ when Vocabulary Insertion occurs, with the result that second and third person forms will always be identical.”

Collins and Kayne (2020) criticize the impoverishment account of syncretism in Latin American Spanish. We refer the reader to that paper for details. Here we adopt their conclusion, and give an alternative account not based on impoverishment. Our basic idea is that the reason why 2PL and 3PL is syncretic in Latin American Spanish is that when the subject refers to the addressee, verbal agreement is always determined by an imposter. The precise argument is laid out below:

- (43) Syntactic account of metasyncretism between 2PL and 3PL in Latin American Spanish:
- Latin American Spanish dialects lack the 2PL pronoun *vosotros*, the 2PL clitic *os*, and 2PL possessive forms *vuestro/a/os/as*.
 - It is not necessary to assume that there is a constraint of the form *2PL ruling out these forms, rather the relevant forms simply don't exist.
 - 2PL and 3PL are syncretic in those dialects because reference to a plural addressee is only expressed with the imposter *ustedes*.
 - There is no need for an impoverishment operation.

7. Pronouns without Antecedents

In the analysis in the previous sections, if the subject refers to the addressee, the third person verbal agreement and third person form of the clitics are due to the fact that the subject is an imposter. This analysis holds for both Iberian Spanish and Latin American Spanish.

Arregi and Nevins (1998) propose (and reject) a similar imposter analysis: “This seems like an initially plausible account of the behavior of strong second person pronouns in Spanish, and, if it is on the right track, it might be possible to analyze the third person-like behavior of their clitic and agreement counterparts as being the consequence of agreement with *usted(es)*, rather than the result of postsyntactic syncretism.”

Arregi and Nevins argue against the imposter analysis based on the following examples:

- (44) a. Ustedes se va-n mañana.
 you.PL CL go-PL tomorrow
 “You’re leaving tomorrow (plural).”
- b. Se va-n mañana.
 CL go-PL tomorrow
 “You’re leaving tomorrow (plural).”

The example (44b) shows that even with pro-drop, the subject-verb agreement can be 3PL. The problem, as noted by Arregi and Nevins (1998) is the following:

- (45) “According to this analysis, the third-person-like form of the second person reflexive *se* and agreement *-n* in (30a) [(44a)] is due to agreement with the strong pronominal subject *ustedes*, a syntactically third person camouflage DP. However, the same explanation cannot be extended to *se* and *-n* in (30b) [(44b)], in which the subject is the covert pro counterpart of *ustedes*....Note, furthermore, that given the right context (30b) [(44b)] can be uttered in the absence of an overt antecedent *ustedes*, and can thus not be accounted for in terms of agreement of pro, *se* and *-n* with some antecedent camouflage in previous discourse.”

Similarly, Arregi and Nevins (1998: 8) give another example involving not pro, but a plural clitic. As they remark: “In a similar vein, nonreflexive second person clitics need not have any sort of overt antecedent...”

- (46) Juan les dio un libro
 Juan CL.3PL gave a book
 “Juan gave you (plural) a book.”

We propose that in (44b) there is a covert antecedent *ustedes* that serves as the antecedent for pro (a similar analysis applies to (46)). There are two ways that this can be implemented in the framework of Collins and Postal (2012). First, in that framework there are a series of null DPs in the left periphery of the clause that represent indexical information of the sentence utterance.

- (47) “...in line with older ideas (Ross 1970) and newer ones..., we believe that at its highest level, each sentence has structure including a pair of basic DPs, of course invisible, one

denoting the speaker(s), call it AUTHOR, and other the addressee(s), call it ADDRESSEE.”
(pg. 38)

On this analysis, a sentence in English is represented as follows:

- (48) [SPEAKER ADDRESSEE [There is a mouse in the kitchen.]]

One possibility is that in Spanish ADDRESSEE itself can appear in *usted* and *ustedes* (see the related discussion of familiarity as a feature of ADDRESSEE in Collins and Postal 2012: 224):

- (49) a. [DP [ADDRESSEE usted]]
b. [DP [ADDRESSEE usted]-s]

On this analysis, the structure of (44b) is as follows:

- (50) [DP [ADDRESSEE USTED]-S]₁ [pro₁ Se va-n mañana.]
CL go-PL tomorrow
“You (pl) are leaving tomorrow.”

In this structure, USTEDES is covert, just like all left peripheral participant DPs. The antecedent for the null *pro* would be the left peripheral [DP [ADDRESSEE USTED]-S]₁, accounting for both the interpretation and the phi-features of *pro*.

Another possibility in the framework of Collins and Postal (2012: 32) is that there is a null topic which is ghosted. Ghosting refers to “...the grammatical deletion of elements whose deletion does not depend on the existence of any antecedent phrase.” Collins and Postal speculate that in many cases, ghosting reduces to a covert topic.

On this analysis, the structure of (44b) would be as follows:

- (51) [AS FOR [DP [TU USTED]-S]₁] [pro₁ se va-n mañana.]
CL go-PL tomorrow
“You (pl) leaving tomorrow.”

Arregi and Nevins argue against a ghosting analysis on the basis of the following constraint given in Collins and Postal (2012: 102):

- (52) No occurrence of an imposter or camouflage DP can be part of
(identical to or dominated by) a ghosted constituent.

The constraint is meant to account for the fact that a 3SG pronoun in English can only refer to the speaker when there is an overt antecedent, as in the following:

- (53) Daddy₁ got thirsty driving home. So he₁ decided to stop and buy a coke.

In this sentence, the reason that *he* can be used to refer to the speaker is because its antecedent is the 3SG DP *Daddy*, which is in the previous sentence. On the other hand, the following sentence, spoken out of the blue in discourse initial position does not permit the 3SG pronoun to refer to the speaker:

(54) He decided to stop and buy a coke.

In this regard, the English example in (54) seems different from the Spanish examples in (44b) and (46), where third person pronouns can refer the addressee without any overt antecedent.

Similarly, Arregi and Nevins (2018: Appendix B) note that the goal argument in (46) cannot refer to a group including the speaker unless there is an appropriate imposter antecedent, as in the following example:

(55)
 Cuando los abajo firmantes se lo pidieron,
 When the under signers CL CL.ACC asked

Juan les dio un libro.
 Juan CL.3PL gave a book
 “When the undersigned asked him to, Juan gave them a book.”

However, it may be possible to reformulate (52) so that it does not apply to Spanish *usted* and *ustedes*. Typical imposters in English add semantic information about the denotation (as part of the non-asserted content). For example, *the undersigned*, *Daddy*, *this reporter* all contribute different kinds of semantic information about the speaker.

Following Collins and Postal 2012, we assume that an imposter is divided into two components, a pronominal component and a nominal component. For example, in the imposter *Daddy* (referring to the speaker), the pronominal component is a 1SG pronoun, and the nominal component is *Daddy*.

(56) If the nominal component of an imposter is semantically non-vacuous, the imposter cannot be part of a ghosted constituent.

In English, the imposters are all based on semantically non-vacuous DPs like *Daddy* or *the undersigned*, so they cannot be ghosted. But in Spanish, *usted* has no use outside of the imposter, and so it is plausibly semantically vacuous (only the null pronoun TÚ in [D [TÚ usted]] determines the reference to the addressee).

The proposed analysis leaves open how to best represent the formality of *usted* and *ustedes*. If formality is a semantic contribution (e.g., a presupposition), then ghosting would be expected to be blocked by the revised (56). Another possibility is that *usted* and *ustedes* are not explicitly represented as having the features [+/-Formal], but that their distribution is determined in some other way.

We leave it open which is the best way to analyze the silent antecedent needed for pro in example (44b). The two possibilities being: (a) a null participant DP [DP [ADDRESSEE usted]] as an antecedent and (b) ghosting of the antecedent.

8. Conclusion

In this paper, we have analyzed *usted* and *ustedes* in all dialects of Spanish as imposters, in the sense of Collins and Postal 2012. We started by giving distributional evidence that *usted* and *ustedes* do not pattern like pronouns (e.g., with respect to post-verbal position and clitic doubling). We have discussed an objection to the imposter analysis given by Arregi and Nevins (2018).

Acknowledgments: We are grateful to Paul Postal, Francesc Roca, Olga Fernández Soriano for helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper.

References:

- Arregi, Karlos and Andrew Nevins. 2018. Beware of Occam's Razor: Morphotactic Analysis and Spanish Mesoclitisis. *Linguistic Inquiry* 49, 625-683.
- Collins, Chris. 2014. *Cross-Linguistic Studies of Imposters and Pronominal Agreement*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Collins, Chris and Paul Postal. 2012. *Imposters*. MIT Press, Cambridge.
- Collins, Chris, Simanique Moody and Paul Postal. 2008. An AAE Camouflage Construction. *Language* 84.1, 29-68.
- Dudley, Rachel. 2014. Spanish imposters and verbal agreement. In Chris Collins (ed.), *Cross-linguistic studies of imposters and pronominal agreement*, 42–70. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Embick, David. 2015. *The Morpheme: A Theoretical Introduction*. De Gruyter Mouton, Berlin.
- Fernández Soriano, Olga. 1999. El pronombre personal, formas y distribuciones. pronombres átonos y tónicos in Ignacio Bosque and Violeta Demonte (eds) *Gramática descriptiva de la lengua española*, 1209-1275. Madrid: Epasa Calpe.
- Harris, James. 1998. Spanish Imperatives: Syntax Meets Morphology. *Journal of Linguistics* 34, 27-52.
- Morgan, Terrell A. and Scott A. Schwenter. 2015. *Vosotros, Ustedes* and the Myth of the Symmetrical Castilian Pronoun System. Ms., Ohio State University.
- Morgan, Terrell A. and Scott A. Schwenter. 2020. *Vosotros* versus *Ustedes*: Asymmetries in 2PL Pronouns across Spanish Dialects. Ms., Ohio State University.
- Ordóñez, Francisco. 2007. Cartography of postverbal subjects in Spanish. In Sergio Baauw, Frank Drijkoningen and Manuela Pinto ed, *Romance Languages and Linguistic Theory 2005*. Amsterdam, John Benjamins. Pages 259-280.
- Rey, Marisol. 2005. El uso de tú, usted y sumercé como formas de tratamiento en Funza, Cundinamarca. Tesis de maestría, Instituto Caro y Cuervo, Bogotá, Colombia.

Ross, John Robert. 1970. On Declarative Sentences. In Roderick A. Jacobs and Peter S. Rosenbaum (eds.), *Readings in English Transformational Grammar*, 222-272. Ginn, Waltham, MA.

Real Academia Española. 2009. *Nueva Gramática de la lengua española*, Madrid: Espasa Libros.

Sánchez-López, Cristina. 1993. Una Anomalía del Sistema Pronominal Español. *Cuadernos de Filología Hispánica* 11, 259-284.

Vazquez Rojas, Violeta. 2014. Indefinite Imposters. In Chris Collins (ed.), *Cross-linguistic studies of imposters and pronominal agreement*, 238-258. Oxford University Press, Oxford.