

# Víctor Lara\* and Ana Guilherme The politeness of *você* in European Portuguese

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**Abstract:** The employment of *você* in current European Portuguese is not clear. Although Brazilian Portuguese has specialised it as an informal pronoun in certain geographical areas within the country, the European variety presents its use in contexts which seem to be contradictory: informal address, formal address and pejorative address. Due to the lack of an in-depth study on the evolution of this form, we have collected data from three different corpora that reflect the real usage of *você* throughout the twentieth century, since it is from the nineteenth century that *você* started specialising as an informal pronoun. The results show a decreasing use of this pronoun and a certain degree of polyvalence due to a gradual marginalisation experienced for over one hundred years. As a consequence, the strategy of null subject plus 3sg has emerged as the unmarked politeness strategy in current European Portuguese.

**Keywords:** forms of address, politeness, European Portuguese, pragmatics, *você*

## 1 Introduction

The system of forms of address in European Portuguese has experienced several changes throughout history. It inherited the Latin system, in which *tu* plus 2sg inflections were reserved for informality (T) and *vós* plus 2pl inflections were used for formality (V) in singular and also for both T and V in plural (Châtelain 1880) (Table 1).

However, the syncretism in *vós* and the evaluation by speakers that it was gradually becoming impolite, triggered the emergence of new terms of address in V. Amongst all the forms compounded of a noun phrase (*your majesty*, *your excellence*...), *a vossa mercê* ('your mercy') arose as the most unmarked for politeness. With time, this noun phrase grammaticalized and evolved into *você*(s). By the sixteenth century, *você* in singular and *você*s in

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**Table 1:** Medieval Portuguese system of address.

	T	V
Singular	Tu	Vós
Plural	Vós	Vós

plural were completely established as V. *Vós*, on the contrary, had specialised for plural T (Bechara 1991; Menon 2006) (Table 2).

**Table 2:** Portuguese system of address from fifteenth century to eighteenth century.

	T	V
Singular	Tu	A vossa mercê (você)
Plural	Vós	As vossas mercês (vocês)

The development of *você(s)* since then until now has not yet been studied in depth. Its validity in the twentieth century has drawn the attention of grammarians and other scholars, but we lack an in-depth investigation of its history in the last three centuries.

A number of descriptive studies are available. For example, according to Cintra (1972) and Vázquez and Mendes da Luz (1971), *você* has not been V since the nineteenth century, when it reached the concept of T, competing with *tu*. Nevertheless, not all authors agree on this. Cunha and Cintra (1992) propose that *você* is still V although *o senhor* (‘sir’) can be resorted to if a higher degree of politeness is selected. Thus, following this second theory, current European Portuguese would possess a triadic system identical to the one attested in Romanian (Cojocaru 2003) (Table 3). *Você*, hence, would be placed in an intermediate position of lack of intimacy (Teyssier 1989).

For others, Carreira (2003), Faria and Nogueira (2009) and Duarte (2010), *você* in singular is not V but can be offensive even in T, as this pronoun is characterised

**Table 3:** Triadic system of address in current European Portuguese, based on grammars.

Intimate	Tu
Non-intimate	Você
Polite	O senhor

by presenting some complexity. According to them, the best way to be polite and avoid any misunderstanding in Portugal is to resort to the null subject plus 3sg verbal and pronominal inflections. However, if we read through the latest manuals of Portuguese as a foreign language<sup>1</sup>, we observe that they still teach *você* as the V strategy in contrast with *tu* (T). Additionally, they make clear that the noun phrase *o senhor* is employed to express the highest rank of politeness.

As for the plural form, *vocês* started being used as T approximately in the eighteenth century. This change began in urban upper classes as a way to differentiate themselves from the rest of the social spectrum (Faraco 1996). It later spread to the rest of social classes and nowadays it is the T form in plural. The new V corresponds to *os senhores*, even though we can attest *vocês* as V in non-intimate contexts (Lara 2012). Nonetheless, this change has not spread throughout the country, since part of the northern area still maintains the former system of *vós* as T and *vocês* as V (Lara 2015) (Table 4, Table 5).

**Table 4:** Current standard European Portuguese system of address.

	T	V
Singular	Tu	O senhor
Plural	Vocês	Os senhores / Vocês

**Table 5:** Current northern European Portuguese system of address.

	T	V
Singular	Tu	O senhor
Plural	Vós	Vocês / Os senhores

The situation in plural has been recently researched, but the status of *você* in singular is far from being clear. To determine the diachronic evolution of this term of address along the twentieth century, we have taken data from three different corpora that we will describe below. Thanks to these, we will be able to provide a more complete account of the function of *você* in European Portuguese.

<sup>1</sup> We have consulted the following manuals: Coimbra (2011); Coimbra and Coimbra (2013); Dias (2011); Ferreira Montero and Pereira Zagalo (2003); Lemos (2000); Oliveira and Coelho (2007); Rosa (2006); Tavares (2011).

## 2 Corpus and methodology

As has been mentioned, the data we will analyse are extracted from three different corpora: the *Linguistic Atlas of the Iberian Peninsula*, the *Cordial-Sin*, and the *Fly*. The *Linguistic Atlas of the Iberian Peninsula* (ALPI) (Heap 2003) was the first dialect tool conceived last century to elicit data for the Romance languages of this area. This project, carried out in the 1920's and 1950's, consisted of having the informants repeat pre-established words and sentences, based on their vernacular variety. The informants' profile corresponded to elderly and illiterate men, in order to collect any phonological, morpho-syntactic and lexical phenomenon of the Romance languages spoken in the Iberian Peninsula Sanchís Guarner et al. 1962.

One of the limitations of the ALPI is its lack of spontaneity, in addition to the fact that it collected only one answer per sentence and locality. With the purpose of compensating the shortcomings of the ALPI questionnaires, sociolinguistics came up with the semi-directed interview, so that informants could produce a large quantity of linguistic occurrences avoiding any priming. So, in the case of European Portuguese, we rely on the corpus CORDIAL-SIN. This corpus is constituted by excerpts of spontaneous speech recorded throughout over 200 localities across Portugal which were extracted from other projects, mainly, ALEPG, ALLP, AIEAç and BA. Their tokens were produced at the end of the twentieth century, approximately in the 1990's.

Lastly, we chose to obtain and analyse data from the corpus FLY – formed by private correspondence – and, in this sense, quite different from the previous ones. As these letters were elaborated in more informal contexts, we expected to find instances of *você* (as an informal pronoun) between equal interlocutors in deferential contexts as well as from an inferior toward a superior in family contexts (i.e., from a child toward a parent, Faria and Nogueira 2009).

The private letters were written between 1900 and 1974, and they are part of a 2000 letter archive, compiled by a group of researchers of the *Centro de Linguística da Universidade de Lisboa* within the framework of the project (*Fly Forgotten Letters, FLY Years 1900-1974*). These documents were produced in very specific contexts, mainly war, prison, exile or emigration. Moreover, the authors, as in the previous corpora, are characterised by having a low educational background. Private letters, even though they obey a discursive tradition, are quite relevant documents under the linguistic point of view owing to their tendency toward spontaneity. This particularity approximates them to an oral register (Koch and Oesterreicher 1990). Additionally, letters are, as observed by Jucker and Taatvitainen (2003: 9), “a way of indirect interaction between a writer and an interlocutor;” therefore, they constitute an atmosphere inclined to the emergence

of discursive second persons. Another characteristic we find relevant for a linguistic analysis is the fact that private correspondence allows authors not to follow certain specific protocols and to write more freely (Jucker and Taatvitsainen 2003; Scollon and Scollon 2001).

### 3 Results

The ALPI questionnaire pre-established two sentences with reference to a formal 2sg. These sentences are *Póngase usted el sombrero* ('Put on your hat') (Figure 1) and *Deme usted un pañuelo* ('Give me a handkerchief') (Figure 2). Although the original sentences are written in Spanish in the questionnaire, the group of researchers who travelled throughout the Portuguese zone translated them into their language and induced the responses based on the Portuguese translation. In the case of the different pre-established sentences that referred to an informal 2sg, these did not provide any occurrences of *você*, since all informants

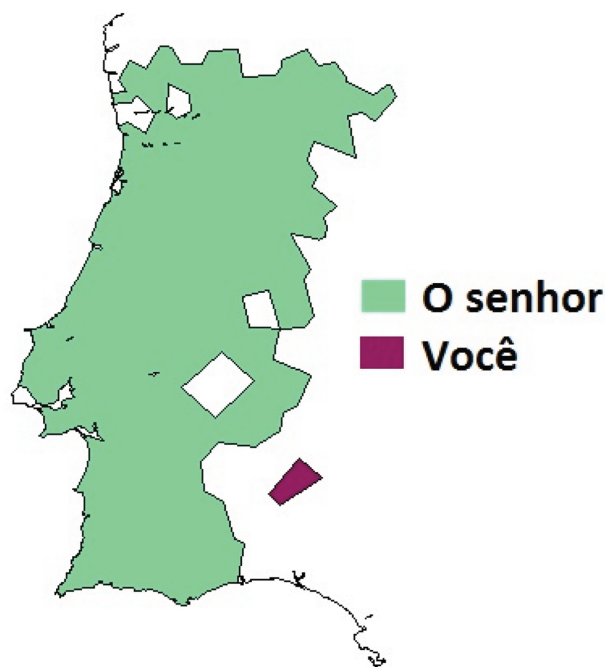


Figure 1: Question 'put on your hat'.

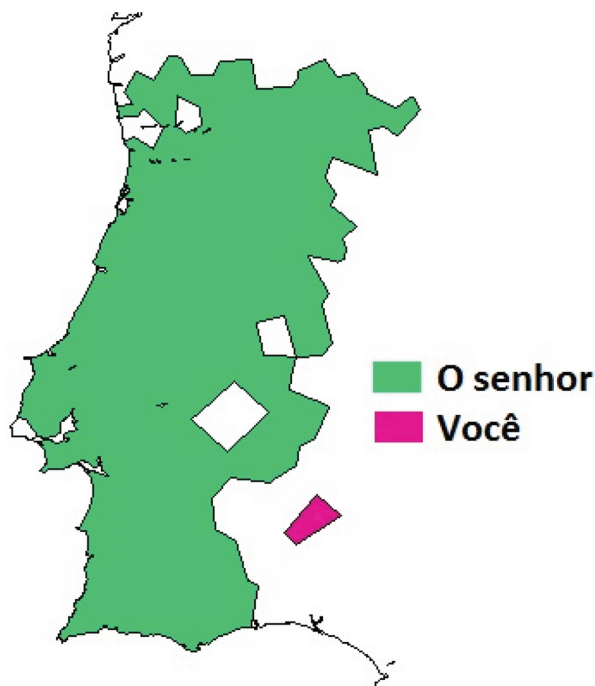


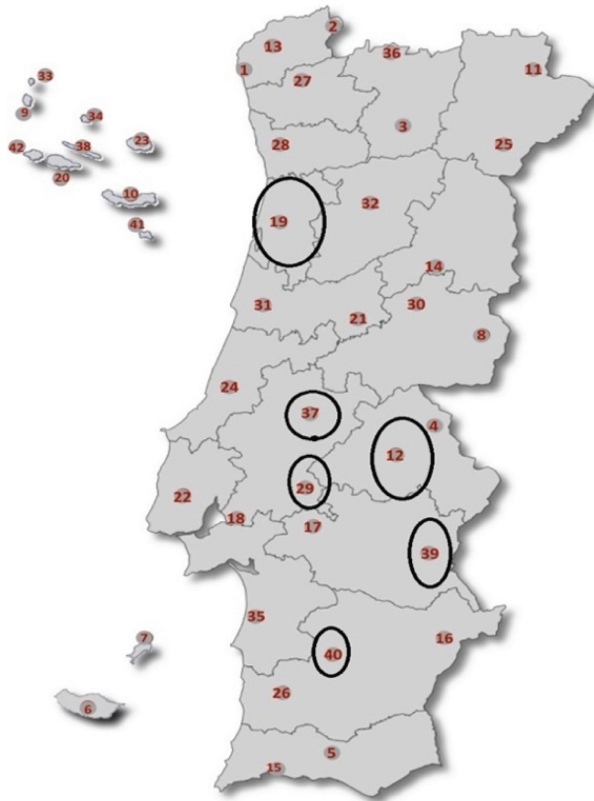
Figure 2: Question 'give me a handkerchief'.

selected a null subject, but all the verb inflections for informal contexts agreed in 2sg, that is, with reference to *tu*.

Both maps perfectly illustrate the extension of the noun phrase *o senhor* as a generic address form, in detriment of *você*, which was uniquely attested in Barrancos, a bordering village characterised by a mixture of Spanish and Portuguese linguistic features (Clements et al. 2011; Navas 2015). This zone preferred to maintain *você* as the courteous address term. However, the expression of the term of address could have been primed by the fact that the pre-established sentence included it. As we have already mentioned, the questions that referred to an informal situation provided responses of null subject plus 2sg inflections, the way the pre-established sentences were written. The shortcomings of the ALPI are obvious, but its results have evidenced that, in principle, *você* is not the chosen term of address, but *o senhor*.

As for the results of the CORDIAL-SIN, we have found archaic forms of *você*, such as *vossemecê* or *vomecê* (previous stages in the grammaticalization of *a vossa mercê* to *você*), which we have also included in our analysis. Hardly 214 occurrences

of *você* were found and 37 of *vocemecê* / *vomecê*, all throughout Portugal. In some areas, the number of instances barely reaches one (for example, in Guarda or Vila Real); in others, we only attested 2 (Funchal, Angra do Heroísmo) and in the area around Lisbon there are just 7 occurrences of this pronoun. Figure 3 marks the localities with over 10 instances – the localities with a higher number of examples are circled. The exact number of instances is presented in Table 6.



**Figure 3:** Occurrences of *você* and *vomecê* > 10.

At first sight, we can highlight two facts based on the general results. Firstly, half of the localities with over 10 occurrences of *você* are found in southern areas – Portalegre (57), Évora (10) and Beja (17). This is to be expected, due to the fact that southern zones are said to possess a higher

Table 6: Higher instances of *você*.

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9 – Covo (Aveiro) – 56 occurrences
37 – Montalvo (Santarém) – 26 occurrences
29 – Santa Justa (Santarém) – 11 occurrences
12 – Cabeço de Vide (Portalegre) – 57 occurrences
39 – Carrapatelo (Évora) – 10 occurrences
40 – Aljustrel (Beja) – 17 occurrences

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usage of this pronoun – particularly in family interactions with some deference (from a child toward a parent, from a grandchild toward a grandparent, etc.). Nonetheless, the total number of occurrences of *você* (and of *vomecê*) in this region is low. In contrast, a place in the northern region – Covo, Aveiro – presents a high number of instances (57). Besides these areas, two other municipalities in the centre (around Santarém) are slightly more productive in the expression of this pronoun, but the number of examples is not representative of the true employment of this pronoun throughout this zone.

However, in a more detailed analysis of the results, these reveal other more important aspects about the usage of *você* as an address form and they reinforce the hypothesis that the explicit use of this pronoun is not significant in European Portuguese: the data evidence that the most common strategy as a formal or semi-formal treatment does not correspond to the choice of *você*. As CORDIAL-SIN is a corpus constituted by a series of excerpts of spontaneous speech, we found it necessary to understand in what communicative situations the informants used *você*: whether they used it to address interviewers or not. The interviewer is not a figure with whom informants share a close relationship and this prompts distance or deference strategies in a communicative situation between the interviewed and the interviewer. For this analysis, we have only resorted to the localities that possess a number of examples of over 20: Covo (Aveiro), Cabeço de Vide (Portalegre) and Montalvo (Santarém).

In these places, the majority of occurrences is found in reported speech, as exemplified in (1), and not in the interview context.

- (1) Nós chegamos                      lá,        disse:                      “Ó patrão,  
We arrive-1PL.PRS.IND. there, say-1SG.PST.IND. oh boss  
você        o que é                                      que        tem?” (Covo, Aveiro)  
you.3SG what be-3SG.PRS.IND. what have-3SG.PRS.IND.  
(‘We arrived there and I said: Oh, boss, what is the matter with you?’)



**Table 7:** Number of instances of *você* and *vomecê* used to address the interviewer.

Locality	Você- general results	Vomecê, general results	Você toward the interviewer	Vomecê toward the interviewer
Covo (Aveiro)	56	0	12 (out of 56)	0
Cabeço de Vide (Portalegre)	44	13	5 (out of 44)	1 (out of 13)
Montalvo (Santarém)	26	0	3 (out of 26)	0

Within the interview, *você* is not the preferred form to address the interviewer. Table 7 shows the results obtained from the use of *você* to address the interviewer.

Once the occurrences of the explicit use of *você* had been collected and described, we found it relevant to understand which politeness strategy is more predominant: the employment of noun phrases such as *o senhor* or *a senhora* or null subject plus 3sg. Table 8 shows the results in the interviews of CORDIAL-SIN.

**Table 8:** Use of noun phrases and null subject to address the interviewer.

Locality	Noun phrases	Null subject plus 3sg
Covo (Aveiro)	27	164
Cabeço de Vide (Portalegre)	4	30
Montalvo (Santarém)	21	103

As Table 8 shows, the use of null subject is the most produced strategy to address the interviewer. The most frequent noun phrase is *o (a) senhor(a)* (2) but in Montalvo (Santarém) we also find instances of *a menina* (‘the girl’) (3).

- (2)

Posso

saber

mais (...), mas há

outras

Can-1SG.PRS.IND.

know-INF.

more (...), but

have-3SG.PRS.IND.

others

em que

o senhor

sabe

mais do que eu.

in

which

the sir

know-3SG.PRS.IND.

more than

I

(Cabeço de Vide, Portalegre)

(‘I can know more (...), but there are times that you sir know more than me’)
- (3)

Não sei

se a menina

sabe?

(Montalvo, Santarém)

No

know-1SG.PRS.IND.

if the girl

know.3SG.PRS.IND.

(‘I don’t know if, you, girl, know’)

Below, we analyse the documents of FLY. Because of the objective this article pursues, we have excluded all the letters written by Portuguese emigrants who lived in Brazil for an extended period of time, as the uses of *você* in Brazilian Portuguese are quite different from those of European Portuguese.

This necessary delimitation resulted in our only finding examples of the explicit use of *você* in 13 documents. This low proportion in the corpus again underlines that the employment of this pronoun is not very common in European Portuguese. Among all the documents analysed, 11 had been written between friends; 1 between cousins; and 1 between siblings. All the letters were written by men, except one. Table 9 provides all the results.

**Table 9:** Social relation between participants.

Total of documents	Between friends	Authors: men	Authors: women	Between relatives	Authors: men
13	11	10	1	2	2

Furthermore, the average of occurrences of *você* per letter is 1, as in (4); only two authors used this pronoun three times, whereas another one used it on five occasions.

- (4) Agradeço os três documentos sobre a LUAR e  
Thank.1SG.PRS.IND. the three documents about LUAR and  
penso, como você, que ela está  
think.1SG.PRS.IND. as you-3SG., that she be-3SG.PRS.IND.  
arrumada (letter in the exile, friends, Algiers,1973)  
do-PTCP.  
(‘I thank you for the three documents about LUAR and I think, like you,  
that it is done’)

The nature of the corpus – all the documents are of an intimate nature, which means that they were written by friends or relatives – prompts in principle the emergence of *tu* or even *você* (we must remember that Vázquez and Mendes da Luz 1971; or Cintra 1972; stated that *você* had become virtually *tu* in the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century). Surprisingly, the preferred strategy is that of null subject plus 3sg (5); this resource spreads throughout 148 documents. Table 10 shows the relationships among addressees.

- (5) Já viu com certeza a fotografia  
Already see-3SG.PST.IND. with certainty the photograph  
(colonial war letter, friends, from Oporto to Angola, 1970).  
(‘You have surely seen the photograph’)

Table 10: Number of documents with null subject plus 3sg.

Between friends	59
From sons To mothers	36
From sons to fathers	29
From uncle to nephew	1
From nephew to uncle/aunt	2
From Godfather to Godson	1
From Godson to Godmother	1
From boyfriend to girlfriend	1
Between colleagues and acquaintance	2
Between employee and head	1
Between subordinate and captain	1
From a citizen to a General Secretary	9
TOTAL	148

The numbers in Table 10 demonstrate that, although the relationships are familiar, the authors choose deference strategies. Therefore, we must deduce that the use of *tu* in these contexts in European Portuguese dates from more recent times. Furthermore, even the documents in which two friends exchange some correspondence show a great many instances of null subject plus 3sg as a way of addressing each other. If we order chronologically the different strategies attested in the FLY corpus, we realise the resource of null subject plus 3sg increases as the century advances. In the case of close family relationships, the uses of 3sg are mainly found in the first half of the century though there are still enough occurrences in the second half. It is in the decades of the 1960’s or 1970’s in friendship relations in which we attest more null subject plus 3sg compared to earlier years. Similarly, the few documents in which there is a clear hierarchy between the participants (like from a subordinate toward a superior), the null subject also increases in the second half of the twentieth century, without any trace of *você* or even *o senhor*.

Although a more social reflection about forms of address is not the scope of this study, we find it pertinent to mention a relevant feature when analysing the epistolary documents. In one of the selected documents, the author questions whether there should be some modification of how a friend should be addressed compared to someone who is less intimate. That is, the author wonders whether it is

appropriate to switch from *você* to *tu*. Nevertheless, all throughout the document, the writer does not explicitly use *você* but always activates the strategy of null subject plus 3sg – the form with which the author addresses her addressee. In fact, it seems that the idea of a possible transference toward a closer treatment with *tu* makes her quite uncomfortable.

- (6) Quanto ao pedido que me fez realmente tenho levado tempo a pensar e só hoje resolvi dizer-lhe que penso a esse respeito: acha realmente que nos devemos tratar por *tu*? eu não sei bem o que o [N] pensa sobre o tratamento por *tu* entre os jovens, eu por mim julgo que poderíamos continuar conforme estamos (...) pode pensar que estou a ser horrível e mesquinha, mas para mim isto representa imenso, (...)’ (colonial war letter, from a girlfriend to a boyfriend, from Oporto to Angola, 1970).

‘Regarding the question you posed to me, I have been thinking about it and I’ll tell you what I really think: do you really think we should address each other with *tu*? I don’t know what [you] think [3sg] about *tu* between youngsters; I believe we should keep on addressing each other as we have up to now (...). [You] may [3sg] think that I am cold and petty, but for me this is very crucial (...)’

This excerpt is highly relevant. In the first place, it represents the perspective a young woman of the 1970’s Portuguese society has of the pronoun *tu*. This vision is virtually non-existent in current society, as in (6) friendship triggers a solidarity treatment. And, secondly, it highlights the unquestionable social and cultural relevance of the judgment speakers make about the nuances of forms of address thus encouraging changes in the politeness system, both at extra-linguistic and linguistic levels. Likewise, we would like to highlight that we have not found instances of pejorative *você*, in spite of the fact that the literature states that this reading is currently possible.

To summarise, the three different corpora verify that the explicit use of *você* (either in formal situations such as interviews or in less formal ones such as private letters) is not frequently produced. We notice above all that politeness strategies are usually materialised through null subjects plus 3sg inflections, as the findings of other authors have indicated.

## 4 Analysis

If we analyse the results extracted from the three corpora we have consulted, we realise the tendency toward 3sg plus null subject grows more and more as the

timeline advances. The responses in the ALPI provide occurrences of explicit subject (*você* and *o senhor*) together with 3sg. The CORDIAL-SIN also shows instances of explicit forms of address, but it also presents a high quantity of null subject. The range of the FLY is wider and it illustrates more clearly the aforementioned tendency. The first letters are characterised by a higher percentage of explicit subject, whether it is *você*, *o senhor* or any other. However, the writings dated in the second half of the twentieth century demonstrate that the authors prefer exchanges in 3sg without any specific term of address. The fact that *você* is no longer appropriate due to its complex validity and the fact that *o senhor* is perceived as extremely formal makes *tu* the term of address of choice. Nevertheless, *tu* turns out to be extremely informal, intimate and face-threatening. The inability of either of these forms of address to fulfil the requirements of the given context seems to lead the speakers to select the 3sg without any subject. We have to bear in mind that we are always dealing with European Portuguese and with the singular. The plural seems to adapt more easily, since *vocês* can work both as informal and formal and, in order to be more polite, the strategy of *os senhores* is available. On the contrary, the singular *você* does not possess the same features as its plural counterpart.

The singular number almost always presents more problems than the plural when politeness is factored in. As we will discuss later, the treatment of a given addressee makes the speaker think about his or her socio-economic status, age and even profession. All this information is not always available when we have to address someone; hence, the risk of a face-threatening act is greater than in plural, where we are likely to find a heterogeneous group. At some point last century, *você* allowed to express an intermediate degree of formality somewhere between the overly formal *o senhor* and the apparently far too intimate *tu*. Currently, it seems that Portuguese speakers are choosing to delete the term of address and leave only the 3sg, because it is the agreement that satisfies politeness; it allows the avoidance of fixing the degree of formality and thus aim for neutrality. We believe that currently *você* in European Portuguese is undergoing a similar transformation process as the one that affected *vós* in the late Middle Ages. As Carreira (2007) states and we have verified, *você* is rather complex, because it can be at times pejorative, at others formal or informal and this perception also depends on the geographical area. The inadequacy prompts its deletion, just as *vós* was eliminated when it too became opaque.

In fact, the decision not to express the term of address represents a very polite strategy, because the interlocutor does not individualise his or her addressee and does not address him or her directly, as a result, the addresser impersonalises him or her even further. The impersonalisation is one of the politeness strategies referred to by Siewierska (2004), who deals with social deixis and states that the three major ways to address someone politely are impersonalisation, pluralisation and abstract

forms of address. As abstract forms of address do not fulfil some contexts in European Portuguese and plural agreements are employed for a group, the way to address someone in singular is reserved to impersonalisation. Furthermore, this impersonalisation is made in 3sg and not in 2pl. To this respect, Head (1978) points out that there exists a continuum in agreement in which politeness decreases or increases: 2sg > 2pl > 3sg > 3pl. According to him, the employment of 3sg is more polite than 2pl. The most polite strategy of all is 3pl, as German does. If we look at the history of Portuguese with regard to politeness, the European variety has evolved toward an increasing politeness. In the Middle Ages, it used the 2pl for formal contexts and from the fifteenth century, it changed to 3sg / 3pl plus abstract noun phrases, which, based on the continuum, is a step forward in the degree of politeness. However, from the second half of the twentieth century, it has eliminated more and more the term of address and has impersonalised even more the address to an interlocutor. The maintenance of the 3sg is coherent with the degree of politeness, as European Portuguese has always tended toward it.

This fact has already been established by Hammermüller (2003) and Carreira (2002), who affirm that European Portuguese has evolved toward a situation in which the explicit form of address is avoided. The purpose of this strategy is not to individualise and not to create immediacy in the relationship between interlocutors. Thanks to the *pro drop* parameter of European Portuguese, speakers can resort to this strategy. According to the authors, this strategy is universal in politeness and in the case of Portuguese it turns out to be a degree zero in deference, this means, a degree in which addressers do not commit themselves to being excessively polite or the opposite. Therefore, the 3sg plus null subject has become more and more the appropriate resource in singular because it guarantees politeness, while the choice of a specific term of address may place the addresser in an uncomfortable position, since they would have to select *o senhor* or *você* and, thus, exceed or not fulfil the required politeness. The plural number does not offer this problem, for a group lends itself to heterogeneity. This implies that within a group, there might be people who the speaker would address with *tu*, others who they would treat *você* and others, *o senhor*. As *você*s does not possess negative connotations in Portugal and can imply both formality and informality, employing it does not mean a FTA. If one wishes to be more polite, *os senhores* is also available.

## 5 Discussion

The data provided by the different corpora and the linguistic atlas show that the use of *você* is no longer as polite as still several grammars and textbooks of Portuguese

as a foreign language state. It has been associated for centuries to informal contexts (T) although it has not ousted *tu* in the European variety. As has been mentioned above, the history of Portuguese has known several T and V pronouns; this raises the question whether forms of address are inclined to disappear and be replaced by new ones. Various theories have been proposed: on the one hand, those which combine linguistic causes with historical processes; and, on the other hand, those which only give relevance to socio-pragmatic factors. In this section, we will discuss all of them and we will defend that socio-pragmatic factors are mostly crucial in triggering the changes in the forms of address system.

## 5.1 Linguistic factors

The scholars that hold that the terms of address are subjected to linguistic change point out that the rise of new forms or the decline of others depend on an array of consequences that stem from loss of inflection in combination with language contact and socio-pragmatic factors. Aalberse and Stoop (2015) exemplify this argument by describing the evolution of the Portuguese phenomenon *a gente* ('the people'), this means, the use of the noun phrase as 1pl with the agreement in third person, as well as the generalisation of *you* in English or *u* in Dutch. According to these authors, the tendency in Portuguese to lose inflection provoked the elimination of the old *vós* – *vocês* system in plural and then the generalisation in certain parts of Brazil of *você* at the expense of *tu*. The final step witnessed in the present is the emergence of *a gente* as the 1pl, since it does no longer needs any inflection. English and Dutch are similarly characterised, as their evolution toward loss of inflection triggered the universalisation of *you* and the deletion of the dichotomy *du* – *ghi*. In fact, Dutch only relies on an extremely simplified inflection system in its verbal paradigm that makes it necessary to express the subject. And English has virtually lost any inflection excepting the 3sg.

Nevertheless, we believe that the process moves in the opposite direction. It is true that current Brazilian Portuguese has virtually extended *a gente* plus 3sg at the expense of *nós* plus 1pl (Zilles 2005). This has resulted in the complete loss of inflection in the verbal paradigm (since all persons agree in third person), except the 1sg (Table 11).

However, the generalisation of *a gente* is dated much later than the generalisation of *você*s (Lopes 2003). No studies about the possible analogy of *você* in singular as the 2sg pronoun have been carried out, but its spread was being attested at a moment in which the Portuguese of Brazil still had a relatively rich verbal inflection. As a matter of fact, this same phenomenon can also be witnessed in European Portuguese. Moreover, the areas where it is attested usually agree *a gente*

**Table 11:** Current inflections in Brazilian Portuguese.

	Singular	Plural
First person	Eu + -o	A gente –ø
Second person	Tu / Você – (s) / ø	Vocês –m
Third person	Ele / ela –ø	Eles / elas –m

with 1pl verbal and pronominal inflections (7–8), so its emergence is not the consequence of a loss of inflection, but rather the loss of inflection is the consequence of its emergence, as Pereira (2003) and Lara (2015) exemplify in their study.

- (7)

A gente vamos de viagem

The people go.1PL.PRS.IND. of trip

(‘We go on a trip’)
- (8)

Viram- nos [a gente]

See.3PL.PRET. 1PL.ACC. [the people]

(‘They saw us’)

In (7) and (8), we observe that the combination of 1pl inflections referring to *a gente* is dialectally possible in Portugal. In the first instance, the verb is construed in 1pl; however, the latter exhibits a clitic in 1pl anchoring *a gente* (although the noun phrase does not arise in the sentence, the corpus from which the authors extracted it clearly reflects that the reference was *a gente* and not *nós*). As Lara and Díez del Corral (2015) argue in their article, these examples are usual all throughout European Portuguese.

In this study, we see that the decline of *você*, which has been somehow T since the nineteenth century, is not a consequence of the loss of inflection in European Portuguese. If it were the case, the choice for a specific term of address that worked as the subject would have been triggered, since the lack of morphological inflection would have turned European Portuguese to non *pro drop*. However, this is not the case, because the European variety still maintains a rich verbal and pronominal morphology that allows the strategy of 3sg plus null subject in politeness. This richness can decrease dialectally, mainly in the south, but even resources such as *a gente* can induce 1pl instead of 3sg, as Lara (2015), Pereira (2003) and Lara and Díez del Corral (2015) have demonstrated. Therefore, the dismissal of *você* has nothing to do with linguistic factors. In addition, Loregian (1996) shows that *tu* in Brazil can also combine with 3sg agreements. This means that, despite the fact that the 3sg has spread virtually



throughout all of the verbal paradigm in certain Brazilian areas, there has not been any consequence regarding terms of address, because *tu* coexists with *você* and *o senhor*.

The best way to exemplify the loss of inflections as a consequence of the disappearance of a T form by another is the pronominal agreement attested in the cases of *vocês* and *ustedes*. The former has become T in Brazil and in centre-southern Portugal, while the latter has also done so in western Andalusia (Lara 2012). The rise of *vocês* or *ustedes* as T is not the consequence of a tendency toward loss of verbal inflection. In other words, speakers have not decided (consciously or unconsciously) to choose *vocês* or *ustedes* because Portuguese and Spanish were losing 2pl inflections by favouring 3pl. Rather, the generalisation of these pronouns led to the partial generalisation of 3pl in detriment of 2pl. Lara (2016) has found that the imposition of *vocês* and *ustedes* instead of *vós* and *vosotros* began in topicalised constructions. In this phase, the pronoun and verb agreements that referred to the topic were construed in 2pl and not in 3pl (9).

- (9) Ustedes   sois                      hermanos  
 You.3PL. be.2PL.PRS.IND. siblings  
 ('You are siblings')

When both elements were reanalysed as actual subjects, the 3pl started to spread throughout syntax, based on the following continuum (i).

- (i) Subject > verb > direct object > indirect object > possessive

The hierarchy clearly pinpoints that, if the 3pl emerges in one of the different stages, then it also has to arise in the stages located on its left. In other words, if the 3pl is attested in the indirect object, it also appears in the direct object, the verb and the subject. Just a few areas in western Andalusia have generalised the 3pl throughout all the syntactic elements that refer to *ustedes*, just as European Portuguese has hardly spread it along the grammatical elements that refer to *vocês*. In fact, the standard pattern prescribes 3pl for verb and reflexive and 2pl for objects and possessives (Lara 2018a) and only the most south-eastern region in Portugal exhibits all syntactic elements in 3pl whereas the rest of the country still combines 2pl and 3pl desinences. Thus, the use of *vocês* and *ustedes*, despite the fact that they are syntactically 3pl, have not been prompted because of a loss of verb inflection; the consequence of the prompt of these pronouns has been the loss of inflection.

In the case of the singular, Brazilian Portuguese shows person mismatches in its forms of address. As Lopes and Cavalcante (2011) explain, the employment of

*você*, although it is syntactically 3sg, can still be combined with clitics that are built in *tú* morphology (2sg). The emergence of *você* is not promoted by the loss of inflection in the 2sg paradigm, but the emergence of *você* is the element leading to the loss of inflection by extending the 3sg. Even in the Spanish spoken in Latin America, the gradual extension of *usted* in singular as T still induces person mismatches. Although it is 3sg, we can witness combinations with 2sg, so the loss of inflection has not come to an end. Furthermore, the *voseo* (the use of pronoun *vos* instead of *tú* for T) possesses its own morphology which has developed over time. This particular inflection has extended to the stressed pronouns and to most of its verbal inflections, but possessives and object pronouns are still construed in *tú* morphology, that is, the lost T form (10 – 12).

- (10) A    *vos*    *te*                      *vi*                                      *ayer*  
       To    you    2SG.ACC.    see.1SG.PRET.IND.    yesterday  
       ('I saw you yesterday')
- (11) A    *vos*    *te*                      *di*                                      *las llaves de casa*  
       To    you    2SG.DAT.    give.1SG.PRET.IND.    the keys    of    house  
       ('I gave you the keys of your house')
- (12) Tus    hijos        [de    *vos*]    están                                      estudiando  
       Your children    [from you]    be.3PL.PRS.IND.    study.GER.  
       ('Your children are studying')

In (10) and (12), although *vos* is produced in an oblique phrase, it is later recovered by the clitic *te*, which belongs to *tú* morphology. In (11), the possessive also exhibits *tuteo* inflection even though it refers to *vos*.

The generalisation of *vos* was clearly not triggered due to an increasing loss of inflection. Again, the displacement of *tú* occurred in topicalised sentences and could be recovered by 2sg inflections. When *vos* was reinterpreted as the subject, it started spreading its own agreement. Nowadays, a great part of Latin American varieties induce a special agreement for *vos* and, consequently, there has not been any loss of inflection; indeed, a new one that can only allude to *vos* has generalised and is currently 2sg. As a matter of fact, *voseo*, apart from inducing *tuteo* in clitics and possessives, can still induce *tuteo* verbal forms in Río de la Plata (Carvalho 2010) or select either *voseo* or *tuteo* in negative imperatives depending on the social profile of the informant as well as the degree of politeness informants want to resort to (Fontanella de Weinberg 1979; Johnson and Grinstead 2011).

Lastly, this theoretical stream also argues that the linguistic factors can be combined with historical processes. An example of this is the disappearance of T

*thou* in English and *du* in Dutch. The Netherlands and the United Kingdom, at the time in which they lost their T pronouns, were host countries of an extensive migration process. The number of people they received triggered language contact and, thus, the reconfiguration of the address system. On the contrary, as Germany was in the 17th and eighteenth centuries a territory of emigration, there was no need to reinterpret the address system. However, this argument clearly does not work for other languages. Let us focus first on the Iberian Peninsula. After the colonisation of America, Seville and Cadis, in south-western Spain, became trade hubs through which people of both sides of the Atlantic and elsewhere passed (in fact, the population in Seville and western Andalusia trebled and quadrupled during the sixteenth century). Likewise, the colonisation by the Portuguese of Brazil and western Africa made of Lisbon and southern Portugal an economic centre where people from many origins converged. Thus, language contact was fiercely taking place long before the loss of T took place (O'Flanagan 2008; Pike 1972). As is well-known, the reconfiguration of the terms of address in plural occurred from the eighteenth century on and not earlier (Faraco 1996; Fernández 2012; Menon 2006). Moreover, it arose at a time in which the Iberian Peninsula was not an economic centre any more, not even a hub that received or sent many people to different places (indeed, it was a pushing centre of migration). If the universalisation of *vocês* in detriment of *vós* and of *ustedes* at the expense of *vosotros* had ensued due to language contact and migration processes, we would expect it to have emerged right after the colonisation of America and not nearly three centuries later. By the same token, if the importance of ports in Spain and Portugal had been so relevant so as to prompt language contact that led to the loss of T, we would expect to see the phenomenon elsewhere in the Iberian Peninsula. Although the trade was mainly between Seville, Cadis, Lisbon and Algarve, Oporto and other northern ports also received many commodities and emerged as important hub centres in the 18th and nineteenth centuries. Interestingly, however, the geographical area that regards Oporto as its centre of prestige still maintains the former address system (*vós* T and *vocês* V), and the rest of Spain (excluding western Andalusia) also preserves the dichotomy between *vosotros* as T and *ustedes* as V.

Regarding Latin America, the spread of *vos* as T happened along the nineteenth century, after the independence from Spain. It started in urban centres and then generalised in rural areas too. The arrival of migration in Argentina, Mexico or elsewhere in the continent is dated in the late of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century (Hatton and Williamson 1994), when *vos* was completely T. The same can apply to Brazil, where *você* as T is first documented approximately in the first half of the nineteenth century (Rumeu 2012).

We do not deny that linguistic changes may every now and then affect the address system, but there are a great many examples that show the opposite effect. If we take a look at current Dutch, the T form in plural is being displaced by a new innovation: *ghi*

*lieden* > *gullie*. According to De Vogelaer (2006), the syncretism in second person has resulted in the emergence of compound forms of the second person pronoun plus *lieden* ('men', 'people'). Additionally, the speakers who have generalised these compound innovations for 2pl, have created a new one in 3pl with the sum of the 3pl pronoun plus *lieden*. Finally, the speakers who resort to compound forms both in 2pl and 3pl, begin to create a similar one for 1pl, on the basis of the same process: 1pl pronoun + *lieden*. But even in Spanish and other Romance languages, the loss of plural T in the Middle Ages was prompted by pragmatic factors that materialised in syntax. As *vos* was quite syncretic (remember that it could be used for singular V and both plural T and V), the emergence of *vos otros* served as disambiguation. However, the imposition of this new form did not occur overnight. The innovation commenced in oblique phrases, as Spanish is a *pro drop* language. When it became common in this syntactic context, it later shifted onto the subject. When it was completely established, the 1pl also turned into a compound form by analogy. And, as we have already pointed out, the 2pl T forms in current Portuguese and Latin American and Andalusian Spanish arose in topicalised constructions until they were reanalysed as subjects. Furthermore, Lara and Díez del Corral (2015) have found that the places in Portugal where *a gente* emerges as 1pl always coincide with the places where *vocês* is 2pl. However, not all the area in which *vocês* is 2pl exhibits *a gente* as 1pl. The 1pl seems to adapt to the 2pl after the latter has undergone some linguistic shift, and this may be due to the fact that first person usually maintains its own particular marker and is the least inclined to adopt syncretism or lose its own marker (Siewierska 2004). All the phenomena referred to throughout the discussion show the innovation in the second person and, later in the first person (Dutch new plural forms, compound forms in Romance 1pl pronouns or the rise of *a gente*). Moreover, plural is cross-linguistically keener to syncretism and levelling than singular (Greenberg 2005) and this is why the levellings or innovations usually occur first in plural (first *vocês* is generalised as T and later *ocê* is; also, first *ustedes* is extended as T and then *usted* is as T too).

## 5.2 Socio-pragmatic factors

We have observed that the shifts in the address system occur regardless of the migration situation or other linguistic factors that may be happening at the same time, such as loss of inflection. We believe (as Brown and Gilman 1960; Brown and Levinson 1987; or Watts 2003; suggest) that the decline or rise of a given form of address or a given politeness strategy is subjected to social and pragmatic conditions, such as the ideology that is extended throughout a given society. In fact, unlike the arguments put forward by Aalberse and Stoop (2015) that assure that loss of T is exceptional, we defend that T is more inclined to disappear than one might

expect and that this development is the consequence of a mere socio-pragmatic matter. Below, we present several examples that support our argument.

Romance languages have undergone several processes of T displacement. For instance, Peninsular Spanish relied on two forms in the Middle Ages: *tú* (T) and *vós* (V). The latter could also be employed for T and V in plural, as in French (Table 12).

Table 12: Medieval system of forms of address in Spain.

	T	V
Singular	Tú	Vós
Plural	Vós	Vós

However, the generalisation of *vós* to so many contexts led to its reanalysis as a negative term of address. To replace it, certain noun phrases emerged, being the most common one *vuestra merced* (‘your mercy’) (Tuten 2008), that later grammaticalized in *usted* (Table 13). *Vós* ended up disappearing, but it is still maintained in north-western areas as V, the same way certain Catalan areas have recovered it to also express V (Lara 2018b).

Table 13: Current system of forms of address in Spain.

	T	V
Singular	Tú	Usted
Plural	Vosotros	Ustedes

The research carried out by Aalberse and Stoop (2015) assures that *vós* is no longer available in Spanish. Nevertheless, besides attesting it in rural areas of Peninsular Spanish, many Latin American countries use it as T. As a matter of fact, the loss of *tú* in the Spanish spoken in Latin America is quite an investigated topic that these authors have not taken into account. Currently, as has been pointed out, the region of Río de la Plata does not possess *tú* as an alternative (except in clitics, possessives and verbs), and *vos* has turned into T (Fontanella de Weinberg 1999). The rest of Latin American countries find themselves in an intermediate situation, in which *vos* is T but still coexists with the traditional *tú*. In addition, *usted*, which is unequivocally V, has become T in many of these countries, at the expense of *tú* (Table 14) Hummel et al. 2010. Again, the loss of T has occurred.

**Table 14:** Current system of forms of address in the Spanish spoken in Latin America.

	T	V
Singular	Tú Vos Usted	Usted
Plural	Ustedes	Ustedes

The plural counterpart has also experienced the same evolution. In Spain, *ustedes* is V and *vosotros* is T in plural. However, the south-western region of Andalusia has eliminated *vosotros* and has made *ustedes* T. This situation is likewise attested in all the Latin American varieties, which have not exhibited *vosotros* since the nineteenth century and count with *ustedes* as T. Thus, the loss of T in Spanish can also be accounted for in plural.

The most famous Portuguese case can be studied in the Brazilian variety. Approximately two centuries ago, the T form *tu* started fading by favouring the V *você*. Nowadays, *tu* has virtually disappeared in most areas within the country or has specialised for T in certain social groups (Modesto and Tiago 2006; Scherre et al. 2012; Silva and Paredes 1998), and *você* is valued as the T form (Lopes 2008; Menon 1995). Once again, the loss of T is attested (Table 15).

**Table 15:** Current system of address in Brazilian Portuguese in singular.

	T	V
Singular	Você / Tu	O senhor

The plural has undergone exactly the same process. The former T pronoun in plural, *vós*, was displaced by the V form *vocês* from 1700 on. *Vocês* became T both in Portugal and Brazil (although in both countries, it can still be employed for formality) and the noun phrase *os senhores* arose to represent the generalised V. The loss of T in Portuguese was, therefore, witnessed in singular and plural.

If we review the history of the 2sg and 2pl pronouns in the Romance languages, we find that at a certain stage, all of them came up with a new T form in plural that either displaced the previous T or did not generalise. Occitan, French, Portuguese, Italian, Catalan and Spanish began around the thirteenth century to use compound forms of *vós* plus the indefinite *others* (*vous autres*, *voi altri*, *vos altres*, *vos otros*)

(García et al. 1990; Gili Gaya 1946; Nowikow 1994; Spitzer 1947). They lexicalised and became common in Spanish, Occitan and Catalan. Still today, northern Italian dialects exhibit compound forms and southern Italian regions that belonged to Spain before the Italian unification also maintain the compound pronouns as T in plural. The loss of T has again occurred.

However, the displacement of T can also be observed in Germanic languages, since Dutch has lost *du* as T, by favouring *ghi*. The same applies to English, which eliminated *thou* by favouring *you*. In both languages the previous T form was lost because of the rise of the V form in the same contexts which was previously reserved to the T form. Nevertheless, current English is again undergoing a process by which a new T form is displacing the existent T. Vernacular varieties, mainly in the United States, have started spreading *y'all* in plural in order to disambiguate the referent (in fact this alternative was also documented in Spanish but did not prosper, Rini 1999). This innovation is T and, as a consequence, the former T (*you*) is lost.

We have accounted for diverse examples of shifts in the address system and, as we will illustrate now, these are mainly the result of a change from above, the upper class. Germanic and Romance examples can provide us with evidences of this social factor. In the case of German, the emergence of *Eure Gnaden* ('your graces') and later *Sie* was prompted in the eastern part of the Elba river because of a quite conservative and rural society (Hickey 2003; Howe 1996). It was later generalised to all German-speaking areas. In the case of English, Raumolin-Brunberg (2005) claims that the extension of *you* was the result of two facts: firstly, the phonetic stress of the object pronoun in comparison to the lack of stress of *ye* (nominative); secondly, the generalisation in London upper classes of *you* in detriment of *thou* as a way to differentiate themselves from the rest of the social spectrum (notice that *thou* is still attested in rural areas of north-eastern England, Evans 1969; Howe 1996). The universalisation of *you* to the rest of the society is due to the attempt of middle classes to appear to be like prestigious upper classes from London.

In the cases of Portuguese and Spanish, the imposition of a certain T or V form responds to the same social parameters. The fashion of solidarity (in terms of politeness) that emerged throughout Spain in the eighteenth century was fiercely contested by Andalusian landowners. These forced workers to exclusively use *ustedes* and never *vosotros* (Fernández 2012), which later extended throughout the entire social spectra, making *ustedes* finally a T form. In fact, when Cadix was turned into the main port connecting with America in the eighteenth century, the city became a place with a much more rigid society, formed by wealthy residents and workers. The fashion of politeness solidarity was not only contested by landowners, but by the upper class arisen thanks to the thriving trade. In Portugal, *vocês* began to be used in urban upper classes families to distinguish themselves from the rest



(Faraco 1996). In this case, the path is identical to the one attested regarding *you*. In the American cases, we find a similar explanation. The places where *vos* has completely displaced *tú* as T started employing this plural in urban environments and it was first done in upper classes (Abadía De Quant 1992; Bertolotti and Coll 2003). The prestige that the urban centres represented made it spread throughout. The same can be observed in the extension of *você* in Brazilian Portuguese (Rumeu 2012).

To this respect, Watts (2003) and even Clyne et al. (2009) argue that the choice of a term of address mainly depends on the ideology of the society. As a matter of fact, Brown and Gilman (1960) remark that the triumph of the French Revolution normalised the terms that were associated to solidarity (T), such as *tu* or *comrade*, in detriment of *vous*, perceived as belonging to the old Regime. On the contrary, the chaos regarding forms of address at the beginning of the sixteenth century in Spain drove king, Philip II to pass a decree to clearly establish which term of address had to be used for every person, so as to accurately recognise their social status. Likewise, Watts (2003) highlights that British society has always been characterised by its hierarchical attitude. According to this linguist, politeness was something associated to the social class that held any sort of social, economic or political power whatsoever. This social class was in charge of indicating the terms of address that society had to employ, depending on the social status of the interlocutor. We have to make clear that, even though English has at present no formal differentiation between T and V in pronouns, politeness can be conveyed through other means, such as noun terms (*madam*, *sir*, *professor*), modals, indirect questions and other mitigating strategies.

As T pronouns are closely related to the concept of politeness, we cannot obviate the research carried out by Brown and Levinson (1987). According to these authors, politeness can be divided into negative and positive and, in order to satisfy them, speakers need to avoid *face-threatening acts* (FTA). Therefore, the spread of a given T or V form to new contexts can be explained by the fact that speakers ask to receive or avoid either of them. For instance, the generalisation of *vós* and *you* to additional social contexts other than that of upper classes usually responds to the demand made by people that feel close to the upper classes who wish to receive the same term of address. With time, middle classes, who also want to identify themselves with people who hold higher positions in the social scale, start demanding to be treated with the same degree of courtesy by people who they consider to belong to an inferior status. The V form gradually generalises until it also establishes itself in the lower classes and ends up not meaning V anymore, but T. The avoidance of an FTA emerges when speakers satisfy the demands of those who want to be treated in a specific way. The same can apply to current trends in politeness solidarity. Scandinavia (Paulston 1984), Italy (Benigni and Bates 1977) or Spain have extended the uses of T to contexts where several decades ago it was



necessary to use V (De Jonge and Nieuwenhuijsen 2012). Behind this tendency, we find attitudes that relate democracy to solidarity, or equality to the universalisation of T (the former communist Yugoslavia extended T following this criterion, Kocher 1967). In the specific case of Peninsular Spanish, many speakers ask to be treated T because V represents a way to address an elderly person. The FTA is avoided when we satisfy their wishes and do not make them feel as if they were considered older than they are.

We believe that the approach to T that *você* experienced in previous centuries, being perceived nearly as *tu*, made it lose its polite value and became a very direct strategy to address someone in a courteous context. In fact, any explicit form of address can be felt as quite a direct way to treat a person politely, since it raises the problem of the choice of the right term, taking into account the social and professional profile of the addressee, which is something we may not necessarily know in advance. In order to avoid all these issues, current European Portuguese usually resorts to a null subject plus a 3sg inflection in singular. With this construction, informants avoid choosing a specific pronoun for their addressee that may be too polite or not polite enough, and satisfy the addressee's face. In current European Portuguese, the selection of the 3sg guarantees the deference in the communicative exchange while the null subject agrees with the idea of impersonalisation that politeness also possesses.

## 6 Conclusions

The research carried out to determine the evolution of the pronoun *você* in singular throughout the twentieth century has shown that it has stopped being a term of address for V and presents some inadequacy in formal communicative situations. Likewise, as *tu* is still considered the T form, *você* is virtually non-existent in informal contexts and we have attested it only in some rural elderly speakers from southern Portugal in non-intimate situations. Its validity is far from being disentangled and not even Portuguese speakers agree in determining the contexts where it can be employed. On the contrary, the current most diffused V strategy corresponds to a null subject plus 3sg. With this construction, speakers avoid choosing a specific term that may be perceived as a very direct address to the interlocutor and guarantees the politeness through the second most courteous morphology strategy.

Furthermore, unlike the explanation put forward by Aalberse and Stoop (2015) where the need for the loss of inflection, socio-pragmatic conditions and language contact have to occur at the same time to trigger the displacement of T by another

form, we have demonstrated that the disappearance of T is more common than expected and it has to do with the social and pragmatic conditions of a certain society. Even though loss of inflection and change contact may also play a role in the loss of T, cross-linguistic cases show that the generalisation of a given term depends on the consideration the term is attributed. In the specific cases of Spanish and Portuguese, the loss of inflection has been the consequence of the displacement of T and not the other way around. In addition, the losses of T described throughout the article happened long after language contact took place, some of them even at times in which the Iberian Peninsula was no longer an immigration centre.

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