



# Background



Past SLA studies in telecollaborative learning:

- ∞ Belz & Kinginger (2002)
- ∞ Belz (2003)
- ∞ Blyth (2012)

# Community of Practice



- ❧ Wenger (2000): Learning is “an interplay between social competence and personal experience”, and continues to qualify it as a “dynamic, two-way relationship between people and the social systems in which they participate” (226).
  
- ❧ “Modes of belonging”:
  - ❧ engagement
  - ❧ imagination
  - ❧ alignment
  
- ❧ These modes usually coexist in a social learning system, but one “can dominate and thus give a different quality to the social structure” (228).

# Nature of online discussion fora



- ❧ On WRF, **there is not a direction for specific topics**, but they are supposed to be related to language
- ❧ On WRF, **the posters direct** the topics of posts, but there are moderators
- ❧ On WRF, moderators can merge posts and delete irrelevant posts



# About WordReference

WordReference.com

☞ Founded in 1999 by Michael Kellogg

☞ A word from the creator:

The Internet has done an incredible job of **bringing the world together** in the last few years. One of the **greatest barriers has been language** [...] I have three main goals with WordReference. First, continue to create free online bilingual dictionaries for English to many other languages. I strive to offer excellent translations for "all" English words, terms, idioms, sayings, etc. into "all" languages [ ...] Beyond English, I plan to do the same for Spanish, French, Italian and Portuguese. Second, provide the world's best language forums, dedicated to **relatively serious discussion about the meanings and translations of words, terms and expressions in many languages**. Third, continue to innovate to produce the best website and reference tools for the world. (my emphasis)

<http://www.wordreference.com/english/AboutUs.aspx>

Language Forums	Direct Links to Dictionaries
	Spanish-English dictionary
	French - Dictionnaire anglais
	Italian - Dizionario inglese-italiano
	Portuguese - Dicionário inglês-português
	German - Wörterbuch Englisch-Deutsch
	Swedish - Engelsk-Svenska Ordbok
	Russian - Англо-русский словарь
	Polish - Słownik angielsko-polski
	Romanian - Dicționar englez-român
	Czech - Anglicko-český slovník
	Greek - Αγγλοελληνικό Λεξικό
	Turkish - İngilizce-Türkçe Sözlük
	Chinese - 英汉词典
	Japanese - 英和辞書
	Korean - 영-한 사전
	Arabic - قاموس إنجليزي - عربي
	Monolingual - English Learner's Dictionary

- Spanish**
  - English-Spanish
  - Spanish-English
  - Spanish-French
  - Spanish-Portuguese
  - Spanish: definition
  - Spanish: synonyms
  - Spanish: conjugations
- French**
  - English-French
  - French-English**
  - French-Spanish
  - French: conjugations
- Italian**
  - English-Italian
  - Italian-English
  - Italian definition

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قاموس إنجليزي - عربي

Language Forums

# What can we learn from WRF?



- ❧ What kinds of questions do non-natives ask?
- ❧ Who responds to the questions?
- ❧ *Tu* vs. *vous* is a pragmatic variable
  - ❧ What do the posts tell us about native and non-native pragmatic competence?
  - ❧ Is there an aspect of cultural exchange?
- ❧ Is this telecollaborative learning?
- ❧ Is there a pedagogical element that we can incorporate in the classroom?

# Data

Wordreference.com



↻ Merged WordReference thread:

**tu/vous-tutoyer/vouvoyer-tutoiement/vouvoiement**

↻ As well as some supporting references from other related threads

Page 1 of 11

**1**

2

3

...



Last »

Results 1 to 20 of 216

**Thread: tu / vous - tutoyer / vouvoyer - tutoiement / vouvoiement**



# Demographic information

Native language	Number of posts
French	100
English	90
Other	13
Bilingual	13

Other languages included Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Swedish  
Bilinguals: French-English, Hindi-English, British English-Russian

**Total number of posts: n=216**

Total number of words from native French speakers' posts: 10,433

Total number of words from non-native French speakers: 7,642

# Participation of Native Speakers



- ❧ 42% of the posts come from native English speakers
- ❧ 46% of the words come from native French speakers
- ❧ Many native speakers post more than once
- ❧ What is the motivation?

# Analysis



- ∞ Affordances
- ∞ Disadvantages
- ∞ WRF as a rich source for CMC data



# Affordances



- ∞ Access to multiple speakers across the globe
- ∞ Free
- ∞ Can learn about different cultures when this sort of topic is discussed
- ∞ Engagement of community members
- ∞ Guidance of moderators

# Access to multiple speakers



- ↻ Native (emic perspective)
- ↻ Non-native (etic perspective)
- ↻ Anyone with Internet access

Free!



# Intercultural exchange



12th July 2013, 11:55 AM

#178



**Nem'o** ◉  
Senior Member

Join Date:	Feb 2013
Location:	Lyon
Native language:	français (France)
Posts:	147

I know exactly what you feel because I've grown up in a rural part of Beaujolais (I love my "campagne" but really, I'm better off in the city!) and relationships with people around you are quite different in small villages compared to big cities. It's a whole new world for someone who has never really lived in small villages and I guess it must be hard to understand the codes and sense of decorum for someone who comes from the city or from a big town... And still harder for someone who is not French!

But I have some good tips for you 😊

**Bastoune** ◦  
Senior Member

Join Date: Mar 2006  
Location: Rio de Janeiro, Brasil  
Native language: French & English - Canada  
Posts: 1,341

👤 Originally Posted by **Monsieur Hoole** 🗨️

There's no easy answer, but I generally use tu if I'd address the person by his or her first name, and vous if I'd say Mr. Ms. etc. Of course, it's also a matter of personal taste - some French speakers very rarely use tu, except with very close friends, and some, particularly in Quebec, use tu most of the time. Of course, if it's plural, you'd always use vous.

Hope I helped,

M.H. 😊

Actually, I say, always err on the side of “vousvoyer” everyone. Use “vous” if you’re not sure.

And I am replying in particular to your post, M. Hoole, because you mentioned how using “tu” is more frequent in Québec but I’m inclined to agree AND disagree. Many of us of even still my generation (I was born in 1973), had to use “vous” with grandparents and older relatives. My parents used “vous” with their parents and so on back. Of course, it will all depend on the family, but this maybe explains why in general I am very formal and polite in my dealings with others I first meet and sometimes shocked when a stranger uses “tu” with me.



6th June 2006, 1:47 AM

#71

**uman** ◦  
Senior Member

Join Date:	May 2006
Location:	Phoenix, Arizona, USA
Native language:	English; USA
Age:	24
Posts:	106

Well there are silly rules in every natural language. French is definitely no exception! We sort of have the same thing in English-speaking cultures with first name vs. last name. It's not exactly equal to tutoyement/vouvoyement but it's the same idea. A student in Joe Smith's class would NEVER just say "Joe", for example, but always "Mr. Smith".

**Reply With Quote**

This issue is culturally specific to English speakers, since they have, ages back, removed the distinction between vous (polite tone) and tu (informal tone). In most of the other languages, like french, german, spanish, italian, indian, japanese etc, there is a clear distinction between polite & informal forms of address. For example, in the Hindi heartland, you may shower the choicest expletives on a person, (and still get away with it) but if you dare use 'tu', it means war.

**Reply With Quote**

# Engagement of community members



- ↻ Native French speakers are engaged in the community- they care enough to answer questions about their own language
  - ↻ 46% of the posts in this thread were by native speakers
  - ↻ Many of the native speakers post more than once
- ↻ Moderators are engaged in keeping the threads relevant/appropriate

# Guidance of moderators



- ❧ Moderators have the ability to edit or delete posts if they feel that the content is not relevant to the thread.
- ❧ They can also merge threads if they feel that there are too many separate threads discussing the same topic.
- ❧ They can even ban posters who do not *engage* or *align* appropriately with the task.

# Disadvantages



- ❧ Time differences
- ❧ No “instructor” guiding the discussion
- ❧ Cultural clashes
- ❧ Anonymity of posters

# Time differences



- ☞ Sometimes there are several turns between non-native speakers, perhaps because the native speakers, who have sometimes a ~7 hour time difference, are asleep!
- ☞ This can lead to non-natives speculating, using “intuitions” that might not be native-like, and more limited experience/anecdotes
- ☞ The more general issue of this being asynchronous communication

**uman** ◦  
Senior Member

Join Date: May 2006  
Location: Phoenix, Arizona, USA  
Native language: English; USA  
Age: 24  
Posts: 106

Hi all,

I understand when to use tu and when to use vous, but when I'm speaking French and not thinking about it, often "tu" will come out when I mean to say "vous". I'm going to be living in France for nine months and I'm sure that during that time I'll inadvertently call somebody "tu" who I should be calling "vous". So, I want to ask you, how bad is it? Is it a horrendously grave insult to disrespectfully call someone "tu", or is it not so bad? Or maybe somewhere in between? Thanks for your time.

Brennan Vincent

[Reply With Quote](#)

**Starcreator** ◦  
Senior Member

Join Date: Jun 2005  
Location: Canada, English, French  
Native language: Canada, English  
Posts: 628

I had the same problem when I started learning French. "Tu" would pop out randomly, and many francophones appeared disturbed by my sudden change. The reason, I guess, was that I referred to both my classmates and teachers with "tu" and knew most expressions/conjugations better with "tu". With time (not a long time, mind you - after I recognized this problem it only took a couple weeks to phase out of it), I managed to observe the tu/vous difference. I thought, afterward, "Shouldn't the francophones realize that I'm a new learner and unaware of the subtleties of the language?", but apparently it was still rather disturbing to them to "les tutoyer" without knowing them very well.

I guess it's just something that comes with time.

**Matt\_11** ◦

Banned

Join Date:

Jun 2006

Location:

Canada

Native language:

English (Canada)

Posts:

12

My french teacher told me that as much as the will not be happy with you calling them by the Tu form, they will immediatley relize why, you are obviously not a french native and they will know that by your accent, so they should allow it too pass by with out too much conflict, you will want to try not too do it, just to be sure you don't hurt someone's feelings, but with a non-frncaphone accent im sure they won't be too ,mad. Its like being a foriegner anywhere else, they know your foriegner, and they will understand.

On that topic, what is th reason for it being offensive, it means the same thing, its just one is more formal, for an accuantince, who came up with such a dumb rule for the language? lol

[Reply With Quote](#)**uman** ◦

Senior Member

Join Date:

May 2006

Location:

Phoenix, Arizona, USA

Native language:

English; USA

Age:

24

Posts:

106

Well there are silly rules in every natural language. French is definitely no exception! We sort of have the same thing in English-speaking cultures with first name vs. last name. It's not exactly equal to tutoyement/vouvoyement but it's the same idea. A student in Joe Smith's class would NEVER just say "Joe", for example, but always "Mr. Smith".

[Reply With Quote](#)



6th June 2006, 1:50 AM

#72

**uman** ◉  
Senior Member

Join Date:	May 2006
Location:	Phoenix, Arizona, USA
Native language:	English; USA
Age:	24
Posts:	106

OK, the consensus seems to be that they'll understand I'm a foreigner and so won't take grave offense. I've got another, related question. How much offense would it cause if one native French speaker called another native French speaker "tu" inappropriately?

[Reply With Quote](#)

6th June 2006, 3:01 AM

#73

**Starcreator** ◉  
Senior Member

Join Date:	Jun 2005
Location:	Canada, English, French
Native language:	Canada, English
Posts:	628

No, this isn't the consensus 😊. You've heard two opinions regarding the situation - one of which is someone's teacher's opinion, and another of which is an actual anecdote. I'd like to believe that most francophones would hear your accent and immediately realize

that you didn't mean to say "tu", this isn't the case many times. I'd sometimes see the "cringe" expression on someone's face after being called by "tu", if I did it inappropriately, and would normally apologize, explaining that it was an accident. We in English sometimes do the same thing - for instance, we sometimes are surprised when foreigners use profanity without being familiar with its magnitude.

That said, hopefully after two or three months in France, this tendency to interchange tu and vous will disappear. And in the interim, hopefully you'll encounter speakers who will recognize the accent and be sympathetic, rather than offended, when the problem occurs.

As for your other question, normally a francophone would know what he or she was doing. If a francophone used tu inappropriately, it would often be specifically to convey disrespect, colloquialism or contempt.

[Reply With Quote](#)



**DDT** ◦  
Senior Member

Join Date: Aug 2004  
Location: Paris, France  
Native language: Italy - Italian  
Age: 43  
Posts: 7,778

👤 Originally Posted by **uman**

OK, the consensus seems to be that they'll understand I'm a foreigner and so won't take grave offense.

I agree with starcreator, this isn't the consensus. I suggest you take care of the difference between "tu" and "vous" when speaking French in spite of the fact you're a foreigner 😊

👤 Originally Posted by **uman**

I've got another, related question. How much offense would it cause if one native French speaker called another native French speaker "tu" inappropriately?

It depends, basically it would be considered rather impolite. But if you're being introduced to friends by a friend you can "tutoyer"...please also remember not to shake the hand of a girl when being introduced, just give her a kiss on both cheeks (to shake her hand would look sort of odd), but if you're introduced to a girl/woman for professional reasons you are supposed to shake her hand, of course

# No “instructor”



- ❧ No one is guiding the discussion
- ❧ Sometimes the discussion gets off-topic before a moderator can intervene (again, a disadvantage of the asynchronous nature of the fora)

# Cultural clashes



Hi all,

Need a bit of clarity on the difference between 'vous' and 'tu' (as in where it is used).

As we all know, French (unlike English) has two forms of address, i.e vous & tu, similar to Indian languages, where the distinction between the polite and informal form of address is quite strict.

In fact most of the Indian languages like Hindi, Bengali, Oriya etc have 3 forms of address viz. Polite, Informal & Casual, and their usage is strictly defined and adhered to.

I have given below some permutations & combinations of relationships.  
Kindly correct if there are any errors.

TU :

Between husband-wife, lovers, friends, casual acquaintances to anybody younger or lower position.

VOUS :

Stranger / Acquaintance, to anybody older (unless its an old servant) or higher position,

Any suggestions? Thanks.

**Moderator note:** see also [tu / vous - married couples, lovers](#)

*Last edited by jann; 18th November 2013 at 7:12 PM. Reason: note*

**Boiron** ◦

Member

Join Date:



Native language:

Posts:

Jul 2013

French

53

 Originally Posted by **NKOS** 

TU :

Between husband-wife, lovers, friends, casual acquaintances to anybody younger or lower position.

VOUS :

Stranger / Acquaintance, to anybody older (unless its an old servant) or higher position,

Unfortunately, you can't limit the use of "Tu" or "Vous" to these cases.

Some examples :

- a professor will use "vous" when talking to a student
- a CEO will use "vous" when talking to his employees
- a mother-in-law will use "tu" when talking with her son's/daughter's spouse but this spouse will use "vous" when talking to his/her mother-in-law
- and so on...

*Last edited by jann; 18th November 2013 at 7:13 PM. Reason: cited post trimmed to save space*

25th July 2013, 4:59 PM

#199

**Uncle Bob** ◦

Senior Member

Join Date:

Location:

Native language:



Posts:

Dec 2009

Hungary

British English

6,671

 Originally Posted by **NKOS** 

TU :

...

to anybody younger or lower position.

VOUS :

...

to anybody older (unless its an old servant) or higher position,

Perhaps that's a bit dated in European terms.

Using "tu" to somebody in a lower position would not be considered polite - it means you want to insist on your superiority. I've never had, nor come across, a servant but I would assume one would have to be very pompous to use "tu".

**Reply With Quote**

**Chat Perché** ◦

Senior Member

Join Date:



May 2012

Native language:

Français

Posts:

325

 Originally Posted by **Uncle Bob** 

Perhaps that's a bit dated in European terms.

Using "tu" to somebody in a lower position would not be considered polite - it means you want to insist on your superiority. I've never had, nor come across, a servant but I would assume one would have to be very pompous to use "tu".

Je suis tout à fait d'accord avec Uncle Bob, la situation hiérarchique n'a plus réellement d'influence sur l'emploi du 'tu', et il est très impoli d'employer le 'tu' avec un subordonné ou un employé de maison par exemple (à moins que les deux personnes soient amies, ou s'accordent sur ce point, et utilisent toutes deux le 'tu' 😊).

Donc, désolée NKOS mais une liste d'emploi du 'tu' et du 'vous' risque de comporter plus de cas spéciaux que de cas généraux ! (Un autre exemple me vient à l'esprit : celui du policier qui utilise le 'tu' pour parler à un suspect et asseoir son autorité).

**Reply With Quote**



25th July 2013, 10:38 PM

#201

**NKOS** ◦

Member

Join Date:

Sep 2012

Location:



Mumbai, India

Native language:

English & Hindi

Posts:

57

 Originally Posted by **Chat Perché** 

Je suis tout à fait d'accord avec Uncle Bob...

Thank you all for your valuable inputs.

Perhaps I failed to mention that I was talking in an Indian context, where the rules of social etiquettes are a bit different from a modern European context, although not very dissimilar.

And yes Uncle Bob, you will find huge traces of the feudal hangover in the Indian subcontinent (except for the metro cities), where the social distinction between 'master' and 'servant' is enormous.

And what you would label as laughable or pompous, would be viewed quite seriously halfway around the globe.

So just to clear any confusion, I'm just reiterating the above mentioned - that in the French context, it is always safe to use 'vous', whenever in doubt ; and that 'tu' is mostly used amongst friends or for the younger generation (where there is familiarity) or children or in certain situations as mentioned above by Chat Perché.

# Anonymity of posters



- ❧ Who is posting?
- ❧ e.g. Is this really a native speaker responding to the question?
- ❧ Are they providing accurate information, or are they making things up?

# What can we learn from WRF?



- ❧ What kinds of questions do non-natives ask?
- ❧ Who responds to the questions?
- ❧ *Tu* vs. *vous* is a pragmatic variable
  - ❧ What do the posts tell us about native and non-native pragmatic competence?
  - ❧ Is there an aspect of cultural exchange?
- ❧ Is this telecollaborative learning?
- ❧ Is there a pedagogical element that we can incorporate in the classroom?

# WRF as a rich source for CMC data



- ❧ emoticons
- ❧ users can embed images, links from [Dailymotion](#); [Facebook](#); [Liveleak](#); [Metacafe](#); [Vimeo](#); [YouTube](#);
- ❧ users can link to others' profiles in their responses
- ❧ thanking/acknowledgement strategies
- ❧ greetings/addressivity

# Conclusion



Unlike *Cultura* (as analyzed by Blyth, 2012), WordReference is not an example of **directed** telecollaborative learning, as the learners are the first participants to post threads, asking questions about anything ranging from simple grammar questions to the pragmatic nuances of the *tu* vs. *vous* distinction. However, the presence of moderators and *engaged* native speakers allows for the learner-directed threads to have some guidance from the more *competent* (Wenger, 2000, 227) members of the group. The fact that this discussion is online and is open internationally to anyone who wishes to post means that people move in and out of the community, and that there are potentially newcomers (Wenger, 2000, 226) every day. The presence of the moderators and engaged senior members helps teach the newcomers how “WordReference is done”, so that when this community of practice functions properly, posters not only learn the answers to their questions, they also learn how to interact in this particular community.

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