'This paper examines the intriguing phenomenon of *switching*, defined here as 'spontaneous shifts from one habitual address pronoun to an opposing one when addressing the same person' and compares the findings in the regions of Spain, Canary Islands, Argentina and El Salvador.

This research is based on a written questionnaire plus 18 role-play dialogues involving specific dyads of child to parent, boss to employee and friend to friend (or colleague). My informants were mainly native Spanish-speaking University students recently coming from or residing in the above-mentioned countries.

I will show that, contrary to the claim by well known linguists Brown & Gilman (1960), *switching* is NOT showing signs of disappearing, at least not in the Spanish language. This seemingly unconscious, socio-linguistic phenomenon is seen to be *universal* by various studies across European and Asian languages. In English there is historical evidence of its existence in the past - as in the *thou of contempt* found in Shakespearean literature. A rough equivalence also exists in present-day English in forms of address such as *young man/young lady* (to a teenager or a child); *sir/madam* (to an adult) or use of *Mr/Mrs/Miss* when first names are the norm, in order to express shock, anger, contempt or irony.

Apart from the frequency of *switching* their possible meanings will be examined here.