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A REVIEW OF LINGUISTIC STUDIES OF ADDRESS TERMS

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Abstract

This paper explores the studies of address terms in three major linguistic branches: sociolinguistics, pragmatics, and functional linguistics. In sociolinguistics, research has concentrated on the influencing social factors on address terms and the social functions of address terms in communication. In pragmatics, scholars paid more attention to how and why speakers make different choices of address terms in various contexts. And in functional linguistics, researchers have centered on how writers and speakers used address terms to achieve the function of cohesion in discourse.

Keywords: address terms, sociolinguistics, pragmatics, functional linguistics

1.   Introduction

As a crucial communication tool among human beings, address terms play a vital role in interpersonal interactions. It is words and phrases used as the name or symbol of a person (Fasold, 1990) or linguistic forms used in addressing others to attract their attention or for referring to them in the course of communication (Keshavarz, 2001). It is the first link in people's communicative behavior, reflecting the relationship between the communicating parties and the social and cultural ideology of the communicators.

Address terms exist in different languages and cultures. China has a long history of the study of address terms. During the Warring States period and the Han Dynasty, a book named *Erya·Shiqin* recorded the kinship address terms in detail. Since then, books have recorded address terms in the Tang, Ming, and Qing dynasties. In the 17th century, *The Pure Language of the Spirit of Truth* (Farnsworth & Richard, 1655) was an early work in the study of

address terms, and in the 18th and 19th centuries, there were works on the Russian and Muslim address terms. In addition, the address terms of Germany, Japan, Korea, and other countries, which have their characteristics, have also attracted the attention of scholars. Since the beginning of the 20th century, the enthusiasm of Chinese and foreign scholars for the study of address terms has continued to rise and become a major research hotspot in different areas of linguistics.

2.   Address Terms in Sociolinguistics

Since the 1960s, with the rise of sociolinguistics, the address terms research has become a hot spot, receiving extensive attention. Sociolinguistic research focused on the social attributes of address terms, exploring the covariation or co-occurrence between social variables and their usage by analyzing actual corpus. These analyses help to understand the constraints or influences of social factors, including history, culture, politics and economy, as well as gender.

Additionally, some research highlighted the social functions of address terms in communication, such as constructing identity and expressing emotions.

2.1 The Influencing Social Factors on Address Terms

Linguistics on historical research entered a renaissance in the 1980s (Lu et al., 2021) when it was realized that it was far from enough to study the corpus of the present day but also to examine the corpus under history. Spanish address terms, which were in their golden age in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, Middle-Highland German address terms, which have their unique history, and Korean address terms, which are rapidly developing into a developed country, have come under scrutiny. These address terms with their particular historical contexts have been analyzed in terms of the choice of address system at that time (Moreno, 2002), the problem of address term switching and the basic features of address term change (Simon, 2003), and the corpus approach to analyze their use (Seongha, 2019), respectively.

Sociolinguistic studies of address terms have been conducted not only in specific historical periods but also in cultural climates. Based on the core of the Chinese etiquette culture of respecting others and humbling oneself, Zhou (2005) discussed that the etiquette culture regulates address terms while address terms express the etiquette culture characteristics such as treating people with courtesy. Based on comparing the differences between Chinese and Uighur's address terms, Cui Wei and Zhang Rui (2010) took kinship address terms as a starting point to further analyze the more profound cultural factors such as historical background, religious beliefs, ethnic psychology, and values reflected in them. Besides, the use of non-kinship address terms by residents of African dialect communities was examined as part of African culture marked by Western and modern culture (Afful, 2006a). In the post-colonial Caribbean, whose culture was also marked by Western culture as a result of colonization, the usage of the plural form of the second-person pronoun as an address term has received scholarly attention (Mühleisen, 2011).

Motivated by the critical influence of political factors on address terms, Watts (1992) put forward the idea that address terms should be classified as political behaviour. His model of restrictive politeness argues that since address terms are chosen based on social interaction, they cannot be regarded as purely polite expressions unless they are used beyond what is necessary to sustain interactive political behavior. Foreign scholars have studied address terms in formal televised political debates and interviews. Some paid attention to the role of vocative forms of address in shaping the political space and the strategic uses of address terms by participants (Jaworski & Galasiński, 2000), while some focused on explicit expression for references to coparticipants by proper address terms and shift of them (Bull & Fetzer, 2006). Address terms in the political news interview in the lead-up to the Australian 2004 federal election were also analyzed, which showed differences in the choice of address terms and in the positioning of address terms within the news interview (Rendle-Short, 2007).

Some studies were on address terms in Chinese political situations, such as changes in Chinese address terms since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 (Fang & Heng, 1983) and changes in address terms on the eve of liberation, when there was only the basic regime during the period of turmoil, under regime change and socialist transformation (Li, 1999). Some studies were on address terms in China's economic situations, such as the characteristics and usage of address terms from different periods of economic development (Zhong, 2005) and the convergence and transformation of address terms that occurred as a result of China's twenty years of reform and opening up (Shi, 2006).

The differences in address terms caused by gender have also been noticed by linguists, and gender-related differences in the system of address terms were analyzed by Kramer (1975). With the rise of the feminist movement, the study of gender in address terms has become a hot topic in the last two decades. Chinese scholars have discussed the phenomenon of women's use of male address terms during oral communication among Han Chinese and its cultural origins (Xiang, 2008), the impact of gender stereotypes of address terms on cognition and behaviour in the socio-cultural context of

gender stereotypes (Zhang, 2010), and the use of a typical male address term "Ye grandfather" by women to refer to themselves (Wang, 2012).

On the other hand, the characteristics of emerging gender address terms in the context of new media were also analyzed (Li, 2017). Zhang Li and Liu Fengguang (2023) selected female address terms in Chinese cyberspace based on cognitive resemblance and pragmatic efficiency to provide valuable references for revealing the functions of these address terms. Moreover, some scholars in the United States initiated a retrospective observational study to reveal that different address terms caused by gender in speaker introductions may amplify the isolation, marginalization, and professional discomfiture expressed by female faculty in academic medicine (Files et al., 2017).

Most of the studies of address terms mentioned above focused on the use of address terms in a particular period time, and some scholars concentrated on the changes that have occurred in address terms over time. For example, the word "cousin" was used as a term of address for non-relatives in late-medieval and Renaissance English, which was well documented in letters between monarchs, as it is difficult to establish whether people were blood relations for earlier periods. An investigation documented the use of "cousin" from the thirteenth to the early-sixteenth century in all literate ranks of society. It concluded that the royal use of cousin constitutes a relic of an earlier and more widespread use (Häcker's, 2019). Aunty, another example, was used in Greater Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, to address older females across different languages, regardless of whether the addressee is a relative of the addresser. A paper explored contact reconceptualizations of English "aunty" as an address term in this multiethnic and multilingual city (Lee & Shanmuganathan, 2020).

The address term "A Yi" in Chinese, similar to "aunty", can be used as both a kinship address term and a social address term, which has had some changes in actual use with the development of society. Ji Dongzhen (2014) used the psychological method of associative group analysis to compare and analyze the semantic images of "A Yi" constructed by different age groups, to summarize their differences and to predict development tendencies. Then, based on this research experience, "Xiao Jie Miss" was studied by a historical contrast/free association method further to discuss changes in its meaning from a different perspective, using the data obtained from free association experiments in 2005 and 2015 (Ji & Chen, 2018).

2.2 The Social Functions of Address Terms in Communication

Scholars in sociolinguistics have conducted a great deal of research on the interaction of address terms. Interaction refers to communication and social interaction between speakers to fulfill needs such as intimacy and social harmony. It focuses on factors in interaction by analyzing, for example, patterns of behavioural rhythms between participants in a conversation.

This area's research focused on power and solidarity, constructing identity, and expressing emotion and attitudes. *The Pronouns of Power and Solidarity* (Brown & Gilman, 1960) is the earliest monograph of address terms. One person may be said to have power over another to the degree that he is able to control the behaviour of the other. It is a relationship between at least two persons and is non-reciprocal in the sense that neither of them can have power in the same area of behaviour. There are many factors of power, such as wealth, age, sex, and institutionalized role in the church, the state, and the army or within the family (Brown & Gilman, 1972:255). Later, Fasold developed the solidarity semantic. According to him, solidarity implies a sharing between people, a degree of closeness and intimacy which is inherently reciprocal (Fasold, 2000:4). Address terms in modern Greek conversation (Tannen & Kakava, 1992), a certain period in Portugal (Oliveira, 2005), and Korean women's talk (Kim, 2015) have been studied based on power and solidarity theory while some scholars studied the first-hand information on the situation of the kinship address terms' extended usage in China (Pan & Zhang, 2001).

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In subsequent studies, an increasing number of studies have noted that address terms not only demonstrate power and solidarity but also construct identity and convey emotions and attitudes. It was highlighted by the study of Dagbanli address terms, which outlined the different ways these elements are combined to convey other meanings, such as power, solidarity, and attitudes (Salifu, 2010). One study focused on the continuous identity construction by speakers through changes in address terms to highlight some aspects such as their position of power, occupational characteristics, and personality and emotions, emphasizing that the constructed identity is not fixed and will change during communication (Liu, 2015), while some scholars analyzed address terms from the perspective of identity and identity construction (Ji, 2016) or for the strong emotion-expressing function that address terms have (Zeng, 2016).

To sum up, from the sociolinguistic perspective, the analysis of address terms delves into the intricate web of social attributes intertwined with linguistic choices. It investigates the co-occurrence of address terms with social variables, unveiling the profound influence of historical, cultural, political, economic, and gender-related factors. Beyond mere linguistic markers, address terms emerge as powerful tools in demonstrating power and solidarity, constructing identities, and expressing emotions.

3. Address Terms in Pragmatics

In the 1960s and 1970s, Lakoff, Ross, and a number of scholars led early attempts at a language approach (Zeng, 2020), focusing on context, which includes the participants and the communication occasions. The study of address terms is gradually expanding from the macro perspective of sociolinguistics to the micro perspective of context and meaning. Since then, more and more researchers have recognized context's decisive role.

In the realm of pragmatics, some studies have delved into usage of address terms in different communities and contexts. Since lesbians are a minority and a unique group with a specific language, address terms in lesbian representations have been observed and analyzed (Davy, 1986). A study described the use of address terms by undergraduate students at an English-medium university in Ghana was conducted with two sets of data collected from participant and non-participant observations and interviews (Afful, 2006b). The use of the term cousin by all literate social classes from the 13th to the early 16th centuries was also examined to show changes in the meaning of cousin (Häcker's, 2019). Furthermore, some studies have examined the usage of commonly used address terms by the Yiwu migrant worker group in both rural and urban societies (Liu, 2010), as well as the performance of illiterate and non-literate groups in terms of address terms (Ma, 2009).

Many scholars have also focused on communicative situational context to study address terms. One of the earlier concerns was the address terms of employees in commercial organizations such as insurance companies (Slobin, Miller & Porter, 1968). Since then, the relationship between the use of names and other words in addressing and referencing has been examined (Dickey, 1997). With the development of law across languages and cultures, court interpreters' use of address terms has been studied (Angermeye, 2005). The interplay between communicative space regulation and changes in address systems through relevant academic address terms (e.g., Dr. and Prof.) in academic settings has also been discussed (Shi, 2011). In addition, some scholars have examined interactions in medical counselling by comparing Swedish-Swedish and Finnish-Swedish address terms (Norrby et al., 2015) and how advertisers and service providers address consumers (Leung et al., 2023).

In summary, in the realm of pragmatics, the scrutiny of address terms transcends linguistic structure to uncover their vital role in shaping communicative dynamics. It focuses on the dynamic interplay of address terms within the context of communication. The attention extends to focus on participants and communication occasions.

4. Address Terms in Functional Linguistics

Address terms also received attention in functional linguistics, especially, how information

coherence and role marking are achieved through address terms.

An early study of address terms in discourse by Brown and Ford (1961) collected data from 38 plays to analyze the forms of address terms between two people and investigate the relationship between 3 forms of address terms in discourse. Since the publication of Halliday and Hasan's *Cohesion in English* (1976), the theory of discourse cohesion has been quickly accepted by linguists. As a result, early studies of address terms in functional linguistics focused mainly on the role of cohesion in discourse, with address terms in drama receiving particular attention. In response to address terms in Shakespeare's dramatic works, scholars discussed address terms switching and formulated specific groupings of address relation clusters, concluding that the function of cohesion was achieved through the reference of individual differences in these clusters with the emotions and plots (Mazzon, 2003; Stein, 2003). Address terms in historical dramatic dialogues were also studied through the ESDD corpus (Anglemark, 2018).

The following studies also confirmed the cohesion function of address terms in different kinds of texts besides plays and dramas. Address terms used in the five situations of *Dream of Red Mansions* fully reflected a high level of discourse cohesion of its address terms (Chen, 2007). In addition, address terms used in the New Year's speeches of the leaders of China and Thailand (SUKPRASONG, 2016), address terms in musical compositions (Zoë, 2018), and address terms in the news commentaries of "cyber wars" in foreign media (Dai, 2018), all illustrated the discourse cohesion function of address terms. The discourse cohesion function of address terms, can help readers grasp the information development mode more accurately. It is clear that the study of address terms belongs to the scope of discourse cohesion research, and the choice of address terms is one of the ways in which the discourse cohesion relationship is manifested (Zhang, 2019).

In light of above, functional linguistics brings another dimension to address terms, as they are seen as integral components of language systems that serve communicative functions. The research highlighted how address terms are embedded within larger discourse structures, contributing to cohesion in communication.

5. Conclusion

Taking the present situation of sociolinguistics, pragmatics, and functional linguistics in understanding address terms, this paper explores the multifaceted nature of address terms, shedding light on their dynamic role in social interaction, pragmatic interpretation, and language functionality. These terms, far from being isolated linguistic elements, emerge as dynamic tools for showing power and solidarity, constructing social identities, expressing emotions, and structuring discourse. By bridging these three perspectives, a holistic understanding of address terms' significance in human communication can be gained.

It can also be found that after the exploration of address terms in sociolinguistics, other fields, such as pragmatics and functional linguistics, have centered on new aspects and enriched the research findings. Perhaps subsequent studies can broaden the research horizons and explore the studies of address terms under other branches of linguistics. Looking ahead, the interdisciplinary nature of address terms invites future research to explore their evolving role in an increasingly globalized and digitized world. Address terms are not static entities but rather living linguistic phenomena that continue to adapt and shape our ever-changing communicative landscape.

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