

# Contrastive Analysis of English and Chinese Social Address Form from the Perspective of Power and Solidarity Semantic Pattern

Feifei Wang

School of Foreign Languages, Taishan University, Tai'an 271021, China

## Abstract

Language used in the context plays an important role on identifying the statues and manner of the interlocutor. In this regard, address forms are socially driven phenomena which make the fundamental point in sociolinguistics clearly. In this paper, the attempt was made to investigate the impact of social context as well as intimacy and distance on the choice of forms of address in the cultures of America and China. As a result, the analysis shows that power derives from higher or lower social status, and solidarity comes from intimacy.

## Keywords

Address Form; Power; Solitary; Contrastive Analysis.

## 1. Introduction

For several decades, the earliest sociolinguistic research of speech events or among speakers of American English has mainly drawn attention on the way people in their society address one another. Particularly, when articulating language, people do more than just try to get another person to understand the speakers' thoughts and feelings. At the same time, both people are using language in subtle ways to define their relationship to each other, to identify themselves as part of a social group and to establish the kind of speech event they are in [1]. With respect to the linguistic and social behavior, the language is addressed not only to be appropriate to the individual and his social economic background, but also to be suitable for particular occasions and situations. In other words, the addressing language varies on basis of the interlocutor's social characteristics and the social context in which he/she finds himself/herself. In particular, terms of address, regarded as linguistic forms, are used in addressing others to attract their attention or for referring to them in the course of a conversation. In this regard, address forms are socially driven phenomena which make the fundamental point in sociolinguistics clearly. Moreover, Interlocutor's social context has a great impact on how language works and uses appropriately.

Simply speaking, address forms (AFs) are "The words speakers use to designate the person they are talking to while they are talking to them" [2]. More specifically, address forms (AFs) are "The word or words used to the person or persons the speaker wants his words to be received and interpreted. They can be personal pronouns, personal name titles, kinship terms, nicknames, nominal phrases, etc. Address forms indicate the relationship of linguistic forms and social setting and the relationship between the interlocutors. They can take initial, medial, or final position in an utterance or a sentence. They can be used in direct speech or writing. AFs can perform many functions. They indicate interpersonal relationship, convey speaker's feelings, and perform certain speech acts, such as to greet people; to attract people's attention; to make a request or give an order; to praise or to scold people; to mock or insult others and so on. In addition, another extremely important factor determining the appropriateness of AFs is the context in which AFs are utilized. [3]

## 2. Power and Solidarity Semantic Pattern

The classic and most influential study of AFs and the social relationship they reveal was published by Brown and Gilman in the 1960 [4]. Using a variety of methods, such as informal interviews, the analysis of works of literature (Particularly drama), and the results of a survey questionnaire, Brown and Gilman investigated second-person pronoun usage in French, German, Italian, and Spanish. They proposed that pronoun usage was governed by two semantics which they called power and solidarity. Power means that a person has power over another person to the degree that he or she can control the other person's behavior. Power is nonreciprocal because two people cannot have power over each other in the same area. In the same way, the power semantic governs the nonreciprocal use of the two pronouns. The less power person says V (the term Brown and Gilman use to designate the deferential pronoun in any of the languages, taking the first letter from Latin vos) to the more powerful one and receives T (the familiar pronoun, from Latin tu). The bases of power are several. Older people are assumed to have power over younger people, parents over children, employer over employees, nobles over peasants, military officer over enlisted men. The power semantics would be sufficient only if a society were finely stratified that each individual had an asymmetrical relationship with every other individual; in other word, there are no power equals. Since this was never the case, at least in Europe, a residual rule for power equals was necessary. This rule called for the reciprocal use of the same pronoun between power equals. This is, you use the same pronoun to a power equal that they use to you. Since not all differences between people are connected with power, a second semantic, the solidarity semantic, developed. Two people can be equally powerful in the social order, but be from different families, come from different parts of the country, and be in different, if equally respected, professions. In other words, the need to develop to distinguished a degree of common ground between people which went beyond simply having equal power. This is where solidarity came in. solidarity implied a sharing between people, a degree of closeness and intimacy. This relationship was inherently reciprocal; if you were close to someone else, in the most natural state of affairs, that person was close to you. Wherever the solidarity semantics applies, then, the same pronoun is used by both people. Originally, according to Brown and Gilman, the solidarity semantic came into play only where it did not interfere with the power semantic. Brown and Gilman's data indicate that, by the mid-twentieth century, solidarity had almost completely won out over power as the dominant governing semantic. Related to the use of T and V pronoun form is the choice of the name which one person will use to address someone else.

This choice is available for manipulation by speakers of English as well as in languages that have T and V. The address system of American English, in particular, has been analyzed by Brown and Ford and Ervin-Tripp. Each of these studies has become something of a classic. The principle choices in American English are between first name(FN) and title with last name(TLN), with FN roughly analogous to T and TLN to V. Brown and Ford used a variety of data in their investigation of which forces influence this choice; they also used literary sources(a set of modern American plays) and records of more than 200 interactions involving about 80 people in a Boston drafting firm), records of observations involving some 56 children in the American Midwest for a psychology research project on another topic in which address forms were frequent. Besides this they used questionnaire data on the reported usage by 34 executives. The three patterns that are possible with the two forms are the mutual exchange of FN (including such common nicknames as 'Bob' and 'Jim'), and the nonreciprocal pattern in which one person gives FN and gets TLN. According to Brown and Ford, the two reciprocal patterns are governed by a single dimension, ranging from acquaintance to intimacy. Americans call someone they are merely acquainted with TLN and expect the same in return. People who

are friends call each other by FN. But Brown and Ford point out that the difference between the two relationships for Americans is very small. Five minutes' conversation is often enough to move from a TLN relationship to a FN one. The nonreciprocal pattern is governed by two dimensions: age and occupational status. The member of a dyad who is older will be called TLN and call the younger person by FN. The persons with the higher occupational status also have the privilege of being addressed with TLN while addressing the other person with FN. Brown took a quite different approach to the study of American English address form use. She presents the address form system as a series of choices, using the computer flow chart format. As Ervin-Tripp says, the model is like a formal grammar. It is instructive to see if Ervin-Tripp's notion of what is crucial in addressing is substantively different from what Brown and Ford and their colleague found [5]. Brown calls for a decision about whether or not the other person is an adult. Her model calls for addressing any child by his or her first name if you know it and not using any name if you do not. Brown and Ford did have data on address to children but they had almost nothing to say about it, so the earlier research neither supports nor contradicts Ervin-Tripp.

### **3. A Contrastive Analysis of Chinese and English Social Address Forms**

#### **3.1. Popularity of English Social Title**

English social titles include Mr. Mrs. Miss, Sir, and Madam. Although the number of English social titles is smaller in comparison with official and occupational titles, they have a relatively higher frequency of usage. In addition, their usages are quite simple in reference to their Chinese equivalents. "Mr." and "Mrs." usually appear together with a last name rather than used alone. All adult men, young or old, married or unmarried, may be addressed in the form of "Mr. + last name". "Mrs. + last name" is usually used to address a married woman with the last name being that of her husband. "Miss" is the way of addressing an unmarried woman, used alone or with last name. For woman who are reluctant to reveal their marital status, there is the prefix "Ms." And those who insist on being addressed like this, may "appear to be more achievement-oriented, socially assertive, and dynamic, but lack interpersonal warmth". But as Brown and Ford point out, the form "Mr. / Mrs./Miss+ last name" is more likely used between those who are unfamiliar with each other, or used non-reciprocally by those who are low in power.

"'Sir' and 'Madam' are generally used alone. 'Sir' has long been perceived as a term of respect, used by a speaker who acknowledges the seniority of social or professional rank of the person being addressed", for example, used by a pupil to his male master, a soldier to his officer, or a waiter to his male customer. "Madam" was once a title of great respect for a woman of high social rank. Now, its social value has decreased and become a common term of respect to address known or unknown females.

#### **3.2. Lack of Generally-accepted Chinese Social Title**

In Chinese, the main social titles are Tongzhi, Shifu, Xiansheng, Xiaojie etc and their usages are diversified and flexible. These social titles can be used alone or with the surname, or full name and even with another title. Take Tongzhi for example, comrade( title alone), Weiguo comrade(name + title), comrade Wang(surname and title), Wang Weiguo comrade( full name and title), director comrade( two titles). Many Chinese social titles have no English equivalents. For example, if Shifu is translated into "master" it carries the idea of a master servant relationship, or a relationship that does not have in present-day usage. The problem is further complicated by the fact that the term is now widely used as a general form of address for people in various occupations. Unlike "Mr." "Sir", "Mrs." there is no Generally-accepted social title for the Chinese. Tongzhi, the first social title established after the founding of the people's Republic of China, reflected the egalitarian ideals of the new order and emphasized the

solidarity relationship among Chinese people as a whole, thus became popular nationwide. During the Cultural Revolution when the virtue of working people was being emphasized, Shifu take the place of Tongzhi and spread. Recently, however, both social titles witness declining. Another social title, Xiansheng, used to address a person of higher social or academic position before 1949, has revived. However, some people are reluctant to accept it for it was once associated with capitalist class. In China, it is hard to address a person without knowing his profession, social position and even his family background. It is even the case when addressing a stranger. Many people, especially the young, are reluctant to use or accept the term Tongzhi and Shifu considering that it is already out of fashion. Similarly, Xiansheng, Xiaojie etc. are alien to people in the rural areas where kin terms, like Daye, Dajie, function as social titles.

### **3.3. The Favor of Official Title in China**

In Chinese, almost all official and administrative as well as military titles can be used as address forms. The Chinese prefer to use official titles to address people, especially those superior to themselves in social status, or official rank. Official titles are generally assumed to show respect and admiration for the addressee, who are also ready to be addressed this way. Thus harmonious atmosphere is realized and successful communication is achieved. Official titles can be used alone or prefixed by surname or occasionally full name, such as Mayor, Mayor Huang, Mayor Huang Zhiguo (in formal occasions). The Chinese are so indulged in being addressed this way that we can hear official titles in all situations as well as governmental offices. There is an interesting phenomenon that the prefix “deputy” is often omitted even if the addressee is not in the chief position. Recently, a new usage of official titles, the surname + short form of official titles, such as Huang Ju, Li Ke, is gaining increasing popularity. This new trend reflects that solidarity is gradually getting the upper hand in interpersonal relationship.

### **3.4. A Variety of Chinese Professional Titles**

In Chinese, titles suggesting one’s profession can also function as address forms. Professional titles are well acknowledged and accepted when the professions enjoy a high social prestige. Terms like Teacher, doctor, Lawyer, Engineer, Journalist, Policeman are among the frequently—used profession titles. The usage of professional title allows variation. For example, they can be used alone or with the surname or other titles. Police, nurse can be addressed Comrade police and Miss nurse respectively. But if the job of the addressee suggests a low grade or is of a physical nature, such as that of a cleaner, a door keeper, or a waiter, there are terms which are often used to show contempt. Another way of addressing these people is euphemism which functions to reduce the unpleasantness, for example, sanitary engineer takes the place of janitor; Automobile engineers refer to mechanics. Thus the AF sounds more elegant and decent and politeness and harmony is achieved.

### **3.5. The Simplicity of English Official and Professional Title**

One seldom hears English speakers addressing others as Bureau Director Smith, Manager Jackson, and Principle Morris. In English, only a few occupations would be used: Doctor is common for those who have qualified in the medical profession, and Judge for those authorized to try cases in law court, Professor for those who have made academic achievement. However, there are very few others. There are also few official titles in America, except for president, minister and etc. Americans tend to regard titles as trivial unless they give a clear idea of what kind of work a person does, what his responsibilities are[6]. Chinese people always seem expected to let you know what they are, for example, “senior engineer”—a title that says nothing about what a person’s functions are. For Americans it’s what you actually do that counts, not where you fit on organizational chart. Your professional role defines you. The American treat titles like “vice president for marketing” and “sales manager” as meaningful. Nonetheless they will not use them to address a person, even reduced to “manager” or “vice president”.

## 4. Conclusion

In this paper, the attempt was made to investigate the impact of social context as well as intimacy and distance on the choice of forms of address in the cultures of America and China. As a result, the analysis shows that power derives from higher or lower social status, and solidarity comes from intimacy. In America, obviously, the choice of the Title + LN and FN refers to the relationship of the social status and power between interlocutors. American address a stranger or unacquainted by using the form of TLN and are expected to receive the same in return. In contrast, people who are acquainted call each other by their FN. In Chinese language, second singular pronouns, indicating *nin* and *ni*, has been taught and used for addressing people with different age and social position. Similarly, LN + *xiansheng* (Mr. LN), LN + *nushi*, LN + *taitai* (Mrs.), and LN + *xiaojie* (Miss) are the appropriate forms of address in regard to respectful forms. This cross-cultural study described above demonstrates that speech communities manifest different styles of interaction at the sociolinguistic and pragmatic level regarding to the forms of address. The perspective of using the appropriate forms of addresses is not vague and difficult to grasp for language learners because all languages make use of some kinds of address forms. However, the analysis of this paper tends to raise the awareness of the background of target languages and to access it authentically in order to develop communicative competence in the target language.

To sum up, the forms of address are in relation to a systematic, variable and social phenomenon. The choice of linguistic forms is determined by the formality of the context and the relationship between interlocutors in a speech event. Hence, the concepts of how the form of address chosen should be taken into consideration in the preparation and presentation of teaching materials in foreign-language situation.

## Abbreviation

AFs: address forms

PP: politeness principle

FN: first name

TLN: last name

FTA: face threatening act

## References

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