

## Terms of Address Usage: the Case of Iranian Spouses

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### Abstract

*The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of social context on the different usage of address terms (first name "FN", pet name "PN", and respect name "RN") according to distinctive contexts between spouses (1. together alone, 2. in the presence of child(ren), and 3. in the presence of husband/wife's parents). Data were collected through interview and a questionnaire. 200 participants were selected according to researcher's criteria: being married and having child(ren). Participants were divided into three different groups according to their age, and into three groups according to their educational level. The results show women and men use PN more when alone. And they use RN more than FN in the third situation. In address terms usage there was no difference between men regarding their educational degree and age differences. Considering women's educational degree there was no difference in usage of PN, FN, and RN. But regarding age differences, there was difference: the first and second age groups prefer to use FN more than RN in order to show more affection, while the third age group is very likely to use more RN in order to show their respect towards their husbands. The findings of the study, therefore, support the view that language is sensitive to its social context. As a result, simply presenting the learners with linguistic input would not guarantee that they would be able to express themselves appropriately in different situations; they should be taught when to say what to whom and how.*

**Keywords:** Address terms; Spouses; Influence of context, age, and education in the usage of language; Iranian people

### 1. Introduction

For a long time, linguists were concerned with sentences in isolation, i.e. with the forms and structure of languages. However, since the beginning of the 1970s, they become aware of the importance of context in the interpretation of sentences. Specially, sociolinguists have become interested in explaining why people speak differently in different contexts. Holmes (1992:1) has mentioned that "examining the way people use language in different social contexts provides a wealth of information about the way language works, as well as about the social relationships in a community." As people used different styles in different social contexts, sociolinguists began to conduct researches in order to find the relationship between the context and language used in that context. Not only social characteristics of the speakers but also the social context in which the speaker finds her/himself will affect language use. Levinson (1983:54) claims that "the single most obvious way in which the relationship between language and context is reflected in the structure of languages themselves is through the phenomenon of deixis." Among different categories of deixis, social deixis which includes terms of address and honorifics is directly related to this study.

### 2. Literature Review

Terms of address are words and phrases used for addressing. Different definitions have been provided by researches. Oyetade (1995) defines address terms as words or expressions used in interactive, dyadic and face-to-face situations to designate the person being talked to. In addition, Keshavarz (2001) considers that terms of address are linguistic forms that are used in addressing others to attract their attention or for referring to them in the course of a conversation. They are words or linguistic expressions that speakers use to appeal directly to their addressees (Taavitsainen and Jucker, 2003). And finally, Yule (2006) asserts that address term is a word or phrase for the person being talked to or written to. To be brief, terms of address are words or expressions used to indicate certain relations between people, or to show the difference in identity, position and social status. As a result, address terms as well as other language practices can mirror the thoughts and attitudes that speakers wish or wish not to express. People use terms of address to address each other in almost all occasions. There are three reasons for using address terms. First, they are used to attract people's attention, to remind the hearer one's professional status or the relationship between the speaker and the hearer. Second, they are used to show politeness and the difference in social class and the degree of respect in certain occasions. Third, they are used to reflect social information about identity, gender, age, status and the complex social relationships of interlocutors in a speech community (Yang, 2010). Therefore, address system is usually used to show the possession of formal and informal manners and consideration for other people.

In other words, by employing a certain address term, speaker wants to express her/his feeling of respect, solidarity, intimacy, and familiarity to the other people. Brown and Yule (1989:54) argue that "in different social contexts different terms of address will be used." For example the terms of address used by a social inferior to a social superior may be different from those between peers (Lyons, 1997). People can find many forms of address term used. In relaxed situation, someone often calls a friend with his nickname, such as Tom for Tommy or Mickey for Michael. However, in other formal situation, people tend to address someone else by their titles like Mr., Mrs., Professor and other names which refer to the profession they have. Besides, the addresses of My Love, My Dear, or title one are usually used to show the intimate relation between the addresser and addressee. According to Fasold (1990) there are two main kinds of address forms: a. using the first name, and b. using the title and last name. However, Fang and Heng (1983) points out other possible options such as use of nickname, pet name, milk name and so on.

In Persian different forms of address terms can be used. They include: a. using the first name e.g. Ali, Leila, etc., b. using the respect names or title terms (generic-honorific, religious, and occupational bound titles), c. using the kinship terms, and d. using pet names and terms of intimacy. Generic-honorific titles include *آقا* /*agha*/ (Mr.) and *خانم* /*khanom*/ (Mrs., Miss, Ms.). These titles may precede first name, last name or first-last name or may follow first name. Regarding religious address terms, Persian has different forms. One way of religious addressing refers to hierarchical ranking of Shia clergymen such as *آیت الله* /*Ayatollah*/ which is used before the full formal name. Some other religious address terms like *خواهر* /*khahar*/ (sister) and *برادر* /*bradar* / (brother) are used to address each other in the society, especially when they are not relatives. According to Keshavarz (1988), their frequent use signifies Islamic post-revolutionary attitude and ideology of their users marking solidarity between them. Another way of religious addressing refers to pilgrims of three holy shrines: Mecca, Karbala, and Mashhad. A person who has been to those holy places is referred to as *حاجی* /*hajji*/ or *حاج* /*haj*/ for men and *آقا* /*hajagha*/ for men and *خانم* /*hajiehkhanom*/ for women, *کربلایی* /*karbalaii*/ and *مشهدی* /*mashhadi*/ for men. Another type of respect name is occupational bound terms that are very common in Persian.

These titles may be classed as vocational such as *دکتر* /*doctor*/ (doctor), *استاد* /*ostad*/ (master) or as ranks in the military or police for example, *امیر* /*Amir*/ (general), and *سرباز* /*sarbaz*/ (private). However, these titles can stand alone or in combination with generic-honorific titles ( *خانم دکتر* /*khanom doctor*/), last names ( *دکتر امیری* /*Doctor Amiri*, *سردار براتی* /*Sardar Barati*) or both of them ( *آقای دکتر امیری* /*aghaye doctor Amiri*). They can also be combined with generic-honorific titles and first-last names ( *آقای مهندس محمد سلامی* /*aghayemohandes Mohamad Salami*). Kinship terms, another kind of Persian address terms, are used to refer to family members and other relatives. Moreover, one may use such terms to address non-relatives but familiar persons in order to show intimacy or respect. Pet names or terms of intimacy, in addition, are used to show affection and friendliness among the members of a group, friends, etc. Another way of addressing intimate partner is to call them by their abbreviated first name such as /*Mamad*/ used for Mohammad. The last common way of addressing in situations where there is a very intimate relationship between the interlocutors is using pet names like *عزیزم* /*azizam*/ (My dear) (Khani & Yousefi, 2010).

Address terms have not only been largely examined in several socio-cultural settings (e.g. Goodenough, 1965; Fang & Heng, 1983; Fitch, 1991; Aceto, 2002), following the most frequently mentioned study by Brown and Gilman's (1960) work, but also been studied in social institutions and practices such as politics (Jaworski & Galasinski, 2000; Fetzer & Bull, 2004), and religion (Sequeira, 1993; Dzameshie, 1997; Wharry, 2003). Together with Brown and Gilman's work, these studies have highlighted the power and solidarity as affecting factor in use of address terms. Address forms have been studied in different languages (see, for example, Bates and Benigni 1975; Brown and Gilman 1960; Brown and Ford 1961; Chandrasekhar 1970; Cintra 1972; Paulston 1976; Ostor 1982; Philipsen and Huspeck 1985; Braun 1988; Mühlhäusler and Harre 1990; Oyetade 1995; Martiny 1996). However, most of the studies have been concerned with variation in the address forms according to social characteristics of the language users and the relationship between speaker and hearer. Brown and Levinson (1979, cited in Wardhaugh 1933:322-333) mentioned that "T/V usage is tied primarily to kinds of social relationship." It is also maintained that address forms are the best place to look at the close bond between language and society (Shih, 1986). Therefore, it is hypothesized here that use of address terms depend largely on social context. The significance of this study, as a result, is that it deals with the role of social context in the choice of address terms. Since address terms can show the attitude of the speaker towards the listener, this paper focuses on the usage of first name (FN), pet name (PN), and respect name (RN) as address forms by Iranian spouses in addressing each other in three different contexts. In this article, the term "terms of address" only refers to vocatives, i.e. terms of direct address to call persons (Chao 1956:217), such as names, like Mary, titles with or without a name, like Sir William and Doctor, or any word used to address a person, like hey and man. Therefore, the study wants to answer the following research questions:

1. Does the formality of context of the situation affect the choice of address terms by Iranian spouses?
2. Is there any difference between Iranian females and males regarding their choice of address terms in different situations?
3. Is there any relationship between people's educational degree and age differences and the use of terms of address?

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Participants**

The participants in this study were 200 Persian speakers (100 female, 100 male) living in different districts of Isfahan, Iran. A purposive method of sampling was used for this study; this method involved looking specifically for candidates who met the conditions of the researcher, i.e. being married and having child(ren). On the basis of the information elicited in the first part of the questionnaire discussed below, the participants were divided into three groups according to their age (20-35, 36-54, and 55 and over). They also were divided into three groups according to their educational degree: primary school education (PSE), secondary school education (SSE) and post-secondary school education (PSSE).

#### **3.2 Instruments**

The data for this study were collected by means of interview and a questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. Part one aimed at eliciting personal information about the participants to make the task of categorization possible, as illustrated above. In part two, items were included that asked the participants to choose the address forms they usually use for interaction with their spouses in the situations described. The situations were formed around the following: how a woman/man would address her/his husband/wife (1) **when together alone** (2) **when in the presence of children**, and (3) **when in the presence of husband/wife's parents**.

#### **3.3 Procedure**

The researcher and her assistants were approached the participants in a friendly manner and try to gain their cooperation and assistance. They also explained the goals of the research to the participants and assured them that the personal information they provide in the first part of the questionnaire will not be disclosed. In order to emphasize this point, the participants were asked not to write their names on the questionnaire. Therefore, they felt comfortable in responding to the questions. After filling in the questionnaire, each participant was interviewed individually in order to seek her/his attitude towards use of different address terms.

### **4. Results and Discussion**

#### **4.1 Interview Results**

The subjects were encouraged to express their attitudes towards address term usage through interview sessions. The results revealed that Iranian men use PT to show their intimacy and less power over their spouses (90%). While when they use the FN of their wives they want to show their intimacy as well as their power over them (86%). They also announced that by using RN, they are eager to show there is a reciprocal respect relationship between them and their spouses (83%). On the other hand, the result of the interview sessions with women revealed that when Iranian women use their spouses' PN they like to show their intimacy as well as their affection (95%). By using the FN of their husbands, women mean to demonstrate their affection and their respect (90%). And when women use RN they like to show their respect and honor. They do not believe that by using RN they mean their husbands have power over them (89%).

#### **4.2 Questionnaire Results**

##### **4.2.1 Item 1. The Use of FN**

In item 1 of the questionnaire, the subjects were asked in which of the three situations (when alone, in the presence of child(ren), and in the presence of parents-in-law), they normally use FN when addressing their spouses. Comparison of the total percentage of the use of FN in these three situations showed that Iranian men and women use FN in these three situations. For men, the least amount of FN usage is related to the first situation (5.8%), and the most amount of FN usage is related to the second situation (51.65%) (see Figure 1). In the case of Iranian women, the least amount of FN usage is related to the first situation (2.52%) and the most amount of this address term usage is related to the second situation (54.43%) (see Figure 1). Therefore the formality of the context may affect use of FN for Iranian women and men. In using FN in these three situations, there was no significance difference between men regarding their educational degree and their age. On the other hand, in the case of women regarding their educational degree, there was no significance difference between them in use of FN. However, regarding their age group a significance difference was seen. Women in the third group (>55) use FN less than the other two age groups in the presence of children (29.28%) and parents-in-law (12.65%).

#### **4.2.2 Item 2. The Use of PN**

In item 2 of the questionnaire, the subjects were asked in which of the three situations (when alone, in the presence of child(ren), and in the presence of parents-in-law), they normally use PN when addressing their spouses. Comparison of the total percentage of PN usage in these three situations revealed that both Iranian men and women use PN just in the first situation (94.2%, 97.48% respectively) and in the other two situations, they do not use PN (see Figure 2). As a result, formality of the context may affect use of address terms by Iranian spouses. In less formal situations, they prefer to use PN. Regarding educational degree and age there was no significance difference between men as well as no significance difference between women. However, women use PN more than men in the first situation.

#### **4.2.3 Item 3. The Use of RN**

In item 3 of the questionnaire, the subjects were asked in which of the three situations (when alone, in the presence of child(ren), and in the presence of parents-in-law), they normally use RN when addressing their spouses. Both women and men never use RN in the first situation. The total percentages of men use of RN in the second and third situations are 48.35% and 53.74% respectively. However, considering educational degree and age differences, there was no significance difference between men in use of RN. The total percentages of women use of RN in the second and third situations are 45.56% and 53.03% respectively (see Figure 3). Although regarding women's educational degree, there was no significance difference between them in use of RN, considering the age differences a significance difference was seen. Women in the third group (>55) use RN more than the other two age groups in the second (70.72%) and third situations (82.35%).

### **5. Conclusion**

For a long time, linguists were only concerned with the forms and structure of language apart from its social context. This was obviously the case with structural linguistics. Even when Chomsky revolutionized the field of linguistics in the mid-1950s and early 1960s, his theory did not go beyond linguistic forms. He was preoccupied with the notions of grammatical competence, i.e. the ability to produce well-formed sentences and to differentiate between grammatical and ungrammatical sentences. Therefore, American structuralists and transformationalists alike concentrated massively on linguistic forms isolated from context. As a reaction to such inadequacies of linguistic theories, some socio-linguists led by Dell Hymes (1966) proposed the notion of communicative competence, as opposed to grammatical competence, which enables us to convey and interpret messages and to negotiate meanings interpersonally within specific social contexts.

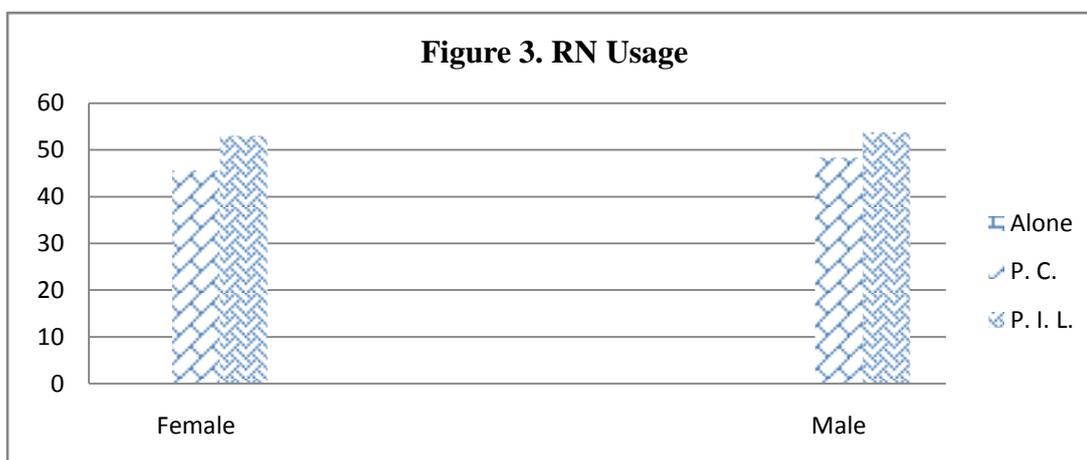
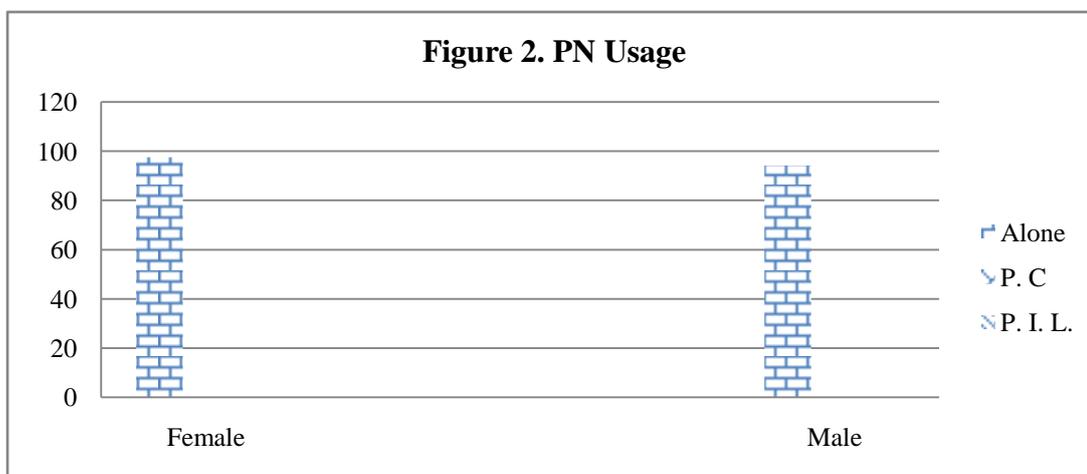
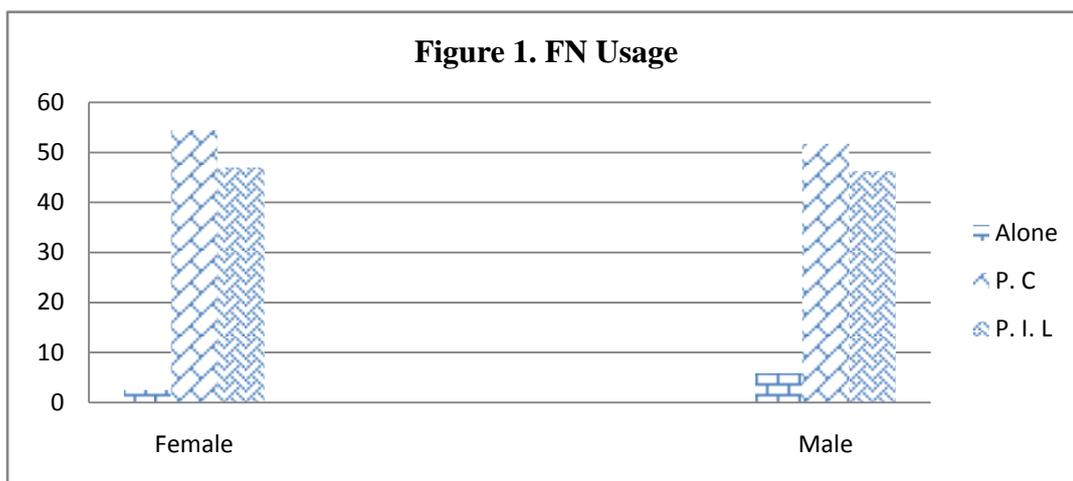
This study was an aim to seek the usage of address terms by Iranian spouses in three different situations, i.e. when alone, in the presence of child(ren), and in the presence of parents-in-law. The results revealed that Iranian men and women use PT when they are alone with their spouses and they never use PN in the two other situations. According to the results of the interview sessions with men, they use PN in order to show their intimacy towards their wives. Iranian males prefer to use FN and RN in the two other situations, i.e. in the presence of child(ren), and in the presence of parents-in-law. As a result, in using PN, FN, and RN there was no significance difference between men regarding their educational degree and age differences. In the case of Iranian female, they prefer to use PN when they are alone with their husbands. As they have expressed in the interview sessions, they want to show their intimacy and affection toward their spouses. The case of using PN and the attitude behind this usage is the same for Iranian females and males. And therefore, there is no difference between women and men in PN usage.

In the second situation, women prefer to use FN and RN; maybe to teach their child(ren) indirectly that intimacy as well as respect are two important factors between the spouses. Regarding educational degree there was no difference in usage of these two aforementioned address terms. But regarding age differences, there was difference in the usage of these address terms. The first and second age groups prefer to use FN more than RN in order to show more affection, while the third age group is very likely to use more RN in order to show their respect and honor towards their husbands. This fact may imply the traditional behavior of Iranian ancestors. In ancient days man was the ruler of the house and his wife should obey him. Showing too much respect and honor towards husbands, especially in situations where there are other people, may be the result of such training.

As a whole, we can see that the formality of the context can affect the choice of address terms by Iranian spouses. In less formal situations they use PN and in more formal situations they use FN and RN. The findings of the present study support the view that language is sensitive to its social context. As Montgomery (1993: 101) asserts, any given instance of language is inextricably bound up with its context of situation. Also the results had shown that there is difference between Iranian females and males regarding their choice of address terms. Although for use of PN there is no difference between them, for FN and RN usage there is difference. Men prefer to use FN more than RN not only to show intimacy but also to show their power over their wives.

But women use FN and RN with no significance difference to show intimacy as well as respect. The results also revealed that for Iranian males there is no significance difference regarding their educational degree and age differences in using of address terms. While for women there is difference in use of address terms regarding their age differences. Older women want to show more respect towards their husbands. Iranian females are more affectionate than Iranian males and they show this affection through the use of address terms. While Iranian males consider themselves as more powerful than women and therefore, they show this attitude in their address terms usage.

In second-language learning and teaching, too, it is essential to realize that mastery of sounds, words, and rules of grammar of the target language is not sufficient. Students also need to be taught the sociolinguistic rules, i.e. rules of appropriateness, not just rules of grammatical accuracy. As Cook (1990: 11) points out: “the language learner needs to be able to handle language which is not idealized, rather language in use”. Simply presenting the learner with linguistic input would not guarantee that he would be able to express himself appropriately in different situations; he should be taught when to say what to whom and how.



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