



## The Role of Gender and Age in the Selection of Address Terms in English

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### Abstract

For many years, the field of linguistics concentrated on the structure and form of language, ignoring the influence of social circumstances and language background. The current study's main objectives are to determine the effects of age and gender on the choice of address terms in English Department classes at Panjshir Higher Education Institute. The hypothesis is that variation in the term of address is related not only gender of the interlocutors but also to their age. The mixed methods have been applied in organizing to study how addressers use personal pronouns regarding the gender and age of their interlocutor. For this study, thirty university students, comprising 15 males and 15 females, participated and were native-speaker of the Dari language. In this process, all of them were asked to fill out a posed questionnaire. The results showed that both men and women use address forms of formality (Soma) more frequently in addressing older people from both genders. In conclusion, age is more significant than gender in determining the pronoun in the address system of Dari.

**Keywords:** Address terms, Age, Dari Language System, Gender.

## Introduction

For decades, linguistics focused on the structure and form of language separate from its social background and social factors efficacy the language. This was the problem with structural linguistics. Even when Chomsky's idea emerged in the field of linguistics in the mid-1950s and early 1960s, his theory did not go over linguistic structure. He was involved with the concept of grammatical competence, that is, the ability to produce well-shaped sentences and to distinguish between ungrammatical and grammatical sentences. Therefore, in the United States of America, formalists' and reformists' lists similarly focused strongly on linguistic forms apart from context. They repeat that the aim of linguistics study should be idealized, decontextualized sentences. However, it is not sufficient only to have grammatical competency in one's original language. One should also understand how language is used in the community. Since, the early 1970s, linguists have become more and more aware of the importance of background in the rendering of sentences. In

proper socio-linguistics have become concerned with explaining why we speak differently in various social contexts. As Holmes (1992) expressed "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 community." We use different forms in different social contexts; therefore, sociolinguistics is interested in the connection between language and the place where it is used. Context in language use is very important, for social behavior, and linguistics not merely has to be suitable to everyone and his socio-economic background, but it also needs to be appropriate for special times and situations. On the other hand, language differs not just regarding to social features of the speakers but also regarding to social context in which they find themselves. Levinson (1983) states that "the single most obvious way in which the relationship between language and context has reverberated in the form of a Language is through the event of daxies". Among the categories of Daxies that depend on this investigation is social Daxies, which refers to the social role played by everyone in a speech event. Social Daxies involved forms of address and honorifics.

Forms of address are linguistic terms that are used in addressing others to attract their attention or for referring to them in the course of conversation. Address terms as Murphy (1988) has gracefully put it, are socially driven events. In other speech, linguistics structures that are used to address others reflect the complicated social relations of persons in the speech community (Paulston, 1976; Trudgill, 1983; & Chaika, 1982). It is also retained that the best position to look for answers between language and community in the grammar of a language is in the pronoun and terms of address. Therefore, address terms have been a big interest to social psychology, anthropology, and socio-linguistics because these terms can display the relationship between language and society. Brown and Yule (1989) discuss that "in different social contexts different terms of address will be used." Consider for instance the distribution of the tu/vous pronouns in French as cited in (Brown and Gliman, 1960). As Lyos (1977) mentioned the form of address used by social lower to social upper may be different from those between counterparts, as in vocative terms like: "sir" or "doctor" or "My lord" (in the courtroom). In Persian, as in various languages (e.g. French, Italian, Spanish, German, and Russian), the speaker has to make a selection between terms of you (1) the distinct you (2), and the familiar you. The distinct 'you' is used when an asymmetrical connection exists between the couple in the speech act, that is, when the address is in a superior social place or when the speaker does not have a close individual relationship with the addressee. The familiar you on otherwise is used intimate connection exists between the speaker and the spoken to, or when the addressee is in the lower position. Wardhaugh (2006) also mentioned

that varieties of social agents usually manage our elects of forms, among these social agents are specific times, the social status or degree of the other, sex, age, family connection, occupational hierarchy interactional status, such as doctor-patient relationship or priest-penitent, race and degree of intimacy. Zhang (2002) emphasizes the importance of address forms and specifies that these forms play a significant role in carrying out the cultural message, particularly about the status of communicators and the power relations between them.

The differential you in Persian /shomâ/ and the familiar you are / to/. Terms of address in various languages have been studied. Unfortunately, there is no such study in this field publicly in Afghanistan, especially at the English Department of Panjshir Higher Education Institute. This study aims to investigate the sociolinguistic norms of address in Dari. It will be clear on the rule and pattern of address that people use in their information exchange process with others in using intimate or formal pronouns like T (To) and (shomâ) V regarding the gender and age of addressees. The significance of this study lies in the fact that deals basically with the role of social factors and the choice of address terms; by understanding addresses, communicators will be able how to use appropriate address terms in the Dari context of Afghanistan.

## Material and Method

In the present research mixed methods have been applied in organizing to study how addressers use personal pronouns regarding the gender and age of their interlocutor. The participants of this study were 30 Dari native-speaker students including 15 males and 15 females who were students in English department at Panjshir Higher Education Institute. The data for this research was collected using a questionnaire. After completion, the questionnaires were collected, studied, and categorized and the numbers percentage of T (to) and V (shomâ) cases were counted regarding different genders and ages. Finally, the numbers of T and V in each case were calculated.

## Results and

Table 1. Same Gender

Same Gender		
Male to Male correlation		
Age	T	V

Elder	28	62
Same Age	41	19
Younger	51	24

**Table 1.** displays male-to-male correlation in terms of using the address terms T and V (Tu: and Shomâ: vous).

There were generally 30 items in the questionnaire 15 of them belonged to males and 15 to females. Out of 15 items, 6 belonged to elder people than the participants, 4 belonged to people who had the same age as the participants, and 5 belonged to people who were younger than the participants. As the table shows, most male students at English department of Panjshir Higher Education Institute, use V for the people who are elder than them when addressing. Thus, 69% of the male participants use the term V (Shomâ :) for males who are elder than them. On the other hand, 31% of them use T (Tu ;). This includes family members, classmates, colleagues, and relatives. The use of V here indicates respect from the person who addresses the addressee.

As the table suggests, most male students in English department use T (Tu ;) when they address male people of their age. According to the statistics, 68% of the male participants use the term T for male addressees of their age. However, 32% of them use V (Shomâ :). This includes family members, classmates, colleagues, and friends. The use of T here shows sincerity, friendliness, and closeness. Also as majority of male students often use T for the people who are younger than them when addressing. So, 68% of the participants address younger people than themselves by using T. Though, 32% of them use V (Shomâ :). This also includes family members, classmates, relatives and colleagues. The use of T for people younger than the speaker indicates superiority. The person who addresses is superior to the addressee.

Table 2. Same Gender

Same Gender		
Female to Female Correlation		
Age	T	V

Older	31	59
Same Age	45	15
Younger	48	27

**Table 2.** defines the correlation between females to females in terms of using T and V while addressing. As the table shows, a large number of female students at Panjshir Institute of Higher Education often use V for female people who are elder than them. In other words, 65.5 % of the female participants use V (Shoma:) for females who are older than them. Yet, 34.5% of them use T (Tu:). This includes family members, colleagues, classmates, and relatives. The use of V here indicates respect and formality.

On the other hand, the majority of the female students at Panjshir Institute of Higher Education frequently use T for people who are their age when addressing. That is, 75% of the female participants address females of their age by using T (Tu :). Conversely, 25% of them use V (Shomâ :) for females of their age. This use of T includes family members, classmates, friends, and colleagues. Also, this use indicates closeness, friendliness, and sincerity. Furthermore, table 2. indicates that female students at Panjshir Institute of Higher Education often use T for people who are younger than them when addressing. To illustrate, 64% of the female participants use T (Tu :) when addressing people younger than them. Nonetheless, 36% use V (Shomâ :). It includes family members, classmates, colleagues, and relatives. It indicates superiority and oldness.

Table 3. Different Gender

Different Gender		
Male to Female Correlation		
Age	T	V
Elder	23	67
Same Age	27	33
Younger	43	32

**Table 3.** shows the male-to-female correlation in terms of addressing the terms T and V at Panjshir Institute of Higher Education.

As the table suggests, most male students in English department of Panjshir Institute of Higher Education use the address term V (Shomâ) for females who are

older than them. To clarify, 74.4% of the male participants address elder females than them by using V (Shomâ:). The remaining 25.6% of the male participants address older females by T. This includes family members, classmates, colleagues, and relatives. The use of V here shows formality and respect. Alternatively, more than half of the male students use V (Shomâ :) for females who are their age. That is, 55% of the male participants use the address term V (Shomâ :) when they address females of their age. 45% of them addressed females of their age T. This also includes family members, classmates, colleagues, and relatives. However, more than half of the participants use T (Tu :) for females who are younger than them. To exemplify, 57% of the male participants called females younger than them by T. Though, 43% of them called younger females V.

Table 4. Different Gender

Different Gender		
Female to Male Correlation		
Age	T	V
Elder	17	73
Same Age	36	24
Younger	40	35

**Table 4.** describes to male correlation in terms of addressing the terms T and V at Panjshir Institute of Higher Education. The table suggests that a great number of female participants 73/90 used the address term V for males who are older than them. To illustrate, 81% of the female participants use the address term V (Shomâ :) when they address older males. Conversely, 19% address older males using T. This also includes family members, classmates, colleagues, and relatives. The use of V by female participants to address males shows immense respect and formality.

Conversely, more than half of the female participants used the address term T for males their age. To elucidate, 60% of the female participants use the term T (Tu:) when they address males of their age. On the other hand, 40% of them use the term V (Shoma:) when they address males of their age. This includes family members, classmates, colleagues, and relatives. Likewise, the majority of the female participants used the term T for males who were younger than them. To clarify, 53%

of the female participants use the term T (Tu :) when they address males younger than them. Oppositely, 47% of them use V (Shomâ :) when they address males younger than them. This also includes family members, classmates, colleagues, and relatives.

## Discussions

The results of this study confirmed the point of view that language is sensitive to social and extra-linguistic variables such as social class, education, gender, age, etc. As Montgomery (1993) expressed any given instance of language is inextricably limited by its sociolinguistic condition. This study can somewhat support the claims made (Keshavarz, 1988) that in the interaction with members of the opposite gender in the Iranian culture people tend to be politer and deferential that this view can be observed about women addressing men to the same extent, and of course not absolutely.

These proper results coordinated with the principle that Brown and Gilman (1960) stated regarding the existence of vertical sociolinguistic parameters that confirm power and horizontal parameters that claim solidarity through the choice of pronouns. The use of the V reflects that the majority of the people actively confirm a proper status of respect elderly by using a special form of pronouns when speaking with them. On the other side of the direction, we observed that the pronominal system establishes the connection of power over younger people, for instance, younger and younger workers; in this count the data reported the favor use of T in both men and women. This fact can be interpreted as a perception of the semantic of T as a means to exercise the upper hand and superiority over younger addressee and the semantic of V/soma/ as a way to prove the upper hand. This fact agreed with Brown and Gilman's proposal (1960) which asserted that the power of semantics is not reflective and is reflected in the selection of pronouns address. In the same way, horizontal sociolinguistic parameters of solidarity were shown by the participants, when expressing a preference for T at the time of addressing people of the same age and the same gender. This guides us to think about the present status of the Afghanistan speech community displayed T and V with extended semantics (Uber,1985) that can be considered as an indication that different generations of the Afghanistan people are going through a trend of change in the criteria regarding the use of pronouns in addressing system of Dari.

## Conclusion

The findings of the data analyses in this study include that the age and gender of the addressee, as the sociolinguistic variables, have significant roles as defining



variables that impact the choice and use of pronouns of address in Panjshir Higher Education Institute, as a general conclusion it can be proof from this investigation in the Dari speakers culture age, as a sociolinguistic variable have more important than the gender. As discussed before, results showed that the women and men who chose and used a formal form of address /soma/ in addressing elder people of the same gender showed the superiority of age over the gender of the addressees. The other section of the study results also displayed that men address elder women with the formal address form /soma/ while women use this formal pronoun to exchange information with elder males of the same age. The demands for employing pronouns in the Dari addressing system are shifting as different generations of Afghans encounter this speech pattern. In addition, the researchers hope that it will motivate other researchers to do more studies on address terms and types, especially on other sociolinguistic factors like social class, education, and religion.

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### **Data Availability Statement:**

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

### **Conflicts of Interest**

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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