

Varieties of Address Forms in Contemporary Hungarian Usage

Theses of Doctoral Dissertation

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1. The theme and the objectives of the dissertation

In the relational communication necessarily accompanying content communication, the linguistic representation of the communicative partner is the means that indicates the relationship between the communicative partners most explicitly and most controllably by the speaker. Therefore, the study of the use of elements capable of marking the communicative partner is an important task of sociolinguistics, since it is here that the social role of language can be best demonstrated. The variety of address forms corresponds to the diversity of social relationships; the system of linguistic elements used for addressing people is also a projection of the internal hierarchy and value systems of a given society at a given point in time.

In my dissertation, I only analyze linguistic elements referring to the communicative partner as addressing; utterances used for calling attention, initiating and maintaining contact, but not directly marking the partner (e.g. *Elnézést! Figyusz! Hé!*, approximately: *Excuse me! Yo! Hey!*) are not examined.

There are several linguistic possibilities in the Hungarian language for marking the communicative partner: pronouns of various forms referring to the second person, personal suffixes of verbs and personal markers of nominal words (i.e. nouns, infinitives, adjectives, participles, numerals and pronouns) put in agreement with the above, various names, titles, ranks, as well as nouns referring to a profession or specific role.

The aim of the dissertation is, on the one hand, to survey the methods and results of the examination of linguistic elements referring to the communicative partner and to present their varieties and possible types, and, on the other hand, by building on the results of empirical surveys, to record the current state of the language from a sociolinguistic perspective, in terms of the sphere of use, stylistic value, and judgment of the various ways of addressing. I intend, therefore, to provide a socially valid description of the contemporary status of the various forms used for addressing the communicative partner, i.e. to present the system of various linguistic forms corresponding to the socially typifiable relations and situations, with a view to the multitude of possible determinants.

2. Research methods

The topic of linguistic elements used for addressing and referring to the communicative partner is basically approached within the theoretical framework of sociolinguistics, assuming that the variety of forms is governed by systematic rules corresponding to the complexity of society.

In addition to the social parameters of the communicative partners, the mode of referring to each other is also greatly dependent on the communicative situation, the mode of language contact, i.e. its oral or written character. Therefore, in addition to the various types of social relations, I differentiated between spoken (or direct) and written (or indirect) communication, as well as mixed forms.

The choice of forms used primarily depends on the communicative partner and the type of situation, and is a part of the linguistic behavior, and so these parameters have to be taken into consideration when determining the research methods. Since the system of addressing forms is difficult to map and measure, I applied the principle of convergence – namely that specific linguistic data are more valuable if more different methods of collection are used to support them – commonly accepted in sociolinguistics within a research process.

Another reason for combining different methods of data collection was the objective that addressing elements should be investigated in all possible basic forms of communication, since the situations of spoken and written communication, mass communication and the Internet all can be examined using various methods.

The quantitative basis of the research project was created by data collection with questionnaire, in which I primarily examined the addressing forms of oral communication, as well as forms of written contacts. The population examined was Hungarians within the country's present boundaries, since the findings of several microsociolinguistic studies have shown that Hungarian-speaking communities beyond the borders use forms of addressing based on different communicative norms.

The data gathered from the returned questionnaires of 576 respondents was examined using a quota sample using age, gender, type of settlement and level of education.

The data from the questionnaires was supplemented and modulated by sociolinguistic interviews: while the questionnaires generated a fewer number of characteristic data on language usage from a large number of respondents, the interviews with a smaller sample provided essential information useful for describing and explaining these relationships existing in the social consciousness of the population. These active methods were also supplemented by the passive method of participatory observation, since any linguistic phenomenon may be best understood in its own context.

In the questionnaire and the interview, I examined the settings of direct communication thematically, mapping the addressing forms used in situations involving family, school, friendship, work, place of residence and various services, and then, in addition to the thematically differentiated settings, as a transversal aspect, I also considered private, official and public situations as well.

The data on addressing forms used in indirect communication gathered by questionnaires were supplemented primarily by an examination of a written corpus constituting official correspondence, various notices and advertisements.

I examined the relations in electronic and network communication on randomly selected samples with the help of summarizing lists, observing the requirements of representativeness and documenting the addressing forms corresponding to the various relationships.

3. The results of the dissertation

3.1. Types and functions of addressing forms

It may be useful to differentiate between free and bound addressing forms in the Hungarian language as well. The fundamental difference between these types is syntactic: vocative forms of addressing are free, as they may constitute complete, unsegmented utterances, and are independent and not bound into a structure; by contrast, bound forms are elements of a segmented utterance referring to the communicative partner, i.e. syntactically bound occurrences of pronouns and other nominal word elements referring to the second person, as well as verbal conjugation and personal markers used in agreement with them. The grammatical difference between the two types also has an influence on their respective uses: syntactically bound forms are almost indispensable in messages directed at the communicative partner, while syntactically free forms, since they contribute to the message independently, as full sentences, may be omitted more freely.

The dissertation examines the possible functions of addressing forms and calls attention to the fact that they are fundamentally different from other linguistic elements inasmuch that over and above their primary reference they always have a social meaning, a function of referring to position in a system of social relationships. This positioning role may be accompanied by conative, phatic and emotive functions in the free, vocative forms of addressing, and a referential function in syntactically bound forms. By initiating communication and occurring interspersed in its process, the vocative form emphatically calls attention to the nature of the communicative relationship, while bound forms used along with communication provide a continuous indication of the relationship's character.

3.2. Varieties of addressing in different social relationships

The thematic examination of the various settings of direct communication yielded the following results:

- The expression of solidarity, the sense of belonging together, increasingly dominates in addressing forms used within the family. Familiar forms (e.g. using the personal pronoun “te”) have become general within the nuclear family for addressing the grandparents, as well as more distant relatives of same generation, and for younger people also relatives of the previous generation. Formal (non-familiar) forms are primarily used in addressing the parents of the spouse, as well as more distant relatives of older generations. In forms of nominal addressing, the role nouns denoting the nature of family relationship is mainly used with members of the older generations, although in some relationships these have given ground to forms of more general meaning.
- In settings of school and education, the asymmetry of grammatical second and third person forms indicates the hierarchy until the end of secondary school, while in higher education, despite the symmetry of grammatical person use, the differences in pronoun and noun forms used in addressing continues to mark hierarchical relationships.
- Within confidential relationships, we may differentiate between a wide assortment of addressing combined with familiar forms used between friends to indicate equal standing and asymmetric addressing situations because of generational differences.
- As far as the setting of work is concerned, on the basis of the addressing forms used we may identify status-oriented and solidarity-oriented communities. The number of linguistically solidary workplaces encouraging the use of familiar forms and first names is on the increase. The relationships at relatively large workplaces which are built on several levels of hierarchy do not allow the general use of familiar terms. The social factors most affecting the choice of addressing forms in this setting are gender and position. Despite the spread of familiar linguistic relationships, certain situations require the marking of status in communication at work: addressing forms referring to rank and position are primarily used in public situations, in front of outsiders.
- Despite the lack of close relationships in the immediate living environment, communities held together by phatic communication are still created, even in urban settings. These situations are characterized by addressing forms typically used in private relationships; however, the phatic elements may retain their original role, which is the creation of an opportunity for communication, and may totally replace content communication, and so language contact is limited to this sole function. The social factor primarily determining the choice of addressing forms is age or generation.

- The situation of reserved communication in the street is characterized by the use of (familiar) second person forms up to around age 30-35 and of (formal) third person forms, the unmarked nature of the communicative partner, and an avoidance of the use of pronouns and nominal elements among older speakers. In addition to the nature of the situation, the avoidance of addressing forms also has linguistic reasons, because contemporary Hungarian language does not have a pronoun and nominal word addressing form of general meaning that would be regarded as neutral by the whole language community. Apart from neutral situations, however, there are also emotionally loaded situations, in which the need for the unmarkedness of the communicative partner is not present. In such over-familiar or offending utterances a multitude of addressing forms may be used.
- In the setting of services, the communicative partners participate in the interaction through situational roles. In rural communities, however, the relationship of the service provision is not only situational, and therefore, the partners address each other as the customs of the community would otherwise require on the basis of gender and age. In urban communication a lack of reserved addressing forms is perceptible; however, because of the length and nature of the interaction, it is less possible to avoid references to the communicative partner. Addressing forms using jobs, professions and situational roles are common, as are some familiar forms of addressing. The distribution of bound and the free forms of addressing depends on the relative status and roles of the situations.
- In official communication, the use of third person forms is common in status-marked situations, while the use of free forms of addressing is disappearing for various reasons. One of these reasons is that the majority of interpersonal relations are becoming solidarity-oriented; in other words, there is a decreasing significance of the linguistic representation of position and rank in personal relationships. Another reason is that it was in the sphere of official communication that the system of addressing forms has gone through the most profound changes in the 20th century as a result of political changes, and this resulted in uncertainties and doubts in the rules of usage. Some situations, however, demand the use of these forms, and so a process may be observed in our days whereby addressing forms more widely accepted are gradually selected from among varieties previously dividing opinions. These preferred forms usually use surnames and elements of general partner marking.

In some types of indirect communication, the potential group of recipients is uncertain, and therefore, the need for the markedness of the partner is downplayed. Letters of various types, however, emphasize the role of the communicative partner, and thus salutation is a compulsory opening element. Written communication demands a more intensive linguistic

expression of respect for the other, which in confidential salutations is manifested in the use of diminutives/nicknames, extended vocative structures with adjectives, while in official communication also in the more emphatic marking of status and rank than direct communication. In indirect communication, a great number of nouns indicating transactional roles may be used in salutations (e.g. *customer, cardholder, gas-consumer*), thereby avoiding the lack of general salutations.

Electronic mass communication and network communication relies on the addressing elements used in direct and indirect relationships, but it may modify the proportions of use. In electronic communication, addressing forms marking status dominate, and so the absence of neutral, reserved addressing forms is perceptible. With its characteristic communicative situation, this medium contributes to the spread of the formal “ön” as an addressing form, as well as to the selection of value-neutral free forms.

In network communication, initially the linguistic solidarity of the users and a general preference for familiar second person forms was characteristic. The multifariousness of communicative situations, however, has reached network communication, which also requires the maintenance of reserved, distancing contact. General familiar forms are only used in certain types of texts on the Internet, in which the partners communicate without assuming their social parameters (e.g. chatrooms, discussion lists). In these situations, forms of addressing expressing a confidential relationship and emotions are common. In all other relationships established through the network, however, the addressing forms also commonly accepted in other settings prevail. The linguistic effect is that partners in frequent interaction over the network may develop a linguistic solidarity earlier than they would in other channels.

3.3 Combinations of elements referring to the partner as separate channels of communication

Within individual relationships, speakers only use certain types of elements referring to the addressee, or a socially determined combination of those types. The basis of reference to the communicative partner is provided by the use of the grammatical second and third person forms. Addressing forms, however, do not simply constitute a two-tier system, since the use of pronouns, nominal addressing forms, or the lack thereof, provides additional variations and shades of meaning in expressing the relationship to the communicative partner. Familiar and non-familiar forms, along with the pronouns and nominal words typically connected to them, create separate channels of communication usable in different types of relationships.

On the basis of the combination of personal suffixes, pronoun and nominal addressing forms used, we may distinguish the following different varieties in contemporary usage: 1) avoidance of marking the communicative partner; 2) second person + lack of nominal

addressing forms; 3) second person + first name or term of kinship; 4) second person + role noun; 5) third person + lack of pronoun or noun addressing; 6) third person + avoidance of pronouns + role noun or kinship term; 7) third person + avoidance of pronouns + first name; 8) third person + *maga* (formal “you”) + lack of nominal addressing; 9) third person + *maga* + first name; 10) third person + *maga* + surname or role noun; 11) third person + *ön* (more formal “you”) + lack of nominal addressing; 12) third person + *ön* + first name; 13) third person + *ön* + surname or role noun; 14) structures using the auxiliary verb *tetszik* + lack of nominal addressing; 15) structures using the auxiliary verb *tetszik* + first name element; 16) structures using the auxiliary verb *tetszik* + surname or role noun.

In differentiating the possibilities of addressing, bound forms have the most vigorous role, so the forms using various pronouns and the structures utilizing the auxiliary verb *tetszik* may be interpreted as separate possibilities within which additional, less markedly distinct shades and grades of meaning may be established.

Three main types may be differentiated among the second person familiar forms: those using the first name or kinship terms, which express a familiar, confidential relationship even with addressees of different age; the more respectful familiar form using nominal phrases, which can indicate hierarchy or difference of rank even in a relatively confidential relationship; and familiar structures without free forms, which suggest solidarity despite the lack of a confidential relationship.

Notwithstanding the abundance of forms using non-familiar (third person) structures, the lack of a stylistically neutral, general, reserved form is apparent. The use of *maga* without nominal addressing as a general form of address can only be used in certain dialect areas, while the majority of speakers regard it as characteristic of impetuous utterances, and attribute affronting stylistic value to it. The pronoun *maga* supplemented with nominal forms may indicate a confidential relationship between equal partners, but is also used in asymmetric relationships by the superior partner. Most speakers below the age of 35, however, even avoid using it in these situations.

The pronoun *ön* without nominal forms is regarded as reserved and official, but it becomes clearly respectful if used in combination with role nouns. Its use combined with first name, which somewhat tones down the official nature of the pronoun, has also been observed among speakers of younger generations.

Because of the restrictions of pronoun use, the most polite forms are apparently those using role nouns and name elements built into the sentence as bound forms. Structures using the auxiliary verb *tetszik* also make the avoidance of pronouns possible; standing by themselves they express respect, in reserved relationships they express increased politeness, while if used

with nominal addressing by a subordinated speaker, they most frequently indicate confidential relationship existing despite age difference.

An examination of the third person varieties according to age groups shows an increasing preference among younger speakers for structures using *ön* and forms avoiding pronouns at the cost of using *maga*.

As seen from the distinct varieties outlined above, the system of contemporary Hungarian addressing forms is not a simple binary system, but one using a model of sixteen possible outputs according to social meaning, in which various social, relational and situational factors determine the speaker's choice of forms.

In contemporary Hungarian usage almost all settings of communication could be characterized by the ascendance of forms emphasizing solidarity, the equal status of the partners, i.e. the use of second person and first name addressing forms. The more respectful and reserved addressing forms are, therefore, limited to an ever narrowing area. This fact is a further obstacle in the way of the emergence of a generally valid, neutral, reserved form of addressing. The judgment of formal, third person forms is diverse across various social groups, with age as the most important determining factor.

The addressing forms used by the youngest generations may show the direction of changes in the system of addressing. These modes forecast a system of fewer options in which familiar, second person forms may have a dominance, capable of expressing not only confidential relationship, but also equal rank and respect. Among the non-familiar forms, it is mainly the functions of structures using *ön* that survive: in reserved, superficial relationships with an avoidance of nominal addressing, and with free addressing forms in settings where status is marked. In addition to the decline of structures with *maga*, the auxiliary verb *tetszik* is also used less frequently, becoming thereby an indicator of asymmetric relationships characterized by large differences in age.

3.4. General pragmatic regularities of addressing forms

The dissertation demonstrates some general regularities in the use of addressing forms applicable to all types of relationships, some of which may also be traced in the usage of other languages. Thus, its findings may be regarded as a pragmatic linguistic universal of usage.

The number of different addressing forms used in individual relationships is always related to the confidential or reserved nature of the relationship. The more confidential a relationship is, the wider the choice is for the communicative partners for addressing each other. This is indicated in Hungarian usage by the great abundance of forms that can be used to address friends, as contrasted with the almost complete absence of forms suitable for addressing

strangers. In confidential relationships, even reserved forms may be used in a humorous, ironic sense.

The number and types of possible addressing forms is also affected by the hierarchical differences within the relationship. A speaker in superior position usually has a wider choice of addressing forms within the same relationship than his or her subordinated partner; this is indicated in the corpus collected by the larger number of addressing forms used by older speakers in families and by superiors in workplaces. Equality is indicated by the use of the same types of addressing forms by the partners, and it may happen that they address each other echo-like, using the same addressing, such as in the case of spouses calling each other by identical names.

The more infrequently a particular addressing form is used within a given relationship, the more emotional charge is associated with it. By contrast, a frequently used form, regardless of its general linguistic value, becomes more neutral. For example, if a parent most frequently uses the diminutive form of the first name when addressing a child, then the use of the full form of the first name conveys emotions.

The more important the setting of the speech act or the status of the speakers is in a situation, the fewer choices are available as possible addressing forms. In settings, for example, where status is of importance, even communicative partners otherwise using first names and other confidential forms would tend to address each other only by role nouns. Indirect communication makes the marking of status more necessary, which is indicated, for example, by the fact that speakers who address each other using familiar, second person forms might use structures with *ön* in official, written communication.

Nominal elements suitable for addressing are sometimes used not only to indicate the relationship between the partners, but may also reflect the point of view of a third person who is a frequent participant of their interaction: parents, for example, sometimes address each other using terms of kinship (parenthood) after the birth of their children. Such shift of perspective usually uses the addressing form that would be appropriate from the point of view of the youngest member of the community.

The use of nominal addressing forms may be extended and made totally independent of the original meaning — cf. *öcsém, anyukám, apukám*, approximately: *(my) brother, mom, daddy* — in which cases the gender reference is most frequently preserved.

3.5. Possibilities of using the results of research in addressing forms

There is a strong demand in our society for efforts to use polite language that would maintain a congenial relationship between the speaker and the addressee. This is underlined by the findings of empirical research based on a representative sociolinguistic survey in which

politeness was ranked as the most important characteristic of language use regarded as beautiful and polished.

Linguistic planning must strive to offer guidelines to tackle the uncertainties of everyday language use. In order to be able to provide effectual guidelines, further research like the present dissertation is necessary to gain an empirical familiarity both with the actual usage and the expectations of the language community.

4. List of publications in the topic of the dissertation

1. A nyelvi udvariasság kérdése a magyar nyelvtudomány történetében [The Question of Politeness in the History of Hungarian Linguistics]. *Magyar Nyelvjárások XXXVII*. Debrecen. 1999: 157–166.
2. Tegeződő világháló? Nyelvi udvariasság az Interneten [The Web on Familiar Terms? Linguistic Politeness on the Internet]. *Magyar Tudomány*. 1999: 1010–1011.
3. A nyelvi viselkedés mintái a televízióban [Models on Linguistic Behavior on Television]. *Magyar Nyelvőr*. 1999: 286–291.
4. A megszólítás és kapcsolattartás változatai a nem tegeződő viszonyokban [Varieties of Addressing and Linguistic Contact in Formal Relationships]. *Magyar Nyelvjárások XXXVIII*. Debrecen. 2000: 129–137.
5. A megszólítás változatai és megítélésük a nem tegeződő viszonyokban [Varieties of Addressing Forms and their Judgment in Formal Relationships]. 10th Hungarian Conference on Applied Linguistics, Székesfehérvár In: *A nyelv szerepe az információs társadalomban [The Role of Language in Information Societies]*. 2000: 63.
6. Az udvarias kérés változatai tizenévesek beszédében [Varieties of the Polite Request Among Teenagers]. *Édes Anyanyelvünk*. 2000. 5: 4.
7. A „verbális érintés” stílusértéke [The Stylistic Value of the “Verbal Touch”]. *Módszertani Közlemények*. 2001: 58–64.
8. A megszólítás vizsgálatának módszerei és eredményei a nemzetközi nyelvtudományban [Methods and Results of the Study of Address Forms in International Linguistics]. *Magyar Nyelvjárások XXXIX*. 2001. Debrecen. 87–102.
9. A megszólítás és a nyelvi kapcsolattartás kérdése illemtankönyveinkben [The Question of Addressing and Linguistic Contact in Etiquette Books]. *Módszertani Közlemények*. 2001: 202–206.
10. A megszólítási és kapcsolattartási formák választásának konfliktushelyzetei [Conflicts of Choice among Forms of Addressing and Maintaining Contact]. In: *A nyelv nevelő szerepe*

[*The Educational Role of Language*]. 11th Hungarian Conference on Applied Linguistics. University of Pécs. 2001. 25.

11. A megszólítások és a beszédpartnerre utaló elemek funkciói [Functions of Addressing Forms and Elements Referring to the Partner]. In: *Éltető anyanyelvünk. Grétsy László 70. születésnapjára*. Ed.: Anna A. Jászó. Budapest: Tinta Könyvkiadó, 2002. 124–128.
12. A „tetszikelés” szerepei nyelvhasználatunkban [The Functions of Structures with “tetszik” in our Language Usage]. *Édes Anyanyelvünk*. February 4, 2002.
13. A nem tegező kapcsolattartási formák használatának és megítélésének problémái [Problems of the Use and Judgment of Non-Familiar Communicative Forms]. Paper presented at the conference entitled *What Can We Do for the Modernization of the Hungarian Language?* December 4, 2000. (under publication)
14. A megszólítás vizsgálatának módszerei és eredményei a magyar nyelv tudományban [Methods and Results of the Study of Addressing Forms in Hungarian Linguistics]. *Acta Academiae Paedagogicae Agriensis. Tom. XXV*. 2002. Eger. (under publication)
15. Megszólítási és kapcsolattartási formák a nyelvi szocializációban [Forms of Addressing and Maintaining Contact in Linguistic Socialization]. In: *Feladatok és módszerek az anyanyelvi nevelésben a XXI. század elején [Tasks and Methods in Mother Language Education at the Beginning of the 21st Century]*. MNyTK No. 213. 42–49. (under publication)
16. A magyar megszólítási rendszer változásai [Changes of the System of Addressing Forms in the Hungarian Language]. In: *Értékközvetítés irodalomban és nyelvben [Communication of Values in Literature and Language]*. Paper presented at the international conference held on October 3, 2001 in Besztercebánya. (under publication)