ENCODING RESPECT AND DEFERENCE: ADDRESS FORMS AMONG FORMOSAN ABORIGINES

Winnie S. W. Wang, Lindsey N. H. Chen

National Taiwan Normal University, 162 Heping East Road, Sec. 1, Taipei, Taiwan

Abstract

This study investigates the forms of address of two Formosan aboriginal groups: Amis and Bunun. By conducting questionnaires and interviews with native informants, the study examines aboriginals' choice of personal address in different contexts. The study's results indicate that age, gender, and tribal status are influential factors in both groups' choices of address forms. Notably, kinship terms are used to show deference and respect to other aboriginals, both within and beyond the tribe. The particular choices of address forms in the two groups also reveal the linguistic impact of foreign influences. The study also notes the ways in which they are similar to the addressing modes of other languages, such as Russian and Yoruba.

Keywords: *form of address, Formosan aborigines, politeness, kinship terms*

1. INTRODUCTION

Whenever two or more people communicate, it is important for the individuals involved in the exchange to understand how to properly greet and address others. Address forms such as pronouns, kinship terms, names, courtesy titles, and honorific terms are frequently used in everyday conversations. The vast amount of existing literature on this subject has shown that address form choices reflect social norms and depend upon variables such as age, gender, social status, context of the speech event, and familiarity between interlocutors. This topic is particularly intertwined with sociolinguistic concepts such as distance, politeness, power, and solidarity.

Earlier studies (see Brown and Gilman (1960); Brown and Ford (1961), among many others) have shown that the relationship between interlocutors determines the choice of address form. Common address forms indicative of social distance include first name, title plus last name, titles, multiple names, and surname only. For example, title plus last name [T+LN] are used either reciprocally between new acquaintances or non-reciprocally by a person of lower status towards a person of higher status (Brown and Ford, 1961). Ervin-Tripp (1972) further identified the addressee's social status and the conversational context as factors that determine the address form choices that are made. In non-reciprocal patterns, those with marked high social status may be addressed by title alone (e.g. 'Father' for a priest). Other crucial factors that influence address form choices are gender and age. For instance, Kramer (1975) demonstrated that men have more freedom than women in the use of address forms for both genders.

Some prior research has insightfully revealed the diverse ways in which address forms are manifested in non-western societies and cultures. For example, a special type of address form in Yoruba society, *Tekonym*, is often used between couples (Salami, 2004). *Tekonym* (TKM) is characterized by a combination of father or mother's name plus the personal name of a child, usually the first-born [F/M+N= TKM]. The use of TKM shows familiarity to the involved parties and respect to the person addressed. Akindele (2013) also noted that Bosotho women tend to use TKM and TLN more than men, as these titles enhance their social status within their society. The different choices in Chinese address terms along the matrilineal and patrilineal lines are discussed in Chao (1956) and Qin (2008). In other Asian cultures, honorific markers—i.e., grammatical forms that signal respect or social deference—are commonly found. For instance, in Korean, the suffix *-nim* ('honorable person') can be attached to nouns to represent a person who is socially superior to the speaker (Kim-Renaud, 2001). Aliakbari and Toni (2013) observed that courteous interactions are striking features of the Persian address system, as evidenced by the frequent use of honorifics in Persian conversations.

The issue of politeness and rudeness in relation to forms of address in Polish and Russian was also explored in (Sosnowski, 2015). Finally, different forms of address are needed to communicate effectively within specific institutional settings. As Iragiliati (2006) noted in a study on medical discourse between doctors and patients in East Java, Indonesia, positive face is achieved through closeness by the use of address forms such as personalization to acknowledge intimacy (e.g., the use of *Buk*—or 'Ma'am'—to a patient's mother or the Indonesian version of 'Dear' to the patient).

This study contributes to the existing research on forms of address across cultures by investigating the address forms of two major aboriginal groups in Taiwan: Bunun and Amis. The groups' culture and history, and language features (i.e. phonological, morphological, and syntactic aspects) have been studied by linguists; however, a comprehensive study of their address form systems has not been conducted. The present study aims to fill this research gap by examining aboriginals' address form choices in different contexts. In particular, through questionnaires and interviews with native informants, the study seeks to answer the following questions: (1) What kinds of address forms are used to refer to reciprocal and nonreciprocal relationships among both groups' aboriginal member? (2) To what extent do factors such as age, gender, and tribal/social status influence the use of aboriginal forms of address? (3) What other factors play important roles in the groups' address form choices? The study's results will provide insights into the use of address forms within the family unit, the forms used to address outsiders, and the linguistic codes used to mark different tribal or social status. Ultimately, this study can further our understanding of the ways in which respect and deference, via address forms, are encoded in aboriginal cultures.

2. AMIS AND BUNUN: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

Amis and Bunun are Austronesian languages spoken in Taiwan (Formosa) today. Traditionally, the Bunun people lived in Taiwan's mountainous interior and small family groups roamed the Central Mountain Range. In the 17th century, the Bunun tribe was regarded as a "Goshan Tribe" (*Goshan*: "high mountain") and called "the guard of Yushan (jade mountain)" since people treated it as a holy mountain.

In contrast to the Bunun tribe, the Amis tribe is mainly situated on Taiwan's plains instead of its mountains. The Amis people are mainly distributed across the eastern region of the Central Mountain Range. They were originally called *Pangcah* ("humans") before their current tribe name of *Amis* ("Northern people"). Unlike the Bunun, the Amis feature a matrilineal society. Women are leaders in the family and men must live in their wives' houses after marriage. However, Amis men still engage in hunting and politics, while women are mainly responsible for farming and housework. Of the two aboriginal groups, Amis is the largest in terms of demographics: Amis 17,000 versus Bunun 50,000 (Taiwan Indigenous Peoples Portal 2020)

3. METHOD

The data for this study were collected from Bunun and Amis informants. Each group consisted of five informants, specifically three women and two men within the age range of 19 to 61. Older informants included tribal teachers while all young informants were university students who could speak the aboriginal language as well as Mandarin Chinese. The purpose of including both young and old informants was to gather a fuller picture of the use of address forms in aboriginal society. Furthermore, since informants in each group knew how to speak different dialects, dialectal differences were noted in the data analysis. Among the Bunun informants, four had knowledge of the Isbubukun dialect and one spoke the Takivatan dialect. Amis informants were familiar with the dialects spoken of Haian Amis, Malan Amis, and Guanfu Amis.

The research was conducted through a questionnaire as well as interviews to facilitate more in-depth discussion. The questionnaire, written in Chinese, was divided into two parts. The first part of the questionnaire introduced its purpose and asked questions regarding informants' backgrounds. The second part focused on address forms. Specific scenarios were provided in order to elicit a more natural response from participants. The scenarios were constructed taking into account various ways of

addressing family members, relatives, strangers, tribal leaders, and other professionals. Since the study's purpose was to investigate different address forms used by the two groups, the scenarios were designed considering factors such as age, gender, and tribal status. After reading each scenario, informants were asked to provide the forms of address they would normally use in each particular case. Scenarios 1 to 10 were used to investigate the address forms for different family members such as elderly relatives, parents, and next of kin. Scenarios 11 to 22 focused on address forms for married and unmarried acquaintances (within the tribe), friends (within and outside the tribe), and strangers. Scenarios 23 to 28 were used to explore address forms for people with different tribal statuses and occupations. The following are translated sample scenarios from the questionnaire to Amis informants. (The questionnaire to Bunun informants is similar except in the substitution of Bunun personal names in some of the scenarios.)

Scenario 10. You see your aunt and uncle at a grocery store.

Scenario 11. You see Amen Falaw, a 30-year-old single man who helps his parents manage a local store.

Scenario 18. Your uncle introduces his friend Batu Istanda, a 35-year-old single man who's about the same age as your uncle.

Scenario 20. You see John, a westerner/researcher visiting your tribe.

Scenario 28. Takav Raka is a 70-year-old retired doctor; she came by to visit your grandparents.

In a few cases, follow-up questions were necessary. For example, when informants were asked to provide the address forms they used for parents or siblings, one participant replied that he would simply use greetings or perhaps not even address his family members. In such cases, the researcher would follow up by reframing the questions in order to gather the required data; for instance, by asking "What do you call your parents and older siblings in your language?" or "How do you address ___ if needed?" The responses were then collected and analyzed. Data were written in Romanization, and the Online Dictionary of Aboriginal Language was used to assist with transcription. The research also consulted aboriginal teachers familiar with the Romanization written system.

4. RESULTS

In this section, results are divided into three categories: forms used for family members; forms used for non-relatives (friends, strangers, foreigners); and forms used for individuals of certain tribal or social status.

4.1 Forms of address within the family unit

All cultures have specific terms to denote family members or next of kin: father, mother, sister, brother, uncle, aunt, grandparents, and so on. According to the study's results, all groups have adopted general forms to address male and female elders, which naturally includes grandparents. In Bunun, *Tama Hudas* ('father' + 'elderly') and *Cina Hudas* ('mother' + 'elderly') are used to refer to grandfather and grandmother, respectively. In fact, *Hudas* ('elderly') can be used to address all elderly individuals. However, for a respectful introduction—i.e., when first introducing an elderly individual to another person—*Hudas Nanaz* ('elderly' + 'male') or *Hudas Pingaz* ('elderly' + 'female') is used. In Amis, *Akong* is the address form for elderly males and *Ama* is the address form for elderly females. These terms are borrowed from the Taiwanese dialect, meaning 'grandfather' and 'grandmother', respectively. There is also a traditional address form for elderly females—*Mamo* ('grandmother'). However, it is used less frequently than *Ama*. Comparing the two groups' primary forms of address, it is clear that Ami has had greater exposure to the Han (Chinese) culture.

To address brothers and sisters, two variant forms exist in Bunun. The general form for older brother and sister is *Masituhas*, while the more specific forms *Tuhas Nanaz* and *Tuhas Pingaz* refer to older brother and sister, respectively. Here, different contexts dictate the use of general or specific form. The former is used when addressing a sibling directly while the latter is used to introduce one's siblings to another person. In Amis, *Kaka* is used to refer to an older sibling (male or female) while *Safa* is used to

refer to a younger sibling (male or female). For both groups, a younger sibling may be addressed directly with their given name. Among young Bunun and Amis informants, the use of Chinese kinship terms (*Da Ge* 'oldest brother,' *Da Jie* 'oldest sister') is increasingly preferred over tribal address forms. The influence of Chinese language on young aboriginals is particularly salient as most of them have left their tribes to study or work in cities.

Regarding next of kin, there is no division of terms along the patrilineal or matrilineal line, as is the case with Chinese. The Bunun use *Dama* 'father' and *Bubu* 'mother' to address male and female relatives. In Bunun, there is no specific term to refer to an aunt or uncle; instead, expressions in the form [father/mother + aunt's/ uncle's name] are adopted to avoid confusion. For instance, a Bunun boy might address his uncle named *Laung* as *Dama Laung*. In contrast, the prevalent address form in Amis for uncles and aunts are *Faki* and *Fayi*, respectively. Table 1 provides examples of address forms for family members and next of kin.

	Father / Mother	Brother / Sister	Uncle / Aunt
Bunun			
Isbubukun dialect	*Dama* / *Cina*	*Masituhas* *Tuhas-nanaz* / *Tuhas-pingaz*	*Dama* / *Cina* + uncle's / aunt's FN
Takivatan dialect	*Dama* / *Dina*	*Dokas*	*Dama* / *Cina* + uncle's / aunt's FN
Amis			
Haian & Guanfu dialect	*Mama* / *Ina*	*Kaka*	*Faki* / *Fayi*
Malan dialect	*Ama* / *Ina*	*Kaka*	*Faki* / *Fayi*

Table 1. Address forms for family members and next of kin

4.2 Forms of address for non-relatives

The category of address forms for non-relatives includes friends, strangers (within the same tribe or from other tribes), and non-aboriginal foreigners. Aboriginals use different kinds of address forms depending on the level of familiarity with each person. On a scale of familiarity, "most familiar" would apply to friends who are also aboriginals, "somewhat familiar" would apply to strangers from the same tribe, and "least familiar" would apply to non-aboriginal foreigners whom tribe members are not acquainted with.

Aboriginals prefer to use kinship terms to address people within the same tribe, regardless of whether they are acquaintances or strangers. Since tribal groups are small, members tend to know each other and in some cases have even grown up together. In such tight-knit communities, they treat each other as family members. For aboriginals, the use of kinship terms signal respect and deference to addressees who belong to the same tribe. Regarding friends, informants from both groups generally prefer to use personal names, nicknames, or terms of endearment.

To note, marital and seniority statuses were also taken into consideration. When a woman gets married, she gains not only a new identity but also a new surname and courtesy title (e.g., *Miss* to *Mrs.* in English). Likewise, her husband also gains a new title or role, specifically the "in-law" status. In aboriginal society,

aboriginals have been observed to primarily use kinship terms to address people with different marital statuses. For example, a 28-year-old married woman may be addressed by a Bunun teenager as *Dokas* 'older sister' while a 50-year-old unmarried woman may be addressed as *Dina* 'aunt'. Here, the interlocutors' age difference would be taken into consideration. The general rule of thumb seems to be that for addressees who are only a few years older, sibling terms are used; meanwhile, for those who are relatively older by many years, "uncle" or "aunt' is used. In this study, gender discrepancy was also observed. When meeting two men aged 30- and 35-years-old, the young male informants in their early 20s would address them as *Kaka* 'old brother'. However, young female informants (of similar age) would address the two men as *Faki* 'uncle', a more deferential form. Table 2 summarizes address forms used with people of different marital and seniority statuses.

	Unmarried / Married Male	Unmarried / Married Female	Elderly Male / Female
Bunun Isbubukun dialect	*Tuhas nanaz* ('old brother') / *Dama* ('uncle') + FN	*Tuhas pingaz* ('old sister') / *Cina* ('aunt') + FN	*Tama Hudas* ('father elderly') / *Cina Hudas* ('mother elderly')
Takivatan dialect	*Dokas* ('old brother') *Dama* ('uncle')	*Dokas* ('old sister') *Dina* ('aunt')	*Aki* ('grandfather') *Bai* ('grandmother')
Amis Haian, Guanfu & Malan dialect	*Kaka* ('old brother') *Faki* ('uncle')	*Kaka* ('old sister') *Fayi* ('aunt')	*Akong* ('grandfather') *Ama / Mamo* ('grandmother')

Table 2. Forms of address and marital/seniority status

On the other hand, when addressing aboriginals from other tribes, Chinese kinship terms were adopted since the interlocutors do not typically understand each other's tribal languages. Aboriginals also use Chinese kinship terms to address foreigners, depending on their age (actual or perceived). For instance, younger informants in this study would address a Japanese elder as *Ye Ye* 'grandfather' or *Akong* 'grandfather' (Taiwanese) and a 25-year-old Japanese woman as *Jie Jie* 'older sister'. Young informants were also likely to adopt the Chinese courtesy titles to address Chinese men or women (e.g., *Xiao Jie* 'Miss'). There is a general referential term—*A Dou A*—adopted from Taiwanese to refer to foreigners of western heritages. However, it would be inappropriate to use such referential forms to address foreigners. Instead, as the informants expressed, they may attempt to use another language (e.g., English) or simple greetings such as 'Hi' or 'Hello' to address foreigners. As demonstrated by these examples, the use of Chinese kinship terms and even English greetings indicates that aboriginals generally endeavor to build a closer relationship with "outsiders" by speaking addressees' native languages.

4.3 Forms of address as marker of status

Tribal and social status are important factors in adopting particular forms of address. In Taiwanese aboriginal society, the elderly are held in high esteem and those who have the authority to make decisions for their respective groups are accorded high status. In most cases, the choice of address depends on the context of the speech event. For example, one of the Bunun informants stated that he

would address elderly individuals as *Matateyan* 'the elderly' in formal situations but *Aki* 'grandfather' when meeting in private. Since church (e.g., Presbyterian Church) is one of the places where aboriginals gather and socialize, the aboriginal church elders too have acquired a higher tribal status. As a marker of respect to those who have made great contributions to the tribe or the church, the Bunun may use kinship terms such as *Dama* 'father' to address those particular individuals. The influence of Han culture was also observed here. For example, one who deals with tribal affairs may be addressed with a job title such as *Cun Zhang* ('village head'), which is more formal and therefore exhibits greater respect towards the addressee.

Although the Amis tribe is known to be a matrilineal society, men are assigned to handle tribal affairs while women focus on dealing with more domestic issues. The address forms used with people of higher tribal status are also based on patrilineage. In contrast to Bunun, Amis has specific terms for addressing people of different tribal statuses. The Amis informant who spoke the Haian dialect indicated that the person who deals with ceremonial and tribal affairs is accorded higher tribal status and hence is addressed with the Chinese head title *Tou Mu* 'chieftain'. Meanwhile, the Amis teacher who spoke the Guanfu dialect would address the leader with his name followed by the head title *Tomok* 'chieftain'. In contrast, according to the Amis informant who spoke the Malan dialect, people who deal with tribal affairs—the *Tabong* 'local gentry'—are often addressed with the more intimate form *Akong* 'grandfather' (Taiwanese). Thus, in Amis, the use of head titles is a formally respectful gesture while the use of kinship terms demonstrates closeness to the addressee.

Within workplace context, there are specific address forms for boss and subordinate. The influence of the Han culture is predominant here, as the relevant forms are generally borrowed from Chinese words. In Bunun and Amis, it is possible to address bosses as *Tauki* and *Tawki*, respectively. Both terms are phonetically similar to the Chinese term *Tou Jia* 'boss'. As for subordinates and colleagues, address forms using given names are preferred. For individuals with high occupational status— doctors, teachers, and pastors—the forms of address are borrowed from Japanese and Chinese. Both the Bunun and Amis languages address doctors as *Ising*, which is borrowed from the Japanese term *Ishi*. Though most of the tribes' pastors are also aboriginals, aboriginal people prefer to address them with the Chinese title *Mushi* 'Pastor' rather than with kinship terms. Teachers are addressed as *Singsi*, which is homophonous with the Japanese term *Sensei*. Moreover, tribal teachers address their colleagues using job titles to show respect. The addressee's (perceived) retirement status may also come into play. For instance, when addressing a 70-year-old retired female doctor, the kinship term 'grandma' was preferred over the former job title since the informants thought that she was retired. Table 3 presents the forms of address for doctors, teachers, and pastors.

	Bunun	Amis
Doctors	*Ising*	*Ising*
Teachers	*Singsi* /*Masnanaba*	*Singsi*
Pastors	*Pukusi*	*Mushi*

Table 3. Addressing doctors, teachers and spiritual leaders

5. DISCUSSION

The study's findings indicate that factors such as age, level of familiarity, and tribal status play important roles in address form choices made by aboriginal speakers. These choices also reveal how foreign influences—as a result, for instance, of Han migration and Japanese colonization—have linguistically impacted these aboriginal groups. The tribes' borrowings from external cultures are instances of acculturation.

As shown, a salient difference between Amis and Bunun and other major languages (e.g., Chinese, English, Spanish) is the absence of courtesy titles. For instance, aboriginals do not have courtesy titles

such as *Xian Sheng* 'Mr', *Tai Tai* 'Mrs, and *Xiao Jie* 'Miss' to address others. In this respect, the two aboriginal languages are like Russian address in that Russians do not use words for Mr or Mrs. On this, Holden, *et al* (2008) explains, the combination of first name plus patronym is the equivalent of 'Mr /Mrs' plus surname in Western terms. As Holden et al have noted, Russians would use forename plus patronymic, and such mode of address conveys both intimacy and distance at the same time.

Furthermore, in some cultures, address forms via kinship terms may even be further divided based on patrilineal and matrilineal lines. For example, in Chinese culture, the address form for "father's older brother" is *Po Fu*; however, the form for "father's younger brother" is *Shu Shu*. On the other hand, maternal uncles are addressed as *Jiu Jiu*, or *n-jiu*, where *n* represents uncles' birth order. These forms, however, were not observed in this study. Bunun and Ami aboriginals generally use kinship terms to address people who are older than them, including family members, strangers within the same community, and non-aboriginal outsiders. Even with non-acquaintances, kinship terms are used to demonstrate respect and deference.

Similar phenomena can be observed in other non-Asian cultures. For instance, Oyetede (1995) reported that Yoruba kinship terms are extended to address people with whom tribe members have no relationship. For example, *Baba* ('father') can refer to any elderly man and *Iya* ('mother') to any elderly woman. The terms *Egbon* ('elder') or *Alagba* (i.e., 'the owner of seniority') can refer to someone who is older than the speaker. If the younger addressee's name is unknown, a kinship term such as 'my child' is adopted (Oyetade, 1995).

In selecting the appropriate address forms, then, the level of familiarity and age seem to take precedence over marital status. However, when addressing people of higher social or tribal status, job or tribal titles are used instead, regardless of age. Thus, a form of address ranking scale can be suggested as:

marital status << age, familiarity << social, tribal status

The study's findings also found variations in address form usage within the two groups. In particular, the Bunun tribe does not have specific address forms referring to aunts and uncles. Rather, the forms [*Cina* 'mother' + aunt's / uncle's name] and [*Dama* 'father' + uncle's name] are adopted. Another apparent difference is that in Amis, the kinship terms referring to older and younger siblings are based on birth order rather than gender. Moreover, the Amis tribe his characterized by a strict social hierarchal system and a specific term (e.g., *Tomok* 'chieftain') is used to address the tribe's leader. In contrast, Bunan does not have strict social hierarchal system yet kinship terms are still used to address people with higher tribal status.

The present study provides an initial glimpse into address form usage in the two aboriginal groups featured herein. However, Amis and Bunun are just two of the sixteen aboriginal groups in Taiwan. Similar studies will be conducted in the near future to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the address forms used by other distinct aboriginal cultures. Of particular interest is Paiwan, which categorizes people into one of four classes. Based on an individual's categorization in these four classes, the speaker will adopt appropriate forms to address that person. Another suggestion for future research may be to consider the bidirectional use of address forms in a comparative study on address form usage among people of different ages. The present study has only investigated the use of forms of address by young aboriginals when referring to older individuals (thus, a unidirectional use of address forms).

Despite of the abovementioned limitations, the present study provides an informative glimpse into the use of address forms in two aboriginal cultures. In so doing, the study fills an important research gap and contributes to our understanding of aboriginal cultures and languages.

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