THE SUBORDINATES' USAGE OF ADDRESS TOWARD THE SUPERIORS IN CHINESE

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1. Introduction

Conversation is a rule-governed, interpersonal communication activity (Shih 1986). It involves at least two interlocutors, a speaker (S) and a hearer (H), engaging in a give-and-take transmission of message. Successful communication in a conversation means that the speaker conveys his meaning and intention accurately, and the hearer understands and interprets the message exactly as the speaker intends. Conversation is also a goal-oriented, cooperative speech act. When people are engaged in a conversation, they normally have one or more of the following goals of communication in mind: to convey information, to establish or reinforce social relationships, to express emotion or direct the activities of other people. In order to accomplish these goals, the speaker needs the cooperation of the hearer. The most effective means to ensure a hearer's cooperation is through the use of politeness strategies (Shih 1986).

Politeness is a very important factor in the construction of conversational utterances, for no matter how clearly a message is conveyed, if the utterance is not conveyed in the proper manner, it may not be accepted by the hearer. To be polite in conversation means to say the right thing to the right person at the right time in the right manner, and thus make others feel happy and at ease. In essence, a polite speech act is one which pays respect to the other's "face", i.e., one's public self-image (Shih 1986). One way to pay respect to the hearer's face is to use appropriate address forms.

The primary goal of this study is to research how subordinates address their superiors. Generally speaking, because of the superiors' power over the subordinates, the latter should address the former in a more polite way. However, the real situation is not always so straightforward since some

social factors, such as the formality of the occasion and the degree of acquaintance, will involve in. Whether these two factors affect the subordinates' usage of address toward their superiors will be the main concern of this study. The reason why I am interested in the usage of address is that, according to Shih (1986), forms of address is one of the areas of sociolinguistics which can best illustrate the close bond between language and society. They are used to announce the relative status and degree of solidarity between the interlocutors and the formality of the occasion. They can also be used to indicate the speaker's attitude toward the hearer, and at the same time determine the speech style for the following conversation (Shih 1986). Therefore, I believe that through the study of people's usage of address toward their superiors I can determine their attitudes toward politeness.

In the subsequent parts, we will first review some notions of politeness and titles in section 2. Then in section 3, the methodology used in data collecting and analysis, and the results and findings of the analysis will be presented. At last, a summary of this study will be stated in section 4.

2. Theoretical Background

In this section, we will review Brown & Levinson's "face theory" in 2.1. Then, the three most important sociolinguistic variables related to politeness will be stated in 2.2. In 2.3, forms of address will be presented.

2.1 Brown & Levinson's Face Theory

In Brown and Levinson's (1987) discussion of politeness, the speaker is molded as a model person (MP), fluent in a natural language, and endowed with two special properties -- rationality and face. With "rationality", the MP can reason logically from ends to the means that will achieve those ends. And with "face", the MP has two particular wants, namely, the want to be unimpeded (negative-face wants) and the want to be approved of in certain aspects (positive-face wants). In general, people will cooperate (and assume each other's cooperation) in order to maintain each other's face. But people are also expected to defend their faces if threatened and to threaten

others' faces in defending their own. Therefore, there are face-threatening acts (FTAs), including acts that primarily threaten the hearer's negative-face wants, by indicating (potentially) that the speaker does not intend to avoid impeding the hearer's freedom of action, and acts that threaten the hearer's positive-face wants, by indicating (potentially) that the speaker does not care about the hearer's feelings, wants, and so on.

In Brown & Levinson's opinion, every person is an MP, who behaves appropriately in every social interactions. Hence, in the context of the mutual vulnerability of face, any MP will seek to avoid face-threatening acts, or will employ certain strategies to minimize the threat. In other words, s/he will take into consideration some strategies to meet the hearer's wants or to satisfy the hearer's desire, i.e., positive politeness, or s/he will do some redressive action to have the hearer's freedom of action unhindered or the hearer's attention unimpeded, i.e., negative politeness. Therefore, to be polite is "do not do the FTA; if unavoidable, do it with redressive action." (Brown & Levinson. 1987)

Positive politeness is an approach-based strategy. It "anoints" the face of the hearer, e.g., by treating him as a member of an in-group, a friend, a person whose wants and personality traits are known, liked, or appreciated. Using appropriate forms of address, the focus of this study, is one of the strategies of positive politeness. If appropriate forms of address are used, the hearer may feel respected, and properly treated. If they are misused, the hearer may feel annoyed, mistreated, and uncomfortable, that is, his positive face is threatened.

2.2 Sociolinguistic Variables

As politeness is a social motive, social factors will surely interact with politeness to make the linguistic realization patterns appear to be more satisfactory.

Social factors relevant to the assessment of politeness are hard to be named or numbered. Deference, modesty, intimacy, praise, status, respect of privacy, sincerity, and acceptance can all be included. But in Brown & Levinson's view, the following three factors are the most influential in all cultures

and most inclusive as they subsume all other factors that have a principal effect in assessing the degree of politeness (Brown & Levinson. 1987):

   (1) the relative power of S and H (an asymmetric relation: vertical distance)
   (2) the social distance of S (speaker) and H (hearer) (a symmetric relation: horizontal distance)
   (3) *the absolute ranking of impositions in the particular culture*

This observation corresponds to Leech's (1983) proposal: the degree of politeness exposed by the linguistic realization patterns is supposed to be mainly connected with the three social variables -- the cost of the act to the hearer, the relative power of the interlocutors and the solidarity between the speaker and the hearer.

Two of these three parameters relevant to this study will be discussed in more detail in the following.

A. Power/Vertical Distance

Power, authority, or superiority, is an asymmetric social dimension of relative status. It is a vertical social distance. Power difference between speaker and hearer may correspond to the degree to which speaker/hearer can impose his/her own plans or his/her own self-evaluation on hearer/speaker. Power difference may result from the difference of age (as between sixty-year-olds and twenty-year-olds), absolute social status (as between parents and children), relative social status (as between principals and teachers, or between teachers and students), and so on (Brown & Levinson. 1987). Besides, in a FTA, rights and duties are important in defining the standing status of participants in power relation to one another (Leech. 1983). Monetary weakness, strength of character, or alliances may all play a role in the assessment of power difference. Power difference between interlocutors will certainly carry its influence into social communication. Therefore, verbal exchange may be modified between those who are of equal social status (Brown & Levinson. 1987).

B. Solidarity/ Horizontal Distance

Solidarity, or intimacy, is a symmetric social dimension of relative status. It is a horizontal distance. In many cases,

solidarity is based on an assessment of the frequency on *interaction and in the kinds of material or non-material goods* exchanged between speaker and hearer (Neustunpy. 1978). Communication exchanged between those who are in intimate social distance will be different from that exchanged between strangers. Language in some respect will reflect these social relationships.

The focus of this study is on the subordinates' usage of titles in addressing their superiors. In the data collected, the interactions between the subordinates and their superiors do not seem to involve any cost or imposition. Therefore, I will analyze the data collected according to the parameters of power/vertical distance and solidarity/horizontal distance and see how the patterns of title usage vary with the distances between the subordinates and their superiors.

2.3 Forms of Address

In Shih (1986), forms of address used as vocatives in face-to-face interaction are classified into the following types, in which titles include occupational titles (e.g. 主任 zhu-ren 'director or chairman') and social titles (e.g. 先生 xian-sheng 'Mr.').

(1) Title alone (T):
   主任 (zhu-ren 'director or chairman')、老師 (lao-shi 'teacher')、先生 (xian-sheng 'Mr.')、小姐 (xiao-jie 'Miss').

(2) Kinship Titles (KT):
   陳伯伯 (Chen bo-bo 'Uncle Chen')、陳媽媽 (Chen ma-ma 'Aunt Chen')、林大哥 (Lin da-ge 'Brother Lin')、王兄 (Wang xung 'Brother Wang')、阿姨 (a-yi 'aunt')、叔叔 (shu-shu 'uncle').

(3) Surname + Title (SNT):
   張主任 (Zhang zhu-ren 'Director Zhang')、陳老師 (Chen lao-shi 'Mr. Chen; lit: Teacher Chen')、林先生 (Lin xian-sheng 'Mr. Lin')、張小姐 (Zhang xiao-jie 'Miss Zhang').

(4) Personal Name:
   (a) Full name (FN):

林文雄 (Lin Wen-xung)、張美玲 (Zhang Mei-ling)
(b) Given name (GN):
文雄 (Wen-xung)、美玲 (Mei-ling)
(c) Diminutive name (DN):
阿雄 (A-xung)、小玲 (Xiao-ling)
(d) Nickname (NN):
雷公 (Lei-gang 'thunder')、老鼠 (Lao-shu 'mouse')
(e) Surname prefixed, or surname alone (SN):
老張 (Lao Zhang 'lit: Old Zhang')、小林 (Xiao Lin 'lit:
Little Lin')、王 (Wang)
(f) Foreign name (FoN):
Mary, John

Shih's classification is very clear and inclusive. However, in working place, occupational titles have a distinct different meaning from social titles. Therefore, in this study, category 1, title alone (T), is divided into two subcategories – occupational titles (OT) and social titles (ST); category 3, surname + title (SNT), is divided into surname + occupational titles (SOT) and surname + social titles (SST). Furthermore, category 2, kinship titles (KT), is also divided into surname + kinship titles (SKT) and kinship titles alone (KT), for I think the addition of surname can distinguish somewhat the degree of intimacy. In addition, there are two more types of address added in this study. One is full name + occupational title (FNOT) which is a common form of address, for example, 林淑芬主任 (Lin Shu-fen zhu-ren 'Director Shu-fen Lin'). The other is surname + occupational title + given name (SOTGN) which is a rare form of address but indeed found in my data, for instance, 林主任淑芬 (Lin zhu-ren Shu-fen 'Director Lin Shu-fen').

Here, I would like to divide these forms of address into two groups, one with titles, and the other without titles. The former, which I regard as a polite manner of address, includes (OT), (ST), (SKT), (KT), (SOT), (SST), (FNOT), and (SOTGN); whereas the latter, which I regard as a less polite manner of address, includes (FN), (GN), (DN), (NN), (SN), and (FoN). The data collected will be analyzed according to this assumption.

3. Data Collecting, Analysis and Discussion

In this section, I will explain how the data is collected in 3.1. Then, the data -- the subordinates' usage of address toward their superiors -- will be analyzed and discussed in 3.2.

3.1 Data Collecting

In order to study how "forms of address" are used to show "politeness" toward the superiors, I design a questionnaire containing two social variables, i.e., the formality of occasion and the degree of acquaintance (See appendix). According to the first variable, there are two groups of questions. Each group is composed of three questions on the basis of the second variable. Thirteen forms of address are listed on the questionnaires for the subjects to choose when answering the questions. In order to avoid the deficiency of the list, I also welcome the subjects to provide any forms of address not appearing in the list. The subjects are workers of post office in Pingtung County. Because of their cooperation, 55 submitted pieces of questionnaires are all judged as valid; 36 involve male informants and 19, female ones. The age of these subjects ranges from 20 to 65. The reason why the range of these subjects' age is so wide is due to the difficulty of finding more subjects. The number of my subjects will be too small if I select only the subjects of the same generation for shortening the range of their age. Nevertheless, on the other hand, the long range of the subjects will be convenient for me to analogize my findings to many different generations.

3.2 Analysis and Discussion

The data collected for this study is analyzed by counting the numbers of times (frequency), the forms of address are filled in the questionnaires. Besides, the subjects are allowed to provide more than one answer to each question; thus the total times of each question varies.

As mentioned in 2.3, I divide forms of address into two types, one with titles and one without, since I consider the former to be more polite and the latter less polite. In 3.2.1, the data is analyzed and discussed according to this division. In

3.2.2, the detailed discussion of the usage of each address form will be presented.

3.2.1 Discussion of Polite Forms and Less Polite Forms

The following three tables show how the formality of occasion and the degree of acquaintance affect the subordinates' usage of polite forms of address toward their superiors.

Table 1: one variable — the formality of occasion

	Formal		Informal	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Polite forms	170	99.4	164	97
Less polite forms	1	0.6	5	3
Total	171	100	169	100

Table 1 shows that on formal occasions, the percentage of the usage of the polite forms of address is 99.4%; in informal ones, it is 97%. This indicates that the polite forms of address are used more frequently on formal occasions than in informal ones. This is because on formal occasions, the different status of subordinates and superiors is reinforced, that is, the power/vertical distance between them is lengthened. The subordinates should use a more polite form of address toward their superiors to show their respect.

Table 2: one variable – the degree of acquaintance

	Familiar		Normal		Unfamiliar	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Polite forms	110	97.3	114	99.1	110	98.2
Less polite forms	3	2.7	1	0.9	2	1.8
Total	113	100	115	100	112	100

Table 2 tells us that when facing a normal superior, the percentage of the usage of polite forms of address is 99.1%; when facing an unfamiliar one, 98.2%; and a familiar one, 97.3%. This means when facing a normal superior, the solidarity/horizontal distance is the longest; an unfamiliar one, the second longest, and a familiar one, the shortest. There is no doubt that the solidarity/horizontal distance is the shortest

when facing a familiar superior. However, the result that the distance of facing a normal superior is longer than that of facing an unfamiliar one indeed surprises me. Some information provided by a subject in his questionnaire may account for this phenomenon. This subject wrote that when facing an unfamiliar superior on informal occasions, he would not greet him/her, and he would pretend that he did not recognize him/her. This kind of situation signifies that when the distance between two persons is too long, they may not need to express their politeness to each other any more; thus they will adopt an impolite strategy to defend their own faces. Moreover, there are too many superiors in a working place, and only some of them are associated with you. Therefore, when facing others that you are never in contact with, it is natural that you have no strong motivation to show your respect to them.

Table 3: the combination of two variables – the formality of occasion and the degree of acquaintance

	Formal					
	Familiar		Normal		Unfamiliar	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Polite forms	57	100	57	100	56	98.2
Less polite forms	0	0	0	0	1	1.8
Total	57	100	57	100	57	100

	Informal					
	Familiar		Normal		Unfamiliar	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Polite forms	53	94.6	57	98.3	54	98.2
Less polite forms	3	5.4	1	1.7	1	1.8
Total	56	100	58	100	55	100

Table 3 gives strong support to the discussion of Table 1 and Table 2 above. People indeed show their politeness on formal occasions more often than in informal ones. Nonetheless, from Table 3, we find that when facing an unfamiliar superior, the percentage of the usage of polite forms of address on formal occasions is equal to that in informal ones. This seems to display that the politeness principles proposed by Brown and Levinson is only a generalization of people's

behavior, not an absolute rule. Once in a while, people will violate these principles.

The informal occasions part of Table 3 presents that when facing a normal superior, the percentage of the usage of polite forms of address is the highest; an unfamiliar one, the second highest, and a familiar one, the lowest. This result is the same with Table 2, so we can explain this uncommon condition in the same way -- when the distance between two persons is too long, they may not need to express their politeness to each other, and they will adopt an impolite strategy to defend their own faces. In fact, in Table 3, on informal occasions, the percentage of the usage of polite forms of address when facing a normal superior (98.3%) is considerably close to that when facing an unfamiliar one (98.2%). It is not easy for us to find their distinction, since both the percentages of these two circumstances are very high. The only one point that we can be sure is people act quite politely in these two circumstances.

3.2.2 Discussion of Each Address Form

The results concerning the usage of each address form are presented in Table 5, 6, and 7. In the left column of these three tables, each number represents an address form, and I would like to list each of them clearly in Table 4.

Table 4: a list of address forms

(1)	Occupational titles (OT)
(2)	Surname + Social titles (SST)
(3)	Full name (FN)
(4)	Nickname (NN)
(5)	Full name + Occupational title (FNOT)
(6)	Surname + Kinship titles (SKT)
(7)	Surname prefixed, or surname alone (SN)
(8)	Surname + Occupational titles (SOT)
(9)	Given name (GN)
(10)	Diminutive name (DN)
(11)	Foreign name (FoN)
(12)	Kinship titles alone (KT)
(13)	Social titles (ST)
(14)	Surname + Occupational title + Given name (SOTGN)

Table 5: one variable — the formality of occasion

	Formal		Informal	
	Frequency	(%)	Frequency	(%)
(1)	86	50.3	58	34.3
(2)	0	0	10	5.9
(3)	0	0	0	0
(4)	1	0.6	0	0
(5)	5	2.9	4	2.4
(6)	4	2.3	4	2.4
(7)	0	0	3	0.8
(8)	73	42.7	86	50.9
(9)	0	0	0	0
(10)	0	0	2	1.2
(11)	0	0	0	0
(12)	1	0.6	2	1.2
(13)	0	0	0	0
(14)	1	0.6	0	0
Total	171	100	169	100

Table 6: one variable – the degree of acquaintance

	Familiar		Normal		Unfamiliar	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
(1)	55	48.7	49	42.6	40	35.7
(2)	0	0	7	0.1	3	2.7
(3)	0	0	0	0	0	0
(4)	0	0	0	0	1	0.9
(5)	3	0.7	2	0.7	4	3.6
(6)	4	0.5	2	1.7	2	0.8
(7)	2	0.8	1	0.9	0	0
(8)	47	41.6	53	46.1	59	52.7
(9)	0	0	0	0	0	0
(10)	1	0.9	0	0	1	0.9
(11)	0	0	0	0	0	0
(12)	1	0.9	1	0.9	1	0.9
(13)	0	0	0	0	0	0
(14)	0	0	0	0	1	0.9
Total	113	100	115	100	112	100

Table 7: the combination of two variables – the formality of occasion and the degree of acquaintance

| | Formal | | | | | |
| | familiar | | normal | | unfamiliar | |
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
(1)	31	54.4	30	52.6	25	43.9
(2)	0	0	0	0	0	0
(3)	0	0	0	0	0	0
(4)	0	0	0	0	1	1.8
(5)	1	0.8	1	1.8	3	5.3
(6)	2	3.5	1	1.8	1	1.8
(7)	0	0	0	0	0	0
(8)	23	40.4	25	43.9	25	43.9
(9)	0	0	0	0	0	0
(10)	0	0	0	0	0	0
(11)	0	0	0	0	0	0
(12)	0	0	0	0	1	1.8
(13)	0	0	0	0	0	0
(14)	0	0	0	0	1	1.8
Total	57	100	57	100	57	100

| | Informal | | | | | |
| | familiar | | normal | | unfamiliar | |
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
(1)	24	42.9	19	32.8	15	27.3
(2)	0	0	7	12.1	3	5.5
(3)	0	0	0	0	0	0
(4)	0	0	0	0	0	0
(5)	2	3.6	1	1.7	1	1.8
(6)	2	3.6	1	1.7	1	1.8
(7)	2	3.6	1	1.7	0	0
(8)	24	42.9	28	48.3	34	61.8
(9)	0	0	0	0	0	0
(10)	1	1.8	0	0	1	1.8
(11)	0	0	0	0	0	0
(12)	1	1.8	1	1.7	0	0
(13)	0	0	0	0	0	0
(14)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	56	100	58	100	55	100

From Table 5, 6, and 7, it is clear that OT (1) and SOT (8) are the most common address forms the subordinates use to address their superiors. This indicates that occupational titles definitely play a significant role in working places where the hierarchy of status is emphasized. The subordinates never use FN (3), GN (9), FoN (11), and ST (13) to address their superiors. In Chinese culture, to address a superior with his/her full name or given name is extremely impolite, that is, it is a severe face-threatening act. Therefore, it is common that no one single subordinate addresses his superior with FN (3) and GN (9). In post office, workers usually do not have a foreign

name, so FoN (11) is never used in addressing their superiors. However, the situation may differ in a foreign trading company where every worker has his/her own foreign name. ST (13) is not suitable to be adopted addressing the superiors, either. If you use this form of address, it seems that you ignore your superior's professional status on purpose, and this is another serious face-threatening act. To my surprise, there are three less polite forms of address (NN (4), SN (7), and DN (10)) used to address the superiors. From Table 7, we can find that the subordinates use SN (7) and DN (10) on informal occasions, whereas NN (4) is used on formal occasions toward an unfamiliar superior. It is not hard for us to understand that in the former condition, the distance between the subordinates and the superiors shortens because of the informal occasions. Less polite forms of address thus appear. However, the latter condition is quite abnormal. Maybe the subordinate is a special person who does not like to follow the polite principle.

4. Conclusion

From the discussion above, we can easily find that no matter which kind of variable is concerned, the vertical or horizontal distance between the subordinates and their superiors is the main factor that affects the subordinates' usage of forms of address. The longer the distance is, the more politeness people show. In addition, though the degree of politeness indeed changes based on the two variables I concern, the percentage of the usage of polite forms of address always maintains high (over 90%). This suggests that the impact of the power distance between the subordinates and their superiors is stronger than the formality of occasion and the degree of acquaintance.

This study will be more complete if more subjects participate in. With more subjects, we may investigate the subordinates' usage of address toward their superiors according to different gender, areas, occupations, etc. In addition, the workers' usage of address toward their colleagues and their subordinates is also worth further research.

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Appendix-- The questionnaire

專題研究之問卷調查

敬啟者：

非常感謝您於百忙之中，撥冗填寫這份問卷。本問卷
之目的在於調查現代人面對上司或長官時，使用「稱呼」
的情形。您的參與，將更增添這份問卷的價值，也使此研
究更富意義。再次謝謝您！

專題研究執行人　鄭惠文敬上

一、 請填寫個人基本資料 (1~3 題請在適合的選項中打√)
　　1.性別：□男　　□女
　　2.年齡：□20 歲以下　　□20-30 歲　　□30-40 歲
　　　　　　□40-50 歲　　□50-60 歲　　□60 歲以上
　　3.職位：_____
　　4.服務機關名稱：_____
　　5.服務機關所在地：_____縣(市)_____市
　　(區、鄉、鎮)

二、 請回答下列問題(本問卷共有 18 個問題，共計 4 頁)：
　　在我們的日常生活中經常會使用到「稱呼」，它至少以
下列幾種方式呈現：

> (1) 只稱呼其職稱(例如：主任)
> (2) 稱呼其姓氏加上"小姐"、"先生"(例如：林小姐)
> (3) 稱呼其姓名(例如：林淑芬)
> (4) 稱呼其綽號(例如：巫婆)
> (5) 稱呼其姓名加職稱(例如：林淑芬主任)
> (6) 稱呼其姓氏加上親屬的稱謂(例如：林大姐)
> (7) 只稱呼其姓氏或在姓氏之前加上"小"、"老"字(例如：林；小林；
> 　　老林)
> (8)稱呼其姓氏加職稱(例如：林主任)
> (9)稱呼其名字(不包括姓氏)(例如：淑芬)
> (10)在其名字前加上"阿"字(例如：阿芬)
> (11)稱呼其英文名字(例如：Rose)
> (12)用親屬的稱謂稱呼之(例如：大姐)
> (13)只稱呼"小姐"、"先生"

例題：在正式的場合(例如：開會)中，你會如何稱呼你的上司或長官(假設對方年紀比你長)？(以下提供兩種答題法，每題答案可不限於一個)

第一種答法

①若你與對方非常熟識，你會稱呼他 _____4_____
②若你與對方交情普通，你會稱呼他 _____2_____
③若你與對方很生疏，你會稱呼他 _____1_____

第二種答法

①若你與對方非常熟識，你會稱呼他 _____淑芬_____
②若你與對方交情普通，你會稱呼他 _____林主任_____
③若你與對方很生疏，你會稱呼他 _____主任_____

請在下列問題的空格裡，填上適當的選項或自己的答案。您可採用例題的第一種答法或第二種答法，也可兩種答法混合使用。選項中若沒有適合您的答案，歡迎您提出自己的答案，謝謝！

A. 在正式的場合(例如：開會)中，你會如何稱呼你的上司或長官(假設對方年紀比你長)？

    a. 若你與對方非常熟識，你會稱呼他 _____
    b. 若你與對方交情普通，你會稱呼他 _____
    c. 若你與對方很生疏，你會稱呼他 _____

B. 在私底下或非正式的場合(例如：菜市場)中，你會如何稱呼你的上司或長官(假設對方年紀比你長)？

    a. 若你與對方非常熟識，你會稱呼他 _____
    b. 若你與對方交情普通，你會稱呼他 _____
    c. 若你與對方很生疏，你會稱呼他 _____