

ADDRESSING FAMILY MEMBERS IN THE MALAY CULTURE: PRACTICES OF 'YOUNG-ADULT' UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT: This paper reports the use of address terms including 'you' directed by young adult university students towards other family members. The data for this study was collected via questionnaire among 50 native speakers of Malay in Malaysia in 2016. All participants were students at Universiti Putra Malaysia and aged between 20-23 years old. The respondents were asked, among other things, in English to indicate the second person form of address they used when addressing a range of interlocutors in a range of contexts. They were able to select from a range of options, i.e. Kin Terms (KT), Short Name (SN), Pronoun (Pr), Mixed Category (MC), and Full Name (FN) in the questionnaire. The Mixed category refers to the combination of two forms of address, for instance KT+SN. This paper presents only the findings relating to the family domain. The results show an overwhelming propensity to use kin terms, as a sign of respect, when speaking to other relatives. This occurs without exception with older adults, such as parents and grandparents. While relatives' age and status are factors, gender however, plays no role. This study also revealed a striking pattern different from findings of other studies particularly in the treatment of siblings and cousins where cousins were the only group addressed with the pronominal 'you' meanwhile previous studies of address terms in other languages indicated no distinctions in the address between the two.

KEYWORDS: Malay language, second person address forms, young-adult

LOS TRATAMIENTOS FAMILIARES EN LA CULTURA MALAYA: PRÁCTICAS DE 'LOS JÓVENES-ADULTOS' UNIVERSITARIOS

RESUMEN: Este estudio se ocupa del uso de los tratamientos, incluido el 'tú', utilizados por los hablantes jóvenes adultos universitarios en la cultura Malaya hacia otros miembros de su familia. Los datos para este estudio se han recogido mediante un cuestionario entre 50 hablantes nativos de malayo en Malasia en 2016. Todos los participantes eran estudiantes de Universiti Putra Malaysia y tenían entre 20 y 23 años. A los encuestados se les preguntó, entre otros, en inglés para que indicaran la forma de tratamientos de segunda persona que utilizan al dirigirse a una variedad

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de interlocutores en diferentes de contextos. Pudieron seleccionar de una lista de opciones, es decir, términos de parentesco (KT), nombre corto (SN), pronombre (Pr), categoría mixta (MC) y nombre completo (FN) en el cuestionario. La categoría mixta se refiere a la combinación de dos formas de tratamiento, por ejemplo, KT + SN. Este estudio presenta solo los hallazgos relacionados con el dominio familiar. Los resultados muestran una abrumadora propensión a usar términos de parentesco, como un signo de respeto, cuando se habla con otros familiares. Esto ocurre sin excepción con adultos mayores, como los padres y los abuelos. Si bien la edad y el estado de los familiares son factores determinantes, el género, sin embargo, no juega ningún papel. Asimismo, este estudio también revela un patrón llamativo diferente de los hallazgos de otros estudios particularmente en el tratamiento entre los hermanos y los primos, donde los primos eran el único grupo abordado con el 'tú' pronominal, mientras tanto estudios previos de los términos de tratamiento en otros idiomas no indicaban distinciones en el tratamiento entre los dos.

PALABRAS CLAVE: el malayo, los tratamientos de la segunda persona, jóvenes adultos

0. INTRODUCTION

The Malay language has a multitude of words for addressing the other person or persons being spoken to and among them are *anda*, *saudara*, *saudari*, *kamu*, *awak*, *engkau*, *kau*, *hang*, *demo*, *Tuanku*, etc. All these forms of address are equivalent to 'you' in English. In a study on address forms in Indonesia, Wittermans (1967) suggests that *anda* is used in formal communication between interlocutors of the same social status and age range. In comparison to Spanish, *anda* is equivalent to *usted*. Alternatively, *saudara* [equivalent to gentleman in English and *caballero* in Spanish] used when addressing a male listener, and *saudari* [equivalent to lady in English and *dama* in Spanish] used when addressing a female listener, are often used in situations where the interlocutors do not mutually know one another. Meanwhile, *kamu*, *awak*, *engkau* and *kau* [equivalent to *tú* in Spanish] are terms of address that show intimacy between the interlocutors. *Kau* is an abbreviation of *engkau* and can stand alone as in *kau yang satu* (you're the only one). *Hang* and *demo* are classified as colloquial speech or slang used by people in the North and East Malaysia and these dialectal forms of pronouns vary tremendously according to regions. *Tuanku* is a form used to exclusively address the royal family especially the King and cannot be used to address commoners.

A form of address is a word or phrase used directly to refer to someone or somebody in both oral and written communication (Amat Juhari Moain, 1987). In daily communication, forms of address are often used to define the social distance or relationship between the speaker and the hearer. Usually, in a Malay family, there are a few synonyms in any form of reference that can be used to address family members. For instance, *ibu*, *mak*, *umi* and *bonda* are synonyms of *emak* (mother). The choice of which pronoun to use depends on various factors such as the personality of the speaker, the presence of the person being addressed when the interaction occurred – in this case the mother –, the speaker's attitude towards his mother, and also the context of the communication. Thus, the selection of form of address to be used in a family is not fixed and hinges on preference and practice (Noor Azlina Abdullah, 1975; Nor

Hashimah Jallaluddin, Harishon Radzi, Maslida Yusof, Raja Masittah Raja Ariffin and Sa'adiyah Ma'alip, 2005).

Malaysians have been described as a society belonging to the "high-ambiguity-tolerant culture" and are not easily "threatened by unknown situation" (DeVito, 2008: 39). This is supported by Hofstede (1984, 1997) who described Malaysians as "people with high tolerance". These notions suggest that Malaysians are resilient and able to withstand whatever that comes their way (Ching Hei, Khemlani David and Su Kia, 2013: 7). However, albeit the high level of tolerance and diplomacy (Khemlani David, 2002; Shanmuganath, 2003; Khemlani David and Kuang, 2005) etiquette and formality are highly regarded within the society. Hofstede (1997) observed that Malaysians are strict when it comes to hierarchies and this is presented by the tendency to use address forms in most situations to mitigate face threats and power (Radiah, 2007; Ching Hei, Jawakhir and Dhanapal, 2012). Using the correct form of address is important to avoid negative perceptions toward the speaker and misunderstandings during interactions (Zainon Othman, 2006) because the wrong address form could lead to the addressee feeling insulted (Nik Safiah Karim, 1990: 103). Address forms are used to show politeness between interlocutors and is representative of good etiquette that is highly valued in the Malay culture (Raminah Hj. Sabran and Rahim Syam, 1984: 237).

1. REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

Over the years, factors such as a technological advancement, the development of the education system, and the social environment have influenced the way address forms are utilized. The differences in social structures, cultural norms, behaviors and geographical settings draw the different choices of address forms from a particular community into others. Numerous studies on address forms have been conducted in various languages (Brown and Gilman, 1960; Brown and Ford, 1961; Philipsen and Huspeck, 1985; Oyetade, 1995; Martiny 1996), however, most of these studies have focused on the variation of address forms according to the social characteristics of the language users and the relationship between the interlocutors (Esmae'li, 2011).

In her 2013 study, Siti Nadiah investigates how address terms are used among Malay family members in Singapore. The data is a corpus of transcribed audio recording of spontaneous and natural conversation among family members. The findings show the existence of hierarchy in the usage of Malay address terms. This hierarchy is defined by pragmatic conventions such as age, power status, and social distance that determine the polite way to address a particular person. Apart from that, the content of conversation, stance taken, and changes in the relationship between interlocutors are some of the factors influencing the variations of address.

Using a direct observation method, Normala (2006) examines the usage of pronouns among Malays across three sociolinguistic variables: age, gender and formality. The study reveals that the 1st person pronoun *aku* or 'I' and 2nd person pronoun *kau* or 'you' are generally considered impolite. Therefore, when speaking with an unfamiliar person, someone older, or a superior these pronouns are to be avoided. Consequently,

the speakers switch between address terms according to their perceived distance and relationship with the hearer (Normala, 2010). Similarly, Radiah (2007) who investigated the personal pronouns in Malay, suggested two terms namely *halus* (refined) and *kasar* (rude) to categorize the pronouns, in which *aku* 'I' and *kau* 'you' fall under the *kasar* group. Although the categorizations of *halus* and *kasar* hold extreme connotations, it does not necessarily imply that address terms of the *halus* category are appropriate for every situation (Siti Nadiah, 2013: 13). The choice of the *halus* and *kasar* address patterns rely on various pragmatic factors such as the context and the relationship between the speaker and the hearer.

In another study, Ching Hei, Jawakhir and Dhanapal (2012) explore the usage of address forms in Malaysian government agencies, among others the immigration office, inland revenue department, police stations and court houses located in an urban area within the Klang Valley. There were three target groups in this study: Malay, Chinese and Indian. The findings indicate that Malaysians tend to use a particular traditional way such as using kin terms when addressing interlocutors even for outsiders

Since address terms are said to be the mirror of the attitude of the speaker towards the hearer (Esmæ'li, 2011) and also reflect the social and linguistic backgrounds between interlocutors (Philipsen and Huspeck, 1985), this paper aims to examine the variation of address forms used by Malay young-adults in addressing their family members.

2. METHODOLOGY

The data was gathered via questionnaire which were distributed to 50 Malaysian students studying in a public higher education institution in Malaysia in 2015. All the participants were native speakers of Malay undertaking a Bachelor of Arts course majoring in English Language at the Universiti Putra Malaysia. They were all aged between 20 – 23 years old and comprised of 45 female and 5 male students.

The respondents were asked to indicate the second person form of address they would use when addressing a range of interlocutors and which form of address they would receive from the same addressees. There were 59 listed persons in the questionnaire including families, friends, baristas, and etc. However, for this study, only the findings relating to the family domain are presented based on the argument that "social relations within the family are relatively clear, stable and well defined, when compared to other potential social relations and contexts" (Parkinson and Hajek, 2004: 100). In this study, the definition of family is restricted to blood relations (parents, siblings, cousins) and marriage (parents in-law), and excluding fictive relatives such as godparents.

In order to limit any instances of problematic or uncertain usage, options of form of address commonly used in Malay such as Kin Terms (KT), Short Name (SN), Pronoun (Pr), Mixed Category (MC) and Full Name (FN) were provided in the questionnaire. The Mixed Category refers to the combination of two forms of address, for instance KT+SN. Participants may also choose Not Available (NA) in

situations non-applicable to the students, e.g. the students are not yet married and are unsure of the form of address that should be used towards parents-in-law. Twelve (12) different family members were listed in the questionnaire marked with QQ1-12 and respondents were required to indicate the form of address used by the respondents toward the listed family members and the reciprocating form or address used by the listed family members toward the respondents. To complete the task, the students were allowed to list more than one form of address if necessary.

3. ANALYSIS OF DATA

In order to get a clear overview of the forms of address used among Malay family members in Malaysia, the results are presented according to generations: grandparent, parent and children. The grandparents’ generation is restricted to only the grandmother and grandfather while the parents’ generation includes mother, father, uncle, auntie and relationships forged by marriage such as parents in-law and stepparents. The children’s generation is focused on siblings, brothers and sisters in-law, and cousins.

3.1 Form of address used among Malay family members in Malaysia

QQ1-12	KT	SN	Pr	MC	FN	NA
father	100	-	-	-	-	-
mother	100	-	-	-	-	-
brother	54	18	10	4	-	14
sister	64	12	10	0	-	14
grandfather	86	-	-	-	-	14
grandmother	96	-	-	-	-	4
uncle	100	-	-	-	-	-
auntie	100	-	-	-	-	-
cousin	26	32	36	6	-	-
brother/sister in-law	42	2	6	16	-	34
father/mother in-law	42	-	-	-	-	58
stepfather/stepmother	30	-	-	-	-	70

Table 1: Percentage of forms of address used by respondents towards the list of family members

Table 1 shows the variation of forms of address used by participants towards the list of family members in the questionnaire. It is evident that respondents tend to use kinship terms particularly when addressing the grandparents and parents. Kinship terms are words to designate a family member who is connected to other family members either by blood, marriage, adoption or fostering (Schwimmer, 1998). Kinship terms

were used in totality (100%) by respondents when addressing the father, mother, uncle and auntie, while other forms of address such as second person pronouns, short name, full name and mixed category were not found at all. A large majority of the respondents also used KT (86%) to address their grandfather and grandmother (96%). In interactions occurring between youths and adults, the younger correspondent is advised to avoid as much as possible the second person pronoun *kau* and substitute it with terms related to rank or relationship with the hearer. As suggested in McGinn's (1991) study of 2nd person pronouns in a Malay family, one avoids 2nd person pronouns and uses pronoun-substitute in their place. Therefore, when addressing someone elderly in family such as grandparent/s or parent/s, the younger speaker should use an appropriate kin term as the address form, while the addressee's name or nickname is often used to address the younger.

The use of KT is notably lesser for QQ10 bother/sister in-law (42%), QQ11 father/mother in-law (42%), and QQ12 stepfather/stepmother (30%). A majority of the students chose NA for QQ10-12 fundamentally because most of them are not married and have little idea on how to address the parents in-law as well as the stepparents.

In interactions with siblings, there are variations in the selection of forms of address by the respondents. For brothers, respondents indicated using KT (54%), SN (18%), Pr (10%) and MC (4%) as address forms, while for sisters, the percentage of use of KT is (64%), SN (12%) and Pr (10%). The percentage of use of KT amongst cousins is also low (26%) compared to the use of Pr (36%). Other than Pr, the respondents preferred the use of SN (32%) when addressing their cousins. This may be influenced by the similar age range factor and siblings-like relationship. The findings show that choices of pronouns among young generation vary from adult generation and this

QQ1-12	KT	SN	Pr	MC	FN	NA
father	58	22	8	8	4	0
mother	56	26	8	8	2	0
brother	48	16	20	6	4	6
sister	48	20	16	4	2	10
grandfather	28	40	14	4	4	10
grandmother	24	52	8	6	6	4
uncle	18	60	16	4	2	0
aunt	12	68	16	2	2	0
cousin	12	42	36	8	2	0
brother/sister in-law	20	40	6	4	2	28
father/mother in-law	8	34	2	2	0	54
stepfather/stepmother	8	20	6	0	0	66

Table 2: Percentage of forms of address used by the list of family members towards the respondents

lends support to the suggestion that youth language exhibit playfulness, flexibility and the desire to innovate (Hoogervorst, 2015).

Table 2 shows the form of address used by the listed family members when addressing the respondents. For the grandparents' generation, grandfathers used KT (28%), SN (40%), Pr (14%), MC (4%) and FN (4%); while grandmothers used KT 24% of the time, SN (52%), Pr (8%), MC (6%) and FN (6%). The percentage breakdown shows that the grandparents' generation prefer to use SN more compared to kinship terms when addressing their grandchildren.

As for the parents' generation, fathers tend to use KT more frequently (58%) compared to SN (22%) which is similar to mothers who also preferred to use KT (56%) than SN (26%) or MC (8%) to address their children.

For uncles and aunts, the use of SN is evidently higher than KT. As shown in Table 2, uncles used more SN (60%) compared to KT (18%) while for the aunts, SN was used up to 68% compared to only 12% for KT. With the younger addressees as nephews or nieces, Pr (*kau*, *kamu* or *awak*) were occasionally used by adults which could indicate the impression of authority or superiority. Otherwise, kinship terms such as *abang* 'brother' or *kakak* 'sister' or MC (KT+SN) were showed to be used less frequently. The use of KT was also higher amongst siblings whereby both brothers and sisters used KT up to 48% than any other forms of address.

Both tables 1 and 2 showed that the percentage of KT (12%) is less amongst cousin compared to SN (42%) and Pr (36%). Adolescents are often heard using pronouns with each other regardless the gender. In this case, solidarity and intimacy are actually influencing the choice of address forms amongst cousins. However, it was observed that the use of pronouns *kau*, *kamu* and *awak* amongst cousins do not occur freely. They were used mainly when speaking to other cousin of similar age or younger, but with older or higher ranked cousins, the use of KT or MC are more in favour.

3.2 Form of address chose by generation

Based on the data, various forms of address used amongst Malay families in Malaysia were founds and kinship terms are more often used compared to other address forms such as second person pronouns or short name.

Grandparent and Parent Generation

For grandparents and parents' generation, there are a few forms of address frequently used in family indicated in Table 3 and 4.

In the Malay family, children do not address their parents with the second pronoun *kau*. Kinship terms are often used to address the family, relatives and older close family members (Normala Othman, 2006). In some conditions, a kin term is added before the name such as *pakcik* Ramli (uncle Ramli) or *kakak* Anita (sister Anita) as an indication of respect towards the person's rank or age. In Table 4, the same kinship terms used for biological parents (genetic father/mother/uncle/aunt) are also used

	Form of address	Number of participant
Grandfather	Tok wan	6
	Atok/tok	24
	Tok ki	4
	Embah	1
	Tok bak	2
	Tok ayah	6
	Not answered	7
Grandmother	Opah	6
	Atok/tok	14
	Wan	11
	Mak tok	7
	Tok mi	2
	Nenek	8
	Not answered	2

Table 3: Number of participants and form of address referring to grandparents

	Form of address	Number of participant
Father	Abah	22
	Ayah	21
	Papa	3
	Bapa	1
	Baba	3
	Not answered	0
Mother	Ibu	16
	Ummi	8
	Mama	12
	Emak/mak	14
	Not answered	0
Uncle	Uncle	6
	Babah	1
	Ayah	2
	Paklong/pakngah/pakcik	36
	Kin term + name	5
	Not answered	0

Aunty	Aunty	6
	Ummi	1
	Emak	1
	Maklong/makngah/makcik	35
	Kin term + name	7
	Not answered	0
Father/mother in law	Ayah/emak	23
	Not answered	27
Stepfather/stepmother	Ayah/emak	19
	Pakcik/makcik	2
	Not answered	29

Table 4: Number of participants and form of address referring to parents’ generation

when addressing the stepfather/stepmother. This is to show the importance of respect towards people of higher rank and to provide the sense of social hierarchy.

Children’s Generation

It is common for parents to establish the form of address to be used by the children to refer to family members within the nuclear family (Muna Afifah Mohd Zulkepli, Jama’ah Zakaria and Nor Azuwan Yaakob, 2015: 99). More importantly, the form of address is used to either distinguish the number of children in family, or whether they are the oldest, the middle or the youngest child in the family.

In the Malay society, the eldest child is referred to as *sulung*, while *tengah* is a reference word for the middle child and *bongsu* is for the youngest child. By using these reference words – *sulung*, *tengah* and *bongsu* – the Malay family came out with form of address that distinguishes the number of children in the family or the

Number of child in family	Reference word according to the number of child in family
older	<i>sulung</i>
middle	<i>tengah</i>
younger	<i>bongsu</i>
brother	<i>abang</i>
sister	<i>kakak</i>
little brother/sister	<i>adik</i>

Table 4: Form of reference by number of children in family

birth order of the children, for instance the term *yong*, *along*, *abanglong* dan *kaklong* all refer to the eldest child in the family while the youngest, *bongsu*, are sometimes referred to as *usu*, *busu*, or *adik*. Radiah Yusoff (2007) describes this complexity by giving the ‘aunt’ in English as an example:

“the English term ‘aunt’ (or more specifically a younger or elder sister of one’s father or mother) could be translated to Mak Long, Mak Ngah, Mak Uda, Mak Lang, Mak Teh, Mak Cik or Mak Su, depending on several factors:

The birth order of the aunt with respect to the birth order of the father or mother in their respective family with the first born female being almost always assigned as Mak Long and the last born female child as Mak Su – Long is usually a marker for first-born child in most Malay dialects, while Su is a marker for the last-born child;

The total number of children in the respective family of the mother or father, causing certain terms to be dropped if, for instance, the number of children in the family is two;

The dialect used in the respective family of the mother or father, causing certain terms to have more than one ways of pronunciation, such as /maksu/, /usu/, /busu/, or /moksu/, for the last-born female child”.

Address forms are not just used to differentiate the number of children, but it also reflects the politeness and ‘honorary’ intimacy between family members (Sumalee Nimmanupap, 1994). These examples were recorded in our data and part of it as shown in the following list.

male	female
<i>along</i>	<i>kaklong/kakyong</i>
<i>abanglong</i>	<i>kakak</i>
<i>abang</i>	<i>kakngah</i>
<i>angah</i>	<i>kakcik</i>
<i>abangngah</i>	<i>acik</i>
<i>abangcik</i>	<i>adik</i>
<i>adik</i>	

This study found that although *abang/kakak* or brother/sister is frequently used as forms of address to genetic/blood siblings, the same terms are used to address brother/sister in-law whose relationship is formed through marriage. The use of KT when addressing brother/sister in-law may largely be due to the sibling-like relationship shared and expected between the interlocutors. Furthermore, it is a general understanding that in a marriage, one does not only marry the person but also the family and becomes a part of it.

With relationships between cousins, apart from KT, preference was also given to other terms in particular SN, Pr, and MC. Pronouns that were often used were *awak*, *kau* and *kamu* and in most cases, cousins are treated the same way as siblings.

This study found that the main factors influencing the selection of address forms among family members are age difference, gender, and social status or rank. This lends support to findings by Muna Afifah Mohd Zulkepli, Jama'yah Zakaria and Nor Azuwan Yaakob (2015: 101) that suggested age as of significant importance in a Malay family. For instance, even among twins, although the difference in the time of birth between the first and second child is only one minute, the second born will most likely have to use KT when addressing his/her older twin sister/brother. Additionally, the findings on the influence of gender on the choice of forms of address such as *abang* 'brother', *kakak* 'sister', *makcik* 'auntie', *pakcik* 'uncle', and etc. recorded by this study also corroborates with findings from Abdullah Hassan (1980) that argues the dependence on gender when selecting forms of address.

4. CONCLUSION

Overall, although the data analysed in this study were not comprehensive, they highlighted the way some of the Malay young adults address their family members in a range of contexts. The findings showed that for some Malay young adults, in this case, the university students, kinship terms were much more preferred than other address forms in addressing their family members.

Furthermore, the findings clearly indicate that the use of kin terms is more evident when younger groups address the adults. Although adults tend to use pronouns when addressing family members who are younger, the younger family members would reciprocate by addressing the adults using kinship terms. In other words, there is no reciprocal *pronoun-pronoun*, but instead *kinship terms-pronoun* as the common practice in communication between youths and adults in the Malay family.

This study, however, did not explore the different uses of address forms based on gender due to the suggestion that gender has no significant effect on behavior with respect to pronoun choice (Parkinson and Hajek, 2004). However, the future research, gender influence may be considered as a goal and a potentially important variable for deciding addressing strategies by speakers. Additionally, broadening the source of data will also be essential to fully develop an understanding of the selection of address terms in communicative exchanges. The current study's main source of data was derived from the native speaker's metalinguistic reports (questionnaires) which represents what they 'declare' to use and is not supported with spontaneous interaction that demonstrates what they 'actually' use. This can be complemented by either adding an open-ended question in the questionnaire that probes into students' decision to use specific address terms, by conducting interviews with both youths and adults, or observations of actual interactions. The incorporation of at least one of these methods could shed more light on the strategies employed by the respondents

when choosing address terms and the extent that gender may or may not influence their selection of addressing strategies.

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