



Persian Negative and Positive Politeness Terms

Mehdi Bagheri

Khorasan Islamic Azad University, Iran.

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ABSTRACT

This study examines Persian address terms within the theory of politeness in the three distinct historical periods of Qajar (1791-1925), Pahlavi (1926-1979) and after the Islamic Revolution (1979 -up to now). Data was collected from 24 novels to best reflect various interpersonal relationships. Data analysis shows that Persian address terms are clearly divided into positive and negative types. All types of positive address terms have shown to increase in number. Negative address terms of 'honorifics', 'educational' & 'cultural' and 'teknonyms' decreased while 'occupational' and 'zero address terms' have increased in frequency which reveals a gradual and regular movement from formality to solidarity.

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Introduction

The use of language in interaction entails more than simply exchanging information about thoughts and factual things between one person and others; it is an important process in which the relationships among people are outlined and negotiated. Participating in conversations, people consciously or unconsciously show their identities, their belonging to a specific culture or group and also their tendencies to become close or distant from others. A significant linguistic area in which all these functions are highlighted is "terms/forms of address". These linguistic elements are almost never neutral in the interpersonal meanings they convey, that is, the choice of a particular form inevitably entails the expression of particular feelings and attitudes, which is the result of the interlocutors' evaluation of the nature of the relationship between them. To Philipsen and Huspek (1985: 94) "terms of address reflect the social and linguistic background of interactants to a greater extent than other aspects of language", this is the reason why these items have been the focus of attention by a large number of researchers in the area of sociolinguistics.

To Brown and Levinson (1987:126) these forms are vital linguistic mechanisms by which a speaker's attitude toward, and evaluation of, his or her relationship with another speaker is mirrored. By appropriate use of address terms, people identify themselves as part of a social group while an inappropriate choice of address ceases good interaction. They function as an indicator of interlocutors' social status as well as their social distance, showing their emotions to the other side and a means of saving one's face (Akindele, 2008).

Address terms are strongly believed to manifest interpersonal relationships, especially the extent and degrees of politeness in a society, a subject that has attracted many sociolinguists' attention all around the world especially in European languages. Although some studies have reportedly been done in Iran, this subject seems to be neglected and needs to be more attentively regarded. The findings of this study are expected to be beneficial to linguists in general and also to those who are interested in the fields of sociolinguistics and the sociology of language.

Definition of 'address terms'

As a universal concept in all languages of the world, there is little question about the meaning and function of 'address terms'. Linguistically, Braun (1988: 7) defines the term as a means of "initiating contact." He indicates that address terms often designate the interlocutors, but not necessarily so, since their literal and lexical meanings can differ from or even contradict the addressee's personal and social features. For instance, in some cultures like Iranian and Arabic communities, a girl may address her friend's mother as 'aunt' to show respect to her though there is no blood relation between them. To Afful (2006b) address terms refer to the linguistic expression by which a speaker designates an addressee in a face-to-face encounter. Oyetade (1995) defines address terms as words or expressions used in interactive, dyadic and face-to-face situations to characterize the person being talked to. Keshavarz's (2001: 6) defines this set as "...linguistic forms that are used in addressing others to attract their attention or for referring to them in the course of a conversation."

Dickey's (1996) definition of 'address' as a speaker's linguistic reference to his/her interlocutor(s) is clearly a very broad one so he made further divisions. He gives an obvious linguistic classification of address terms by their parts of speech, into nouns, pronouns, and verbs which are further classified in to 'bound' and 'free' forms. Bound morphemes are those integrated into the syntax of a sentence and free forms are those not integrated in this way.

Social meanings and functions of address terms

Apart from the linguistic definition of terms of address, it is not less important to shed light on the social function and meaning of address forms. As Murphy (1988) has elegantly put it, address forms are socially driven phenomena. This feature of address forms is conspicuously evident in light of the observation that linguistic forms used to address others mirror the complex social relations between individuals in a speech community (Paulston 1976, Trudgill 1983, Chaika 1982). All meanings of forms of address refer to the fact that these forms have their roots in the socio-cultural context of the community where they are used. Leech (1999) cited in Afful (2006b) considers terms of address as "important formulaic verbal

behaviors well recognized in the sociolinguistics literature to signal transactional, interpersonal and deictic ramifications in human relationships.” To Afful (2006a: 81) terms of address are an important part of verbal behavior through which “the behavior, norms and practices of a society can be identified.” Also, Parkinson (1985: 1) states that terms of address can function as a very important treasure trove of social information. To him, the form of an utterance and the way it is said encode not only a referential meaning, but also “encode much information about who the speaker believes he is, who he believes the addressee is, what he thinks their relationship is, and what he thinks he is doing by saying what he is saying.” He adds that terms of address in spite of little grammatical functions and opaque referential meanings, convey crucial and accurate kinds of social information.

Types of address terms in Persian

Address terms have been classified differently in different languages. Mehrotra (1981) in Hindi, Parkinson (1985) in Egyptian Arabic, Fitch (1998) in Columbia, Manjulakshi (2004) in Kannada (a language spoken in Mysore District in India), Afful (2006a) in Ghana put forth their classifications. In Persian languages, Aliakbari and Toni (2008) categorized different types of address terms that Persian interlocutors may use in different contexts, as (1) personal names, (2) general titles, (3) occupation titles, (4) kinship related terms, (5) religious oriented expressions, (6) honorifics, (7) terms of intimacy, (8) personal pronouns, (9) descriptive phrases and (10) zero-address terms. In this study, the authors deleted descriptive phrases since address terms of any type can be described in phrases. Also, the two types of ‘educational and cultural titles’ and ‘teknonyms’ were added to the list due to a considerable amount of samples found for each type as explained in the following taxonomy:

(a) **Personal names:** a common form of addressing by addressee's personal name through people's first name, last name and combination of first and last name, e.g., [abbas], ‘FN’, [karimi] ‘LN’, [abbas karimi] ‘FN+LN’.

(b) **General titles:** a general and neutral method for calling others to regard their face with no consideration of factors such as age, religion, social rank, etc. [aqa] ‘Mr.’ and [xanom] ‘Mrs, Miss’ are the most common general titles.

(c) **Religious titles:** religion has always been a powerful and effective factor in Iranians’ social life and behaviors including the use of address terms. The three forms of [haji], [mashadi] and [karbalaii] which refer to pilgrimages of three holy shrines and also the terms [sejied /sejiede] ‘male/female descendent of Holly Imams’ are common religious forms in Iran.

(d) **Occupational titles:** work-related term of address that a person receives or earns because of the degree s/he holds or because of the occupation s/he is engaged in e.g., [hakim] ‘doctor’, [sarhang]+N ‘colonel’, [mohandes] +N ‘engineer’.

(e) **Educational and cultural titles:** terms used for those with a high educational or cultural status in the society, e.g. [fazel] ‘wise man’, [shaere] ‘female poet’, [malek-o-shoara] ‘great male poet’.

(f) **Kinship /Family terms:** address terms indicating family relations, e.g., [dadash] ‘brother’, [baba bozorg] ‘granddad’, [xahar] ‘sister’.

(g) **Honorifics or terms of formality:** these terms of formality or honorifics are used by a speaker to show great respect and express deference to the addressee. The speaker seems to show that the addressee is of a higher rank or social status. e.g., [jenab] ‘sir’, [sarkar] ‘your excellency’, [qorban] ‘sir’, [arbab] ‘lord’.

(h) **Terms of intimacy:** terms used in situations where intimate interlocutors need to address partners in a conversation with a more friendly and amiable tone. Intimacy here refers to the relationship where the speaker considers the addressee as a member of an in-group, a friend or a person who shares some commonality with the speaker, so they address him using an intimate address term to show this close relationship e.g., [djanam] ‘my soul’, [azizam] ‘my dear’, [qashangam] ‘my beauty’.

(i) **Personal pronouns:** pronouns, apart from their grammatical functions, having been reported to perform a social function by signaling the disparity in the status of the speaker and addressee e.g., [bandeh] ‘I/me’, to ‘second person singular ‘you’, [shoma] ‘second person plural ‘you’.

(j) **Zero address terms:** terms used when the speaker is not certain how to address others. They often avoid the difficulty by not using any address form. Instead, they may use greetings or attention getters, e.g., [salam] ‘hi’, [bebakhshid] ‘sorry’, [sob bexejir] ‘good morning’.

(k) **Teknonyms:** nominal forms of address which define an addressee as a father, a brother, a wife, or a daughter of someone else by expressing the addressee's relation to another person. Here the addressee is known through someone else, e.g., [zaneh aqa mashala] ‘Mr.Mashala's wife’, [xanome aqaje doctor] ‘The doctor's wife’.

Address terms and politeness

Generally speaking, politeness involves taking account of others’ feelings. A polite person selects utterances appropriately to make others feel comfortable. The choice of address terms can be a sign of politeness since it is closely dependent on the interactants’ relationship or social distance (Holms, 1992:268). In politeness theory (Brown and Levison, 1987), address terms are used to show either positive or negative politeness. Positive politeness is solidarity oriented (maintained when interactants are intimate and close to each other) whereas negative politeness is power and distance oriented (in unapproachable situations and when speakers are formal to each other).

Positive politeness aims at supporting or enhancing the addressee's positive face achieved through closeness by the use of intimate forms of address. The speaker regards the listener as a member of an in-group, whose character and personality are known and liked. Close and intimate address terms are typical instances of positive politeness.

Negative politeness aims at showing awareness for the addressee's face when he is socially distant, described in terms of respect or deference. Negative politeness is often achieved through address forms of honorifics and titles.

Purpose and questions

The general aim of the present research is to study and analyze Persian address terms in terms of types and changes within the theory of politeness in the recent two centuries of Persian historical periods. To be more specific, this study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. Is the theory of politeness applicable to Persian set of address terms? And if so, how are this set distributed based on this theory?
2. How have Persian address terms changed within the politeness theory?

Review of the related literature

As address terms reveal clear examples for positive and negative politeness in the process of social interaction, they have attracted many scholars’ attentions to study different aspects of politeness in addressing set.

Table 1. Positive politeness from Qajar to the after Islamic Revolution of 1979

| | Qajar | Pahlavi | After the 1979 Revolution |
|----------------|-------|---------|---------------------------|
| Personal names | 3.56% | 17.8% | 19% |
| Intimacy names | 1.8% | 6.7% | 7.57% |
| Kinship terms | 1.39% | 11.69% | 12.53% |

Table 2. Negative politeness from Qajar to the after Revolution of 1979

| | Qajar | Pahlavi | After the 1979 Revolution |
|-------------------------------|-------|---------|---------------------------|
| Honorifics | 20% | 19% | 4.96% |
| Educational & cultural titles | 2.79% | 2.63% | 1.56% |
| Teknonyms | 1.69% | 1.16% | 1.04% |

Table 3. Negative politeness from Qajar to after the 1979 Islamic Revolution

| | Qajar | Pahlavi | After the 1979 Revolution |
|---------------------|-------|---------|---------------------------|
| Occupational Titles | 8.21% | 10.81% | 11.61% |
| Zero address terms | 0% | 1.46% | 2.61% |

The following is a list of some research in this area. Wood and Kroger (1991) in a study on politeness of English forms of address found that negative politeness outweighs positive politeness. Also they maintained that negative politeness is more polite than positive politeness. Fukada and Asato (2004) investigated the use of Japanese honorifics based on the Universal politeness theory of Brown and Levinson (1987). The results indicated that the use of honorifics is indeed in line with the politeness theory once we take into consideration the vertical aspect of Japanese society. Nevala (2004) focused on the socio-pragmatic aspects of forms of address, terms of reference and the factors which influence their choice in late 16th-century English correspondence. The study showed that referential terms are the most direct address forms, used when the social status of either the addressee or the referent is high and also when the interlocutors are socially distant from each other. He concluded that the reasons for the choice of an appropriate term are more complex, and the parameters set for, e.g., positive and negative politeness can no longer be seen as equally valid.

Ugorji (2009) investigated politeness strategies of address forms in Igbo, a national language in Nigeria. The result showed some different degrees of politeness between family and social communication. He also concluded that age is the most dominant social variable in Igbo families.

Mühleisen (2011) studied the forms of address in Caribbean English-lexicon Creoles. She stated that forms of address in the Caribbean are part of a complex politeness system developed as a result of the socio-historical conditions of the cultivation system, transferred and continued from the West African and European cultural and linguistic traditions, as well as new innovations. The study indicated that the plural form is used either to express the plural addressees or positive and negative face addressing. In any situations, the plural form is used as a politeness device for instance to express vagueness or indirectness when a speech act could be otherwise interpreted as face-threatening.

In Persian, a number of studies have been conducted on the categorization and variation of the Persian address system, from among whom we can name Keshavars (1988, 1993) indicating that since the 1979 Iranian revolution, plain speech and forms of address marking solidarity have gained popularity. In his later study, he focused on the impact of social context, intimacy and distance on the choice of Persian pronominal and address forms (Keshavarz 2001).

Hosseini (1388/2009) focused on the way power distribution is realized verbally by the two opposing sides in the thesis defence sessions regarding politeness principles.

Nanbakhsh (2011, 2012) examined the correlation between language use (particularly address terms and pronouns), politeness norms and social structure in contemporary Iranian society.

Afzali (2011) investigated different terms that spouses apply in order to address each other in different social strata in Iran regarding how they reflect power and solidarity relationships of spouses in the present society of Iran.

Methodology

Theoretical framework

Sociolinguistic research indicates variation and change in the communicative systems of many languages. The use of forms of address is one of the ways in which politeness is manifested in speech and writing. For Brown and Levinson (1987), politeness theory is based on the recognition of positive and negative politeness and in their theory, addressing can be used to show both, for example, when the speaker wishes to emphasize his/her close relationship with the hearer or the referent, positively polite formulae like FNs are most often used. Negative politeness is constructed as a means of avoiding face-threatening act (FTAs) and this can be done by using, for example, LNs and titles.

To Brown and Levinson (ibid: 46) politeness in an interaction can be defined as “the means employed to show awareness of another person’s face or ‘face want’ of an addressee, which is highly valued in conversation.” It can be neglected, maintained or intensified and is constantly attached to any verbal interaction. As we communicate with others, “we are constantly aware of our own and others’ face needs, we attend to it consciously or unconsciously, and we cooperate to maintain one another’s face” (Brown and Levinson 1987: 62). We attempt to soften utterances or acts that will threaten the face needs of the other, i.e. face threatening acts (FTAs) by using a variety of politeness strategies, including address terms. Within this system, address forms are the most direct means through which either positive or negative politeness are generally expressed. The factors which may influence the use of address terms are social distance, power and ranking of imposition, also referred to as ‘rating’, indicating the importance or the degree of difficulty attributed by the interlocutors to the situation (Cesiri 2009).

Brown and Levinson’s (1987) politeness theory is based on the recognition of positive and negative face acts, and in their theory, address can be used to show both. For example, when the speaker wishes to emphasize his/her close relationship with the referent, positively polite formulae like FNs are most often used. Negative politeness is constructed as a means of avoiding face-

threatening acts (FTAs), and this can be done by using address forms like last names and titles (Nevala 2004). Brown and Levinson's strategies of positive and negative politeness allow us to study not only variation in the overall use of address terms, but also variation that occurs within the terms themselves.

Data collection and analysis procedure

To collect the most common Persian address terms in the recent two centuries regarding types of politeness, 24 novels written in the recent two centuries, 8 in each period of Qajar, Pahlavi and after Islamic Revolution were selected, from which 1370 address terms were extracted and categorized by types. In the Qajar period, due to the limited number of published books, nearly all available novels were selected. In the two second periods, the selection was based on the popularity of novels in which actual and spontaneous language is reflected. So, the most popular novels were randomly selected from among a large number of available novels. Novels were selected as the database to investigate the changing route of address terms through Persian history because of the following reasons:

- This form of literature seems to reflect social, cultural and ideological realities as well as interpersonal relationships.

- From among different modes of literature (poetry, drama, itinerary, stories...), novels especially the parts of conversations (and not narratives) are closer to the natural language in form and style. The novelist does not seem to utilize aesthetics and literary devices; rather s/he shows the tendency towards most natural language used by speakers in society. So, in novel conversations as in everyday language, less formal and figurative speech is used.

- Although conversations are the most natural forms of language, they are impossible to be studied from the past to present due to the lack of sufficient recorded data. Thus, conversations in novels seem to be the nearest and the most appropriate substitute. The list of novels used as the database is provided in the appendix.

The corpus including 1370 address terms were extracted from the novels belonging to the three historical periods of Qajar, Pahlavi and After the Islamic Revolution which were then studied regarding change in positive and negative politeness. The periods under study are considered to contain the most important historical events which have taken place in Iran which caused essential changes in political as well as socio-cultural affairs. To be more comprehensible, a brief review of the periods is given below:

Qajar period: the Qajar dynasty is an Iranian royal family of Turkic origin, who ruled Persia (Iran) from 1170/1791 to 1304/1925.

Pahlavi period: the Pahlavi came to power after Qajar. Pahlavi dynasty comprised two Iranian/Persian monarchs, father (Reza Shah Pahlavi) and his son (Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi). They ruled Persia (Iran) from 1305/1926 to 1357/1979.

Islamic Revolution: The Islamic Revolution (also known as the 1979 Revolution) refers to events involving the overthrow of Iran's monarchy (Pahlavi dynasty) under Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and its replacement with an Islamic Republic under Ayatollah Khomeini, the leader of the revolution (Avery et al. 1991).

Data Analysis and Discussion

In this part, the data including 1370 Persian address terms used in the two recent centuries are going to be analyzed within the theory of politeness. In this set, 645 (p=47%) forms are Qajar address terms, 342(p=25%) Pahlavi and 383(p=28%) after the 1979 Islamic Revolution. The general aim of this part is to show

how Persian address terms are distributed and how they have changed within this theory.

Distribution of positive and negative politeness address terms in three historical periods of Persian language

The data consisting of a set of 1370 Persian address terms from a history of two hundred years divided into three historical periods was reviewed to see if the address terms can be classified into positive and negative types and subtypes within politeness theory. Data analysis showed that Persian address terms as well as address classifications can be classified into positive and negative types, as explained below:

Positive politeness address terms

Analysis of the data in all three periods shows that positive address terms are of the following types:

(A) **Personal names:** including male and female first names with or without [ʔAn/ʔun] 'dear'.

(B) **Kinship terms:** including close family names such as [pedar] 'father', [mAdar] 'mother', [amu] 'uncle' with or without [ʔAn/ʔun] 'dear'.

(C) **Terms of intimacy:** Including pet names e.g., [rafiq] 'comrade', descriptive phrases, e.g. [pesare xub] 'good boy' and also abbreviated forms of first names e.g. [fAti] 'used for Fatemeh'.

Negative politeness address terms

Based on the data, negative address terms are distributed in the following classification types: A) **General titles:** forms such as: [AqA] 'Mr.', [xAnom] 'Mrs.' have shown to be the most common titles in all three periods.

(B) **Religious titles:** forms such as [hAʔi], [mashhadi], [karbalaji] 'titles for a man who has gone to the religious places of Mecca, Mashhad and Karbala and also the term [sejed] 'male descendant of the Holy Imams' are the common forms in the three periods.

C) **Occupational titles:** the most common occupational titles have been formed by noun+[bashi] 'to be' e.g. [hakim bashi] 'to be a doctor' and job+noun; e.g., [mohandes] +noun 'engineer+noun'.

D) **Honorifics:** formal titles such as [arbAb] 'lord', [qorbAn] 'sir', [sarkar] 'your excellency 'sir', and [ʔenAb] 'your excellency, sir' are the most common types.

E) **Personal pronouns:** forms of this type like [bandeh] 'me, I', [ishAn] 'they', [ʔenabali] 'excellency' have been shown to be in this category.

F) **Zero addresses terms:** a new classification created in Pahlavi period when the addressee is unknown to the addressor and is called by different forms like [salam] 'hi'.

G) **Teknonyms:** frequency of items of this type decreased in number due to direct reference to women rather than being referred by their fathers, husbands or brothers.

H) **Personal names:** personal names of negative type were added to the list in Pahlavi period and were used afterwards.

Changing route of address terms regarding politeness

Persian address terms of both positive and negative types like any other linguistic items have changed through time in line with different social changes:

Changes of positive and negative politeness

Changes in the address terms have shown to be of different types of deletion, addition or change of frequency in both positive and negative types:

A) **Deletion:** Data related to the positive address terms showed no change in terms of deletion. However, some negative address terms were deleted from one period to the next one, from among the following cases can be mentioned:

- From Qajar to Pahlavi, general titles like [mirzA] 'sir' and [mosijo] 'monsieur', religious titles such as [molla] 'mullah', [darvish] 'a sufi mystic', occupational titles such as noun+[bAshi] 'to be', noun+[toḡAr] 'titles of merchants', honorifics like noun+[soltAn] 'refers to official positions within the court or the government of Qajar', Noun+[molK] 'owner of the country and its glory' and also some teknonyms like [zoḡeje]+noun '...s wife', [hamshireje]+noun '....s sister' were deleted and no longer used.

- From Pahlavi to the 1979 Islamic Revolution period, occupational titles like [motreb] 'musician', [mirAxor bashi] 'stableman', [hakim bashi] 'to be a doctor' were deleted from the list of negative address terms. o Deletion took place for different reasons such as:

- Substitution of new lexical items for the same meaning, for example, [doctor] for [hakimbish] and [AqA], [qorbAn] and [ḡenAb] for the French loan word [mosijo].

- Change in government resulted in change in royal address terms.

- Gender-equality or less gender-bias in society resulted in direct reference rather than indirect or teknonyms.

- Some items gradually changed to convey a negative load and so they were substituted for a new items, for example, [motreb] → [navazandeh]

B) Addition: The history of Persian address terms shows a number of positive and negative address terms added to the list:

- From Qajar to Pahlavi, new kinship terms of positive type were added e.g. [xAnombozorg] 'grandma', [amexAnom] 'dear aunt'. Abbreviated intimacy forms were also added from Pahlavi to IR.

Also new negative terms like occupational title, for example, [xanmmoalem] 'Mrs.teacher', teknonyms, for example, [xAnomeAqye] '...s wife', religious titles e.g. [hAḡije] 'title for a woman who has gone Mecca' and also zero address terms such as [salam] 'hi' were added from Qajar afterwards.

As the data shows, most address terms added to the list are of positive type, indicating an increasing movement to more social intimacy. Also, new jobs and occupations were another reason for new items of this type. Items like [hAḡije] and [xAnom]+job title are the result of more freedom for females to take part in social relations and activities.

C) Change in frequency: Some address types and forms have been shown to change in their frequency. From positive categories; personal, intimacy and kinship terms have increased in number from Qajar afterwards, as shown below:

Negative titles of honorifics, educational and cultural and also teknonyms have revealed to decrease in number in the past two centuries, as shown in the Table 2.

Negative titles of occupation and zero address terms have shown to increase in Table 3.

The results show that while all positive address types increase in number, some types of negative address terms increased and some decreased. It reveals an increasing movement from negative to positive politeness, in other words, a movement from more formality to more intimacy in the use of Persian language addressing forms.

Conclusions

In order to study and analyze Persian address terms in the two recent centuries within the theory of politeness, a number of 1370 address terms was collected from 24 novels belonging to the three important historical periods of Qajar (1170/1791-1304/1925), Pahlavi(1305/1926-1357/1979), and after the

Islamic Revolution of 1979 (1357/ 1979 up to now). The analysis of the data showed the following results:

- Persian address terms of different historical periods are clearly divided into positive and negative types.

- Since address terms are believed to manifest social relationships as well as social changes, this set shows different types of addition, deletion, and change in frequency in line with similar changes in society, such as launching new jobs and occupations as well as improvement in education.

- All types of positive address terms including 'personal names', 'terms of intimacy' and 'kinship terms' have increased in number.

- Negative address terms of 'occupational' and 'zero address terms' have increased in frequency while 'titles of honorifics', 'educational and cultural' and also 'teknonyms' show to have decreased in frequency.

- Although negative politeness address terms have always been more frequently used in the three historical periods of Persian language, positive types have shown an increasing movement from past to present.

- Decreasing frequency in negative types and increasing frequency in positive types indicate that the Persian language is moving from formality to intimacy in social interactions.

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