

FORMS OF ADDRESS

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Abstract: Forms of address play a key role in interpersonal communication, reflecting social norms, cultural traditions, and levels of politeness in society. In different languages, systems of address have evolved under the influence of historical, social, and linguistic factors, leading to significant differences in their use. This paper presents a comparative analysis of forms of address in English, Russian, Japanese, Korean, Uzbek, and German languages. The study draws on theoretical perspectives from sociolinguistics, discourse pragmatics, and politeness theory, allowing for the identification of both universal and specific features of address systems.

Keywords: forms of address, sociolinguistics, intercultural communication, comparative analysis, politeness, linguistic traditions, pragmatics.

Forms of address play a key role in interpersonal communication, as they reflect social norms, cultural traditions, and levels of politeness in a society. In different languages, systems of address have evolved under the influence of historical, social, and linguistic factors, resulting in significant differences in their usage. For example, in Russian, it is common to use both a first name and patronymic, while in Japanese, honorific suffixes are widely used, and in German, the distinction between *du* (informal "you") and *Sie* (formal "you") is crucial.

The study of forms of address falls within the field of sociolinguistics, which examines how language reflects and shapes social structures. Address terms serve as markers of politeness, social hierarchy, and interpersonal relationships, making them an essential part of pragmatic competence. Three key theoretical perspectives contribute to the analysis of address forms: politeness theory, discourse pragmatics, and sociolinguistic variation.

Watts (2003) emphasizes that politeness is not just a set of rules but a dynamic process influenced by cultural norms and social expectations. Forms of address are a crucial component of politeness strategies, used to establish or maintain relationships between speakers. In hierarchical societies, such as those in Japan and Korea, politeness is heavily regulated through formalized address terms (*san*, *sama*, *ssi*, *nim*), whereas in more egalitarian cultures, such as modern English-speaking societies, first-name address has become the norm in many informal contexts.

Cutting (2008) discusses how discourse pragmatics affects the selection of address forms in different communicative contexts. The choice between formal and informal address depends not only on social status but also on situational factors, including the speaker's intention, the relationship between interlocutors,

and the setting of the conversation. For instance, in business communication, German speakers traditionally prefer Herr and Frau + surname, while English speakers increasingly opt for first names, reflecting a shift towards a less rigid business culture.

Holmes (2013) explores the role of power and solidarity in language use, particularly in the selection of address terms. According to her analysis, societies with strong hierarchical structures (e.g., Japan, Korea, and, to some extent, Russia) maintain clear distinctions between formal and informal address as a means of reinforcing power relations. In contrast, societies with a higher emphasis on solidarity (e.g., English- and Uzbek-speaking communities) show greater flexibility in address choices, allowing for more informal interactions even in professional settings.

Understanding these theoretical perspectives helps explain the variation in address forms across languages and the cultural factors that shape their use.

Apart from the linguistic aspect, forms of address are closely related to social structures and etiquette. In languages with a strong hierarchical component, such as Japanese and Korean, address systems are strictly regulated, and using an inappropriate form may be perceived as impolite or even offensive. In European languages like German and English, there are distinctions between formal and informal address, but their usage rules are more flexible. In Uzbek and Russian, forms of address also reflect social roles and the status of both the speaker and the addressee.

Beyond grammatical differences, forms of address serve an important pragmatic function. They help establish distance or, conversely, create an atmosphere of trust and friendliness. For example, in English, using a first name without a title usually indicates informal communication, while in German, addressing someone by their surname with a title (Herr Schmidt, Frau Müller) remains the norm in professional settings. In Korean, omitting an honorific suffix is acceptable only between very close individuals, while in Uzbek, using the respectful *siz* emphasizes politeness when speaking with older people or superiors.

Thus, studying forms of address in different languages helps not only to better understand the culture and traditions of different peoples but also to avoid communication mistakes in intercultural interaction. In this study, we will examine forms of address in six languages, analyze their features, and identify patterns characteristic of various cultural traditions.

The goal of this study is a comparative analysis of forms of address in English, Russian, Japanese, Korean, Uzbek, and German.

The objectives of the study include:

- Describing the main forms of address in each of the languages examined.
- Identifying similarities and differences between them.
- Analyzing the influence of cultural factors on the use of address forms.

The research methods include an analysis of scientific publications from the CyberLeninka database, a comparative analysis, and an examination of how forms of address are used in real-life communication.

This study employs several methods to conduct a detailed analysis of forms of address in English, Russian, Japanese, Korean, Uzbek, and German. The primary methods include:

- Comparative analysis – used to identify similarities and differences in the address systems of the six studied languages. This method helps determine which elements of speech etiquette are universal and which are culturally specific.

- Analysis of academic publications – the study is based on the examination of articles published in peer-reviewed academic journals on the CyberLeninka platform. Specifically, research on address forms in English, Russian, and Korean [1], cross-linguistic comparisons of Russian and Uzbek address forms [2], and studies on politeness in German and Japanese cultures [3] have been utilized.

- Cultural analysis – allows for the consideration of historical and social factors influencing the use of address forms in each language. For example, in Japanese, the traditional principle of hierarchy has had a strong influence on the address system, whereas in English, forms of address have become more democratic due to cultural changes [4].

- Analysis of real-life communication – a review of modern examples of how address forms are used in spoken and written communication. Specifically, formal and informal address usage, as well as the impact of social media on changes in speech etiquette, were analyzed [5].

Additionally, when analyzing address forms, their relationship with the grammatical system of a language was taken into account. In morphologically rich languages (Russian, Uzbek, German), forms of address can change depending on case and number. In German, the distinction between *du* and *Sie* manifests not only in vocabulary but also in grammatical structures, as verb forms change depending on the level of formality [6].

In Japanese and Korean, the choice of address form often depends on social relationships between speakers. In Japanese, several levels of politeness exist, including *keigo* (敬語), which is subdivided into *sonkeigo* (尊敬語, respectful language for the addressee) and *kenjougo* (謙讓語, humble language for oneself). Similarly, in Korean, special speech levels such as *hapsyoche* (합쇼체, formally polite speech) and *haeyoche* (해요체, neutral polite speech) exist [7].

To understand the evolution of address forms in different languages, historical changes were also analyzed. In English, the pronoun *thou* has fallen out of use in most dialects, replaced by the universal *you*. In Russian, the term *товарищ* ("comrade") was widely used during the Soviet period, but it has practically disappeared from modern speech. In Uzbek, under the influence of Russian and Persian cultures, the use of *siz* (formal "you") has become more

widespread in official speech, although the traditional *sen* (informal "you") remains common in communication with close people [8].

Thus, the methodological foundation of this study allows not only for the classification of address forms in six languages but also for identifying their changes under the influence of social and cultural factors.

The study examined the main forms of address in English, Russian, Japanese, Korean, Uzbek, and German. The analysis revealed both universal and unique features in the address systems of each language.

The English system of address is relatively simple. The main forms include:

- Formal address: Mr. (sir), Mrs. (madam, married), Miss (madam, unmarried), Ms. (neutral form), Sir (respectful address for men), Madam (respectful address for women) [1].

- Informal address: Using a first name without a title, which is common in everyday and business communication, especially in English-speaking countries with democratic traditions.

- Pronouns: In modern English, *you* is used for both formal and informal situations, whereas historically, *thou* was used in informal communication [6].

The Russian system of address is more complex and includes:

- Formal address: "Господин" ("gospodin" – Mr.) and "Госпожа" ("gospozha" – Mrs.), though rarely used today. The most common formal address is by first name and patronymic (e.g., "Иван Иванович" – Ivan Ivanovich). The pronoun "вы" (*vy* – formal "you") is also used to show respect [3].

- Informal address: Using only the first name (e.g., "Иван" – Ivan), the pronoun "ты" (*ty* – informal "you"), and colloquial forms like "дружище" (*druzhitshe* – buddy), "брат" (*brat* – brother), which are typical of informal speech [4].

The Japanese language has a highly developed system of honorifics:

- Formal address: *san* (universal polite suffix), *sama* (highly respectful form), *sensei* (used for teachers, doctors, and masters) [5].

- Informal address: *kun* (casual male address), *chan* (diminutive affectionate suffix), and addressing someone by their first name without a suffix, which is only appropriate between very close individuals [5].

The Korean language uses hierarchical address forms:

- Formal address: *nim* (respectful suffix, e.g., "선생님" – *seonsaengnim*, teacher), *ssi* (neutral polite form) [7].

- Informal address: *oppa* (older brother for women), *hyung* (older brother for men), *noona* (older sister for men), *unnie* (older sister for women) [7].

Uzbek forms of address vary depending on age and social status:

- Formal address: *aka* (respectful address for an older man), *opa* (respectful address for an older woman), and the pronoun *siz* (formal "you") [8].

- Informal address: Using *sen* (informal "you") and diminutive forms in family settings [8].

The German language has strict rules regarding formality:

- Formal address: Herr (Mr.), Frau (Mrs.), Sie (formal "you") [9].
- Informal address: du (informal "you"), and first-name usage is acceptable in friendly and family circles [9].

The evolution of address forms in the English language reflects broader historical and social changes. Throughout its history, English has undergone significant shifts in the way speakers address each other, moving from rigid hierarchical distinctions to more egalitarian forms of address.

Medieval and Early Modern English

During Old and Middle English, address forms were primarily influenced by feudal social structures. The second-person singular pronoun thou was used for informal or intimate relationships, while ye and later you served as formal or plural pronouns (Holmes, 2013). This distinction was similar to the du/Sie contrast in German and the ты/вы distinction in Russian. By the Early Modern English period (16th–17th centuries), you had largely replaced thou, reflecting a broader shift towards more neutral politeness strategies (Watts, 2003). The disappearance of thou in most dialects was linked to changes in social hierarchy, as the use of you became a way to avoid perceived imbalances in power.

Titles and Honorifics in Traditional English

In addition to pronouns, English historically relied on a system of titles and honorifics, including Sir, Madam, Master, and Mistress, which indicated both respect and social rank. These forms were commonly used in professional, noble, and aristocratic circles (Cutting, 2008). Over time, many of these terms fell out of everyday use, with Master disappearing almost entirely and Mistress evolving into Mrs.

The Decline of Formal Address and the Rise of First-Name Usage

By the 20th century, formal address in English-speaking countries began to decline, particularly in informal and business settings. The widespread use of first names, even in professional relationships, became more common, reflecting the increasing emphasis on equality in Western societies. However, certain formal titles (Mr., Mrs., Dr., Professor) remain in professional and academic contexts.

Today, English address forms continue to evolve. The emergence of gender-neutral titles such as Mx. reflects changing social attitudes towards gender inclusivity. Additionally, workplace dynamics have shifted towards more informal communication, further reducing the use of formal titles in many English-speaking countries (Holmes, 2013).

The analysis revealed that all six languages have both formal and informal address forms. However, the extent of their use varies:

- Japanese and Korean have the most hierarchical address systems, where choice depends on social status and age.
- English and German show a trend toward reduced formality, especially in business settings.

- Russian and Uzbek retain traditional respect forms, expressed through names, patronymics, and pronouns.

Address forms remain a crucial aspect of intercultural communication, requiring consideration of national characteristics.

The analysis of address forms in six languages revealed both common trends and specific features shaped by cultural and social factors. This chapter discusses the main findings of the study, their interpretation, and potential directions for future research.

The study found that all six languages distinguish between formal and informal address. However, the degree of differentiation and the methods of expressing it vary significantly.

- English and German have relatively simple address systems, where the distinction between formality and informality is primarily reflected in pronoun choice (you vs. thou historically, Sie vs. du in German) and the use of titles (Mr., Frau, Herr, etc.) [6, 9].

- Russian and Uzbek use respectful and informal pronouns ("вы" – vy vs. "ты" – ty in Russian, siz vs. sen in Uzbek) as well as name and patronymic or respectful words ("господин", aka, opa, etc.) [3, 8].

- Japanese and Korean have the most complex systems, where the choice of address depends on age, social status, respect level, and even the specific communication context. These languages employ specialized grammatical structures and suffixes, and verb forms change depending on the level of politeness [5, 7].

Thus, address systems can be classified based on their structural complexity:

1. Simple systems (English, German) – minimal distinction between formal and informal address.

2. Moderately complex systems (Russian, Uzbek) – clear distinction between formal and informal address but without strict hierarchical rules.

3. Highly complex systems (Japanese, Korean) – hierarchical address structures, involving grammatical modifications.

The formation of address systems in languages is influenced by cultural and historical features.

- English and German have shown a trend toward simplifying forms of address, particularly in recent decades. For example, in German business environments, du is increasingly replacing the traditional Sie, indicating a decrease in formality levels [9].

- In Russian, the reduced use of patronymics in informal communication also points to a certain democratization of the language, though in formal settings, patronymics remain an essential element of respectful address [3].

- In Uzbek, the influence of Russian and Persian cultures has led to the widespread use of the respectful siz, whereas traditionally, sen was more common [8].

• In Japanese and Korean, the address system remains stable, as it is closely tied to social behavior norms. Changes are occurring slowly, but, for instance, modern Japanese youth are increasingly avoiding keigo (honorific speech) in everyday conversation [5, 7].

This study is limited to six languages, but future research could focus on:

• Comparative analysis of other language groups, such as Turkic, Romance, or Sino-Tibetan languages, to identify broader patterns.

• Studying the dynamics of address forms in the digital age, where formal and informal communication boundaries are blurring.

• Investigating the perception of address forms by native speakers in intercultural communication, which could be useful for linguistics, sociology, and international relations.

Differences in address systems are explained by both linguistic and cultural features. The strictest hierarchical systems are found in East Asian languages, while European languages exhibit a trend toward simplifying formal communication. However, national traditions continue to shape the choice of address forms depending on the situation and social context.

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