



GENERAL AND PARTICULAR CHARACTERISTICS OF FORMS OF ADDRESS IN CHINESE

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Abstract

The correct choice of address units leads to the successful or unsuccessful implementation of the speech process. In this case, it is necessary to pay attention to the level of familiarity, age characteristics and social status, i.e. profession, of the interlocutors. The rules of speech etiquette of the Chinese people are based on the teachings of Confucianism. The standards of speech etiquette reflect the mentality and national and cultural characteristics of the Chinese.

Keywords: Speech etiquette, greetings, sociological and communicative level, form of address, related and social addresses.

Introduction

In Chinese linguistics, speech culture has developed primarily in a social context. This socio-political orientation was shaped by the specific conditions of Chinese statehood and the bureaucratic hierarchy upon which society was built. To attain a higher social status, Chinese people have traditionally been expected to observe the customs and traditions that have been preserved for centuries. One of the most important values in Chinese society is respect for elders. For the Chinese, various customs and traditions represent a distinctive code of behavior. There is a widespread belief that a person who follows the rules of speech etiquette will be able to find and establish their proper place in society.

Speech culture is considered one of the essential components of traditional Chinese culture. It serves as a means of preserving customs, traditions, and national values. Throughout history, Chinese speech culture has maintained its significance and has never lost its cultural value.

There is a Chinese saying: **“He who respects others will always be respected by others.”** (Mengzi).

In general, honorific expressions in Chinese can be divided into two categories: **nominal expressions** and **verbal expressions**.

Nominal expressions. The honorific pronoun 您 (**nín**) is the polite form of the second-person singular pronoun 你 (**nǐ**) (“you”) in Modern Chinese. Interestingly, residents of Beijing tend to use 您 (**nín**) more frequently than people in many other regions of China.

There are various forms of address used for women in Chinese. In addition to the common titles 太太 (**tàitai**) (“Mrs.”) and 小姐 (**xiǎojiě**) (“Miss” or “Madam”), the term 女士 (**nǚshì**) (“Ms.” or “Madam”) is widely used as a respectful and polite form of address. Furthermore, married women of high social status may be addressed as 夫人 (**fūrén**) (“Madam”).

Adjectival morphemes such as 贵 (**guì**), 令 (**lìng**), 贤 (**xián**), and 高 (**gāo**) function as honorific prefixes and are commonly used in the formation of respectful expressions.

The morpheme 贵 (**guì**) literally means “honorable,” “valuable,” or “esteemed.” It is often employed to make speech more polite and respectful. In formal contexts such as business communication or diplomatic affairs, the following honorific expressions are frequently used:

贵国 (**guìguó**) – “your esteemed country”

贵国人民 (**guìguó rénmin**) – “the people of your country”

贵公司 (**guì gōngsī**) – “your esteemed company”

贵处 (**guìchù**) – “your esteemed institution/place”

In addition, this honorific prefix can be attached to nouns referring to people or objects, for example:

贵报 (**guìbào**) – “your esteemed newspaper”

贵客 (**guìkè**) – “honored guest”

贵家长 (**guì jiāzhǎng**) – “your respected parent(s)”



The preservation of speech culture and national traditions among the Chinese people is founded upon core human virtues, social norms, and their philosophy of life. These values include respect for elders, diligence, collectivism, organizational ability, composure, and many other admirable qualities that continue to shape Chinese society and communication practices.

Confucius once said: “不学礼，无以立” (**Bù xué lǐ, wú yǐ lì**) — “If you do not learn the rules of propriety and etiquette, you will not be able to establish yourself in society.” China has an ancient history and is widely recognized as a land of etiquette. Civility and moral conduct are reflected not only in an individual’s behavior but also in the level of civilization attained by a nation and its people.

There are many everyday expressions surrounding us, and we should learn and use them appropriately. Sometimes a simple greeting or compliment can bring happiness to others. The phrase “Thank you” encourages people to feel appreciated after helping someone, while the words “I’m sorry” can provide comfort to a person experiencing anxiety or distress.

Chinese etiquette is founded upon the preservation of traditions and customs, as well as respect for elders. Conflicts based on age or social status are generally discouraged, and when such conflicts arise, they are often viewed as evidence that traditional customs and national values have not been properly maintained.

Speech norms characteristic of both speakers and listeners have been preserved in all languages through proverbs and sayings. In Chinese, however, the use of idiomatic expressions (成语 *chéngyǔ*) is particularly widespread. For example, the Uzbek proverb “Ko‘p gap eshakka yuk” (“Too much talk is a burden to a donkey”) is commonly used to discourage unnecessary conversation. Similarly, Chinese culture values restraint in speech, as reflected in sayings such as “Silence conquers everything” and “Words never truly come to an end.” Chinese equivalents include: “A spoken word cannot be caught once it has left the mouth,” “The eyes see the truth while the ears hear lies,” “Speak honestly so that everyone may hear,” “Words fly away like the wind, but writing remains forever,” and “Words are wind; the pen leaves a trace.” These proverbs and sayings reflect the Chinese people’s understanding of etiquette and their psychological outlook.

The concept of speech culture among the Chinese people emerged between the fifth and seventh centuries BCE. How does speech culture arise? According to Chinese philosophy, human needs are limitless. The Chinese believe that if a person’s needs remain unsatisfied, and if they insist only on their own desires and



regard themselves as always being right, misunderstandings inevitably occur. Over time, Chinese culture has sought to maintain a balance between human needs and the necessity of regulating and fulfilling them appropriately.

Compared with many other languages of the world, Chinese possesses one of the richest systems of kinship terminology, including numerous expressions corresponding to “uncle,” “aunt,” and other relatives. This reflects the historical and cultural importance of kinship relations in Chinese society. In *The Great Learning*, Confucius stated: “If you wish to bring order to the world, you must first govern your state; if you wish to govern your state, you must first regulate your family.” He further emphasized that “The family and the state share the same structure.”

In everyday communication, Chinese kinship terms are used not only for blood relatives but also for unrelated individuals. For example, young men may be addressed as 大哥 (*dàgē*), meaning “elder brother”; older women as 张阿姨 (*Zhāng āyí*), meaning “Aunt Zhang”; and elderly men as 李爷爷 (*Lǐ yéye*), meaning “Grandpa Li.”

Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, social forms of address have undergone significant changes, developing different forms and characteristics in different historical periods to meet the needs of a rapidly changing society. Following the establishment of the PRC, 同志 (*tóngzhì*), meaning “comrade,” became one of the most popular and widely accepted forms of social address among the Chinese people. At the same time, 师傅 (*shīfu*), meaning “master” or “skilled worker,” which was initially used in workshops and factories, gradually gained broader popularity. As society continued to evolve, both “comrade” and “master” gradually returned to their more specialized and original meanings.

Following the period of economic reform and opening-up, forms of address became increasingly diverse. By the mid-1980s, the term 老板 (*lǎobǎn*), meaning “boss,” became increasingly popular in business and service sectors as a result of economic growth.

Speech etiquette includes various communicative situations that require adherence to politeness norms, such as introductions, greetings, forms of address, requests, farewells, congratulations, good wishes, expressions of gratitude, apologies, invitations, advice, sympathy, compliments, and others. This master's



thesis focuses in detail on communicative situations involving forms of address, introductions, greetings, farewells, gratitude, apologies, and requests. These situations were selected because students learning Chinese inevitably encounter them in communication and therefore need to master the fundamental principles of speech behavior in everyday interactions.

The modern Chinese system of address is primarily based on kinship and social forms of address. Both referential and vocative kinship terms in modern Chinese constitute an important part of speech etiquette. Referential terminology mainly serves to classify relatives, whereas vocative terminology reflects interpersonal relationships among family members.

The use of kinship terms to address non-relatives is common in many languages; however, this phenomenon is particularly widespread in Chinese. When choosing an appropriate form of address for non-relatives, factors such as familiarity, profession, and social status are taken into account.

Speech etiquette norms reflect the mentality and national-cultural characteristics of the Chinese people. As mentioned above, observing speech etiquette is extremely important in China. Therefore, if you are unsure how to address a Chinese person, it is customary first to ask:

“请问，您怎么称呼？” (Qǐngwèn, nín zěnmē chēnghu?) — “May I ask how I should address you?”

“我该如何称呼你？” (Wǒ gāi rúhé chēnghu nǐ?) — “How should I address you?”

National characteristics of a language are clearly reflected in its forms of address. These differences are closely connected with the dominant social values of a society. For example, both China and Uzbekistan traditionally emphasize collectivism, whereas many European countries place greater emphasis on individualism.

These cultural differences become evident when representatives of different societies interact. In formal English-speaking contexts, individuals typically introduce themselves using their first and last names (for example, “James Thompson”). In Chinese, however, people are often addressed by their surname and professional title (for example, 李老师 (Lǐ lǎoshī) — “Teacher Li”). It should also be noted that if a person does not hold a specific professional title,

they are usually addressed as 先生 (*xiānsheng*), meaning “Mr.,” or 太太 (*tàitai*), meaning “Mrs.”

Like many other languages, Chinese possesses a variety of forms of address used to facilitate communication between individuals who are not related by blood. Some of these forms of address are widely used in everyday communication. Kinship terms and various address formulas have long served as common and socially accepted means of addressing others in Chinese society.

Based on the analysis conducted, it can be concluded that after the establishment of the People's Republic of China, new and different types of commonly accepted forms of address emerged. This development marked a significant turning point in the evolution of the Chinese system of address. As Chinese society continued to develop, forms of address adapted to changing social and cultural conditions while preserving many traditional features.

Observance of speech etiquette, particularly politeness, remains highly important in Chinese culture. Politeness is fundamentally reflected through the appropriate use of forms of address. A form of address is a linguistic unit directed toward a particular person and expressed through a word or phrase. It is used for various communicative purposes, such as attracting attention, making requests, initiating interaction, expressing respect, or conveying other intentions. Therefore, forms of address play a crucial role in maintaining harmonious interpersonal relationships and ensuring effective communication in Chinese society.

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