

Address rituals as heuristics of social structure

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The address form as linguistic variable has more realisation possibilities than any other, because semantic variation is involved and it reflects all the different interpersonal relations in the societal structure. Factors such as religious status, sex, kinship and age differences play a key role in the choice of the address form. It is hypothesised that the way in which address forms vary in a speech community is a linguistic reflection of the social norms determining the hierarchical structure of the community.

Die aanspreekvorm as linguïstiese veranderlike het meer verwesenlikingsmoontlikhede as enige ander vorm, want semantiese verskeidenheid is betrokke en dit reflekteer die verskillende interpersoonlike verhoudings in die gemeenskapstruktuur. Faktore soos religieuse status, geslag, verwantskap en ouderdomsverskille speel 'n sleutelrol in die aanspreekvorm. Daar word gehipotetiseer dat die wyse waarop aanspreekvorms in 'n spraakgemeenskap wissel, 'n linguïstiese refleksie is van die sosiale norme wat die hiërargiese struktuur van die gemeenskap bepaal.

1 Introduction

A topic of this nature is closely connected with Hymes' ethnography of speech, the anthropological equivalent of sociolinguistics which concerns itself not only with language usage itself as a phenomenon of linguistic science, but also with the contextual functions of language usage, with

... rules of speaking ...the ways in which speakers associate particular modes of speaking, topics or message forms, with particular settings and activities (Coulthard 1981:31).

The value which this approach has for a socially responsible study of patterns of language use in a specific speech community lies, on the one hand, in the insight to be gained into the social structure and cultural communication within the community, and on the other in the explanation which can be given of the occurrence of language variation among speakers of the language concerned. Naturally, these factors cannot be divorced, given the fact that language variation and social variegation together specifically form the basis of sociolinguistics, even though the emphasis in sociolinguistics falls on the linguistic aspect. If, however, the communicative functions of language form the focal point, one has to move closer to Hymes' "ethnography of communication", which again falls within the ambit of interactional

sociolinguistics and conversational analysis. This additional dimension results from the importance attached to **context** by language ethnographers in the functional explanation of language phenomena. An ethnography of communication was initially (circa 1960) regarded as the method by means of which the internal patterns of speech acts could be discovered. Towards 1972, however, a shift in emphasis occurred away from a predominantly descriptive approach, which resulted in Gumperz and Hymes' collection of articles, *Directions in sociolinguistics: The ethnography of communication*. The empirical orientation is here still very much in evidence, but the research has become more theory-orientated. In conjunction with the Chomskyan concept of grammatical competence, "communicative competence" has become the model directing the aims of descriptive research. Blount (1981:97) defines the concept as

...the ability of speakers to perform ... their enactment of social roles
through the use of verbal messages appropriately and in acceptable ways.

A typical problem in this connection is the alternation of address forms in conversational situations. A mere description of the occurrence and context of this alternation in practice is not regarded as sufficient - the deeper causes, situated in both the social structure and communicative strategies of speaker and hearer, must be determined.

2 A connection between address forms and social structure?

The achievement of the ultimate goal of scientific disciplines, namely to create an integrated theory, is naturally dependent on restricted hypotheses, which in the case of social linguistics (cf. Webb, 1983:239) must rest on much empirical research. One such hypothesis, which pertains to the alternation of address forms mentioned above, could be formulated as follows:

The manner in which address forms vary in a speech community, is a linguistic reflection of the social norms which determine the hierarchical structure of the community.

This hypothesis will subsequently be tested against data obtained during a sociolinguistic investigation into variational patterns in Malay Afrikaans (Kotzé, 1983).

2.1 An interactional dimension

A wider analysis of variational phenomena in the speech of the target group (the Malay community of the Cape Peninsula) revealed that the choice of a particular variant relates to the position of the speaker within the community hierarchy. This finding results from the application of correlational sociolinguistic principles (Labov, 1972, Goyvaerts and Velders, 1975; et al) and pertains principally to the placing of the speaker **qua** speaker within the social matrix. By means of the analysis of conversations between a Malay fieldworker and respondents known to him (from his personal social network), particular conversational rituals could be identified in which especially the address form figured as a systematically variable category. In this way an interactional dimension was incorporated into the correlation framework, in which the choice of particular variants was associated with the relation between speaker and hearer.

2.2 Address form as variable

The address form (henceforth AF) is defined by Marais (1979;286) from the viewpoint of communication science:

The address form can be regarded as the codified representation of, on the one hand, the existence of the relation between sender and receiver and, on the other, the qualitative nature of that relation.
(Translated from Afrikaans)

From the linguistic viewpoint, the AF in Afrikaans is always a noun phrase (NP), which as vocative counterpart of the referential NP, is identical to it (cf. Lombard, 1978). Consequently, titles and kinship names can all function as common nouns:

- (1) Dokter, ek voel verskriklik.
Doctor, I feel terrible.

as against

- (2) Ek het vir die dokter gesê ek voel verskriklik.
I told the doctor that I was feeling terrible.

- (3) Oom, kom oom vanaand oor?
Uncle, are you coming over tonight?

as against

- (4) Ek het my oom gevra of hy vanaand oorkom.
I asked my uncle if he was coming over tonight.

In addition one finds that pronouns, like proper nouns, often act as disjunctive AF's:

- (5) **Jy**, kom 'n bietjie hier.
You, just come here

- (6) Ek is nou moeg gespeel, **julle**.
I am now tired of playing, you

Example (3) above illustrates the syntagmatic difference between the vocative and referential NP's, respectively, namely the disjunctive form (as peripheral noun phrase) on the one hand and the referential (deictic) NP as subject of the sentence (in this case) on the other. Henceforth I shall distinguish between vocative and referential deictic NP's.

The choice between alternative AF's can, according to Brown & Ford (1964), who made a study of the semantic rules determining AF's in 20 European and Indian languages,

essentially be reduced to that between (Afrikaans) **u** (German **Sie**) and **jy** (German **du**) as personal pronouns, expressing a relation of power and solidarity, respectively, between the interlocutors. (In reality there is a second dimension: Unfamiliarity and/or social distance as against familiarity are expressed respectively by the two forms). According to Scholtz (1963:76) and Van Loey (1964:139) references to **u** as subject in European-Dutch sources prior to 1840 are extremely rare. In Swedish, too, the use of this form (**ni>i**) was a thirteenth century 'innovation' which even today has not really gained acceptance (Mitchell, 1979:61), and as part of a politically motivated process of democratisation is everywhere being ousted deliberately by **du**. The linguistic correlate of a hierarchical (or asymmetrical) relation between interlocutors in Swedish, more than in any other European language (**ibid.**)¹, takes the form of an oblique deictic NP. So, third person pronouns, proper nouns and titles are also being used as oblique deictic NP's (Paulston, 1980:363):

- (7) Vad vill hon ha?
What does she want?

- (8) Vad vill Christina ha?
What does Christina want?

- (9) Vad vill fröken ha?
What does the lady want?

- (10) Vad vill professorn ha?
What does the professor want?

Also in Afrikaans (cf. example [3]) the oblique mode of address is still in use, as is evident from a research project among students at various educational institutions (cf. Odendal, 1976:112). It is above all this oblique mode of address, and the large number of variants which reflect various relations between interlocutors, which is typical of the conversational situation among members of the Cape Malay community. Regarding the origin of the phenomenon, Scholtz (1963:67-77) points to the fact that it had been in use in 18th century Netherlands, and that examples occurred in both European Dutch and Cape Dutch sources of that time. It would appear, therefore, that the first Malay slaves at the Cape, in adopting Cape vernacular Dutch as their mother tongue, took over the address system and expanded it to include kinship as well as religious terms which had been in common use among them.

3 Deictic NP variation in Malay Afrikaans address rituals

Particularly when someone is visited at home, conversations among Malays are usually introduced by a strongly ritualised order of expressions, which strengthen the social (or family) ties between the interlocutors, and in which the AF is used very prominently to emphasize the interpersonal relation. Subsequently, this impression will be tested against a number of recorded conversational rituals in which particular relational aspects come to light.

In the first case, the fieldworker (a hadji²) visits an aged woman:

Fieldworker: Salaam aleikum!

Respondent: Aleikum salaam!

Fieldworker: Hoe vaar oemie?
How is granny?

Respondent: Alchamdu lillah. Hoe vaar Ishaak?
By the grace of Allah (everything is fine). How is Ishaak?

Fieldworker: Alchamdu lillah.

In this situation, respect is shown by both speakers: The fieldworker uses the oblique deictic NP **oemie**, while the older woman uses the field worker's first name referentially. In the subsequent course of the conversation **oemie** is replaced by the personal pronoun (third person), while the first name of the fieldworker is substituted by **jy** (Germ. **du**), which became evident at a later stage:

Fieldworker: Ek kom vir oemie sien. Ek het gehoor sy maak toppe.
Maak sy nog altyd toppe?
*I've come to see granny. I've heard she is making hats.
Is she still making hats?*

Respondent: Ja, maar ek is so besig.
Yes, but I'm so busy.

Fieldworker: O, sy maak nie meer nie.
Oh, she is not making (them) any more.

In the next situation the respondent (again a woman) is much younger, but still in years the senior of the fieldworker:

Fieldworker: Salaam aleikum!

Respondent: Aleikum Salaam! Kom maar in, hadjie.
Peace be with you! Do come in, hadji.

Fieldworker: Hoe vaar sles Poppie?
How is aunt Poppie?

Respondent: 'Chamdu lillah.

Fieldworker: Ek kom maar net kyk hoe sy is.
I'm just coming to see how she is.

Respondent: Ek wil al die kinders gestuur het om te kom kyk het vir hadjie.
I've been wanting to send the children to come and look up hadji.

Here again, the principle of reciprocal deference applies through the use of the familial title (which indicates deference, not kinship, here) plus first name towards the respondent and, on the other hand, the use of the fieldworker's religious title. (With a first name, **hadjie** is sometimes abbreviated to **hai**.) This title is also used with the definite article in the AF, while in individual cases the AF is ignored by an older person (with equal religious status). In the next example the fieldworker addresses an older woman, also a hadji:

Fieldworker: Salaam aleikum!

Respondent: Aleikum salaam!

Fieldworker: Hoe vaar die hadjie?
How is the hadji?

Respondent: Alchamdu lillah. Hoe vaar?
By the grace of Allah. How's it?

Fieldworker: 'Chamdu lillah.

Later he also addresses her referentially as **Minora** and **sy** ('she').

In a conversation with an older man (64 years) the fieldworker (28 years) never ceased to address him as **Boeta Chamsa**, while the latter only used **jy**. From this fact the relative higher status enjoyed by men in the Malay community is evident.

Conversations with younger girls, however, revealed an interesting phenomenon. On first acquaintance with a 17 year old first names were used reciprocally, with pronominal substitution by the fieldworker (**sy** towards the respondent):

Fieldworker: Wat is **haar** hobbies in die lewe? Wat doen **sy**?
What are her hobbies in life? What does she do?

When he learned that she had only just left school, he switched to **jy**:

Fieldworker: Maar jou ma sê nie wat **jy** moet nog doen nie?
But your mother doesn't tell you what to do any more?

The request to read a wordlist and prose passage (which formed part of an investigation into style variation) caused the fieldworker temporarily to switch back to **sy**. Afterwards, when the situation returned to informal, he also granted her exemption from addressing him as **boeta** (AF towards older men) and they left each other 'on first-name terms'. From this situation it is evident that the AF as variable is also subject to style shifting and that peer group familiarization often takes the form (sometimes in a romantic way!) of AF shifting. The fact that a respondent is still at school, serves as a distinct barrier of seniority. Against schoolgoing boys and girls alike the asymmetrical relation was maintained and no exemption was given from addressing him as **Boeta Ishaak** [buta Isxak] or **Boeta 'Gak**.

It became clear from a penetrating conversation with the fieldworker as well as respondents that within the Malay community formality does not play any significant role concerning the choice of AF's. The crucial factor is deference for the hierarchical boundaries, which are determined (as is evident from the preceding data) by religious status, kinship, age and familiarity within the peer group. In the case of inter-group contact with outsiders (often in a formal context) there do seem to be certain adjustments, e.g. by using forms such as **meneer**, **u** and **mister**. One could say that AF's, which naturally vary from person to person, are determined in this community by religious and cultural boundaries and that any contact with **nasaras** (Christians, non-Muslims) outside the personal circle of friends brings about a measure of formality. Referential **ju** for peers or inferiors (in respect of age and the religious hierarchy) is only used when the degree of familiarity justifies it. Otherwise the oblique deictic NP, which can be either a religious or a kinship³ title is customary. **U** is virtually never used. On first acquaintance (in this case a proselyte to Islam) the first name is, for example, used in the following way:

Fieldworker: Wat Farieda islam word, het Farieda vir getroude redes
islam geword?
*When Farieda became a Muslim, did Farieda become a
Muslim for reasons of marriage?*

As the familiarity increases, the first name is substituted by **ju** and **jou**. In the case of a significantly older person (ca. 15 years), however, the oblique form is never substituted.

In the case of kinship and social titles the title is used by itself as AF (except sometimes **sies** and **boeta**, which indicate social as well as kinship ties and are used with the first name), while in the case of religious titles the use of the first name is optional and often depends on the degree of familiarity (e.g. **sjeg**, **hadjie**, **hai Achmat**, **imam Abdullah**). Although the use of religious titles with younger titleholders (including hadji's) is retained, in which case both interlocutors use deference terms (the hadji, for instance, would use **boeta** in addressing the older person), here, too, familiarity can neutralise the use of the religious title, especially if the titleholder is considerably younger or a peer group member within the same family. For the sake of completeness, it can be mentioned that a professional title (e.g. **dokter**) is always used as AF without first name or surname and is never substituted by **ju** or **u**, except in the case of the neutralising effect of kinship familiarity.

Glossary of address forms in Malay Afrikaans

agoeja [axuja] - *brother* (obsolete), *uncle*

ámatie [amati] - *older woman* (often *aunt*)

ammie [ami] - *uncle*

bappa [bapa] - *father* (obsolete)

boeja [buja] - *father*

boeta [buta] - *uncle, older brother, older male acquaintance*

gálatie [xalati] - *older woman* (not related)

hadjie [haji] - *male or female person who has completed the pilgrimage to Mecca*

imam [imam] - *Muslim priest, officiator*

memme [m m] - *grandmother* (obsolete)

opa - [o:pa] *grandfather* (obsolete)

ouboeja [ubuja] - *grandfather*

siesie (sies) [sisi] - *aged woman, grandmother* (to some)

sjeg [s x] - *Muslim priest who has achieved a certain level of erudition* (not to be confused with **sheikh**)

tatta - *grandfather* (obsolete)

tietie [titi] - *older sister*

Notes

- ¹ In Mitchell's words: "Swedish, in which greater avoidance of second person singular pronouns has traditionally been practised than in other European language..."
- ² See glossary.
- ³ As a result of the use of kinship terms to refer to nonrelated persons, the difference between the two reference possibilities is not always so clear.

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