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Original article

Power dynamics and forms of address in Algerian and Russian academic discourses

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Abstract

This study examines the forms of address employed by teachers in Algeria and Russia, focusing on their cultural significance, student preferences, and the underlying power dynamics in educational settings. Drawing on sociolinguistic and pragmatic frameworks, the research investigates how teachers and students navigate authority, respect, and social hierarchy through language use. The study includes 143 participants from Algeria and Russia, encompassing teachers and students across various educational levels, allowing for a comparative analysis of cultural and contextual influences on classroom discourse. Data collected from classroom interactions reveals the significance of address forms—such as titles, pronouns, and honorifics—in constructing and negotiating power relationships. The findings highlight the dual role of politeness strategies: maintaining hierarchical structures while fostering a collaborative learning environment. It has been noticed that Algerian teachers predominantly use first names, last names, honorifics, and kinship terms, reflecting the societal emphasis on familial bonds and respect. Conversely, Russian teachers utilize first names, first names combined with patronymics, last names, and endearment terms, embodying a blend of formal respect and nurturing communication. However, the students' preference for informal address forms reveals a shift towards reducing power imbalances, promoting a more collaborative and inclusive classroom atmosphere. This paper contributes to understanding the sociocultural underpinnings of classroom discourse in multilingual and multicultural contexts, offering insights into the broader relationship between language, power, and education.

Keywords: power dynamics, linguistic politeness, forms of address, Algerian class, Russian class, classroom discourse, sociolinguistics, multilingualism, cross-cultural comparison, education, pragmatics

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Оригинальная научная статья

Динамика власти и языковая вежливость: формы обращения во взаимодействии учителей и учеников в алжирских и русских классах

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Аннотация

В этом исследовании изучаются формы обращения, используемые учителями в Алжире и России, с упором на их культурное значение, предпочтения учащихся и лежащую в основе динамику власти в образовательных учреждениях. Опираясь на социолингвистические и прагматические рамки, исследование изучает, как учителя и ученики управляют авторитетом, уважением и социальной иерархией посредством использования языка. В исследовании приняли участие 143 человека из Алжира и России, учителей и учеников разных уровней образования, что позволяет провести сравнительный анализ культурных и контекстуальных влияний на дискурс в классе. Данные, собранные в ходе взаимодействия в классе, показывают важность форм обращения, таких как титулы, местоимения и почтительные обращения, в построении и обсуждении отношений власти. Результаты подчеркивают двойную роль стратегий вежливости: поддержание иерархических структур при содействии совместной учебной среды. Было замечено, что алжирские учителя в основном используют имена, фамилии, почтительные обращения и термины родства, отражая общественный акцент на семейных связях и уважении. Напротив, русские учителя используют имена, имена в сочетании с патронимами, фамилиями и ласковыми терминами, воплощая смесь формального уважения и заботливого общения. Однако предпочтение студентами неформальных форм обращения показывает сдвиг в сторону сокращения дисбаланса власти, способствуя более совместной и инклюзивной атмосфере в классе. Данная работа способствует пониманию социокультурных основ дискурса в классе в многоязычных и многокультурных контекстах, предлагая понимание более широких отношений между языком, властью и образованием.

Ключевые слова: динамика власти, языковая вежливость, формы обращения, алжирские классы, русские классы, дискурс в классе, социолингвистика, многоязычие, кросс-культурное сравнение, образование, прагматика

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Introduction

Definition and categories of forms of address. Address terms or form/term of address are other names for an address form. In speech or writing, it simply refers to the word or phrases used to address someone. Address forms are the terms speakers use to identify the person they are **speaking** to throughout a conversation [1]. Another

definition which suggests that Forms of address any word that identifies the person to whom you are speaking or writing, such as their name, title, or pronoun. These forms of address can develop as a variety of titles, names, kinship terms, words of love, and nicknames—all often with an initial capital in English—or they might be ingrained in the grammar of the language being used, as is the case with the French pronouns *vous* and *tu*.

Additionally, Oyetade [2] defined forms of address as the words or expressions we use in dyadic and interactive face-to-face encounters to continue a discourse with the addressee. This brings up another definition for us: In a face-to-face setting, address forms are language expressions that a speaker uses to identify his or her addressee [3]. An analogous definition is provided by Keshavarz [4], who characterizes forms of address as language expressions that a speaker uses to address utilizes to acknowledge or refer to other individuals throughout a chat. According to Parkinson [5], forms of address may be broadly characterized as the terms we use to refer to an addressee of a communicative event in that event. These words, address forms, transmit social information. In addition to accurately conveying social information, an utterance's form also contains referential meaning, or the speaker's perception of the nature of the connection with the addressee [6]. Additionally, a large portion of the verbal behavior that characterizes the norms, behaviors, and practices of a particular community is represented by the forms of address [3]. Address forms reveal and mirror some aspects of the cultural social milieu. Put differently, they elucidate the intricacy of social connections between communicators and the link between language and society, assisting sociolinguists in comprehending the ways in which these interactions are formed [4; 7].

Adding to that, address forms illustrate the connection between welcoming behavior and cognitive processes in social interactions. The cognitive process indicates that the way address forms are employed in regular discourse is inextricably linked to the development of social identities and the maintenance of social structures [8]. Address terms are essential for maintaining and fostering social proximity, as well as having a considerable significance as expressions in the development of relationships [9].

There are several categories of English terminology for addressing. Using first names to address the listener, for instance, addressing one another by name, such as with Jack, Elizabeth, Will. Also, using kinship to address the interlocutor is another way to address the listener, which means addressing one another using kinship words, such as “Mom,” “Dad,” “Grandma,” etc., the speakers utilize the kinship terms “title without last name” (TLN). Third, use intimacy forms of address, which is a type of communication, through which the speakers address each other using intimate terms that suggests that there is a kind of closeness between the interlocutors instead of using their names. For example: honey, sweetheart, dear. As for another form of address through which individuals are addressed by their title before their name, such as Mr. Jacob, Mrs. Smith [10].

Furthermore, and talking in detail about the forms of address and its subdivisions that it can be spotted in different cultures and across different societies. The following categories are commonly spotted in different cultures:

Nouns. Certain languages, like Japanese, have complex pronoun systems that indicate the connection between the addresser and the addressee. Certain European language systems have two pronoun systems: one for formal, polite communication between equals or between superiors and inferiors (French “vous”, Spanish “Usted”), and another for informal, personal communication between equals or between superiors and inferiors (French “tu”, Spanish “tú”). This system is the source of the French verbs *tutoyer* (to call tu; to be on friendly terms with) and *vousvoyer* (to call you; to be on formal terms with). Prospero greets his daughter Miranda in Shakespeare's *Tempest* with the personal th-forms (thou, thee, thy, thine), while she addresses him with the polite y-forms. This is how GENERAL ENGLISH used pronouns in the past.

Title names and honorifics. English now mostly relies on forms of address to indicate relationship subtleties because it lost its th-forms as living pronouns (apart from the Northern Isles and North of England dialect) and expanded its y-forms to all usage. The general rule for forms of address is that those who are acquaintances use a title and family name, such as Mr. Jones, Mrs./Ms./Miss Smith, and are “on last-name terms,” whereas people who are intimates use given names, such as George and Sue (and are “on first-name terms”). In situations that are somewhat formal, strangers only use titles (Sir, Madam).

Kinship terms. Kinship words are widely used within families: (1) In official terms, mother, father, grandmother, and grandfather. Extremely formal, particularly among the higher echelons of the British people, as seen by the 19th-century names Mama, Papa (with emphasis on the second syllable) or the Latin Mater, Pater (pronounced “may-ter, pay-ter” in English). (3) Informal, with regional and class-specific variations: Ma/Mam/Mom/Momma/Mum/Mammy/Mommy/Mummy, Pa/Pop/Poppa. The roles of father, mother, brother, and sister have been extended outside the family for fellowship and religious reasons. Within the family, particularly in AmE, Brother is referred to as the occasional Bro, Sister as Sis, Bud(dy) (which has become common use, mostly among men), and Brer.

Professional Titles. The titles given above may be replaced by certain professional titles. While in North America any person holding a professorial rank (assistant, associate, or full professor) is often permitted to use it, in Britain the academic title Professor (abbreviation Prof.) is limited to those holding a professorial chair. As a result, few professors in Britain and the Commonwealth are addressed as such, but most university-level instructors in the US and Canada are. When addressing someone in the military, titles for ranks are frequently used: Captain Bligh, several of the soldiers would want to see you. In a similar vein, the clergy may be addressed using titles: I have a riddle for you, Father Brown. Sister Bernadette, have you noticed anything intriguing lately? Lawyers are referred to as Counsellors, without surname, while judges are called Judge Bean in American law (pardon me, Counsellor, but... Presidents, vice presidents, senators, representatives (sometimes known as congressmen or congresswomen), governors, mayors, and a variety of other office holders are addressed by their titles and surnames on a regular basis in other levels of the US government: Senator/Mayor Smith, are you planning to seek for office once more?

The role of social context, and distance in the choice of forms of address. Linguistics is mostly focused on sentence structure and function alone for several decades. Nonetheless, linguists’ awareness of the significance of context in sentence interpretation has grown since the early 1970s. Sociolinguists are particularly interested in understanding why people communicate differently in various social circumstances. According to Holmes [11], “studying how people use language in various social contexts offers a wealth of information about the social relationships in a community as well as about the way language works.” Because humans employ distinct styles in various social circumstances, sociolinguistics studies the interaction between language and its environment.

Furthermore, when it comes to language use, context is crucial since acceptable language and social conduct must fit not just the individual and his financial background but also certain events and circumstances. Put differently, language is not only influenced by the social attributes of the speaker but also by the social environment he is in. According to Levinson [12], “the phenomenon of deixis is the single most obvious way in which the relationship between language and context is implemented in the structure of languages themselves.” Social deixis, which describes the social roles that people play in speech events, is one of the deixis categories that is closely connected to this research. Honorifics and words of address are examples of social deixis.

Linguistic expressions known as terms of address are employed while addressing someone in order to get their attention or to make references to them during a discourse.

Murphy [13] has succinctly stated that address formats are socially constructed phenomenon. Stated differently, language patterns utilized for interpersonal communication can reflect the intricate social dynamics among members of a speech community [14, 15, 16]. It is also argued that pronouns and forms of address are the ideal places to search in a language's grammar for a correlation between language and society. Because address forms so clearly illustrate the connection between language and society, sociolinguists, anthropologists, and social psychologists have taken a keen interest in them [4].

According to Talk [17], "different terms of address are being used in different social contexts." For instance, we can have a look at how the French pronouns "tu" and "vous" are distributed [18]. The forms of address used by a social inferior to a social superior, such as vocative phrases like "Sir," "Doctor," or "My Lord" (in the courtroom), may differ from those used amongst peers, as Lyons [19] notes. Similar to many other languages (such as French, Italian, Spanish, German, and Russian), The deferential "you" is employed in speech events where there is an unbalanced relationship between the dyads, such as when the addressee has a greater social position or when there is insufficient personal contact between the speaker and the addressee. Conversely, the familiar "you" is employed in situations where the addressee is in a subordinate position or when the speaker and addressee have an intimate connection.

However, a lot of researchers have focused mostly on how different forms of address vary depending on the social attributes of language users and the interpersonal dynamics between them. For instance, Brown and Levinson [20] propose that the interlocutor's interaction is largely associated with certain types of social relationships, but the main focus of this study is on how social environment influences the choice of address forms, which makes it significant. Two significant variables are examined in this study: the degree of social context formality and social distance.

The degree of intimacy or distance we have with someone influences our language choices greatly. For example, the French pronoun /tu/ denotes closeness, whereas /Vous/ denotes distance. According to Holmes [21], "a variety of factors may contribute to determining the degree of social distance or intimacy between people with regard to age, sex, social roles, co-employment, family status, and so forth." In a similar vein, formality level is helpful in determining the impact of social context. For instance, the way friends and relatives address each other depends on how formal the social setting is. For instance, a couple may use personal forms when speaking to each other privately, but they may switch to polite forms in public.

Methodology of the study

This study employs a qualitative and quantitative research design to explore the interplay between power dynamics and linguistic politeness in forms of address within classroom settings. The methods used, data collection tools, and details about the study population are outlined below.

Methods. The study adopts a comparative approach, analyzing classroom discourse in Algeria and Russia to identify similarities and differences in how linguistic politeness and power dynamics manifest in educational settings. The research focuses on how participants address one another and the strategies used to negotiate authority and respect.

Data Collection Tools. To gather comprehensive data, the study utilizes the following tools:
Discourse Completion Test (DCT):

A structured instrument designed to elicit specific linguistic behaviors in hypothetical scenarios. The DCT consists of prompts simulating classroom interactions, such as teacher-student and student-student exchanges. These scenarios focus on requests, directives, apologies, and other speech acts that reveal politeness strategies and forms of address.

Interviews. Semi-structured interviews with a subset of participants were conducted to gain deeper insights into their perceptions of politeness, power dynamics, and cultural norms influencing their linguistic choices.

Since the DCT is designed to collect a general insight of the proposed study through the collection of the mass data that would provide the research with numerical data and give a general overview of the relationship between the power dynamics and the address forms, meanwhile, the interviews comes as a second tool that would provide a in depth overview of the actual case studies, thus, it provides the qualitative data that would serve the results of the quantitative data collected through the DCT. For example, through the DCT, researchers can the number of students who claim that their teachers use their first names to call them, but through the interviews, it can be revealed why the teachers tend to use such an address form and in which situation.

Population of the Study. The study involves 143 participants, divided as follows:

Algeria: 71 participants, students from different branches and they study in two different universities;

Russia: 72 participants, students from RUDN university who are either Russians or Russian speaking students.

The participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure representation across diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This approach enables a comparative analysis of how sociocultural contexts influence forms of address and politeness strategies in classroom interactions.

Summary of the Results

Address forms in Algerian classrooms

The responses collected show how different the Algerian teachers like to address their student in different situation:

The use of Honorifics (student + utterance):

(1) جيلم شككت عهم ام كعاعات عباإلإ دواع, بلإط

Student, repeat your answer, I couldn't hear you well.

(2) هوفوشي اوردقي لمك كعاعات ءالمزلأ شاب ولباطللأف نيرمتلأ يبتكأ ع لطلأ, فسناً

Miss, come to the board and write the exercise, so that all your classmates can see it.

(3) demoiselle كلضف نم عباإلإ يدواع

Miss, please repeat the answer.

The use of kinship terms (Kinship term+ request):

(4) يذه يبتكأ ولباطللأ يحاورا, يتنب

My daughter, come to the board and write this.

(5) وعاعات يلزنملا بجاوالا ريدي مكعاعات دي دجلأ ليمزلا نواعت ردقت, يدلو

My Son, can you help your new classmate with his homework?

The use of First names (First name+ utterance):

(6) دراب وجال! كلضف نم عقاتلأ قلغت ردقت ينأه

Hani, could you close the window, please! It feels cold.

The use of Last names (Last name+ utterance):

(7) ولباطللأف نيرمتلأ بتكأ ع لطلأ, يديزوب

Bouzidi, come and write the exercise on the board.

Interview verification summary:

More details concerning the forms of address were obtained through the face-to-face interviews conducted with the students. The students were asked about the way the teachers are addressing them when requesting them to perform an action or do a favor for them, the students argues that teachers tend to address them frequently either using Honorifics, kinship address terms First names or Last names (As was mentioned previously through the analysis of the responses of the DCT), furthermore, the students

were asked what is the address form that they prefer and why, (58.4%) of the students said that they prefer the teachers to call them by their first names, whilst (22,1%) said that they like when their teachers use kinship terms in order to address them, meanwhile, (14,3%) said that they more likely to prefer the Honorifics as a form of address, only (6,2%) said that they prefer the teacher to call them using their Last names. (see Table 1)

Table 1

Analysis of Algerian students’ preference of forms of address

Таблица 1

Анализ предпочтений алжирских учеников в отношении форм обращения

Forms of Address	Honorifics	Kinship terms	First name	Last name
Percentages	14,3%	22,1%	58,4%	6.2%

When asking the students why they prefer a certain form of address, the students who preferred to be called used the honorifics said that it is a sign of respect and that this is the best way the teachers should address their students, as for the students who preferred to be called by their first name said that when their teachers call them using their first names, it means that this is a sign that the teacher knows that they are making an effort and that they are going to be getting a good mark on the continuous assessment which is mainly based on the students’ interactions in-classroom settings, also, they said that it is a sign that the teachers care more to know about their students and to get closer to them.

Moreover, the students who preferred kinship terms said that this make them feel closer to their teachers and that they are trying to create a closer tie with their students and create more of a family-like relationship. The rest of the students who preferred to be called by their last names said that this is more formal, and it shows at the same time, that the teachers know them and know that they are active during the continuous assessment. (see Table 2)

Table 2

Analysis of the students’ reasons of preference of forms of address

Таблица 2

Анализ причин, определяющих предпочтения учеников в отношении форм обращения

Address forms	Students’ thoughts about these forms of address	Percentages
Honorifics	Respect/Formality	88.7%
	Distance	11.3%
	Closeness/Intimacy	0.0%
Kinship Terms	Respect/Formality	0,0%
	Distance	9.9%
	Closeness/Intimacy	89,1%
First Name	Respect/Formality	22.3%
	Distance	11%
	Closeness/intimacy	66.7%
Last Names	Respect/Formality	67.5%
	Distance	32.5%
	Closeness/Intimacy	0.0%

Address forms in Russian Classrooms. The responses collected through the discourse completion test (DCT) show that the Russian teachers include different address forms when interacting with their students:

First Name (Имя):

8) Полина, вы да не могли помочь ему с этим заданием?

Polina, couldn't you help him with this task?

9) Катя, можешь, пожалуйста, помочь студенту с домашним заданием?

Katya, can you please help a student with his homework?

First Name + Patronymic (Имя + Отчество):

10) Иван Иванович, почему ты не сделал домашнее задание?

Ivan Ivanovich, why you haven't done your homework?

Last Name (Фамилия):

11) Кузнецов, подойди к доске, пожалуйста.

Kuznetsova, come to the board, please.

Terms of Endearment or Group References:

12) Ребята, почему вы не выполняете работы? Соберитесь, это может отразиться на итоговых баллах.

Guys, why aren't you doing your work? Pull yourself together, it could affect your final grades.

Interview verification summary

Additional insights into the forms of address used by Russian teachers were gathered through face-to-face interviews with students. During these interviews, students were asked how their teachers address them when requesting actions or favors. The students reported that teachers often address them using First names, last names, first names+patronymic, as well as using terms of endearment or group references. Furthermore, the students were asked about their preferred form of address and the reasons for their preference. A majority (66.1%) stated that they prefer to be addressed by their first names, while (26.9%) expressed a preference for first names+patronymic. Meanwhile, (7%) favored the use of terms of endearment, and no one preferred being addressed by their last names. (see Table 3)

Table 3

Analytical analysis of Russian students' preference of forms of address

Таблица 3

**Аналитическое исследование предпочтений российских учеников
в отношении форм обращения**

Forms of Address	<i>First name+patronymic</i>	<i>endearment terms</i>	<i>First name</i>	<i>Last name</i>
percentages	26.9 %	7%	66.1%	0%

When asked why they preferred specific forms of address, students who favored honorifics explained that these convey respect and represent the most appropriate way for teachers to address their students. Students who preferred being addressed by their first names mentioned that this form signals that the distance between them and their teachers is decreased as well as it shows closeness with a percentage of (71.2%). Additionally, they felt that being addressed by their first names showed that teachers cared about their students on a personal level and sought to build closer connections.

The majority of (63%) who preferred First name+ patronymic expressed that this is a sign of respect, and they'd rather feel respected as for (22.7%) said that this would show distanced and the hierarchy between the teachers and the students. Furthermore, the ones who prefer endearment terms with a percentage of (88.1%) said that this form of address helps in fostering a family-like bond and a more personal relationship. Meanwhile, students who favored being addressed by their last names they are very few from the whole group of participants and said that they appreciate the formality of this approach, also, it shows the distance between them and their teachers. (see Table 4)

Table 4

Students’ reasons of preference of forms of address

Таблица 4

Причины, определяющие предпочтения учеников в отношении форм обращения

Address forms	Students’ thoughts about these forms of address	Percentages
First Name	Respect/Formality	22.3%
	Distance	5.6%
	Closeness/Intimacy	72.1%
Last Names	Respect/Formality	61.3%
	Distance	22.7%
	Closeness/Intimacy	16%
First name+ patronymic	Respect/Formality	63%
	Distance	31%
	Closeness/intimacy	6%
Endearment terms	Respect/Formality	7.2%
	Distance	4.7%
	Closeness/Intimacy	88.1%

Discussion

From the analysis of the data above, it must be said that teachers’ forms of address reflect cultural norms and influence classroom dynamics. In Algeria, teachers often use first names, last names, honorifics, and kinship terms (e.g., **يـدلى** = “My son” or **يـتنب** = “my daughter”), aligning with the cultural emphasis on familial bonds and respect [17]. Students, however, tend to prefer being addressed by first names or kinship terms, suggesting a desire for a more informal and relational dynamic. In contrast, Russian teachers commonly address students by first names, first names combined with patronymics (e.g., **“Иван Степанов”** = “Ivan Stepanov”), last names, or endearment terms (e.g., **“Дорогой/Дорогая”** = “dear”). The use of patronymics demonstrates respect and tradition in Russian culture, while endearment terms indicate a more nurturing approach. Russian students, similar to their Algerian counterparts, prefer being called by their first names, reflecting a trend towards informality and approachability. These differences highlight how cultural expectations shape interactions and emphasize the importance of aligning address forms with students' preferences to foster positive teacher-student relationships. Research suggests that language is both a reflection of and a contributor to social networks and relationships, and the use of culturally appropriate address forms can strengthen interpersonal bonds in educational settings [22, 23]. Balancing cultural norms with individual preferences remains key in diverse educational contexts. Research suggests that when students feel addressed in ways that respect their preferences, it

can enhance engagement and comfort in the learning environment [24, 25]. Balancing cultural norms with individual preferences remains key in diverse educational contexts.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the forms of address used by teachers in Algeria and Russia highlight significant cultural differences and power dynamics in educational settings. Algerian teachers often employ kinship terms and honorifics, which reflect a hierarchical relationship steeped in respect and familial bonds. In contrast, Russian teachers use first names, patronymics, and even endearments, which convey varying degrees of formality and nurture, demonstrating a more nuanced balance between authority and approachability. Despite these cultural differences, students in both countries prefer being addressed by their first names, indicating a shared desire for a less hierarchical and more collegial relationship with their teachers.

The comparison reveals how forms of address function not only as linguistic tools but also as expressions of social power and authority. In Algeria, the use of honorifics and kinship terms reinforces traditional power structures, positioning teachers as figures of respect akin to familial elders. Meanwhile, the use of patronymics in Russia maintains a formal power dynamic rooted in cultural heritage, while endearments soften this authority to create a more supportive atmosphere. However, the preference for first-name usage among students in both contexts suggests a growing inclination towards egalitarian interactions, reflecting broader societal shifts toward reducing power imbalances in education.

Ultimately, the choice of address forms is not merely a linguistic preference but a dynamic negotiation of power, respect, and relational warmth. To foster inclusive and effective learning environments, educators must navigate these dynamics thoughtfully, balancing cultural norms with students' evolving preferences. This underscores the importance of context-sensitive communication strategies that empower students while respecting cultural values and traditions.

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