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Article

Sociolinguistic Characteristics and Verbal Strategies for Selecting the Appropriate Form of Address for Women in Northern India within the Context of Hindi-English Bilingualism

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Abstract

The issue concerning the appropriate manner of addressing women in contemporary Northern India serves as a reflection of the response of established socio-cultural norms to the evolving role of women within Indian society. The primary objective of this study is to ascertain the patterns associated with the selection of both traditional and borrowed forms of address for women in present-day Northern Indian society, examined through the lens of linguistic affiliation. The specific research objectives include: the compilation of samples of forms of address for women that are prevalent in the Hindi-speaking regions of Northern India, specifically within the states of Delhi and Uttar Pradesh; the analysis of the sociolinguistic characteristics pertaining to the contexts in which traditional and borrowed forms of address for women are utilized; and the development of a classification scheme for these forms of address based on their type (traditional, hybrid, borrowed). Furthermore, utilizing both the sociolinguistic characteristics of the context and formal classification, algorithms for the application of forms of address to women within a multilingual context will be constructed. The methods employed in the research were systematically implemented in stages. In the initial stage, a diagnostic survey was conducted to gather samples of the linguistic units employed in etiquette for addressing women. The subsequent stage involved the analysis of language materials. Two types of materials were utilized: questionnaires and video recordings. The analysis of the video materials revealed a notable discrepancy between the formally stated list of address forms and the actual etiquette units employed in addressing women. This discrepancy is primarily characterized by the observation that certain forms of address initially identified by speakers as intended for men are also used to address women. This trend was consistently observed across all three formal categories of address: traditional, hybrid, and borrowed. In the Hindi-speaking regions of Northern India, forms of address for women comprise a diverse array of lexemes, including those from Hindi as well as hybrid forms integrating English vocabulary. The choice of address directed towards women is influenced by the type of addressee and the social context, which may be formal, informal, friendly, or familial. The inclination to amalgamate lexical units into words of a 'common gender' represents a linguistic strategy that reflects the new social roles of women in contemporary Northern Indian society. This trend may be regarded as one of several mechanisms for the linguistic representation of women's social roles within the domain of etiquette.

Keywords: classification of the addressee; the address; the etiquette of speech in India; bilingualism; gender; Hindi speaking area; linguistic borrowings; instances of bilingualism in Hindi and English

Introduction

The issue pertaining to the selection of appropriate forms of address for women in contemporary Northern India serves as an illustration of the response of entrenched socio-cultural norms to the evolving role of women within Indian society. The decision regarding the appropriate manner of addressing a woman is influenced not solely by her gender, but also by a multitude of additional factors, which include, but are not limited to, her societal role, origin, religious affiliation, educational attainment, place of residence—whether urban or rural—and the overall context of the interaction, as well as the relative identities and roles of both the speaker and the recipient, among other considerations. The choice of a language unit for addressing a woman is complicated by the presence of a multilingual environment in Northern India, in which the choice of an etiquette unit begins with the choice of the etiquette language.

Literature Review

The examination of gender studies in the realm of linguistics has recently garnered significant interest from scholars in the field [2,6,9,11]. Contemporary women in India assume a multitude of social roles, ranging from housewife to president. Nonetheless, the linguistic evolution of the languages spoken in Northern India frequently fails to adequately represent the growing diversity of women's social roles within the framework of the Hindi language. T. I. Golubeva asserts that in such instances, elements of the English language serve to fill a void within the recipient language [4]. Consequently, in the discourse of speakers addressing women, one can observe not only traditional forms of address but also instances of English addresses, as well as blended Hindi-English expressions.

Valuable data were obtained during the study of verbal strategies by a Russian-Indian group of researchers [8]. However the experimental description presented by researchers T. Larina and N. Suryanarayan [8] appears to be missing some concrete linguistic material, as their conclusions are primarily based on participant surveys. Previous work by the author of this article [12] suggests that such data may not fully capture the complexities of linguistic realities, since individuals commonly tend to idealize their language proficiency. The researchers emphasize ([1,7,121]) that authentic language data can be gathered through observations conducted in a more detached manner. This approach allows for the observer to be less influential in the selection of appeals, effectively addressing the phenomenon often known as the 'observer paradox' [7,121].

The potential for expanding and clarifying the information available regarding modern Indian address conventions for women is significant. An Indian researcher specializing in speech etiquette notes the term '*sir*' in the following way: 'The address '*sir*' can be used in relation to a stranger to express respect, while the Indian address '*swami*' can be used informally to address a person with the same power' [3,10,118]. This observation illustrates that, in this context, the gender of the addressee is not explicitly stated, suggesting an assumption that the addressee is male. Additionally, this may indicate the speaker's neutrality regarding the gender of the addressee, focusing instead on the social role.

Therefore, there is a gap in the study of the choice of etiquette expressions for women at this stage of Hindi-English bilingualism, which underscores the relevance of the present study.

This gap creates a methodologically justified necessity to conduct the research presented here to enhance the accuracy and rectify the data obtained from the survey of carriers, which does not include observations of the actual speech. This study represents the first step toward establishing the patterns of etiquette units used in Northern India in relation to women within the context of bilingualism.

Research Hypothesis: in modern India, where there is an ever-expanding range of social roles for women in a multilingual environment, several words from the English language have emerged as etiquette units of address. In this context, the agender social role takes precedence, while gender does not play a decisive role in the choice of language.

Research Aim: to establish the patterns of traditional and borrowed addresses to women in contemporary Northern Indian society from the perspective of linguistic affiliation.

Research Objectives are to collect samples of appeals to women, operating in the Hindu-speaking region of Northern India, specifically in the states of Delhi and Uttar Pradesh; to analyze the sociolinguistic characteristics in which traditional and borrowed appeals to a woman are used; to create a classification of appeals based on their form (traditional, hybrid, borrowed); based on the sociolinguistic characteristics of the context and formal classification, to develop algorithms for addressing a woman in a multilingual environment.

The focus of the study was selected etiquette expressions of address, which were documented in the regions of Northern India concerning female individuals.

The subject of the study was the principle governing the selection of these expressions in various speech situations.

Materials and Methods

In this regard, a method has been developed to reduce measurement inaccuracies. The methods were applied in stages. In the first stage, it was necessary to collect samples of language units of etiquette used to address a woman. The type of addressee being considered is a woman, which is understood as 'a potential listener possesses a set of sociological characteristics that are known to the speaker and is associated by the speaker with a specific stereotypical speech situation, as well as with a particular social role of the addressee' [12,23].

The appeals were categorized into three groups based on the presence of an English component: traditional, hybrid, and borrowed. Four types of context were identified: formal, informal with strangers, with friends, and with family. Depending on the stage of the study, two types of materials were employed: questionnaires and video materials. The questionnaire served as a diagnostic survey aimed at identifying the fundamental units of etiquette used in the Hindi-speaking region across various speech situations. A total of 36 individuals participated in the survey, and the results are presented in previous studies [12,76].

Subsequently, videos featuring appeals to women were selected. A total of 105 videos were analyzed, in which 38 appeals to women were recorded. The criteria for selecting the video material included the naturalness of language use, as the analyzed appeals were intended to be applicable in conditions closely resembling real-life situations.

The genre of a video blog, or vlog, meets these criteria to a certain extent. According to I. A. Tekutyeva's definition, a vlog is 'a genre of Internet video in which the author shares aspects of his life' [13,110].

Of particular interest as a material is a subgenre of vlogging that involves interviewing passersby on the street. The speech of the respondents is spontaneous and unprepared; however, since they are aware that they are being filmed, their speech behavior cannot be considered entirely natural. Therefore, in addition to vlogs, pranks and social experiments were also analyzed.

A prank is defined as 'a genre of video in which the authors play around' [13,110]. The purpose of the prank is to elicit spontaneous reactions from others. Simultaneously, the speech of both the prank's authors and the individuals on the street can be analyzed, as the authors typically aim to behave as naturally as possible in order to avoid detection and to persuade the participants to believe in the reality of the situation.

A social experiment, similar to a prank, is intended to elicit a spontaneous and natural reaction; however, its purpose is not only to entertain but also to test social norms and attitudes.

The selection of videos from the aforementioned genres was conducted manually on the YouTube platform using the keywords, 'vlog', 'prank,' 'Delhi,' 'Uttar Pradesh' and 'social experiment'.

The transcription of the video text was performed using artificial intelligence [5]. (Azure AI Video Indexer neural network).

Ethic statement: the video materials were on free public access (youtube.com), no human being was interviewed in person therefore, and it cannot be classified as an experiment on people according to Declaration of Helsinki and does not require any approval.

Results

The results of the survey indicate that the English language typically dominates the discourse surrounding women in Northern India. In contrast, there is a diverse array of terms for addressing women in Hindi. However, the majority of these terms pertain to familial interactions, communication with villagers, and informal conversations. There is a notable lack of terms for addressing unfamiliar women or for use in formal settings. Consequently, despite the extensive collection of terms in Hindi, each one tends to have a narrower meaning compared to expressions in English. It seems that hybrid forms, such as '*Madam ji*', have emerged to elevate respect by incorporating the polite particle '*ji*', thereby attempting to align English forms of address with a similar standard found in Indian culture.

Table 1. Appeals to women registered according to the survey data.

Traditional	Hybrid	English adoptions
Yaar (यार)	Madam ji	Mam (madam)
Bagan ji(बहनजी)		Aunty
Beti (बेटी)		Sister
Kaki (काकी)		Miss
Amma (अम्मा)		Baby
Nani (नानी)		
Guru ji (गुरुजी)		
Mata ji (माताजी)		
Bahan (बहन)		
Beta (बेटा)		
Chachi ji (चाचीजी)		
Didi (दीदी)		
Dadi ji (दादी जी)		

Table 2. Appeals to women recorded during the analysis of video materials.

Traditional	Hybrid	English adoptions
Yaar (यार)	Sir जी	Sir
Bhai (भाई)	Mummy जी	Madam
Bhai sahab (भाई सहब)		Ma'am
Dadi (दादी)		Bro
Dadi ji (दादी जी)		Aunty
Didi (दीदी)		
Ladki (लड़की)		

According to a study analyzing video materials from several groups of etiquette expressions, including appeals [12,89], the Hindi-speaking region is characterized by a greater use of English-origin terms when addressing women rather than men, both in communication with strangers and with friends. The findings from the diagnostic survey and the video material analysis align with one another [12,89].

The speaker's attempt to transition from formal communication with an unfamiliar woman to informal communication is also noted: 'Etiquette expressions (EE) in L1 (Hindi) when communicating with women are generally fixed; however, in the following example, they mimic the EE used for men: a person says goodbye to an unfamiliar girl by stating, 'Miss you *bhai* *bahut sara*' which translates to 'I miss you very much, bro'' [12,89].

It is important to note that the choice of addresses in both Hindi and English is strictly regulated and adheres to a system of norms; violating these norms can lead to communicative failure. Consequently, the prankster specifically provokes girls by calling them 'aunty' in order to gauge their reaction, to which the girls respond predictably negatively.

As a result of the analysis of video materials, a discrepancy was identified between the declared list and the actual etiquette units used to address women.

The primary characteristic of the discrepancy is that appeals aimed at women can initially be described by speakers as intended for men. A similar trend is observed across all three formal categories of appeals: traditional, hybrid, and borrowed. The selection of a specific unit in this case depends on the social distance between the speakers (friends and family, official communication, strangers). Furthermore, female addressees do not respond negatively to such 'male' types of address as 'bro', 'sir', in contrast to the 'aunty' form of address, which is female but does not correspond to the age of the addressee.

Discussion and Limitations of the Study

It is challenging to determine the reason for the combination of genders in appeals to women. Consequently, this prevents from answering the question of whether the use of gender-neutral appeals for a social role is a core or peripheral trend at this time.

On one hand, the influence of the Hindi substratum on the informal English term 'Bro' is likely, given that in Hindi there are universal (agender) forms of address, such as 'Yaar', which serve as analogs to the aforementioned English term.

On the other hand, this may emerge as a new trend, with the underlying reason being the existence of a Hindi-English 'interlanguage' [16,496]. Within this interlanguage, processes occur at the junction of systems, which are not merely the result of a simple combination of the two languages.

Conclusion

We can conclude that the appeal to women in the Hindi-speaking regions of Northern India is represented by a wide range of lexemes, including both standard Hindi and hybrid forms that incorporate English. The type of addressee and the social context — whether formal, informal, friendly, or familial — play a significant role in the choice of address used when speaking to women.

The tendency to combine lexical units into words of a 'common gender' reflects the new social roles of women in the modern society of Northern India. This trend can be seen as one of several ways to linguistically register women's social roles in etiquette. Unlike the method of forming feminitives, neologisms, and similar constructs, which utilize suffixation and word composition at the morphemic level, the examples discussed above belong to the lexico-semantic level of the language.

The presented study enables to gain a broader understanding of the stereotypes associated with speech behavior in Northern India, while also clarifying and supplementing the array of lexical units used for addressing women in various communication situations.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Software: Azure AI Video Indexer Neural Network <https://www.videoindexer.ai/media/library>

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