

# THE IMPACT OF AGE AND GENDER IN THE SELECTION OF ADDRESS TERMS BY BAOULE SPEAKERS

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## **Abstract**

*The current study mainly aims at investigating the influence of gender and age on the choice of terms of address by Baoulé-speaking individuals, in Côte d'Ivoire. In this work, we hypothesize that both age and gender play an important role in the variation of terms of address by Baoulé people. For this study, 28 Baoulé-speaking individuals (14 males and 14 females) took part in this survey. They filled out a questionnaire. The results of the data analysis reveal that Baoulé-speaking people generally use terms of formality to address the older people from both genders. That is, Age is more significant than Gender in the address system of Baoulé people.*

**Keywords :** *address terms, age, gender, baoulé language system*

## **Résumé**

*La présente étude a pour objectif principal d'analyser l'influence du genre et de l'âge sur le choix des termes d'adresse par les locuteurs Baoulés, en Côte d'Ivoire. Dans ce article, nous émettons l'hypothèse selon laquelle l'âge et le genre jouent un rôle primordial dans la variation des termes d'adresse chez les Baoulés. Pour cette étude, 28 locuteurs de la langue baoulé (14 hommes et 14 femmes) ont participé à cette enquête. Ils ont rempli un questionnaire. Les résultats de l'analyse des données révèlent que les Baoulés utilisent généralement des termes de formalité pour s'adresser aux personnes âgées des deux sexes. C'est-à-dire que l'âge est plus important que le genre dans le système d'adresse des Baoulés.*

**Mots-clés :** *termes d'adresse, âge, genre, système linguistique Baoulé*

## **Introduction**

The establishment of social relationship between interlocutors is possibly the first step to every communicative occurrence. To do so, individuals may select diverse systems to open, further, maintain, or close conversations. One imperative issue in studying communication is to learn how people manage to open conversations or how they may address one another in a given language.

Sociolinguists have been intensely concerned with investigating various dimensions in the use of address forms. As a classic work in sociolinguistics, Brown and Gilman (1960) study of the pronominal address system drew attention to the semantics of power and solidarity in relation to address terms. Since then a lot of works, with much broader scope and depth, have been conducted.

In addition to Brown and Gilman's discussion of power and solidarity, Brown and Ford's (1961) distinction in American English between address by first name ("John") or by title and last name ("Mr. Smith") function in the same way as the difference between T pronouns and V pronouns (called a "T/V distinction") in most European languages.

Benavides (2003) joined Brown and Gilman (1960) to contribute to the debate about those factors that might prompt the use of reciprocal and non-reciprocal norms of address. He makes the distinction between the expressions familiar relations and familial relations: Familiar relations are those recognized by ease and informality which exist among acquaintances of long standing association such as friends, or members of the family. Such relationships are familiarity-driven: as the degree of acquaintance among interlocutors is high, the degree of familiarity also increases. By contrast, familial relations are those that occur among family members. Such relationships are kinship-driven: for instance, relations between brothers and sisters, between parents and children and more generally between "ego" and other relatives (cousins, nephew/niece, uncle, aunt and grand-parents).

Presenting the three dyadic address patterns, namely nonreciprocal T-V, reciprocal T, and reciprocal V, as the basis for their analysis, these researches offer varied, and often clashing comments. Fontanella de Weinberg's (1970) and Weinerman's (1976) studies in Argentina, whose purpose was to evaluate the validity of Brown and Gilman's theory, confirmed that the symmetrical address system is taking over the asymmetrical one and that there is a major increase in the reciprocal T. Moreover, they found that the rules for the use of pronominal address are related to the place of residence and social origin of the interlocutors.

A lot of variables like social class, gender, education, age and so on may contribute to the selection of address terms in Baoulé. Therefore, the study hypothesizes that the choice of address terms is partly based on social context and sociolinguistic factors like age and gender of the

interlocutors. Accordingly, the current study attempts to answer the following questions :

1. How do social factors contribute to the choice of address terms in Baoulé ?
2. Is there any link between the sociolinguistic variables such as age and gender of interlocutors and variation in the use of terms of address by Baoulé speakers ?

Baoulé is an African language of the Akan or Central Tano language family. It is the language of the Baoulé people. It is mainly spoken in Côte d'Ivoire in the center of the country in Bouaké, Yamoussoukro, Dimbokro, Béoumi, Sakassou, Daoukro, Bouaflé, Kouassi Kouassikro, Bodokro, Bocanda, Ouelle, M'bahiakro, Toumodi, Tiébissou and Didiévi.

The objective of the current study is to explore the sociolinguistic norms of address in Baoulé. It will discuss the rules and patterns of address used by Baoule people in their interactions with other people. Studies which deal with the sociolinguistic rules of address do not take into account all the theories of socio-linguistic rules of address. In this investigation, we will attempt to analyse the rules and frequencies of address terms such as pronouns “I” and “V” among Baoule speakers. The significance of the investigation lies in the fact that it mainly tackles the impact of social factors in the selection of terms of address. Significant variables such as age and gender of interlocutors are examined. In addition, considering that there is a limited number of works on this field, we think that this study will urge other researchers to be interested in investigations about address term variations according to other sociolinguistic factooors like relationship between interlocutors, generation, context, etc.

In this study, the collection of data was made through a questionnaire. Twenty-eight (28) Baoule speakers, namely fourteen (14) men and fourteen (14) women were used as informants. They were asked to fulfill a questionnaire which was given to them. Then, we collected them for a quantitative and qualitative analysis.

This study consists of five parts. The first part is the introduction including the literature review, research problem, purpose, significance, limitation and organization of the study. The second part is the theoretical framework and methodology consisting of the key related theories, and the method of analysis used to conduct this study. Then,

the results of the research will be discussed in the fourth part. Finally, the last part is the conclusion of the whole study.

## **1. Theoretical framework and methodology**

### ***1.1. Theoretical framework***

The analysis of address terms in this study is mainly based on the most influential and classic work on address forms and the social relationships, by Brown and Gilman (1960). They suggested that the use of pronouns was led by two factors that they called Power and Solidarity.

#### ***1.1.1. Definition of Power***

In language use, there is no reciprocity in the power-oriented pronoun. A person is said to have power over another person when the former can control in one way or another the behavior of the latter. This kind of relationship is said to be a non-reciprocal one, since it is not possible that two people get at the same time and in the same context, power over each other.

The manifestations of power are numerous: older individuals are supposed to have power over younger individuals, teachers over students, directors over secretaries, employers over employees, doctors over nurses.

The “semantics of Power” is a linguistic notion used by linguists or other social scientists to mean how language can delicately, but powerfully convey differences of power. For example, if I have to call my teacher Dr. Soro or Pr. Silué, but he calls me Alex or Ange, there is the power semantic.

Brown and Gilman indicate that the semantics of Power is the non-reciprocal or dissymmetrical use of pronominal address forms: a superior will afford addressing an interlocutor with familiar terms but he himself expects to be addressed with the non-familiar ones.

In addition to pronominal address forms, we can express the non-reciprocity through the use of titles, proper names and signs. A non-reciprocal relationship between interlocutors grounds on the fact that people in a society are not situated on the level of the social ladder and this uneven location of individuals structures around the social status, the age, the generation, the profession, the sex etc. ; thus the relations

such as “older than”, “the brother of”, “the assistant of”, “poorer than” and “more intelligent than” are asymmetrical.

Brown and Gilman agree that the “semantics of power” remains in the mind of French and English speakers because of its dominion in literature. Yet, to their mind, the domain of solidarity is increasing: the use of the T spreads among students, partners, and members of the same fellowship...

The non-reciprocal use of the two pronouns TU (T) and VOUS (V) and/or their variants is governed by power semantics. This means that, the person who is the most powerful uses TU to address the less powerful one. However, to address the most powerful person, the less powerful person uses VOUS and receives TU.

Decades later, Braun (1988 : 24-29) comes back on the same phenomenon and defends the point that the use of an address form conveys some information, not only about the addressee but also about the speaker. The non-reciprocity according to her does not always mean the existence of a relation of power.

### ***1.1.2. Definition of Solidarity***

The semantics of solidarity is defined as a linguistic term used by linguists or other social scientists to mean how language can, in a solitary way convey social similarities. For example, if I have to call my friend “Yao” or “Jonas”, and he also calls me “Alex” or “Ange”, there is the solidarity semantics.

In solidarity semantics, both the speaker and the addressee use the same address form, since no speaker is more powerful than the other. They use TU reciprocally.

According to Brown and Gilman (1960 : 257-258) in solidarity semantics, relations are symmetrical or reciprocal and in such instances, the logical relation “more powerful than” is ruled out. Solidarity applies among equals whose correlations are created by circumstances like “having attended the same school or having the same parents or practice the same profession”.

It would seem that solidarity is never determined by concrete physical attributes such as having the same nose or head, but by those that stem from the social dynamics, that is the relationships people entertain on the basis of their belonging to the same society and these.

### ***1.1.3. Distance and proximity***

The Power and solidarity semantics imply social and psychological distance or proximity. In language use, power dominated relations imply a social and psychological distance between the speaker and his addressee in face to face interactions. Even so, contrary to power, solidarity dominated relations imply a social and psychological proximity.

In fact, when two individuals are power equal and that there is no solidarity, their relation is said to be power-oriented. And yet, if they are power equal and solidarity, their relation is qualified as solidarity-oriented. Power and solidarity are linked to some social facts. For example, solidarity-oriented is related to the social facts such as familiarity, kinship, acquaintance, camaraderie, friendship and intimacy.

As far as power-oriented is concerned, we have social facts like master and employee interactions, teacher and students, adults and young people, etc.

### ***1.2. Methodology***

In this study we present the analysis of sociolinguistic variation. Its objective is to find out the influence of social factors in the use of pronouns while addressing other people in Baoulé. In order to analyse the way Baoulé speakers use personal pronouns according to the age and gender of their interlocutors, we have applied quantitative and qualitative methods.

The informants of this study were 28 Baoulé speakers, precisely 14 males and 14 females. They were all university students who speak Baoulé very well. Referring to the information obtained in the first part of the questionnaire, the informants were classified into two categories according to their gender (male vs. female).

The instrument used to collect data for this study was a questionnaire (appendix) which was given to each of the informants. The questionnaire was made of two main sections. The aim of the first section was to retrieve personal information from the informants, and in the second section, the informants were asked to select the address terms they generally use to address Baoulé speakers of different ages and genders. The questionnaire was based on another study carried out by Mahzad Mardaha (2012), which looks like the current one.

Before participants fill out the questionnaire, they were orally explained in order to elaborate more on what they were asked to do and give the participants a sufficient detail about the objectives of the study to obtain their cooperation and assistance.

Once the data were collected, we examined and classified the questionnaires. Then, we counted the number of T /A/ and V /Amou/ cases according to the different age and gender categories.

## 2. Results

**Table 1** below consists of two columns. The vertical column represents the age of interlocutors and the horizontal one refers to their gender. In this table, T is used to deal with cases in which addressers use the pronoun /A /, and V represents the cases in which interlocutors use the pronoun /Amou / during the conversation. « Same Gender » means men (M to M) or women /Fto F/ address interlocutors of their own gender and « Different Gender » is about the instances that men /M to F/ or women « F→M » address interlocutors of the opposite gender.

**Table 2** represents the table of percentages of the number of using T and V in each case. It was calculated and finally, after comparing the results from each part, we concluded.

**Table 1 :** Occurrences

	SAME				DIFFERENT			
	GENDER		GENDER		GENDER		GENDER	
	Part 1		Part 2		Part 3		Part 4	
	From M to M		From F to F		From M to F		From F to M	
	T	V	T	V	T	V	T	V
<b>Younger</b>	57	24	62	03	38	17	49	16
<b>Same Age</b>	28	04	39	05	18	10	20	18
<b>Older</b>	13	56	46	21	12	60	11	51

**Table 2 : Percentages**

	SAME				DIFFERENT			
	GENDER				GENDER			
	Part 1		Part 2		Part 3		Part 4	
	From M to M		From F to F		From M to F		From F to M	
	T	V	T	V	T	V	T	V
<b>Younger</b>	70.37	29.62	95.38	4.61	69.09	30.90	75.38	24.61
<b>Same Age</b>	87.5	12.5	88.63	11.36	64.28	35.71	52.63	47.36
<b>Older</b>	18.84	81.15	31.34	68.65	16.66	83.33	17.74	82.25

### 3. Discussion

In this investigation, the participants were asked to select one of the two address terms, either /A/ or /Amou/ that they generally use to address specified interlocutors, referring to their age and gender. Contrary to English, in Baoulé there are two personal pronouns /A/ and /Amou/ to address a single addressee. The familiar term /A/ is used to address intimate friends, parents and co-workers, and also inferior addressees in terms of age and authority. As far as the formal term /Amou/ is concerned, it is used to address superiors and/or equals in different contexts. The objective of the information inserted in the questionnaire was to investigate the impact of the formality of context as well as age and gender of the interlocutors on the selection of appropriate terms of address.

The first part of the previous tables presents the occurrences and percentages of the use of the pronouns of address /A/ and /Amou/ by men to address the addressees who share their own gender (M to M). We can observe that to address their own gender men, men use the address term /A/ to address their inferiors and equals, in terms of age. However, they resort to /Amou/ for addressing their older addressees of the same gender. Those results show that as proportion as the age gap between the interlocutors decreases, the use of /Amou/ also declines. For example, the percentage of use of /Amou/ in addressing the younger men was 29.62 percent ; and yet, this percentage increased to 70.37 percent in addressing older men. In reality, the general observation of these data would seem to show that men addressers have a tendency to

address younger men or men of their own age with the intimate pronoun /A/ and older men with the formal pronoun/Amou/.

In the second part of the tables, the occurrences and percentages of the use of the pronouns of address /A/and/Amou/ by women to address the addressees who share their own gender (F to F) are shown. We can notice that, to address their own gender women, women also use the address term /A/ to address their inferiors and equals, in terms of age. But, they use /Amou/ for addressing their older addressee getting their own gender. The investigation shows that as the difference of age between women interlocutors decreases, the use of /Amou/ between them also decreases. To illustrate it, the percentage of the use of /Amou/ in addressing younger women was 4.61 percent ; However, this percentage increased to 68.65 percent in addressing the older women. Thus, these results tend to show that women addressers like men, have a tendency to address the younger women or women of their own age with intimate and familiar terms of address /A/ and the older women with the deferential and formal form of /Amou/.

The third part of the tables shows the occurrences and percentages of the use of the pronominal terms of address in Baoulé /A/and/Amou/ by men to address their opposite gender, women (M to F), from three different age classes. The analysis of these terms of address clearly shows us that men in interaction with younger women or women of their own age, use the intimate term of /A/ more than /Amou/, but when addressing the older women, they use the formal term of /Amou/ more than /A/. Through these findings, we could deduce that age is more significant than gender in the choice of terms of address. For example, the percentage of use of /Amou/ in addressing older women was 83.33 percent ; however, this percentage decreased to 30.90 percent in addressing the younger women and 35.71 percent in addressing women who share their own age.

In the fourth and last part of the tables, we can see the occurrences and percentages of the use of the pronominal terms of address in Baoulé /A/and/Amou/ by women to address their opposite gender, men (F to M), from three different age classes. The findings show that women do not use the same address terms in addressing men referring to their age. Just like the way men do with women, women also in addressing younger men and men of their own age, use the intimate term of /A/ more than /Amou/ ; whereas when addressing the older men, they use the formal term of /Amou/ more than /A/. For example, in addressing younger

men and those of their own age, the percentage of the use of /Amou/ was respectively 24.61 and 47.36 percent ; however, this percentage increased to 82.25 of /Amou/ more than /A/, the familiar term. Here again, we can conclude that age is a paramount factor in the selection of these two pronouns for addressing different genders.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the current investigation shows that language is sensitive to social and extra-linguistic variables like age and gender. After the analysis of the data in this article, the results reveal that the sociolinguistic variables, age and gender of interlocutors, have a significant impact on the selection and use of pronouns of address in Baoulé. In general, we can say that, in the culture of Baoulé people, age is more significant than gender. Results indicate that men and women select and use the formal form of address /Amou/ in addressing the older addressees of their own opposite gender, which justifies the superiority of age over gender of addressees. This seems to be opposed to the results found in another study (Keshavarz, 1988) according to which when addressing the opposite gender in the Iranian culture, individuals tend to be more polite and deferential. The results found in this work verify the assertion of Brown and Gilman (1960) in the sense that the selection of one of the two pronominal terms of address in Baoulé is based on Power and solidarity. Baoulé speakers use the familiar term /A/ to address their inferiors and equals in term of age. And yet, they use the term of formality /Amou/ to address those who are older than them.

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## APPENDIX

What pronoun do you use towards?

- A. /A /  
 B. /Amou/  
 C. Don't have / Don't know /

<b>1. Your grand mother</b>		A	B	C
<b>2. Your grand father</b>		A	B	C
<b>3. Co-workers of your age</b>	Women	A	B	C
	Men	A	B	C
<b>4. Older co-workers</b>	Women	A	B	C
	Men	A	B	C
<b>5. Younger co-workers</b>	Women	A	B	C
	Men	A	B	C
<b>6. Relatives of your age</b>	Women	A	B	C
	Men	A	B	C
<b>7. Older relatives</b>	WomenA	A	B	C
	Men	A	B	C
<b>8. Younger relatives</b>	Women	A	B	C
	Men	A	B	C
<b>9. Your mother</b>		A	B	C
<b>10. Your father</b>		A	B	C
<b>11. Sister of your age</b>		A	B	C
<b>12. Brother of your age</b>		A	B	C
<b>13. Older sisters</b>		A	B	C
<b>14. Older brothers</b>		A	B	C
<b>15. Younger sisters</b>		A	B	C
<b>16. Younger brothers</b>		A	B	C

<b>17. Your own daughter</b>	<b>Kid</b>	A	B	C
	<b>Teen</b>	A	B	C
	<b>Youth</b>	A	B	C
<b>18. Your own son</b>	<b>Kid</b>	A	B	C
	<b>Teen</b>	A	B	C
	<b>Youth</b>	A	B	C
<b>19. Any children</b>	<b>girls</b>	A	B	C
	<b>boys</b>	A	B	C