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Address forms among university students in Ghana: a case of gendered identities?

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In the last two decades, scholars in discourse studies and sociolinguistics have shown considerable interest in how identity is encoded in discourses across various facets of life such as academia, home, politics and workplace. By adopting an ethnographic-style approach, this study shows how students in a Ghanaian university construct their gendered identities through a key verbal behaviour, address form. A three-pronged framework comprising social constructionism, communities of practice and post-structuralism underpins the present study. Two key findings emerge from the analysis of data. First, three major categories of address forms, namely personal names, descriptive phrases and titles constitute the key lexicon of address terms used by Ghanaian students in their interactions. Second, students constantly use these three modes of address to express, negotiate or resist their gendered identities. These findings have implications for research on identity, language and gender as well as intercultural communication.

Keywords: address forms; ethnography; gendered identity; university students

Introduction

In the last two or three decades, considerable research has been conducted in the social aspects of language use (e.g. Fairclough 1992; Gee 1992). Research in, especially, discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, socio-psychology and anthropology has amply demonstrated that language use reflects and constructs the thoughts, values and attitudes that speakers wish to express or refrain from expressing. Additionally, it has been shown that a society's beliefs about and towards gender differences and relations can be mediated through either the way(s) language is used to speak about men and women or the ways in which men and women utilise language (e.g. Holmes and Schnurr 2005; Sunderland and Litosseliti 2002). There are several verbal behaviours that fulfil these roles, one of which is address forms.

Undoubtedly, in several societies, address forms represent a very fundamental verbal behaviour in the process of socialisation. In fact, as noted by Kielkiewicz-Janowiak (2000), address forms represent one of the most common verbal behaviours found in interaction-oriented utterances. Not surprisingly, address forms have been extensively examined in several sociocultural settings (e.g. Aceto 2002; Fang and Heng 1983; Fitch 1991; Oyetade 1995), the most frequently cited being Brown and Gilman's (1960) work. Together with Brown and Gilman's work, these studies,

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ranging from the Anglo-American to African contexts, have underscored the power and solidarity semantics as well as the situatedness of address terms.

Further, several discourse and sociolinguistic studies on address forms have been conducted in social institutions and practices such as politics (Fetzer and Bull 2004; Jaworski and Galasinski 2000), religion (Sequeira 1993; Wharry 2003), and the media (Edu-Buandoh 1999); but it is only recently that we have begun to notice studies on address forms in academia that pay attention to students. Studies on address terms used by students include notably Crozier and Dimmock (1999), De Klerk and Bosch (1999) and Dornyo (2010) who focus on nicknames. In particular, De Klerk and Bosch (1999) associate nickname formation with linguistic creativity and verbal playfulness, and interpret the pervasive use of nicknames among students as reflective of peer group membership and cohesion. Kajee's (2005) work deals tangentially with address forms among undergraduates in a South African university in an online discussion, rather than a face-to-face interaction, while contributing to the literature on students' construction of what she calls 'virtual identity'.

Other illuminating sociolinguistic studies on address terms among students include Afful (1998, 2006), Kiesling (1998), Li (1997) and Wong and Leung (2004). In particular, Kiesling's (1998) work focuses on *Dude*, a solidary term used as an identity marker among white American male students in a fraternity. In a study conducted among students in Hong Kong, through detailed interviews and questionnaires administered to undergraduates, Wong and Leung (2004) found that although addressing each other in Chinese is more common than in the past, students' choice of English address forms reflects an identity predicated on their field of study, the culture of secondary school and peer pressure. Similarly, Li (1997) investigates identity in the use of address forms among Hong Kong students, but remains mute on the issue of gender. Afful's (2006) work on the use of address forms among university students in a non-Anglo-American setting alludes to the possible influence of gender.

Thus, the above literature, especially from the last decade, shows in various ways an interest in the construction of students' identities. To the extent that these studies point to various aspects of meaning-making and the different sociocultural underpinnings in the investigation of various aspects of identity, they are enlightening. However, the relationship between address forms and gender among university students appears to be underresearched.

Aim of the study

The present study, therefore, attempts to investigate whether or not the use of address forms among students in an African university is related to gender. Specifically, the study has two main objectives. The first is to identify the key naming practices that underpin students' use of address terms in the university being considered in this study. The second, and more important, objective is to demonstrate how students use these naming practices as address forms to accomplish or resist their gendered identities. It is important to answer the first research question before dealing with the second in order to see how students' use of address forms is informed by a particular sociocultural context.

Theoretical background

The present study is grounded in a three-pronged interactional framework – social constructionism, community of practice and post-structuralism – given that I examine a verbal behaviour among a distinct group of people in a particular setting.

First, I turn to social constructionism. Common to all the versions of social constructionism is the central assumption that – instead of the inner dynamics of the individual psyche (romanticism and subjectivism), or the already determined characteristics of the external world (modernism and objectivism), the two polarities in terms of which we have thought about ourselves in recent times (Gergen 1991) – it is the continuous interaction between humans that becomes the focus of concern. From this flow of relational activities and practices, constructionists maintain that all other socially significant dimensions of interpersonal interaction among all persons, including students, with their associated modes of being (either subjective or objective) originate and are formed or re-formed. Language in such an interactional site constitutes the social context and is in turn constituted by the social context. Address forms are important in such an interactional site.

The second notion of interest in this study is communities of practice, developed by Wenger (1998) and popularised in relation to research on language and gender by Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1998, 1999). As Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1998, 490) contend, a community of practice is:

an aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in some common endeavour. Ways of doings, ways of talking, beliefs, values, power relations – in short, practices – emerge in the course of their joint activity around that endeavour.

Thus, students constitute a homogeneous group in terms of their obvious rationale in being members of the university, with the aim to study and possibly have peripheral participation in academia. They can, therefore, be regarded as a community of practice. More important, they are likely to be involved in a ‘joint negotiated enterprise; and a shared repertoire of negotiable resources accumulated over time’ (Wenger 1998, 76). University students are likely to develop linguistic resources (here, a lexicon of address terms) which will distinguish them from other members of the university community such as faculty and non-academic staff. Taking a cue from Mills (2002), the possible influence of gender in such an apparent homogeneous group of students needs to be acknowledged. Characterising students as a community of practice in this way is important for this study as it could highlight students as members of a larger group while they still belong to other sub-groups, and can thus shift and take on different identities.

The final notion is post-structuralism. This notion is crucial to our understanding of the verbal behaviour of students, given its contribution in problematising the two related key terms in the study, ‘identity’ and ‘gender’. From the traditional view of identity as homogeneous and stable (Pavlenko and Blackledge 2004; Tajfel 1974, 1981) and the attempt to explain language contact outcomes through group memberships (Agnihotri et al. 1998; Kim 1996), in recent times the post-structuralist notion of identity has underscored the individual’s fluidity, multiplicity and embeddedness of identity. Similarly, under the influence of post-structuralism, the term ‘gender’ is no more considered bounded or dichotomous, as it was under the *dominant* (e.g. Edelsky and Adams 1990; Lakoff 1975) and *difference* (e.g. Coates 1993; Tannen 1995) theories. Instead, it is seen as a social

(Litosseliti 2006), performative (Baxter 2003) and discursive (Lazar 2005) construction. Post-structuralists such as Crawford (1995) and Jones (1997) further argue that speakers are not defined by only gender but also other cultural categories such as class, race, language and ability which tend to interlock with gender (Baxter 2002). Post-structuralist theory thus points to splits in the two categories (that is, identity and gender) in the present study, underscoring their fluidity, multiplicity and embeddedness within relations of power, affiliation and choices.

In general, the usefulness of such a theoretical paradigm lies in recognising university students as a fairly homogeneous group who, through various forms of interaction, constitute (make) and reconstitute (remake) their own social worlds through a common linguistic resource. In the process, they are also themselves made and remade.

Method

Research design

An ethnographic-style approach is adopted in the present work, given its potential to ‘emphasize the localized, microscopic, particular, context-bound features of given settings and cultures’ (Baxter 2003, 85). From this perspective, the present study seeks to utilise the advantage of studying a particular group of students, using two research instruments (observation and interview), with the aim of recording (and understanding) the complexity and diversity of the discursive practice – address form – in a given period.

Educational setting

The study took place within an English-medium public university in Ghana, University of Cape Coast (UCC), established originally to train teachers for the country’s secondary schools and training colleges. UCC conducts its teaching, learning and research through faculties, namely Education, Arts, Sciences and Social Sciences and schools (Agriculture and Medical Sciences) enabling the university to provide several academic programmes to about 14,000 regular students and 22,000 distance learners. This setting is chosen because of my familiarity with the students, as I had spent eight years as a student (undergraduate and postgraduate) and three years as a lecturer there. In addition, the students come from different ethnolinguistic backgrounds in Ghana (for a discussion on these ethnolinguistic groups, see Bodomo 1996). I focus on both undergraduate and postgraduate students; international students (mainly Nigerians) were excluded in order to prevent any introduction of ‘non-Ghanaian’ verbal practices into the data. This is important, given the relative political and economic stability of Ghana, which has resulted in students from several African countries seeking university education there.

Data collection and analysis

The data upon which the study is based were derived from the observation of various interactive encounters involving students and interviews of university students. The former was obtained from actual use of address terms in 280 dyadic situations at three different periods on the university campus: first, June–December 1998; second,

December–April 2003; and third, February–May 2008. These observations, which ranged from participant to non-participant focused on several sites on the campus such as lecture theatres, cafeteria, taxi stations, residential halls, junior common rooms (JCRs), and departmental offices and were recorded in a notebook. I also kept a diary, reflecting on incidents which seemed significant. Given the status of English as the only official language of Ghana and the medium of instruction in all educational institutions in Ghana, English is not surprisingly used extensively as a lingua franca in both formal and informal domains among students. Students' use of address terms was likely to be both in English, Pidgin English (a code often used among Ghanaian male students, according to Dako [2002]), and other Ghanaian languages.

The interviews were semi-structured and audio-taped, lasting between 30 minutes and one hour each; they also involved 50 students on a one-on-one basis. The primary goal was to uncover 'local' meaning from the participants' point of view (Geertz 1973) regarding address forms. The interview method was partly chosen for its qualities of flexibility of operation, sensibility in acknowledging feelings and potential delicacy of interpretation. Whereas in the observation I did not need the consent of the students, I asked for the interviewees' consent before the interview, assuring them of confidentiality and anonymity in the analysis and interpretation of data.

Following the data collection, the analysis, which was reflective and cyclical, involved the following procedures: (1) transcribing and coding interviews; (2) coding the observations which had been recorded in field notes; and (3) noting emerging patterns for themes and relationships in interview and observation data. There was the need for assistance in coding the interview data, which had been collected single-handedly. I first transcribed the interview and later asked a research assistant to check for accuracy. Emergent themes were then discussed in periodic consultations with the research assistant. Further consultations were made with a selected number of interviewees to check on the interpretation behind the use of address terms.

Students and naming practices in Ghana

From the data it became evident that the naming practices among students at UCC, from which address forms were derived, comprised personal name (PN), descriptive phrase (DP), title, catchphrase, kinship term, attention getter and pronoun (see Afful 1998 for a full discussion). However, only the first three naming practices are discussed on account of their saliency and space constraint.

Personal names

PNs represent the most common address form identified in the present study. They are made up of primary names and secondary names. As in several sociocultural settings, primary PNs or, what Aceto (2002, 594) calls, 'true names' are acquired at birth through a culturally accepted arrangement. These names often remain with a person throughout life though they can be changed through either a new status acquired by marriage or other circumstances. A secondary name or, as termed 'appellative' elsewhere (Afful 2006), is acquired by an individual as s/he grows.

Primary names consist of mainly first names (FNs), some of which are specifically realised as day-names which also reflect the sex of bearer or addressee such as *Kweku*, *Kofi* (names for a male person born on Wednesday and Friday, respectively), *Ekua*,

Efua, (name for a female born on Wednesday and Friday, respectively); English FNs, whether as full forms such as *Magnus, Joseph, Marjorie, Elizabeth* or diminutive forms such as *Gina* (for Georgina), *Willy* (for William); last names (LNs), whether English/Anglicised such as *Firth, Rockson, Myers* and *Brown* or indigenous lineage name such as *Kplego*, or *Arbuah*, or *Fosuwa* (female) or *Fosu* (male); full names (often a combination of indigenous and exogenous names), such as *Linda Fobi, Josephine Efua Appia-Kubi* and *Kofi Mercer*.

It is worth noting that out of this pool of PNs in Ghana most individuals (including students) usually have two sets of names: first, ‘a house name’ by which they are known in the community, similar to what obtains in Anglophone Caribbean speech communities in Latin America (Aceto 2002) and, second, what for lack of appropriate term I call ‘institutionalised name’. Whereas the former name tends to be used in the domestic domain (that is, at home among the nucleus and extended family members as well as neighbours), the latter name, which is often a cluster of names tends to be dominated by Anglophone/Anglicised, Islamised or lineage (indigenous) names realised often as the LN together with other forenames and used in official documents such as birth certificate, passport and baptism certificate. Examples of such institutionalised names are *Richmond Somuah, Kojo Kwaku Nyarku, Francisca Atsuprey Kudjordjie* and *Brenda Anita Alofah*. In recent times, however, some Ghanaians (usually educated to higher levels such as the university) are beginning to drop the ‘institutionalised’ names and maintain the ‘house’ name as an all-purpose name to demonstrate nationalism and cultural renaissance.

On the other hand, secondary names are commonly instantiated as nicknames (e.g. *Kuwornuman, John Lyons, Poco a Poco* (little by little), *Otwe* (deer); endearment terms (e.g. *Darling, Honey, Sweetheart* and *Sweetie*); terms of solidarity (e.g. *Azei, Buddy, Charlie, Komfo* and *Paddy*); and Romanised initials/alphabetisms (e.g. *J.Y.* for Johan Yaw and *T.A.* for Teaching Assistant). Other secondary names include hypocoristic names (day-names which also reflect the sex of bearer or addressee and employ reduplication for their phonetic realisations) such as *Kuukuu* (name for a male person born on Wednesday) and *Kukuwa* (name for a female born on Wednesday) among a particular major ethnolinguistic group, the Akan, in Ghana. In contrast to the primary names, secondary names, as earlier indicated, are used among peers either to tease or reflect closeness and solidarity.

Descriptive phrases

The second naming practice involves DP. A DP provides a description of an addressee to enable him/her to know that s/he is being addressed, thus fundamentally functioning as either an attention getter or an identifier. In their interaction, students utilised four groups of DPs. For a full description of these DPs, please see Afful (2007).

The first group of DPs refers to those often restricted to the halls of residence (e.g. *Room, Mate, Room mate, Room 125, Next door* and *J.C.R. mate*). These DPs are used, for instance, where the interactants share a room, a floor, a JCR. The second group of DPs, which tends to be used in lecture theatres or in academic settings, range from simple noun phrases to the more complex ones such as *Gentleman, The lady in the corner* and *The gentleman sitting very close to the bespectacled lady*. These are actuated by an immediate concern to identify the addressee for an expected response in student discussion groups. These are often used by the ‘leader’ in such

group discussions. The third sub-group of DPs involves some apparent denigratory terms such as *Foolish Man*, *Kwasea* (Silly) *Boy* and *Fantsenyi* (a person of Fante origin). In Ghana, it is the case that Fantes are considered to have a knack for humour, and are not serious-minded people. These apparent DPs are, therefore, negative in denotation. The last group of DPs comprises linguistic forms that reflect an interlocutor's status as an alumnus of a pre-tertiary educational institution. Examples of the DPs in this last group include *Old Boy*, *Old Girl* and *School Mate*, *Achimota Mate*, *Fijai Mate*. The last DPs, in particular, refer to two senior high schools, namely Achimota Senior High School and Fijai Senior High School.

Titles

Admittedly, in many societies or speech communities, the sense of achievement or social status is inscribed in titles (Ts), thus recalling Gilman and Brown's (1961) power postulate. Surprisingly, the interaction of students, which is mainly symmetrical (based on equality), demonstrated the use of Ts.

The data-set in the present study revealed two categories of Ts: western-oriented and non-western. The western ones consisted of established academic Ts and other non-academic Ts, while the non-western ones comprised those used before the emergence of western/formal education in Ghana. Often at lecture theatres, residential halls, student forums and JCRs, western-oriented titles (from basically academic and non-academic staff) are jokingly used. Students very easily exchange academic-oriented Ts such as *Professor* and *Doctor*, with their Romanised initials/aphabetisms and diminutive forms such as *Prof* and *Doc*, respectively. They also deploy non-academic Ts such as *Pastor*, *Reverend*, *Reverend Father* or *Rev*, *Chairperson*, *Mr*, *Miss*, *Mrs*, *Mr Electoral Commission*, *Madam*, *Sheik* ('teacher' in Islam) and *Alhaji* (a male Muslim who has undertaken the pilgrimage to Mecca). While address terms such as *Pastor*, *Mr* and *Madam* are, in general, more permanent, *Mr. Electoral Commissioner*, for instance, is rather temporary, referring to the role of a student as the electoral commissioner for an election in his hall of residence.

Apart from the 'western' Ts, the non-western type was less frequently used among students. These included Ts such as *Ɔkyerekyerenyi* (teacher), *Ebusuapanyin* (head of family clan), *Nana* (grandparent, deferential title, or title for an Akan chief), *Ɔhembraa* (queen mother), *Owura* (Lord) and *Opanyin* (Elder). As can be seen, these non-western Ts reflect the social structure of the Ghanaian society before the onset of colonialism (and for that matter Christianity and Islam).

Address terms and gendered identities?

This section focuses on the possible link between gender on the one hand and the PNs, DPs and Ts on the other hand in order to address the second concern intimated at the beginning of this paper.

Of all the PNs, FNs and LNs were the most prominent in terms of use. It was the norm for male students to exchange LNs (lineage/indigenous, Anglophone/Anglicised or Islamised names) such as *Aboagye*, *Myers*, *Egyir*, *Blankson*, *Rockson*, *Issa* and *Yakubu*. This did not mean that no FNs were exchanged among male students. In fact, when male students did, it indicated a closer relationship between them. In contrast, female students usually exchanged indigenous (*Abena*, *Maanan*, *Efua*, *Hawa*) and exogenous or foreign (*Rosemary*, *Stephanie*, *Valentina*) FNs with

their diminutive forms. Interestingly, this gender-exclusive use of FNs was also reflected in mixed-gender interaction; in other words, male students would often address female students by the latter's FNs, whereas female students would address male students by their LNs. Consistent with Li's (1997, 505) finding, FNs among both male and female students, regardless of single-gender or mixed-gender interactions, evinced a sense of closeness and familiarity.

Apart from the FNs and LNs, a variation of PNs concerned the use of full forms such as 'John Kweku', 'Rosemary Enuson', 'Sylvester Peter Krakue' and 'Evelyn Tandoh'. These were rarely used as students interviewed about these full forms indicated that such forms tended to denote a distant relationship among interactants. More importantly, these full forms were used either to express a heightened emotion of surprise, excitement or disappointment among friends, as in the exchange below:

- A: *Akosua Frema Agypong*, you don't mean it!
 B: Well, if you don't believe it, that's your problem.

As seen in the above example, this heightened feeling could not have been present in either the unmarked *Akosua* or *Frema*, the address forms frequently used by the addresser's friends, as I learnt later. Such usage among students was gender-blind. The interview data also confirmed students' awareness of the use of full forms to express deep emotional involvement.

However, the use of abbreviated forms/Romanised initials of the above names such as *J.K.* for 'John Kweku' or *S.P.* for 'Samuel Paul Kainyah', *T.T.* for 'Tawiah Tandoh', *J.B.* for 'Joseph Baah' or *S.K.* for 'Samuel Kwofie' was restricted to the male students. Further, during the fieldwork male students were heard using address forms that combined a Romanised initial and a full form such as *John K* (John Kweku) or *Kojo T* (Kojo Tagoe). Apart from enhancing familiarity, male students valued the use of these Romanised initials for their playfulness.

In mixed-gender interactions, the use of Romanised initials tended to be non-reciprocal. Interestingly, female students used such address forms for their male counterparts, while they did not receive any in return. If such usage originating from the male students constitutes innovativeness, then it may be argued that the male students tended to be more creative than their female counterparts. Considered in another sense, the female students tended to maintain the status quo, unwilling to experiment with various word formation processes while recognising the linguistic ingenuity of their male counterparts. The point worth noting is that though the use of complete Romanised initials (e.g. *P.K.*, *W.O.* and *S.P.*) or semi-Romanised initials (e.g. *Kojo T.* and *John K.*) is found in other settings (Li 1997; Oyetade 1995), the present study found that Romanised initials proliferated among male students.

The use of secondary names, especially nicknames, was more enlightening in highlighting the issue of gendered identities. The evidence from the observation and interview indicated that nicknames such as *Karl Marx*, *Max Weber*, *Chomsky*, *Plato* and *Herodotus* which are associated with some discipline-specific fields were frequently used among male students. During the data collection, only one female student was observed to be addressed by her friends (male and female) as *Jane Ure*, a scholar in Register Analysis. These nicknames from discipline-specific areas were used for some students to acknowledge their potential in becoming scholars; in other words, they were used to show the addressee's intellectual prowess. Female students

used these discipline-specific nicknames for their male friends, while to a large extent they received none.

The fact that male students addressed one another by these 'discipline-oriented' or 'academic' nicknames while female students hardly did may stem from two factors. First, in general, few female scholars are found in most disciplines, especially the hard sciences, applied sciences and the social sciences, thus limiting the possibility of female students identifying with such scholars. Another reason could be cultural; that is, in Ghana while males are expected to show erudition and a knack for knowledge, the same cannot be said about the females. This is gradually changing though, with the increase in accessibility to education by both genders. Thus, the genderisation of 'academic' nicknames reflects not only the society's attitude towards knowledge acquisition but a legitimate way by which the males assert their dominance within the academic space.

Besides 'academic' nicknames, there were other nicknames from different social domains such as politics and sports. For the male students these included *Abedi Pele* (a notable Ghanaian footballer) and *Azuma Nelson* (a Ghanaian boxer recently inducted into the world's Hall of Fame) as well as *Mobotu*, *Kabila*, *Idi Amin* and *Charles Taylor* (all African politicians noted for their ruthlessness) and for the female students *Princess Diana* and *Margaret Thatcher* for their beauty and unbending firmness, respectively. These two groups of 'gendered' nicknames seem to feed into the stereotypical notion of physical attractiveness which is associated with women as well as aggressiveness, sporting prowess and popularity associated with men. It is also worth noting that the use of these 'non-academic' nicknames in the present study did not suggest a dominant teasing function, as noted in earlier studies (De Klerk and Bosch 1997, 1999); the difference in communicative functions of nicknames in these two sets of studies could stem from the different level of students involved. These 'non-academic' address terms seek to test 'peer group bonds' or, what Baxter (2002, 85) simply calls 'peer approval'.

Beyond these two kinds of nicknames – 'academic' and 'non-academic' – the suffixation of '-man' to surnames or FNs as in *Collinsman*, *Joshuaman* and *Akotoman* offered some interesting insights on gendered language. The suffix '-man' was usually attached to both indigenous Ghanaian names (lineage) as well as Anglophone or Anglicised names. More importantly, this verbal practice was common among male students who shared something in common – a course, hall of residence, or an organisation on campus. Where '-man' was not accompanied by PN, it tended to collocate with 'my', giving rise to 'My man', which then assumes the character of a solidarity term. Whether it collocated with PNs or 'my', as observed during the fieldwork, '-man' was hardly used among female students. This verbal usage is consistent with Goodwin's (1990) study, which showed the use of '-man' among young African-Americans in the USA.

In addition, female students were sometimes addressed by this form of nickname of their boyfriends as a sign of familiarity and acceptance into an 'in-group'. But more importantly, the attempt by a few female students to use '-man' among themselves represents a resistance of a gendered identity, which associates this usage with male students, thus raising the question as to whether it is always possible to establish a connection between linguistic behaviour and gender. In fact, some female students who were interviewed about this usage among few female students indicated that it constituted a 'guy's language' while others indicated that such use represents an attempt at being 'tough': that is, they were used as a defensive mechanism to ward

off unwarranted 'harassment' from male students. These varying uses of -man in nicknames thus evoke sociolinguists such as Tannen (1993) and Johnstone (1996), who explore the essentialised links between language and specific groups, as individuals may construct particular identities through linguistic resources of groups to which they do not straightforwardly belong.

A further set of secondary names which highlighted gendered identities among students at UCC involves solidarity terms and endearment terms. In the present data, the former included notably *Ogyam*, *Komfo*, *Paddy*, *Azei* and *Charlie*, which are all denotatively analogous to *Buddy* reported by Leech (1999, 10) and Kiesling's (1998) *Dude*. Apart from the fact that these solidarity terms were commonly used among male students, *Charlie* tended to be used reciprocally and frequently, with few female students using it for both male and female students. In this sense, the use of *Charlie* could be said to be similar to the current use of *Guy* in some English-speaking societies (Leech 1999), which is extended to female addressees. Interestingly, the female students in the present study who reciprocally used forms such as *Charlie* and *Azei* were young and had attended the so-called 'elite' secondary schools in Ghana such as Achimota School (co-educational) as well as Wesley Girls' High School and Holy Child Girls' School. Thus, here, we see gender interacting with age and socioeconomic background in influencing the use of address terms among female students in both single-gender and mixed-gender interactions.

Female students also tended to exchange endearment terms such as *Baby*, *My dear*, *Darling*, *Honey Sweetheart*, *Sweetie* and *Sweetie pie*. The interview data suggested that female students found them helpful and natural in maintaining good relationships with one another; that is, these endearment terms fostered emotional involvement and deep interpersonal relationship in both academic and non-academic settings. But few male students used these endearment terms when addressing female friends. Some male students interviewed, on the other hand, felt such terms were generally 'effeminate' or 'girlish' when used by male students among themselves. They added that when used by both male and female students for their addressees of the opposite gender, this tended to reflect a 'romantic' or closer relationship between interactants. The female students' use of endearment terms appeared to be reflecting their caring, gentle and affectionate nature, which is consistent with the finding in Dornyo's (2010) most recent work.

Turning to DPs, we find that the denigratory ones (that is, those that threatened the face of the addressee) served to distinguish the male and female students. At various sites on campus such as taxi stations, cafeteria, halls of residence and on the streets, male students frequently exchanged *Kwasea Boy*, *Foolish Man* and *Crazy Guy*. These DPs which were accompanied by loud shouts and gestures tended to position male students as aggressive, bold and coarse. The interview data showed that young male students who are very close pals used these terms. More importantly, the male interviewees claimed that they often used them to express a heightened sense of disappointment, frustration or excitement. Female students hardly utilised these terms, lending credence to the usual notion of linguistic decorum, finesse and politeness associated with women's use of language (Holmes 1995; Talbot 1998).

Similar to the apparent denigratory DPs was the use of ethnic-related terms among young male students who are close friends. This involved using such terms as *Fantsenyi* (a person of Fante origin), *Awonanyi* (a person of Ewe origin), *Pepenni* (someone from the northern part of Ghana) or *Nkrannyi* (a person of Ga origin). (Fante, Ga and Ewe are three of the major ethnic groups in Ghana.) Indeed,

addressing a mate by these expressions illustrates what Doran (2004, 107) calls 'ethnic specificity', as it foregrounds the ethnic background of the addressees. Although these forms of DPs emanated mainly from a Fante (a sub-group among Akans) speaker, they suggest that other speakers of different ethnic background may be using similar terms in addressing students from other ethnic backgrounds. By flagging ethnicity in these address terms and using them in playful ways, male students make face-threatening address terms less so, thus creating a semantic field of address terms within which ethnic origins could be benign. In this sense, similar to Doran's (2004) work, such ethnic-related terms ironically affirm the bonds of shared membership in a multi-ethnic community called Ghana, represented by the student speech community at UCC.

Regarding the use of titles, the last broad category of address terms considered in the present study, there did not appear to be any reason to suggest gender-exclusivity. As explicated elsewhere (Afful 2006), students use *Sir* and *Madam*, decidedly honorific titles, based on three factors: the addressee's dignified department, significant age difference and the possibility of the addresser having been taught by the addressee at an earlier stage of his/her education. The latter reason particularly is not surprising, given that some students continue their education long after they have married and reached a stage in their teaching career where obtaining a degree offers them an opportunity to gain promotion. When such 'mature' students meet students whom they have taught at the pre-university stage, the latter address the former as *Sir* or *Madam* to show deference. In this case, the gender of the addresser does not necessarily mediate this address form.

Equally so is the use of *Sir* and *Madam* and diminutive forms such as *Prof* and *Doc* by students to humour one another and to explicitly acknowledge the intellectual prowess of the addressee and their potential for becoming an academic (note the use of 'academic-oriented' nicknames discussed earlier). Besides these honorific terms, there were others such as *Your Worship*, *Most Honorable*, *Your Excellency*, *Your Highness* and *Your Majesty* that were used by both male and female students in very informal situations. Further, where a title does not identify an addressee's role in real life, as for example, *Bishop* or *Reverend*, it is used as a nickname among peers to suggest the addressee's proclivity towards either sermonising or possessing traits of a reverend minister.

Conclusion

The paper has explored the relationship between the use of address forms and gendered identities. Derived from the analysis and discussion are three key findings and implications for both theory and further sociolinguistic research.

The first finding indicates that students use three salient sets of address terms in their interactions, to serve as a boundary marker between the student speech community and the other two speech communities represented by the academic staff and non-academic staff. Second, the gendered identities of students manifest in the use of FNs and LNs, nicknames, endearment terms, and denigratory terms: these tend to uphold stereotypes of attitudes and norms regarding gender relations. In the use of nicknames and solidarity terms, however, there is a case of resistance towards what is considered to be the accepted or dominant gendered verbal practice. On the other hand, the use of honorific titles is gender-inclusive. Finally, the gendered identities (or resistance of stereotypical gendered identities) of students interact in overlapping

ways with their other identities (age, ability and socio-economic status), given that as identity theorists such as Miller (2000) argue, individuals have multiple, intersecting social identities.

These findings have implications for scholarship on the construction of identities, in general, and research on language and gender (or gendered identities), in particular. Traditionally, such sociolinguistic or discourse analytic research has focused on Anglo-American or European settings, although in the last decade, we have begun to see an increasing number of studies in other geographical settings. The present research, therefore, is an attempt to widen the scope of such research to cover other settings such as Africa that have been underresearched. Moreover, while the present study did not set out to critique the dominance or difference theory in studies of language and gender, it has indicated wider trends in the use of such a key discursive practice as address terms among female and male students in a Ghanaian public university. The ethnographic evidence adduced in the present study adds to our understanding of gender relations and identities by suggesting that discursively produced language (here address terms) is not fixed, but subject to 'contestation and change' (Baxter 2002, 94).

Finally, the above findings also have implications for further research. Indeed, it will be interesting if future research is conducted to ascertain how students in English-medium or non-English-medium educational institutions elsewhere negotiate or reproduce their gendered identities through the use of address forms. It is to be expected that different national or sociocultural proclivities can have a considerable influence in this regard. This will in turn add to the emerging scholarship on the construction of student identities, address forms, as well as language and gender.

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