



Address Terms among University Students in Ghana: A Case Study

Joseph Benjamin Archibald Afful

To cite this article: Joseph Benjamin Archibald Afful (2006) Address Terms among University Students in Ghana: A Case Study, *Language and Intercultural Communication*, 6:1, 76-91, DOI: [10.1080/14708470608668909](https://doi.org/10.1080/14708470608668909)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14708470608668909>



Published online: 26 Dec 2010.



[Submit your article to this journal](#)



Article views: 447



[View related articles](#)



Citing articles: 7 [View citing articles](#)

Address Terms among University Students in Ghana: A Case Study

Joseph Benjamin Archibald Afful

Department of English Language and Literature, National University of Singapore, Singapore

An important feature of the interface between language and society is the use of address terms. Following Brown and Gilman (1960), research studies of address terms have been extended to several cultural settings. This study contributes to this fertile area of sociolinguistic studies by describing the address terms used among undergraduates in an English-medium university in Ghana. Two sets of data collected from participant and nonparticipant observation and interviews constitute the primary source of data, supplemented by intuition. Analysis and discussion of this study point to three key findings. First, Ghanaian students use four major groups of address terms. The second finding relates to the use of the reported modes of address, namely, personal names, titles, descriptive terms and catch phrases to reflect and construct the individual and social identity of students. The final point is the use of modes of address to reflect a warm and vivacious culture. These findings have implication for theory and intercultural communication.

Dzinfre ho hia wo nyimpa dodow nkitahodzi afamu. Fitse ber a Brown na Gilman (1960) yeɛ nhwehwe mu wo aborɔkyirman mu no, binom so ayɛɛ nhwehwe mu a ɔfan dzinfre ho wo wiadze yi mu (Evans-Pritchard, 1948; Fitch, 1991, Fang na Heng, 1983). Dem adzesua yi botae nye de ɔbeyɛ nhwehwe mu a ɔfan esuafo a woahye hon adzesua ase wo Ghana esuapon bi a borɔfo kasa na wodze sua adze. Mefaa kwan ahrow ebien do na me dze yeɛ nhwehwe mu yi. Odzikan, mohweɛ kwan a esuafo yi frefreɛ hon ho wo nkitahodze ahrow mu. ɔto do ebien, me nye esuafo yi twetweɛ nkɔmbɔ wo edzin a wodze frefreɛ hon ho. Ndzemba ebiasa na opueɛ fi adzesua yi mu. Odzikan, Ghanaman esuapon esuafo to de wodze edzin anaan frefreɛ hon ho. ɔto do ebien, yenam edzinfre anaan yi mu hu akorankɔ ana nyimpa dodow hon su. Dza ɔto do ebiasa nye de edzinfre yi ma yehu de kusum a wo ebibiman Ghana mu ye enyigye enyigye. Dza oepueɛ adzesua yi mu hye hen nyimdze wo edzinfre ho ma na wo so ma yehu hia wo de yebetse obiara ase wo hon edzinfre ho.

Keywords: academic English, address terms, communicative domains, names, titles

Introduction

Terms of address constitute an important part of verbal behaviour through which the behaviour, norms and practices of a society can be identified. Other issues such as sexuality, age, ethnicity and religion can also be inferred and realised from address terms. Given the above ramifications of address terms, sociolinguistic studies have in the past often been undertaken in domestic or familial settings. More recently, studies of address terms (sometimes aided by discourse analysis) are beginning to make forays into other social processes

and practices such as politics (e.g. Jaworski & Galasinski, 2000) and religion (Dzameshie, 1997; Sequeira, 1993), suggesting the vitality of address terms.

The present study of address terms is, therefore, a continuation of this emerging trend, as it ventures into an academic setting. In this study, 'address terms' refers to words or expressions used in an interactive, dyadic and face-to-face situations to designate the person being talked to (Oyetade, 1995). It is with this definition in mind that this paper attempts to describe and explain the linguistic resources and meanings of English forms from an ethnographic study conducted among university students in one Ghanaian university.

Previous Studies of Address Terms

Since Gilman and Brown (1960) highlighted the semantics of power and solidarity in relation to address terms, several studies of address terms have emerged. Subsequent research, while drawing upon Gilman and Brown, however, has faulted this power/solidarity semantics for appearing too deterministic and assuming a pre-existing cultural system on which verbal practices hinge. As is now clear, speakers use address terms to negotiate a cultural system (see Fitch, 1991; Morford, 1997); speakers can use terms of address in creative and non-literal ways such as metaphor, joking, irony and deception (Fitch, 1991); finally, speakers can apply their own personal meaning when using terms of personal address (Afful, 1998; Sequeira, 1993).

Moreover, various studies of modes of address have shown that there exists a number of other categories of address terms, apart from pronominals, and that these forms reflect and construct cultural beliefs. For example, Fitch (1998) identifies five categories of address terms: second-person pronouns, proper names, kinship terms, titles, and nicknames and adjectival terms. She demonstrates that the kinship term, *Madre*, or mother, reflects and constructs a variety of relationships among participants in Columbia (Fitch, 1991). Likewise, studies of address terms in China show how the title *tongzhi*, or comrade, reflects China's changing social structure (Fang & Heng, 1983; Scotton & Zhu, 1983). Evans-Pritchard's (1948) study remains one of the earliest on address terms in Africa. A number of major sociolinguistic studies of address terms in Ghana, which include Agyekum (2003), Akrofi and Owusu-Ansah (1995), Dakubu (1981), and Egblewogbe (1987), have emerged in the last two decades.

In sum, all these studies – from Asian, European, Arabic, South American and African contexts – show that address terms constitute a much broader field than first envisioned by Brown and Gilman (1960), and that it is a fruitful field for sociolinguistics as it shows how interpersonal relationships can be socially and strategically constructed (Fitch, 1991; Morford, 1997) in various cultural settings. In addition, the above-mentioned studies and numerous others have emphasised the domestic or familial setting, at the expense of other domains.

As a cultural setting, educational institutions (including universities) have received very little attention in studies of address terms. Although Cutting's (2000) study is a commendable attempt at investigating students' language use, she marginalises address terms. Crozier and Dimmock (1999), and De

Klerk and Bosch (1997, 1999) while dealing in part with students, have been restrictive in focusing on only nicknames. Similarly, Anwar (1997) appears restrictive on account of its focus on address terms among only Malay/Muslim undergraduates. The exception remains Dickey (1997), who specifically explores address terms in an academic setting. Her overarching concern is to explain the disjuncture between forms of address and terms of reference in relation to an interlocutor.

The Present Study

Aim of the study

Against this terrain of previous studies on address terms, briefly sketched, this study explores address terms as a verbal expression which uses social rules and other sociopragmatic features to identify a distinct group of members of an academic community: students. First, to accomplish this goal, I describe the social context of the present study, University of Cape Coast (UCC), as I believe this enables the context of situation and context of culture within which language is used to be captured. I then describe the methodology used to obtain the data and follow it up by discussing the various forms that students use in their interaction. The study shows that interlocutors draw on a set of linguistic resources; furthermore, it shows that the choice of address terms is not arbitrary, but determined by knowledge of rules and accompanying meanings associated with the address terms in a speech community.

Research setting: University of Cape Coast

As already noted, the setting chosen for this study is University of Cape Coast (UCC), one of five public universities in Ghana, and one of the few postcolonial settings where English remains the only official language. Established in 1962, UCC was the only institution charged with training teachers for the country's secondary and training colleges, but now shares that role with University of Education of Winneba. As in several English-medium universities elsewhere, UCC conducts its learning, teaching and research through faculties, namely Education, Humanities, Sciences, Agriculture and Social Sciences; and this enables it to provide several academic programmes for nearly 15,000 local and international students (University of Cape Coast, 2005).

As a social unit, UCC is made up of three identifiable groups of people: students, faculty and nonacademic staff. In this paper, my interest lies with the most dominant group, students, whose social interaction occurs within both academic and nonacademic domains. Students interact for academic purposes during lectures, seminars, tutorials or group discussions. They also engage in nonacademic activities mainly at halls of residence, taxi and car parks, gardens, and cafeterias. Further, students meet regularly in mosques, temples or churches on campus for religious reasons, while campus and national politics as well as sports remain pastimes for a great number of students.

In all these interactive encounters (academic and nonacademic), given that English is the medium of instruction in educational institutions in Ghana, it is

not surprising that English is used extensively in both formal and informal domains among students who do not share a common Ghanaian language. Nevertheless, not all interactions in UCC are carried out in English; Ghanaian languages are often used informally where participants share a common Ghanaian language, and on certain formal occasions, such as *durbars*, or festivals, organised during 'hall week' celebrations. Sometimes, in informal situations, especially among male students, as noted by Dako (2002), Pidgin English, a popular code among young university students, is used.

Methodology

Essentially, I utilised an ethnographic approach, thus making it possible to combine data from observation and interview data.

The former was obtained in actual usage of 204 dyadic encounters involving students of varying backgrounds at two different times: June–December 1998; and December–April 2003. At every opportunity field notes and other descriptive matrices such as observation lists were used to unobtrusively record the address forms. In recording the address terms, I was guided by background information such as the identity of the interlocutors, the role relations between them, the situational context of speech and the purpose of interaction. The interview data, mainly supplementary, were obtained from semi-structured interviews administered to 45 Ghanaian students concerning the forms of address they use and their reasons for using them (see the interview schedule in the Appendix). I based the selection of Ghanaian students on age, sex, courses and halls of residence in order to achieve variability.

The motivation for using the ethnographic approach emanates from two factors. First, there was the need to collect reliable data in natural, everyday, interactive situations, hence the focus on dialogues. The second consideration stems from the need to study social reality (in this case, address terms as a verbal behaviour) from the point of view of the informants (Saville-Troike, 1983). The data obtained were supplemented by the author's own introspection, aided by his membership of the university community.

Analysis and Discussion

The study showed that eight key categories constituted the linguistic repertoire used by students in various communicative encounters on the university campus. These include personal names, titles, descriptive phrases, catch phrases, zero address/no name, kinship terms, other attention getters and pronouns. I, however, focus on the first four address terms on the basis of prominence, besides the constraint of space.

My analysis is supported by examples drawn from the data. Moreover, my own experience as an immediate alumnus and later a lecturer plays a significant role in the analysis. At the outset, it is important to note that by academic domain, I mean the interaction of setting, participants (here students) with an academic orientation, whereas the non-academic domains refer to events and their purposes outside the academic sphere.

Personal names

The available evidence in this research supports classification into two: birth name considered as 'real' name, and appellative which is regarded as an addendum. By alluding to real names I mean the more permanent names which a child acquires at birth, the range of which could be quite complex (Dakubu, 1981). On the other hand, 'appellatives' is used here to refer to names that are added to the 'real' name as a child grows; that is, they are, in the words of De Klerk and Bosch (1999: 1), 'thrust upon one by family, playmates, friends, and colleagues'. They can be nicknames, terms of solidarity, endearment terms and initials.

Real names

As the university is a multicultural entity, it was not surprising to find 'real names' from all kinds of origins: indigenous, Europeanised or Anglicised, Arabic/Muslim, Christian or English. Indigenous, or ethnic, names are by definition names that reflect the distinct family lineages unfettered by any form of Westernism or colonialism such as *Nkegbe*, *Frema*, *Owusu*, *Ohene* and *Arbuah*. The Anglicised refers to names which originate from Ghana but have seen some form of influence from Westernism; these include *Kuntu* (meaning 'blanket') which is now realised as *Blankson*, or *Ɔbo* (meaning 'rock') now realised as *Rockson*. Examples of Arabic names include *Umar*, *Ayisha* and *Ishaq*. Distinct English names include *Brookman*, *Firth*, *Mary* and *Myers*.

In general, however, addressing a person by the birth name in the UCC community often takes three major forms:

1. First name (FN) or its variants e.g. *Kofi*, *Adwoa*, *John*, *Margaret*, *Hetty*, *Joshua*.
2. Last Name (LN) e.g. *Ampiah-Ghartey*, *Mahama*, *Sackeyfio*, *Brown*, *Blankson*.
3. Full formal name (FFN) e.g. *Linda Fobi*, *Derek Kwesi Intsiful*, *Josephine Efua Olympio*.

Each of these indicates the relationship between interlocutors, from a familiar to a formal relationship.

The reciprocal use of English FNs (e.g. *Rose*, *Daniel*) is the norm among friends, close associates, although the ethnic FNs (e.g. *K bena*, *Akosua*) are by no means entirely excluded. This verbal behaviour operates in both the academic and nonacademic domains in UCC. Using English FNs tends to be reciprocal and cuts across gender and age. It was usual to hear the exchanges below:

1. **A:** *Joe*.
B: *Rich*, anything the matter?
A: Did you see the guy for your marked assignment?
B: No, I just learnt about it right now. Thanks so much, *Joe*.
2. **A:** *Jane! Jane! Jane!* It's time for prayer meeting. Are you ready now?
B: Hmm! Just a few minutes, if you don't mind.

As shown above, depending on the intimacy of the friends, the diminutive form rather than the full form of the first name, among both male (and female) students, is used.

In informal settings, Akan (a language spoken by the Akans, a major ethnic group in Ghana) day-names (that is, names reflecting the day on which a person was born) such as *Kwame* (male born on Saturday) or *Esi* (female born on Sunday) were used to show a much more intimate relationship. The most intimate relationship between interactants was further expressed through the use of what Obeng (1997: 39) calls, 'Akan hypocoristic day-names' such as *Fiiifi* derived from *Kofi* and *Ewuraesi* derived from *Esi*. Evidence from field work indicated that the use of hypocoristic forms, though relatively few, shows the familiarity between interactants to be traceable to the home. In general, however, the use of hypocoristic day-names as address forms in the study depends largely on similarity in age (Obeng, 1997), rather than merely on participant relationship.

The most marked of the names used among students in UCC, FFNs, are often found in formal contexts such as church service where, for instance, names of graduating students are being called to collect certificates for participation in activities of a church group:

3. **A:** *John Kwesi Dadzie, past President, God bless you!*
B: Thanks.

As is shown, it is common to add an appositive as a way of announcing the addresser's role or accomplishment. In contrast, at lectures, as shown in Example 3, FFNs could be used by the class monitor when distributing marked assignments without any accompanying appositive.

4. **A:** *Mary Osei*
B: Yeap!

It is worth noting that in the above exchange sometimes class monitors could choose to mention a student's registration number for identification where both names and the registration number have been provided on the answer script. The choice of either depends on which one is more convenient for the class monitor.

Besides the formal contexts which warrant the use of FFNs, in some informal contexts friends address each other by these FFNs to express mood, whether excitement or surprise, as illustrated below:

5. **Friend A:** *Akosua Fremā Agyapong, you don't mean it!*
Friend B: Well, if you don't believe it, that's your problem.

In Example 5, the FFN is used to express a heightened feeling, which may not be available in either a hypocoristic form or a lineage name. Moreover, as can be seen in both the formal and informal situations above, the element of nonreciprocity is the norm.

Besides FNs and FFNs, LNs or surnames featured prominently in my data in terms of their occurrence and use. LNs appeared to be more informal, of course, than FFNs, but less informal than FNs in their usage. Hence, for

example, Emmanuel Abakah (FFN) is addressed by his male and female friends in differing terms as *Abakah*, *Abek* and *Abeko*; while the first remains the same, the last two of these three names of Abakah suggest the application of some morphological processes. *Abek* becomes a diminutive form, while the rounded vowel in the last syllable of *Abeko* makes it euphonious and sound like a pet-name. Last names (or surnames), with their varied forms, were a constant address form among male interactants on UCC campus, suggesting a possible gender influence. Additionally, such usage suggests that the interactants are in a symmetrical relationship based on age and familiarity.

Appellatives

The second major source of personal names, appellatives, has even more interesting usage among students at UCC, operating in the domain of friendship. They involved nicknames, solidarity terms, endearment terms and initials/alphabetism.

Nicknames were the most prominently used among friends, regardless of age. Students commonly address each other with nicknames such as *Karl Marx*, *Max Weber*, *Chomsky*, *Plato*, *Herodotus*, *Webster*, *Margaret Thatcher* and *Abedi Pele*. They are given names according to their subject disciplines. *Karl Marx* and *Weber* are typically identified in Sociology; *Chomsky* and *Webster* in linguistics; and *Plato* and *Herodotus* in philosophy. Also, referring to a female student leader as *Margaret Thatcher* suggests the possession of unbending firmness, while addressing a male student as *Abedi Pele* is acknowledgement of the addressee's flair in soccer. I found these data interesting because they pointed to attempts by students to construct an identity that rests on various determinants of success – intellectual prowess, power or skill. Moreover, this particular verbal practice has links with language habits of naming in traditional stories and the custom of allocating a new phenomenon to a mask in a traditional dance in order to 'conquer' it or be 'superior'.

Deliberate twisting of personal names such as *Geele* for *Abigail* or *Telli* for *Ethel* represents another source of nicknames in UCC. These are interesting to note because of the comic effect they achieve and their playfulness. Similarly, some male students reciprocally employ '-man' as a suffix to lineage names, surnames or forenames as in *Collinsman*, *Joshuaman* and *Akotoman*. Where this type of nickname is used nonreciprocally, the addresser is seen to be condescending and trying to initiate an informal relationship, which is, otherwise, absent because of an apparent discrepancy in age. This observation is consistent with Goodwin's (1990) study, which showed the use of 'man' among young blacks in the USA. The point of commonality between the use of 'man' in the present study and Goodwin's is that both uses suggest that a semantically neutral term of address 'man' can obtain affective saliency, depending on the way in which it is embedded within a larger field of verbal interaction. This source of nickname as an address term was not in use among female students; however, occasionally some female students addressed male students by this form of nickname. In some cases too, female students were

addressed by other nicknames of their boyfriends as a sign of conviviality, warmth and familiarity.

There are two salient points to note about the incidence of nicknames among undergraduates. Unlike Crozier and Dimmock's (1999) study that reported that nicknames are hurtful, my present data challenge this finding. It can be argued further then that in primary schools pupils tend to use hurtful nicknames as part of the socialisation process whereas in universities, as a result of greater maturity and their increasing sensitivity to the other person's face, students tend to use greater commendatory or benign nicknames. Further, the finding in the use of nicknames in the present study is consistent with findings of De Klerk and Bosch (1996) among South African adolescents, where males created and exchanged more nicknames. Within the category of appellatives, as indicated by Crozier and Dimmock (1999), nicknames evince a greater degree of intimacy and complexity than any other type of names.

The next point to note under appellatives concerns terms of solidarity. They include *Paddy* and *Charlie*, which are all analogous to *Buddy* and *Dude* reported by Leech (1999: 110) to be predominantly used among American youth. In general, these terms of solidarity were found to be common with male students in UCC. Even where they are strangers to each other, interlocutors of either the same age or a difference range of five years used these terms of solidarity. The most common term of solidarity used among students in UCC was *Charlie*; it was used among males on a reciprocal basis but occasionally used by young female students. In this sense, *Charlie*, as is the case with the present use of *guy* in some English-speaking societies (Leech, 1999), was extended to female addressees.

While it may be argued that female students do not find appealing the kind of solidarity that their male counterparts seek through the above solidarity terms, female students are certainly not without solidarity. They express solidarity through reciprocal and nonreciprocal patterns of endearment terms such as *Baby*, *(My) dear*, *Darling*, *Honey*, *Hon*, *Sweetheart*, *Sweetie* and *Sweetie (pie)*. It was, therefore, common to find female students addressing each other or other interlocutors (male friends) in domestic, social and official domains of life with these endearment terms. The fact that female students' use of endearments extends into domains other than private, thus belying its apparent face-value, resonates with a similar finding in other studies, showing that females tend to overuse endearment terms (Dickey, 1997; McConnell-Ginet, 1978; Wolfson & Manes, 1980).

Apart from the use of nicknames, terms of solidarity, endearment terms, the high incidence of initials such as *P.K.* (derived from Paul Kabah), *J.A.* (from John Agyei) and *J.B.* (Joseph Bernard Kwofie) was not only noticeable but also often indicated familiarity or intimacy. The above names suggest that they could be derived from either the entire names or just the forenames. One could also hear a combination of a name followed by an initial as in *Kojo T* (full form being Kojo Tandoh). Though these initials occurred usually among male friends and acquaintances, they also occurred among female members in UCC, to a minimum degree.

The following exchange, rendered in Pidgin English, illustrates the use of initials:

6. **A:** *T.T*
B: Wetin (meaning, 'what's the matter?')
A: You de come or you de go (meaning, are you coming or you are going?)
B: But you koraa, why you de be impatient (meaning, 'why are you so impatient?')

The above discussion suggests that personal address forms represent a significant but complex way through which students maintain, enhance and negotiate relationships on campus in, especially, nonacademic domains. In particular, there is great cultural richness in the range of personal names. Also the use of appellations, especially nicknames, underscores the African predilection for playfulness with language.

Titles

The second most interesting linguistic feature students deploy in addressing one another is titles. These titles are usually associated with hierarchical institutions and so when students use them they tend to acquire an added significance.

Titles such as *Reverend Professor, President, Professor, Director, Madam, Dean, Vice-Chancellor* and *Sir* are unquestionably formal and unmarkedly operative among faculty. Among students, *Sir* and *Madam*, otherwise reserved non-reciprocally for faculty, are markedly used to show deference to the addressee. This is illustrated in the exchange between two course mates:

7. **A:** Were you at lectures today? You know, I had to rush home to see one of my daughters who had come home for mid terms.
B: Oh *Sir*, you really missed a wonderful lecture. But never mind, I can give you my notes for today.

As in similar exchanges found in my data, the use of *Sir* in the above scenario to address an interlocutor is dictated by three factors: the addressee's dignified mien, 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 especially 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 can assure them of promotion. Such 'mature' students are likely to meet students whom they have taught at the preuniversity stage. It is in this kind of relationship that the nonreciprocal use of *Sir* or *Madam* from the relatively younger students becomes acceptable.

However, in a lighter mood, students use *Sir* and *Madam* and diminutive forms such as *Prof* and *Doc* to humour one another and to tacitly acknowledge the intellectual prowess of the addressee and consequently their potential for becoming a professor or doctor. Further, the interview and observation data show how friends of similar age tend to exchange playful honorific titles such as *Your Worship Sir, Most Honorable, Your Excellency, Your Highness* and *Your Majesty* in very informal circumstances with jocular intent. In general, where a

title does not identify the addressee's role in real life, as for example, *Bishop* or *Reverend*, it is used as a nickname among peers to tease and suggest the addressers' bent towards either sermonising or possession of traits of a reverend minister. Thus, though titles are decidedly formal, their use – whether with full names as in *Professor Baiden* and *Your Worship Sir Cornelius*, or uncombinable as in *Honorable*, or even as a diminutive form like *Doc* – among both female and male students still remains informal.

Addressing a fellow student by a title, indicating occupation or vocation, appears rather marked because of the addressee's background. Thus, students talking to mates who are in real life ministers of religion would use terms such as *Pastor* and *Reverend Sister* unaccompanied with the addresser's personal name, either forename or surname. Sometimes varied forms of one linguistic mode of address evince different levels of formality of descending order as illustrated below:

8. Member of

Congregation: *Reverend*, I thought today's sermon was short and powerful.

9. Friend: *Rev*, did you hear the announcement?

10. Friend: *Revo*, I hope you're fine today.

The varied forms of *Reverend* as shown above depend on the nature of relationship between the interactants.

The above discussion shows that given the decidedly formal nature of titles, the use of titles as an address form among students is both significant and interesting. Although in very few instances students maintained the deferential use of titles, often they were markedly used to achieve humour and familiarity.

Descriptive phrase

A descriptive phrase (DP) or epithet is not a 'real' name; it 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. The ensuing discussion of the four groups of DPs observed during my fieldwork suggest that there could be communicative functions other than those just alluded to.

The first group of DPs involves those mainly used in the residential halls, such as *Room*, *Room mate*, *Mate*, *Basu* (meaning Baptist Students Union) *mate*, *Sosu mate*, *C.S. mate* and *J.C.R. mate*. A careful examination of the above terms shows that many of them have a head-word and a modifier; the head-word is 'mate' which implies a sense of companionship while the modifier identifies this unifying denominator such as a course, room or a lecturer by the name of *Sosu*, whose lectures both interactants attend. The ages of students do not exert any strong influence on the use of this set of DPs; neither does gender nor formality. We may consider this exchange:

11. Student A: *Room 125! 125! 125!*

Student B: Yees! Who dey call? (meaning, yes, who is calling?)

Student A: You get call! (You've got a call)

As expected, DPs such as *Room 125*, *Room mate* or *Room* tended to be used among friends or acquaintances, or interlocutors with some shared experience. In particular, the habit of calling each other 'roommate' is reminiscent of the use of 'brother' and 'sister' in a rural setting; this appears to have been transferred to the university setting. This in addition reflects a familial or communal bonding among students.

The second group of DPs that occurs in the academic domain in UCC ranges from simple noun phrases to the more complex ones: *Lady*, *Gentleman*, *Young man*, *Lady in red* and *The lady laughing in the corner*. In a nonreciprocal manner, these descriptive expressions are used by student leaders in group discussions to ensure the participation of every student. In this sense, DPs as address forms have a deictic function. In addition, they may also have an encouraging effect, as expressed in *Black Beauty*, *My Friend* and *Lady*, as a discussion facilitator tries to ensure active participation from every member of a group. Outside the lecture theatre other DPs such as *Form One Girl* (that is, a first-year female student) and *The Boy* are simply used among friends to enliven the interaction.

Even more striking and marked is the third set of DPs involving some apparent denigratory terms such as the reciprocal use of *Kwasea Boy* (meaning stupid boy), or similar English versions such as *Naughty Boy* and *Foolish Man*. Ordinarily perceived as insults, these DPs contain no element of denigration as a typical exchange below shows:

12. Friend A: *Kwasea Boy*, let me use your pen for a second, okay?

Friend B: No problem, *Senior Kwasea Boy*.

Instead, DPs in their denotation as insults are invested with some tinge of neutrality and at best express a specific mood at a time. There was no evidence of such use of DP among the female students, lending credence to the usual notion of finesse, politeness and correctness associated with women's use of language. As can be seen, the possible use of DPs both in terms of their lexicon and their denotation as insults is similar to name-calling (Farb, 1973) and negative nicknames (Crozier & Dimmock, 1999; De Klerk & Bosch, 1999). However, the use of DPs as insults in the present study differs from name-calling and negative nicknames because their sociolinguistic import is one of neutrality and at best indicative of a pleasurable mood. Moreover, this marked use of DPs as insults is expressive of an in-group, that is, a means by which other students are excluded. Thus, my finding of DPs, though denotatively seen as insults but divested of such meaning in communicative encounters among students, finds support in Dickey's (1996) study which reports a similar use of address terms among students.

The last subgroup of DPs concerns the addressive use of *Old Boy* and *Old Girl* among both male and female students. Used among alumni of the same secondary schools prior to commencement of their university education, these two terms take into consideration the gender of the addressee. A less frequently used form among alumni is *School mate*. Basically, both sets of forms used by alumni of secondary schools or training colleges assert the interactants' identity and sense of belonging. It may be argued at this point

that this form of DPs represents a much more explicit avenue of excluding other students than what is seen in DPs that are realised as insults. This sense of belonging to the same school can be invoked sometimes as an ingratiation for a persuasive end as demonstrated in the exchange below:

- 13. Friend A:** (knocks and enters a friend's room) *Old Girl!*
Friend B: *Old Girl!*
Friend A: Oh, sorry, you have a visitor. Can you spare me a few blank sheets? I've run short of them.
Friend B: (looks around). Okay, here you are. Hope that's enough for you.

This evidence shows that DPs are essential to both male and female students in UCC in enhancing their social interaction. And although DPs may appear to be a useful pragmatic tool where students do not know each other's names, the evidence from my study shows that they are utilised to reflect various levels of relationship, achieve a sense of belonging, and playfulness. Similar to the use of appellatives, DPs enable us to see the creativity of students at UCC as they interact with one another.

Catch phrases

Catch phrases are address terms or mottos used to express transient communicative intent such as the sharing of a common fate, the mood of the moment or the aims of a group (be it religious, social, economic or political) or the invention of particular individuals who are often friends. As address forms, 'group' catch phrases tend to be used by the members on particular occasions; they could also be used when the group is not in session to affirm the sense of belonging. On the other hand, 'personal' catch phrases operate on an informal level.

A structural analysis of catch phrases used as address forms reveals that they operate as on the basis of a call-response pattern. In my data, I found out that a catch phrase functions almost in the same way as adjacency pairs do in conversations. That is, catch phrases are identified by the following features: an initial utterance that predicts the following utterance; a beginning and a closure; and a second utterance that is constrained by the former. Additionally, in my data when a catch phrase is initiated as a statement by the addresser, it ends with a response in the form of a repetition or a different structure by the addressee. Although the dominant examples of catch phrases in my data are nominal, that is, constituting a nominal phrase, they need not always be nominal. Find examples below:

- 14.** Land.....Of Opportunities
15. Ideas.....Ideas
16. Service.....To God
17. Ambassador.....For Christ
18. Positive Change.....Chapter 2

The first two catch phrases (14 and 15) typify several other personal catch phrases that were observed among both female and male interlocutors in

interactive exchanges in UCC. Such catch phrases were usually accompanied by nonverbal expressions such as snapping of fingers, shouting and hugging. On meeting at the taxi rank one may hear two male friends exchange, for instance the personal catch phrase *Respect* repeatedly amidst laughter, vigorous shaking of hands and an embrace.

Examples 16 and 17 are 'owned' by two Christian groups (Methodist church choir and Youth Fellowship), although their uses are not limited to meetings of the groups; that is, members used them in other situations. These could be used to initiate discourse or to simply signify a member's awareness of the presence of the other member. Example 18 represents a catch phrase used by sympathisers of the present ruling political party in Ghana, the National Patriotic Party, and was used in much the same way as Examples 16 and 17. However, insofar as Examples 16 and 17 tended to be used among students throughout the year, they were found to be similar to Examples 14 and 15, which were personal in orientation. Political catch phrases were likely to be actively used among students in an election year and more particularly during the campaigns of the political parties to identify with other party members, garner support from interlocutors perceived to be apolitical and sometimes to provoke.

Catch phrases based on one's former secondary school or even an ethnic group or co-curricular group are also heard among students. The point to note is that many secondary schools, as in many other countries, have catch phrases or mottos in several languages (English, Akan and Latin, etc.). Examples of these catch phrases are presented below:

19. **Friend A:** *Obra pa* ('Good character')
Friend B: *Gya owura kwan* ('Yields good dividends')
20. **Friend A:** *Lux et* (meaning 'Light and')
Friend B: *Veritas* ('Truth')

These mottos or catch phrases are as much a feature of identification as they are a way of drawing a group's attention to a cherished belief, value or norm. Among students in UCC, mottos or catch phrases of their various schools become actively used on first meeting each other on campus but as the same interactants meet in other student groups that they become affiliated to, the catch phrases of the latter group assume more importance.

From the above discussion, three observations need to be made about catch phrases. First, they highlight personal and social identities, depending on whether the domain is friendship, politics or religion. A second point to note is the cognitive dimension inherent in catch phrases as they announce a particular system of thinking and belief or norms valued by members. Lastly, the use of catch phrases seemed not to be influenced by either age or gender.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have explored the sociopragmatic factors that condition the use of address terms among a distinct group of people in an academic setting. Specifically, I was interested in finding out whether they (that is, address terms) reflected the subgroup identified in an academic community, students.

In this paper, I have presented selected results from an ethnographic study, suggesting the prominent use of four selected groups of address terms with differing frequency and sociocultural and pragmatic force. Based on the findings, four conclusions can be made. The first is that although the research site chosen is multicultural, the verbal behaviour (here, address terms) reflects the interplay of Western and local influences, especially in the use of personal names. Second, all four groups of address terms reflect attempts to construct and reflect individual and social identities of students based on values, norms and beliefs valued either by the students, the academic setting or the larger society. A third point, which is in tandem with McConnell-Ginet's (2003) view about verbal practices of members of communities, is that students develop their own verbal practices; in this way, we see their inventiveness and creativity. The final point is that the verbal behaviour reported here depicts a culture of warm-hearted, intelligent people who love playing creatively with the language in their repertoire.

The knowledge about the verbal behaviour of Ghanaian students obtained from this research is useful on account of the implications it has for cross-cultural communication. Given that each university is located in a larger national or local setting with its own norms on verbal behaviour and increasing globalisation and internationalisation of tertiary education, findings from the present study could enhance understanding of communication among students (both local and international). This could also promote understanding on the part of other members of the university community, faculty and nonacademic staff, and foster effective communication.

Correspondence

Any correspondence should be directed to Joseph Benjamin Archibald Afful, Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, National University of Singapore, Block AS 5, 7 Arts Link, 117570 Singapore (jbafful@yahoo.com).

References

- Afful, J.B.A. (1998) The relationship between language and culture in Ghana: A comparative study of address terms in three speech communities in Cape Coast. Unpublished MPhil Dissertation, University of Cape Coast.
- Agyekum, K. (2003) Honorifics and status indexing in Akan communication. *Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 24 (5), 369–385.
- Akrofi, A.K and Owusu-Ansah, L.K. (1995) Place and family names of European origin in the Cape Coast-Elmina Area of Ghana. Paper presented at a seminar in Cape Coast and Elmina, 23–25 March 1995, University of Cape Coast.
- Anwar, R.B. (1997) Forms of address: A study of their use among Malay/Muslim undergraduates. Unpublished Honors thesis, National University of Singapore.
- Brown, R. and Gilman, A. (1960) The pronouns of power and solidarity. In T.A. Sebeoki (ed.) *Style in Language* (pp. 253–276). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Crozier, W.R. and Dimmock, P.S. (1999) Name-calling and nicknames in a sample of primary school children. *British Journal of Educational Psychology* 69, 505–516.
- Dako, K. (2002) Pidgin as a gender specific language in Ghana. *Ghanaian Journal of English Studies* 1, 73–82.

- Dakubu, K.M.E. (1981) *One Voice: The Linguistic Culture of an Accra Lineage*. Leiden: African Studies Centre.
- De Klerk, V. and Bosch, B. (1996) Nicknames as sex-role stereotypes. *Sex Roles* 35, 525–541.
- De Klerk, V. and Bosch, B. (1997) The sound patterns of nicknames. *Language Sciences* 19, 289–301.
- De Klerk, V. and Bosch, B. (1999) Nicknames as evidence of verbal playfulness. *Multilingual* 18 (1), 1–16.
- Dickey, E. (1997) Forms of address and terms of reference. *Journal of Linguistics* 33, 255–274.
- Dzameshie, A.K. (1997) The use of in-group linguistic choices as an identificational strategy of persuasion in Christian sermonic discourse. *Legon Journal of the Humanities* 10, 127–148.
- Egblewogbe, E.Y. (1987) The structure and functions of Ghanaian personal names. *Universitas* 9, 189–205.
- Evans-Pritchard, E.E. (1948) Nuer modes of address. In D.H. Hymes (ed.) (1964) *Language in Culture and Society*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Fang, H. and Heng, J.H. (1983) Social changes and changing address norms in China. *Language in Society* 12, 495–507.
- Fitch, K.L. (1991) The interplay of linguistic universals and cultural knowledge in personal address: Columbian Madre terms. *Communication Monographs* 58, 254–272.
- Fitch, K.L. (1998) *Speaking Relationally: Culture, Communication, and Interpersonal Connection*. New York: The Guilford Press.
- Goodwin, M.H. (1990) *He-said-she-said: Talk as Social Organization among Black Children*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Jaworski, A. and Galasinski, D. (2000) Vocative address forms and ideological legitimization in political debates. *Discourse Studies* 2 (1), 35–53.
- Leech, G. (1999) The distribution and function of vocatives in American and British English conversation. In H. Hasselgard and S. Oksefjell (eds) *Out of Corpora: Studies in Honor of Stig Johansson* (pp. 107–118). Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- McConnell-Ginet, S. (1978) Address forms in sexual politics. In D. Butturf and E.L. Epstein (eds) *Women's Language and Style* (pp. 23–35). Akron: L & S.
- McConnell-Ginet, S. (2003) 'What's in a name?' Social labeling and gender practices. In J. Holmes and M. Meyerhoff (eds) *The Handbook of Language and Gender* (pp. 69–97). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Morford, J. (1997) Social indexicality in French pronominal address. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 7, 3–37.
- Obeng, S.G. (1997) From morphology to sociolinguistics: The case of Akan hypocoristic day-names. *Multilingual* 16 (1), 39–56.
- Oyetade, S.O. (1995) A sociolinguistic analysis of address forms in Yoruba. *Language in Society* 24, 515–535.
- Saville-Troike, M. (1983) *The Ethnography of Communication: An Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Scotton, C.M. and Zhu, W. (1983) Tongshi in China: Language change and its conversational consequences. *Language in Society* 12, 477–494.
- Sequeira, D.L. (1993) Personal address as negotiated meaning in an American church community. *Research on Language and Social Interaction* 26, 259–285.
- University of Cape Coast (2005) *Basic Statistics*. Ghana: Data Process Unit.
- Wolfson, N. and Manes, J. (1980) 'Don't dear me!' In S. McConnet-Ginet, R. Barker and N. Furman (eds) *Women and Language in Literature and Society* (pp. 79–92). New York: Praeger.
- Zwicky, A. (1974) Hey, what's your name! In M.W. LaGaly, R.A. Fox and A. Bruck (eds) *Papers from the Tenth Regional Meeting of the Chicago Linguistic Society* (pp. 787–801). Chicago: Chicago Linguistic Society.

Appendix: Interview Schedule

Address terms used among students on campus

Section A

1. Kindly mention your name.
2. What terms do the following group of people use in addressing you?
a) friends b) acquaintances and c) students you've never met address you.
3. Mention the terms/names your fellow students use in addressing you in these places:
a) lecture theatre b) residential halls c) places of relaxation d) places of worship, e.g. church, mosque, etc.
4. Mention any names that are used by a particular friend of yours in addressing you.
5. What account for the use of these varied address terms in the above question?
6. Does gender play any part in the various names your friends use in addressing you? If yes, how does it manifest in the kind of terms they use in addressing you?
7. Does it matter whether age influences the way your fellow students call you? If yes, give specific examples of address terms that highlight this point.
8. What values or norms do you think are highlighted generally in the terms your fellow students use in addressing you?

Section B

9. What terms do you use in addressing the following?
a) friends b) acquaintances, and c) students you've never met before
10. Mention the names/names you use in addressing your fellow students in these places:
a) lecture theatre b) residential halls c) places of relaxation d) places of worship, e.g. church, mosque, etc.
11. Mention any names you use in addressing a particular friend.
12. What reasons account for these varied terms?
13. Does gender play any part in the various names you use in addressing fellow students? If yes, mention some examples of terms that result from this influence.
14. Does it matter whether age influences the way you address your fellow students? If yes, give specific examples of address terms that highlight this point.
15. What values or norms do you think are highlighted generally in the terms you use in addressing you?