



AMERICAN ENGLISH

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Abstract. Our modern, globalized world is developing along the path expanding the cooperation in economic, political, social and cultural life. The result of this interaction is the rapid growth of cultural exchanges and direct contacts between state institutions, social groups and individuals of different countries and cultures. The interrelation of language and culture plays an important role in communication both between the members of one group and with the representatives of other cultures. English is a global language and the term “English as an International Language” (EIL) corresponds to British English (BrE), American English (AmE), Canadian English (CanE), and Australian English (AusE). The present paper aims at showing differences between the usage of honorific titles in two varieties of the English language — American and British — relating to address forms used in everyday interaction and explaining the differences through social and interpersonal relations, cultural values and politeness strategies.

The recent study of address forms is relevant as it helps us to find out speaker's cultural peculiarities and to determine different usage of honorific titles in AmE and BrE. We draw on G. Hofstede's Cultural dimensions (1991), Politeness theory (Brown and Levinson 1987, Hickey and Stewart 2005, Leech 2014), Intercultural pragmatics (Kecskes 2014, Wierzbicka 1991/2003). The data has been obtained through observation, questionnaires and interviews which contained a number of questions and situations, covering different social contexts: everyday communication with interlocutors of different age, sex and occupation. The study focuses on the main tendencies which illustrate the impact of culture on the usage of honorific titles in American English and British English.

Keywords: Address forms, Honorific titles, American English, British English, Culture, Intercultural communication

INTRODUCTION

Our modern, globalized world is developing along the path expanding the cooperation in economic, political, social and cultural life. The result of this interaction is the rapid growth of cultural exchanges and direct contacts between state institutions, social groups and individuals of different countries and cultures. The interrelation of language and culture plays an important role in





communication both between the members of one group and with the representatives of other cultures. English is a global language and the term “English as an International Language” (EIL) corresponds to British English (BrE), American English (AmE), Canadian English (CanE), and Australian English (AusE). Besides, English is very often one of the languages of comparison in the comparative studies. The present paper aims at showing differences between the usage of honorific titles in two varieties of the English language — American and British — relating to address forms used in everyday interaction and explaining the differences through social and interpersonal relations, cultural values and politeness strategies. While the English speaking world is becoming more culturally complex, BrE, AmE, CanE and AusE are a combination of linguistic, cultural and worldview elements that reflect the linguistic world-image of the language speaker. The cultural differences between English speakers from a wide range of linguistic and cultural backgrounds can lead to intercultural misunderstanding and miscommunication while speaking a common language like English.

In this paper we represent the results of our research and analyze the use of honorific titles in AmE and BrE in everyday interaction and explaining the same through differences in social and interpersonal relations, cultural values and politeness strategies. We will examine how accepted traditions and norms influence the verbal behavior while using address forms, the frequent use of kinship terms for addressing people.

The recent study of address forms is relevant as it helps us to find out speaker’s cultural peculiarities and to determine different usage of honorific titles in AmE and BrE. “Communication is embedded in culture, which serves as its context and is based on the prior experience of a community. In intercultural relations culture is the most important extralinguistic factor shaping its members’ communicative style and behavior” [1]. What address forms are characteristic to the members of one culture can be totally unacceptable to the representatives of another culture. We draw on G. Hofstede’s Cultural dimensions (1991) [2], Politeness theory (Brown and Levinson 1987 [3], Hickey and Stewart 2005 [4], Leech 2014 [5]), Intercultural pragmatics (Kecskes 2014 [6], Wierzbicka 1991/2003 [7]; M. Clyne [8]). The data has been obtained through observation, questionnaires and interviews which contained a number of questions and situations, covering different social contexts: everyday communication with interlocutors of different age, sex and occupation. The study focuses on main tendencies which illustrate the impact of culture on the usage of





honorific titles in American English and British English.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

As culture is the most important part of communication, we will try to show the most essential features in the usage of address forms in the British and American cultures and explain them from such parameters of cultures as social distance and powerdistance (Hofstede, 1984, 1991) [2; 9].

The data for analysis was collected through quantitative method, which is focused on gathering numerical data among Americans and Englishmen through questionnaires, descriptive research, interviews in order to describe the use of honorific titles in AmE and BrE. In this paper we have examined how accepted traditions and norms influence the verbal behavior while using address forms, the frequent use of kinship terms for addressing people in everyday communication with interlocutors of different age, sex and occupation. The recent study focuses on the main tendencies which illustrate the impact of culture on the usage of honorific titles in American English and British English. The aim of the study was to analyze the use of honorific titles in everyday interaction and explaining the same through differences in social and interpersonal relations, cultural values and politeness strategies. The chosen situations were taken in order to determine and study symmetrical and asymmetrical relationship between the interlocutors. The questionnaire was filled by 120 informants (60 Englishman and 60 Americans), aged from 15 to 62. The collected data needs further and more detailed analyses in order to get more information concerning gender, age and social differences. Besides, the aim of this paper is to focus on the preliminary results obtained, which reveal the cultural similarities and differences and modern tendencies in the usage of honorific titles in BrE and AmE. In this paper we take into account Fitch's categories of address terms (second-person pronoun, proper names, titles, kinship terms, nicknames and adjective terms) (1998) [10]. Besides, we are interested in appellative address forms (kinship terms and titles) while examine address forms.

ADDRESS FORM IN SOCIOCULTURAL CONTEXT

Forms of address are a key to the understanding of social concepts and human relationship in a society. Address forms are an essential area of research in the field of socio-cognitive linguistics as they demonstrate how a context reflects in the communication etiquettes and in language. "Communication is embedded in





culture, which serves as its context and is based on the prior experience of a community. In intercultural relations culture is the most important extralinguistic factor shaping its members' communicative style and behavior" [1].

Address terms are an essential aspect of sociolinguistic studies. The usage of address terms denotes a speaker's reference and attitude towards the interlocutor. Besides, address terms reveal social and interpersonal relationships. While addressing the inter-locutor, the usage of address forms evoke personal identities and define relationships such as close/distant, personal/professional, peers/rank-differentiated, etc [10]. According to Fitch's classification, second-person pronouns consist of all the ways to address the interlocutor as "you". Proper names include first name, last name, second name and full name. Kinship terms include terms that suggest biological relationship, used both literally and metaphorically. Titles reflect non-kinship positions/relations (educational, social, organizational positions). Nicknames and adjectival terms, derived from first names and last names, terms referring to personal characteristics, abilities, physical appearance.

Address terms are an important aspect of sociolinguistic studies. "General address form is one language form which is used by people to address each other in some speech communication forms" [11]. In a speech act, address forms refer to verbal communication by the addresser and the addressee, through different channels (e.g. verbal). The choice of address forms and expressions reflects the social relationships among people, represents the cultural connotation of a language. Polite address forms vary from culture to culture and even within different regions of one country. According to our recent study we have examined the use of address forms in the boundaries of one language but in two different countries with their historical, cultural and political background. Our results have shown that nowadays both in BrE and AmE address forms including a title are used only in formal situations.

In cross-cultural situations, the choice of address terms reflects cultural differences. Every culture has its own rules and norms, which govern the choice of address terms, which are appropriate to use between the interlocutors in this or that society. In order to analyze the usage of address terms, chosen by the interlocutors, who speak different varieties of one language (e.g. British English and American English) in similar situations, reveal how the socio-cultural context influences the usage of address terms.

G. Leech explained the pragmatic choice of address terms, according to the





differences relating to horizontal distance and vertical distance [5]. In British culture, horizontal distance is prominent in the context of privacy, as British people maintain their distance, use an elaborate system of negative politeness strategies and strict communicative taboos. According to the Cultural dimensions by G. Hofstede [2; 9] both Great Britain and America are on the top of the most individualistic cultures. In these countries people are motivated by their personal interests. Power distance is measured by distribution of power within a single institution or even society. Both Great Britain and America are countries with a short PD (America — 40, England — 35). Such countries appreciate the equal distribution of power, equal rights and relationships. Uncertainty avoidance is the level of anxiety, the degree of discomfort experienced by the representatives of a particular culture while embarrassing situations or how they try to avoid them. America and the United Kingdom belong to cultures with a low degree of uncertainty avoidance (the United States — 46, the United Kingdom — 35). In such cultures behavior aimed at resolving the conflict is encouraged. In such cultures, uncertainty, variability, dynamism, high mobility, tasks and problems, high tolerance for ambiguity are valued. According to Hofstede's classification, Great Britain is a masculine country (66) and takes the 8th place out of 50, while America (62) takes the 11th place. The values of these cultures are mutually complementary sexual roles, the stiffness of men and the softness of women, clear distribution of roles between a man and a woman. Each language is nationally specific and reflects not only the peculiarities of the natural conditions or culture, but also the national character of its owner, therefore the national and cultural identity of people, its peculiarities are regarded as the historical basis of its development and can be more fully and comprehensively understood in comparison with national and cultural features of peoples.

The ethno-cultural style of communication is a historically, culturally, traditionally predetermined type of communicative behavior of a community, reflecting a preference for certain strategies and means of verbal communication of its representatives [1].

Both British and American cultures are characterized by distance and equality in communication. The interlocutors use informal norms while addressing others, so they rarely have difficulties while interacting with people.

According to the main criterial features of the British communicative style, determined by Larina (2015) distance [12], identified as the main criterial feature, determines all subsequent features and dominates the entire communicative





space of the British communicative style — verbal, non-verbal, emotional.

LANGUAGE SITUATION

The language situation is a definite type of language interaction (or different forms of existence of one language) in the public life of each nation at a certain stage of its historical development [13].

Among the language situation we detach: — endoglossal (sets of subsystems of one language) and exoglossal (relations of the set of languages). These groups are divided into balanced language situations if the constituent languages or their subsystems are equal in functional terms and unbalanced if the constituent languages or their subsystems are non-equal (consequently, inadequate) [14].

The language situation is determined by social conditions of language usage. So, it's determined by the following factors:

- a set of specific forms of language existence;
- the sphere and environment of the language use;
- the interaction of languages [13].

As for the another approach, according to its structure: — monolingual language situation (set of functions of all existing forms of language in all spheres of social activity under certain social attitudes in the life of a given collective), — multilingual language situation (real correspondence of the roles of different languages in the life of particular people its parts or representatives) [15].

Obvious, while describing the language situation it is necessary to take into account the following parameters:

- the number of languages;
- what kind of languages;
- under which circumstances it is used in the studied area;
- the number speakers;
- attitudes held by members of the collective.

The status of the language is one of sociolinguistic parameters or language profiles predetermining the possibility of presenting information about the forms and functions of the language in bilingual and polylingual societies [16]. The legal status of the language, fixed in the legislative order is focused on the language use in a particular situation is singled out. In this case, the legal states deals with the status of the state language. The actual status of the language is determined, due to its actual use, its functional load. At the same time, the actual status of the language is not always formalized by law.

Nowadays, English is a global language (International English, EIL) and the number of English speakers is growing. It's estimated to be spoken at least to some





extent by a quarter of the world's population.

While considering the spread of English in the modern world, it's necessary to consider the sociolinguistic theory of "three concentric rings" by Braj Kachru. He showed the spread of English in the form of three circles:

the inner circle which refers to countries where English is a native language. These countries include the United States, Great Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The total number is 320—380 million people;

the outer or extended circle refers to countries where it has received the status of an official language. These countries include India, Singapore and many others. The total number is 150—300 million people;

the expanding circle includes countries where English is the main foreign language studied in educational institutions. These countries include Germany, Greece, China, Poland, Russia, Japan, etc. The number of such countries is steadily increasing. The total number is 1 billion people [17].

The term "international English" means British and American varieties of the English language. To a smaller extent, this term refers to Canadian and Australian varieties of the English language. The term "international English" does not apply to other regional varieties.

According to Oschepkova [18], all national variants of the English language combine common features and specific national features. All national variants of the English language are a combination of linguistic, cultural and worldview elements reflecting the linguistic picture of the world of its bearers. All these cause a wide variety of English and strengthen the process of nativization. Nativization is understood as the process of changing the language under the influence of local languages. At the same time, new types of English are being formed and the forms and structures of the so-called "standard" varieties of the English language are being changed.

DATA ANALYSIS

While addressing someone the interlocutor evokes personal identities, creates and defines relationships. According to the above mentioned theories British people are highly individualistic and they value equality, so in order not to show differences in social status, they avoid using special address terms. In the English language if one is not sure how to address the interlocutor, it is acceptable not to use any address forms at all. The use of honorific titles (sir, miss, madam) has reduced greatly and it confirms anonymous style of communication, as the interlocutors don't seem necessary to name the addressee. According to our study





British people don't draw on the asymmetry in age, gender, even when they are present. Nowadays this tendency is increasingly noticeable.

According to our research we have proved that the use of honorific titles (sir, miss, madam) has reduced greatly in everyday communication and is generally used when the people need to get someone's attention or when you don't know the name of your addressee (e.g. at the hotel, bank or reception desk).

We have considered the use of honorific titles in America, except South America. In American English, generally the address forms, including the words "Miss" or "Ma'am" are used to get someone's attention or when you don't know the name of your addressee

*"Hey **miss**, you've forgotten something",*

*"Sorry **ma'am**, you've just dropped something",*

*"Excuse me **sir**, how can I help you",*

*"Excuse me **sir**, do you need my help".*

The word "Sir" is generally used in formal situations, when you don't know someone's name. You can easily hear this address form in different hotels or restaurants. In the majority of cases people try to call you by name, rather than calling you "Sir".

*"Excuse me **sir**, can you introduce yourself",*

*"You must be **Mr. Martinez**. We are very glad to meet you" (at the hotel).*

The word "Lady" is not normally used in America. Very seldom you may hear this title from someone, who works in service industry but he/she would rather prefer to call you by name.

*"Did anyone else see the accident? — Yes, **the lady** in the post"*

The word "Madam" is not generally used in America. We have met it only once in the situation when the policeman interrogated the witness of the accident.

*"What were you doing when you saw the accident, **madam**?"*

Ten years ago, in formal situations, we addressed men as "Mr." ("Mister"), married women as "Mrs." ("Misses"), unmarried women as "Ms." ("Miss", "Ms") followed by the last name or surname. Recently, the address forms have changed significantly. Nowadays, we continue to address men of all ages as "Mr.". We use "Miss" to address someone who is about 18 years old or younger. As women don't usually officially take on husband's last name or we may don't know if woman is married or not "Ms." can be used to refer to both married and unmarried women. If the woman has officially taken on her husband's last name we address her "Mrs." Recently, they don't generally use these address forms in





daily life but only in official correspondence.

According to our research in AmE people rarely used honorific titles (30%) and there were cases when people used titles (madam, lady) while addressing a stranger or the witness of the accident (20%). In AmE the titles “miss” or “ma’am” are generally used when someone’s trying to get someone’s attention.

*Excuse me, **ma’am** how to get to the bus station.*

*Hey, **ma’am** is a bus stop near here?*

Both Americans and British people use attention-getters (*Excuse me, Hey*) while addressing strangers or use zero address forms.

Excuse me, I would like to know how to get to the bus station. (BrE)

Excuse me, is there a bus station near here? (BrE)

Excuse me, do you know where the bus stop is. (AmE)

Excuse me, where is the bus stop. (AmE)

Excuse me, what time does the coference begin. (AmE)

Besides, 25% of Americans used utterances containing a nominal address form at least once. They were used by informants while addressing young men and women (their age or younger than they). The nominal address forms (first names, titles) may be considered as the overarching principle that guides speakers in their choice of address forms. “Social distance is a multidimensional concept involving degrees of affect, solidarity and familiarity” [19].

In British English the use of address forms has changed during the last decade. Nowadays, address forms including a title are only used in formal situations. They must be followed by the surname, and can’t be used with the first name, or without any name. Recently, in formal situations, they address men as “Mr.”, and don’t normally use “Mister” in full. If the woman is married and has taken on her husband’s surname, they address her as “Mrs.” If the woman is single, or has kept her surname after the marriage they may address “Ms.”. Officially, “Miss” indicates single status and is used for girls. Nowadays, “Master” which was used for boys is old-fashioned.

During informal situations it’s normal to use firs name.

*Hey, **Jim!** I haven’t seen you for ages.*

If we are talking about someone and are not sure if our addressee knows him, it’s normally to use first name and surname.

*I’m not sure if you know **John Farry**.*

According to our research in BrE people seldom used honorific titles (20%) and there were cases when people used titles (madam, lady) while speaking officially (15%).



Excuse me, madam, is there a bus station near here.

According to T. Larina [20; 21; 21; 23], British communicative style is described as:
indirect (in terms of expressing communicative intentions);
distant (observing distance in different aspects);
non-imposing (minimizing a direct impact on the interlocutor);
person-oriented (priority to the status);
informal, emotive (a deliberate demonstration of positive emotions);
expressive (frequent use of superlatives).

Our study proves that politeness in England is to show equality and keep distance while communication.

CONCLUSION

In cross-cultural situations, the choice of address terms reflects cultural differences. Every culture has its own rules and norms, which govern the choice of address terms, which are appropriate to use between the interlocutors in this or that society. In this paper we have studied the usage of honorific titles in AmE and BrE and found out the similarities and differences of their usage. Both British and American cultures are characterized by distance and equality in communication. In this paper we have examined how accepted traditions and norms influence the verbal behavior while using address forms, the frequent use of kinship terms for addressing people in everyday communication with interlocutors of different age, sex and occupation. This study was focused on the main tendencies which illustrated the impact of culture on the usage of honorific titles in American English and British English.

Polite address forms vary from culture to culture and even within different regions of one country. According to our recent study we have examined the use of address forms in the boundaries of one language but in two different countries with their historical, cultural and political background. Our results have shown that nowadays both in BrE and AmE address forms including a title are used only in formal situations.

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