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Address forms and age roles in emailing practices between university students and their teachers¹

1. Introduction

Building on the results of an empirical survey exploring emailing practices between Hungarian university students and their teachers, the paper presents addressing practices including T/V relationships,² which contribute to the negotiation of student and teacher identity, with special regard to the construal of age roles.

The key starting point of our analysis is that the discourses of higher education have a fundamentally intergenerational character, since a high number of students first find themselves in adult roles at the discourse domains of universities, and their teachers commonly act as role models in written communication (cf. Domonkosi and Ludányi 2019). Hence, intergenerational features may emerge even when the age gap between students and teachers is very limited, as the construal of teacher and student roles invites the activation of different age-related schemas.

2. Theoretical background. Research on social age and addressing practices

2.1. Age and social role as socio-cultural constructs

In research on the relationship between age and language use, objectivist frameworks interpreting age as an *a priori* category, a static

¹ This work was supported by the Bolyai János Research Scholarship and NKFIH K 129040 grant (Á. D.).

² Following Brown and Gilman's (1960) dichotomous view of address introduced in their classic paper, T stands for informal, while V for formal, official, more distanced address.

social variable have increasingly given way to constructivist approaches that put a premium on the socio-cultural and contextual groundedness of age roles. This trend has been supported by the insight that in many cases, the interpretive power of age constructions surpasses that of biological age (Eckert 1997; Coupland 2004; Cheshire 2005; Bartha, Hámori and Huppert 2016).

Accordingly, we interpret the categories pertaining to age and age groups (similarly to other socio-cultural variables underpinning language use) not as *a priori* categories but rather as constructs that emerge and are constantly subject to negotiation in discourse (cf. Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz 1982). Age is thus seen as a social and personal construct which is continuously re-created, reinforced or adjusted in social practices.

Social or contextual age is a component of social identity associated with socio-cultural meanings that have practical-behavioural implications. Age is shaped in interaction with other components of identity, with particular social roles such as teacher and student roles activating age-related schemas as well. The role of a student and that of a younger person are strongly associated because of the related beliefs and stereotypes they are bound up with.

As regards particular ages, the constructs of old age (Heckhausen and Lang 1996; Nussbaum and Coupland eds. 2004; Bartha, Hámori and Huppert 2016) and youth (Georgakopoulou 2003; Kataoka 2003; Alvermann 2009; Stenström and Jørgensen eds. 2009) receive considerable attention in the literature, partly because of the changes, cultural re-assessments that affect the age roles of these groups.

2.2. Youth as a discursive construct and addressing practices

Shaped, reinforced and negotiated as successive discourses unfold, the construct of youth can be best explored and captured in interactive situations (Georgakopoulou 2002: 75). Owing to its intergenerational character, email correspondence between university students and their teachers (vö. Bloch 2002; Bachmann 2011; Danielewicz-Betz 2013; Chejnová 2014; Alsout and Khedri 2019) lends itself particularly well to the study of how the concept of youth is construed in discourse.

Email correspondence between students and teachers displays many features contributing to the construal of age roles. These include the use of innovative opening and closing formulas, fragmented structure of the letters, elements indicating continuous online presence and the markers of online literacy (for details, see Domonkosi and Ludányi 2020). Besides

these factors, the discursive construal of age roles is also fundamentally shaped by T/V variants and associated addressing practices.

Address forms are directly linked to the nature of social relationships, with the age of the speaker and the addressee, their similarity or difference both correlating with addressing practices. Therefore, age as a variable has always figured prominently in research on address forms (Clyne et al. 2009: 51–61). Since according to recent approaches, age as a social construct emerges in the active linguistic practices of members of a speech community, repetitive patterns in addressing practices are considered crucial for the construal of age roles. Moreover, through their repetitive nature, they are also key to their reinforcement (cf. Domonkosi 2018).

2.3. The addressing system of Hungarian and its major age-related aspects

In the Hungarian addressing system, T and V forms are differentiated. In terms of social meaning, T indicates a more intimate relationship characterized by less distance and a higher degree of solidarity. The V form, typically considered more polite, more distancing and more formal, is further differentiated. The addressing pronouns *ön* and *maga*, third person singular verb forms used without a pronominal subject, and constructions involving the *tetszik* auxiliary may all contribute to the construal of the discourse partners' relationship (Domonkosi 2010).

In the Hungarian speech community, the use of T and V variants correlates strongly with social age and the discursive shaping of age relations. The most typical discourse patterns for construing age relations include (i) reciprocal use of T, construing youth as an element of identity, (ii) the use of asymmetric address forms, primarily related to the child role or to a large age gap between interlocutors, and (iii) use of the *tetszik* construction, especially in utterances directed at the elderly (Domonkosi 2010).

3. Research material and methods

In line with the principle of methodological congruence (Morse and Richards 2002), our research involves a variety of methods controlling each other. Thus, the research benefits from the advantages of mixed methodology, namely the fact that methods may have a supplementary or extending role with respect to each other (Dörnyei 2007: 164–165).

For collecting language material, we have been compiling a database from email turns of student-teacher correspondences. Data collection relies

on the snowball method (cf. Babbie 1998: 312) and involves a high number of lecturers, with the database containing 680 emails at present. Due to their peculiar nature in terms of age and associated role perceptions, part-time students are treated as a separate group. Whereas full-time students are mostly in their early 20s, part-time students do not constitute a homogeneous age group, with many of them pursuing their studies while also having a workplace.

Our analyses of the database have focused on several linguistic factors (Domonkosi and Ludányi 2019, 2020). In the present paper, we report on findings about variants of T, V and nominal address forms.

As additional data collection methods, we also conducted interviews with lecturers and focus-group conversations with groups of students. These had the goal of learning about general conceptions, i.e. the participants' experiences of, and schematic knowledge about, how students and their teachers address each other. We conducted semi-structured interviews with lecturers contributing emails to our database. At focus-group interviews, we elicited opinions from student groups about selected emails. In addition, our interpretation of results was also informed by personal observations about emailing and addressing practices in higher education.

4. Results. Address forms and the construal of age roles

In the collected material, we have identified major trends characterizing written communicative strategies of address in teacher-student exchanges. In what follows, we present observations about the ways in which particular addressing practices contribute to the construal of age relations.

4.1. T/V variants and age relations

Age figures prominently as a variable in the use of T and V variants (Clyne et al. 2009: 51–61). The results of previous sociolinguistic surveys suggest that Hungarian addressing conventions involve certain practices which are specifically linked to the construal of social age (Domonkosi 2002). These practices include the reciprocal use of T among young people; non-reciprocal practices prevailing in the case of a significant age gap between interlocutors; and the use of *tetszik* in utterances directed at the elderly (Domonkosi 2002).

4.1.1. Reciprocal use of T makes for a typical device for construing roles related to young age. In the Hungarian speech community, reciprocal T (based on age solidarity) is dominant among young people, even with strangers, including less formal, less official scenes of communication in the service sector. Under the age of 35-40, age as a variable is itself sufficient for inviting the choice of T (Domonkosi 2010: 37). However, focus-group interviews conducted with students highlight the fact that a small age gap does not by itself warrant the use of T to address a teacher; in addition, the teacher's friendly attitude, i.e. his/her active construal of young age is also necessary.

(1)

Egy oktatót csak akkor tudok letegezni, ha [...] nem elég, hogy fiatal, de még olyan lazábbnak is kell lennie (Hallg21F)
 'I can only use T to address a teacher when [...] he's not only young but also kind of easy-going.'

Another interview subject (a female lecturer under 30) reported using T on a mutual basis with her students. However, her correspondence has shown that very few of her students use T to address her, which creates an asymmetrical relationship in terms of age roles. The lecturer's intention is clearly to signal her own young age, her age role based on age parity. However, the use of T remains one-sided, producing a situation that may even reinforce differences in age roles (2).

(2)

Lecturer: Én a hallgatókkal mind tegeződöm, nekem valahogy ez természetes...
 'I always use T forms with students, for me somehow this comes naturally.'

Interviewer: De a neked írott levelek között szép számban vannak nemtegező megszólítások is [...] 'But in letters written to you, there are quite a few V address forms too.'

Lecturer: [...] én tegeződöm velük, kivétel nélkül mindenkinek felajánlottam, akit tanítok 'I'm on T terms with them, I have offered this to everyone I teach.'
 (OktN1)

Looking at the lecturer's emails, we find that out of 40 letters written by students, there are 8 in which the address form is (*Kedves [Keresztnév]!* 'Dear [FN]'), suggesting a more intimate, T-type relationship.³ Of these 8 letters, only one features a T verb form used by the student (cf. (3)); in the remaining 7 cases the letter-writers simply avoid elements referring to the speech partner.

³ The abbreviations stand for the following: FN - first name (given name), LN - last name (family name).

(3)

Kedves [Keresztnév]!

Ezt a ppt-t [Teljes név], [Teljes név] és én, [Teljes név] csináltuk. Remélem **meg tudod így nyitni** a linkről, ha nem, akkor küldöm rendesen :)
 [Teljes név]⁴

Dear [FN],

This ppt was made by [LN + FN], [LN + FN] and me, [LN + FN].⁵ I hope **you can.T⁶ open** it like this with the link, if not, I will send it the usual way :)
 [LN + FN]

Among the letters contributed by the lecturer to the database, there is also one in which the student adopts the conventional address form *Kedves Tanárnő!* 'Dear Ms. Teacher', typically associated with the use of V; however, in the closing formula, she expresses her thanks by a T form (4). Such a combination of social deictic elements indicates a duality in the relationship, with both the difference of roles and the sameness of age being conveyed. This use of T departs from addressing strategies expressing age solidarity and often standing without other address forms; it highlights the possibility of using T in a honorific manner (Domonkosi 2010: 36).

(4)

Kedves Tanárnő!

Az ügyben írok, hogy a holnapi felező bálra való tekintettel meg lesz-e tartva a szerdai óra a B csoportosok számára? [...]

Válaszodat előre köszönöm, további szép napot kívánok!

[Teljes név]

II. éves óvodapedagógus hallgató

'Dear Ms. Teacher,

I'm writing in the matter if the Wednesday class will be held for Group B, in view of tomorrow's ball. [...]

Thanks in advance **for your.T answer**, I wish you a nice continuation of the day.

[LN + FN]

2nd year student in kindergarten pedagogy'

As shown by the letters under study, students' attitudes are not uniform with regard to the use of T to address their teachers. However, lecturers are expected to adjust their linguistic behaviour to entire groups, which may

⁴ Letters are reproduced in their original spelling, without any correction of typos and non-standard forms.

⁵ In Hungarian, the traditional order of names is family name + given name.

⁶ In the English glosses, .t marks particular forms as informal (T-type), .v as formal (V-type), as is usual in the specialized literature.

give rise to controversial situations, as reported by one of our interview subjects, a woman in her 20s (5):

(5)

Egyszer egy csoporttól az a visszajelzés jött, hogy mivel fiatal vagyok, ők jobban örültek volna a tegező viszonyoknak, így a következő kurzuson felajánlottam a tegezést, de csak a fél csoport élt a lehetőséggel, a másik fele azért nem, mert szerintük hiába vagyok fiatal, de az órán oktató szerepben nekik könnyebb, ha magáznak. Ez pedig annyira furcsa és kellemetlen helyzetet szült [...]. Azóta egységesen magázok mindenkit. (Okt27N)

'On one occasion I got feedback from a group that since I'm young, they would have preferred a T-type relationship. Therefore in the following course I allowed them to use T forms; however, only half of the group took the opportunity, the other half didn't because they thought that even though I was young, it's easier for them to use V during lessons when I was their teacher. This created such a weird and unpleasant situation [...]. Since then I have used V with everyone.'

4.1.2. As we have seen, in the case of young lecturers the construal patterns of age role and professional role are in conflict, which may give rise to asymmetric addressing practices, the non-reciprocal use of T. Such asymmetry is in general rare in the Hungarian speech community, usually only occurring between adults and children, within the family, and in the case of a large age gap (Domonkosi 2010), thus its adoption clearly foregrounds age differences.

The non-reciprocal use of T between university students and their teachers is caused by discrepancies in strategies for construing participant roles. On the students' side, their non-uniform or reluctant returning of the teacher's use of T, their acceptance of an asymmetrical situation follows from the difference between student and teacher roles (cf. Formentelli and Hajek 2015). Thus, adhering to a non-reciprocal practice may be interpreted as a signal of identification with the role of a younger, less experienced person. The situation is somewhat paradoxical, since in the construal of age categories, lecturers typically do not opt for T-forms with the intention of highlighting differences in age and professional role. On the contrary, they aim for equality and professional community in the interest of age solidarity (especially in the case of young lecturers).

Focus-group interviews conducted with students highlight the fact that a significant number of them do not consider asymmetric communication problematic, since in earlier phases of their studies, at elementary and secondary schools they got accustomed to non-reciprocal situations with regard to T/V variants. Due to roles reinforced by iterative practices, the

linguistic behaviour of university students (construed in relation to the teacher role) continues to be dominated by an identity absorbing adult roles to only a limited extent and showing signs of post-adolescence.

4.1.3. Among V forms, the *tetszik* auxiliary construction is typically employed in interactions between children and adults, with most of its patterns of use evoking a considerable age gap in addition to politeness (Domonkosi 2010: 40). In our database, use of this form by female and male students in emails sent to young teachers contributes to the construal of the teachers' more advanced age even when the age gap is relatively small in terms of biological age.

4.2. Nominal address forms and age roles

When it comes to nominal address forms in the database, opening formulas give evidence of a widespread non-reciprocal practice reinforcing hierarchical relationships. Whereas lecturers typically address their students by their given names, students generally resort to address forms referring to the teacher role (*tanárnő* [address form for addressing a female teacher], *tanár úr* [address form for addressing a male teacher]).

In the Hungarian addressing practice, teachers' nominal address involves a role nominal in both spoken and written discourse at all levels of education (*Tanárnő / Tanár úr*⁷). This practice, extending even to adult-adult relationships in higher education, is presumably also motivated by the lack of address forms which would be independent of roles/positions while still conveying respect to a sufficient degree (Domonkosi 2002). In English and German, addressing formulas consisting of the addressee's last name and a social indexical element are ubiquitous; however, in Hungarian written discourse, they are not considered sufficiently polite (Domonkosi 2002, 2017).

Besides often featuring the opening formula *Tisztelt Tanárnő / Tanár Úr!* ['respected teacher'], student emails also include innovative address forms, variants not uniformly accepted in the speech community. In their interpretation, age roles may play a prominent part.

Some student emails in the database start with the address form *Tisztelt/Kedves [LN + FN]!*, lacking any positional marker, in line with the general trend that position and status marking receive less and less

⁷ These are specifically Hungarian address form combinations. In *tanár úr*, a title (*tanár* 'teacher') and a honorific element also marking gender (*úr* 'sir') are combined, whereas the address form *tanárnő* (consisting of *tanár* 'teacher' and *nő* 'woman') integrates the function of a title with that of a honorific.

emphasis in interpersonal relations (Domonkosi 2002). Such address forms which only use the name itself are primarily characteristic of impersonal, official correspondence in present-day Hungarian addressing practice. They have a controversial reputation. On the one hand, inclusion of the name element allows them to express the function of turning to and identifying the addressee. On the other, the lack of any marker of role or position makes them ill-suited for construing status-dependent, hierarchical relationships (Domonkosi and Ludányi 2019: 121). This issue was also brought up by a student informant participating at a focus-group interview. Having addressed her teacher by the *Tisztelt [FN+LN]!* formula, she received the following answer.

(5)

Így az adóhivatal szokott megszólítani. (Int/Hallg2)

'Normally I'm addressed like this by the tax authority.'

At interviews, teachers expressed reservations about this type of address form. They do not consider it polite and adequate even though it has become fairly common. They put down its use to the students' relatively young age and lack of experience in correspondence. Such accounts also underscore the fact that in the emailing practice of teachers, orienting remarks and suggestions guiding students' written communication characteristically appear.

In the database, forms addressing the teacher as *Kedves [FN]!* are also attested (in V-type relationships), mostly in emails written by part-time students. Using such address forms in V-type discourses can be linked to age roles; as demonstrated by recent sociolinguistic research, it is a novel phenomenon typical of the language use of younger age groups (Domonkosi 2010: 39). However, the database suggests that compared to full-time students, part-time students are more likely to avoid markers of hierarchy and to choose more intimate forms instead, as they identify less with the age role characteristic of post-adolescence. This is presumably why they address teachers by their given names, aiming for the creation of a symmetric relationship.

In address forms, the teacher's given name may also be combined with the more formal attribute *tisztelt* 'respected'. This illustrates well the linguistic practice of part-time students whereby they aim not only for a higher degree of intimacy and symmetry (as indicated by the use of given names in address forms) but also for the explicit marking of respect.

It may seem paradoxical that even though the frequency of opening and addressing forms departing from the conventions (*Tisztelt/Kedves Tanárnő/*

tanár úr!) is not particularly high, lecturers still consider their students' written interactional and politeness practices as highly problematic (as shown by interviews). In their schemas pertaining to the interactional practice of students and youth in general, the use of innovative communicative devices seems to have a dominant role. This phenomenon may be explained by the basic perceptual pattern that deviations from the norm are more salient than well-entrenched, routinized forms of expression. Hence, the extent of change and discrepancies with respect to the norm in the linguistic practice of younger people may seem greater than they actually are.

5. Summary

In keeping with our constructivist theoretical orientation, age-related differences manifesting themselves in the use of address forms do not simply reflect social relations but rather actively contribute to the shaping of particular age roles. Our analysis has presented how age roles are construed by address forms employed in written discourses between university lecturers and their students. With regard to the choice between T and V variants, linguistic strategies associated with age role and the professional role of teachers are in conflict in email exchanges involving younger teachers. Differences between the students' and their teachers' attitudes to these roles give rise to non-reciprocal T/V practices highlighting the students' age. Within variants of V, use of the *tetszik* auxiliary construction by students signals a large age gap. As regards nominal address, two trends deserve special mention. Firstly, there is a general asymmetry accentuating role differences, with teachers being addressed by role nominals, and students by their given names. Secondly, despite the fact that most students do adhere to the norms, university lectures tend to attribute innovative addressing strategies to them (as a feature characteristic of their age group).

Overall, our database of emails suggests that the lecturers address forms used by teachers and students in Hungarian higher education foreground hierarchy and related age roles to a large extent, with asymmetric practices prevailing in the construal of interpersonal relations.

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English sentence structure and the principles of style-on the influence of clarity, logic and context on the effectiveness of communication

The following paper addresses the role of sentence structure analysis in developing the competence of writing in good style in English. Style belongs to those discourse evaluation criteria that leaves room for interpretation, depend on linguistic intuition, even the maturity of the speaker/writer. When we discuss style, we do not discuss errors, but problems; therefore, we make individual choices. In effect, teaching style (as part of the academic writing course) at the tertiary level of education is essential for both native and non-native users of English. However, while for example English Philology students understand and do not question the need to focus on English grammar, students-native speakers of English may not realize that they need grammar to help them revise their writing effectively in terms of style. According to Joseph Williams (2015: 4), the author of the widely acclaimed *Style. The Basics of Clarity and Grace*, most writers write unclearly because of social and private causes. The former include the field and genre conditions, while the latter may result from the lack of skills, psychological factors, confusing “deep thinking” with “deep writing.”

For years, [style] has had many distinguished advocates: Strunk (1918), Orwell (1946), Vonnegut (1985), Lesikar (2001), Williams (2015), etc. but not enough practitioners. Teaching the principles of style ... has long tradition especially at the American academic institutions. One of the biggest authorities among the experts on style has been the late Joseph Williams from Chicago University. His academic coursebook, entitled *Style: The Basics of Clarity and Grace* was first published in 1981 and up till now has had more than eleven editions, with the latest one published in 2015 and co-edited by Joseph Bizup' (Gadomska, 2017).

Williams proposes ten principles, which when applied, result in “writing clearly.” (Fig. 1)