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Special Issue Reprint

Perception and Processing of Address Terms

Edited by
Helen de Hoop and Gert-Jan Schoenmakers

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Guest Editors

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About the Editors

Helen de Hoop

Helen de Hoop is professor of Linguistics at the Centre for Language Studies (CLS) of the Radboud University Nijmegen. Her research bridges theoretical linguistics and experimental psycholinguistics, focusing on the interaction between speakers and addressees in communication. In 2021, she received a grant from the Dutch Research Council NWO to conduct a research project on processing pronouns of address, and the impact of being addressed with a polite or an informal pronoun. She was one of the organizers of the seventh workshop of the International Network of Address Research (INAR 7) in 2023 in Nijmegen that eventually led to the publication of this Reprint.

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Introduction: Perception and Processing of Address Terms

Helen de Hoop ^{1,*} and Gert-Jan Schoenmakers ²

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People can address each other in many ways, and this can be studied in many ways too. Studies on forms of address in language often focus on the choices that a speaker has to address their interlocutor, for which they “seem to rely on a complex network of factors” (Liebscher et al., 2025) such as age and the nature of the relation between the interlocutors (e.g., Schoenmakers et al., 2025), or the particular language in which they communicate in the case of a multinational company (den Hartog et al., 2022).

Speakers’ choices of how to address someone can be quite conscious. Schoenmakers et al. (2025) investigated the choice of pronouns of address in Surinamese and Caribbean Dutch. One participant (46 years old) reported that she was taught in her childhood to use the formal V-pronoun *u* to address people who were older and people providing a service, but that she no longer used *u*, “only to my grandmother. I believe that using *u* is outdated. I started adjusting my forms of address” (Schoenmakers et al., 2025, p. 191). Liebscher et al. (2025) investigated the forms of address used in the linguistic landscape of Mannheim in Germany and argued that each form was consciously chosen among a set of alternatives because it serves a particular function (e.g., the informal T-pronoun *du* was used in activist contexts to appeal to youthful and open-minded target groups).

A question that has received less attention in the literature is whether and how a speaker’s choice regarding a certain form of address may affect the addressee(s), and if it does, whether the effect is in accordance with the speaker’s intentions. How would the grandmother mentioned in the quote above react if her granddaughter suddenly started addressing her with the Dutch T-pronoun *jij*? Would younger or open-minded people in Mannheim feel less engaged with an activist message when they were addressed with the German V-pronoun *Sie*?

The current Special Issue contributes to our understanding of how forms of address are perceived and processed by the addressee, either consciously or unconsciously. If the use of a certain form of address does not always have the effect intended by the speaker, this may help to explain various mixed results from recent studies on address forms. For example, there is a clear trend towards the use of the informal T-pronoun in business communication in The Netherlands, and Dutch consumers seem to appreciate product advertisements with the informal T-pronoun more than with the formal V-pronoun (Leung et al., 2023; Schoenmakers et al., 2023). However, they estimate the product’s price as higher when a formal V-pronoun is used, which might increase their purchase intention (de Hoop et al., 2024). Also, Leung et al. (2023) showed that V-pronouns were more likely to be preferred and receive more positive responses when used by more competent brands. Companies might thus strategically use the formal V-pronoun at times to exude luxury or look competent.

Another example of mixed results can be found in the context of HR communication. de Hoop et al. (2023) found that Dutch participants appreciated organizations and recruiters by which they were addressed in an email with the formal V-pronoun more than with the informal T-pronoun. Similarly, den Hartog et al. (2024b) found that both French and German participants were more positive about recruiters who addressed them with formal V-pronouns than with informal T-pronouns in an online job interview. They also found that German male participants expected a higher salary if they were addressed with the formal V-pronoun. In contrast, in an experimental study on job advertisements, den Hartog et al. (2024a) found that Dutch participants estimated a higher salary if highly competent companies addressed them with the informal T-rather than the formal V-pronoun.

Heinz Kretzenbacher and Susanne Hensel-Börner argue that, because of various historical events, the sociolinguistic norms regulating address in German (in- and outside of Germany) are convoluted. Therefore, responses to the ongoing shift towards the default use of informal address in Western European service encounters are particularly interesting in a German context. Kretzenbacher and Hensel-Börner exploratorily investigated how German respondents perceive salespersons using the informal T-pronoun or the formal V-pronoun with customers, using prerecorded videos of service encounters in which the customer was looking to buy sports shoes, a small car, or open a new account with a local bank. The authors did not find a general trend favoring the T-strategy over a V-strategy—if anything, the salesperson was rated more positively when they used the V-form.

Sebastian Sadowski, Helen de Hoop, and Laura Meijburg conducted an experiment to test the influence of T and V in Netherlandic Dutch charity slogans, where the communicative goal is to activate people to donate money. Based on previous literature that implied that a formal language style can boost donation intentions, Sadowski et al. investigated the impact of T- and V-pronouns on the participants' intention to donate money to charity. They found that altruistic participants indicated higher intentions to donate money when T was used. This result surprisingly did not corroborate previous research regarding the level of formality in charity appeals. Sadowski et al. argue that the discrepancy could be due not to the formality of the text, but to the different possible interpretations of the pronouns of address under investigation (see de Hoop et al., in press). They proposed that V-pronouns do not have a generic reading and are more readily interpreted as directives, to which their participants might have felt a certain resistance. However, the authors conducted a follow-up experiment with new participant groups that casts doubt on this interpretation: the experimental sentences were rated as more likely to be interpreted as generic with any of the second-person pronouns. Thus, Sadowski et al. concluded that the higher donation intentions found in their experiment must have been due to the use of informal instead of formal pronouns after all.

The contribution by **Luis Miguel Rojas-Berscia** discusses one particular factor that potentially bears on the fact that the Shawi—an Indigenous population in the Peruvian Amazon—remained relatively unscathed during the COVID-19 pandemic, in spite of the fact that the overall Indigenous population in Peru endured much higher infection and mortality rates than the general population. Focusing on the importance of effective communication strategies in times of crisis, Rojas-Berscia noted that the Shawi translations of information posters distributed by the Peruvian State uniquely made use of first-person inclusive forms; translations into other Indigenous languages instead used second-person imperative forms. The author argues that the first-person inclusive forms could have led to an elevated sense of community, in that the State is presented as a member of the Shawi community and could thus have been more effective than the second-person imperative forms used in other languages. Perhaps the Shawi population had followed the instructions more consistently, and Rojas-Berscia therefore concluded that the pronouns used on the

COVID-19 posters may have been one of the factors underlying the fact that the Shawi were less affected by the pandemic.

Laura Rosseel, Eline Zenner, Fabian Faviana, and Bavo Van Landeghem presented an experimental investigation into the question whether Belgian Dutch-speaking consumers noticed any differences between corporate communications in which the T-pronoun *jij* or the V-pronoun *u* was used. Participants in the experiment read two versions of a text that differed in several ways, one of which was the pronoun of address that was used. They were asked to indicate whether they had noticed any differences between the texts. Rosseel et al. reported that only a very small minority had noticed the switch between address forms, even among the participants who had a language-related professional background. Rosseel et al. argued that a reason for this could be the non-standard status of Belgian Dutch: unlike the Netherlandic Dutch address paradigm, Belgian Dutch employs an additional informal pronoun *gij*. The standardized T-form *jij* is considered as more formal in Belgium than in The Netherlands, because it is only used by speakers of Belgian Dutch in formal contexts that arguably require the use of standard Netherlandic Dutch (cf. De Dijn et al., 2025).

Although the participants in Rosseel et al.'s study did not consciously notice the difference between T- and V-pronouns in the text, it might still be the case that they were unconsciously affected by the pronoun of address. **Patricia Sánchez Carrasco, Marjolein van Hoften, and Gert-Jan Schoenmakers** conducted a self-paced reading experiment in which French participants read two stories written in first and in third person, after which they completed a questionnaire to measure their immersion in the stories. In the questionnaire, readers were addressed with either T or V. In French, it is unusual to be addressed with T by a stranger, and this can lead to a negative opinion of the speaker. However, the questionnaire in this study was not about the speaker (the researcher or writer of the questionnaire), but about immersion in and emotional engagement with the stories the participants had just read. As expected, Sánchez Carrasco et al. found higher reported immersion scores for stories written in first than in third person, but remarkably, they only found it when formal V-pronouns were used in the questionnaire, and not when informal T-pronouns were used. Sánchez Carrasco et al. concluded that the use of the inappropriate T-pronoun in the questionnaire after the reading task threw the participants off balance to such an extent that the differences in immersion they experienced between first- and third-person stories completely disappeared.

While the study by Sánchez Carrasco et al. found unconscious effects of being addressed with T- or V-pronouns on the readers' immersion in a story, **Hanna Lappalainen and Maija Saviniemi** examined the conscious metalinguistic comments on how forms of address affected the first-person narrator and other characters in a Finnish autobiographical novel series of 26 volumes. Lappalainen and Saviniemi noted that perceptions of address are difficult to study through authentic interaction, because addressees may find it unpleasant or offensive to be addressed in an inappropriate way. They also pointed out that variation in forms of address is one of those linguistic features ordinary speakers (i.e., non-linguists) often have strong feelings about. Fiction, as Lappalainen and Saviniemi argue, can provide access to the characters' perceptions of forms of address in the narrative world, which in an autobiographical work like the novel series they studied, can be considered to mirror the author's perceptions of forms of address used in the real world. For example, the narrator frequently describes the use of third-person (indirect) address, by which a speaker can avoid the choice between T and V in cases of doubt. One example is when the narrator's father addresses his daughter-in-law in third person. Although it was common in those days to address a daughter-in-law with T, the father considered his son's wife higher in social status. When the narrator himself is addressed indirectly in the story

by old acquaintances that look up to him, he finds it very unpleasant. Lappalainen and Saviniemi argue that the narrator feels disconnected from his former home region, and this disconnect increases when people address him indirectly.

A similar case of indirect address is the use of the forms *oom* ‘uncle’ and *tannie* ‘aunt’ in Afrikaans. In contrast to the negative feelings evoked in the narrator by the use of indirect address forms in Lappalainen and Saviniemi’s study, **Carla Ellis** found an overall positive sentiment towards these third-person forms of address. Ellis collected data from questionnaires and interviews. In investigating these data, Ellis focused on how first language speakers of Afrikaans thought about the use of *oom* ‘uncle’ and *tannie* ‘aunt’. All age groups disagreed with the statement that these terms were old-fashioned. Younger participants (18–29 years old) indicated that they felt old when addressed as *oom* or *tannie*, but the majority of people of 30 years and older only sometimes felt old when addressed as such, and almost all participants of 50 years and older indicated that they did not feel old when addressed as *oom* or *tannie*. Furthermore, most participants indicated that they agreed with the statement that the forms *oom* and *tannie* are used to show respect. The forms are considered polite but at the same time informal, comfortable, and “even comforting”. **Ellis** emphasizes that the use of these forms is not dictated by a prescriptive norm within the Afrikaans community, instead it is a culturally accepted way to address people, as long as they are at least ten years older than the speaker.

What is a prescriptive norm, is the ban on mixing of T- and V-pronouns in Netherlandic Dutch, as studied by **Suzanne Pauline Aalberse**, although the reason to mix T and V could be the same as in the case of Afrikaans, namely, to signal respect and express closeness at the same time. The use of pronoun mixing in Netherlandic Dutch has been argued to be functional. Aalberse investigated the perception of pronoun mixing among high school students, who she assumed to be in the process of learning the prescriptive norm. Surprisingly, she found large individual differences in the perception of mixing. First of all, most students had never noticed the phenomenon of pronoun mixing. However, when Aalberse asked them how they felt about pronoun mixing, about one third said they thought it was wrong, sloppy, or weird. Others said that they did not care, and a few said that mixing was a special style. One informant said “it is a style. You are nice and you show respect.” Interestingly, shifting from V to T was perceived as something positive, because it shows that the addressee is *jij-waardig* ‘T worthy’. Some students liked it when companies addressed them with the informal T-pronoun in an email but then ended their email with the formal V-pronoun, because that was considered *netjes* ‘proper’ or *zakelijk* ‘professional’.

As the studies by Aalberse, Ellis, and Lappalainen and Saviniemi show, address is not always a clear-cut binary T/V system (cf. Fernández-Mallat & Moyna, 2025). The system may be subject to ongoing changes to and interpretations of the sociolinguistic norm. As a case in point, nominal forms in European Portuguese have gained ground in the domain of address and have in fact started taking over the paradigmatic position of the pronominal V-form. **Rita Faria**’s contribution discusses a recent event that showcases the instability of the politeness paradigm in European Portuguese: in 2020, soccer coach Jorge Jesus (Benfica) used the address pronoun *você* in court to address the prosecutor. Although *você* is the pronominal V-form in European Portuguese (opposing the pronominal T-form *tu*), Jesus’s use of it was considered inappropriate and he was reprimanded for it because *você* lacks specific semantic content: he should have instead used the nominal form *Senhora Procuradora* ‘Madam Prosecutor’—a third-person form that states the occupational and hierarchically superior status of the addressee. Faria argues that an appropriate form of address is selected automatically, based on social norms and collective expectations. That is, Jesus was reprimanded because he failed to discern from the situation that he should have used a polite nominal form, which implies that *você* is essentially a neutral N-form rather

than a polite V-form in European Portuguese. As Jesus's case caused quite a commotion in Portugal, Faria analyzed a sample of comments left on online versions of local newspapers and on X (formerly Twitter). She observed that the public response was extremely diverse. On the one hand, support could be found for a reliance on the established sociolinguistic norms such that the use of nominal forms and honorifics is considered appropriate and the use of *você* is not. On the other hand, there were respondents who rejected the hierarchical paradigm and stressed that Portugal is an egalitarian society—an ideology that has seen growing support since the Carnation Revolution in 1974. The sociocultural perception of pronouns of address can thus be quite intricate and warrants additional research.

The contributions to this Special Issue provide insight into the different perceptions that individual addressees may have of forms of address, which can have very different causes. The Finnish narrator in Lappalainen and Saviniemi's study had a low opinion of himself, which made him feel uncomfortable when people addressed him formally. Kretzenbacher and Hensel-Börner's research showed that addressing customers formally rather than informally led to a more positive perception of a salesperson. However, the participants in their study were observers, not the addressees themselves, whose perceptions might have been different. The participants in Sánchez Carrasco et al.'s study only reported a higher immersion in first-person stories when they were addressed formally in the questionnaire afterwards, while Sadowski et al. found that (altruistic) participants showed a higher donation intention when they were addressed informally. Faria showed that in European Portuguese, the use of a V-pronoun instead of indirect address with a title is considered impolite by some but not all people, while most participants in Ellis's study on Afrikaans considered the use of the indirect forms of address *oom* 'uncle' and *tannie* 'aunt' to be respectful but at the same time informal. Rosseel et al. found that most Belgian Dutch-speaking participants in their study did not even notice shifts from T to V or vice versa. Similarly, Netherlandic Dutch-speaking pre-university students in Aalberse's study often did not notice it when T- and V-pronouns were mixed. However, it remains unclear whether being addressed with either pronoun may have unconsciously affected these participants. A strong case for the potential (unconscious) effect of a particular form of address is reported on in Rojas-Berscia. In a campaign by the Peruvian government to advise indigenous citizens on measures against COVID-19, the Spanish version of a poster was translated into 24 indigenous languages. However, only the Shawi translator translated directives in the second person ("wash your hands") into inclusive plural forms in the first person ("let's wash our hands"), which apparently led to the Shawi population being more inclined to follow the advice.

We hope that future research into forms of address will pay more attention to the conscious or unconscious perception of being addressed in a certain way and the intended and sometimes unintended effects thereof.

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Article

Pronominal Address in German Sales Talk: Effects on the Perception of the Salesperson

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Abstract: Increasing numbers of commercial enterprises in the German-speaking countries are switching from the traditional formal *Sie* address for customers to the more casual *du* address. This article reports on a part of an interdisciplinary empirical study evaluating the effect that the address pronoun used towards the customer has on the perception of the salesperson. Respondents were shown short videos of sales encounters and asked to indicate their perception of the salesperson in a guided questionnaire. The choice of either *du* or *Sie* as the address pronoun used by the salesperson in the videos did not make a substantial difference to the way the salesperson was perceived by the respondent group as a whole, but some significant differences appeared within sub-cohorts, which were determined by the gender, age group and education level of respondents, and by the industries in which the videos that the respondents watched were set. The overwhelming majority of the significant differences in the perceptions of the salesperson according to the address pronoun used shows that the salesperson using *Sie* is seen in a more positive light. This suggests that, somewhat surprisingly and counterintuitively, addressing customers with *du* does not have the general effect of improving the perception of the salesperson.

Keywords: German; pronoun; T/V address; service encounter

1. Introduction

Just like other parts of Western Europe, the German-speaking countries have undergone radical societal and cultural change since the 1960s. As far as language is a symptom and an expression of social behaviour, this change is reflected in the development of the German language. Pragmatic elements of language such as addressing behaviour have been described as prime examples of the German language's development reflecting social and cultural change (cf. Kretzenbacher 1991; Simon 2003a, 2003b). The question of how to address customers in service encounters, first triggered by the import of informal Swedish address practices into the German-speaking countries by Swedish-based international retail chains IKEA and H&M, has been a hotly discussed topic since the 1970s.

Addressing interlocutors in German has the two linguistic expressions of pronominal address (by an address pronoun—obligatory in Standard German—and the agreeing verb form) and nominal address (by name and/or title forms). For the pronominal address of single interlocutors, German offers the alternatives of the second-person singular (2sg) pronoun *du* with 2sg verbal agreement (used to address children or socially close adults, such as family or friends) or the grammatically third-person plural pronoun *Sie* with 3pl verbal agreement (the default address for adult interlocutors). Thus, German seemingly follows the T/V address dichotomy postulated by the classic study by Brown and Gilman (1960), in which T stands for a more intimate address form (such as the Latin *tu* from which the abbreviation is derived) and V for a more formal one (such as the Latin *vos*). The basic binary T/V opposition can be fine-tuned by other linguistic features to make

it perfectly appropriate for the specific social distance between interlocutors in a given situation (cf. Kretzenbacher 2010, 2011a). Such features include elements of nominal address such as first name, hypocoristic, last name, courtesy title (such as *Herr* ("Mr.") or *Frau* ("Ms/Miss/Mrs.")) and academic or professional title, as well as more T- or V-like salutations. This makes the German address system, as Raymond Hickey (2003) puts it, both binary and scalar at once.

The system of nominal address in German has been constantly changing with political and social developments. This has not only extended to changing titles with changing forms of government in the German-speaking countries, but also to phenomena such as the virtual disappearance of *Fräulein* ("Miss") from the inventory of German courtesy titles. In contrast, the basically binary pronominal T/V opposition of *du* vs. *Sie* was relatively stable from the time when *Sie* emerged as the default address for adult strangers around the end of the 18th century (cf. Listen 1999; Simon 2003a) until the 1960s. Starting with the university environment, the T address has since extended into many domains, ousting the V address, although the victory of the German *du* was never anywhere near as complete as that of its cognate T pronouns in the fellow Germanic languages of Norwegian, Swedish and (to a slightly lesser extent) Danish.

Due to the very different historical developments in Germany, Austria and Switzerland, German is, despite the contiguous German-speaking area in Europe, a distinctly pluricentric language, with national as well as regional standards. Pragmatic phenomena such as address are not exempt from this national and regional diversity, so that nationally appropriate address behaviours in Austria and German-speaking Switzerland are as different from each other as from those in Germany, and there still are differences between the areas of the former GDR and FRG in Germany (cf. Clyne et al. 2009, pp. 129–32; Kretzenbacher 2011b; Norrby and Kretzenbacher 2014; Schüpbach 2015).

Traditionally, the default address form between adult interlocutors in service encounters has been V (pronoun *Sie*, courtesy title *Herr/Frau*, professional or academic title if applicable and appropriate, last name) across the German-speaking countries. Even the increased use of the T address among university students and people with a leftist-alternative attitude since the late 1960s did not really change anything in this respect, with the possible exception of small-scale alternative businesses, such as organic food stores and alternative cooperatives. It was the globalisation of (at the time only recently developed) Swedish address practices¹ by international brands such as the furniture retailer IKEA and (slightly later) the fashion retailer H&M that first brought the T address in service encounters to the attention of wider circles in German-speaking countries.² This so-called "IKEA-*du*" in service encounters has been vividly discussed in German published and social media, and its introduction was rather uneven across media of communication in German-speaking countries (Norrby and Hajek 2011). However, while there is no information on a specific policy at H&M, IKEA Germany now address their customers in all advertising with the T pronoun *du*, but in direct contact with individual customers, they have returned to the V address, with *Sie* (Schupp 2017). As a reason for this distinction by contact situation, the IKEA blog indicates that some customers find the *du* address inappropriate ("*unangebracht*"). Generally, however, the use of the T address with customers in service and sales encounters is increasing in Germany, according to German media reports (cf. Müller 2018; Hoefer 2021).

While the discussion of address in service encounters in German-speaking media, particularly online,³ is ongoing, serious research (either economic or linguistic) on the topic with regards to the situation in German is scarce. In the field of economics, Brosig-Koch and Heinrich (2018) use the German T address as an example of reduced social distance, which, in their game-theory-based study, shows a positive effect on customer behaviour in some communicative situations. Additionally, in their marketing-based analysis of the study which we are approaching from a linguistic viewpoint in this article, Hensel-Börner and Kords (2021) find that a T address in sales encounters does not provide any advantages for sales. Also rare are linguistic studies on the topic. Apart from two

studies comparing (amongst other topics) customer address in Finnish and German online advertising (Ylönen 2003, 2007), the studies from the Melbourne Address Research circle already mentioned above (Clyne et al. 2009; Norrby and Hajek 2011) were the only ones that we found. There are, however, two public surveys that were conducted in Germany in the last decade (GfK 2016; INSA Consulere 2021),⁴ which allow some comparison with our own experimental results.

The project we are reporting on here was conceived and is being carried out in interdisciplinary cooperation between an economist specialising in marketing studies and a linguist specialising in sociolinguistics and pragmatics. It is, as far as we are aware, the first study—certainly the first interdisciplinary one—dealing experimentally with the perceptions that respondents have of sales encounters with a salesperson addressing the customer either with the T or the V address. Our study therefore had an exploratory character, and it was guided by the following hypotheses:

- H1: In a sales encounter, the choice of T or V address used by the salesperson towards the customer will influence the perception of the salesperson by the customer.
- H2: The type of product or service to be sold is a factor in the influence that the choice of address pronoun by the salesperson has on the way in which they are perceived by the customer, as well as on the probability of a successful sale.
- H3: Given that age, gender as an identity marker and status (including education level) are important variables for address choice (cf. Clyne et al. 2009) and that age, gender and education level are relevant variables in existing surveys (see Section 4, below), they are factors in the way in which the choice of T or V address used by the salesperson towards a customer will influence the perception of the salesperson by the customer.

While H2 will be tested in relation to the probability of a successful sale in a separate publication, the research questions we seek to answer in this article are as follows:

- RQ1: Is a salesperson judged differently according to the V or T pronoun they use to address their customer?
- RQ2: If so, does either the T or the V address make the salesperson appear in a more positive light?
- RQ3: Are there any systematic differences in the perception of the salesperson using the T or the V address according to the particular industry in which a sales encounter takes place, or according to the demographic parameters of the respondents, such as gender, age and education level?

2. Materials and Methods

In order to produce robust experimental results on the perception of a salesperson's use of T or V address towards a customer in a sales encounter, we decided to perform a strictly quantitative study with an experiment focussed on this specific difference in address pronouns used, set in three industries selling different products/services. Our experiment's design was informed by methodological discussions in social psychology and sociolinguistics, such as those of Wells and Windschitl (1999) and Schüpbach et al. (2021).

2.1. Materials

The survey was based on questionnaires about videos of the respective initial phases of simulated sales encounters, which the respondents had seen immediately before. The sales literature reveals that the initial few minutes of a one-on-one interaction are the most critical (De Meuse and Erffmeyer 1994) and that the decision as to how to address the customer is made precisely in this initial contact. By focussing the respondents on the specific situation that they had just witnessed, we avoided the methodological problem of being unable to guess which specific situation a respondent was thinking of when they answered a question linked to such a situation-dependent phenomenon as address. We also deliberately avoided asking respondents directly what they thought about the address form used by the salesperson (as in other studies on address in a business context, such

as that by (House and Kádár 2020), or having them watch and compare a T-based and a V-based version of the same sales situation, respectively, which would have made them aware that the experiment was about their perception of the address form used. Rather, we asked them about their perception of the specific sales encounter in the video that they had just watched and only added a question on their own attitude towards T or V address much later in the questionnaire. In this way, we had respondents react to the respective address forms used rather than having them tell us how they thought they would react.

We produced six videos with the same male actor (aged 27) playing the salesman and the same female actor (aged 47) playing the customer. Three situations were shot twice each in original settings: one in a shop for sports shoes, in which the customer is looking to buy a pair of appropriate sneakers for a half marathon, one in a car dealership, in which the customer is looking to buy a small car and one in a bank, with a customer having moved from another city recently and looking for a new local bank for her financial services. We chose these three industries because research suggests that there are more T-friendly industries, such as the media or sports goods and sports fashion retail (cf. Clyne et al. 2009, p. 109; and Kretzenbacher 2011a), and more V-friendly industries, such as the financial and legal sectors. The sports footwear shop represents an industry that is considered more T-friendly, and the bank one is considered more V-friendly. We chose a car dealership as a third setting, as in the automotive industry, customers expect to pay a more substantial price in a purchase than at a sports footwear shop (which might make it less T-friendly), but at the same time, the automotive industry that does not have the same image of formality as the financial sector (which might make it less V-friendly).

In the three videos, the dialogue (and the clothes style of the salesman) was kept as appropriate to the specific product/service and setting as necessary, and yet as similar as possible. Differences in the settings caused small differences in the lengths of the video clips (between 0:58 and 1:31 min). Otherwise, the actors were advised to keep their linguistic and non-linguistic behaviour as consistent as possible across the six videos, with the salesman showing what is defined as customer-oriented communication style in marketing research (Saxe and Weitz 1982; Williams and Spiro 1985; Spiro and Weitz 1990; Williams et al. 1990). For each of the three settings, two versions of the scene were shot, with the only difference between them that the salesman addressed the customer with the V pronoun *Sie* in one version, and with the T pronoun *du* in the other one (while the customer did not address the salesperson directly at all).

2.2. Participants

The survey respondents were chosen by a convenience sampling strategy and randomly assigned one of the six videos to avoid interviewer selection bias. In addition, we worked with eleven different interviewers, who shared the survey independently of each other. Continuous coordination of the sampling process ensured structural equality of the sub-samples regarding the relevant factors of age, gender and educational level. Immediately after the respondents had watched the video, they were asked to answer a questionnaire. Thus, they were unable to compare videos that only differed in the address pronoun used and, consequently, to become aware of the focus of our study. Additionally, the questionnaire contained more questions than the ones relevant to this article (which will be discussed in another publication, as mentioned above). The respondents' memory of the video they had just seen could stay fresh for the whole time that they needed to answer the questionnaire, which would have been more difficult if they had seen more than one video.

2.3. Procedure

One part of the questionnaire that is relevant to this article was a specific part with seven-point Likert scales, where respondents were asked to give their impressions of the salesman in the video. The other was a general part asking about demographic data (age,

gender, education background) and, finally, their general attitude towards addressing strangers with *du*.

To indicate their perception of the salesperson in the video they had just watched, respondents were given the incomplete sentence, “The salesperson in the video appears ...” (“*Der Verkäufer in dem Video wirkt ...*” in the German original questionnaire), and then 11 adjectives to complete the sentence, each of which was accompanied by a seven-point Likert scale, on which 1 indicated total disagreement and 7 indicated total agreement. The adjectives were attentive (*aufmerksam*), open (*offen*), dominant (*dominant*), honest (*ehrlich*), empathic (*emfühlend*), competent (*kompetent*), meticulous (*präzise*), calm (*gelassen*), trustworthy (*vertrauenswürdig*), lively (*lebendig*) and friendly (*freundlich*). The choice of adjectives was based on Norton’s (1978) foundation of a “communicator style” construct and subsequent further developments of that construct (Dion and Notarantonio 1992; Notarantonio and Cohen 1990). This construct is commonly used in the sales literature to test judgements and perceptions of sales effectiveness. Because each adjective represents a different dimension of the perception, and the construct has not been tested yet for the T/V address of customers, we decided not to aggregate the 11 attributes.

Of the total of 321 respondents, 308 completed their questionnaires and are consequently the cohort we are analysing. A total of 151 of the respondents saw a video with T address, and 157 one with V address. Each of the 6 videos was seen by a group of between 46 and 60 respondents. For the analysis, we divided the cohort of respondents by demographic features into pairs of sub-cohorts of roughly the same size: in total, 161 (52%) of the respondents were male, and 147 (48%) were female. The median age of the respondents was 37. In total, 156 (51%) were born in 1981 or after, and 152 (49%) in 1980 or before, which also happened to make the former group (aged 37 or younger at the time the survey was performed) “digital natives” and the latter “digital immigrants” (cf. Prensky 2001). In order to make our results comparable to those of public surveys (which use very different age groupings; see Section 4), we found that the two age group cohorts we formed with the median age of the total cohort separating them were each large enough to allow for significant statistical results. In total, 154 (50%) of the respondents were tertiary-educated, 149 (48%) had a lower education level and 5 (2%) did not indicate their education level.

We compared the mean scores for each of the adjectives per group to analyse the effect of the address form on the perception of the salesperson. Furthermore, the differences were tested for significance by using the *t* test.

3. Results

Across the total cohort and across all three industries, there were few differences in the perception of the salesperson using the V pronoun *Sie* and the one using the T pronoun *du*.

The only significant differences in Table 1 show a perception of the salesperson addressing the customer with the V pronoun as more honest, competent and trustworthy. The salesman using the *Sie* address received average scores of 4.91 (with a standard deviation (SD) of 1.31) for honesty, 5.14 (SD 1.40) for competency and 4.51 (SD 1.49) for trustworthiness. For the salesman addressing the customer with *du*, the average scores were 4.47 (SD 1.41) for honesty, 4.66 (SD 1.45) for competency and 4.96 (SD 1.41) for trustworthiness.

Table 1. Perceptions of salesperson using V vs. T pronouns across the total cohort. Pairs of values highlighted indicate significant differences ($p < 0.05$) according to the *t* test. Standard deviations in brackets after mean values.

Feature	Total	V	T
<i>n</i>	308	157	151
attentive	5.36 (1.30)	5.47 (1.26)	5.25 (1.32)
open	5.06 (1.37)	5.04 (1.41)	5.09 (1.34)
dominant	3.51 (1.65)	3.43 (1.73)	3.60 (1.56)
honest	4.69 (1.37)	4.91 (1.31)	4.47 (1.41)

Table 1. Cont.

Feature	Total	V	T
empathic	4.51 (1.33)	4.63 (1.35)	4.39 (1.30)
competent	4.90 (1.44)	5.14 (1.40)	4.66 (1.45)
meticulous	4.51 (1.47)	4.58 (1.49)	4.44 (1.44)
calm	4.56 (1.50)	4.57 (1.46)	4.55 (1.55)
trustworthy	4.74 (1.47)	4.96 (1.49)	4.51 (1.41)
lively	4.32 (1.47)	4.18 (1.50)	4.47 (1.43)
friendly	5.82 (1.16)	5.92 (1.06)	5.71 (1.25)

3.1. Results by Industry

If we compare the picture across the three industries, not many significant differences appear within the three settings (Table 2) either:

Table 2. Perceptions of salesperson using V vs. T pronoun in the three different industries. Pairs of values highlighted indicate significant differences ($p < 0.05$) according to the t test. Standard deviations in brackets after mean values.

Feature	Car V	Car T	Bank V	Bank T	Shoes V	Shoes T
<i>n</i>	47	46	50	59	60	46
attentive	5.11 (1.34)	4.78 (1.41)	5.56 (1.18)	5.12 (1.30)	5.67 (1.23)	5.89 (0.99)
open	4.70 (1.41)	4.83 (1.34)	4.88 (1.41)	4.95 (1.44)	5.45 (1.32)	5.52 (1.11)
dominant	3.15 (1.66)	3.57 (1.54)	3.30 (1.74)	3.37 (1.36)	3.75 (1.75)	3.91 (1.77)
honest	4.52 (1.06)	3.76 (1.34)	4.74 (1.41)	4.39 (1.31)	5.35 (1.29)	5.29 (1.19)
empathic	4.26 (1.51)	4.02 (1.22)	4.78 (1.25)	4.29 (1.39)	4.80 (1.25)	4.87 (1.13)
competent	4.70 (1.25)	4.00 (1.46)	4.98 (1.39)	4.41 (1.33)	5.61 (1.39)	5.65 (1.04)
meticulous	4.11 (1.54)	3.87 (1.33)	4.58 (1.37)	4.32 (1.46)	4.95 (1.48)	5.15 (1.25)
calm	4.30 (1.35)	4.61 (1.48)	4.44 (1.49)	4.31 (1.70)	4.88 (1.49)	4.80 (1.38)
trustworthy	4.34 (1.45)	3.85 (1.45)	5.04 (1.50)	4.50 (1.47)	5.37 (1.37)	5.20 (0.93)
lively	3.38 (1.53)	4.35 (1.57)	4.12 (1.37)	4.25 (1.40)	4.85 (1.27)	4.87 (1.28)
friendly	5.77 (1.09)	5.39 (1.50)	5.76 (1.26)	5.68 (1.20)	6.18 (0.79)	6.07 (0.93)

In the sports shoe scenario, there were no significant differences whatsoever, while in both the bank and car dealership scenarios, the salesperson using *Sie* was considered significantly more competent. In the bank scenario, he received a score of 4.98 on average (SD 1.39) for this feature, compared with an average score of 4.41 (SD 1.33) for the salesman using *du*. In the car dealership scenario, V address use earned the salesman an average score of 4.70 (SD 1.25) for competency, with T address use only receiving an average score of 4.00 (SD 1.46). In the same scenario, the salesman addressing the customer with *Sie* also appeared more honest to the respondents, with an average score of 4.52 (SD 1.06), compared to an average of 3.76 (SD 1.34) for the salesman using *du*. The only significant advantage of the salesman using *du* was that he appeared livelier to the respondents in the car dealership setting (4.35 on average, SD 1.57) than when using *Sie* (average score 3.38, SD 1.53). However, while appearing honest and competent seem to be clearly desirable characteristics for a salesperson, this is much less obvious for appearing lively. It is interesting that significant differences in the perception of the salesperson only appeared in situations that usually deal with larger amounts of money, as opposed to the sports shoe store, which not only exemplifies an industry with a younger and more casual image, but also one in which the financial transactions in a sale can be expected to be less substantial than in the two other industries.

3.2. Results by Gender

When interpreting the results by gender (Table 3), we need to keep in mind that in order to keep all parameters except the address pronoun used by the salesperson the same between the respective pairs of videos for each of the three industries, we used the same actors for them. Therefore, in all the scenarios, a younger male salesperson was dealing with a female customer twenty years his senior.

Table 3. Perceptions of salesperson using V vs. T pronoun according to gender of respondents. Pairs of values highlighted indicate significant differences ($p < 0.05$) according to the t test. Standard deviations in brackets after mean values.

Feature	Male V	Male T	Female V	Female T
<i>n</i>	77	84	80	67
attentive	5.21 (1.33)	5.14 (1.34)	5.71 (1.15)	5.39 (1.30)
open	4.69 (1.55)	5.07 (1.30)	5.39 (1.16)	5.10 (1.41)
dominant	3.74 (1.78)	3.76 (1.61)	3.13 (1.63)	3.39 (1.48)
honest	4.67 (1.33)	4.49 (1.38)	5.14 (1.25)	4.45 (1.46)
empathic	4.19 (1.43)	4.37 (1.20)	5.05 (1.11)	4.41 (1.43)
competent	4.75 (1.49)	4.60 (1.38)	5.51 (1.20)	4.75 (1.54)
meticulous	4.16 (1.47)	4.42 (1.38)	4.99 (1.41)	4.46 (1.52)
calm	4.34 (1.54)	4.56 (1.47)	4.79 (1.36)	4.54 (1.65)
trustworthy	4.55 (1.60)	4.57 (1.34)	5.35 (1.25)	4.45 (1.51)
lively	3.96 (1.44)	4.46 (1.56)	4.39 (1.54)	4.48 (1.26)
friendly	5.66 (1.17)	5.57 (1.25)	6.18 (0.88)	5.88 (1.23)

For the male respondents, the use of address pronoun by the salesperson only made a significant difference with the feature *lively*, with the salesperson using T being perceived as livelier (average score: 4.46, SD 1.56) than when using V (average score: 3.96, SD 1.44). The female respondents, on the other hand, had a significantly more positive perception of the salesperson addressing the customer with *Sie* in terms of five out of the eleven features, all of which seem rather relevant for a salesperson. The female respondents found him more honest (with an average score of 5.14, SD 1.25, compared to an average score of 4.45, SD 1.46 for the salesperson using the *du* address), more empathic (5.05, SD 1.11 vs. 4.41, SD 1.43), more competent (5.51, SD 1.20 vs. 4.75, SD 1.54), more meticulous (4.99, SD 1.41 vs. 4.46, SD 1.52) and more trustworthy (5.35, SD 1.25 vs. 4.45, SD 1.51).

3.3. Results by Age Group

Younger German speakers tend to be more prepared to use and accept the T address with strangers than older ones (Clyne et al. 2009, p. 56). This is also reflected in the answers our respondents gave to the question as to whether they usually changed quickly from *Sie* to *du* with strangers: those who indicated that they did were on average 33.20 years of age (SD 10.96), while those who responded that this transition takes some time for them were 50.84 years old on average (SD 19.42).

In addition to this, given the predominance of the T address in the German-speaking part of the Internet, the younger and digital native respondents might have been expected to have a better perception of a salesperson using *du* to address their customer. However, this was not the case.

The use of the V or T pronoun by the salesperson did not seem to make much of a difference for the younger cohort, with the exception of a significantly higher value for competency attributed by the younger respondents to the salesperson using *Sie* (5.37, SD 1.27 vs. 4.91, SD 1.43). The older respondents similarly found the salesperson using the V pronoun significantly more competent (4.91, SD 1.49 vs. 4.40, SD 1.44). In addition, they

also considered him more honest (4.84, SD1.23 vs. 4.20, SD 1.36), empathic (4.66, SD 1.38 vs. 4.21, SD 1.28) and trustworthy (4.85, SD 1.52 vs. 4.27, SD 1.41) (Table 4).

Table 4. Perceptions of salesperson using V vs. T pronoun according to the age group of respondents. Pairs of values highlighted indicate significant differences ($p < 0.05$) according to the t test. Standard deviations in brackets after mean values.

Feature	Younger V	Younger T	Older V	Older T
<i>n</i>	78	78	79	73
attentive	5.59 (1.23)	5.44 (1.23)	5.34 (1.29)	5.06 (1.39)
open	5.15 (1.27)	5.32 (1.23)	4.94 (1.53)	4.83 (1.41)
dominant	3.62 (1.77)	3.67 (1.51)	3.24 (1.68)	3.52 (1.62)
honest	4.97 (1.39)	4.73 (1.41)	4.84 (1.23)	4.20 (1.36)
empathic	4.60 (1.32)	4.55 (1.31)	4.66 (1.38)	4.21 (1.28)
competent	5.37 (1.27)	4.91 (1.43)	4.91 (1.49)	4.40 (1.44)
meticulous	4.68 (1.49)	4.56 (1.48)	4.48 (1.50)	4.30 (1.39)
calm	4.60 (1.52)	4.63 (1.53)	4.53 (1.40)	4.47 (1.57)
trustworthy	5.06 (1.45)	4.74 (1.38)	4.85 (1.52)	4.27 (1.41)
lively	4.18 (1.54)	4.54 (1.49)	4.18 (1.47)	4.40 (1.37)
friendly	6.03 (0.95)	5.81 (1.09)	5.82 (1.15)	5.60 (1.39)

3.4. Results by Education Level

Does the level of education play a part in the perception of the salesperson? Our data suggest that this is the case (see Table 5).

Table 5. Perceptions of salesperson using V vs. T pronoun according to the education level of respondents. Pairs of values highlighted indicate significant differences ($p < 0.05$) according to the t test. Standard deviations in brackets after mean values.

Feature	tert. ed. V	tert. ed. T	no tert. ed. V	no tert. ed. T
<i>n</i>	85	69	70	79
attentive	5.33 (1.36)	4.94 (1.37)	5.60 (1.13)	5.53 (1.25)
open	5.09 (1.39)	4.68 (1.40)	4.99 (1.46)	5.40 (1.20)
dominant	3.61 (1.83)	3.75 (1.54)	3.16 (1.58)	3.43 (1.58)
honest	4.95 (1.32)	4.29 (1.41)	4.84 (1.32)	4.61 (1.42)
empathic	4.68 (1.26)	4.35 (1.32)	4.57 (1.47)	4.45 (1.29)
competent	5.06 (1.40)	4.43 (1.48)	5.24 (1.41)	4.86 (1.43)
meticulous	4.33 (1.52)	4.12 (1.55)	4.87 (1.42)	4.73 (1.30)
calm	4.64 (1.47)	4.62 (1.53)	4.49 (1.47)	4.47 (1.58)
trustworthy	4.94 (1.51)	4.38 (1.34)	4.97 (1.49)	4.60 (1.49)
lively	4.21 (1.51)	4.45 (1.42)	4.13 (1.51)	4.47 (1.47)
friendly	6.00 (0.93)	5.51 (1.34)	5.81 (1.21)	5.87 (1.17)

For respondents without a university-level education, the use of V or T address by the salesperson did not make a significant difference in their perception of the salesperson. The university graduates, however, had a significantly more positive perception of the salesperson using *Sie* for four out of the eleven features. This did not only apply to features that might have been expected, such as honesty (4.95, SD 1.32 vs. 4.29, SD 1.41), competency (5.06, SD 1.40 vs. 4.43, SD 1.48) and trustworthiness (4.94, SD 1.51 vs. 4.38, SD 1.34). It was also the case for a feature such as friendliness (6.00, SD 0.93 vs. 5.51, SD 1.34, to which the *du* address might seem more conducive at first glance.

4. Discussion

Our data provide quite a varied picture of perceptions of a salesperson using T vs. V pronouns to address their customer in a sales conversation. From the viewpoint of how the salesperson is received, addressing customers with the T pronoun *du* rather than the V pronoun *Sie* does not make much of a difference in general, certainly not a substantial positive difference. If anything, across our total cohort and all scenarios, the few significant differences show a more positive perception of the salesperson using the V address (see Table 1). This is in line with previous surveys conducted in Germany showing that there is a preference of the V address in sales encounters in that country. In 2016, the GfK survey asked respondents, amongst other questions, whether they welcomed the development of the more frequent use of the T address “in contact with salespersons, waiters, etc.” (“im Kontakt mit Verkäufern, Kellnern etc.”). Out of the 1033 respondents, 34.7% said that they did, but 65.3% responded that they did not. The INSA survey of 2021 asked 2017 respondents whether they agreed with the statement, “I appreciate being addressed with *du* as a customer (e.g., in a shop, in a letter in an email or on the Internet.” („Ich finde es gut, wenn ich als Kunde (z.B. in Geschäften, per Brief, E-Mail oder im Internet) geduzt werde.“). In total, 32.3% of respondents agreed with that statement, while 48.3% did not agree with it.⁵

4.1. The Different Industries

If we compare the answers across the three different industries (Table 2), the image of the industry and the amount of money that a possible sales transaction would involve seem to play a role in the perception of the salesperson. In the sports shoe shop scenario, a sales environment with a more youthful and casual image, the salesman using the T address did not impress the respondents in any particular way. None of the features showed any significant differences between the salesperson’s uses of the T and V address. On the other hand, in the car dealership scenario, in which a sale would mean a substantial financial transaction, the salesman using the V address was perceived as significantly more honest and competent. The salesman addressing the customer with *du* was seen as significantly livelier. However, this might not necessarily be a good characteristic for a car salesman, particularly one that is seen as significantly less honest and competent at the same time. The perception of honesty was the only perception showing a significant difference in the bank videos (while arguably being a very important feature for a bank employee). The salesman using the V address was seen as significantly more honest in this scenario. This somewhat corresponds to the only recent industry-specific survey that we were able to find. Leichsenring (2020) quotes a YouGov survey from the same year, where respondents were asked whether they preferred to be addressed with *du* or *Sie* by their bank, e.g., on its website or in letters or emails (“Würden Sie von Ihrer Bank, beispielweise auf der Webseite oder in Briefen oder E-Mails, lieber geduzt oder gesiezt werden?”). In total, 55% of respondents preferred a V address and only 10% a T address, while 29% said they did not care either way.

4.2. Gender

The results by gender (Table 3) showed that the male respondents were not very likely to have a significantly different perception of a salesperson according to the address pronoun that this salesperson uses towards a customer. They only perceived the salesman using *du* as significantly livelier (which, again, might not necessarily be an ideal or important impression for a salesperson to make in many industries). For the female respondents, however, the use of address pronouns by the salesperson significantly influenced their perception of the salesperson. They found the salesperson addressing the customer with *Sie* significantly more honest, empathic, competent, meticulous and trustworthy. This result matches the frequently mentioned impression among German speakers that the more formal form of address with *Sie* is perceived as more neutral or even distant, and more respectful (cf. Clyne et al. 2009, p. 45). The difference in perception between the male and female respondents might have been influenced by the fact that all the videos showed a younger male salesperson interacting with an older female customer. However, previous

surveys show that the preference for the V address in service encounters is consistently stronger with female respondents than with male respondents. In the GfK survey of 2016, 42.6% of the male, but only 27.1% of the female respondents stated that they welcomed the development of the more frequent use of the T address “in contact with salespersons, waiters, etc.”, while 57.4% of the male, but 72.9% of the female respondents said they did not welcome this development. In the 2021 INSA survey, the gender difference was less dramatic, but still apparent. In total, 35.2% of the male and 29.6% of the female respondents indicated that they were happy to be addressed with *du* as a customer, while 46.7% of the male and 49.8% of the female respondents said they did not appreciate this. Furthermore, in the bank-specific survey performed by YouGov in 2020 (Leichsenring 2020), 50% of the male and 60% of the female respondents stated that they preferred to be addressed with *Sie* as customers.

4.3. Age Groups

The results by age group (Table 4) show that—unsurprisingly—the older respondents had a more positive perception of the salesperson using the V address, finding him considerably more honest, empathic, competent and trustworthy. The younger respondents also found the salesperson significantly more competent than when using the T address. While surveys confirm that the acceptance of the T address with strangers decreases with age (Allensbach 2011; GfK 2016), the younger respondents did not have a significantly more positive perception of the salesperson using *du* in terms of any of the features. The previous surveys define age groups differently, but an increasing preference for the V address in service encounters with increasing age is common across them. In the 2016 GfK survey, the respondents in their twenties were the only age group in which a majority (53.5%) stated that they welcomed the development of the more frequent use of the T pronoun in service encounters. That percentage decreased almost continuously with age (45.6% of the respondents in their thirties, 39.7% in the forties age group, 25.8% in the fifties age group, 30.2% of the respondents in their sixties and 14% of the respondents aged 70 and older). The 2021 INSA survey showed a similar decrease with age in the acceptance of being addressed with the T pronoun as a customer. In the 18–29 age group, 44.4% agreed with the statement that they appreciated the T address in that situation, and 32.7% disagreed with it. Conversely, in the 60-and-older age group, less than a quarter of the respondents (23.3%) agreed with the statement, while 59.2% disagreed with it. In the 2020 YouGov survey (Leichsenring 2020), 44% of the respondents aged 18–24 said that they would prefer to be addressed with *Sie* as bank customers. In the 25–34 age group, this percentage increased to 46%, in the 35–44 age group to 52%, in the 45–54 age group to 55% and in the group of over-55-year-olds to 62%.

4.4. Education Level

Dividing the respondents into those with a tertiary education and those without one (Table 5) showed the strongest difference between sub-cohorts with regards to the perception of the salesperson. While there were no significant differences in how the respondents without tertiary education perceived the salesperson according to the pronoun he addressed the customer with, the university graduates had a significantly better impression of the salesperson using *Sie* in terms of four out of the eleven features they were asked about. Perhaps surprisingly, this group also perceived the salesperson using the V address as significantly friendlier. Again, this confirms the trend shown in previous surveys that preference for being addressed with *Sie* in service encounters increases with the level of education. In the 2016 GfK study, 36.9% of the group of respondents with the lowest education level welcomed the development of the more frequent use of *du* in service encounters, and 63.1% did not. In the group with the highest education level, 31.9% of the respondents welcomed the development, and 68.1% did not. In the 2021 INSA survey, 41.3% of the respondents with the lowest level of education agreed with the statement that they appreciated the T address as customers, and 30.5% disagreed with it. In the group

with the highest education level, only about a quarter of the respondents (27.3%) agreed with the statement, while the majority (57.2%) disagreed with it.⁶

4.5. Answers to Research Questions

Turning our attention back to the research questions formulated in the introduction, we can answer these questions as follows:

- RQ1: Is a salesperson judged differently according to the V or T pronoun they use to address their customer?
 - This is not generally the case, or at least not to a significant extent. Significant differences that appeared in the total cohort, with regards to the more positive perception of the honesty, competency and trustworthiness of the salesperson using the V pronoun, can also be found (albeit not consistently) across the three industries tested and across demographic sub-cohorts.
- RQ2: If so, does either the T or the V address make the salesperson appear in a more positive light?
 - The three significant differences in the total cohort mentioned above all favour the salesperson using *Sie*. This is also the case in the overwhelming majority of the significant differences appearing across the three industries tested and across the demographic sub-cohorts.
- RQ3: Are there any systematic differences in the perception of the salesperson using the T or V address according to the particular industry in which a sales encounter takes place, or according to the demographic parameters of the respondents, such as gender, age and education level?
 - There were no significant differences in the perception of the salesperson that were consistent across the three industries tested and across the demographic sub-cohorts. Two significant differences that were consistent across the majority of the industries and sub-cohorts were that the salesperson using the V address was perceived as more competent and (slightly less consistently) more honest than the salesperson using the T address.

Our study—the first detailed experimental approach to the phenomenon that we are aware of—had an exploratory character, which is reflected in its methodology, which tries to limit the parameters tested. This study corroborates tendencies shown in previous (much more general) demoscopic surveys performed in Germany. Almost all the significant differences in the perception of the salesperson favour the salesperson addressing the customer with the V pronoun, i.e., the traditional way in which customers used to be addressed in service encounters across the German-speaking countries. Whatever reasons commercial enterprises might have for the change to a T address when dealing with customers, which is described as a trend, at least in Germany (cf. Müller 2018; Hoefer 2021), our survey does not indicate that such a change results in a more positive perception of the salesperson. IKEA, having been among the pioneers of companies addressing their customers with *du*, have returned to the *Sie* address in direct contact with customers in Germany (cf. Schupp 2017; cf. Hoefer 2021). This return might be followed by other companies if the lack of a positive effect of the *du* address for customers, as shown in previous surveys and confirmed in our study, becomes apparent to them, as seems to have been the case with IKEA.

The methodology of our study proved efficient in contradicting (at least for Germany) the impression that addressing customers with *du* in service encounters might be conducive to sales by improving the perception of the salesperson among customers—an impression that seems to have triggered the change to the use of address in service encounters with many companies. It would be desirable for other surveys with different parameters with regards to industry and salesperson/customer pairing to be performed across several regions in Germany, as well as in Austria and the German-speaking part of Switzerland, in order to complement ours.

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Data Availability Statement: The datasets presented in this article are not readily available because the data are part of an ongoing study. Requests to access the datasets should be directed to the corresponding author.

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Notes

- ¹ The traditionally complex Swedish system of address forms changed radically to almost universal T address in the so-called “du-reform” of the late 1960s (cf. Clyne et al. 2009, pp. 22–23).
- ² IKEA opened their first store outside Scandinavia in the German-speaking part of Switzerland in 1973 and expanded to Germany in 1974 and to Austria in 1977. H&M opened their first stores respectively in Switzerland in 1978, in Germany in 1980 and in Austria in 1994.
- ³ Some recent examples: <https://www.new-communication.de/neues/detail/corporate-language-2024/>; <https://www.lexware.de/wissen/marketing-vertrieb/kundenansprache/>; <https://www.text-macht.de/blog/kunden-duzen-oder-siezen>; <https://taz.de/Umgang-mit-Verbraucherinnen/!6000447/> [all last accessed 9 July 2024].
- ⁴ Alexander Kolb from GfA and Thomas Paulwitz from the journal *Deutsche Sprachwelt* kindly gave us access to the unpublished datasets of both surveys.
- ⁵ The remaining percentages are “I don’t know” (15.3%) and no answer (4.1%). Not really being relevant for our purposes, we will leave the percentages of those answers out of the further discussion of the INSA survey results.
- ⁶ The group with the lowest education level in the 2016 GfK survey consists of people with the lowest level school leaving certificate, while the highest education level in that survey is represented by anyone with a high school leaving certificate or a higher level of education. The 2021 INSA survey groups people without any school leaving certificate in the lowest level of education, while university graduates form the highest education level group.

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Article

You Can Help Us! The Impact of Formal and Informal Second-Person Pronouns on Monetary Donations

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Abstract: Does it matter whether charitable organizations address potential donors with an informal or formal second-person pronoun in their appeal to donate money? This study shows that it does indeed make a difference. Using an informal pronoun of address can have a positive effect on intentions to donate money. An online experiment ($n = 220$) found that a charitable appeal to potential donors was more effective when an informal rather than a formal second-person pronoun was used in Dutch, particularly for altruistic people. We discuss the potential explanations of this effect, concentrating on the association between the informal pronoun of address and perceived closeness, and the generic versus deictic reference of informal pronouns of address in Dutch.

Keywords: charity; pronouns of address; experiment; informal language; generic reference; deictic reference

1. Introduction

Consumers across different countries are willing to help good causes and donate part of their income to charities. The Dutch, for example, donated EUR 5.6 bn. to various good causes of their choice in 2020 (Bekkers et al. 2022). However, the amount of money donated to charity has remained more or less stable in recent years, and the total amount donated to charity in 2020 was only 0.7% of the Dutch GDP (Bekkers et al. 2022). Research to date has concentrated on different factors that may contribute to increasing donations to charities (Chapman et al. 2022). Calls to donate money to a charity can highlight altruistic values, commitment, empathy with the social cause, connectedness, and the organization's true intrinsic social motives (Song and Ferguson 2023).

One stream of research on prosocial behavior concentrates on identifying the most important characteristics of people who are more willing to help (Kataria and Regner 2015; Zemack-Rugar et al. 2016). One of the traits that make people help others more is altruism, defined as the characteristic that makes people behave in a way that benefits others at their personal cost (Kerr et al. 2004). Altruists are more willing to help others (Batson and Powell 2003; Simpson and Willer 2008; van Vugt and van Lange 2006) and tend to donate more money to charities (San Martín et al. 2016). Other important characteristics of potential donors are, for instance, empathy (Lee et al. 2014; Verhaert and Van den Poel 2011), humility (LaBouff et al. 2012), or socioeconomic status, particularly, greater wealth (Bekkers et al. 2022; Schlegelmilch et al. 1997). In addition, situational factors might increase charitable donations. For instance, people who are more guilt-sensitive are more likely to buy hedonic products (vs. utilitarian products) when the purchase of the product is connected with a donation to a charity (Zemack-Rugar et al. 2016). Stress has been shown to increase pro-environmental donations, particularly among men with low pro-environmental orientation—donations helped them to restore their mood, inducing more calmness (Sollberger et al. 2016). Research has also uncovered a wide variety of charity- or cause-related characteristics that could result in higher donations, such as the perceived

reputation of the charity (Meijer 2009; Trussel and Parsons 2007; Koschate-Fischer et al. 2016), trustworthiness (Meijer 2009), compassion (Bennett and Gabriel 2003), efficiency (Gneezy et al. 2014), and effectiveness (Bodem-Schrötgens and Becker 2020).

Charities could also benefit from tailoring their communication strategies toward specific groups of people more interested in helping (Chapman et al. 2022), but the research on the usage of specific linguistic strategies in designing charitable solicitations has so far been scant. Pronoun use is one way in which nonprofit organizations position themselves and their donors in an effort to gain support (Lentz et al. 2021). Macrae (2015, p. 105) noted that, since the last decade, British charity fundraising appeals have been increasingly dominated by second-person address: “Where there used to be a declarative, third person summary of the hardship of a representative sufferer, emboldened and colourful, next to an image of that sufferer, now an interrogative, directly addressed to the reader, voices the appeal for donation.” Lentz et al. (2021) analyzed pronoun use on the home and donor pages of 100 nonprofit organizations. Second-person pronouns were by far the most frequently used pronouns (*Your gift to Boston Children’s Hospital helps treat the whole child*), including implicit second person used in imperatives (*Give monthly to help protect elephants*). They were followed by first-person plural exclusive pronouns (*We are proud to serve a broad and diverse patient population*). In the examples throughout this article, we have bolded the relevant pronouns.

Yilmaz and Blackburn (2022) investigated the impact of gain and loss frames in charitable appeals (Das et al. 2008; Erlandsson et al. 2018) in connection with the usage of first-person plural pronouns such as *we* or *our* (*Our mission is to provide emotional and financial support*) versus second-person pronouns such as *you* or *your* (*With your donations, these kids will smile again*). They found that gain-framed messages led to higher intentions to donate than loss-framed messages, but that first-person plural pronouns in loss-framed messages help boost the effectiveness of donation solicitations in comparison to second-person pronouns. They argued that messages with a loss frame emphasize the negative results of non-compliance. Hence, loss-framed messages combined with second-person pronouns will cause addressees to feel guilty, which is not a pleasant feeling for most people and thus may evoke resistance, resulting in lower donation intentions.

Yilmaz and Blackburn (2022) also found that the highest intentions to donate were observed in gain-framed messages using second-person pronouns rather than first-person plural pronouns. They assumed that first-person plurals (*we*, *our*) represent inclusive and second-person pronouns (*you*, *your*) exclusive language. Hence, they claimed that first-person plural pronouns trigger a community connection, while second-person pronouns make potential donors feel like outsiders. However, the relationship between first- and second-person pronouns and the inclusivity or exclusivity of their readings is more complicated than Yilmaz and Blackburn (2022) assumed. On the one hand, second-person pronouns make people feel included rather than excluded, because they are addressed and involved in the conversation. Therefore, a second-person pronoun automatically appeals to the addressee’s involvement and feelings of empathy (de Hoop and Tarenskeen 2015). On the other hand, first-person plural pronouns in English, as well as other languages, are ambiguous between an ‘inclusive’ and ‘exclusive’ reading (Lentz et al. 2021).

Inclusive *we* refers to a group to which the speaker and the addressee belong, while exclusive *we* refers to a group to which the speaker and some other person belong, but crucially *not* the addressee (de Schepper 2013). An example of an exclusive *we* is the sentence *We also organized several fundraising and awareness campaigns for the fight against childhood cancer* from Yilmaz and Blackburn’s loss-framed message. Clearly, the *we* in that sentence does not include the addressee, who most likely had no part in organizing the campaigns. The other first-person plural pronouns Yilmaz and Blackburn (2022) used in the loss-framed message also refer exclusively, thus *not* including the addressee, e.g., *To date, with the help of our donors, we helped 500 children*. The donors are the donors of the organization Help Marathon (the *we*), but they are not the addressee’s donors. Hence, the addressee is not included in the possessive pronoun *our*. Lentz et al. (2021) only

found 328 instances of inclusive first-person plural in their corpus of websites of charitable organizations (*Let's cure childhood cancer. Together*) versus 1562 instances of exclusive first-person plural, suggesting that the first-person plural used in donation appeals is often not inclusive, *pace* Yilmaz and Blackburn (2022).

In fact, what Yilmaz and Blackburn (2022) called 'inclusive' language is an example of exclusive language and the other way around. Hence, it comes as no surprise that second-person pronouns in Yilmaz and Blackburn's (2022) study appealed to consumers more than first-person plural pronouns, and triggered the highest intentions to donate in gain-framed messages. Consumers apparently feel more addressed by second-person pronouns, because second-person pronouns are, after all, forms of address. This has a negative effect on them if the message is loss-framed, as they do not want to feel responsible for the loss, but a positive effect if the message is gain-framed, as the addressee likes to be included in the winning team.

While English only has one second-person pronoun, *viz.*, *you*, other languages make a distinction between informal and formal pronouns of address, for instance, French (*tu* vs. *vous*), German (*du* vs. *Sie*), and Netherlandic Dutch (*jij* vs. *u*). Standard Netherlandic Dutch distinguishes various informal forms of second-person pronouns. The most frequently used informal form is the unstressed second-person pronoun singular *je*, which can be used as a subject, object, or possessive pronoun (Vismans 2013). It is the reduced (unstressed) version of the unreduced 'full' second-person singular pronouns *jij* 'you [informal, singular, subject]', *jou* 'you [informal, singular, object]', and *jouw* 'your [informal, singular]'. Apart from the singular forms, there is the informal second-person plural pronoun *jullie* 'you/your [plural]', which may also be used to address a group of people who the speaker would address individually with the formal pronoun *u* 'you [formal]'. The formal pronouns of address *u* 'you [formal]' and *uw* 'your [formal]' can be used as a plural pronoun as well, but the plural use seems not very common anymore. In advertising, either the singular informal pronouns *je/jij/jou* 'you' and *jouw* 'your' are used, or the formal pronouns *u* 'you' and *uw* 'your', but not the plural form *jullie* 'you/your'.

In this article, we are interested in whether using an informal or formal pronoun of address can increase donation intention. In the preparatory phase of this study, we noted a lack of consistency in the way charities address their potential donors on their Dutch websites. While some charities use informal pronouns in requests for donations, others show a clear preference for formal pronouns of address. For example, informal pronouns were used on the website of Alzheimer Nederland, a charity that raises money for research into Alzheimer's disease:

- (1) *1 op de 5 mensen krijgt een vorm van dementie. Bij vrouwen is dit zelfs 1 op 3. Alleen door méér onderzoek kunnen we dit stoppen. Met **jouw** donatie kunnen onderzoekers de komende jaren blijven werken aan een toekomst zonder dementie. Help **je** mee voor een toekomst zonder dementie? Dat kan op veel verschillende manieren.*

'1 in 5 people will develop some form of dementia. In women, it's even 1 in 3. Only through more research can we stop this. With **your** [informal] donation, researchers can continue working towards a dementia-free future in the years to come. Will **you** [informal] help to create a future without dementia? There are many ways to do so'.

Formal pronouns were used on the website of Stichting Kinderen van de Voedselbank, a charity fighting child poverty in the Netherlands:

- (2) *Wat kunt **u** doen? Uiteraard is niet iedereen in de gelegenheid om iets beschikbaar te stellen en denkt **u**, maar wat kan ik dan doen? Ook **u** kunt heel veel voor ons betekenen. Geef deze website bekendheid, plaats overal waar **u** maar kunt linken naar deze website, gebruik socialmedia zoals, Facebook en Twitter, om deze website bekendheid te geven. Misschien kent **u** mensen die iets voor de stichting kunnen betekenen, of kunt **u** een leuke inzamelactie opzetten. Wellicht heeft **u** een kind op de basisschool, en kunt **u** onze klavertje-vier actie met de school opzetten. Voor meer informatie stuurt **u** via de contactpagina een mailtje.*

'What can **you** [formal] do? Of course, not everyone has the opportunity to donate money and **you** [formal] may be asking yourself: But what can I do? **You** [formal]

too can do a lot for us. Spread the word about this website, post a link to this website wherever **you** [formal] can, use social media such as Facebook and Twitter to make the website known. Maybe **you** [formal] know people who can do something for the foundation, or you can set up a fun fundraising campaign. Perhaps you have a child in primary school and **you** [formal] can set up our four-leaf clover campaign with the school. For more information, send an email via *the contact page*'.

Pfeiffer et al. (2023) investigated the impact of linguistic style (formal vs. informal) on donation intentions. They found that the use of a formal language style in charitable appeals resulted in higher donation intentions than an informal, colloquial style. They argued that the usage of formal language signals the greater effort the charity is exerting to support their cause. Surprisingly, no research to date has explored the impact of formal versus informal pronouns of address on donations to good causes. This is even more striking if we look at the number of countries in which such variation in addressing potential donors exists.

We contribute to the current literature by investigating whether addressing consumers in donation solicitations with either formal (Dutch *u* 'you') or informal (Dutch *je/jij* 'you') pronouns of address could boost their donation behavior. Section 2 discusses previous research on the effects of employing linguistic strategies such as the use of pronouns to increase donation intentions or appreciation for a persuasive text. Section 3 describes an experiment designed to investigate the effect of using a formal or informal pronoun in donation appeals, and Section 4 presents the results of that experiment. Section 5 discusses our findings. Section 6 presents a small follow-up experiment to investigate the distribution of generic and deictic readings of the different types of pronouns, and Section 7 concludes.

2. How to Increase Donations for Nonprofits

2.1. Linguistic Strategies

As mentioned above, Pfeiffer et al. (2023) investigated the impact of formal and informal language styles on the effectiveness of charitable appeals. They found experimental evidence that charitable appeals are more effective when a formal rather than informal language style is used. One of their studies investigated charitable appeals taken from GoFundMe, an online crowdfunding platform. For this study, they coded the language style (formal versus colloquial) of 60 campaigns. They found a significant correlation between language style and the actual amount raised by that campaign. Because the campaigns varied in more dimensions than just language style, Pfeiffer et al. (2023) conducted a second study in which they experimentally tested the influence of language style on donation intentions. The formal writing style in their manipulation included formal words, more complex sentences, and no exclamation marks (e.g., *Firefighters are working hard to contain the wildfires to allow individuals to return to their homes and livelihoods safely*). The informal writing style contained more colloquial words, short simple sentences, and exclamation marks (e.g., *Firefighters are working very hard to block off these blazes so people can return home safely!*). The results of this experiment showed that participants were more likely to indicate support for the charity when presented with an appeal in a formal rather than a colloquial style.

Pfeiffer et al. (2023) argue that formal language is more congruent in communicating serious topics, and therefore increases charitable support. Importantly, although Pfeiffer et al. (2023) found greater charitable support when formal language was used, the use of pronouns was not manipulated in their study. Clearly, based on Pfeiffer et al.'s (2023) results, we might expect that using a formal pronoun of address may increase people's intention to donate money to a good cause, compared to using an informal (colloquial) pronoun of address. It has been shown, however, that people react differently to these pronouns across various contexts. In Dutch, Jansen and Janssen (2005) explored the perception of formal and informal forms of address in functional texts, such as communication by government agencies. Their results showed that if recipients of the message are enthusiastic about its content, they become even more enthusiastic when addressed formally. Similarly, de Hoop et al. (2023) investigated the possible influence of formal versus informal forms

of address in Dutch HR communication, concentrating on both invitation and rejection emails and measuring the appreciation of the company and the recruiter. They found that the formal forms of addressing resulted in more positive outcomes. By contrast, Leung et al. (2023) showed that the usage of informal address is more beneficial for brands that are perceived as warmer, and Schoenmakers et al. (2024) showed that using an informal pronoun in the slogan of a product ad leads to a higher rating of the ad than a formal one. Schoenmakers et al. (2024) concluded that using a formal second-person pronoun in a slogan of a product ad is better avoided. These four studies were all conducted in Dutch and investigated the impact of using either the informal second-person pronoun *jij* or *je* or the formal second-person pronoun *u*. To sum up, whereas the use of the formal pronoun led to a slightly higher appreciation in government brochures (Jansen and Janssen 2005) and HR communication (de Hoop et al. 2023), the use of the informal pronoun was more appreciated in product advertisements (Leung et al. 2023; Schoenmakers et al. 2024). This raises the question whether formal or informal second-person pronouns are more effective in fundraising appeals. One construct that might help us provide an answer to this question is altruism, broadly established as an important characteristic influencing whether people are more or less likely to help others (Kerr et al. 2004).

2.2. Altruism

A large body of literature supports the notion that altruism is connected to closeness and perceived social proximity between people (Long and Krause 2017). People are for instance more likely to be altruistic toward family members rather than strangers. Correlational evidence about the connection between the social distance within groups of people and their altruistic behavior is abundant—a plethora of research findings demonstrate that people are more altruistic toward closer rather than distant relatives, and relatives rather than non-relatives (Barber 1994; Hames 1987). Experimental evidence, further ruling out potential confounds such as sexual attraction or reciprocity (Madsen et al. 2007), corroborates these suppositions.

Closeness can be implied through informal communication, for instance in the use of informal forms of address (Stephan et al. 2010). The literature demonstrates that the usage of informal language helps to reduce the perceived psychological distance between people and has further consequences for how people behave, work together, and collaborate (Kraut et al. 1990; Bleakley et al. 2022). Building on the established relationship between closeness perceptions and altruistic behavior, we may expect that using informal forms of address in charitable appeals will be valued, particularly by people high in altruism.

Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1. *Self-report altruism will moderate the relationship between the form of address and donation intentions so that:*

- (A) *People high in altruism will express higher donation intentions when addressed in an informal (vs. formal) way.*
- (B) *People low in altruism will not be affected by the form of address.*

We investigate the use of formal and informal pronouns of address through an experimental study. Because concrete use of language and abstract use of language could either match better the informal or formal forms of address, respectively, due to the perception of the psychological distance they create (Sneffjella and Kuperman 2015), we varied also the concrete or abstract presentation of the charity in our experiment to rule out this possible confound.

3. Experimental Study

3.1. Participants and Design

In total, 220 Dutch respondents (61.8% male, $M_{age} = 30.99$, $SD = 11.37$) participating in an experiment on Prolific were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions in a 2

(form of address: *u* (formal) vs. *jij* (informal) \times 2 (construal level: concrete vs. abstract) between-subjects factorial design with a measured continuous moderator of Self-Report Altruism (SRA) (Rushton et al. 1981). Our focal dependent variable was the donation intentions to the charity used in this experiment, *Trees for All*.

3.2. Procedure

The experiment started with information about a lottery through which participants had a chance to win 20 euros (Touré-Tillery and Fishbach 2017). Then, respondents were introduced to the charity *Trees for All* and exposed to one of the donation solicitation messages, in which we varied the usage of the forms of address (formal vs. informal). In each condition, a message from the charity *Trees for All* was shown asking for monetary donations. *Trees for All* is a charity that is dedicated to planting trees in the Netherlands and abroad and thereby counterbalancing carbon emissions. Their mission is to plant new forests worldwide and to restore existing forests.

Participants in the formal form of address condition saw the message in which the formal pronoun *u* was used twice. In the informal condition, we replaced the formal form of address *u* with the informal forms *jij* and *je*, as illustrated in Table 1. Furthermore, we varied across conditions the presentation of the charity so that the respondents could either help the charity to rescue the environment (abstract construal condition) or to plant trees (concrete construal condition).

Table 1. Slogans used in the experiment.

	Informal	Formal	Translation
Abstract	<i>JIJ kunt helpen het milieu te redden. Je kunt helpen door nu geld te doneren.</i>	<i>U kunt helpen het milieu te redden. U kunt helpen door nu geld te doneren.</i>	‘YOU could help rescue the environment. You can help by donating money now’.
Concrete	<i>JIJ kunt helpen bomen te planten. Je kunt helpen door nu geld te doneren.</i>	<i>U kunt helpen bomen te planten. U kunt helpen door nu geld te doneren.</i>	‘YOU could help to plant trees. You can help by donating money now’.

After the presentation of the charity, we collected our core dependent variable, intended monetary donations. Next, we also measured our moderator, of Self-Report Altruism (SRA, Rushton et al. 1981).

3.3. Moderator

We measured self-report altruism using a broadly implemented scale developed by Rushton et al. (1981). The scale consists of 20 items and is behaviorally oriented—it explores to what extent the respondents behave altruistically in their daily lives. Example items used in the scale are for instance: *I have given directions to a stranger* or *I have given money to charity* (1 = Never, 5 = Very Often, $M = 2.58$, $SD = 0.53$, $\alpha = 0.84$).

3.4. Dependent Variable

As our core dependent variable, we collected intended monetary donations. We asked participants to imagine that they won EUR 20 in the lottery and inquired how much they would be willing to donate to *Trees for All* in case this happened (Touré-Tillery and Fishbach 2017, $M = 6.71$, $SD = 5.96$).

4. Results

We started our analysis with PROCESS macro model 3 (Hayes 2018), exploring whether the effectiveness of donation solicitation depends on the pronoun of address (effect-coded, formal [−1] vs. informal [1]), the way the charity is presented (effect-coded, concrete [−1] vs. abstract [1]), and the altruism level (mean-centered; Rushton et al. 1981). None of the main effects were significant (Pronoun: $\beta = 0.72$, $t(212) = 1.82$, $p = 0.07$; Charity

Presentation: $\beta = 0.28$, $t(212) = 0.71$, $p = 0.48$; Altruism: $\beta = 1.90$, $t(212) = 2.51$, $p = 0.01$, $\eta^2 = 0.03$). The three-way interaction between the form of address, the presentation of the charity, and the altruism was not significant ($\beta = 0.61$, $t(212) = 0.40$, $p = 0.69$). The complete overview of the regression model can be found in Table 2. The presentation of the charity in either abstract or concrete terms did not affect the amount of money respondents were willing to donate to *Trees for All*. As a result, we collapsed both conditions presenting the charities either in an abstract or in a concrete way for subsequent analyses.

We ran a follow-up linear regression using PROCESS macro model 1 (Hayes 2018) to test the two-way interaction between the usage of a specific form of address (effect-coded, formal [−1] vs. informal [1]) and the altruism level (mean-centered) on monetary donations. We did not observe a main effect of the pronoun based on this analysis ($\beta = 0.69$, $t(216) = 1.78$, $p = 0.07$), but there was a main effect of altruism ($\beta = 1.99$, $t(216) = 2.72$, $p < 0.01$, $\eta^2 = 0.03$). Moreover, the analysis revealed a significant two-way interaction between the form of address and the altruism level, $\beta = 1.71$, $t(216) = 2.34$, $p = 0.02$, $\eta^2 = 0.03$ (complete overview of the regression model can be found in Table 3). In monetary terms, participants who scored 1SD above the mean altruism level in the sample ($M + 1SD = 3.11$) indicated that they are willing to donate EUR 3.21 more when addressed with informal (vs. formal) forms of address.

We probed the interaction between the form of address and the altruism level using the Johnson–Neyman technique (Spiller et al. 2013). To enhance the interpretability of the results, we used the raw scores of altruism in this analysis. One cut-off point at which the form of address significantly starts to influence donation intentions was identified. Respondents indicated that they would be willing to donate more money while being addressed with the informal form of address at a high level of altruism—2.62 ($M + 0.08SD$). At this value, the informal form of address started to exert a significant positive effect on donation intentions, $B_{JN} = 0.77$, $SE = 0.39$, $p = 0.05$. 46.36% of respondents scored higher on altruism than this cut-off value.

Figure 1 illustrates our finding that respondents high in altruism were willing to donate more money to the charity *Trees for All* after they had been addressed with an informal rather than formal form of address.

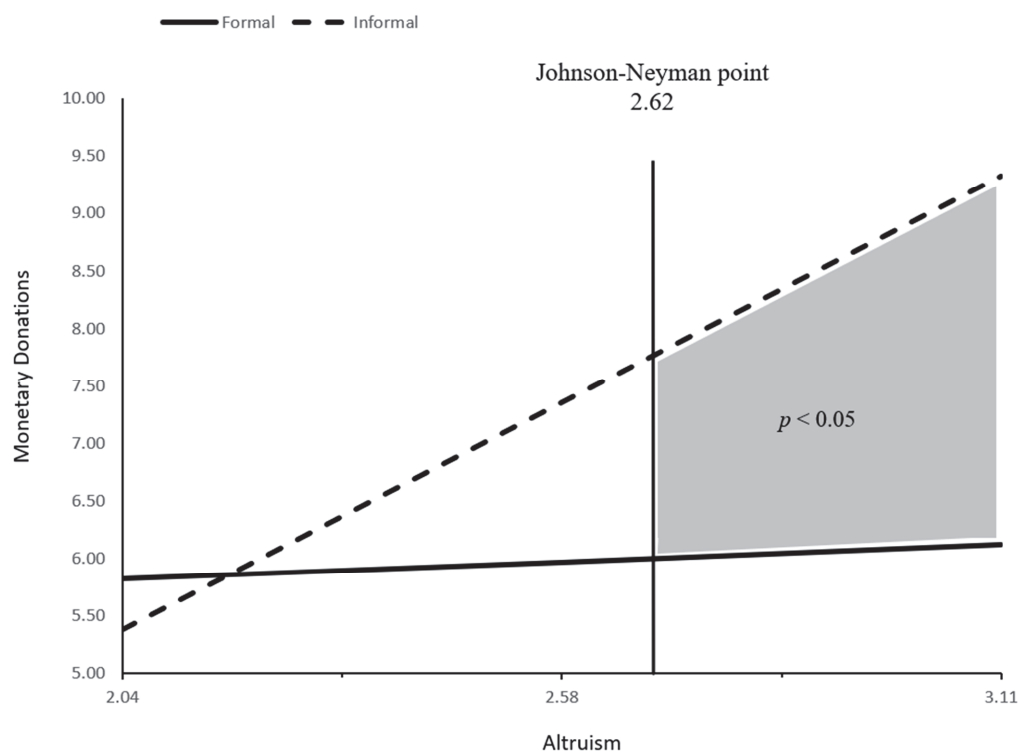


Figure 1. Interaction effect between the form of address and altruism.

Table 2. Moderation model between the pronoun, charity presentation, and altruism on monetary donation intentions.

Variables	β	t	p	95% CI
Pronoun	0.72	1.82	0.07	[−0.06, 1.49]
Charity Presentation	0.28	0.71	0.48	[−0.49, 1.06]
Altruism	1.90	2.51	0.01	[0.41, 3.39]
Pronoun × Charity Presentation	−0.43	−1.10	0.27	[−1.21, 0.34]
Pronoun × Altruism	1.80	2.39	0.02	[0.31, 3.29]
Charity Presentation × Altruism	−0.53	−0.70	0.49	[−2.02, 0.96]
Pronoun × Charity Presentation × Altruism	0.31	0.40	0.69	[−1.18, 1.80]

Table 3. Moderation model between the pronoun and altruism on monetary donation intentions.

Variables	β	t	p	95% CI
Pronoun	0.69	1.78	0.08	[−0.08, 1.46]
Altruism	1.99	2.72	0.01	[0.55, 3.44]
Pronoun × Altruism	1.71	2.34	0.02	[0.27, 3.16]

5. Discussion

The results of our study show that being addressed with an informal pronoun of address increases donation intentions compared to being addressed with a formal pronoun of address, at least among altruists. Although this is what we could have expected based on the assumption that the use of informal address may create a sense of greater closeness (cf. Stephan et al. 2010, p. 269), and is also more appreciated in product advertising (Leung et al. 2023; Schoenmakers et al. 2024), our results seem to contradict Pfeiffer et al.’s (2023) finding that a formal language style is more effective than an informal style in charitable appeals. How can we explain the fact that in the context of charitable contributions, calls for monetary donations written in a formal language style are more persuasive than in an informal language in English (Pfeiffer et al. 2023), while the use of an informal pronoun of address is more effective than the use of a formal one in Dutch? Below, we aim to provide an explanation for the difference in persuasiveness between an informal and a formal pronoun of address in this context, which, to our knowledge, has not previously been proposed in the literature.

The question is how to explain the difference we found between informal and formal pronouns of address in a slogan for the benefit of a social cause. Indeed, both pronouns are second person and thus have the power to address potential donors directly and get them involved. The English second-person pronouns in the fundraising study of Yilmaz and Blackburn (2022) are assigned generic meanings. When the second-person pronoun receives a generic reading, it does not refer (exclusively) to the addressee, but rather to people in general, or to a subset of people, which may include the speaker as well as the addressee (van der Auwera et al. 2012; de Hoop and Tarenskeen 2015).

Orvell et al. (2020) in a series of rating studies found that the generic use of the English second-person pronoun *you* causally promotes resonance. Statements containing generic *you* such as *Sometimes, you have to take a step back before you can take a step forward* resonated more with participants than statements with a first-person pronoun *Sometimes, I have to take a step back before I can take a step forward*, but also more than generic statements about people in general, such as *Sometimes, people have to take a step back before they can take a step forward*. These findings support the idea that generic *you* is effective not only because it generalizes over people, but also because it simultaneously addresses the reader. The fact that generically used second-person pronouns reinforce resonance between people and ideas (Orvell et al. 2020) is probably the reason for their widespread use in various contexts, such as advertisements (Christopher 2012), educational texts (Sangers et al. 2022), and charity fundraising (Macrae 2015). Generalizations are known to have an inclusive effect in the sense that interlocutors use them to emphasize their mutual agreement (Scheibman

2007). de Hoop and Tarenskeen (2015) assume that addressees will feel directly addressed by a second-person pronoun, even if it is clear that the second-person pronoun does not specifically, or *deictically* refer to them, as in *Today, Help Marathon asks for **your** help again* (example taken from the stimulus material of Yilmaz and Blackburn 2022, boldface is ours). In declarative sentences such as *You only live once*, the generic reading including the addressee is preferred over the deictic reading that exclusively refers to the addressee (van der Auwera et al. 2012; de Hoop and Tarenskeen 2015).

The question is whether in languages that do have formal and informal second-person pronouns, they can both refer deictically as well as generically. Helmbrecht (2015) notes that in German, the informal second-person pronoun *du* ‘you’ in (3a) as well as the formal pronoun *Sie* ‘you’ in (3b) can have a generic reading. However, Helmbrecht (2015, p. 178) notes that the “distinction between a familiar and a more distant polite relationship is preserved” in that in (3a) “the hearer/addressee has most likely a close relationship to the speaker”, while in (3b) “there is most likely a distant relationship between speaker and hearer”.

- (3) a. *Leckeren Käse kannst **du** in dem Laden da nicht finden.*
 - b. *Leckeren Käse können **Sie** in dem Laden da nicht finden.*
- ‘You can’t find delicious cheese in that grocery store’.

Salvador et al. (2022) showed that, apart from the distinct generic person marker *se*, speakers of Spanish use the informal pronoun *tú* ‘you’ generically to convey norms, but not the formal pronoun *usted* ‘you’. Because the informal pronoun is used when the speaker and addressee are on the same level, the preferred use of informal *you* in Spanish suggests that its generic use “may be serving a more equalizing rather than distancing function” (Salvador et al. 2022, p. 6).

If indeed informal pronouns of address that are used generically maintain their function to express closeness, unlike formal pronouns of address, our findings provide support for the hypothesis put forward in Section 2 that closeness perceptions in relation to altruistic behavior lead to more favorable responses when informal pronouns of address are used in charitable appeals compared to formal pronouns of address.

In Dutch, the two types of pronouns of address, the informal and formal one, differ in how frequently they obtain generic and deictic readings. In a study of spoken Dutch, de Hoop and Tarenskeen (2015) found that 66% of the informal second-person pronouns functioning as the subject of a declarative sentence receives a generic reading, versus 34% a deictic reading. Indeed, *Je leeft maar één keer* ‘You [informal] only live once’ straightforwardly has a generic reading, just like its English translation. However, when we replace the informal pronoun by the formal pronoun, *U leeft maar één keer* ‘You [formal] only live once’, the deictic reading arises: ‘You [pointing to a specific addressee] only live once’. de Hoop and Hogeweg (2014) found that the formal second-person pronoun, unlike the informal one, almost never received a generic reading in the literary work they studied.

In the advertisement that we used in our experiment, the second sentence contains the request for money. The informal pronoun *je* in *Je kunt helpen door nu geld te doneren* ‘You [informal] can help by donating money now’ gives rise to a generic reading (the information applies to anybody), while the formal pronoun *u* in *U kunt helpen door nu geld te doneren* ‘You [formal] can help by donating money now’ rather seems to have a deictic reading. Thereby, the latter statement is interpreted as a directive, urging the addressee to act. Directives often contribute to the face-threatening force of an utterance (de Hoop et al. 2016), and thus the use of a formal pronoun of address can be perceived as a negative politeness strategy, in recognition of the addressee’s need for distance and the absence of identity overlap (Vismans 2013, p. 165). The use of a clear directive instead of a generic statement may result in the addressee’s resistance, leading to lower intentions to donate. Zemack-Rugar et al. (2017) found that (committed) consumers responded more negatively to a directive (*Buy now!*) than to a non-directive ad (*Now is a good time to buy!*), even when the directive ad was phrased more politely by adding *please* (*Please buy now!*). This shows that rather

than the use of a polite or formal pronoun, it may be the use of a directive, although it is a very common marketing practice, that consumers respond more negatively to.

While a generalization evokes a sense of connectedness, a directive appeals to the consumer to perform a particular action that serves the sender's interest. Not surprisingly, such a directive can evoke resistance as opposed to a generic statement. We suspect that in the generic context of charitable appeals, the difference in default reading between the two pronouns (generic for the informal pronoun *je*, but deictic for the formal pronoun *u*) may explain the difference in their effects, rather than their being informal or formal per se. However, as can be seen in Table 1 above, the informal slogan contained not only the informal pronoun *je*, which is easily given a generic reading, but also the strong (unreduced) second-person pronoun *jij*, which seems more likely to receive a deictic reading (Gruber 2017; de Hoop and Hogeweg 2014). To test whether the sentences in the experiment's slogans were more likely to receive a generic or a deictic interpretation, the next section reports on a small follow-up experiment we conducted in which the generic or deictic interpretation of the three types of second-person pronouns *je*, *jij*, and *u* was explicitly questioned (cf. Orvell et al. 2020).

6. Follow-Up Experiment on Deictic and Generic Readings of Dutch Address Pronouns

To find out whether the three second-person pronouns used in the main experiment obtain a generic or a deictic reading, a small online experiment was conducted. A total of 122 respondents, all first speakers of Dutch ranging in age from 19 to 77 ($M = 42$) completed one of three versions of an online questionnaire, administered through Qualtrics. After they had received general information, had given consent and confirmed they were 16 years or older and first speakers of Dutch, they were presented with 9 stimuli (3 subsets of 3 sentences each) and 9 fillers in a randomized order. For each sentence, participants had to answer the question 'Which is most likely?' with two response options, corresponding to a deictic and a generic reading, respectively: 1. 'The statement refers to one specific person'; 2. 'The statement refers to (a group of) people in general'. The three subsets of stimuli contained the three types of second-person pronouns, *je*, *jij*, and *u*. The 9 fillers were the same for each version and contained first- and third-person pronouns (2x *ik* 'I', 2x *hij* 'he', 2x *zij* 'she', 3x *men* 'one'). The pronouns were used as grammatical subject in all 18 sentences. The experimental design of the stimuli is given in Table 4.

Table 4. Experimental design with the numbers of stimuli in the three versions. Each subset contained three items.

Stimuli	Version 1	Version 2	Version 3
Subset 1	<i>jij</i>	<i>u</i>	<i>je</i>
Subset 2	<i>u</i>	<i>je</i>	<i>jij</i>
Subset 3	<i>je</i>	<i>jij</i>	<i>u</i>

One subset contained the three sentences used in the main experiment (see Table 1 above). The eighteen sentences were randomized for each participant, but care was taken that the three sentences from the main experiment were not presented as the first or last question, nor were they presented adjacent to each other. Each participant thus read the three experimental sentences with either *jij*, *je*, or *u*, and two subsets of three sentences each with the other two pronouns. All stimuli are listed in Table 5 below.

Because in the main experiment both *jij* and *je* were used in the informal condition, it is not possible to determine whether the difference found between the formal and informal condition in the main experiment is indeed due to the level of formality, or whether it may be influenced by a difference between deictic and generic readings of the different types of pronouns. The results of the current experiment may shed some light on this. We expected that all three types of second-person pronouns could receive a generic reading, but only for the informal pronoun *je* would this be the most likely reading, whereas for the pronouns *jij* and *u*, the deictic reading (exclusively referring to the addressee) would be the most likely.

However, the results show a different pattern. Table 5 shows the numbers of deictic versus generic responses for the nine stimuli. The sentences in the table are in ascending order from most deictic to most generic.

Table 5. Deictic/generic readings of experimental items.

Stimuli	Numbers Deictic/Generic Reading (% Generic Reading)			Deictic: Generic
	<i>JE</i>	<i>JIJ</i>	<i>U</i>	
(1) <i>Ben(t) je/jij/u binnenkort jarig?</i> 'Are you having a birthday soon?'	34/8 (19%)	38/2 (5%)	28/12 (30%)	3:0
(2) <i>Je/jij/u moet een helm op.</i> 'You have to wear a helmet'.	16/24 (60%)	39/1 (3%)	16/26 (62%)	1:2
(3) <i>Soms moet je/jij/u een stapje terug doen.</i> 'Sometimes you have to take a step back'.	5/35 (88%)	35/4 (10%)	17/25 (60%)	1:2
(4) <i>Je/jij/u mag hier niet roken.</i> 'You are not allowed to smoke here'.	4/38 (90%)	33/7 (18%)	12/27 (69%)	1:2
(5) <i>Je/jij/u leeft maar één keer.</i> 'You only live once'.	4/36 (90%)	32/8 (20%)	17/25 (60%)	1:2
(6) <i>Je/jij/u bent van harte welkom in onze winkel.</i> 'You are most welcome to visit our store'.	8/34 (81%)	23/17 (43%)	1/39 (98%)	1:2
(7) <i>Je/jij/u kunt helpen bomen te planten.</i> 'You could help to plant trees'.	4/36 (90%)	14/28 (67%)	10/30 (75%)	0:3
(8) <i>Je/jij/u kunt helpen het milieu te redden.</i> 'You could help rescue the environment'.	3/37 (93%)	14/28 (67%)	9/31 (78%)	0:3
(9) <i>Je/jij/u kunt helpen door nu geld te doneren.</i> 'You can help by donating money now'.	3/37 (93%)	9/33 (79%)	7/33 (83%)	0:3

While some of the filler sentences received a 100% score on either the deictic reading (e.g., *Hij moet nu wel kiezen* 'He has to choose now') or the generic reading (e.g., *Men moet beter naar elkaar luisteren* 'People need to listen to each other better'), there was more variation in the experimental stimuli, as shown in Table 5 above. Sentence (1) ('Are you having a birthday soon?') was the only item that was most likely to have a deictic reading for all three types of second-person pronouns. Notably, the three sentences (7)–(9) used in the main experiment ('You could help to plant trees', 'You could help rescue the environment', 'You can help by donating money now') were most likely to have a generic reading for all three types of pronouns. Also, while the informal pronoun *je* was more likely to have a generic reading than a deictic reading in all sentences except for (1), the same holds for the formal pronoun *u*, which we had not expected. The informal pronoun *jij* was overall more likely to have a deictic reading than a generic reading, namely, in six out of nine sentences. Only in the three sentences used in the main experiment, *jij* was more likely to have a generic reading than a deictic reading, just like the other two pronouns. Therefore, we reject the hypothesis that *je* was interpreted generically in the main experiment, while *u* and *jij* were interpreted more deictically. The reason that the formal pronoun *u* has a generic reading rather than a deictic reading might be due to the fact that *u* can also be used for plural reference, which is not the case for *jij* (Aalberse and Meyer). Apparently, however, a context calling on the addressee to donate money to plant trees or save the environment is enough to evoke a generic reading of *jij* as well. Based on this, we conclude that it is indeed the use of informal rather than formal pronouns of address that give rise to higher donation intention among altruistic participants.

7. Conclusions

The main finding of our study is that an appeal to potential donors to donate money to an existing charity (Trees for All) is more effective when informal rather than formal second-person pronouns are used in Dutch, particularly for altruistic people. Our results contribute to the literature that aligns nonprofit organizations' communications with donor characteristics to increase their helping behavior (Kolhede and Gomez-Arias 2022; Lv and Huang 2024). Generic uses of second-person pronouns are known to promote resonance between people and ideas (Orvell et al. 2020). The Dutch informal second-person pronoun *je* commonly has such a generic meaning (de Hoop and Tarenskeen 2015; de Hoop and Hogeweg 2014), whereas this is less common for the informal second-person pronoun *jij* and the formal second-person pronoun *u*. Nonprofit organizations could strategically use the common informal second-person pronoun *je* in Dutch, which by default has a generic reading, to motivate altruistic consumers to donate money without making them feel too personally addressed. However, the small experiment reported in Section 6 showed that within the context of charities and donations, the formal pronoun *u* and even the informal pronoun *jij* also give rise to a generic reading. We thus conclude that our main finding should be attributed to the difference in formality between *je/jij* and *u* and not to a difference between generic and deictic reference.

Our results demonstrate that when charities design their communication strategies to focus primarily on people with higher altruism, it would be more beneficial to consistently use informal forms of address. The question then arises: how can charities be sure that their intended donors are altruistic at any given time? One possible piece of advice is to at least use informal forms of address in all communications with people who have donated significantly in the past. For example, the Red Cross in the Netherlands regularly distributes mailings to people who have donated to this charity before, outlining in those messages the current needs of the organization and its beneficiaries. Based on our findings, we would recommend using informal forms of address in such forms of communication.

Our article presents findings of one experimental study conducted in the Netherlands. More research on the impact of different forms of address on charitable donations in other languages is desirable. The literature shows that the impact of the usage of linguistic cues such as second-person pronouns on people's attitudes can vary not only by language, but also by culture and context (House and Kádár 2020; Truan 2022; Yu et al. 2017; de Hoop et al. 2023; Schoenmakers et al. 2024; Razzaq et al. 2024; Rosseel et al. 2024). Therefore, it would be interesting to investigate whether the results we presented also apply to other languages or cultures. Moreover, field experiments with real behavioral data could further replicate our results in real-life settings. Last, but not least, our findings demonstrate linguistic strategies that are successful in influencing the behavior of people with higher altruism. We believe that unraveling communication strategies that could be more effective for people with lower altruism is another fruitful avenue for future research.

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When Your Pronominal Marking Matters during a Pandemic: Shawi Pronominals and COVID-19 Interventions

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Abstract: In this communication, I focus on Shawi forms of address used in Peruvian State posters during the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic took a heavy toll on the Peruvian Indigenous population. A recent study showed that Indigenous people had 3.18 times the risk of infection and 0.4 times the mortality risk of the general population in Peru. The Shawi have not been included among the most heavily affected. A preliminary descriptive and critical account of Peruvian State posters whereby languages such as Shawi and other Peruvian Indigenous languages (Awajun, Ashaninka, different varieties of Quechua, Shipibo, etc.) have been used to prevent the spread of COVID-19 is provided. Shawi seems to be the only language of the sample where information has been framed using first-person inclusive forms. This appears to have led to enhanced communal engagement in the suggested health-related practices. Additionally, opinions on the issue from local stakeholders are briefly discussed. While the results are derived solely from preliminary observations, my findings could serve as a basis for enhancing health communication strategies in other Indigenous contexts, utilizing linguistically informed intercultural approaches.

Keywords: forms of address; Shawi; COVID-19 interventions; Amazonian languages; intercultural communication

1. Introduction

The Indigenous Holocaust (Smith 2017) has been one of the greatest catastrophes in human history. Smith (2017) estimates that over 175 million Indigenous people have been lost between 1492 and the beginning of the twentieth century. The numbers only worsen when including the 20th century and the last couple of decades. Although the Great Invasion and the colonizing processes thereafter were the trigger of this catastrophe, several post-invasion events, i.e., imported epidemics and unfavourable post-colonial social stratification, continue to affect the remaining Indigenous population until today.

When the COVID-19 pandemic was declared on 11 March 2020, one of the primary concerns in several South American countries was the protection of Indigenous populations. For Indigenous people, this was just one of the many foreign pathogens that outsiders had introduced into their ancestral homelands. Indigenous associations and leaders immediately raised concern and put into practice a diverse set of strategies that had been useful in past events of similar typology. The studies in Espinosa and Fabiano (2022b), for instance, describe strategies followed by the Shipibo (Favaron and Bensho 2021), the Ticuna (del Águila Villacorta et al. 2022), the Shawi (Castro 2022), etc., during the COVID-19 pandemic. Unfortunately, the pandemic took a heavy toll on several Indigenous populations (see, for example, *Muere por coronavirus el cacique Aritana Yawalapiti, defensor de la Amazonía* 2020).¹

The COVID-19 pandemic was probably one of the most challenging social phenomena in the era of globalisation. Informing citizens from all over the world, who did not necessarily share the same culture or language, about social distancing and general prevention measures became a priority. Previous research highlighted the importance of presentation

styles when informing people (Sunstein and Thaler 2003, p. 1182). The way ideas are framed can thus alter people's behaviour in predictable ways without properly modifying underlying intentions or incentives (Dorison et al. 2022; Sunstein and Thaler 2003). For instance, in a recent macro-survey with a sample of over 89 countries, it has been observed that messages that promoted social distancing rooted in choice promotion and agency were more effective as regards long-term engagement with social distancing than forceful shaming messages (Psychological Science Accelerator Self-Determination Theory Collaboration 2022). Although the sample was of considerable size, little to nothing has been said about these same dynamics outside the realm of Western, European, Industrialised, Rich, and Democratic (WEIRD) societies. In 2020, the Peruvian State launched a campaign to inform Indigenous citizens about the spread of the coronavirus disease and to foster social distancing, isolation, and preventive measures. The campaign deployed posters (see Figure 1) and radio-streamed messages (Ministerio de Cultura traduce información y mensajes preventivos sobre el COVID-19 en 21 lenguas originarias y variantes 2020). The Spanish version of the poster was translated into 24 Indigenous languages, which include Harakbut, Shawi, Ticuna, Yanetsha, Matsigenka, Uruarina, Awajún, Aimara, Murui-Muinane, Quechua (Cajamarca, Ancash, Cuzco-Collao, Chanka, Huanca, and Napo), Wampis, Asheninka, Ashaninka, Yagua, Shipibo-Konibo, Kakataibo, Jaqaru, Yine, and Ocaina.



Figure 1. ©Peruvian Ministry of Health. Poster used as a basis for translations into Peruvian Indigenous languages. The title and the main text are in Spanish and literally mean: “Protect yourself against the coronavirus. Steps for a correct hand-wash. That is how you prevent respiratory, diarrheic, and other types of diseases”. All materials can be found and downloaded following this link: <https://www.gob.pe/institucion/cultura/campa%C3%B1as/872-acciones-contra-el-coronavirus-lenguas-originarias> (last accessed on 18 January 2024).

Even though the good intentions behind the campaign cannot be denied, the COVID-19 pandemic still took a heavy toll on the Peruvian Indigenous population. A recent study showed that Indigenous people had 3.18 times the risk of infection and 0.4 times the mortality risk of the general population in Peru (Soto-Cabezas et al. 2022). The Indigenous Shawi have not been included among the most heavily affected. According to local *sabios* (wise men), such as Elio Yumi Pizango, Segundo Pinedo Escobedo, and the *Achinapi* (teacher) Rafael Chanchari Pizuri (p.c.), the Shawi were not affected by the coronavirus pandemic. The numbers presented in the local studies, however, must be carefully re-examined, as Indigenous populations tend not to appear in the official counting, either due to an overflow of patients or simple mistrust in Western medicine (which means avoiding hospitals and Western physicians by all means) (see Espinosa and Fabiano 2022a).

In this short communication, my focus is on the posters distributed by the Peruvian State in 24 Indigenous languages, with particular attention to the Shawi version. Shawi appears to be the only language of the sample where information has been presented using first-person inclusive forms. Based on exchanges with local *sabios*, I suggest that this could have triggered improved engagement in the suggested practices, thus, potentially, contributing to the lesser impact in the spread of the virus in Shawi communities. In Section 2, I provide a sketch of the contemporary Shawi community, as well as their language, focusing on its clusivity system (Barraza de García 2005) and the use of inclusive forms when describing important Shawi institutions. Section 3 provides an analysis of some of the languages of the poster sample (Shawi, Awajún, Quechua varieties, Aymara, Jaqaru, and Shipibo-Konibo)², thus providing a direct comparison with the Shawi variant. Section 4 discusses the findings in light of recent discussions (January 2024) with local stakeholders in the city of San Lorenzo del Datem del Marañón and the town of Balsapuerto in Alto Amazonas. Section 5 outlines the preliminary conclusions.

2. The Shawi, Their Language, and Its Pronouns

Shawi stands as the sole remaining vital language within the Kawapangan language family. Its sister language, Miquira, may have become “extinct” in the early twentieth century, while another sister language, Shiwilu, is still spoken by a few dozen elders in the towns of Jeberos, Jeberillos, and San Gabriel de Varadero, located in Alto Amazonas, Peru. Shawi remains actively used by individuals of all ages, with many being coordinated bilinguals in Spanish. According to State sources, the Shawi population is said to surpass 21,000 individuals (Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática 2009) and keeps growing. According to the independent and collaborative Native newspaper *Salud con Lupa*, the total Shawi population amounts to 31,284 individuals (*Salud con Lupa* 2021). Today, Shawi is spoken in the triangle formed by the Marañón River, the Huallaga River, and the Escalera Mountain Range (see the Map on Figure 2). As is the case with many Amazonian groups, communities are steadily growing in number and new communities are being founded close to cities outside this triangle. The farthest communities can be found on the margins of the Morona River and close to the city of Iquitos (the capital of Loreto), over 400 km away.

The Shawi belong to the Bajo Huallaga cultural complex, which encompasses different ethnic groups such as the Chamicuro (Chamekolo), Muniche, Lamista, Shiwilu, and Kukama-Kukamiria. These groups have in common the fact that they were *reducidos*, lit. ‘reduced’, in the times of the Jesuit Missions, before the independence of Peru. For Gow (2009), these Indigenous groups might have reemerged out of a complex social phenomenon which implies not just impending Christianisation, but also the emergence of a new type of social stratification which differentiates them, i.e., *indios cristianos* ‘Christian Indians’, from non-Christianised Indians, dubbed *kema* in Shawi (mostly used to refer to the Jivaroan Awajún) (q.v. Gow 2009). This also contributed to the emergence of an identity hoisted in missionary centres, which modern communities stem from, and which heavily relied on communitarian practices which included the even distribution of power, food, community chores, etc. The disappearance of smaller languages such as the Parapuro or Tabaloso (Teruel n.d.) and the emergence of larger lingua francas fostered by catechism practices such

as San Martín Quechua, Shawi (Rojas-Berscia 2021), or Shiwilu (see Alexander-Bakkerus 2013 for the latter) are also a result of this phenomenon.

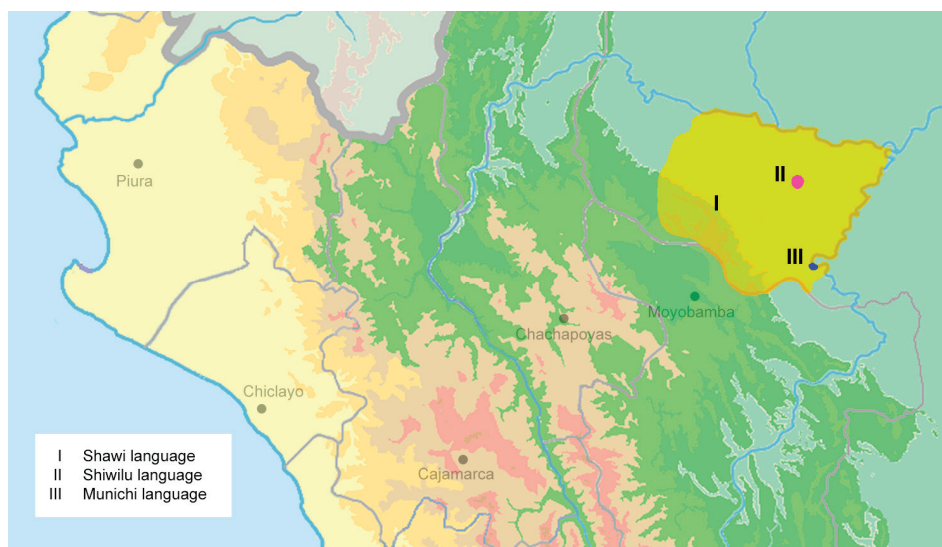


Figure 2. The Shawi speaking area within Peru. Within the area, two other languages are spoken, namely, Shiwilu, also known as Jebero, and Munich, a language isolate. Although Munich is not a Kawapanan language, it has undergone prolonged contact dynamics with Kawapanan languages.

In the case of Shawi, communitarian practices are also linguistically reflected. As is the case in many languages of the region, such as Quechuan and Aymaran (Cerrón-Palomino 2008), Shawi displays an inclusive vs. exclusive distinction in person marking strategies. This is reflected in the pronominal system of the language (Rojas-Berscia 2021, p. 91). See Table 1.

Table 1. Shawi free pronoun system.

	Minimal	Augmented
1st person exclusive	<i>ka</i> ‘only I’	<i>kiya</i> ‘we but not you’
1st person inclusive	<i>kanpu</i> ‘you and I’	<i>kanpua</i> ‘all of us’
2nd person	<i>kema</i> ‘you’	<i>kampita</i> ‘you (pl.)’
3rd person	<i>ina</i> ‘he, she, it’	<i>inapita</i> ‘they’

Free pronouns have bound counterparts as subject, object, and recipient suffixes for all moods, as well as possessor suffixes and markers for nominal predication (Rojas-Berscia 2021, pp. 74–84). This is summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Shawi bound pronouns.

	Subject bound pronouns								Object and Nominal Predication bound pronouns		Possession	
	Realis	Irrealis	Subjunctive		Dubitative							
	Min.	Aug.	Min.	Aug.	Min.	Aug.	Min.	Aug.	Min.	Aug.	Min.	Aug.
1 excl.	-awe	-ai	-ø	-i	-i	-i	-ku	-kui	-ku	-kui	-we	-wei
1 incl.	-e’	-ewa’	-ø	-wa’	-a	-awa’	-npu	-npua’	-npu	-npua’	-npu	-npua’
2	-an	-ama’	-(a)n	-ma’	-eke	-uku	-ken/-nke	-kenma’/nkema’	-ken/-nke	-kenma’/nkema’	-n	-ma’
3	-in	-pi/ina	-(i)n	-na	-(i)n	-ina	-ø	-(p)i	-ø	-ø	-in/-n	-ina’/-na’

Beyond structural facts, Shawi speakers tend to pervasively use inclusive/exclusive forms in daily speech. This seems to work as a sociolinguistic index (q.v. Agha 2005; Silver-

stein 2003) of community belonging. This is reflected in the naming of Shawi institutions, which include first-person inclusive pronouns: *kanpunan* (lit. our (yours and mine, not theirs) language), *kanpupiyapi* ‘Shawi people’ (lit. our (yours and mine, not theirs) people), **Kanpuwanama*’ (lit. our lord) ‘Cumpanamá (God) (Rojas-Berscia and Ghavami-Dicker 2015). In addition, if two Shawi men or women have a conversation, inclusive forms abound. If there is a *mestizo* (lit. ‘mixed-race’, used for Spanish descendants and not considered pejorative) or a *kema* (Awajún [Jivaroan]), exclusive forms abound. See the exchange below. It was extracted from a conversation between one of our main consultants, Catalino Pizango, and his nephew. They discuss the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic (all inclusive forms are marked in bold):

Nephew: *Irakaware kanpuaru ihse, ihse ya’urewake, ina kaniu, nunca, nunca. Kanpua na’tanterewa ma’nin kaniu, nimara, kanpu ihse ya’werewasu. Sha’pikaniu, nitutereewa ihse nisha, a’na kaniu. Tuhpinan, u’wairu nitutereewa nisha, nisha kaniu nitutereewa, pero ihse kaniu ya’urinsu. Ku kanpua nitutereewa na’sha pi’pirarin kanpuantawe pi’pirinsu ku nitutereewa. Ihse ya’urewasu, mamapeirusa, tatama’shurusa, ma’shurusa, pa’yanpita, hasta kanpuanta pa’yanewa. Nahpurinpinin inamare, kemasu unpuinta. Mahsu, este, ihse kaniu pihpirarin unpuinta kankantera, ¿pa’yanan, ku pa’yananun?*

“Since well before, where we live, we never knew about that disease. Who knows what it might be. Where we live, we know about yellow fever, we know about yellow fever, another disease. We only know about bronchitis, we know about different diseases, but we do not know anything about this disease. Here, where we live, grandpas and grandmas were scared. Even we got scared, it is true. But you, regarding this disease, how do you feel? Were you scared?”

Catalino: *Tewenchachin, kanpuwasu, piyapinpua, shawinpua³, ihse ihse ninewasu wa’yanusa takirawachina, se’terewa.*

“It’s true. We, given that we are people, that we are Shawi. When the mestizo died, we were sad.”

Nephew: *Tewechachin, nuhten, ahpi.*

“That’s true, uncle.”

Catalino: *Kanpuanta tenewa. Kanpuasu ta’kiarewa.*

“We also said: “We will disappear””.

Nephew: *Ku ninanuke pa’newa nihtun, kanpuaru natanterewa ninanuke na’kun wa’yanusa chiminawi.*

“We did not go to the city. We know that many mestizos are dying in the city”.

The conversation was recorded in late 2021, in the community of Canoapuerto. Canoapuerto is a piedmont community that can only be reached by foot (~1 h) or, more recently, by motorcar (~15 min) from the town of Balsapuerto, if the weather allows.

As regards the use of these forms, even when resorting to the local variety of Spanish, the use of first-person plural inclusive/exclusive forms emerges. For example, it is very frequent to hear phrases such as *Nosotros shawi* ‘Us Shawi’ or *Nosotros porque somos shawi* ‘Us, because we are Shawi’, in interactions between Shawi community dwellers and *mestizos*. In these cases, the Shawi resort to Spanish periphrases to express what in Shawi would otherwise be straightforwardly conveyed with exclusive pronominal marking, namely, *kiya*, as a free pronoun, or *-kui* as a bound form. Local *mestizos* also comment on this style, emphasising on how “redundant” it sounds. Beyond the mere anecdotal effect of its use, this phenomenon could be considered a discursive tradition in Shawi textual elaboration.

3. COVID-19 among Indigenous Peruvians and Forms of Address in Peruvian State Posters

In 2020, the Peruvian State, through its Ministries of Culture and Health, launched a campaign to prevent the spread of COVID-19 among Indigenous communities. The

campaign consisted of translating a poster and radio messages that would reach most Indigenous communities. The messages, in the end, were only translated into 24 different languages (Acciones Contra el Coronavirus | Lenguas Originarias 2021). After engaging in informal discussions with linguists Yolanda Payano Iturrizaga, who specializes in Jaqaru translation, and Leo Almonacid Leya, an expert in Ashaninka translation, it became evident that translators are typically provided with a Spanish model to translate into Indigenous languages when assigned such tasks. However, they noted a lack of further information provided beyond this initial instruction.

According to the *Sistema de Notificación de la Vigilancia Epidemiológica*, CDC (lit. Notification System of Epidemiologic Vigilance), by September 2021, the Indigenous group with the largest number of cases was the Awajún (Jivaroan), with 7490 cases⁴, followed by the Kichwa, with 3390 cases, the Ashaninka, with 2028 cases, and the Shipibo Konibo, with 1252 cases. The Shawi only registered 352 cases (*Salud con Lupa* 2021). As regards deaths by ethnic group, the Awajún were the most affected with 46 losses, followed by the Ashaninka (21), the Kichwa (18), and the Achuar (7). Although the number of human losses seems to be low, the lack of access to healthcare services must be considered. According to *Salud con Lupa*, less than 1% of the 1690 healthcare establishments in Indigenous communities have a hospitalisation facility. The situation only worsens when knowing that the Peruvian State itself promoted the displacement and non-compliance of distance measures among Indigenous populations, when distributing a monetary voucher for financial help in times of crisis that the Indigenous population could only have access to if travelling to major towns or cities (Espinosa and Fabiano 2022a, 2022b). Moreover, the campaign launched by the Peruvian State mostly relied on written language. The radio alternative, in that regard, seemed to have been a better solution given that literacy in Spanish/Indigenous language is very low among Indigenous populations in Peru. However, based on my own experience in the field, radio is not necessarily the preferred means of communication in contemporary Indigenous communities either. Not everybody has access to a radio signal receiver. The use of mobile phones and social media is increasingly popular. This seems to have allowed the written posters to be distributed faster. They could have been read aloud by local authorities, such as *apus* (in the Bajo Huallaga) or *líderes* (in the *Selva Central*). Despite this overall dire situation, the Shawi seem not to have been heavily affected during the pandemic.

The Peruvian State posters analysed here include Andean languages such as Quechua, Aymara, and Jaqaru; Central Amazonian languages such as Shipibo (Panoan) and Ashaninka (Arawak); and Bajo Huallaga languages such as Shawi and Awajún (Jivaroan). These languages were chosen based on two criteria: (1) the existence of strong communitarian traditions among their speakers, and (2) access to linguistic knowledge from consultants. In this regard, languages such as Murui-Muinane or Kakataibo were not considered in this preliminary discussion.

In the case of Quechuan varieties such as Chanka, the second person imperative is used: *Harkaku-y*, lit. protect-IMP.2. The same holds for *qati-y*, follow-IMP.2, and *qayaymu-y*, call-IMP.2 (see Figure 3).

In the case of Napo Kichwa, an Amazonian variety, the same strategy is used. The second person imperative is used for the titles, e.g., *washa-y*, protect-IMP.2, *kati-y*, follow-IMP.2, and *kaya-y*, call-IMP.2. Even in the translation of the famous hashtag #yomequedoencasa, lit. 'I stay home', the imperative has been used, *kipari-y*, stay-IMP.2 (see Figure 4), thus meaning 'stay home!'.

As regards Huanca Quechua, a central Quechuan variety, the pattern holds. The strategy was to translate the Spanish original literally, e.g., *amachaku-y*, protect-IMP.2, *lula-y*, do-IMP.2, and *aya-y*, call-IMP.2 (see Figure 5).



Figure 3. ©Peruvian Ministry of Health. General poster translated into Chanka Quechua.



Figure 4. ©Peruvian Ministry of Health. General poster translated into Napo Kichwa.



Figure 5. ©Peruvian Ministry of Health. General poster translated into Huanca Quechua.

This translation strategy is followed in all remaining varieties of Quechua from the campaign, i.e., Cajamarca Quechua, Ancash Quechua, and Cuzco-Collao Quechua.

In the case of Central Amazonian languages, such as Shipibo-Konibo and Ashaninka, the pattern seems to be the same. In Shipibo, for example, the (second person) imperative *-we* (Faust 1973, p. 11) has been used, e.g., *koirame-we*, take.care-IMP.2, *chiban-we*, follow-IMP.2, *bane-we*, return-IMP.2, and *kena-we*, call-IMP.2 (see Figure 6).



Figure 6. ©Peruvian Ministry of Health. General poster translated into Shipibo-Konibo.

In Ashaninka, the leave-taking formula *pamabentakotyaro*, meaning “take care” (Mihas 2015, p. 149), is used (see Figure 7). Given that Ashaninka does not have a specific morphological means of marking canonical second-person imperatives (Mihas 2015, p. 499) and intonation patterns (preferred means for the conveyance of commands) are not marked in written form, we need to be guided by person-marking, e.g., *po-jate-ro*, 2-go-3NM.O, and *pi-n-kajem-e*, 2-IRR-call-IRR. What is interpreted as imperative is always conveyed using the irrealis in the language (Mihas 2015, p. 499).



Figure 7. ©Peruvian Ministry of Health. General poster translated into Ashaninka.

The Aru languages, also called Aymaran languages (Cerrón-Palomino 2000), display a similar pattern. In the case of Jaqaru (Hardman 1983), the verb used in the title is *jakat-ma-ta-m-txi*, leave-IMP.2-PROHIB.2-IMP.2-NEG, where an unusual chain of imperatives occurs. Second person imperatives are also used in the other cases: *nur-ma*, do-IMP.2, *jarwaq-ma*, stay-IMP.2, and *ar-ma*, call-IMP.2 (see Figure 8).



Figure 8. ©Peruvian Ministry of Health. General poster translated into Jaqaru.

For Aymara, the same strategies were followed. The second person imperative *-ma* (Hardman 2001) was used, e.g., *jark'aqas-ma*, protect-IMP.2, *uta-n-kak-ma*, house-LOC-be-IMP.2, and *jaws-ma*, call-IMP.2 (see Laime Ajacopa et al. 2021, for translations of the roots) (see Figure 9).



Figure 9. ©Peruvian Ministry of Health. General poster translated into Aymara.

In the case of Awajún, a Jivaroan/Chicham language of the Upper Amazon, the same translation strategies hold. The imperative suffix *-ta* is used (Overall 2017), e.g., *kuwitam-*

jama-ta, take.care-2P.O-IMP.2, *umik-ta*, accomplish-IMP.2, and *untsumka-ta*, call-IMP.2 (see Figure 10).



Figure 10. ©Peruvian Ministry of Health. General poster translated into Awajún.

The Shawi case is of particular interest, as the translation strategy sees no parallel (see Figure 11). The title literally reads: “A new disease, coronavirus, is entering **us**, **take care of each other**”; see *yakunt-a-r-in-pua*, enter-PROG-REAL-3MIN.S-1INCL.AUG.O, and *ni kiwite-ke-na*, RECIP take.care-IMP-PL. This trend, unlike the other languages, is also followed in the hand-wash strategies poster, which literally reads: “how to wash our hands (not yours)”; see *imira-ne-npua*, hand-INALIEN-1INCL.AUG.POSS. However, for the instruction in the main poster, the second person imperative is used: *nunte-ke*, follow-IMP.2. The same occurs in the hashtag, *kiparite-ke pei-ke*, stay-IMP.2 house-LOC.

As regards the main titles, in Table 3, I summarise my observations.

Table 3. Summary of different person-marking strategies in the titles of the Peruvian State posters to prevent COVID-19 spread in Indigenous communities.

Languages	Title in 2nd Person Imperative	Title in 1st Person Inclusive	Title with Another Strategy
Chanka Quechua	✓		
Napo Kichwa	✓		
Cajamarca Quechua	✓		
Ancash Quechua	✓		
Cuzco Quechua	✓		
Huanca Quechua	✓		
Aymara	✓		
Jaqaru	✓		
Shipibo-Konibo	✓		
Ashaninka			✓ (irrealis + intonation)
Awajún	✓		
Shawi		✓	✓



Figure 11. ©Peruvian Ministry of Health. General poster and hand-wash poster extract translated into Shawi.

It would be farfetched to claim that the Shawi poster translations lie behind the fostering of health-related practices, or that there is a direct correlation between their use and the results observed after COVID-19 receded. It could be, however, that this strategy, together with an array of ancestral practices aimed at dealing with the arrival of foreign pathogens in the Shawi area (Castro 2022), partially explains why the Shawi were not severely affected by COVID-19. In the following section, I explore some local opinions on this specific topic.

4. Discussion

In the previous sections, I highlighted how Shawi communitarian practices are linguistically reflected through the pervasive use of inclusive/exclusive forms in discourse. This strategy is also present in the poster from the Ministry of Health aimed at preventing the spread of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020. Surprisingly, in the case of other Indigenous groups, the social practices of which find many parallels with those of the Shawi, the same strategy was not used in the translations into their Indigenous languages.

In a conversation with two Shawi women, Mady Huazanga Sánchez and Rebeca Pinedo Escobedo, on January 13th 2024, in the city of San Lorenzo del Datem del Marañón, regarding this campaign, they assert the following:

Mady Huazanga Sánchez: “Yo te dije porque yo he escuchado en awajún, y como si fuera en awajún no le importara nada. Como dice en awajún, “si quieres lava tu mano”, pero en shawi no es así. En shawi dice “vamos a lavar juntos todos”, “vamos a lavar nuestro mano”. Es lavada del mano dicen, pero en awajún no dicen así. En awajún dice “lava tu mano”. Eso quiere decir. Está hablando con una sola persona [...] porque está diciendo “lava tu mano”, pero en cambio en shawi abarca todo lo que es en general.”

Rebeca Pinedo Escobedo: “En general”

Mady Huazanga Sánchez: “Eso es lo que yo entiendo”

Rebeca Pinedo Escobedo: “Sí, es cierto lo que dice ella, este, porque nosotros hemos vivido en nuestra zona, por ejemplo. Hemos vivido donde que dice ese esa pancarta lo que dice lavemos las manos. Nosotros como shawis hemos este hemos practicado ese lavada de mano, ya, pero, eh, no hemos, este, no hemos hecho al 100%. Por ejemplo, mantener el distanciamiento, ¿no? No hemos hecho nosotros normal, hemos visitado entre familia, entre la comunidad, pero sí hemos tomado vegetales de la zona. Ya, pero, así como dices, lavemos las manos es como dice ella. Se refiere en general, pero, eh, como dice ella, en awajún es, es como si estaría diciendo a una sola persona: “lávate las manos”, pero en shawi es general.”

Translation

Mady Huazanga Sánchez: “I tell you because I have heard in Awajún, as if they did not care at all in Awajún. As is said in Awajún, “if you want, wash your hands”, but in Shawi it is not this way. In Shawi it says, “let’s wash our hands all together”, “let’s wash our hands”. They call it handwash, but in Awajún it is not this way. In Awajún they say, “wash your hand”. That is what it means. You are talking to one single person [...] because you are saying “wash your hand”, but in Shawi it is more general.”

Rebeca Pinedo Escobedo: “In general.”

Mady Huazanga Sánchez: “That’s what I understand.”

Rebeca Pinedo Escobedo: “Yes, what she is saying is true, because we have experienced that in our area. For example, we have experienced (lit. lived) what is said in that poster, that we must wash our hands. We, as Shawi, we have put into practice that handwash, but we have not done it a 100%. For example, keeping social distancing, right? We acted normally, we visited family, inside the community, but we had local herbs. Ok, but, as you say, washing our hands was as she says. It means “in general”, but, as she says, in Awajún, it is as if they referred to a single person, “wash your hands”, but in Shawi it is general.

This conversation was recorded during an exchange the author had with Mady Huazanga Sánchez and Rebeca Pinedo Escobedo on contemporary Shawi societal practices. The participants were talking about customs, traditions, the use of the Shawi language, and recent issues they had to deal with. It was in that context that the COVID-19 pandemic was raised, and the author asked for their opinion about the messages portrayed in the translations. It was unexpected that Mady Huazanga Sánchez had some knowledge of Awajún. Based on her knowledge of the two languages (Shawi and Awajún) and as a L1-speaker of Shawi, she compared the Awajún and the Shawi posters. For her, the Awajún poster message indexed individual action. The Shawi one, conversely, addressed communal action, e.g., *vamos a lavar todos juntos*, i.e., “let us wash all together”. This was confirmed by Rebeca Pinedo Escobedo. She was honest in admitting that social distancing measures were not always complied with, but she agreed with the “general” character of the Shawi addressing strategy, i.e., engaging with the totality of the community.

As such, it seems that the strategy deployed by the Shawi translator had a different effect. In most cases, the State’s messages were framed in a way that portrayed the State as an authority that was prompting individual action or making them go somewhere to do

something. In the Shawi case, the State was portrayed as a member of the Shawi community (prompting communal action) through the use of the first-person inclusive. The message is exactly the same, but the way it can be received by the community, as well as all potential effects thereafter, seem to be different. This goes hand-in-hand with what has been found in previous studies on the effect of message presentation/framing when informing people (Psychological Science Accelerator Self-Determination Theory Collaboration 2022; Sunstein and Thaler 2003). This might be even more prominent in the poster title, as it is the first thing to be read from afar. As is argued for in other studies in this Special Issue, the choice of pronouns of address has a significant impact in engagement with the public (den Hartog et al. 2024; Sánchez Carrasco, van Hoften, and Schoenmakers, this issue). In the case of the posters, the use of first-person inclusive bound pronouns seems to have fostered better engagement with the public.

In a conversation with *achinapi* Rafael Chanchari Pizuri (Figure 12) in the city of Lamas on 27 January 2024, he commented on the use of these pronouns. Chanchari Pizuri (p.c.) mentioned that he has been involved in the translation and interpretation of State messages during the pandemic. He emphasised the importance of the understanding of Indigenous cosmovisions and the careful use of these pieces of knowledge to convey State messages. He added that translations could not be carried out literally from Spanish moulds. This could inevitably trigger misunderstandings.



Figure 12. *Achinapi* Rafael Chanchari Pizuri discussing Shawi traditions.

These ideas seem not to be exclusive to the Shawi area. I also had the chance to exchange ideas with Leo Almonacid Leya, an Ashaninka linguist, leader, and translator. He explained that translations practices are not so well established among Indigenous translators and the State, namely, “*Te dan el formato para traducir. Así funciona*”, lit. trans. “You are given a format you have to translate. That is how it works.” Translators are expected to translate literally what the State provides them. The Shawi case is special, as

it seems that the translator took some liberties that eventually allowed the State to better engage with the community. For Almonacid Leya, in reference to the Shawi translation, “*eso de realizar afiches colectivos, eso sí es interesante*”, lit. trans. “the fact of making collective posters [here referring to the use of inclusive pronouns], that is indeed interesting.” Posters that encourage communal responsibility and action among these Indigenous groups appear to be more interculturally appropriate.

I hope that these observations and discussions prompt pluricultural States to be better informed when it comes to policies aimed at dialoguing with non-WEIRD groups. Although intentions in this case were far from negative, speedy monocultural measures could potentially trigger opposite effects. The presentation and framing of messages need always be interculturally informed.

5. Final Ideas

The use of Shawi first-person inclusive pronominal marking in State posters during the COVID-19 pandemic seems to have had a different effect when compared to the literal translations using second-person imperative marking in posters in other languages. This was discussed by local Shawi stakeholders, who experienced this message as a call to act all together. The question of whether a relationship exists between this practice and the relatively “minor” impact of COVID-19 on Shawi communities remains unsolved.

Based on our initial observations and the opinions of our collaborators, the State introduced itself as a Shawi, i.e., as a member of the Shawi community, by means of the use of typical Shawi discourse strategies common to the local communitarian practices. According to the stakeholders I interviewed, the use of inclusive pronouns in the titles seems to have triggered more engagement among the Shawi towards the State-imposed measures during the pandemic. It is difficult to assert that this lies behind the low number of infections/deaths among the Shawi. I preferably lean more towards this as an additional variable which, together with local ancestral practices learnt from previous epidemics, allowed the Shawi to be better protected at the time of the arrival of the virus. This, however, stems from observations and more studies need to be conducted to understand the engagement with State messages in radio streaming and television advertisements. Thorough descriptive studies on forms of address strategies in South American languages embedded in long-term ethnographic observation are needed. This is a necessary first step towards proper intercultural dialogue. Finally, future local studies in the fields of epidemiology and ethnopharmacology would be fruitful in shedding some light on the Shawi way of dealing with foreign epidemics.

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Notes

- ¹ Aritana Yawalapiti, commonly known as *Cacique Aritana*, was a prominent figure in the fight against the exploitation of the Amazon. Furthermore, he was among the last speakers of the Yawalapiti language.
- ² While conducting an analysis of the entire sample of languages would have been ideal, it was not feasible to find consultants for every language. The analysis presented in this short communication relies on the author’s firsthand knowledge of these languages and the assistance provided by speakers of the languages from the selected sample.

- ³ For example, in this case, if the interlocutor were a non-Shawi who can understand Shawi, the nephew would have used the exclusive nominal form *Shawi-kui* lit. ‘we the Shawi, not you’.
- ⁴ Note that Awajún, according to Ethnologue (Eberhard et al. 2024), is spoken by 53,400 individuals. If these numbers are taken categorically, this means that 14,026% of the Awajún-speaking population got infected.

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Article

The (Lack of) Salience of T/V Pronouns in Professional Communication: Evidence from an Experimental Study for Belgian Dutch

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Abstract: In their quest to find a suitable tone of voice in an informalizing society, many companies are confronted with the choice of using T or V pronouns in their B2C communications. This paper presents an experimental study addressing the question of whether the recipients of these messages actually notice the difference between being addressed with a T form, which carries social meanings of informality and proximity, or a more distant V form, and to what extent the presence of additional informal linguistic features influences the salience of a pronoun switch. We furthermore investigate to what extent the professional socialization of participants impacts on the noticing of pronoun use. In a case study for Belgian Dutch, participants (N = 279) were presented with two versions of an information letter that they were asked to read quickly. The texts were manipulated for the use of T/V pronouns, as well as, depending on the condition, a number of additional informal linguistic features (i.e., informal punctuation, intensifiers, and English lexical items). Participants were not warned in advance about the changes between the two versions of the stimulus text. In a salience test following the presentation of the two text versions, less than 10% of participants noticed a switch in T/V form regardless of the presence of additional informal features. Similarly low rates of noticing were found for the other informal features, except for English loanwords. No differences were found depending on whether participants had a language-related professional background (e.g., language teachers, journalists, editors). We argue that the lack of noticing T/V pronouns may be due to the specifics of the Belgian Dutch system of pronominal address that has an additional highly salient colloquial pronoun of address which may obscure the difference in social meaning between the standard T and V pronouns. The discussion critically evaluates the implications of the study for the use of T/V pronouns in professional communication, musing on the complex relationship between noticing and evaluating.

Keywords: T/V pronouns; salience; Dutch; social meaning; applied sociolinguistics

1. Introduction

This paper aims to empirically investigate to what extent participants with and without a language-related professional background notice changes in T/V pronouns in B2C communication (i.e., business-to-customer communication) and how this compares to other markers of informal discourse. As argued below, many companies are in search of a more informal brand identity that presents them as accessible and customer-oriented, and in that context wonder how best to address their clients in professional communications. In T/V languages, this raises the question of which second-person pronoun is most suitable. In this paper, we focus on one such language, Belgian Dutch, which offers an interesting case

given the sometimes-heated public debate on T/V pronoun use. While there is hence quite some research that reports on the use of Belgian Dutch T/V pronouns in general, little is known about how T/V differences are perceived by readers, particularly in professional communications. In our study, we set out to feed this debate on T/V usage in Belgian Dutch by answering the question of whether readers actually notice differences in use between the two forms and whether they are more salient than other markers of formality. We also aim to find out whether a change in pronoun use is more salient to readers with a professional language-oriented eye. In doing so, we contribute a perceptual perspective to both the academic study of pronoun use in Belgian Dutch and the applied question of how to communicate most effectively in professional contexts, as well as the societal debate of which pronouns suit this type of communication. To this end, we first provide the necessary background information on language as a tool to construct corporate identity (Section 2.1), on T/V pronouns in (Belgian) Dutch (Section 2.2), and on noticing and salience (Section 2.3). Building on this, we formulate precise research questions (Section 3). The paper then outlines the methodology of the study (Section 4), and reports (Section 5) and discusses (Section 6) the results.

2. Background

2.1. Corporate Identity and Language in B2C Communication

Building a strong corporate identity is crucial for companies to secure their place in an ever more competitive market (Balmer and Gray 2003). That identity is expressed via visual means through a graphic identity, but also language is a powerful tool to build a company's image, as is well documented in research on corporate tone of voice, brand linguistics, and marketing more broadly (e.g., Usunier and Shaner 2002; Delin 2005; Kelleher 2009; Carnevale et al. 2017; Holmqvist et al. 2017). This possibility to use language to shape identity is hardly surprising from a sociolinguistic perspective: it has been studied extensively how language users build their identity by drawing on socially meaningful language variants, viz. linguistic forms that are associated with social information about the speaker or context (e.g., Eckert 2008; Eckert 2012). A well-studied example is the alveolar pronunciation of word final *-ing* [ɪŋ] as *-in* [ɪn] in English which has for instance been shown to carry associations with a speaker's regional background and perceived intelligence (e.g., Campbell-Kibler 2007, 2009, 2010). Similarly, companies can deploy socially meaningful language variation to manipulate and communicate their corporate identity, which is an increasingly pressing need in today's changing requirements for business communications.

Traditionally, corporate communication has been considered to comprise formal genres in which considerable distance exists between the sender of a message and the receiver (Campbell and Roberts 2007). However, in the context of the late modern informalization of society, many businesses have followed the New Work Order (Gee et al. 1996; Roberts 2011), a term introduced to describe the shift from the traditional 'old' economy and its hierarchical and formal workplace to a 'new' economy with its (seemingly) more egalitarian and informal structures (see also Hull 2001). Resultingly, companies often wish to build a more informal image and communication style (Norrby and Hajek 2011; House and Kádár 2020; De Dijn and Van De Mierop 2021), which calls into question the required formality level of professional interactions and correspondence (Scheuer 2001). This search for an appropriate degree of formality in tone of voice recurs frequently in questions addressed to professional copywriters and it is these bottom-up questions from the field of B2C communication that triggered the research reported in this paper. More specifically, recurring requests for advice directed to the fourth author of this paper, who is professionally active in copywriting, revealed that companies struggle to decide on how to address customers in their communications.¹ A question that was asked particularly frequently in that respect is the choice of address pronoun to use in languages that maintain a T/V distinction (Brown and Gilman 1960): is the use of more informal T pronouns an option in professional communication, or is it better to stick to more formal V forms? While

there seem to be many questions and insecurities on this topic on the side of the sender, one can wonder how salient the use of T/V pronouns actually is for the recipient of a message. Hence, the aim of the present study is precisely to find out whether readers notice the use of T rather than V pronouns in corporate communications, and how the salience of T pronouns interacts with other linguistic elements representing an informal tone of voice. As a case study, we focus on T/V variation in Belgian Dutch B2C information letters (see Section 4.2), given the prominent position in societal metalinguistic debate of pronominal variation in the Belgian context (Van De Mierop et al. 2016).

2.2. T/V Pronouns in (Belgian) Dutch

Dutch is a pluricentric language, viz. a language with more than one national centre (Muhr 2016), which is mainly used in the Netherlands and Belgium. In Belgium, it is spoken in Flanders, the northern half of the country. Both countries have their own standard variety of Dutch, but the way these standard varieties are positioned compared to non-standard varieties differs significantly (Geeraerts and Van de Velde 2013). In the Netherlands, colloquial language use tends to be linguistically closer to the standard variety. In Flanders, by contrast, a relatively delayed standardization history led to a situation of hyper standardization (Van Hoof and Jaspers 2012), in which the standard language enjoys considerable prestige but is seldom used apart from in the most formal situations. The colloquial varieties of Dutch in Flanders—while highly diverse—tend to be further removed from the standard variety than in the Netherlands. While both regions are characterized by considerable dialect levelling, this is particularly the case in the Netherlands.

A T/V distinction in second-person singular pronouns is found in Standard Dutch in both the Netherlands and Flanders: in subject form, *u* is the formal pronoun, while *je* is the informal one. Belgian Dutch also has the colloquial second-person pronoun *ge* which is found in both supraregional colloquial varieties of Belgian Dutch and certain local dialects (Vandekerckhove 2005). For the subject forms, both *je* and *ge* are unstressed forms and have a stressed equivalent, *jij* and *gij*, respectively. In Standard Dutch, this opposition between stressed and unstressed is also found for object (*je* and *jou*) and possessive (*je* and *jouw*) T forms. For colloquial Belgian Dutch, the object and possessive forms coincide with the respective V pronouns *u* and *uw*.

Table 1 gives an overview of the second-person singular pronominal system in Standard Dutch and colloquial Belgian Dutch. The colloquial *ge* form is generally used in spoken informal language, as well as certain genres of highly informal writing like chat-speak (cf. Plevoets et al. 2008; Hilte et al. 2020), and hence shares indexical values with T forms. Despite occurring for stylistic purposes in marketing contexts (Van Gijssel et al. 2008), it is not usually found in the type of professional communication relevant to this paper, as this type of communication is normally written in Standard Dutch. Hence, we limit the discussion here to the T/V pronouns in the Standard Dutch system.

Table 1. Pronominal system for the second-person singular in Standard Dutch and colloquial Belgian Dutch.

	Standard Dutch			Colloquial Belgian Dutch	
	T Pronoun		V Pronoun		
	Unstressed	Stressed		Unstressed	Stressed
Subject	je	jij	u	ge	gij
Object	je	jou	u	u	
Possessive	je	jouw	uw	uw	

Research on T/V pronouns in Standard Dutch has predominantly focused on the Netherlands (Vismans 2015). Studies have documented the generally changing (reported) use of these pronouns throughout the twentieth and twenty-first century (e.g., Van den

Toorn 1977; Van den Toorn and Vermaas 1988; Vermaas 2002; Vismans 2013a, 2013b, 2018). The most recent work confirms that the V form *u* is used in formal situations characterized by a larger distance between interlocutors, especially in educational and business contexts, whereas previously it was used to express an unbalanced power relationship between speaker and addressee (Jansen and Janssen 2005; Vismans 2013b; Vismans 2015; but see Levshina 2017 for recent data indicating social status differences as a dominant factor in determining the choice of *u*). The T form *je* is, as usual in T/V languages, reported to be used in exchanges where interlocutors have more common ground or are considered to be part of the same social group. The T pronoun is furthermore increasingly used in service encounters and is generally advancing compared to the use of the V pronoun (Vismans 2019; den Hartog et al. 2022; de Hoop et al. 2023). Research in Flanders is mostly limited to work on the competition between the Standard Dutch *u/je* system and the endogenous colloquial *ge* system in spoken Dutch (e.g., Deprez and Geerts 1977, 1980; Vandekerckhove 2004, 2005; Plevoets et al. 2008; Van De Mierop et al. 2016; Zenner and Van De Mierop 2021; Vismans 2015; De Dijn et al. n.d.). Recent work focusing on the use of the standard T/V system in Flanders is largely missing with the exceptions of Vismans (2007), Vismans (2013b), Oosterhof et al. (2017), and den Hartog et al. (2022), all of which take a comparative perspective between Belgian and Netherlandic Dutch (cf. *infra*). This bias in research focus on the variation between the standard and colloquial system rather than within the standard system for Dutch in Flanders reflects the firm presence of the topic in public debate.

If we turn our attention to what is known about Dutch T/V pronouns specifically in professional communication, work has been undertaken on a variety of genres, but again mostly with a focus on the Netherlands. Vismans (2019) reports on the negotiation of T/V forms in email correspondence between unacquainted writers. The study finds that the V form *u* is the default option at the start of email exchanges. Similarly, de Hoop et al. (2023) report evidence from an experimental study in which participants show more positive attitudes towards the use of *u* in emails relating to a job application procedure regardless of whether the email invited the addressee for an interview or rejected them, and regardless of participant profile (e.g., age, gender, level of education). This status of *u* as the unmarked default in professional interactions is echoed in a study by Jansen and Janssen (2005) that measures the appreciation of public information brochures using the V form *u* or the T form *je*. However, in line with the results reported in van Zalk and Jansen (2004), the authors do point out that the perception of *u* vs. *je* depends on interactions between the topic and the target audience of the text. Research on advertising banners in newspapers reports something similar to topic-based variation, namely that the choice of the V form *u* vs. T form *je* depends on the industry of the advertising company: the services industry tends to use *u* more often, while *je* is the pronoun of address of choice in entertainment and ICT advertisements (Vismans 2013a). Another study on T/V pronouns in advertising indicates a positive impact on the appreciation of an advert when the T form is used, but no effect of pronoun use on attitude towards the advertised product, purchase intention, or product price estimation was found (Schoenmakers et al. 2024). A final set of studies investigating T/V pronouns in Dutch language professional communications gear the attention towards a comparison between Belgian and Netherlandic Dutch. Generally, results are mixed. Vismans (2013b) reports no differences in the use of pronouns between the Netherlands and Flanders in his work on advertising banners. Similarly, den Hartog et al. (2022) who studied pronoun use in job adverts for multinational companies found that both Dutch adverts from the Netherlands and Belgium show a strong preference for T pronouns. Vismans (2007) by contrast does find regional variation in the use of T/V pronouns in job advertisements for highly educated job seekers, as well as variation dependent on industry. Overall, Flemish adverts use the V form *u* more, an effect that is driven by the financial-legal industry and the public sector (i.e., government, health, research, and education). Vismans frames these branches of industry as more conservative, especially in Belgium. The higher use of

V forms in job advertisements in Belgium compared to the Netherlands is confirmed by Oosterhof and colleagues (Oosterhof et al. 2017).

To sum up, research on T/V variation in pronominal address in Dutch has mostly focused on the Netherlands and predominantly consists of work on (reported) usage. Studies including T/V variation in Dutch-speaking Belgium are scarce, just like research on the perception and evaluation of these pronouns. Findings relating to usage are mixed, but for Belgian Dutch the current state of the art seems to suggest that the V form *u* is the default option for written corporate communication, especially in more conservative sectors. Studies on the evaluation of the V form *u* vs. T form *je* in Flanders is lacking—to the best of our knowledge—but research in the Netherlands overall indicates that *u* is slightly more appreciated in professional copy (Jansen and Janssen 2005; de Hoop et al. 2023; but see Schoenmakers et al. 2024 for mixed results in an advertising context). Yet, more research on the perception of Dutch T/V variation could provide insights into whether this pronoun choice is salient to readers and hearers and in that sense should be of concern to professional copy writers.

2.3. Relative Salience of T/V Pronouns

The salience of a linguistic feature is a notoriously difficult concept to define (see, e.g., Zarcone et al. (2016) or Jaeger and Weatherholtz (2016) for reviews that aim to disentangle various interpretations). It is usually taken to refer to the fact that a feature is prominent in some way which may facilitate noticing (Kerswill and Williams 2002; Vandekerckhove and Ghyselen 2017; Jaeger and Weatherholtz 2016; but see for instance Rácz 2013 and Boswijk and Coler 2020 for more in-depth critical appraisals of the concept of salience in (socio)linguistics). This link with noticing is particularly relevant in sociolinguistics where it has been invoked as the crucial distinction between two types of sociolinguistic features: stereotypes and markers (Jaeger and Weatherholtz 2016). The former receive metalinguistic commentary and undergo style shifting, while the latter remain unnoticed by linguistic laypeople (Labov 1972). Pronominal address in Belgian Dutch has typically been classified as a stereotype in the Labovian sense (Van De Mierop et al. 2016): language users are aware of the variation and there is metalinguistic debate on their use and social meaning in various contexts. As touched upon above, this prominence of pronominal address in public debate likely has its roots in the delayed standardization history of Dutch in Belgium, but deserves more support from empirical research.

While it is sometimes argued that linguistic features may be salient due to intrinsic qualities, often a feature will be prominent because it stands out in a certain context due to its unexpectedness (Vandekerckhove and Ghyselen 2017, p. 249; Rácz 2013; see Zarcone et al. 2016 for a discussion of the link between the concept of salience and that of surprisal). According to the latter view, salience is an inherently relative concept (Rácz 2013; Boswijk et al. 2020). Contextual elements that have an impact on how prominent a linguistic feature is could be social in nature: a feature may be salient if it is (un)expected based on certain speaker information like regional background (e.g., Niedzielski 1999; McGowan 2015). The unexpectedness may also be triggered by the linguistic context. Research on genre and register has shown extensively that certain types of discourse tend to exhibit particular bundles of co-occurring linguistic features (Biber 1988, 1995, 2019; Biber and Conrad 2005; Heylighen and Dewaele 2002; Koppen et al. 2019). Hence, if a feature is used that violates the expected combination of linguistic characteristics of a text, it may become salient in that text. This line of research has extensively documented linguistic characteristics co-occurring in formal and informal types of discourse. More formal genres and registers show a higher degree of informational density and typically contain linguistic features that serve an informational function, such as high frequencies of nouns, attributive adjectives, articles and prepositions, a high type/token ratio, and longer words (Biber and Conrad 2005; Heylighen and Dewaele 2002; Koppen et al. 2019). More informal genres and registers are more involved and are characterized by a higher degree of affection, empathy, and subjectivity (Heylighen and Dewaele 2002; Vis et al. 2012; Vliegen 2014). To that end,

discourse of this type often exhibits high frequencies of (first- and second-person) pronouns, adverbs, verbs, interjections, and direct reported speech (Heylighen and Dewaele 2002; Vis et al. 2012; Biber and Conrad 2005).

To sum up, based on previous work, one could assume pronominal address in Belgian Dutch to be a sociolinguistic stereotype and hence be highly noticeable to language users. However, this assumption overlooks the fact that salience is not just an intrinsic quality of a linguistic feature, but also a contextual phenomenon: a feature's salience depends on the situation it appears in and which other linguistic features are present in that context. In this paper, we prioritize such a contextualized approach to studying the salience of T/V variation in Standard Belgian Dutch. In particular, we aim to investigate to what extent participants with and without a professional background notice T/V changes in B2C communication and how this compares to other markers of informal discourse, viz. intensifying adverbs, exclamation marks, and English loanwords.

3. Research Questions

The first research question this study aims to address is as follows:

RQ1: To what extent do Belgian Dutch language users notice pronominal variation in B2C communication?

As pointed out above, business communication is usually seen as a formal genre and studies on register, like Biber and Conrad (2005), have been able to put professional letters on the formal side of the continuum based on the linguistic features that characterize them. As a result, a reader may find informal features more unexpected in such texts and hence more salient, which increases their chance of being noticed. However, given the recent shift towards a more egalitarian work order, this preference for a formal variant may be called into question and we may even wonder whether pronoun choice is noticed at all. To better understand the impact of this evolution on the perception of pronouns of address in Belgian Dutch B2C communication, we further investigate the impact of additional informal features (intensifying adverbs, exclamation marks, and English loanwords) on the noticing of these pronouns. To that effect, we propose a second research question:

RQ2: to what extent do other informal markers help notice a shift from V to T forms?

As discourse types are characterized by sets of co-occurring linguistic features, the informality of a text and hence the salience of an informal feature in that text can be hypothesized to depend on the features it co-occurs with in a text. This means that if we want to better understand how salient T forms are in business communication, we need to take into account their linguistic context. To that end, we aim to measure the impact of incrementally adding more informal features to the same text on the noticing of T/V pronouns. More specifically, we in turn add three features that the literature has characterized as informal. First, exclamations and the use of exclamation marks is usually advised against in more formal styles of writing (e.g., Chang and Swales 1999; Hyland and Jiang 2017; Lee et al. 2019). Second, intensifiers (for Dutch, e.g., *erg*, *veel*, or for English, *very*, *strongly*) have been associated with informal writing (e.g., Vis et al. 2012; Vliegen 2014). And finally, research has shown that the use of English words in Dutch is typical for informal styles as they have been shown to be used in situations with high involvement and emotion (Zenner et al. 2016) and are associated with teenagers' online informal conversations and youth language more generally (Hilte et al. 2020). Including these additional features will allow us to explore the relative status of T forms in an increasingly informal text. It could be hypothesized that the presence of more informal features increases the chance of noticing other informal features. We could in turn expect that the more informal features a text contains, the more the text as a whole becomes informal and the unexpectedness and hence salience of the features decrease, leading to less noticing of T forms. Further, one could also put forward alternative scenarios in which for instance the most informal feature would stand out the most, perhaps directing attention away from T forms. These two hypotheses

taken together make it more reasonable to assume that more informal features will lead to less noticing of T forms.

RQ3: to what extent is noticing influenced by linguistic socialisation: do language users working in a language-oriented profession notice T/V shifts more readily than other language users?

RQ3 finally links up with the social factors that may play a role in salience, as pointed out above. It has been shown that language perceivers take into account social information about the speaker (e.g., Sumner et al. 2014; Niedzielski 1999; Hay et al. 2006). Perceivers can do that because they build on experience with socially meaningful language variation (McGowan 2016). This means that the background and socialisation of the perceiver is a factor that may influence noticing. In this study, we aim to investigate to what extent professional linguistic socialisation plays a role in the noticing of T/V pronouns in B2C communication. It could be the case that language users working in a language-oriented profession are more aware of the choice of pronouns of address as they have been taught more explicitly which is appropriate to a certain genre. They may also be more sensitive to language-related public debate, or they may be trained to pay more attention to linguistic choices in general. We have presented pronominal address as a linguistic feature that is above the level of awareness in Flemish society and regularly commented on, but it may not be equally noticeable for all readers/hearers.

Below, we present an experimental study designed to answer these research questions concerning the noticing of T/V pronouns in Belgian Dutch business communications in relation to variation in the linguistic context and the socialisation of the language perceiver.

4. Method

4.1. Design

To answer the research questions, we measured the perception of T/V pronouns in written corporate communications using a three-phase experiment followed by a sociodemographic questionnaire. In essence, the experiment offered participants a B2C information letter twice, with small manipulations between the versions. We then gauged whether participants noticed these manipulations.

Phase 1: B2C information letter Version 1.

Phase 1a: Reading Version 1 under time pressure.

Phase 1b: Answering check questions.

Phase 2: B2C information letter Version 2.

Phase 2a: Reading Version 2 under time pressure.

Phase 2b: Answering check questions.

Phase 3: Salience test.

Phase 4: Debrief and sociodemographic questionnaire.

In the initial phase, participants were presented with a first version of a text representing corporate B2C communication: an information letter from an insurance company outlining the advantages of the insurance packages chosen by the customer (cf. Section 4.2). Respondents were asked to read the text under time pressure, based on the average time a sample of pretest participants needed to superficially process the text. This way, all participants engaged in a fairly similar and nonchalant way with the text (phase 1a).

In phase 1b, participants were asked four easy questions to check whether they had actually read the text. Only participants who responded correctly to the questions could move on to the next phase of the experiment. Those respondents were told that they would see the same text again and were asked to read it again as fast as possible in order to answer some more questions, emphasizing the importance of reading the text again. The text they were shown in phase 2a was a manipulated version of the initial text containing a number of linguistic differences, including a shift in the use of T/V pronouns and, depending on the condition of the experiment (cf. below), up to three additional informal linguistic features.

After reading the manipulated text in phase 2a, participants went on to phase 2b in which they were asked to indicate whether they actually read the text a second time. Only those who indicated they did could continue to the third phase. In phase 3, it was explained to participants that the second text they read was actually not the same as the first text and they were asked whether they noticed any differences and if so, if they could describe those differences. At the end of the study, participants received information on the precise nature of the differences and were asked to provide basic sociodemographic information.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of five conditions. In each of those conditions, the number of linguistic differences between the text in phase 1a and the text in phase 2b increased with incrementally more informal features. Table 2 summarises the five conditions. In conditions 1 (C1) and 2 (C2), the only difference between the texts was the use of T or V pronouns. In condition 3 (C3), the T version of the text additionally contained intensifying adverbs. Condition 4 (C4) added exclamation marks to those features. Condition 5 (C5) finally contained the maximum of four informal features, adding English loanwords to the list. Note that to control for order effects, C1 and C2 were counterbalanced for whether the text containing V pronouns was shown first or whether the text with T pronouns was shown first. In C1, C3, C4, and C5, the text with V pronouns was used as the baseline text in phase 1a of the experiment given that one would traditionally expect V pronouns in formal types of communication such as a B2C information letter.

Table 2. Overview of the conditions in the between-subject experimental set-up.

Condition	Version 1 (Phase 1a)	Version 2 (Phase 2b)	N
C1	V pronouns	T pronouns	50
C2	T pronouns	V pronouns	53
C3	V pronouns	T pronouns + Intensifying adverbs	55
C4	V pronouns	T pronouns + Intensifying adverbs + Exclamation marks	49
C5	V pronouns	T pronouns + Intensifying adverbs + Exclamation marks + English loanwords	72

4.2. Materials

The texts shown in phases 1a and 2a of the experiment were based on an authentic letter from an insurance company. A number of adaptations were made to make the letter suitable for the experiment. First, the letter was anonymised to avoid effects of familiarity or existing associations with the insurance company. This meant that the name of the company and the agent, as well as the graphic identity of the company, were removed. Next, the letter was shortened from 437 to 189 words in order not to make the experiment too long and lose participants' interest. Finally, the text was adapted to contain the linguistic features characteristic of each condition. The initial letter contained 14 V pronouns of address (7 of subject form *u*, 2 of object form *u*, and 5 of possessive *uw*; see Table 1 for an overview of the Belgian Dutch pronominal system) which were changed to T pronouns. The additional informal features were added to the letter to construct Version 2 for C3 to C5. Below, (1) illustrates the text manipulations, giving all possible manipulations (underlined) in the second paragraph of the body of the letter corresponding to Version 1 and Version 2 in C5, with the pronominal variants marked in bold. See Appendix A for the full text in all different conditions.

1. *Sleutels verloren? We zorgen voor een slotenmaker . ! ! Wenst | wens u | je een video-expertise? Dat kan, u | je filmt de schade met uw | je smartphone, de expert kan de opgelopen schade vanop afstand vaststellen en wij kunnen uw | jouw schade Ø | véél sneller vergoeden. In sommige gevallen is een herstelling in natura mogelijk. Wij zorgen er dan voor dat een vakman de schade komt herstellen, en we betalen de rekening rechtstreeks aan de hersteller. U | Jij betaalt niets. Dat bespaart u | je een hoop zorgen . ! ! . Ook goed om te weten | By the way : we houden in onze tussenkomst rekening met de nieuwe bouwnormen.*

Translation: 'Keys lost? We arrange a locksmith . ! ! Would you like video-based expert advice? No problem, **you_V** | **you_T** film the damage using **your_V** | **your_T** smartphone, the expert assesses the damage remotely and we will be able to reimburse **you_V** | **you_T** Ø | much faster. In certain cases we can offer you repairs in kind. We arrange a professional who will assess and repair the damage, and we pay the bill directly. **You_V** | **You_T** do not pay anything. That saves **you_V** | **you_T** a lot of worries. ! ! By the way_{DU} | By the way_{EN}: we take into account the new building regulations in our intervention.'

In order to consolidate the hypothesized degree of informality of the additional informal linguistic features used in C3 to C5, a pretest was conducted (N = 6) in which participants rated which variant was the most informal for each variable (i.e., T vs. V pronoun, exclamation mark vs. full stop, intensifier vs. no intensifier, and English loan vs. Dutch alternative). This confirmed that the V pronoun was perceived as more formal than the T pronoun and that the use of intensifiers, exclamation marks, and English loans were perceived as more informal than the absence of these features. A follow-up task in which respondents ranked the informal variants in order of formality showed that English loans were seen as most informal, followed by exclamation marks and intensifiers, respectively. Further care was taken to select linguistic features that were easy to name for linguistic laypeople, so that if they noticed them in the salience test in phase 3, they would be able to verbalise what they had noticed.

4.3. Instruments

The instruments in this study consisted of two control questions in phases 1b and 2b, the salience test in phase 3, and the sociodemographic questionnaire at the end of the study in phase 4. The control questions in phases 1b and 2b aimed to detect participants who did not read the text at all, or with insufficient attention. As explained above, in phase 1b this was undertaken by directly asking participants if they had managed to read the entire text and by using content questions about the letter (see Appendix B). For phase 2b, this strategy was not an option to verify whether participants actually read the text a second time, given that the content of the text remained unchanged between phase 1a and 2a. Hence, we had to rely on participants' honesty to directly report whether they completed the second reading. Of course, this strategy is prone to social desirability bias, but we believe that bias to be somewhat attenuated by the fact that the study was anonymous and not taken in the presence of the researchers.

In phase 3, participants were first told that the texts they read in phases 1a and 2b were not exactly the same. They were then asked in an open-answer field to describe any differences they noticed as precisely as they could. Participants who did not notice any difference could also indicate this and move on to the final part of the study (phase 4).

The sociodemographic questionnaire contained questions about participants' gender, age, residence, native language, level of education, and whether participants were in a language-related occupation (e.g., teacher, editor, journalist, translator). The latter question served to measure professional linguistic socialization, and hence we prioritized the participants' own assessments, asking them whether they were engaged with language in a professional capacity.

4.4. Procedure

The experiment was conducted through the survey platform Qualtrics. Data collection was anonymised, and this was clearly communicated to participants at the start of the experiment. The study was presented to participants as research on reading skills. It was

not possible to give full disclosure on the exact nature of the research questions at the start of the study, as this would have interfered with its aim. In phase 1a, participants had 52 s to read the information letter in Version 1. The maximum display length was determined after pretesting to make sure that the vast majority of readers applying the targeted casual reading style would have enough time to read the entire text. Participants who took more than the allotted time were screened out and debriefed about the reason they were screened out. Those who read fast enough went through to phase 1b. Participants who did not pass the control questions in this phase were screened out, again with the necessary explanations about why the experiment ended there for them. Those who read carefully enough went on to phase 2a, where they read Version 2 of the text. To encourage participants to read the text again, the button to move on to the next page phase only appeared after 52 s. In phase 2b, participants were asked to honestly indicate whether they did indeed reread the text. Those who said they did not were screened out with the necessary debriefing. Those who said they did advance to the salience test in phase 3 and afterwards to the sociodemographic questionnaire in phase 4. At the end of phase 3, after completing the salience test, participants were debriefed about the actual goal of the study.

4.5. Participants

Participants were recruited in the first half of 2019 through the personal networks of the authors on social media, as well as through the professional network of the fourth author. Participation was voluntary. Originally, 543 respondents started the experiment. Of those, 366 made it to the end of the study, 84 dropped out early because they did not read one of the texts fast enough (cf. Section 4.4 Procedure on the reading time threshold), and 93 were led to the end of the survey because they failed to respond correctly to the reading check questions in phase 1b.

Out of the 366 complete participations, data from 87 additional respondents were disregarded for one of the following reasons. We excluded data from participants whose native language was not Dutch ($N = 5$) and from participants who were not originally from Flanders or Brussels ($N = 3$). As we wanted to ensure a sample that was as homogeneous as possible, we excluded two groups who were not numerous enough to be well represented in each of the conditions: participants who were not highly educated ($N = 45$) and participants who were not part of what is traditionally considered the active population (i.e., over 65 years old, $N = 4$). Finally, participants from the western-most province of Flanders, West Flanders, were not included in the analyses ($N = 30$). The reason for this last decision is that the endogenous T form of the second-person pronoun singular is different in the West-Flemish dialect area compared to the rest of Flanders: the T form used in several (mainly coastal) dialects in this area is the same as the T form in the standard language, namely *jij*, while in the rest of Flanders *gij* forms are more common (see Devos and Vandeweghe 2003). It is not inconceivable that having a different endogenous T form could influence the perception of its social meaning in terms of formality in West Flanders compared to the rest of Flanders. As a result, the salience of the use of T/V pronouns in formal communication may differ for participants from this region, but verifying this hypothesis is beyond the scope of this study.

Given these exclusion criteria, the sample used for analysis consisted of $N = 279$ participants. Participants belonging to various demographic groups were distributed evenly over the conditions: chi square tests showed no significant skew in the distribution of participants from different regions ($\chi^2 = 10.46$, $df = 16$, $p > .1$) or gender ($\chi^2 = 3.82$, $df = 4$, $p > .1$). A one-way ANOVA did not indicate differences in mean age over the conditions ($F = 1.28$, $df = 4$, $p > .1$). There was furthermore no significant difference in the distribution of respondents who used language professionally (e.g., teachers, editors, journalists, translators) and those who did not over the conditions of the study ($\chi^2 = 3.19$, $df = 4$, $p > .1$). For a detailed breakdown of participant demographics per condition, see Appendix C.

4.6. Analyses

The data provided by participants in the salience test in phase 3 were coded independently by two researchers (one of which was the first author) to indicate whether participants mentioned the presence of each of the linguistic features under study (i.e., T/V pronouns, intensifiers, exclamations marks, and English loanwords). For instance, the response in (2) was coded for noticing intensifiers, exclamation marks and English insertions, but not T/V pronouns.

2. *Er kwamen enkele Engelstalige termen voor, zoals “by the way” en “oldschool”. Daarnaast werden er ook accenten geplaatst op bepaalde woorden, zoals “héél” en “véél”. Ik denk ook dat er meer uitroeptekens werden gebruikt in de tweede tekst [id024, C5]*

Translation: ‘There were a few English terms, like “by the way” and “oldschool”. Additionally accents were placed on certain words, like “héél” and “véél”. I also think that more exclamation marks were used in the second text.’

We only coded for features that actually appeared in the condition in question. In example (3), the participant correctly notices the use of English words, but also reports that a procedure for repairs was explained differently which was not the case. In this example, the imagined difference was not coded for.

3. *Er wordt nu over oldschool gesproken. De procedure voor de herstelling door een vakman leek ook duidelijker uitgelegd. [id051, C5]*

Translation: ‘Now oldschool is mentioned. The procedure for the repairs by an expert seemed to be explained more clearly.’

The coding strategy was conservative as to avoid an incorrect interpretation of participant responses. For example, if a participant mentioned that they noticed that the second version of the text contained ‘modern words’, as in (4), this most likely referred to the English loanwords in C5, yet this was not coded as such to avoid overinterpretation. Ambiguous responses like these were, however, rare, and in most cases it was clear whether a participant identified the difference(s) correctly or not.

4. *Modernere woordenschat [id004, C5]*

Translation: ‘More modern vocabulary’

Analyses were carried out in R (v4.3.0, R Core Team 2023) using stats (R Core Team 2023) and emmeans (Lenth 2023) as the main packages.

5. Results

To tackle RQ1, we specifically verify whether participants reported noticing a change in T/V pronouns between the two texts they were offered. Overall, we see that, across conditions, 17 of our 279 participants (6%) report noticing such difference (see Table 3). To answer RQ2 and RQ3, i.e., to determine to what extent noticing was impacted by the presence of additional informal language features and participants’ linguistic socialization, responses were modelled using a generalized linear model. The model included the reporting of noticing a change in T/V pronouns (yes vs. no) as the binary response variable, and condition (C1 vs. C2 vs. C3 vs. C4 vs. C5), language socialization of the participant (language professional vs. other professional backgrounds), and their interaction as fixed effects. No significant effects of either condition, language socialization, or their interaction were found (see Appendix D for details on the model). Given the skew in the distribution of the response variable, we additionally verified the impact of condition and professional background on T/V change noticing using conditional inference trees (Tagliamonte and Baayen 2012). A lack of branching in the tree confirmed the conclusion that neither factor seemed to impact on the degree of noticing a pronoun change between the text versions.

Table 3. Overview of participant numbers and proportions reporting noticing a difference in T/V pronouns between the two text versions.

Condition	Language Professional			Other Professional Backgrounds			Total		
	<i>N T/V Noticed</i>	<i>N T/V Unnoticed</i>	<i>% Noticed</i>	<i>N T/V Noticed</i>	<i>N T/V Unnoticed</i>	<i>% Noticed</i>	<i>N T/V Noticed</i>	<i>N T/V Unnoticed</i>	<i>% Noticed</i>
C1	3	24	11%	2	21	9%	5	45	10%
C2	2	18	10%	1	32	3%	3	50	6%
C3	0	25	0%	2	28	7%	2	53	4%
C4	2	20	9%	0	27	0%	2	47	4%
C5	4	32	11%	1	35	3%	5	67	7%
Total	11	119	8%	6	143	4%	17	262	6%

Although strictly speaking not within the scope of our research questions, we supplemented the above analysis with a further analysis of the noticing of the other linguistic features to put the noticing of T/V pronouns in perspective. Table 4 gives an overview of the proportion of participants noticing each of the four linguistic features under study. Overall, just like T/V pronouns, intensifiers and exclamation marks are rarely reported as differences between the two texts: on average, 10% of participants report the intensifiers, and 5% the exclamation marks. These figures are in the order of the 6% noticing of the T/V pronouns. By contrast, the English lexical items are noticed by 63% of the participants in C5, the only condition including this feature. A chi square test confirms a significant association between noticing and the type of features for Table 4 ($\chi^2 = 172.77$, $df = 3$, $p < .0001$, Cramer's $V = 0.52$). Interestingly, this considerably higher degree of noticing of English lexical items in C5 did not increase or decrease the degree of noticing of the T/V pronouns in this condition (cf. lack of effect of condition in the model reported in Appendix D). In a series of generalized linear models for each of the additional features separately,² we also found no significant differences in noticing for any of the features for language users working in a language-oriented profession compared to other participants.

Table 4. Overview of participant numbers and proportions reporting having noticed a difference in one or more of the four features under study and those who did not.

	Change Noticed		Change Unnoticed	
	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
T/V pronouns	17	6%	262	94%
Intensifiers	18	10%	158	90%
Exclamation marks	6	5%	115	95%
English lexical items	45	63%	27	37%

6. Discussion and Conclusions

The experiment suggests that changes in T/V forms in pronominal address in Dutch professional communication are not very salient: less than 1 in 15 respondents noticed that the pronouns of address varied between two versions of the same information letter they read in the study. Moreover, there was no difference in noticing between participants in a linguistic profession and those without a language-oriented professional background. Interestingly, boosting the informality of the text by adding other informal linguistic features did not impact the salience of T/V variation. Two of these additional features, intensifiers and exclamation marks, went virtually unnoticed as well. By contrast, English lexical items, the most informal feature that was added in C5 alongside the T pronouns, intensifiers, and exclamation marks were picked up significantly more frequently, with over 60% of participants noticing their appearance in the second version of the information letter. These results lead us to formulate negative answers to RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3.

These results raise two questions that require further discussion: (1) Why do only few participants notice the difference in pronominal address? (2) Why do English lexical items get noticed? Starting with the first question, we can consider several potential explanations. A first hypothesis draws on research in the field of visual perception: we may be confronted with a case of change blindness owing to the design of the experiment (Simons and Levin 1997). This phenomenon is defined in psychology as “the surprising failure to notice seemingly obvious changes from one moment to the next, [...] people are ‘blind’ to the changes between what was in view moments before and what is in view now,” (Chabris and Simons 2010, pp. 54–55). While work on change blindness does not tend to focus on the type of linguistic changes relevant for this study, and hence further research would be required to give a decisive answer regarding its relevance here, the phenomenon does offer an interesting avenue to reflect on why participants did not notice the change in T/V pronouns in the experiment designed here. Many theories accounting for change blindness suggest that it occurs for elements that are not significant for the interpretation of a visual scene (Kentridge 2015). Likewise, the linguistic changes in our experiment do not change the understanding of the text as a whole. Another feature of our experimental design that may facilitate change blindness is the amount of time between seeing the first and the second text. Research suggests that the longer the time between two scenes, the less likely a visual change will be noticed (Hollingworth 2004). The comprehension check (phase 1b) in between our two text versions may hence have contributed to change blindness. Yet, if we invoke change blindness as an explanation for (1), the question remains (2) why the English items *did* get noticed. Future research could explore when and to what extent textual change blindness occurs, e.g., by including other textual changes than those implemented here, by varying the attention drawn to possible changes between text versions in the instruction phase, varying the amount of time included between variants in the reading itself, or in the elicitation of the perceived differences in the test phase.

Second, de Hoop et al. (2023) and Schoenmakers et al. (2024) suggest that the salience of T pronouns may be influenced by whether their stressed or unstressed forms are used. This certainly is a plausible suggestion, but we cannot confirm or reject this hypothesis based on the current study. We included a mix of stressed and unstressed forms which we felt were natural in the context of our information letter, and as such hope to have improved the ecological validity of the experiment. Future research could explore to what extent change between stressed forms may be picked up more easily than changes to unstressed forms. For instance, eye-tracking methods could be used to investigate which forms draw attention (compare, e.g., Hilberink-Schulpen et al. 2016, for the use of foreign languages in job advertising). Eye-tracking methods could also be used in between-subject set-ups where participants read only one version of the text to avoid reduced ecological validity by presenting the same (slightly altered) text twice.

A third alternative explanation for (1) may be found in Jansen and Janssen (2005), who suggest that the topic of the text in interaction with the attitudes of its readership towards that topic may impact the perception of T/V pronouns. Their study on text appreciation in relation to the use of T/V pronouns indicated that participants who are indifferent about the topic of the text are insensitive to the use of different pronouns in the text. It is not unlikely that the topic of the informational text on insurances in our study was not of particular interest to many participants. This indifference to the topic perhaps also led to less attention to pronouns of address. Additionally, the experimental setup reduced the ecological validity of the reading task, which may have also led to lower levels of engagement with topic and text, even for participants who are supposed to engage with text and language on a professional level. As such, the response to (1) may not (solely) lie in aspects of the experimental design, but may also be answered by looking into the respondent profiles of those who (do not) notice the T/V pronouns. While we were able to show that a professional linguistic background is not what sets these participants apart, we do not have any other data at hand or a sample large enough to investigate further individual differences in linguistic experience or cognitive and sociodemographic

characteristics that may be involved in noticing T/V pronoun use. Future research could for instance look at the impact of (individual) reading styles and reading skills, involvement of readers with the text, or consider aspects of socio-economic background other than language orientation in participants' professions.

The most likely explanation for (1), however, may be found in our initial appraisal of the formality level of either the text genre or the T pronouns. It could be that the professional information letter in B2C communication has recently come to be perceived as more informal than previously reported in the literature. As rightly pointed out by an anonymous reviewer, the fact that we use *we/wij* forms in the letter may have added to this more informal style. Hence, T pronouns would not be out of place in a genre that is not seen as overly formal. However, if the genre was perceived as genuinely informal, then we would expect a higher noticing of V pronouns, especially in C2, which was not the case.

More plausible is that the relationship between T and V pronouns in the Belgian context is not quite the same as the one in the Netherlands, which has been described more extensively in the literature and which led us to formulating our hypotheses. As discussed in Section 2, the Belgian linguistic landscape has an additional option for pronominal address, namely the colloquial *gij* system, which has been convincingly shown to be a stereotype in the Labovian sense (Van De Mierop et al. 2016). Speakers are highly aware of its non-standard status, yet at the same time it is the most natural option for many, as for few Belgian Dutch speakers the standard T/V distinction is part of their native variety (Deprez and Geerts 1977; Vandekerckhove 2005). Hence, it may be the case for these speakers that the difference between the *gij* and *jij* system is much more salient than that between the *jij* and *u* system, with the latter two options being both perceived as standard and more formal, their difference in formality fractional compared to the difference with *gij*. This hypothesis that puts the social meaning of *jij* close to that of *u* compared to *gij* would be in line with recent anecdotal reports of changes in the pronominal system where *je* is becoming the new *u*, effectively taking over its function as a V form, leading to a T/V system with *jij* as the V form and *gij* as the T form. Indeed, the Belgian Dutch context is quite unique in offering speakers two T forms alongside a V form. If *jij* as a standard T form is undergoing change to take up part of the social work traditionally performed by V forms (see De Dijn et al. n.d.), and to as such set it apart from the colloquial T form *gij*, this may well explain why it did not stand out to participants in a formal information letter. A factor that could contribute to this levelling of the perceived formality difference between the Standard Dutch T and V pronouns is that the forms *u* and *uw* also feature as the oblique form in the *gij* system, meaning that the same linguistic forms are both used in informal and formal contexts. As can be seen in Table 1, the oblique form of the *gij* system is *u*, which formally coincides with the *u* forms in the Standard Dutch V system. This means that language users can produce formally identical variants in both formal and informal discourse, which could potentially attenuate the formality associated with the V system, reducing the difference with the T system (cf. De Dijn et al. n.d. on ambiguity of *u* forms in professional communication).

Let us now turn to the second open question: why were English lexical items noticed more readily than the other linguistic features? While this question goes beyond the scope of the original research questions of this study, it is a noteworthy finding that deserves further consideration. To explain the salience of the English items, one could argue from a visual prominence perspective that they are longer and perhaps in that sense visually more readily perceptible than exclamation marks or pronouns. This explanation, however, cannot account for the fact that the intensifiers were hardly noticed. The latter are also full lexical items which were furthermore emphasized visually by using stress marks. Another straightforward explanation concerns the shift in language: the English items might be more salient simply because they are in English (see also Hornikx and van Meurs 2020).³ Another explanation is that these items cross a certain threshold of informality so that even if the informational B2C letter has become less formal as a genre, they still stand out. The fact that the English loans rather than the other features got noticed by a significantly

larger portion of the participants is in line with the pretesting of the informality of the linguistic features that informed the experiment. Note that a qualitative analysis of the responses offered in phase 3 of the core experiment suggests that many respondents who did not explicitly name the English loans (and hence are not included in the proportion of participants who noticed the change in the text) did report a change in the style of the text. Participants, for instance, mentioned that the second version of the text seemed more ‘informal’, ‘jovial’, ‘smooth’, ‘modern’, and ‘youthful’. Of course, we cannot claim with any certainty that these qualifications of the second version of the text are to be associated with the English loans, as all informal features or their accumulation in C5 potentially made the text more ‘informal’, ‘jovial’, and ‘smooth’. Yet, descriptions like ‘modern’ and ‘youthful’, which were absent in the other conditions, echo indexical values that have been associated with the use of English in Belgian Dutch. For instance, the perception study by Schuring et al. (2023) shows how the use of English lexical items in Dutch is linked more with (pre)adolescents than with older participants, and more with modern roles (e.g., rapper) than with traditional roles (e.g., ‘butcher’) or public roles (e.g., ‘mayor’). Likewise, in their summary of the associations linked to the use of English (in advertising), Hornikx and van Meurs (2020, pp. 99–100) identify ‘modernity’ (including values such as youth and future), ‘success’, and ‘internationalness’ as main dimensions.

As this research was inspired by questions arising from the field of professional communication, it seems only fitting to conclude this paper with an attempt at formulating more practical advice that can provide guidance to communication professionals. At first glance, one may be inclined to conclude that it does not matter a great deal whether one uses the T or V form in Belgian Dutch business communications, as most people do not notice the difference. The results show that shifts from T to V forms, or vice versa, are not noticed by the majority of respondents. However, caution is warranted and there may be more at play. First, it is clear that the ecological validity of an experiment like the one reported here is limited. This means that the results may not transfer readily to real life communicative situations. Second, linguistic research has not been able to determine what the role of noticing and salience is in the activation of indexical meaning. As pointed out in the introduction, the reason why companies and communication specialists are in doubt whether to use T or V forms boils down to the question of what indexical meanings these forms introduce in communication, which feeds into a company’s tone of voice which in turn is crucial in determining its public perception. Preston (2011), for instance, argues that noticing, be it conscious or subconscious, is a necessary condition for the activation of social meaning (i.e., the Contrastive Mandate). Drager and Kirtley (2016), by contrast, claim that social meaning activation is not dependent on any form of noticing. It may be clear that both linguistic theorising as well as empirical work on this topic are urgently needed. The same goes for further research on pronouns of address in Belgian Dutch, not just focussing on their perception as we have here, but in parallel with studies on evaluation and the production of T/V variation. For now, the best advice for companies seems to be to choose the pronoun of address with the social meaning that best fits the corporate tone of voice, but consider that many customers may not pick up on the difference.

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Appendix A. Stimulus Materials: Five Versions of the Text Used in Phase 1a and Phase 2a of the Experiment

Text containing V forms as used in C1 phase 1a, C2, phase 2a, C3 phase 1a, C4 phase 1a, and C5 phase 1a

Beste klant,
 Samen met uw makelaar maakte u met het contract [NAAM VERZEKERING] een goede keuze. Deze verzekering biedt vandaag immers al meer dan een klassieke brandverzekering.
 Sleutels verloren? We zorgen voor een slotenmaker. Wenst u een video-expertise? Dat kan, u filmt de schade met uw smartphone, de expert kan de opgelopen schade vanop afstand vaststellen en wij kunnen uw schade sneller vergoeden. In sommige gevallen is een herstelling in natura mogelijk. Wij zorgen er dan voor dat een vakman de schade komt herstellen, en we betalen de rekening rechtstreeks aan de hersteller. U betaalt niets. Dat bespaart u een hoop zorgen. Ook goed om te weten: we houden in onze tussenkomst rekening met de nieuwe bouwnormen.
 Dit zijn maar enkele van de troeven van [NAAM VERZEKERING]. Met dit contract, waarbij u een uitgebreide bescherming geniet, kunt u dus op beide oren slapen. Toch blijven we streven naar beter, want wij zijn supporter van uw leven. We informeren u dan ook graag dat we nog meer dekkingen toevoegen aan het contract.
 Bedankt voor uw vertrouwen.
U kunt altijd op ons rekenen.
 Vriendelijke groeten,
 [VOORNAAM NAAM]
 Managing Director

Text containing T forms as used in C1 phase 2a and C2 phase 1a

Beste klant,
 Samen met je makelaar maakte je met het contract [NAAM VERZEKERING] een goede keuze. Deze verzekering biedt vandaag immers al meer dan een klassieke brandverzekering.
 Sleutels verloren? We zorgen voor een slotenmaker. Wens je een video-expertise? Dat kan, je filmt de schade met je smartphone, de expert kan de opgelopen schade vanop afstand vaststellen en wij kunnen jouw schade sneller vergoeden. In sommige gevallen is een herstelling in natura mogelijk. Wij zorgen er dan voor dat een vakman de schade komt herstellen, en we betalen de rekening rechtstreeks aan de hersteller. Jij betaalt niets. Dat bespaart je een hoop zorgen. Ook goed om te weten: we houden in onze tussenkomst rekening met de nieuwe bouwnormen.
 Dit zijn maar enkele van de troeven van [NAAM VERZEKERING]. Met dit contract, waarbij je een uitgebreide bescherming geniet, kan je dus op beide oren slapen. Toch blijven we streven naar beter, want wij zijn supporter van jouw leven. We informeren je dan ook graag dat we nog meer dekkingen toevoegen aan het contract.
 Bedankt voor je vertrouwen.
Je kan altijd op ons rekenen.
 Vriendelijke groeten,
 [VOORNAAM NAAM]
 Managing Director

Text containing T forms and intensifiers as used in C3 phase 2a

Beste klant,
 Samen met je makelaar maakte je met het contract [NAAM VERZEKERING] een héél goede keuze. Deze verzekering biedt vandaag immers al meer dan een klassieke brandverzekering.
 Sleutels verloren? We zorgen voor een slotenmaker. Wens je een video-expertise? Dat kan, je filmt de schade met je smartphone, de expert kan de opgelopen schade vanop afstand vaststellen en wij kunnen jouw schade véél sneller vergoeden. In sommige gevallen is een herstelling in natura mogelijk. Wij zorgen er dan voor dat een vakman de schade komt herstellen, en we betalen de rekening rechtstreeks aan de hersteller. Jij betaalt niets. Dat bespaart je een hoop zorgen. Ook goed om te weten: we houden in onze tussenkomst rekening met de nieuwe bouwnormen.
 Dit zijn maar enkele van de troeven van [NAAM VERZEKERING]. Met dit contract, waarbij je een héél uitgebreide bescherming geniet, kan je dus op beide oren slapen. Toch blijven we streven naar beter, want wij zijn supporter van jouw leven. We informeren je dan ook graag dat we nog meer dekkingen toevoegen aan het contract.
 Bedankt voor je vertrouwen.
Je kan altijd op ons rekenen.
 Vriendelijke groeten,
 [VOORNAAM NAAM]
 Managing Director

Text containing T forms, intensifiers, and exclamation marks as used in C4 phase 2a

Beste klant,
 Samen met je makelaar maakte je met het contract [NAAM VERZEKERING] een héél goede keuze. Deze verzekering biedt vandaag immers al meer dan een klassieke brandverzekering.
 Sleutels verloren? We zorgen voor een slotenmaker! Wens je een video-expertise? Dat kan, je filmt de schade met je smartphone, de expert kan de opgelopen schade vanop afstand vaststellen en wij kunnen jouw schade véél sneller vergoeden. In sommige gevallen is een herstelling in natura mogelijk. Wij zorgen er dan voor dat een vakman de schade komt herstellen, en we betalen de rekening rechtstreeks aan de hersteller. Jij betaalt niets. Dat bespaart je een hoop zorgen! Ook goed om te weten: we houden in onze tussenkomst rekening met de nieuwe bouwnormen.
 Dit zijn maar enkele van de troeven van [NAAM VERZEKERING]. Met dit contract, waarbij je een héél uitgebreide bescherming geniet, kan je dus op beide oren slapen. Toch blijven we streven naar beter! Want wij zijn supporter van jouw leven. We informeren je dan ook graag dat we nog meer dekkingen toevoegen aan het contract.
 Bedankt voor je vertrouwen.
 Je kan altijd op ons rekenen.
 Vriendelijke groeten,
 [VOORNAAM NAAM]
 Managing Director

Text containing T forms, intensifiers, exclamation marks, and English lexical items as used in C5 phase 2a

Beste klant,
 Samen met je makelaar maakte je met het contract [NAAM VERZEKERING] een héél goede keuze. Deze verzekering biedt vandaag immers al meer dan een oldschool brandverzekering.
 Sleutels verloren? We zorgen voor een slotenmaker! Wens je een video-expertise? Dat kan, je filmt de schade met je smartphone, de expert kan de opgelopen schade vanop afstand vaststellen en wij kunnen jouw schade véél sneller vergoeden. In sommige cases is een herstelling in natura mogelijk. Wij zorgen er dan voor dat een vakman de schade komt herstellen, en we betalen de rekening rechtstreeks aan de hersteller. Jij betaalt niets. Dat bespaart je een hoop zorgen! By the way: we houden in onze tussenkomst rekening met de nieuwe bouwnormen.
 Dit zijn maar enkele van de troeven van [NAAM VERZEKERING]. Met dit contract, waarbij je een héél uitgebreide bescherming geniet, kan je dus op beide oren slapen. Toch blijven we streven naar beter! Want wij zijn supporter van jouw leven. We informeren je dan ook graag dat we nog meer dekkingen toevoegen aan het contract.
 Bedankt voor je vertrouwen.
 Je kan altijd op ons rekenen.
 Vriendelijke groeten,
 [VOORNAAM NAAM]
 Managing Director

Appendix B. Control Questions from Phase 1b

Heb je de volledige tekst kunnen lezen? [Have you been able to read the entire text?]

- ☐ *Ja* [Yes]
- ☐ *Nee* [No]

[page break]

Is een herstelling in natura mogelijk? [Are repairs in kind possible?]

- ☐ *Ja, altijd* [Yes, always]
- ☐ *Ja, in sommige gevallen* [Yes, in certain cases]
- ☐ *Nee, nooit* [No, never]

Waarmee wordt er volgens de tekst rekening gehouden bij tussenkomst van de verzekeraar? [According to the text, what is taken into account when insurances get involved?]

- ☐ *De wensen van de klant* [The preferences of the customer]
- ☐ *De beschikbaarheid van een vakman* [The availability of an expert]
- ☐ *De nieuwe bouwnormen* [The latest planning regulations]

Welke afsluitende groet werd er gebruikt? [Which greeting was used at the end of the letter?]

- ☐ *Vriendelijke groeten* [Kind regards]
- ☐ *Hoogachtend* [Yours sincerely]
- ☐ *Hartelijke groet* [Best wishes]

Welk woord komt NIET in de tekst voor? [Which word does NOT appear in the text?]

- ☐ Slotenmaker [Locksmith]
- ☐ Video-expertise [Video expert]
- ☐ Franchise [Franchise]

Appendix C. Breakdown of Participant Numbers per Region, Gender, Language Socialisation Background, and Age for Each Condition

	Region					Gender		Participant Working in a Language-Oriented Profession		Age	Total N
	Antw	Bru	Lim	E-Fl	Fl-Br	M	F	Y	N	Mean (SD)	
C1	6	0	23	16	5	18	32	27	23	36.80 (11.79)	50
C2	4	0	31	11	7	11	42	20	33	37.91 (12.12)	53
C3	6	1	32	9	7	16	39	25	30	38.38 (11.75)	55
C4	6	1	22	11	9	16	33	22	27	42.04 (12.67)	49
C5	11	1	39	13	8	25	47	36	36	39.43 (13.47)	72

(Abbreviations: Antw = Antwerp, Bru = Brussels, Lim = Limburg, E-Fl = East Flanders, Fl-Br = Flemish Brabant, M = male, F = female, Y = yes, N = no, SD = standard deviation).

Appendix D. Details of Generalized Linear Model of Reported Noticing of T/V Pronouns

Table A1. Regression output for reporting noticing a difference between the two texts in phase 1a and phase 2a (significance codes: '***' < .001; '**' < .01; '*' < .05; '.' < .1; ' ' > .05).

Reporting Noticing T/V Difference	Estimate	Std. Error	z Value	p Value	
INTERCEPT	2.08	0.61	3.40	<.001	***
CONDITION (reference level: C1)					
C2	0.12	0.96	0.12	.90	
C3	17.49	2 151	0.01	.99	
C4	0.22	0.96	0.23	.82	
C5	0	0.81	0	1	
LANGUAGE PROFESSIONAL (reference level: yes)					
No	0.27	0.96	0.28	.78	
CONDITION X LANGUAGE PROFESSIONAL (reference level: yes—C1)					
C2—nee	1.00	1.58	0.63	.53	
C3—nee	−17.20	2 151	−0.01	.99	
C4—nee	16.99	2 070	0.01	.99	
C5—nee	1.20	1.49	0.81	.42	

Table A2. ANOVA generalized linear model reported in Table A1 (significance codes: '***' < .001; '**' < .01; '*' < .05; '.' < .1; ' ' > .05).

	Df	Deviance	Residual Df	Residual Deviance	p Value
NULL MODEL			278	128.07	
CONDITION	4	2.30	274	125.78	.68
LANGUAGE PROFESSIONAL	1	2.12	273	123.66	.15
CONDITION X LANGUAGE PROFESSIONAL	4	6.91	269	116.75	.14

Notes

- ¹ This research is the result of co-creation with a professional copywriter. While this study is inspired by bottom-up questions from organisations and companies, the research was conducted independently and there are no conflicts of interest to report.
- ² Given that not all conditions included changes in all linguistic features, there was no shared participant pool that could be included in a single model. For the noticing of each feature, we started with a maximal model including the noticing of the feature as the binary response variable and condition, language socialization, and their interaction as fixed effects. Note that the model for the English lexical items did not include condition as a predictor, given that these features only appeared in C5.
- ³ We would like to thank one of the reviewers of this paper for this suggestion.

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Article

What *I* Can Do with the Right Version of *You*: The Impact of Narrative Perspective on Reader Immersion, and How (in)Formal Address Pronouns Influence Immersion Reports

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Abstract: Previous research has shown that readers experience stronger immersion while reading first-person narratives than third-person narratives, but whether this difference in processing is time-sensitive remains unclear. We report on a self-paced reading experiment in which French participants read short stories in first and in third person. Additionally, participants were directly addressed with either formal or informal second-person pronouns in the final sentence of the narrative, as well as in a subsequent (off-line) questionnaire soliciting post-story immersion reports. The suitability of a particular pronoun of address depends on the social context, and misplaced use can impact the way in which people perceive and assess a particular situation. We did not find significant differences between reading times with first- or third-person pronouns, but participants reported higher immersion and emotional engagement after reading first-person stories than third-person stories. Moreover, the effect of story perspective on reported immersion only occurred when participants were addressed with formal second-person pronouns. We take these findings as evidence for an effect of first- versus third-person pronouns on immersion via perspective shifts. Moreover, we argue that the effect of being addressed with an unexpected (in this case, informal) pronoun can overrule such an effect, while being addressed with an expected (in this case, formal) pronoun can be conducive of it. This finding highlights the importance of research into the impact of pronouns of address.

Keywords: immersion; pronouns; address; French; narrative; processing

1. Introduction

Readers are said to be *immersed* in a story when they experience it as if they were part of it. Immersion may be defined as a “state of cognitive, emotional, and imaginative absorption” within the story world (Hartung et al. 2017b, p. 2). The experience of immersion is not identical for everyone; what immersion entails largely depends on someone’s personal preferences (Hartung et al. 2017a) and their disposition to imagination and empathy (Hartung et al. 2016, 2017b; Mak and Willems 2019). Reading habits also contribute to what immersion looks like for each reader: more habitual readers are generally able to experience immersion more deeply and with more ease than those who read sparingly (Mak et al. 2020). Despite the variety of immersive states, researchers agree on what immersion generally looks like: readers mentally re-enact described actions and emotions, create images in their mind, feel transported into the story world, and/or think along with the characters of a story (Green and Brock 2000; Shanton and Goldman 2010; Kuijpers et al. 2014).

Moreover, the experience of immersion varies for an individual depending on the actual reading material at hand (Kuijpers et al. 2014; Hartung et al. 2017b; van Krieken et al. 2017): an instruction manual will probably immerse a reader much less than a fantasy novel. It is generally assumed that the narrative genre promotes immersion with much more ease

than other genres because of a perceived similarity with narrative characters, the use of suspense, and view-point techniques. That is, a key feature of narratives that modulates the experience of immersion is the narrative perspective (see Sanders and Redeker 1996).

Narratives are commonly written from a third-person perspective, with an omniscient narrator who is external to the story telling the reader about what the characters feel and do. Narratives may also be written from a first-person perspective, where the narrator is typically one of the characters describing events from his or her own limited perspective. Narrative points of view, and the corresponding linguistic cues, have been shown to impact readers' perspective-taking: reading in the third person elicits an external or onlooker's perspective, while reading in the first person prompts the reader to adopt an internal or agent perspective (Brunyé et al. 2009; Ditman et al. 2010). That is, in reading a sentence like "I cut a tomato", the reader imagines themselves doing the cutting; when the sentence is "He/she cuts a tomato", the reader feels as if they see someone else cutting it.

Crucially, assuming a point of view while reading is linked to immersion into the story: an experimental study by Hartung et al. (2016) investigating the effect of perspective-taking on immersion reports that reading Dutch short stories in first (versus third) person resulted in readers reporting higher levels of immersion. They also measured the electrodermal activity (EDA) of the participants while reading. This method provides a measure of a person's arousal through small changes in the glands in the skin. They found increased arousal through EDA while people read third-person stories rather than first-person stories. Hartung et al. interpret these results by assuming that third-person stories involve a higher cognitive demand than first-person stories: in third-person stories, readers may adopt the points of view of multiple characters and, thus, anticipate having to do so even when it is unnecessary for the understanding of the story. The increased processing load of reading third-person perspective results in a less immersive experience for the reader. Moreover, a subsequent study by Hartung et al. (2017b) reports that first-person stories generate higher levels of emotional engagement with the characters than third-person stories. Reading times were measured so as to explore whether the increase in processing load is reflected in reading behavior, but no significant differences between narrative perspectives were found.

In the present study, we reinvestigate the effect of first- versus third-person perspective on immersion in French short stories by means of a self-paced reading experiment and a post-hoc questionnaire collecting reports of the immersive state of participants. We suspect that the measures used in Hartung et al. (2017b) were not sensitive enough to capture an effect of the pronoun type, as they measured the time spent on the full stories, i.e., the time from the onset of the full-text fragment presentation until the button press. In our experiment, we instead measure reading times for the pronouns themselves (and the spillover regions). Thus, we collect a measure that reflects the online processing cost of first- and third-person pronouns (in the short story), as well as an off-line measure that reflects participants' self-reported post-hoc immersion in the story (in the questionnaire). Our hypotheses are as follows:

H1: *Third-person pronouns are read more slowly than first-person pronouns.*

H2: *First-person short stories lead to higher reader immersion reports than third-person short stories.*

Narratives written from a second-person perspective are traditionally less common (see Fludernik 1994), and their effect on immersion remains understudied. However, we will not include second-person narratives in our study because of the referential complexity of the second person in narratives (it is not easy to determine who the intended addressee is), and the fact that many languages have a bipartite or tripartite second-person pronominal system. An investigation of second-person narratives deserves its own in-depth study.

Still, there is recent interest in the effects of second-person pronouns on processing, particularly when a second-person pronoun is used to address the interlocutor directly.

Pronouns of address have been found to affect people's attitudes to, evaluations of, and involvement with real and experimental material. Cruz et al. (2017), for example, investigated social media users' involvement with online ads in English. They found that when ads contained a form of the second-person pronoun *you*, users were more likely to interact (i.e., like, share, and comment) with the ad, compared to ads without any pronouns of address. This might be due to the fact that pronouns of address have a self-ascriptive ability (Wechsler 2010; de Hoop and Tarenskeen 2015), where addressees are more ready to interpret the pronoun as a deictic rather than a generic reference.

For languages that use two or more second-person pronouns (e.g., Dutch *jij* and *u*, German *Sie* and *du*, French *tu* and *vous*), additional factors come into play revolving around the particular second-person pronoun. Such languages present speakers with a choice not based on grammatical rules, but on social norms. Traditionally, constructs such as power, solidarity, respect, and distance were applied to explain the variation in the use of these pronouns of address. Pronouns of address are usually categorized as formal (or V, from Latin *vos*) or informal (or T, from Latin *tu*) (Brown and Gilman 1960). Several studies looked into how Netherlandic Dutch speakers' attitudes towards commercial and corporate communications are affected by the use of a T (*jij*) or a V (*u*) pronoun of address (van Zalk and Jansen 2004; Leung et al. 2022; de Hoop et al. 2023; Sadowski et al. 2024; Schoenmakers et al. 2024). There is a general preference for T pronouns among speakers of Dutch in The Netherlands (Vismans 2013; Levshina 2017), which led researchers to hypothesize that consumers' evaluations would be more positive when addressed with T than V pronouns. Indeed, Leung et al. (2022) found that Dutch consumers prefer to be addressed with T forms in commercial communications rather than V forms in general. Schoenmakers et al. (2024) found that T-use in commercial advertising leads to a higher appreciation of product advertisements than V, and Sadowski et al. (2024) found that T-use leads to more willingness to make monetary donations than V-use, particularly for altruistic participants. van Zalk and Jansen (2004), by contrast, found that Dutch speakers were more positive about an online travel advertisement when it contained V pronouns than T pronouns. However, a post-hoc analysis revealed that, while younger people evaluated both ads with T and V pronouns similarly, older people preferred V pronouns. Schoenmakers et al. (2024) and van Zalk and Jansen (2004) also found that being highly involved with the material (e.g., the scenarios, the ads, or the brands depicted in the experiment are "effectively relevant to the receiver", Zaichkowsky 1986) results in higher appreciation and more positive evaluations regardless of the pronouns of address received.

German T (*du*) and V (*Sie*) pronouns have also been shown to differentially affect people's attitudes and evaluations (den Hartog et al. forthcoming). In German, there seems to be no clear-cut preference for T or V (Kretzenbacher et al. 2006; den Hartog et al. 2022). den Hartog et al. (forthcoming) designed an online (mock) job interview, where participants (in the role of candidates) saw a series of videos of a recruiter asking them questions while addressing the candidate with either T or V. German participants evaluated the recruiter more positively when they had used V to address participants. In the case of French, the language under investigation in the present paper, the default pronoun used for public communications is the formal *vous* 'you' (den Hartog et al. 2022). Meanwhile, *tu* is the marked pronoun, restricted to (perceived) intimate contexts where interlocutors know each other well or at least experience a certain sense of (social) proximity (Warren 2006; Pager-McClymont et al. 2023). The study of den Hartog et al. (forthcoming) also tested French participants taking part in a mock job interview: French speakers were significantly more critical in their evaluation of the recruiter when they received T rather than V. The use of T-pronouns by a stranger in a formal situation was perceived as too intimate, or even disrespectful, and was consequently deemed inappropriate.

The studies discussed above provide evidence that speakers of Dutch, German, and French are sensitive to being directly addressed with T- or V-pronouns, and that this sensitiveness is reflected in their evaluations of real and experimental material, as well as their interlocutor. Whether we choose to address our participants with T or V forms

may thus impact their attitude towards the task, the materials, and/or the researcher. The effect also depends on the language under investigation, likely driven by differences in cultural practices.

The social norms in France seem to be quite strict in what is an acceptable and unacceptable use of a T-pronoun, as evidenced by the results of den Hartog et al. (forthcoming). Moreover, research into the choice of T/V by French speakers also highlights that speakers negatively judge a violation of the address practices. French informants in focus groups revealed to Warren (2006) that they felt offended or embarrassed when addressed with *tu*, or that the speaker was unilaterally trying to establish an undesired relationship by addressing them with the T-form. The informants' testimonies show that speakers who break the social norms associated with the use of pronouns of address are frowned upon. This is supported by the findings from Pager-McClymont et al. (2023), who conducted a survey in which many participants evaluated T-use by a French news channel on their social media platforms as odd because of the "false familiarity" and forced intimacy.

Our investigation is, therefore, not limited to testing putative effects of narrative perspective (first- versus third-person) on immersion, but extends to putative effects of pronouns of address (T versus V) on readers' (post-hoc) reports of immersion. To that end, we conducted an experiment consisting of a self-paced reading and a questionnaire component. First, we presented French readers with short stories in first or third person. Next, we asked the participants to fill out a questionnaire about their immersion in the story. The questionnaire was either presented in T or in V. Thus, we collected a measure that reflects the on-line processing cost of first- and third-person pronouns (in the short story), as well as an off-line measure that reflects participants' self-reported immersion in the story (in the questionnaire).

Regarding the T-/V-manipulation in the questionnaire, we expect to observe a difference in the readers' reported immersion based on the pronoun of address they received (T or V). We expect that French readers have a preference for V-pronouns of address, and judge V-pronouns as appropriate in the context of an experimental setting with unfamiliar researchers. Consequently, receiving a pronoun of address that conforms to readers' expectations may translate to more appreciation for the task and, by extension, we expect the immersion reports to be higher.¹ Conversely, the use of the T-pronoun may be perceived as inappropriate and could result in a lower level of engagement with the experimental material and a diminished post-hoc sense of immersion (i.e., being confronted with an inappropriate address pronoun in the questionnaire following the reading task "kills the vibe" from immersion), leading to reduced immersion reports. Our hypothesis is as follows:

H3: *T-pronouns will lead to poorer reader immersion reports than V-pronouns.*

We see no reason to expect the T-/V-manipulation to yield a different effect based on whether it follows a first- or a third-person story, and so we remain agnostic about a potential interaction effect. Finally, to exploratorily obtain an index of the processing difficulty associated with formal and informal second-person pronouns, participants were directly addressed directly in the final sentence of the story (using the French version of the frame "And **you**, have **you** ever ...?"). Participants were presented with the same pronoun of address as they would see in the questionnaire. We expect that the T-forms will be read more slowly than the V-forms because of a surprisal effect due to the use of a non-default or even inappropriate form (Warren 2006; Pager-McClymont et al. 2023).

H4: *T-pronouns are read more slowly than V-pronouns.*

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Participants

We recruited 111 French speakers from the faculty of Legal, Political, and Social Sciences at the University of Lille (42 male, 67 female, 2 non-binary) between the ages of 17 and 24 ($M = 19.2$, $SD = 1.43$). Participants were not aware of the purpose of the study. Participation was voluntary and participants received a snack as a reward. All participants were spoken to, and provided informed consent, in English. We discuss the exclusion criteria in Section 2.5.

2.2. Design

This experiment had a 2 (narrative perspective; first or third person) \times 2 (pronoun of address; T or V) mixed design. All participants read one story in the first person and one story in the third person (within subjects) but received a single pronoun of address, either T or V (between subjects). For any particular participant, the pronouns used in the final question of the story and in the questionnaire were the same (viz. *tu* or *vous*). Two main measures were recorded: reading times at each region of interest (the pronouns) and spillover regions (the two words following each region of interest), and immersion scores (in the questionnaire). Story appreciation, individual reading habits, and a French version of the Author Recognition Test (Stanovich and West 1989) were included as control measures. This study received approval from the Ethics Assessment Committee Humanities of Radboud University (EACH file number 2021-3221).

2.3. Materials

All our stimuli and questionnaires are available via our repository at Supplementary Materials <https://doi.org/10.34973/gzx3-yk10> (last accessed on 23 July 2024).

2.3.1. Stories

Two French fictional short stories were selected (see Table 1) from the open-access website of the publisher Short Édition (2011), who granted us permission to use the stories in our experiment. A fragment of one of the stimulus stories can be found in Appendix C. The original stories can be accessed through the Short Édition website and the modified versions through our repository. The stories were chosen based on word length (approximately 500 words) and the gender of the protagonist (one male and one female). Both stories have one protagonist, a single plotline, and do not touch on sensitive subjects. Neither of the stories made use of direct speech, and both originally referred to the protagonist with third-person pronouns. To manipulate the perspective of the stories, we produced a second version of each, referring to the protagonist with first-person pronouns (i.e., modifying the personal pronouns and the corresponding verbs).

Table 1. Story information.

Title, Author (Year)	Nr. of Words	Protagonist Gender	Nr. of Target Words	Nr. of Participants	Plot Summary	"And You?" Question (V-Version) (Target Word; Spillover)
Péripéties nocturnes (Barreyre 2019)	517	F	45	96	The protagonist, the tooth fairy (<i>petite souris</i> , lit. 'little mouse'), is being followed by an owl and must reach the children's bedroom to succeed at her mission.	Et <i>vous</i> , est-ce que <i>vous</i> avez déjà reçu la visite de la petite souris? ('And you, have you ever been visited by the tooth fairy?')
Les grandes découvertes perdues (D. 2014)	415	M	34	86	A geneticist at NASA invented a way to teleport anywhere into the universe.	Et <i>vous</i> , est-ce que <i>vous</i> aimeriez pouvoir te téléporter? ('And you, would you like to be able to teleport yourself?')

Both stories were written in the past tense. This is different from the stimuli in Brunyé et al.'s (2009, 2011, 2016) and Ditman et al. (2010) experiments ("I am slicing the tomato"),

which were presented in the present tense, even though literary narratives typically use the past tense, which is considered a narrative tense (de Swart 2007; Mulder et al. 2022). The experiments that tested longer story stimuli, rather than single sentences, were not specific about their tense use: the example from a longer text passage used in Brunyé et al. (2011) was in the present tense, and one of two examples in Brunyé et al. (2016) was in the present tense, the other in the past tense.

Furthermore, we added a final sentence to the short stories in which the reader is directly addressed. These sentences took the form of a question (e.g., *and you, have you ever...?*), beginning with *Et vous* 'And you' (formal) or *Et toi* 'And you' (informal). Earlier experiments used descriptive language to advance the story, although this type of language does not support the self-ascriptive effect of the second person 'you' as much as interactive language (imperatives, questions) does (de Hoop and Tarenskeen 2015). In descriptive passages, de Hoop and Tarenskeen (2015) find that 'you' is more often than not interpreted as a generic 'you' rather than a deictic pointing to the existence of an addressee. Therefore, the final sentence of the short stories we used in our experiment, which directly addressed the reader, was an interrogative clause.

The regions of interest in the main part of the short stories were the first- and third-person pronouns (target words) and the two words following the target words, to control for spillover effects (e.g., *elle arrive enfin* 'she finally arrives').² Target words and their spillovers were excluded from the analysis when they were the first or last word on the page, and when the target word contracted with the previous or following word (e.g., *j'arrive* 'I arrive'). We also excluded a spillover when it was another pronoun (e.g., *je me retournai* 'I turned myself'). In the end, one story contained 45 pronouns, while the other contained 34 (see Table 1). We did not control for grammatical function or position in the sentence, as these were the same in the first- and third-person condition.

As an offline measure of immersion (one of our main dependent variables), and other factors related to immersion, we made use of several questionnaires, which we discuss in the next subsection. When T-/V-pronouns were used in these questionnaires, the pronoun was manipulated as a between-subjects variable (in line with the pronoun read in the self-paced reading component). Hartung et al. (2016, 2017b) showed that psychological aspects, such as the ability to empathize and a disposition to imagination, explained much of the variance in their results. Assuming that our sample would be as varied in this respect, we recorded our participants' reading habits and preferences as well to make sure that potential patterns observed in our data were not due to uniformity of our sample (university students).

2.3.2. Immersion Questionnaire

An adapted version of the Story World Absorption Scale (SWAS, Kuijpers et al. 2014) and the Narrative Engagement Scale (NES, Busselle and Bilandzic 2009) was used to measure immersion, containing 19 items in total. The full questionnaire can be found in Appendix A.

The SWAS was specifically designed to measure the subjective experience of absorption in the story world of narrative texts. It is divided into four subscales, each with their own set of three-to-five statements: *attention* (e.g., "When I was reading the story, I was focused on what happened in the story"), *transportation* (e.g., "The world of the story sometimes felt closer to me than the world around me"), *emotional engagement* (e.g., "I felt sympathy for the main character"), and *mental imagery* (e.g., "I could imagine what the world in which the story took place looked like"). The SWAS lacks a dimension about participants' ease of understanding the story, and so we added a narrative understanding scale from the NES (e.g., "I could easily follow the thread of the story"), since understanding is a prerequisite for immersion (Busselle and Bilandzic 2009; Hartung et al. 2016).

After removing several of the statements in the scales to avoid redundancy, we translated them into French and rephrased them with second-person pronouns (T/V, see Appendix A). Six of the selected nineteen statements were reverse-coded to ensure that

participants continued to pay attention to their responses. Participants responded to the statements on 100-point slider scales, with the anchors *Je ne suis pas du tout d'accord* 'I don't agree at all' and *Je suis tout à fait d'accord* 'I agree completely'. The corresponding numerical scores were not visible to the participants so that they had to rely on their intuition. Participants were forced to move the slider before moving to the next question.

2.3.3. Appreciation Questions

Variation in story appreciation was measured through the question *Que pensez-vous/penses-tu de cette histoire?* 'What do you [V or T] think of the story?'. Participants responded to this question on five semantic binary questions: *mauvaise-brilliante* 'bad-brilliant', *ennuyeuse-captivante* 'boring-captivating', *pas originale-originale* 'unoriginal-original', *nulle-drôle* 'lame-funny', and *mal écrite-bien écrite* 'badly written-well written'. These questions are included because a correlation has frequently been found between appreciation and immersion: readers who experience higher degrees of immersion also like the stories better than readers who experience less immersion (e.g., Kuijpers et al. 2014; Hartung et al. 2016; Mak and Willems 2019).

2.3.4. Reading Habits Questionnaire

To get an indication of participants' individual reading habits, we compiled a questionnaire based on Hartung et al. (2016) that consisted of five questions: two questions asked about reading frequency, two about genre preferences, and one about the preferred medium for reading (i.e., book or e-reader). With this questionnaire, we can capture variability between participants due to their individual reading habits. The full questionnaire can be found in Appendix B.

2.3.5. Author Recognition Test

To obtain a more objective measure of reading exposure than self-reported habits, we created a French version of the Author Recognition Test (originally developed for American English by Stanovich and West 1989). We conducted a pre-test in which 15 French participants categorized a list of 78 names, of which 60 were existing authors and 12 were foils, in three categories: *Je connais cet auteur* 'I know this author', *J'ai entendu parler de cet auteur* 'I've heard of this author', and *Je ne connais pas cet auteur* 'I don't know this author'. Based on the responses, we compiled a list of 42 names. This list consisted of 10 authors from each category (well-known, somewhat known, and unknown names) and 12 foils. The foils were created by combining a first and last name from the top 500 most common names in France according to Forebears (2014). These names were checked to make sure they were not coincidentally the names of real authors. The number of authors participants recognize serves as an indication of how much they read (Stanovich and West 1989; Acheson et al. 2008; Mar and Rain 2015) and as a control for reading frequency, in addition to participants' self-reported reading habits.

2.3.6. Content Questions

To ensure that the participants paid attention during reading, content questions were added to the questionnaire. For each story, three content statements were included, which participants could answer with *vrai* 'true' or *faux* 'false'.

2.4. Procedure

The experiment was conducted on the campus of the faculty of Legal, Political, and Social Sciences of the University of Lille. Information and consent documents were provided to participants in English to avoid exposing them to T-/V-pronouns prior to the experiment. Other instructions provided in French during the experiment avoided the use of T/V. The self-paced reading task was presented on a laptop using the software package PsychoPy (Version 2022.2.2; Peirce et al. 2019). A moving window mechanism was used that allowed the stimuli to be revealed on a word-by-word basis, from left to right, and

with masking lines that provided an indication of word length, punctuation, and sentence structure. Participants advanced through the text by pressing the spacebar at their own pace. Reading times for each word were recorded. At the end of the story, and still in self-paced reading mode, the final question *Et vous? / Et toi?* ‘And you?’ was directed at the reader. The reading times for the words in this sentence were also recorded but stored separately for the purpose of analysis. Participants did not have to answer this question.

Immediately after reading the story, participants answered the content questions and filled in the immersion and appreciation questionnaires. The procedure was the same for the second story. Each participant saw both stories: one in the first person and the other in the third person. The order of the story versions was randomized and counterbalanced across conditions. In the last part of the experiment, participants filled out a questionnaire concerning demographics, general reading habits, and French ART, which was constructed and presented in Qualtrics (2022).

2.5. Data Exclusion

Data from two participants were discarded because they did not finish the full experiment. Data of two more participants were discarded because they were exposed to the wrong demographic and reading habits questions. Data from 11 participants were excluded because they were non-native speakers of French. This left us with a total of 96 participants (38 male, 56 female, and 2 non-binary) between the ages of 17 and 24 ($M = 19.1$, $SD = 1.39$).

Each participant read two stories and answered three content questions about each story. These content questions were designed to check if participants paid attention when reading. If more than one out of the three questions per story was answered incorrectly, all data from the participants for that story were excluded from the analysis. This resulted in the deletion of 7.1% of the participant data.

We removed reading times below 50 ms or above 3000 ms as these outliers were implausibly low or high. Datapoints were also removed when the reading time differed over 2.5 SD from the participant or item mean. Following these deletions, with regard to the main part of the story, 7.04% of the data points for the target word (first- or third-person pronoun), 6.04% of the data points for the first spillover, and 6.40% of the data points for the second spillover were removed. With regard to the direct address question data, 3.91% of the data points for the target word (T- or V-pronoun), 3.91% of the data points for the first spillover, and 3.35% of the data points for the second spillover were removed.

2.6. Data Analysis

All data were processed and analyzed in R (Version 4.2.2; R Core Team 2022). We calculated Cronbach’s alpha values as a measure of reliability for each construct in our immersion questionnaire. At $\alpha = 0.447$, the *mental imagery* scale proved insufficient (generally an alpha of 0.7 or higher is considered acceptable; Tavakol and Dennick 2011), thus *mental imagery* was excluded from the analyses. The immersion score was consequently based on the constructs *attention*, *transportation*, *emotional engagement*, and *narrative understanding*.

Our dependent variables were the total immersion scores and the reading times of the regions of interest (averaged over all instances of the pronouns and their spillover). The reading time data were log-transformed before analysis. For a more detailed understanding of which components of immersion are affected by the use of narrative perspective and pronouns of address, in addition to the total score analyses, we also performed separate analyses for each individual dimension of immersion. The processed answers on the general reading habits questionnaire, the Author Recognition Test, and the appreciation questions were used as measures of individual differences.

We used the R-package *lme4* (Bates et al. 2015) to construct multiple linear mixed-effects regression analyses for (total) immersion, reading times of the narrative perspective condition, and reading times of T/V. For the immersion scores, each base model included the fixed effects of perspective and T/V, as well as the interaction between them. By-

participant, by-story, and by-question varying intercepts were included as random effects. For the reading times of perspective, each base model included a perspective as a fixed effect, and by-participant, by-story, and by-item (the pronoun in the story) varying intercepts as random effects. For the reading times of T/V, each base model included the fixed effects of perspective, T/V, and mean immersion, and the interaction between perspective and T/V. By-participant and by-story varying intercepts were included as random effects. To each of these base models, other potentially relevant factors (covariates) were added one by one. A covariate was only included in the model if it improved the model fit. Models were compared using ANOVA comparisons in the R-package *lmerTest* (Kuznetsova et al. 2017) using Satterthwaite's method. We discuss the final models in the sections below.

We contrast-coded the variables perspective, T/V, and the question on preferred materials in the reading habits questionnaire (Question 5) as $[-0.5, +0.5]$. We used the R-package *emmeans* (Lenth 2022) for the comparison of the conditions in the interaction if it was significant. *p*-values were then Bonferroni-corrected for multiple comparisons. We used the R-package *ggplot2* (Wickham 2016) to visualize the data.

3. Results

3.1. Reading Times

Three analyses were conducted on the reading times for perspective (first versus third person): one for the target words (the pronouns), one for the first words after the pronouns (first spillover), and one for the second words after the pronouns (second spillover). Figure 1 shows the mean reading times and standard errors per perspective. Differences can be observed between first-person pronouns and third-person pronouns in the first spillover region (target word: $M_1 = 442.6$, $SD_1 = 196.7$; $M_3 = 444.4$, $SD_3 = 191.7$; first spillover $M_1 = 409.8$, $SD_1 = 136.6$; $M_3 = 402.7$, $SD_3 = 128.0$; second spillover $M_1 = 405.4$, $SD_1 = 143.8$; $M_3 = 407.4$, $SD_3 = 150.9$). Stories with third-person pronouns appear to be read faster than stories with first-person pronouns. However, we did not find significant main effects of perspective on the reading times of the target word ($\beta = 0.006$, $SE = 0.021$, $t = 0.257$, $p = 0.797$), first spillover ($\beta = -0.012$, $SE = 0.017$, $t = -0.744$, $p = 0.458$), nor second spillover ($\beta = -0.002$, $SE = 0.0017$, $t = -0.53$, $p = 0.913$). Further, we do not observe effects of the covariate *appreciation* on reading times in any regions of interest.

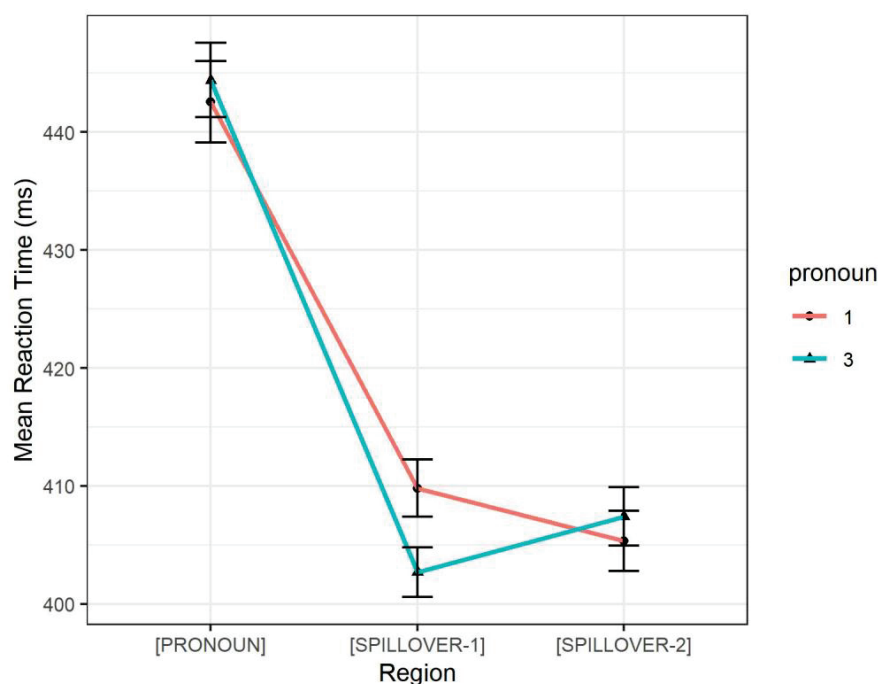


Figure 1. Mean reading times in milliseconds and standard errors of the target word (pronouns), as well as its two spillovers per perspective in French short stories.

Next, we constructed six models for the analysis of T-/V-effects on reading times: one for each of the two target words (the pronouns) in the question (viz. *Et tu/vous, est-ce que tu/vous as/avez...?* ‘And you, have you...?’) and one for each of the pronouns’ first and second spillovers. We constructed separate models for the first and second occurrence of a pronoun because the question starts by directly addressing the participant directly after the short story, which was written in first or third person. The surprisal effect may thus be larger for the first occurrence of a pronoun of address. Figure 2 shows the mean reading times and standard errors of the two target words in the question and their two spillovers. The reading times are lower for V ($M = 347.3$, $SD = 100.8$) than for T ($M = 354.1$, $SD = 82.8$), except in the first spillover of the first pronoun.

None of the effects entered into the models were significant, see Table 2. These models show that the T/V address form participants received in the final sentence of the short story was not reflected in their reading times. The full models for reading times per narrative perspective and per pronoun of address can be accessed via our repository.

Table 2. Model specifications of the reading time data for the two target words (pronouns) and their two spillovers in the *Et tu/vous, est-ce que tu/vous...?* ‘And you, have you...?’-question per T/V. Interaction effects are marked with *.

Pronoun	Region	Effect	β	SE	t	p
First pronoun	Pronoun	T/V	−0.04	0.04	−1.04	0.303
		Perspective	0.03	0.03	1.11	0.272
		Perspective * T/V	0.07	0.05	1.25	0.214
		Mean Immersion	−0.00	0.00	−0.37	0.710
	First spillover	T/V	−0.01	0.06	−0.24	0.812
		Perspective	−0.03	0.03	−0.91	0.364
		Perspective * T/V	0.00	0.07	0.05	0.961
		Mean Immersion	0.00	0.00	−0.33	0.742
	Second spillover	T/V	−0.06	0.05	−1.15	0.253
		Perspective	0.03	0.03	1.02	0.311
		Perspective * T/V	0.04	0.07	0.55	0.586
		Mean Immersion	−0.00	0.00	−0.70	0.488
Second pronoun	Pronoun	T/V	−0.05	0.05	−1.15	0.266
		Perspective	−0.04	0.03	−1.61	0.110
		Perspective * T/V	−0.03	0.05	−0.51	0.612
		Mean Immersion	−0.00	0.00	−0.70	0.484
	First spillover	T/V	−0.03	0.04	−0.66	0.513
		Perspective	−0.01	0.03	−0.45	0.652
		Perspective * T/V	−0.07	0.06	1.73	0.240
		Mean Immersion	−0.00	0.00	−0.42	0.676
	Second spillover	T/V	0.00	0.05	0.02	0.986
		Perspective	0.00	0.03	0.03	0.979
		Perspective * T/V	−0.04	0.05	−0.72	0.476
		Mean Immersion	0.00	0.00	0.57	0.570

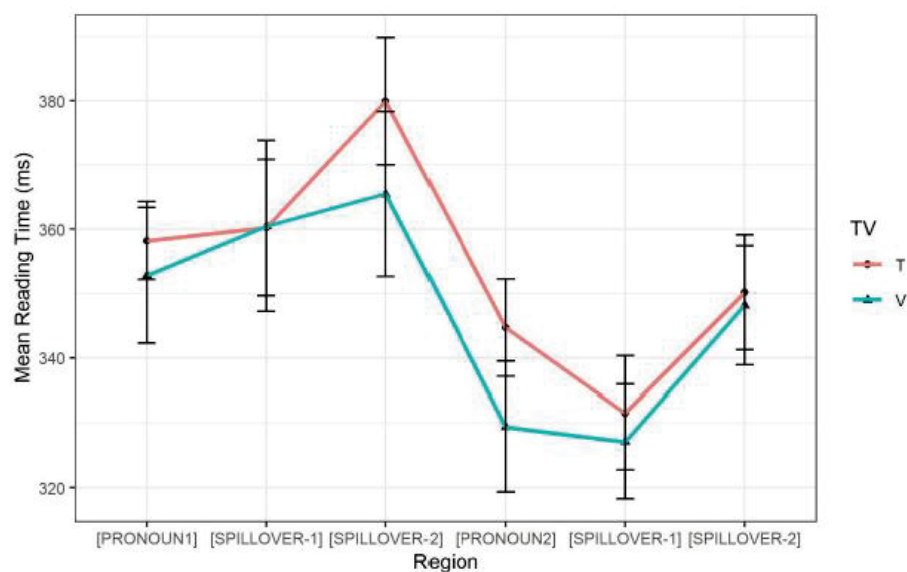


Figure 2. Mean reading times in milliseconds and standard errors of the two target words (pronoun) and their two spillovers in the *Et tu/vous, est-ce que tu/vous...?* 'And you, have you...?'-question per T/V.

3.2. Immersion Scores

For the measure of immersion, we analyzed the total scores, as well as the scores of each individual subscale (*attention, emotional engagement, transportation, and narrative understanding*). We start with the findings of the immersion questionnaire in its entirety. Then, the results for each of the subscales are reported. A complete report of the models used for every subscale can be accessed in our repository at <https://doi.org/10.34973/gzx3-yk10>.

Figure 3 illustrates the total immersion scores per perspective and T/V. Immersion was higher for stories with first-person pronouns ($M = 64.3$, $SD = 28.3$) than for stories with third-person pronouns ($M = 58.8$, $SD = 28.8$). In addition, for participants addressed with V, first-person stories scored higher on immersion ($M = 66.4$, $SD = 28.9$) than third-person stories ($M = 57.2$, $SD = 31.4$). For participants addressed with T, there seems to be no great difference between first-person stories ($M = 62.3$, $SD = 27.6$) and third-person stories ($M = 60.4$, $SD = 25.7$). The violin plots show great variation between participants.

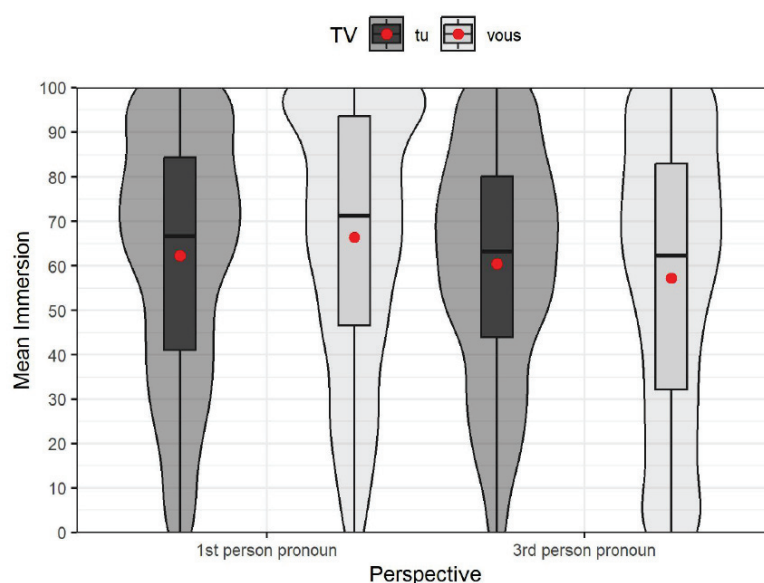


Figure 3. Violin plot of the total immersion scores per narrative perspective (first and third person) and pronoun of address (T and V); the red dot represents the mean score.

The best model fit for the mixed model for immersion was achieved when including the reading habits question about frequency of reading (Questions 1 and 2), genre preferences (Question 3), preferred reading materials (Question 5), and appreciation. Random intercepts were included for the participant, story, and question.

The analysis showed a significant main effect of perspective on immersion ($\beta = -3.89$, $SE = 0.90$, $t = -4.33$, $p < 0.001$): first-person stories scored higher on immersion than third-person stories. No significant main effect was found for T/V ($\beta = 2.00$, $SE = 2.62$, $t = 0.76$, $p = 0.446$). The interaction effect between perspective and T/V was significant ($\beta = -5.76$, $SE = 1.81$, $t = -3.18$, $p = 0.002$). Thus, whether the reported immersion scores differ between perspectives is dependent on the pronoun of address. We performed an additional analysis to compare the different conditions. This analysis showed no significant difference between the immersion scores of first- and third-person stories when T was used ($\beta = 1.01$, $SE = 1.27$, $t = 0.79$, $p = 1.000$). However, a significant effect was found between first- and third-person stories when V was used ($\beta = 6.77$, $SE = 1.29$, $t = 5.24$, $p < 0.001$). That is, immersion scores for first-person stories were higher than for third-person stories when participants had been addressed with V.

Figure 4 illustrates the scores for each of the four subscales of immersion, per condition (perspective and T/V). For all subscales, the distribution of the scores shows a similar general pattern as in the aggregated total immersion scores: first-person stories score higher than third-person stories in the V condition, but this difference is not observed in the T condition. The violin plots show great variation between participants, especially for emotional engagement.

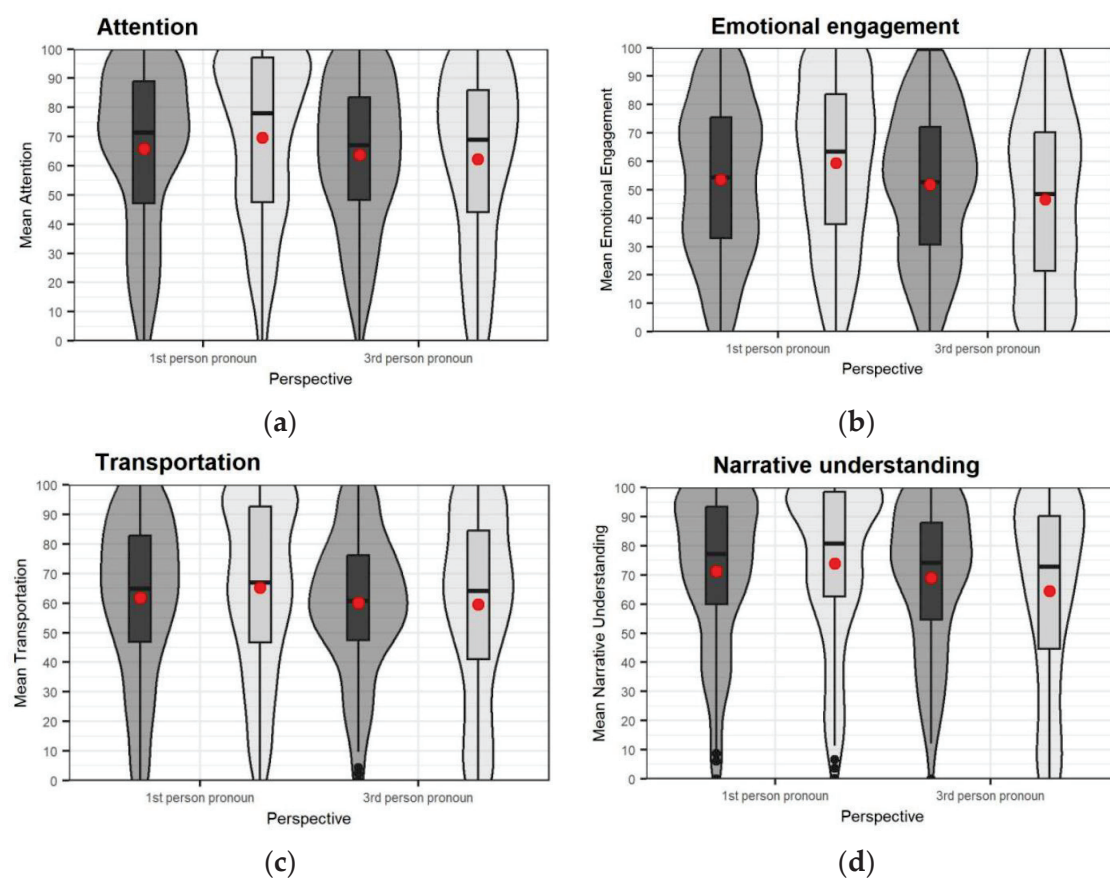


Figure 4. Violin plots for immersion subscales scores per narrative perspective (first and third person) and pronoun of address (T and V): (a) *attention*; (b) *emotional engagement*; (c) *transportation*; and (d) *narrative understanding*. The red dot represents the mean score.

For the subscales *emotional engagement*, *transportation*, and *narrative understanding*, the best model fit was achieved when including the reading habits question about frequency of reading (Questions 1 and 2), genre preferences (Question 3), preferred reading materials (Question 5), and appreciation as covariates. For the *attention* subscale, the best model was included the ART responses. Random intercepts were included for the participant, story, and question. In what follows, we describe the outcome of the models per subscale.

3.2.1. Attention

No significant main effects of perspective ($\beta = -2.32$, $SE = 1.96$, $t = -1.18$, $p = 0.237$) nor T/V ($\beta = 3.75$, $SE = 3.24$, $t = 1.16$, $p = 0.248$) were found on *attention*. The interaction between perspective and T/V was not significant ($\beta = -3.39$, $SE = 3.96$, $t = -0.86$, $p = 0.392$).

3.2.2. Emotional Engagement

A significant effect was found for perspective on *emotional engagement* ($\beta = -6.07$, $SE = 1.55$, $t = -3.92$, $p < 0.001$). First-person pronoun stories scored higher on this subscale than third-person pronoun stories. No main effect of the pronoun of addressed was observed ($\beta = 1.26$, $SE = 2.72$, $t = 0.46$, $p = 0.643$). The interaction between perspective and T/V was significant ($\beta = -9.65$, $SE = 3.09$, $t = -3.13$, $p = 0.002$). Thus, whether the immersion scores differ between perspectives is dependent on the pronoun of address. An additional analysis showed no significant effect on perspective when T was used in the questionnaire ($\beta = 1.24$, $SE = 2.17$, $t = 0.57$, $p = 1.000$). However, a significant effect was found for perspective when V was used in the questionnaire ($\beta = 10.89$, $SE = 2.22$, $t = 4.91$, $p < 0.001$). The emotional engagement scores for first-person stories were higher than the scores for third-person stories when addressed with V.

3.2.3. Transportation

No significant main effects of perspective ($\beta = -2.35$, $SE = 1.58$, $t = -1.49$, $p = 0.137$) nor T/V ($\beta = 4.80$, $SE = 3.37$, $t = 1.42$, $p = 0.155$) were found on *transportation*. The interaction between perspective and T/V was not significant ($\beta = -3.15$, $SE = 3.20$, $t = -0.99$, $p = 0.324$).

3.2.4. Narrative Understanding

A significant main effect was found for perspective on *narrative understanding* ($\beta = -3.90$, $SE = 1.65$, $t = -2.37$, $p = 0.018$). First-person pronoun stories scored higher on this subscale than third-person pronoun stories. No significant main effect of T/V was observed for narrative understanding ($\beta = -0.75$, $SE = 3.84$, $t = -0.20$, $p = 0.845$) nor an interaction effect of perspective and T/V ($\beta = -5.23$, $SE = 3.28$, $t = -1.59$, $p = 0.112$).

3.2.5. Individual Differences

In addition to the effects reported above, several covariates showed significant effects. On all scales, a significant effect was found for appreciation: immersion scores were higher when appreciation was higher (cf. Kuijpers et al. 2014; Hartung et al. 2016; Mak and Willems 2019). Moreover, on all scales except *narrative understanding*, a significant effect was found for the question about frequency of reading: participants who read more frequently scored higher on these scales than participants who never read (Mak and Willems 2019). However, rather surprisingly, the French ART results did not contribute to the models except for the *attention* subscale model. For the full immersion scale, as well as the subscales *attention* and *narrative understanding*, a significant effect was found for the question about reading materials: scores were higher for readers who prefer physical books over e-readers. These findings corroborate the claim that immersion is prone to individual differences (Mak et al. 2020) and warrant additional research into these factors. The details of the mixed-effect models for each subscale can be found in our repository.

4. Discussion

We investigated the influence of first- and third-person narrative perspectives in French short stories on reading times and reported immersion, and whether being addressed with a formal (*vous*) or informal (*tu*) pronoun had any effect on readers' reports about immersion in the story and on their reading times (of the address pronouns). We asked participants to read two short stories on a laptop, word by word, at their own pace. Each story was narrated in either the first or third person. Then, participants were directly addressed with either V- or T-pronouns in a question at the end of each story and throughout the post-hoc immersion questionnaires. Thus, readers' immersion was gauged by means of a questionnaire administered after each story, and by measuring their reading times of the pronouns (first or third person) at the word level. Other variables indicating individual characteristics were also recorded, viz. reading habits and preferences.

First, we investigated if perspective (first versus third person) had an impact on reading times due to potential time-sensitive cognitive effects. We expected third-person pronouns to be read more slowly than first-person pronouns (H1), but we did not find evidence for this hypothesis. However, we note that previous research has not found conclusive evidence for the claim that narrative perspective leads to differences in reading times either (Hartung et al. 2017b), and so our self-paced reading results rather add to the argument against the notion that one particular perspective poses more processing difficulties than the other (as claimed by Hartung et al. 2016). In a similar vein, Hartung et al. (2017a) suggest that readers simply engage in different modes of perspective-taking regardless of the narrative perspective as a strategy to understand the text, which is supported by different neural networks being activated during their experimental task.

Our results did confirm our second hypothesis (H2): Readers reported being significantly more immersed after reading first-person than third-person stories. In our study, we observed the effect of perspective on the dimensions *emotional engagement* and *narrative understanding*. These results differ slightly from what Hartung et al. (2016) observed in their experiment: They found effects of perspective in the dimensions *transportation* and *mental imagery*. However, the fact that an identical general immersion pattern was found suggests that further discrepancies in how participants experience immersion may be due to content-based differences. Different types of reading materials might elicit immersion in different dimensions, as the contents and forms of the text evoke diverse immersive states (Kuijpers et al. 2014; Hartung et al. 2017b). So, Hartung et al.'s stories might have contained more visually stimulating language to enhance transportation into the story world, as well as to create mental images of depicted events and physical spaces. Our participants, in turn, experienced heightened *emotional engagement*, which might have been caused by more relatable emotional states and situations presented in the stories. This emotional resonance can contribute to a more profound understanding of the characters' motivations, struggles, and the overall storyline, enhancing the reader's overall comprehension. Either way, perspective (first versus third person) affects the rate of reported immersion, such that first-person pronouns stimulate immersion.

Further, the finding that appreciation and immersion are positively correlated indicates that, by simply enjoying a story less, readers are less prone to report immersion (cf. Kuijpers et al. 2014; Hartung et al. 2016; Mak and Willems 2019). This finding relates to the variability of the immersion results due to individual differences (see Mak and Willems 2019 for more discussion). Indeed, we find significant influences on reading habits, such as reading frequency, but also a preference for physical books over e-books. Surprisingly, our French ART measures did not contribute to explaining any of the differences observed on immersion. Further research into triggers of each individual dimension of the immersion spectrum is warranted to unravel this issue.

We also investigated the impact of being addressed with formal or informal second-person pronouns on the rate of reported immersion. We predicted that the two types of address pronouns would distinctly influence the reports of immersion (H3) based on the strict address norms in France (Warren 2006; Pager-McClymont et al. 2023). We did

not find a main effect caused by the pronoun of address. However, we did find that readers who had been addressed with *vous* after reading first-person stories reported being more immersed than readers who had received *vous* after reading third-person stories. The informal pronoun of address did not produce any discernible difference between perspectives in the reported rates of immersion. Address pronouns thus affect how readers reflect on and evaluate their reading experience. This difference may be attributed to cultural expectations and social norms. The narrator and the experimenters are strangers to the participants; the task being conducted is perceived as formal. The expectation and the appropriate address form is V. Adhering to these social expectations can influence the reader's affinity for the task. Therefore, we find a difference when the social norms are followed, and V is used. However, deviating from social expectations by using T-pronouns can cause a surprisal effect that dampens the effect caused by the story's perspective. This effect may differ across languages and cultures, contingent on the social norms associated with the use of pronouns of address.

Finally, in an exploratory effort, we tested the reading times of T- and V-pronouns of address in a question directed at the reader after the short story, expecting that T-pronouns would be read more slowly than V-pronouns (H4). We did not observe an effect of receiving T or V on reading times: no surprisal effect or processing difficulty was registered. We believe that this may be due to the fact that we only tested a single question directly addressing the participants, and only after the participants were already (supposedly) immersed in the first- or third-person story. The question itself, and the sudden addressing, may have been a surprise, overshadowing the putative effect of the T-/V-pronouns. However, we stress that this distinction was evident in the subsequent questionnaire (as per H3), and so we conclude that address pronouns may trigger surprisal effects in French. Future research may experiment with longer fragments with pronouns of address (T/V) to shed more light on this matter.³

Our study only captured differential effects of perspective on immersion indirectly through readers' reports. Our instruments were adapted from scales validated in multiple studies (SWAS, Kuijpers et al. 2014; NES, Busselle and Bilandzic 2009). Our results suggest that these scales might be sensitive to the type of language used in them, in particular, to pronouns of address. Our online measure of immersion, reading times at the word level, is hypothesized to be capable of reflecting differences between cognitive processing of each perspective, but no such effect surfaced in our analyses. Future research could implement more sensitive online measures to detect processing differences driven by perspective, such as EDA as in Hartung et al. (2016), eye-tracking, or EEG. These data would provide a more accurate index of real-time immersion.

While our study captures the effects of second-person pronouns in a post-test questionnaire, we did not include a condition with a second-person pronoun in the self-paced reading component of the experiment. Thus, we did not investigate direct effects of second-person pronouns while immersion is happening, as in narratives written in the second person. The second person is not a common narrative perspective, but it is more complex due to the multiplicity of potential referents (see e.g., Sorlin 2022) and the fact that the second-person pronoun is allowed a generic reading quite often (de Hoop and Tarenskeen 2015). Yet research suggests that second-person pronouns may facilitate emotion processing and sense of participation even more so than first- and third-person pronouns, which could translate into higher immersion in the story. Specifically, Brunyé et al. (2011, 2016) found that readers easily develop a sense of agency while reading short narratives written in second person and experience higher emotional engagement than the other perspectives through self-ascriptive devices. Child et al. (2018) similarly find that readers experience text passages describing positive emotions in a more immersed way when addressed in second person (versus third person) in English, and that the second-person pronoun elicits a higher sensitivity to mismatching emotional information.

Since pronouns of address have been repeatedly shown to affect attitudes towards other people and tasks, it may be worthwhile to explore the use of formal-versus-informal

second-person pronouns in narratives and their immersive outcomes. Initial endeavors to study such effects are pursued by den Hartog et al. (2024). They investigated the use of T-/V-pronouns in Dutch short stories and found that V has an initial processing cost compared to T (i.e., V is read more slowly at first), which they attribute to their participants (university students) not being used to V-address. They also report that readers experience emotion in narratives differently based on whether the narratives contained V or T pronouns, and this effect is dependent on gender: while male participants respond more negatively to negative texts and more positively to positive texts when V is used, female participants show this pattern when T is used. We leave the question how French T/V pronouns drive immersion in stories as compared to other perspectives to future research.

5. Conclusions

We conducted an experiment with a self-paced reading component and a questionnaire component to study the effect of narrative perspective (first versus third person) and pronoun of address (T versus V) on processing and immersion in French. In the experiment, we collected reading time data (for first- versus third-person pronouns and T versus V pronouns) and self-reported post-story immersion rates. Based on suggestions from the literature, we hypothesized that first-person pronouns and formal pronouns would be read faster than third-person pronouns and informal pronouns, respectively. The rationale for these hypotheses was that (i) third-person pronouns activate the viewpoints of multiple referents and are, therefore, harder to process, and (ii) T-pronouns are non-default and perhaps inappropriate in French and, therefore, trigger a surprisal effect. We did not find evidence for these claims. That we did not find the expected effects may be due to readers employing a reading strategy regardless of individual pronouns, so as to understand the narrative, and for the pronouns of address because of an overall surprisal effect of address after a story.

Furthermore, the post-story questionnaire presented statements using T- or V-pronouns. We expected stories in the first person to yield higher immersion scores than stories in the third person since this effect has been reported before. This prediction was borne out. We also expected T-pronouns to lower the reported immersion scores because of their inappropriateness for the particular situation (at least in French). Although we did not find the hypothesized effect in our data, we did find that T-use nullified the effect of story perspective (or that V-use stimulated it). The interaction between perspective and T/V may thus be explained as follows: we observe that first-person stories trigger a higher reported rate of immersion than third-person stories (due to their higher immersive potential), but this effect in the post-story reports is canceled when an inappropriate pronoun is used to address the participant. Participants are taken aback by the use of the inappropriate T-pronoun and are pulled out of their immersed state, so to speak. This is a novel finding as, to the best of our knowledge, any effects of pronouns of address on the addressees' attitudes and evaluations were observed solely when the material itself contained pronouns of address (i.e., advertisements).

Pronouns of address may thus have a certain power to affect language users in a psychologically relevant way that is dependent on both individual and cultural factors. We conclude that the processing and the impact of formal and informal pronouns of address deserve further attention.

Supplementary Materials: The following supporting information can be downloaded at <https://doi.org/10.34973/gzx3-yk10>: stimulus stories and content questions; immersion questionnaire; reading habits questionnaire; French Author Recognition Test; full report of statistical models (for immersion scores, immersion subscales scores, and reading times); anonymized participant data.

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Institutional Review Board Statement: The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and approved by the Ethics Assessment Committee of Radboud University (EACH file number 2021-3221).

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: All anonymized data can be accessed at <https://doi.org/10.34973/gzx3-yk10> (last accessed 23 July 2024).

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Appendix A. Immersion Questionnaire

The following questionnaire contains the French and English versions of the statements used to measure immersion. The statements were presented to participants in random order and with second-person pronouns, so we created a T (informal pronouns) and a V (formal pronouns) version. The items under the constructs *attention*, *mental imagery*, *emotional engagement*, and *transportation* have been adapted from the Story World Absorption Scale (SWAS), originally developed by Kuijpers et al. (2014). The items under *narrative understanding* are adapted from the Narrative Engagement Scale (NEQ), originally developed by Busselle and Bilandzic (2009). Here, we present the statements in the V version and organized according to the construct they belong to.

Appendix A.1. French Immersion Questionnaire

Attention

- (1) En lisant l'histoire, vous avez perdu la notion du temps.
- (2) Vous avez eu du mal à rester concentré.
- (3) Votre attention était tellement concentrée sur l'histoire que vous avez oublié votre environnement.
- (4) Vous étiez immergé dans l'histoire pendant que vous lisez.

Mental Imagery

- (5) En lisant, vous avez eu du mal à imaginer le personnage principal dans votre esprit.
- (6) En lisant, vous pouviez voir des images des situations décrites.

Emotional engagement

- (7) Vous avez ressenti la même chose que le personnage principal.
- (8) Vous avez eu du mal à imaginer ce que les personnages vivaient émotionnellement.
- (9) L'histoire vous a affecté émotionnellement.
- (10) Vous avez été capable de comprendre les événements de l'histoire d'une manière similaire à celle dont les personnages les ont compris.
- (11) Vous ne vous êtes pas senti connecté au personnage principal de l'histoire.

Transportation

- (12) Vous avez oublié vos propres problèmes et préoccupations au cours de l'histoire.
- (13) Lorsque vous avez terminé de lire l'histoire, vous avez l'impression d'avoir voyagé dans le monde dans lequel l'histoire se déroule.
- (14) En lisant, vous avez l'impression d'être à l'intérieur du monde narratif.
- (15) Par moments, vous avez l'impression que le monde de l'histoire et la réalité semblent se chevaucher.

Narrative understanding

- (16) Vous avez eu du mal à suivre le fil de l'histoire.
- (17) À certains moments, vous avez eu du mal à comprendre ce qui se passait dans l'histoire.
- (18) Vous avez compris pourquoi les personnages ont fait ce qu'ils ont fait.
- (19) Vous pouviez comprendre pourquoi les personnages ressentaient ce qu'ils ressentaient.

Appendix A.2. English Immersion Questionnaire

Attention

- (1) While reading, you lost track of time.
- (2) You have had a hard time concentrating.
- (3) You were so focused on the story that you forgot your surroundings.
- (4) You were immersed in the story during reading.

Mental Imagery

- (5) While reading, you found it hard to imagine the main character in your mind.
- (6) While reading, you could see images of the situations being described.

Emotional engagement

- (7) You felt the same as the main character.
- (8) You found it hard to imagine what the characters were going through emotionally
- (9) The story affected you emotionally.
- (10) You were able to understand the events in the story in a way similar to the way the characters understood them.
- (11) You didn't feel connected to the main character in the story.

Transportation

- (12) You forgot your own problems and concerns during the story.
- (13) When you finished reading the story, it felt like you had traveled into the world in which the story was set.
- (14) While reading, it seemed as if you were inside the narrative world.
- (15) At times, you felt like the world of the story and reality seemed to overlap.

Narrative understanding

- (16) You could easily follow the thread of the story.
- (17) At certain points, you had a hard time making sense of what was going on in the story.
- (18) You understood why the characters did what they did.
- (19) You could understand why the characters felt the way they felt.

Appendix B. Reading Habits Questionnaire

The following questionnaire contains the French and English items used to record participants' reading habits. The questions were presented in random order and with second-person pronouns, so we created a T (informal pronouns) and a V (formal pronouns) version. The items were adapted from the reading habits questionnaire used by Hartung et al. (2016). Here, we present the statements in the V-version.

Appendix B.1. French Reading Habits Questionnaire

- (1) À quelle fréquence lisez-vous des ouvrages de fiction?
 - a. Quotidiennement
 - b. Plus de deux fois par semaine
 - c. Une fois par mois
 - d. Je ne lis pas régulièrement
 - e. Je ne lis jamais

- (2) Combien de livres lisez-vous par an?
- a. Plus d'un par mois
 - b. Huit à douze par an
 - c. Trois à sept par an
 - d. Moins de trois par an
 - e. Zéro
- (3) Quel type de fiction préférez-vous?
- a. Prose
 - b. B.D.
 - c. Poésie
 - d. Théâtre
 - e. Je n'aime pas du tout la fiction
- (4) Quels genres populaires préférez-vous?
- a. romance
 - b. action-aventure
 - c. science-fiction
 - d. fantasy
 - e. thriller
 - f. jeune-adulte
 - g. horreur
 - h. mystère/crime
 - i. fiction historique
 - j. fiction féminine
 - k. saga familiale
 - l. roman psychologique
 - m. passage à l'âge adulte
 - n. fiction littéraire
 - o. autres:
- (5) Lisez-vous généralement sur une liseuse numérique ou un livre physique?
- a. Liseuse numérique
 - b. Livre physique

Appendix B.2. English Reading Habits Questionnaire

- (1) How often do you read fictional works?
- a. Daily
 - b. More than twice per week
 - c. Once per month
 - d. I do not read regularly
 - e. I never read
- (2) How many books do you read every year?
- a. More than one book per month
 - b. Between eight and twelve per year
 - c. Between three and seven per year
 - d. Less than three per year
 - e. Zero

- (3) Which types of fiction do you prefer?
- a. Prose
 - b. Comic
 - c. Poetry
 - d. Drama
 - e. I do not like fiction at all
- (4) Which popular genres do you prefer?
- a. Romance
 - b. Action-adventure
 - c. Science-fiction
 - d. Fantasy
 - e. Thriller
 - f. Young adult
 - g. Horror
 - h. Mystery/crime
 - i. Historical fiction
 - j. Feminine fiction
 - k. Family saga
 - l. Psychological novel
 - m. Coming of age
 - n. Literary fiction
 - o. Others:
- (5) Do you normally read on a digital e-reader or a physical book?
- a. Digital e-reader
 - b. Physical book

Appendix C. Stimulus Material Extract

Appendix C.1. Les Grandes Découvertes Perdues, by Maxime D. (2014)

Appendix C.1.1. Original Story in Third Person and with Masculine Protagonist

Petit, il avait toujours rêvé d'être astronaute. Hélas, il était nul en astrophysique. Cela ne l'avait pas empêché de devenir le meilleur généticien de la NASA.

Le jour où il s'injecta sa dernière concoction, il sut qu'il le tenait, son Nobel. L'invention lui permettait de se téléporter n'importe où à l'intérieur de son champ de vision. Il lui fallait seulement repérer à l'œil nu l'espace qu'il souhaitait rejoindre.

Grisé, il fit un bref aller-retour entre son laboratoire et l'immeuble d'en face. Son désir de partager sa découverte fut étouffé par l'envie égoïste de se mouvoir à volonté, sans entrave. Il était enfin libre.

En bon scientifique, il objecta que s'il voulait traverser la surface de la Terre, il lui fallait effectuer un nombre considérable de téléportations. Cela lui aurait demandé trop d'efforts. Un second problème vint percuter son esprit: comment pouvait-il franchir les océans?

Appendix C.1.2. Modified Story in First Person and with Masculine Protagonist

Petit, j'avais toujours rêvé d'être astronaute. Hélas, j'étais nul en astrophysique. Cela ne m'avait pas empêché de devenir le meilleur généticien de la NASA.

Le jour où je m'injectai ma dernière concoction, je sus qu'je le tenais, mon Nobel. L'invention me permettait de me téléporter n'importe où à l'intérieur de mon champ de vision. Il me fallait seulement repérer à l'œil nu l'espace que je souhaitais rejoindre.

Grisé, je fis un bref aller-retour entre mon laboratoire et l'immeuble d'en face. Mon désir de partager ma découverte fut étouffé par l'envie égoïste de me mouvoir à volonté, sans entrave. J'étais enfin libre.

En bon scientifique, j'objectai que si je voulais traverser la surface de la Terre, il me fallait effectuer un nombre considérable de téléportations. Cela m'aurait demandé trop d'efforts. Un second problème vint percuter mon esprit: comment pouvais-je franchir les océans?

Appendix C.1.3. English Translation—*The Lost Great Discoveries*

As a child, he was always dreamed of becoming an astronaut. Sadly, he really sucked in astrophysics. That had not prevented him from becoming the best geneticist at NASA.

The day he injected himself his last concoction, he knew he got it, his Nobel. This invention allowed him to teleport anywhere within his field of vision. It only took him to fix his eye on the place where he wished to go.

Exhilarated, he took a quick round trip between his laboratory and the building across the street. His wish to share his discovery was suppressed by the selfish desire of moving at will, without obstacles. He was finally free.

In proper scientific terms, he objected that if he wanted to travel around the globe, he would have to perform a considerable number of teleportations. That would be too exhausting. Another problem hit him: how could he go across the oceans?

Notes

- ¹ Note that we are discussing putative differences in the *reported immersion* of participants. We do not mean to claim that the pronouns of address used in the questionnaire have any post-hoc bearing on the immersive state of the participants themselves.
- ² The regions of interest in the questions following the short story consisted of the two T-/V-pronouns and the two following words as spillover.
- ³ An anonymous reviewer suggests that one potential issue with second-person pronouns in this type of research is that their reference is much less stable than first- and third-person pronouns. In particular, second-person pronouns have a multitude of potential references (see e.g., Sorlin 2022), which may impact the rate of immersion. Moreover, as noted, narratives are not typically written entirely in the second person.

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Article

Metalinguistic Commentary on Forms of Address in a Finnish Autobiographical Novel Series

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Abstract: This article examines the metalinguistic commentary on address practices in a Finnish autobiographical novel series, the 26-volume *Iijoki-sarja* ‘Iijoki Series’ (1971–1998) by Kalle Päätaalo. Our aim is to show how the forms of address affect the protagonist and other characters. The study is anchored in previous sociopragmatic research on address and in folk linguistics. The analysis is based on searches in the digital corpus of the whole series by means of keywords related to forms of address. The analysis proceeds chronologically, from Kalle’s childhood and adolescence to his marriage and working life, including his social rise from a poor country boy to a full-time novel writer. Our results show that Kalle, the fictional protagonist of the series, mirrors his own and others’ choices in address practices throughout his life against the norms he has learned in his childhood. These choices are explained by the (relative) age, sex, status and regional background of the interlocutors. Metalinguistic comments reflect the characters’ social relations and changes in them during the protagonist’s linguistic biography. We argue that fiction can open up perceptions and contexts related to address practices that are not easily accessible by other methods or datasets.

Keywords: forms of address; metalanguage; fiction; perception; linguistic biography

1. Introduction

Fiction has become one of the traditional objects of address research (e.g., Nischik 1997). Previous studies have focused, for example, on how forms of address have been translated from one language to another (e.g., Ethelb 2015; Kluge 2019). In addition to the dialogues in fiction, which provide an opportunity to examine the use of forms of address in the narrative world, novels sometimes include comments on addressing and its norms. By this means it is possible to show how address practices are perceived and valued by the narrator and (other) characters in the novel.

Our aim in this article is to examine metalinguistic comments on address practices in a large autobiographical novel series (1971–1998) (see also Lappalainen and Saviniemi 2023). The object of study is the 26-volume *Iijoki-sarja* ‘Iijoki Series’ by the Finnish author Kalle Päätaalo (1919–2000). The series describes in detail the life of the protagonist, Kalle, from his early childhood to his retirement years, and his social rise from a poor country boy to a construction foreman and later a successful author (Keskimaa 2018a). However, the novel series depicts not only the social rise of one fictional person but also the broader transformation of Finnish society, from the rural communities of the early 20th century to an urbanizing society. Like Keskimaa (2018a), who has explored the metalanguage of the *Iijoki Series* in her dissertation, we regard the series as a linguistic biography in which the narrator describes his life events through his linguistic repertoire and language-related experiences and perceptions (for linguistic biography, see Section 1.2). We are interested in how the choices of the forms of address and the impact of the choices on the protagonist are portrayed as a part of the various stages of his life in this fictional data. We aim to answer the following questions:

1. How are address practices commented on in the *Iijoki Series* as part of the protagonist's linguistic biography?
2. How are these practices justified by the narrator and other characters in the series?

The *Iijoki Series* is a particularly suitable subject for examining metalinguistic commentary on address practices, since the practices are commented on frequently throughout the series. Thus, we can see how forms of address are perceived by characters, how others' choices of the forms affect them in different contexts and how they reflect their own choices.

Our analysis is based on searches of the digital corpus of the whole series by means of keywords related to forms of address that are both pronominal and nominal (see Section 2.2). The study is grounded in previous sociopragmatic research on address (e.g., Clyne et al. 2009) and in folk linguistics (e.g., Preston 1989; Niedzielski and Preston 2000). These perspectives arise from the fact that we focus on the perceptions of non-linguists (through fiction) and their metalinguistic comments revealing the relevance of social and pragmatic variables and the part they play in explaining the choices of forms of address. Our aim is not only to complement the previous research focusing on Kalle Päätaalo's *Iijoki Series* (see Ylönen 2013; Keskimaa 2018a; Saviniemi 2022) and Finnish address patterns (e.g., Yli-Vakkuri 2005; Isosävi and Lappalainen 2015; Wide et al. 2019; Isosävi and Vecsernyés 2022), but also to show that the analysis of literary texts can provide new insights for the analysis of how the choices of forms of address affect an addressee. We will argue that metalinguistic comments which verbalize characters' perceptions of address practices reflect the characters' social relations and also the development and changes in these relationships. In addition, the comments will shed light on the social norms of the period during which the events of the novel series have been set.

1.1. Forms of Address in Finnish

The difference in Finnish between informal T forms and formal V forms of address is essential. T/V opposition (see Brown and Gilman 1960) is expressed in terms of second-person pronouns (*sinä* vs. *te* and their dialectal variants), verb inflection (*laula-t* 'sing-SG2' vs. *laula-tte* 'sing-PL2'), and possessive suffixes (*kirja-si* 'book-POSS.SG2' vs. *kirja-nne* 'book-POSS.PL2'). In spoken language, address is often expressed redundantly by using both pronouns and inflected verb forms (*sinä laula-t* 'you(T) sing-SG2', *te laula-tte* 'you(V) sing-PL2').

In addition to direct address with T and V forms, third-person singular forms and other indirect forms (e.g., passive forms) are frequently used in Finnish (Yli-Vakkuri 2005). In many cases, these implicit forms are used to avoid a choice between T and V forms. Third person forms involve referring to the addressee by a pronoun, name, endearment, title, etc. However, nominal address, such as the use of titles, is not common in Finnish when addressing someone directly in the second person (Havu et al. 2014).

In the period that the novel series primarily describes, V forms and other formal forms of address were more common than they are nowadays (Paunonen 2010). In present-day Finland, informal T forms of address predominate and titles are only used in some ceremonial situations (Yli-Vakkuri 2005; Lappalainen 2015; Lappalainen and Vecsernyés 2023). In contrast, in the first half of the 20th century, V forms were used self-evidently when addressing older people or people in more elevated positions, including family members, and formal titles were more favoured than they are nowadays (Yli-Vakkuri 2005; Paunonen 2010).

1.2. Linguistic Biography, Metalanguage, and Perception

Our article draws on three concepts used in sociolinguistic research: *linguistic biography*, *metalanguage*, and *perception*. When focusing on a linguistic biography, the starting point is to examine the life events of an individual through his or her linguistic repertoire and language-related experiences, memories and perceptions (Pavlenko 2007; Busch 2018). In previous sociolinguistic research, linguistic biographies have been analysed using interviews, writings, diaries or drawings, or by combining a variety of materials (e.g.,

Pavlenko 2007; Busch 2018; Hippi et al. 2020; Lönnroth 2023). Research on linguistic biographies opens up perspectives on the subjective positioning, language attitudes, emotions and identity constructions of individuals (Busch 2017, p. 46). Linguistic narratives have been used especially for exploring multilingualism and language learning (Pavlenko 2007; Pietikäinen 2012; Busch 2017, 2018), but this approach is also suitable for examining fiction, especially the *Iijoki Series*, as Keskimaa (2018a) has shown in her dissertation. Keskimaa has analysed the *Iijoki Series* as a linguistic biography of the main character by focusing on its metalanguage in terms of its dialects, language ideologies, and stance-taking (see also Keskimaa 2022). Our study complements her research in terms of forms of address, since Keskimaa has made only a few isolated remarks concerning forms of address in the series of novels (see Keskimaa 2018b). Like Keskimaa (2018a, pp. 47–48), we use a linguistic biography by referring to the ways in which the narrator considers his life events through his linguistic repertoire and also through his experiences and memories, together forming a picture of his reality.

When we speak of perceptions, we mean the findings that ordinary language users make about language variation and the beliefs they have about variation (Preston 1989, p. 2). In order to comment on variation, language users must be aware of it. Not all linguistic features of language are equally accessible to ordinary speakers, but the forms of address have been used as an example of a feature that non-linguists are aware of (Niedzielski and Preston 2000, pp. 10–11), which in turn makes them a fruitful object of study.

Perceptions of address practices can be studied in different data and with various methods, such as interviews, surveys and experiments (e.g., Clyne et al. 2009; Lappalainen 2019; de Hoop et al. 2023). In the case of this study we approach perceptions through fiction by analysing metalinguistic comments on addressing. Because metalanguage, “language about language” (Niedzielski and Preston 2000, p. 302), is not usually focused on in fiction, it can be considered to be meaningful for the interpretation of the novel. The comments orient the reader’s attention to the language itself and make prevailing norms visible, offering guidelines for interpretation to the novel’s readers and directing them to pay attention to the use of language itself (see Lucy 1993, pp. 9–11; Keskimaa 2013, p. 502).

Perceptions of addressing are difficult to study through authentic interaction, since it is exceptional for the person being addressed to directly suggest whether (s)he finds the address unpleasant or offensive (cf. Haugh 2010, p. 155). In fiction, in contrast, the narrator does not need to hide their true feelings, they can reveal what is on their mind and what is not said out loud in the interaction.

The *Iijoki Series* has been written entirely from the point of view of the protagonist, Kalle. Comments on addressing occur both in the narration and in the dialogue. In most cases, the comments are concerned with situations where Kalle himself is one of the participants in the interaction. In these cases, we have direct access to Kalle’s perceptions and interpretations of the situation. There are also some situations in which he is observing interactions amongst other characters, and access to their perceptions of forms of address is opened up through dialogues in which unsuccessful choices are explicitly commented on in the discussion (see Extract (3)).

2. Materials and Methods

This section is devoted primarily to introducing the literary works produced by the author Kalle Päätalo and to describing the stages in the life of the fictitious protagonist Kalle. Subsequently, we discuss the *Iijoki Series* as a text corpus and present the corpus searches that we have made in order to locate the passages in which forms of address have been commented on.

2.1. Stages in the Life of the Protagonist

Kaarlo Alvar “Kalle” Päätalo (1919–2000) was a Finnish forestry worker and builder who became a novelist. He published 44 books (39 novels, three collections of short stories, one play and one illustrated book) in the course of 1958–2001. In his main work, contained

in the autobiographical *Iijoki Series* (1971–1998), Päätaalo writes as a first-person narrator about the characters, events and landscapes of his life (Rajala 1987). He was one of the most popular Finnish authors in Finland in the 20th century, and his novels were read especially by ordinary Finns—and also by Finns who might not otherwise have read books at all. By the time of his death, as many as 3.6 million copies of his books had been printed (Saviniemi and Mantila 2022, p. 9). For comparison, in the year 2000, the population of Finland was approximately 5.2 million. Rajala (1987) even considers Päätaalo to be the most successful Finnish author. Critics have, however, often been quite critical of his works, and only a handful of his books have been translated for an international readership.¹

The biography of the protagonist, Kalle, is quite similar to that of the author Kalle Päätaalo himself (Table 1; for further detail, see Ylönen 2013, pp. 419–28; Keskimaa 2018a, p. 23). Although the lives of the author Kalle Päätaalo and the fictional Kalle seem to be quite alike, we have no access to the reality. In consequence, we can only comment on the fictional life of the protagonist. This also concerns the use and comments related to address practices. When referring to the protagonist, we will use the first name *Kalle* and when we mean the author Kalle Päätaalo, the name form *Kalle Päätaalo* or *Päätaalo* will be used.

Table 1. Principal events in the life of the protagonist, Kalle.

Main Events and Years
Childhood, 1919–1933
Youth, 1933–1939
War years, 1939–1944
First marriage to Laina Päätaalo and his move to the Tampere region, 1944
Studying to become a construction foreman in Tampere, 1947–1949
Moving back to Taivalkoski and back to Tampere, 1951–1952
Becoming the father of an illegitimate child, 1954
Divorce from Laina Päätaalo and second marriage to Leena Päätaalo, 1955
Becoming the father of two daughters, 1956 and 1959
Becoming a novelist, 1958
Becoming a full-time writer, 1963

Kalle was born in 1919 and raised in a small town called Taivalkoski in the north-eastern part of Finland. He was the second eldest of eight children. He studied at a primary school for five years in 1928–1933 in Taivalkoski, but he had no opportunity to study further for any occupation before his military service. His father was a lumberjack who suffered from periodical mental disorders, which caused the family financial problems. Hence, from the age of 14, Kalle had to maintain his family, for instance, by means of timber rafting and logging. He volunteered for the army in 1939 at the start of the Second World War, and after the war and five years of military service (1939–1944), he married and moved with his wife Laina to the Tampere area.

In the post-war years, Kalle worked mainly on construction sites as a handyman, before studying for two years at technical school to become a construction worker. His new occupation as a construction foreman facilitated the start of his social rise. In the early 1950s, he returned with his wife to his hometown of Taivalkoski and worked there as a construction foreman. Less than two years later, they moved back to the city of Tampere. After he fathered an illegitimate child, Kalle and his first wife divorced in 1955, and at around the same time, he met Leena and remarried. In the 1950s he and his second wife became the parents of two daughters. At this point in his life, Kalle wrote a first novel about a building site in Tampere; the novel was published in 1958 and he became a full-time writer in 1963.

2.2. *The Iijoki Series as a Text Corpus*

Kalle Päätaalo’s main work, the *Iijoki Series* (1971–1998), is one of the longest autobiographical works ever written. Päätaalo writes about his life in this novel series in a highly detailed way. From the perspective of a single, fictional individual, Kalle, the events in

the *Iijoki Series* span a period of about 70 years, but they especially describe the period spanning the 1920s to the 1950s. Central to the story is the tension between Kalle's home region, the northern countryside (especially the town of Taivalkoski), and his later place of residence, an industrial city (Tampere) in southern Finland. The series tells the story of the protagonist Kalle, but there are other, more extensive stories included in it: in all, it has more than 1 800 minor characters (Ylönen 2013, p. 271).

Our data covers the entire *Iijoki Series*, comprising 26 novels, some 17,000 pages, 494,614 sentences, and 5,280,750 tokens. The electronic corpus of the whole series has made it possible to systematically analyse this extensive data. The corpus, maintained in the Language Bank of Finland, has been freely available to researchers since 2019.

This study represents corpus-based research (see, e.g., Tognini-Bonelli 2001, p. 65) in which corpus tools have only been used in the keyword searches. Subsequently, we discuss the *Iijoki Series* as a text corpus and present the corpus searches we have made in order to locate the passages in which forms of address have been commented on.

The analysis is based on corpus searches for 10 keywords (see Table 2). We obtained over 1400 hits, but some of them were irrelevant from the perspective of our research topic. We went through all of the search results manually and removed the irrelevant cases. This left a total of 726 relevant cases.

Table 2. Search terms and their frequencies in the corpus.

Search Term	N
<i>etunimi</i> 'first name'	78
<i>herroitella</i> ~ <i>herrotella</i> 'to address as Sir'	13
<i>puhutella</i> 'to address'	308
<i>puhuttelu</i> 'addressing'	37
<i>rouvitella</i> 'to address as Madam'	1
<i>sinutella</i> 'to address with T forms'	126
<i>sinuttelu</i> 'the use of T forms'	18
<i>sukunimi</i> 'surname'	29
<i>teititellä</i> 'to address with V forms'	97
<i>teitittely</i> 'the use of V forms'	19

The metalinguistic comments have been analysed qualitatively, within the wider context encompassing the concordance lines, and by classifying them into several categories based, on the one hand, on the forms of address (T vs. V forms, the use of nominal forms) that they comment on and, on the other hand, on the social and situational factors (e.g., age, gender, power relations) mentioned in the justifications of the choice of the form. Our analysis revealed some trends that we aim to illustrate using a number of representative examples in the following section.

3. Results

The present section consists of an analysis of the selected examples to illustrate how address practices are commented on at different stages in Kalle's life; a further aim will be to highlight the social and situational factors underlying the chosen forms of address. In most cases, these factors will be explicitly commented on. The analysis will proceed chronologically, from Kalle's childhood to his adulthood.

3.1. Childhood and Adolescence

Our first example comes from Kalle's childhood in the 1920s, when Kalle is around four years of age and lives in his home village, Taivalkoski. He is visiting an elderly neighbour whom he has stayed with over a long period of time; here, a neighbour is growing tired of Kalle, who repeatedly asks questions. At this point the neighbour also criticizes Kalle for his inappropriate manner of address. It is more common in the *Iijoki Series* that the narrator comments on the unexpected forms of address, but in this specific

case it is natural that the addressee expresses her irritation directly to the interlocutor, since adults have the power to remind children of what constitutes good manners.

(1)

–Selevitäppä taas sitä kun olit Ruijassa kalalla!

–En selevitä! Silittiinkää. . . Eläkä sinä yhtenä inkuta ja kysele! Muuvvanhi aina on tutteeraamassa täysi-ikäisiltä ihmisiltä. . . Ja pittää olla ihme, ettei se Riitu opeta sulle miten puhutellaan vanahoja ihmisiä. Sannoo sinuksi kun vertaisijaan. . .

Monta kertaa äiti samoin kuin isä ovat iskostaneet tätä tapaa mieleeni. Useat kerrat äiti on pyöräyttänyt minua tukasta kun vieras, jota olen erehtynyt puhuttelemaan sinuksi, on sulkenut perässään oven. Päätän korjata puheeni ja sanon:

–Pulukallako ne lappalaiset teitä kuskasi kun kulitta Ruijassa?

–Tell[T] me again about the time you[T] were fishing in Ruija!

–I won’t! Don’t[T] keep on talking and asking questions. You’re always disturbing adults with all sorts of questions. How strange that Riitu hasn’t taught you how to speak to old people. You address them with *sinä* [‘you T’] forms as if they were your peers.

My mother and also my father have instilled this habit in my mind. My mother has pulled my hair several times when a stranger, whom I have mistakenly addressed as *sinä* [‘you T’], has closed the door. I decide to correct my speech and say:

–Did the Lapps carry you[V] with a sledge when you[V] were wandering in Ruija?

(Huonemiehen poika 1971)

At the beginning of the extract Kalle uses T forms, as can be seen in his use of verb inflections (*kerro* ‘tell.IMP2.SG2’, *ol-i-t* ‘be-PST-SG2’). Following the neighbour’s rebuke, the narrator comments on the situation by pointing out that the neighbour has formulated the general norm: in the Finnish society of the 1920s, children were not permitted to address older people using T forms. The norm violation is not entirely blamed on Kalle, since Kalle’s mother Riitu is held responsible: *Ja pittää olla ihme, ettei se Riitu opeta sulle miten puhutellaan vanahoja ihmisiä*. ‘How strange that Riitu hasn’t taught you how to speak to old people.’ In more recent times, this norm of addressing has, to some extent, changed in Finland. A majority of Finns still think that elderly people should be addressed using V-forms, but the norm no longer extends to small children nor to relationships between acquaintances such as close neighbours (Hippi and Lappalainen 2020). The concluding part of the extract, however, shows that Kalle knows how to address according to conventional expectations. The use of V forms is visible in both the pronoun (*tei-tä* ‘you(V)-PART’) and the verb inflection (*kul-i-tta* ‘go-PST-PL2’).

In adolescence, Kalle joins the army and corresponds with several girls. Because of the war, his military service lasts for years. In the army, Kalle experiences difficulty in learning formal address patterns in connection with military titles and their complex rules. In romantic relationships, the way in which he addresses girls reflects his emotional attitude to them (see also Lappalainen and Saviniemi 2023, pp. 155–56). The following example describes a situation in which Kalle has been hospitalized after being wounded in the war. In the hospital he talks with other patients, doctors, nurses, and “Lottas”. (Lottas were members of the women’s voluntary paramilitary service organization, Lotta Svärd, and served in many kinds of auxiliary roles, such as in hospitals and at air raid warning posts during the Second World War.) In the dialogues preceding the example, at the beginning of his treatment, Kalle is addressed with V forms or indirectly in the third person. However, the situation changes as his condition improves and he is able to communicate more with others.

(2)

Kun haavakuumeeni hellitti, aloin yhä nopeammassa tahdissa tulla tutuiksi vanhojen potilaitten samoin kuin hoitohenkilökunnan kanssa.

Olin luokan nuorin potilas. Varmaan tästä syystä lotat ja Punaisen Ristin Hilikka olivat alkaneet kutsua minua etunimeltä ja sanoa sinuksi. Hilkan siirtymistä sinutteluun oli tosin edeltänyt hienovarainen "ottaa nyt", "maistaa edes" -muotojen käyttö. Hilikkaa ja Annikkia minunkin oli helppo sinutella. Elinaa sain juuri ja juuri kutsutuksi etunimeltään, sinuksi sanomista kuitenkin kiersin. Sairaanhoitajia teitittelin, vieläpä arasti, ja heitä teitittelivät muutkin luokan potilaat—vänrikkiä ehkä lukuun ottamatta. Koska minut poisjättäen nuorimmatkin potilaistamme lähentelivät kolmeakymmentä—vedossa makaava uskovainen kersantti oli jo jonkin vuoden päälle neljäkymmenen—kutsuivat kaikki kaverini lottia ja Hilikkaa etunimeltä tai sinuksi. Nämä taas teitittelivät kaikkia itseään vanhempia.

As my post-surgical temperature subsided, I started increasingly to get to know patients who had arrived earlier as well as the nursing staff.

I was the youngest patient in the class.² Probably for this reason, the Lottas and Hilikka from the Red Cross had started calling me by my first name and addressing me as *sinä* [T]. Hilikka's switch to *sinä* had been preceded, however, by a subtle use of the forms "(he) takes it now", "(he) tastes a bit". It was easy for me to address Hilikka and Annikki with T forms. I could scarcely call Elina by her first name, but I avoided calling her *sinä*. I addressed the nurses with V forms, even shyly, and they were also addressed with V forms by the other patients in the class—perhaps with the exception of the lieutenant. Since, apart from me, the youngest of the patients were approaching their thirties—the religious sergeant in traction was already a bit older than forty—all my friends called Lottas and Hilikka by their first names or *sinä*. The latter, in turn, addressed everyone older than themselves with V forms.

(*Liekkejä laulumailta* 1980)

The first-person narrator, the protagonist, does not mention in his metalinguistic description how he had been addressed earlier, which can be interpreted as an indication that readers would, in any case, know the reality on the basis of their own worldview or of the previous context. Rather, the protagonist makes it clear that the hospital staff have started to address him using his first name and T forms. This is explained by Kalle's age: he is the youngest of the patients, i.e., younger than the staff, and the same age as the youngest of the Lottas. In contrast, the older patients are addressed with V forms by the Lottas and nurses. This is not surprising, since the age of the addressee and the age difference between interlocutors are key factors in understanding the choice between T/V forms in Finland and more generally (Clyne et al. 2009; Paunonen 2010; Wide et al. 2019; Hippi and Lappalainen 2020). In present-day Finland, however, in the choice of V forms, the actual age difference between the parties concerned is likely to be much greater than in the case in the example described here. However, the use of T forms has not been entirely painless for all of the staff concerned, as is evidenced by the fact that Hilikka, who works for the Red Cross, has initially used indirect third-person forms when addressing Kalle.

The change in the use of the forms of address concerns not only how Kalle is addressed but also the way in which Kalle addresses others. Extract (2) shows how the various groups of hospital staff are addressed using different forms. Kalle reports that he addresses nurses using V forms, which is probably influenced by their education and position at the hospital. The respect they enjoy is also reflected in the fact that other patients do the same. In contrast, Kalle addresses Hilikka and Annikki (a Lotta) using T forms, whereas he is unable to do the same with Elina, a Lotta whom Kalle seems to be in love with. The description of his addressing her by her first name (but not with *sinä* forms) suggests that, in Kalle's hierarchy, the use of T forms is a more familiar form of address than the use of first names, by which he probably refers to this as an indirect way of addressing others in the third person. In

addition to his romantic feelings, his familiar way of addressing Elina may be inhibited by Kalle's knowledge that she comes from Helsinki and a middle class family—in other words, from a much more socially sophisticated background than Kalle himself. Later, however, after Elina has given Kalle a New Testament, they start to address each other using T forms.

3.2. *Working Life, Marriage, and Tensions between Countryside and City*

Approaching the novel series as a linguistic biography allows us to follow the changes in relationships and linguistic practices related to them over the course of the protagonist's life. This approach also reveals changes in the way that people address each other and the perceptions and feelings associated with these changes. The following example illustrates how the mode of addressing can change over time and how Kalle tends to adapt to the choices made by his interlocutor. Extract (3) describes a situation in which he is looking for a job after the war. The job situation is bad at the time, so he is in the position of an underdog. The recruiter turns out to be someone he knows, as Mr. Oksa is an acquaintance of Kalle's family and comes from his home village.

(3)

Käsitän olevani Oksalle kaikkea muuta kuin tervetullut asiakas. Jo siksikin, että hän on minua teititellyt. Ensimmäisen kerran elämässään! Minä olin puhutellut Oksaa teiksi poikasena ja vielä nuorukaisena, niin kuin selkosissamme lapset ja nuoret teittitelevät vanhempia ja etenkin herraskaisia ihmisiä. Sotahommissa olimme puolin ja toisin sinutelleet.

I find that I am anything but a welcome client for Oksa. This is evident especially in the fact that he has addressed me with *te* ['you V'] forms. For the first time in his life! I used to address Oksa with *te* ['you V'] as a boy and still as a young man, as children and young people do in my home region when addressing older people, especially genteel people. But in wartime jobs we had addressed each other by using *sinä* ['you T'] forms.

(*Pohjalta ponnistaen* 1983)

Because Mr. Oksa is older than Kalle and has been higher in the social hierarchy in Kalle's adolescence, Kalle has been accustomed to addressing him using V forms. However, they have served in the war on the same front and under these circumstances they have addressed each other using the informal T forms. But now, in this new situation, Kalle is hesitant about how to address and greet Oksa. The narrative context around the extract reveals that Kalle is confused and secretly outraged when Oksa shows no sign of knowing him, treating him instead with formal detachment. The conversation is obviously awkward for both parties, and Mr. Oksa, who is higher in the social hierarchy, distances Kalle from himself by addressing him using V forms. The metalinguistic commentary on the forms of address shows that the narrator interprets the choices of address as reflecting changes in the relations between himself and his interlocutor.

After the war, Kalle marries Laina, settles in the Tampere region, a large industrial city by Finnish standards, and qualifies as a construction foreman. Both his living in a large city and also his social rise through education distances Kalle from the people of his hometown. This social distance is also evident in Kalle's parents' relationship with his wife Laina, who comes from a city and has grown up in a family representing a higher social class than Kalle's (Keskimaa 2013). Extract (4) describes an interaction that occurs during Kalle's and Laina's first visit to Kalle's home in Taivalkoski.

(4)

–Sekö ei ui? Tarkotan että sekö... tuota eikö uija...

–Mitä tuo Hermannin oikein tappailoo ja puhuu nuin mutkasesti! Lainahan se on! Meidän minniä—minna, äiti sekoo isän puheeseen.—Kuulostaa kun puhutteleisi rinssessaa...

–Totta kai puhuttelette minua etunimeltä tai sinuksi, vaimoni sanoo.

- She doesn’t swim? I mean, she doesn’t. . . well, doesn’t (she) swim. . .
- What’s Hermannni trying to do but beat about the bush! It’s Laina! Our daughter-in-law, mother butts into (my) father’s talk.—That sounds as if you were addressing a princess.
- Of course you [V] call me by my first name or *sinä*, my wife says.

(*Nuorikkoa näyttämässä* 1984)

In the time-setting of the novel, the 1940s, it was typical to address one’s in-laws using V forms, as Laina does (*puhuttele-tte* ‘address-PL2(=V)’) (see Paunonen 2010, pp. 340–42). In contrast, it has been assumed that parents-in-law would use T forms with their daughters-in-law (and sons-in-law) simply because of the age difference.³ In this light, the way that Kalle’s father addresses Laina in the third person is exceptional. He refers to Laina with the pronoun *se*, which is the colloquial equivalent of the third-person pronoun (vs. *hän* ‘she’, ‘he’ in standard Finnish). The unpredictability of Hermannni’s address choice is shown in the example by the fact that his wife notices it and comments on it publicly: *Mitä tuo Hermannni oikein tappailoo ja puhuu nuin mutkasesti! Lainahan se on! Meidän minniä—minna* ‘What’s Hermannni trying to do but beating about the bush! It’s Laina! Our daughter-in-law’. At the same time, Kalle’s mother shows that she has the courage to call her daughter-in-law by her first name. In the *Iijoki Series* the narrator frequently describes the habit of avoiding the choice between T and V forms as a local peculiarity. However, similar strategies have also been used elsewhere in Finland (Yli-Vakkuri 2005). The timid reluctance of Kalle’s father to address Laina in a more familiar way probably stems from Laina’s urban background, which in itself places her in a higher social position in the eyes of her father-in-law. Laina tries to encourage her father-in-law to use a more familiar way of addressing her by offering him two options, to either call her by her first name or address her as *sinä*: *Totta kai puhuttelette minua etunimeltä tai sinuksi, vaimoni sanoo* ‘Of course you[V] call me by my first name or *sinä* [‘you T’].

The choice of the appropriate form of address is particularly prominent in the descriptions of Kalle’s working life. By uttering their metalinguistic comments, Kalle and his workmates generally address each other informally, either using T forms or calling each other by their first names. However, a number of exceptions are repeatedly commented on. In addition to his discourse with older male employees, Kalle does not use informal forms with any female employees because he does not want to give the impression of having a relationship with them. At the beginning of his career, Kalle found it difficult to address his workmates using T forms, and even later he does not enjoy being formally addressed by others (Keskimaa 2018b, pp. 18–19; Lappalainen and Saviniemi 2023, pp. 160–61).

Extract (5) illustrates the situation at the construction site. Kalle has returned to his home region of Taivalkoski in northern Finland and works there as a construction foreman. His former acquaintances find it difficult to relate to him, since he has lived for years in a big city and has been educated. This has rendered him eminent in the eyes of the locals. Kalle, though, feels uncomfortable when old acquaintances address him indirectly, i.e., using, for instance, passive forms or nominal forms with third-person verb forms. In the extract below, he is visiting one of his construction sites, the Huttu school.

(5)

- On pärjätty näillää tilapäisillä. Ja on uskottu, että kun mestari on luvannu toimittaa, niin tulevat aikanaan.

Olen tuntenut keittäjän penskavuosiltani lähtien. Keittäjä on minua puolisenkymmentä vuotta vanhempi. Hänen tavassaan puhutella minua on samaa arkailua, jota olen usein tavannut tultuani tekopitäjäni kunnan palvelukseen. Olen Hutun koulun keittäjälle huomauttanut ”mestaroimisesta”, mutta tuloksetta. Tällä ker-
taa en puutu asiaan, vaikka keittäjä puhuttelee Teemua ja Svandea etunimeltä.

–We have managed before with these temporary ones [instead of a fixed cabinetry]. And we have believed that, because the *mestari* has promised to deliver them, they will come in time.

I have known the cook since my childhood. The cook is half a decade or so older than me. Her way of addressing me conveys the same timidity that I have often encountered since coming to work for the municipality in my home town. I have pointed out to the Huttu school cook that she does not need to address me as a *mestari*, but to no avail. I won't intervene in the matter this time, even though the cook does call Teemu and Svande by their first names.

(*Epätietoisuuden talvi* 1992)

The school cook addresses Kalle in the third person and refers to him as *mestari* ('master'), which comes from *rakennusmestari*, 'construction foreman'. The narrator (Kalle) explains in his commentary why he feels uncomfortable because of the way he is addressed by the local people. The cook is only a little older than him and they have known each other since childhood, so the use of informal T forms would be more expected. Besides, the cook calls Kalle's colleagues by their first names—hence, more informally than her way of addressing Kalle, and Kalle has already pointed out to her that her way of addressing him is unnecessarily formal. The novel series reveals that Kalle has low self-esteem and therefore finds it difficult to put himself in a position in which he will be looked up to (see Ylönen 2022, p. 164; Lappalainen and Saviniemi 2023, pp. 162–63). At the same time, the comments on the forms of address in the narrative reinforce the image that Kalle feels disconnected from his former home region (see Keskimaa 2018b, p. 15). His dislike of the indirect modes of address that avoid the choice between T and V forms, and which he considers to be particularly characteristic of the local people, increases when he mentally detaches himself from the area. Extract (5) is a good example of how the perceptions and feelings of the participants are not always revealed in the interaction itself (see the narrator's comment: *Tällä kertaa en puutu asiaan* 'I won't intervene in the matter this time'), but rather they are only conveyed through the narrator's metalinguistic commentary (see the sentences after the cook's comment).

The novel series culminates in Kalle's becoming a successful writer. This means another social rise for him, moving even into academic circles. His encounters with representatives of literary circles are a source of tension, as Kalle feels he is on unfamiliar ground. Such situations include meetings with the director Ville Repo, who works at a publishing house, and Repo's wife. In Extract (6), Mr. Repo and his wife pay their first joint visit to Kalle and his second wife, Leena.

(6)

Revon pariskunnan vierailu meille toteutui sovittuna aikana. Leenan ja minun Gummeruksen kirjallista johtajaa kohtaan aluksi tuntema maisterinpelko oli alkanut jo kustantajapäivien jälkeen haalistua. Aune-sisareni tunsu tätä pelkoa edelleen ja toimeutui vieraittemme saapumisiltana kylään. Tällä kertaa Leena ja minä jännitimme enemmän rouva Revon kuin hänen miehensä saapumista, mutta turhaan. Jo kahvipöydässä rupesimme rouva Revon aloitteesta kaikki neljä sinuttelemaan toisiamme.

–Kuulostaa kovin kankealta, jos Kalle ja Ville keskustelevalat jatkuvasti näin viral-lisesti. Eikö kaunokirjallisesta tekstistä puhuminen vaatisi lähempää tuttavuutta? Teidän yhteistyönne kun tulee jatkumaan. Ja kai Leenan ja minunkin kieli on notkeampi, kun puhuttemme toisiamme etunimillä.

The Repo couple's visit to us took place at the appointed time. The fear that Leena and I initially felt towards the publishing director of Gummerus [the name of the publishing house] had begun to fade after the event that had been organized by the publishers. My sister Aune still felt this fear and organized herself out of the

house by visiting somebody. This time Leena and I were more excited about Mrs. Repo's arrival than that of her husband, but for no reason. At the coffee table all four of us, on Mrs. Repo's initiative, immediately began addressing each other using T forms.

–It sounds very stiff if Kalle and Ville insist on speaking to each other so formally. Wouldn't talking about a fictional text require closer acquaintance? Your collaboration will continue. And I suppose Leena and I can talk more flexibly⁴ when we start calling each other by our first names.

(*Pöyhökanto Iijoen törmässä* 1998)

The narrator explicitly describes the tension felt by him and his wife with respect to meeting other fiction writers and representatives of the publisher. Kalle feels inferior because he has not been academically educated. His tension is especially associated with Ville Repo, who is Kalle's editor at the publishing house, since he has a master's degree. But, as Extract (6) shows, Kalle's fear of Mr. Repo has begun to ease since they have become better acquainted with each other; however, Kalle and Leena do not yet know Repo's wife.⁵ Mrs. Repo, however, immediately takes the initiative by speaking in a more familiar manner. In accordance with etiquette, it is the woman who should suggest that interlocutors can call each other by their first names (Lappalainen 2015, p. 78). In this case, the initiative can be taken only by Mrs. Repo since she is higher in the social hierarchy than Kalle's wife, Leena. When she justifies her suggestion, Mrs. Repo appeals to the prospect of smooth professional cooperation between Kalle and her husband, but adds that it will also be a matter of greater convenience between herself and Leena. The narrator's comment shows that he equates Mrs. Repo's initiative to the use of first names when addressing each other using T forms: *rupesimme rouva Revon aloitteesta kaikki neljä sinuttelemaan toisiamme* 'all four of us, on Mrs. Repo's initiative, immediately began addressing each other using T forms'. The narrator does not directly explain in detail how he and his wife experience this initiative, but its positive interpretation becomes apparent in light of the preceding comment that their tension with respect to Mrs. Repo proves to be unnecessary.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

This article has paid particular attention to the metalinguistic comments concerning the modes of address in a large autobiographical novel series, the *Iijoki Series* (1971–1998), by Kalle Päätalo. Our analysis is based on searches done in the digital corpus of the whole series. The study is grounded in previous sociopragmatic research into modes of address and also into folk linguistics. Our aim has been to investigate how address practices are commented on in the *Iijoki Series* as part of the protagonist's linguistic biography and how the choices related to the forms of address have been justified in the narrative. Our aim has also been to show how the forms of address reflect social relations between the protagonist and other characters.

Our analysis shows that Kalle, the fictional protagonist of the series, mirrors his own and others' choices of address throughout his life against the norms he has learned since his childhood in his home region. The most essential norm is that old or unknown people cannot be addressed using informal T forms. Our examples also illustrate how Kalle perceives the avoidance of the choice between T and V forms through various indirect forms of address and considers this strategy to be particularly typical of his home region. In the context of the *Iijoki Series*, the use of first names refers to indirect third-person addresses. On the continuum of formality, this is located between the T and V forms, representing informal rather than formal address. These address practices are commented on and reflected in descriptions of Kalle's childhood, his military service, his working life and also in his relationships with women.

In our discussion of the particular factors used in justifying choices of address patterns, our study shows familiar social categories: the (relative) age, sex, social class, status and regional background of the interlocutors (Clyne et al. 2009; Paunonen 2010). However, rather than being stable entities, these categories are intertwined, and their importance

changes along with Kalle's own age, status, and place of residence in the course of his life. We have also shown how an address practice can make the addressee, the speaker—or, indeed, both—for example, feel annoyed, embarrassed or delighted. Hence, we would argue that metalinguistic comments that verbalize characters' perceptions of address practices reflect the characters' social relations as well as the development of and changes in these relationships. These aspects can be examined as part of the linguistic biography because of the longitudinal nature of the data.

The metalinguistic comments concerning the forms of address shed light on the social norms of the period during which the events of the novel series take place by focusing on both predictable cases and also cases where norms are violated. The novel series depicts not only the linguistic biography and social rise of one fictional character but also the broader transformation of Finnish society, from the rural communities of the early 20th century to a subsequently urbanising society (Saviniemi and Mantila 2022, p. 9). The metalinguistic comments and the representation of address practices in the novel series cannot be seen as a direct reflection of historical reality, but we would argue, on the basis of our results and also of the previous research available on address patterns during that period, that the *Iijoki Series* provides a credible picture of the Finnish speech culture of its time, especially with reference to the period from the 1920s to the 1950s. During that period, the use of V forms and titles was much more common than it is nowadays (see Paunonen 2010). In addition, the series of novels sheds new light on address patterns in contexts that have not been focused on previously in address research. The *Iijoki Series* describes, for instance, the way in which the members of different work communities (especially people working on construction sites) were in the habit of addressing each other. The novels also show situations in which the power relationships between the participants are relevant, such as when applying for a job or being in military service. Previous conclusions concerning the address patterns of the same period are based mainly on questionnaires concerning retrospective observations of rather limited social relations (Paunonen 2010). In contrast, the *Iijoki Series* expands the overall picture by presenting a greater variety of contexts and the longitudinal perspectives relevant to them.

Kalle Päätalo's *Iijoki Series* is one of the longest autobiographical works ever written, and, hence, it provides an exceptionally rich resource for the study of metalinguistic commentary. We believe, however, that other novel series or individual works may also prove to be interesting objects for research in this respect. In our own research, the focus has been only on metalinguistic comments, but our study could be complemented by analysing the ways in which the forms of address occur in the dialogue. Fictional dialogues are, of course, the author's interpretation of reality and their analysis cannot replace the analysis of an authentic interaction; nevertheless, fiction is able to expose the past and other situations to which we have no other access.

Our aim in this article has also been to show how research into the language of fiction can contribute an additional body of research into address practices. Not all authentic situations are easily accessible and there is very limited access to those that have taken place in the past. Authentic conversations seldom reveal how participants experience being addressed and how they reflect their own choices. Fiction, in contrast, often provides access to the perceptions and attitudes of the characters through the narrator's metalinguistic comments, sometimes also in the form of dialogue. Research into fictional texts can also provide further ideas concerning the kinds of situations that could be explored in future research, both through surveys and interviews and also by analysing authentic interactions.

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Abbreviations of Glossing Symbols

IMP	Imperative
PART	Partitive
PST	Past tense
POSS	Possessive suffix
PL	Plural
SG	Singular

Notes

- ¹ In this article all of the Finnish extracts have been translated by the authors. We have focused in our translations on the main content of the extracts, since our skills are not sufficient to convey, for instance, the author's dialectal style in English.
- ² The war hospital was located on the school premises.
- ³ This happens, for example, between Kalle and his first mother-in-law. Kalle addresses her using V forms, while his mother-in-law addresses him using T forms.
- ⁴ Literally: 'Leena's and my tongue is supplier'.
- ⁵ Kalle's sister Aune, who lives with Kalle and Leena, is so nervous about the guests that she leaves the place.

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Article

Unlocking the Power of *Oom* and *Tannie*: How Forms of Address Shape Perception and Respect in Afrikaans

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Abstract: Although some research on forms of address toward adults in the South African context has been conducted in the past, there remains a gap regarding the use of *oom* and *tannie* as a specific informal Afrikaans form of address. This study comprises both a review of the existing literature and an empirical investigation to address this gap. A mixed-methods approach was used to conduct the empirical investigation. Quantitative data were collected through electronic questionnaires completed by adults and learners. Qualitative data were collected by conducting semi-structured interviews. Analysis of the data indicated that the use of *oom* and *tannie* is still prevalent in the Afrikaans-speaking community, demonstrating a high frequency of use. From the data, it becomes evident that age, respect, familiarity, social class, and status serve as determining factors in the use of *oom* and *tannie*. The age difference between speaker and addressee that serves as the accepted norm for using *oom* and *tannie* remains ten years or more. It seems that the Afrikaans community is moving toward a more informal and solidary society, with *oom* and *tannie* or *first names* being preferred over the use of titles. Without a doubt, *oom* and *tannie* are used in the Afrikaans community as alternative forms of respect.

Keywords: forms of address; Afrikaans; *oom*; *tannie*; sociolinguistics; respect; age; norms

1. Introduction

The use of forms of address and salutations is one of the most important ways in which verbal communication between interlocutors is initiated. Although forms of address are important in all linguistic communities and cultures, they are often specific to different cultures and the unique ways in which they are used (Ellis 2022, p. 1). Forms of address are closely linked to various aspects of human interaction, such as social power and distance. Since language use is often influenced by culturally determined social interactions, the conforming forms of address will, therefore, be used in different ways in different cultures. The use of any given form of address—or lack thereof—is subject to several variables, which usually indicate something about the addressee, the speaker, the contextual formality of the situation, and the type of social interaction among interlocutors (Combrink 1987, p. 15). These variables include age, familiarity, status, sex, and so on.

Although extensive research exists in the international context, the focus and research on forms of address in South Africa have been more limited. Most of the studies focusing on Afrikaans forms of address were published between 1963 and 1989 and later in 2015 and 2019. The first comprehensive study focusing specifically on *oom* and *tannie* was completed in 2022. It provided contemporary insights into a unique phenomenon and addressed the gap in the existing literature on Afrikaans forms of address, specifically the informal *oom* and *tannie* (Ellis 2022, p. 363). From a diachronic perspective, the study provides a reference point for future research on these forms of address, which will help to determine the extent to which Afrikaans forms of address might change. It also offers a data baseline for future real-time sociolinguistic studies exploring similar issues (Ellis 2022, p. 363).¹

Afrikaans is one of the 12 official languages of South Africa. With historical influences from Germanic, various Asian, and indigenous languages, its forms of address reveal

intricate layers of respect, familiarity, and hierarchical dynamics (See Scholtz 1963; Carstens and Le Cordeur 2016; Carstens and Raidt 2017, 2019). The data, analysis, and conclusions presented in this paper result from research conducted² on Afrikaans forms of address with a focus on the contemporary use of and norms related to *oom* (English “uncle”; German “Onkel”) and *tannie* (English “aunt”; German “Tante”) as *informal* forms of address. The primary aim of this comprehensive study was to determine how prevalent the use of these forms of address was (circa 2021), whether a prescriptive norm for their use exists within the Afrikaans-speaking community, and to determine whether Afrikaans speakers have an overall positive or negative attitude toward the use of these terms (Ellis 2022, p. 7).

The 2022 Census indicated that the population of South Africa consisted of 62 million people (Stats SA 2022, p. 22), of which only 10.6% of speakers use Afrikaans as a mother tongue. The country is culturally diverse, and Afrikaans is the third most spoken language after IsiZulu (24.4%) and IsiXhosa (16.3%). English is the fifth most spoken language, with 8.7% of the population using it as a first language (Stats SA 2022, p. 22).

The approach taken in this comprehensive study focused on several variables with a high probability of influencing the choice of address form: age, sex (biological category), social class and status, situation, race, family relationship, education and occupation, and familiarity between interlocutors (Ellis 2022, p. 173). For the purposes of *this* article, however, the focus has been narrowed to consider only age and sex as variables since the data gathered within the broader scope of the original project indicated that these variables were the most definitive for the choice of *oom* and *tannie*.

Previous studies on Afrikaans forms of address have been undertaken from sociolinguistic perspectives (Odendal 1976; Wybenga 1981; Kotzé 1983; Bosman and Otto 2015; Hoffmann 2019; Ellis 2022), pragmatic perspectives (Combrink 1987; Kotzé 1987; Wybenga 1987; Hoffmann 2019), and historical perspectives (Scholtz 1963; Swanepoel 1989). For this study, a sociolinguistic perspective was used to address existing gaps in this tradition. This approach was supplemented by pragmatic references, as these two fields cannot function in isolation, especially when describing and analyzing forms of address. In this regard, respect (holding someone in high esteem), politeness (practicing good manners), and implicature as pragmatic determinants were taken into account.³ Based on these two approaches, the objective of the argument presented here is to explore how Afrikaans *speakers* perceive the general use of the informal *oom* and *tannie* (as old-fashioned, polite, comfortable, and/or informal), as well as how *being addressed* in this manner may elicit feelings of belittlement and/or being classified as old.

With this paper, I intend to concretize the phenomenon of *oom* and *tannie* by situating these forms of address within the larger Afrikaans language community. This study comprises three parts: first, a description of norms and conventions within the Afrikaans language community is presented, specifically focusing on how they have been described and analyzed in previous studies. The second part of the article presents data from my research, focusing on several variables. The last section offers concluding remarks, highlighting limitations and possible future endeavors.

1.1. Norms and Social Conventions in Afrikaans

As Brown and Gilman (1960, p. 271) state, children are instructed on what to say as they grow up, which includes familiarity with conventions such as the use of forms of address conveyed during childhood (Wybenga 1981, p. 9). The language community in which one grows up plays an important role in acquiring social and cultural values. The norms related to the community refer to the linguistic and social guidelines within the community, which are usually prescriptive in nature. If these rules are violated, it leads to potentially uncomfortable situations for both interlocutors (Ellis 2022, p. 32). Since language is transferred from one generation to the next, the use of language and certain forms of address reflect the traditions of the language and its speakers (Carstens and Raidt 2017, p. 84). In the Afrikaans language community, the use of *oom* and *tannie* is quite a common occurrence, and children are (still) expected to use them. Even though these are

common forms of address, one could ask whether this should be considered as a norm or rather as a convention (Ellis 2022, p. 37). Even though these terms are often (wrongly) used interchangeably, norms are normative or prescriptive in nature, whereas conventions are not. As this study mainly focuses on the sociolinguistic aspects of forms of address, the focus, therefore, is on the sociolinguistic nature of linguistic norms and social conventions within the Afrikaans community (Ellis 2022, p. 31).

1.2. Symmetry and Asymmetry in Forms of Address

For any research on forms of address, the seminal work conducted by Brown and Gilman (1960) about second-person pronouns remains an important point of reference. They focused on the asymmetric power relations expressed by using these pronouns, e.g., the formal V form (*you, vous, Sie*) and the informal T form (*you, tu, du*) (Brown and Gilman 1960, pp. 253–54). They emphasized the influence of two constructs on social relationships, namely power and solidarity, and how this relationship is expressed by means of address forms and/or pronouns (Brown and Gilman 1960, p. 253). According to them, the nature of power is non-reciprocal, and consequently, any power relationship is established by the choice and use of the form of address: the person with more power gives T and receives V (thus asymmetrical), and vice versa (Brown and Gilman 1960, p. 255). The contrast to power is solidarity, which refers to the feeling of unity between people within the same community—both speakers, by using the reciprocal T (or V), establish a symmetrical relationship (Brown and Gilman 1960, p. 258; Ellis 2022, p. 64).

According to this distinction, the use of *oom* and *tannie* is asymmetrical because as a general rule, an older person will be addressed as such but will not address a younger person in this way (Ellis 2022, p. 6). When changes occur in communities, also regarding forms of address, they will change from being more formal (V) to being more informal (T), thus becoming more symmetrical (See Brown and Gilman 1960; Marais 1979; Isosävi and Lappalainen 2015; Waterlot 2017; Vismans 2016; Formentelli and Hajek 2013). Considering the abovementioned, one might infer that using *oom* and *tannie* indicates a need within the Afrikaans community to establish more solidarity between interlocutors. This is achieved by addressing persons older than oneself using *oom* and *tannie*, though with the features associated with the T form (solidarity, informality) replacing the conventional formal V features. However, some members in the community do not want to accept this change from a more formal community to a community with more solidarity and, therefore, reject the use of *oom* and *tannie* (Ellis 2022, p. 6).

Forty years ago, Odendal (1976, p. 107) predicted that the use of *oom* and *tannie* would decline based on the results of his research. However, Wybenga (1981, p. 111) was more positive regarding these forms and suggested that the use of *tannie* will increase and that this has already been the case since the 1950s (Ellis 2022, p. 6). The data analysis enables me to determine, statistically, whether the use of *oom* and *tannie* has declined or increased.

1.3. The Unique Situation of Afrikaans

Afrikaans, similar to German and Dutch, forms part of the Germanic language family and distinguishes between the formal *u* (*vous, Sie*) and informal *ji* (*tu, du*) pronouns. But there is a difference from these languages regarding their respective uses of familial terms (Ellis 2022, p. 17). Unlike German and Dutch (where *Onkel/Oom* and *Tante* are used for family members, very close family friends, or as terms of endearment and then always with a first name), in Afrikaans, *oom* and *tannie* can be used toward any (older) person, and then with or without using a first name (Spillner 2014, p. 179; De Wachter 2017; Odendal 1976, p. 108; Ellis 2022, p. 21). In the Afrikaans community, and especially amongst younger people, the default form of address seems to be *oom* and *tannie*. It mainly functions as a convenient and relatively safe form of address if a speaker is uncertain about the appropriate form to use. It provides comfort because the speaker still shows respect, even though it may not be the most suitable address in a particular situation.

As a rule of thumb, only persons ten years and older than the speaker should be addressed as *oom* and *tannie* (Odendal 1976, p. 109; Ellis 2022, p. 43). In a comprehensive study, it was found that speakers use *oom* and *tannie* for the following reasons: *because they were taught that way; to show respect; because someone is 20+ years older than them; because they do not know how to address someone; it feels acceptable or adequate in the situation; and because formal forms of address make them uncomfortable* (Ellis 2022, p. 184). Even though it appears to be a common form of address, some people within the Afrikaans community still find it irritating, unprofessional, too familiar, and so on. (Ellis 2022, p. 2).

1.4. Retracing Oom and Tannie: A Linguistic Overview

As studies in Afrikaans linguistics that analyze forms of address are limited, addressing this language phenomenon in the current context becomes even more pertinent. A brief overview of the research conducted thus far in the context of Afrikaans follows. This overview provides the background for my research as it illustrates what has been done so far and what has not yet been addressed in the Afrikaans context.

The first study to explore Afrikaans forms of address was that of Scholtz (1963, in Ellis 2022, pp. 82–83; Bosman and Otto 2015, p. 366), in which he discussed the historical development of Afrikaans from Dutch, with specific reference to how and when Dutch linguistic forms changed in (South) Africa.⁴ He provides an overview of the pronouns *u* (you formal), *ji* (you informal), and *julle* (you plural). As becomes clear from his overview, already during the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century, *oom* and *tannie* were used to address family members, but these terms were also used as a polite form in the South African countryside (Scholtz 1963, p. 67).

In 1976, Odendal undertook a small, qualitative, and introductory study amongst students, in which he focused on maturity as a variable (i.e., whether the person is perceived as an adult or not). The intention was to establish how this variable influenced the choice of form of address in several contexts. The results indicated that a young(er) person would be addressed by their first name and *you* (informal), whereas an adult would be addressed by their title and *u* (formal) (Odendal 1976, p. 107). He provided a model for Afrikaans forms of address based on Ervin-Tripp's (1973) model established for the American address system. With this model, he attempted to provide a general description of the variables that influenced the choice of address in Afrikaans (Odendal 1976, p. 105). An interesting result from his research indicated that the forms *oom* and *tannie* could be used toward *any* person deemed *aansienlik ouer* ("considerably older") than the speaker (Odendal 1976, p. 107).

Marais (1979) conducted an empirical study to determine the extent to which power and solidarity correlated with the use of *u* (formal) and *ji* (informal) between interlocutors in Afrikaans (Ellis 2022, p. 104). A total of 225 first-year students participated, and the results of this study indicated that the use of the formal *u* signified higher levels of power, whereas the use of the informal *ji* indicated an increased feeling of solidarity between speaker and addressee (Marais 1979, p. 273).⁵

In 1981, Wybenga published a comprehensive mixed-methods study conducted amongst white Afrikaans speakers in Vanderbijlpark, an industrial city located south of Johannesburg. His goal was to investigate the correlation between Afrikaans forms of address and the role of status and status-related issues, focusing specifically on pronouns and vocatives (Wybenga 1981, p. 12; Bosman and Otto 2015, p. 368). Wybenga (1981, p. 1) claimed that using pronouns in Afrikaans was insufficient to indicate the level of power or solidarity between interlocutors. According to him, it was true that the pronouns *ji* and *u* provide a general indication regarding the social distance between interlocutors, but the use of a vocative (*meneer, Piet; oom, tannie*) would give a more accurate indication (Wybenga 1981, p. 2). One aspect that hampered the study was the participants' unwillingness to share their ages. The issue of age being a sensitive matter during data collection will be returned to later.

Kotzé (1983) concluded a systematic investigation into how respective relationships were conveyed using different forms of address in (Cape) Malay Afrikaans (Ellis 2022, p. 104; Bosman and Otto 2015, p. 370). He focused on the importance of the hierarchical structures within this community and provided a model for the referential address system within the Cape Malay community (Kotzé 1983, pp. 197, 199).

The next study pertaining to the Afrikaans forms of address is that of Combrink, concluded in 1987, in which he analyzed the purpose or usefulness of the vocative in Afrikaans and aimed to illustrate how different types of address forms can be used in different imaginary situations (Ellis 2022, p. 94). He distinguished between vocatives pertaining to first and last names and subsequently illustrated the effect or implications of the choice of these during interactions (Combrink 1987, p. 17). According to Combrink (1987, p. 30), the person with greater power or higher status may omit the vocative in cases where the addressee has less power, which is deemed neither polite nor impolite. However, if the roles are reversed, this is considered impolite in Afrikaans (Combrink 1987, p. 30).

In 1989, Swanepoel set out to determine, using a text-based investigation, how forms of address between people from different ethnic backgrounds had changed between 1652 and 1988. She focused specifically on the interethnic forms of address between white-to-nonwhite, nonwhite-to-nonwhite, nonwhite-to-white, and white-to-white interlocutors, as well as the use of racial pejoratives (Swanepoel 1989, p. 1).⁶ Swanepoel's results indicated that certain pejoratives had not changed between 1652 and 1988, whereas the choice of address form had changed, or its occurrences had declined (Ellis 2022, p. 98). She concluded that there are definite normative or social mechanisms at play that determine the changes found in the use of interethnic forms of address in Afrikaans (Swanepoel 1989, p. 129).

The next study to examine Afrikaans forms of address followed only 25 years later: Bosman and Otto (2015, p. 361) undertook a quantitative pilot study amongst the Afrikaans-speaking communities in South Africa and Namibia to assess the contemporary use of the informal and formal second-person pronouns *ji* and *u*. One of the focal points of the research was to determine the current perceptions regarding these pronouns and whether their use had changed since the 1980s (Bosman and Otto 2015, p. 362).⁷

The results indicated that 61% of the participants, especially the younger cohorts, preferred not to be addressed with the formal *u* (Bosman and Otto 2015, p. 385). A section specifically focusing on the participants' perceptions regarding their use of the formal *u* was included. Participants were given three statements, namely *I perceive u as very formal*, *I perceive u as very old-fashioned*, and *I perceive u as very polite* (Bosman and Otto 2015, p. 386). The majority of the participants indicated that they either agreed or were neutral toward the first question (Bosman and Otto 2015, p. 386). Regarding the use of *u* being old-fashioned, most of the participants indicated that they were neutral or that they disagreed. With the last question in mind, 79% of the participants agreed that *u* is a very polite form of address to use (Bosman and Otto 2015, p. 386).

The first small-scale study that focused on *oom* and *tannie* was conducted by Hoffmann (2019). She investigated the use, experiences, perceptions, and attitudes of buyers and sellers at two marketplaces in the Pretoria area, one being a *boeremark* (farmers market) and the other a *Banting and Keto Lifestyle* market. In essence, Hoffmann (2019, p. 86) claims that the visitors to these two markets are conspicuously different from one another. She states that the Banting lifestyle completely diverts from a traditional Afrikaans lifestyle: participants from the former describe their lifestyle as being alternative, with them entertaining modern opinions and attitudes, whereas participants from the latter describe their lifestyle, opinions, attitudes, and values as being more traditional (Hoffmann 2019, pp. 123–24).

A mixed-method study follows, with questionnaires, interviews, and observations employed for data collection (Hoffmann 2019, p. 8). With a focus on both sociolinguistics and pragmatics, she aims to determine whether the forms *oom* and *tannie* are (still) used by the participants and what their perceptions of and attitudes toward these forms of address are (Hoffmann 2019, p. 119).

The results show that *oom* and *tannie* are still used in the Pretoria area and the attitudes towards using these forms are predominantly positive (Hoffmann 2019, p. 128). The participants stated furthermore that the use of *oom* and *tannie* has changed since they were young (Hoffmann 2019, p. 128). Most of the participants indicated that *oom* and *tannie* are currently being used less than before and that people generally prefer to use the informal *jy* and *jou* (“your”) (Hoffmann 2019, p. 126). Even though Hoffmann (2019, p. 131) states that no generalizations can be made due to the small scale of the study, some delineable patterns regarding the use, experience, and perceptions of and attitudes towards the forms *oom* and *tannie* can be seen in her results (Ellis 2022, p. 103).

This overview of all the studies on Afrikaans forms of address indicates several gaps that should be addressed: most of the studies did not explicitly focus on *oom* and *tannie*, are already considered outdated, were conducted on a small scale, or were limited in terms of variables such as race. This forms the background for the large-scale research project that was concluded in 2022, in which an attempt was made not only to include more variables but also to use social media as an additional data instrument.

2. Materials and Methods

The first comprehensive study in Afrikaans to focus on the current use of *oom* and *tannie* adopted an empirical approach with a mixed-methods design for data collection. Data were collected using questionnaires, interviews, social media, observation, and focus group conversations, making this the first research on forms of address in Afrikaans to include all these instruments. For the purposes of this article, however, only data obtained from questionnaires and interviews will be presented in assorted tables relative to age as a distinctive variable. The questionnaire aimed to establish a norm within the Afrikaans language community, with its format at least partly based on the (Afrikaans) research instruments developed by Odendal (1976), Combrink (1987), and Bosman and Otto (2015). An additional purpose of the questionnaire was to determine the frequency of use of *oom* and *tannie*, as well as the extent to which participants agreed (or disagreed) with several different statements (Ellis 2022, p. 141). Regarding each of the questions and its discussion below, a brief mention will be made as to how the data can be presented in terms of sex, as some instances were statistically significant.

Two questionnaires were utilized in the study—one for adult participants (18 years and older) and one for children (ages 12–15 years). The adult questionnaire comprised 55 multiple-choice items (closed questions), whereas the children’s questionnaire consisted of 33 items. Like the former, the latter questionnaire also used a multiple-choice format and the same questions; however, questions deemed irrelevant to children were omitted, and the language was simplified (Ellis 2022, p. 142). Both nominal and ordinal variables were included in the questionnaires, and a Chi-Square test was applied per question to determine whether there is a correlation between two items, e.g., age and the use of *oom* and *tannie* (Ellis 2022, p. 173). Each question was compared in terms of six variables, namely gender, race, occupation, qualification, age, and area.

The data are presented here in terms of the following age cohorts: children (12–15 years), young adults (18–25 years), and then adults of 30–39 years, 40–49 years, 50–59 years, 60–69 years and 70–89 years, respectively. The first language of all the participants was Afrikaans, and they were recruited from two areas, namely Bloemfontein in the Free State province, and George in the Western Cape (Ellis 2022, p. 149). Afrikaans is spoken in both regions.

A total of 2697 questionnaires were initially completed, but ultimately, only 2435 were used. All participants who were not mother-tongue Afrikaans speakers and those living outside the focus areas were excluded ($n = 262$) (Ellis 2022, p. 149). In the following section, the data are presented in terms of the responses received per question.

3. Results

3.1. Questionnaire

The first question (Table 1) set out to determine whether the participants view the use of *oom* and *tannie* as old-fashioned. This question was directed at the total number of participants ($n = 2432$). Age was indicated as a statistically significant variable ($p = 0$).

Table 1. *Oom* and *tannie* are old-fashioned (Ellis 2022, pp. 222–23).

	12–15	16–24	25–29	30–39	40–49	50–59	60–69	70–89
I strongly agree	87 (4.5%)	5 (1.6%)	1 (3.8%)	2 (3.4%)	2 (4.5%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (100%)
I agree	184 (9.6%)	17 (5.3%)	1 (3.8%)	8 (13.8%)	8 (18.2%)	7 (14.6%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
I disagree	832 (43.4%)	126 (39.5%)	17 (65.4%)	32 (55.2%)	24 (54.5%)	33 (68.8%)	15 (88.2%)	0 (0%)
I strongly disagree	816 (42.5%)	171 (53.6%)	7 (26.9%)	16 (27.6%)	10 (22.7%)	8 (16.7%)	2 (11.8%)	0 (0%)
Total	1919	319	26	58	44	48	17	1
2432								

The different age cohorts indicated that, without a doubt, they do *not* think that the forms *oom* and *tannie* are old-fashioned. Interestingly, the 16–24 years cohort felt most strongly that these terms do not represent an old-fashioned form of address (Ellis 2022, p. 223).

In terms of sex, the majority of female (88.0%) and male (85.2%) participants indicated that they disagree that the forms of address *oom* and *tannie* are old-fashioned (Ellis 2022, p. 218). Even though this variable was not statistically significant ($p = 0.246$), it is clear that neither males nor females perceive the forms *oom* and *tannie* to be old-fashioned (Ellis 2022, p. 218).

The following two questions were used to determine whether the participants feel *old* or *belittled* when addressed as *oom* or *tannie* (Ellis 2022, p. 237). For obvious reasons, these questions were only directed toward the adult participants ($n = 417$). Regarding feeling *old* (Table 2), the variables of both age ($p = 0$) and sex ($p = 0.004$) were found to be significant.

Table 2. I feel old when addressed as *oom* or *tannie*.

	18–24	25–29	30–39	40–49	50–59	60–69	70–89
No	33 (14.7%)	3 (11.5%)	11 (19.0%)	5 (11.4%)	18 (38.3%)	7 (41.2%)	0 (0%)
Sometimes	71 (31.7%)	10 (38.5%)	28 (48.3%)	28 (63.6%)	23 (48.9%)	9 (52.9%)	0 (0%)
Yes, always	120 (53.6%)	13 (50.0%)	19 (32.8%)	11 (25.0%)	6 (12.8%)	1 (5.9%)	1 (100%)
Total	224	26	58	44	47	17	1
417							

The two younger cohorts indicated that they *always* feel old when they are addressed as *oom* or *tannie*. If one considers the informal “rule of thumb” in Afrikaans, whereby *oom* and *tannie* are used for persons who are perceived to be ten years and older than the speaker, it makes sense that they may feel a bit old. The majority of participants older than 30 years indicated that they only *sometimes* feel old when addressed as such, with a large

percentage of the 50 years and older participants indicating that they do not feel old when they are addressed as *oom* or *tannie*.

Sex was a significant variable ($p = 0.004$), indicating that male and female participants have different perceptions about feeling old when addressed as *oom* or *tannie* (Ellis 2022, p. 238). The majority of women indicated that they *always* feel old when addressed as *tannie* (46.2%), while the majority of male participants indicated that they only *sometimes* feel old when addressed as *oom* (42.6%) (Ellis 2022, p. 238). Only a quarter of the male participants (25.2%) indicated that they do *not* feel old when someone addresses them as *oom*, while a minority of female participants also indicated *no* (14.5%) (Ellis 2022, p. 238). It is clear that women are more inclined to feel old when addressed as *tannie* than men when they are called *oom*.

One may think that feeling old and belittled are both viewed negatively, but it seems as if there is a distinction to be made between feeling *old* and feeling *belittled*. The former seems to lean toward the *Yes*-side of the scale (which can be interpreted as a negative feeling), whereas the latter leans toward the *No*-side of the scale (which can be interpreted as positive) (Ellis 2022, p. 239). In Table 3, only the variable age ($p = 0.002$) was significant regarding feeling belittled (Ellis 2022, pp. 237–38).

Table 3. I feel belittled when addressed as *oom* or *tannie*.

	18–24	25–29	30–39	40–49	50–59	60–69	70–89
No	199 (89.2%)	23 (88.5%)	51 (87.9%)	33 (75.0%)	43 (89.6%)	11 (82.4%)	0 (0%)
Sometimes	17 (7.6%)	3 (11.5%)	7 (12.1%)	11 (25.0%)	4 (8.3%)	3 (17.6%)	0 (0%)
Yes, always	7 (3.1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (2.1%)	0 (0%)	1 (100%)
Total	223	26	58	44	47	17	1
	417						

A distinct majority of participants in the different age cohorts (>75%) indicated that they do *not* feel belittled when someone calls them *oom* or *tannie*, which can be attributed to the fact that these forms of address are commonly used to show respect and not to (intentionally) insult the addressee. Only nine participants (2.6%) felt belittled when addressed as *oom* or *tannie*. Seven out of the nine participants fall in the youngest cohort.

How do the respective sexes respond to feeling belittled when addressed as *oom* or *tannie*? Both men (91.0%) and women (84.7%) indicated that they do not believe these forms of address are belittling in nature and do not experience them as such. A small number indicated that they *sometimes* feel belittled, with only 1.3% and 2.7%, respectively, *always* feeling belittled (Ellis 2022, p. 239).

With the next question, the intention was to determine whether the whole group of participants ($n = 2435$) uses *oom* and *tannie* because respondents view them as a respectful form of address. Both age ($p = 0$) and sex ($p = 0.017$) were found to be significant. In terms of age, the results are as follows in Table 4.

A distinct majority of the participants in all age cohorts indicated that they *agree* that they use *oom* and *tannie* as a form of respect toward (usually older) addressees. Regarding the cohorts 12–15 years (64.4%), 16–24 years (70.6%), and 30–39 years (48.3%), most of the participants indicated that they *strongly agree* that these terms are a form of respect. There is no denying that all the above cohorts agree that *oom* and *tannie* are respectful forms of address to use and consequently intended to show respect. Age, therefore, does not matter: these forms of address remain respectful to use.

Table 4. I use *oom* and *tannie* as a sign of respect.

	12–15	16–24	25–29	30–39	40–49	50–59	60–69	70–89
I strongly agree	1238 (64.4%)	226 (70.6%)	11 (42.3%)	28 (48.3%)	17 (38.6%)	23 (47.9%)	4 (23.5%)	0 (0%)
I agree	600 (31.2%)	79 (24.7%)	14 (53.8%)	26 (44.8%)	22 (50.0%)	24 (50.0%)	12 (70.6%)	0 (0%)
I disagree	49 (2.6%)	8 (2.5%)	1 (3.8%)	4 (6.9%)	4 (9.1%)	1 (2.1%)	1 (5.9%)	1 (100%)
I strongly disagree	34 (1.8%)	7 (2.2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (2.3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Total	1921	320	26	58	44	48	17	1
2435								

In terms of the different sexes, the responses were relatively similar in that both males (62.1%) and females (64.8%) *strongly agreed* that they use *oom* and *tannie* to show respect, whereas 32.2% of men and 31.7% of women stated that they *agreed* (Ellis 2022, p. 246). There remains no doubt that *oom* and *tannie* are perceived as respectful forms of address in Afrikaans.

The next question aimed to determine whether participants feel that (older) persons are more (or overly) sensitive to being addressed as *oom* or *tannie* (Ellis 2022, p. 249), in the sense that these persons will usually make a fuss or take exception when addressed in this way. As this is a difficult question to ask (older) participants in a direct manner (see the reason above), the hope was that the (anonymous) response to the question would be honest. Only the adult participants (n = 415) completed this question; the data are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Older people are sensitive to being addressed as *oom* or *tannie*.

	18–24	25–29	30–39	40–49	50–59	60–69	70–89
I strongly agree	21 (9.5%)	1 (3.8%)	8 (13.8%)	5 (11.4%)	4 (8.5%)	2 (11.8%)	1 (100%)
I agree	106 (47.7%)	12 (46.2%)	28 (48.3%)	24 (54.5%)	27 (57.4%)	8 (47.1%)	0 (0%)
I disagree	78 (35.1%)	12 (46.2%)	20 (34.5%)	15 (34.1%)	16 (34.0%)	7 (41.2%)	0 (0%)
I strongly disagree	17 (7.7%)	1 (3.8%)	2 (3.4%)	0 (0%)	1 (2.1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Total	222	26	58	44	47	17	1
415							

Even though the variable age was not significant ($p = 0.411$), it is interesting that the majority of participants in every age cohort indicated that they *agreed* with the statement and that (older) people tended to be more sensitive to being addressed as *oom* or *tannie*. The cohort 25–29 years was split in the middle, with 46.2% indicating that they *agreed* and 46.2% indicating that they *disagreed*. Only the 13.8% in this cohort who *strongly disagreed* ultimately swayed the scale towards disagreeing with the statement. This is also the only age cohort that ultimately *disagreed*, indicating that they feel that (older) Afrikaans persons are not (overly) sensitive when they are called *oom* or *tannie*.

The only significant variable related to this question was sex ($p = 0.001$). A total of 51.7% of female participants *agreed* that older persons are sensitive, whereas only 45.5% of male participants indicated as such. About twice as many women than men (12.3% vs.

6.4%) *strongly agreed* that older people are sensitive, whereas 1.9% of women and 9.6% of men *strongly disagreed* and did not feel that there is any sensitivity related to the use of *oom* and *tannie*. Overall, the results indicate some agreement among men and women, but the female participants are more inclined to agree with the statement (Ellis 2022, p. 251). This indicates that the influence of gender on the perception and use of address forms is evident and deserves further investigation.

With the following two questions, the intention was to determine whether the participants ($n = 2434$) perceive *oom* and *tannie* to be polite, in addition to being comfortable and informal (Ellis 2022, p. 251). Regarding the politeness of the address forms (Table 6), age was found to be significant ($p = 0$); regarding how comfortable and informal they were perceived to be, age was also indicated as significant ($p = 0.001$) (Ellis 2022, p. 252).

Table 6. The use of *oom* and *tannie* is polite.

	12–15	16–24	25–29	30–39	40–49	50–59	60–69	70–89
I strongly agree	1202 (62.6%)	136 (42.5%)	5 (19.2%)	19 (32.8%)	11 (25.0%)	16 (33.3%)	3 (17.6%)	0 (0%)
I agree	649 (33.8%)	164 (51.3%)	19 (73.1%)	31 (53.4%)	23 (52.3%)	27 (56.3%)	13 (76.5%)	0 (0%)
I disagree	40 (2.1%)	16 (5.0%)	2 (7.7%)	8 (13.8%)	9 (20.5%)	4 (8.3%)	1 (5.9%)	1 (100%)
I strongly disagree	29 (1.5%)	4 (1.3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (2.3%)	1 (2.1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Total	1920	320	26	58	44	48	17	1
2434								

A distinct majority of the respective age cohorts felt that *oom* and *tannie* are polite forms of address and that they are therefore fitting to use. The 30–39 years (13.8%) and 40–49 years (20.5%) cohorts disagreed that using *oom* and *tannie* is polite. A small number of participants (35; 1.0%) *strongly disagreed* about the polite nature of these forms in Afrikaans.

In terms of sex as a variable, the data were not significant ($p = 0.391$). The male and female participants responded to this question in a similar manner, with the majority distinctly indicating that they perceive *oom* and *tannie* as polite forms of address.

Regarding comfortability and informality (Table 7), the informants perceived *oom* and *tannie* as comfortable and informal forms to use. Less than 15% of all the age cohorts indicated that these forms are neither (socially) comfortable nor informal to use.

In summary, the participants indicated that they did not perceive *oom* and *tannie* as old-fashioned forms of address in Afrikaans. Likewise, the participants did not feel belittled when addressed as *oom* and *tannie*. The younger participants indicated that they felt old when they were addressed as *oom* and *tannie*, but the older participants did not. The female participants were more inclined to feel old when addressed as *tannie*. Regarding these forms of address being respectful in Afrikaans, there is no doubt that the distinct majority perceive *oom* and *tannie* as address forms that show respect to other (older) persons. Of all the age cohorts, only the 25–29-year-olds did not think that (older) persons are too sensitive. Lastly, *oom* and *tannie* were seen as polite, comfortable, and informal forms of address to be used in the Afrikaans language community.

Table 7. The use of *oom* and *tannie* is comfortable and informal.

	12–15	16–24	25–29	30–39	40–49	50–59	60–69	70–89
I strongly agree	679 (35.4%)	125 (39.1%)	5 (19.2%)	12 (20.7%)	10 (22.7%)	11 (22.9%)	3 (17.6%)	0 (0%)
I agree	949 (49.5%)	171 (53.4%)	20 (76.9%)	41 (70.7%)	28 (63.6%)	31 (64.6%)	12 (70.6%)	0 (0%)
I disagree	204 (10.6%)	22 (6.9%)	1 (3.8%)	5 (8.6%)	5 (11.4%)	6 (12.5%)	2 (11.8%)	1 (100%)
I strongly disagree	87 (4.5%)	2 (0.9%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (2.3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Total	1919	320	26	58	44	48	17	1
	2433							

3.2. Interviews

In the section below, the data obtained through interviews will be discussed. The interview questions mainly focused on *how*, *if*, and *why* participants choose certain forms of address when speaking to others. Even though the data will not be presented in terms of the above questions, some conspicuous themes regarding the use and occurrence of *oom* and *tannie* within the Afrikaans community emerged during the interviews. This section will focus on these.

The interviews only included adult persons 18 years and older, with 65 adults participating. The average age of the group was 69 years and consisted of 41 female and 24 male participants (Ellis 2022, p. 160). With the interviews, the intention was to gain insight into (possible) changes that have occurred regarding the use of *oom* and *tannie*.

3.2.1. Age

It was confirmed that age is the main factor to be considered when addressing persons who are not family members and who are (more than) ten years older than themselves (Ellis 2022, pp. 281, 284). One of the participants indicated that she did not use *oom* and *tannie* towards unknown persons because she herself is old and therefore could not use this form of address with anyone (Ellis 2022, p. 281). *Oom* and *tannie* are also commonly used as a term of endearment for older persons (Ellis 2022, p. 281). Age correlates with the sensitivity older persons may experience being addressed as *oom* or *tannie*, as some participants stated that people fear getting old and want to remain young (Ellis 2022, p. 292).

3.2.2. Respect

The pragmatic matter of respect was mentioned a few times during the interviews. According to some participants, the use of *oom* and *tannie* towards older persons is linked to respect, which, in turn, relates to the culture, norms, and upbringing of the speakers (Ellis 2022, pp. 281, 284). One of the participants said that he calls older people *oom* and *tannie* out of “principle” (Ellis 2022, p. 281).

3.2.3. Familiarity

The participants indicated that familiarity as a variable is important to consider when using *oom* and *tannie*. The more familiar the addressees are, the more the speakers will use *oom* and *tannie* to address them, irrespective of family relations (Ellis 2022, p. 282). Keeping in mind that the participants were older than 40 years (Ellis 2022, p. 160), they indicated that they had no problem with addressing familiar persons with *oom* and *tannie*, but this sentiment did not extend to unknown persons (Ellis 2022, p. 282).

3.2.4. Culture and Traditions

As mentioned above, the norms and conventions within a specific culture are important, and they influence the ways in which people act and how they address others. The participants stated that the cultural norms imposed on them while growing up still influence them when deciding on an appropriate form of address (Ellis 2022, p. 282). It is interesting to note that some participants indicated that they were explicitly taught to use *oom* and *tannie*, while others stated that they were never explicitly taught this way but had always used these terms notwithstanding (Ellis 2022, p. 284). As confirmation of what was stated earlier, the general 10-year rule was also mentioned again by participants.

3.2.5. Physical Appearance

It seems as if physical appearance sometimes influences which form of address is used. A 62-year-old female participant stated that she would consider the appearance of people in order to choose a form—if a man were to be in a suit, she would probably call him *Sir*, and if it were an old man talking about the weather, she would probably call him *oom* (Ellis 2022, p. 291).⁸

The same topics and variables identified by means of the questionnaires were revisited during the interviews, namely the role of age, familiarity, status, race, sex, education, culture, and respect (Ellis 2022, p. 297).

4. Discussion

Odendal (1976, p. 107) predicted in his study that the use of *oom* and *tannie* would decline—the data show, however, that the use still had a high occurrence circa 2021. He also commented on the phenomenon that persons ten years and older than the speaker were addressed as *oom* and *tannie*—this still seems to be the norm (Ellis 2022, p. 359). Around the 1980s, studies indicated that *tannie* was deemed a less civil form of address (Wybenga 1981, pp. 110–11), but the data collected for this study suggest otherwise.

Waterlot (2017) indicated that older persons might be offended when addressed with informal forms of address by younger persons, even though the offense was not intended. In Afrikaans, it seems this is not the same—older people are not (as) offended when addressed informally with *oom* and *tannie* (Ellis 2022, p. 332).

Though both male and female participants indicated that older persons exhibit a sensitivity regarding being addressed as *oom* and *tannie*, it is the female participants, however, who seem to be more understanding as to why someone would feel sensitive to being addressed as such (Ellis 2022, p. 334). This is supported by Meyerhoff (2011, p. 219) and Holmes (2008).

From the interview data, the conclusion can be drawn that times are changing, and society is becoming more informal. The (older) participants indicated that they mostly do not care about how they are addressed by younger persons as long as it is performed with respect (Ellis 2022, p. 347). Previously, it was unheard of for younger persons to address older persons with the informal *jy* and *jou*, but today, it seems acceptable, with a use that appears to be increasing. There is, however, an acceptable way to use *jy* and *jou* when addressing older persons, for example, *Tannie, wil jy koffie hê?* (“Tannie, do you want coffee?”) (Ellis 2022, p. 347). The address form should be used first before using *jy*, otherwise it is considered impolite, according to the female interviewees. In reality, direct forms of address in Afrikaans have three possible syntactic positions (at the beginning, the middle, or at the end of a sentence), and each position signifies a different pragmatic function (Combrink 1987, pp. 18–19; Ponelis 1979, p. 505). However, this interplay between syntax and pragmatics lies beyond the scope of the current study, but it remains a relevant topic justifying further research.

Kretzenbacher et al. (2013) focused on the correlation between introductions at international conferences, and the results indicated that the speakers’ culture influences how they navigate local norms. In the South African context, there is a change towards being more informal, and it becomes clear that older persons introduce themselves more readily

these days as *oom* or *tannie*; for example, *Ek is tannie Anna* instead of *Ek is Anna* (Ellis 2022, p. 360).

5. Conclusions

The discussion of previous studies clearly showed that certain gaps exist in the research on Afrikaans forms of address. These gaps include limited recent research on the topic, no specific focus on *oom* and *tannie* in existing studies, and a focus on a limited number of variables. My research managed to address these gaps. The hypothesis that there is a rule of thumb that persons ten years and older than you are addressed with *oom* and *tannie* still seems to be valid. This is not a *prescriptive* norm within the Afrikaans community, however, but merely a customary and useful *guideline*. Furthermore, the data indicate an overall positive feeling towards these forms of address, and older persons (>60 years) experience being called *oom* and *tannie* in a positive light. These findings provide a valuable contemporary contribution to existing Afrikaans literature on forms of address.

Using *oom* and *tannie* is a culturally accepted and polite way to address people and is generally regarded as one of the main ways to show respect within Afrikaans-speaking communities. Appropriate forms of address help to foster a sense of belonging within a particular community or culture. When people use the correct terms and titles to address one another, it reinforces the shared values and norms of the group. This sense of inclusion can provide a comforting feeling of being part of a larger community. In Afrikaans, this includes using the more informal, comfortable, and even comforting *oom* and *tannie*.

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Notes

- ¹ Recent international studies include Schoenmakers et al. (2024), Sadowski et al. (2024), and Faria (2024), and in Afrikaans Bosman and Otto (2015) and Hoffmann (2019).
- ² For the purposes of a PhD study.
- ³ Afrikaans forms of address can also be illuminated by developments in the field of postcolonial pragmatics, a relatively new approach to language that explores the colonial history of countries and how this influences language use. Postcolonial communities, such as South Africa, exhibit great ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity, as well as social, economic, and political unevenness (Anchimbe and Janney 2011, p. 1451). The language(s) in these communities reflect the mix of colonial and indigenous influences, resulting in unique communicative practices. The colonial and postcolonial context in South Africa is further complicated by it being colonized by both the VOC (Dutch East India Company) and Britain. Pragmatic components relevant to postcolonial pragmatics include history, age, ethnicity, kinship, linguistic background, religion, identity, social class, culture, and gender (Anchimbe 2018, pp. 44–55). For research conducted on Afrikaans forms of address, the postcolonial pragmatic components of age, culture, and gender are relevant to explain communication patterns in Afrikaans, specifically focussing on *oom* and *tannie*. Postcolonial pragmatics, specifically in the South African context, will be applicable to a language study in terms of *longue durée*. The current study focuses on the contemporary use of Afrikaans forms of address.
- ⁴ During the 17th century, a diverse society was established by the Dutch East Indian Company in Cape Town—due to the diversity of the people who arrived, a variety of forms of (spoken) Dutch were introduced to the local population, and this later developed into what we know as Afrikaans today (Ponelis 1993, p. xvii).
- ⁵ This is similar to the findings of Brown and Gilman (1960).
- ⁶ The racial classification system adopted by the South African government post 1994 utilizes the terms *White*, *Black*, *Coloured*, *Indian*, and *Others*.

- ⁷ Formerly known as South West Africa, Namibia was under South African administration from 1919 to 1990. Although not the main focus of their study, it is interesting to know why Namibia, and consequently Afrikaans, is included in the study. According to Stell (2009, p. 85):
- “[...] the varieties spoken in S.W.A./Namibia have pretty much been regarded as a constellation of relocated South African varieties. It seems fair to assume that, up until Independence, these varieties had little sociolinguistic scope for diverging from their South African counterparts and that a state of continuum prevailed on account of greater freedom of movement across the border as well as similar degrees of exposure to prescriptive Standard Afrikaans through education.”
- ⁸ This correlates with Grezel (2002, p. 264), who states that appearance also determines the form of address. He provides a good example of this: “[b]ij de supermarkt krijg ik *u* als ik me geschoren heb, maar met stoppels ben ik ‘jij’. *U* lijkt bedoeld voor het maat- en mantelpak, *jij* past bij de joggingbroek” [At the supermarket, I am addressed with *you* (formal) if I have shaved, but with stubble, I am addressed with *you* (informal). *You* (formal) is seemingly meant for a suit and jacket, and *you* (informal) for sweatpants].

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Article

Pronoun Mixing in Netherlandic Dutch Revisited: Perception of ‘u’ and ‘jij’ Use by Pre-University Students

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Abstract: Prescriptive grammars of Netherlandic Dutch usually explicitly warn against mixing

T- and V-pronouns. Although the prescriptive norm opposes mixing, pronoun mixing does occur, and its use can often be interpreted as strategic, in the sense that mixing pronouns might help to balance conflicting needs such as signaling respect and formality to the addressee on the one hand as well as expressing closeness on the other hand. This article explores the perception of pronoun mixing among high school students who were in the process of acquiring the norm. As part of a student science project, we asked students to categorize real-world examples of pronoun mixing that they themselves had gathered as a strategy or as a mistake. Based on the students’ responses, we extrapolated that the most acceptable forms of mixing were brief switches to V in a T-context to express humor or urgency and—if there was no clear default pronoun—that mixing was most acceptable (1) when the text was free of spelling errors and other signs of sloppiness, (2) when the mixing was intersentential, (3) when the number of switches was infrequent, and (4) when there was a clear division of tasks between the pronouns. As an offshoot of this student science project, we designed a brief follow-up survey to gain insight into domains and consensus and variation among the students’ perceptions of pronoun mixing. This follow-up survey revealed that if not explicitly asked, most students do not notice pronoun mixing. We asked students to rank four real-life examples of address pronoun mixing that they had gathered during the student science project. We expected that with respect to their perception of the mixing of address pronouns all students would rank examples of mixing in the same order. A primary result of this part of our exploration was that there were large individual differences in the perception of mixing and that there was variation in the ranking of examples among the students. Intersentential mixing yielded the most neutral evaluations by the students, but intrasentential mixing showed the most extreme evaluations. It was disliked most strongly by students who had a general dislike of mixing and liked best by students who appreciated mixing as a style. Briefly switching to V in contexts associated with the T-pronoun was perceived to be humorous by a quarter of the students, and half of the students perceived a switch to the petrified abbreviation AUB (‘if you-V please’) as expressing urgency.

Keywords: pronoun mixing; folk linguistics; Northern Dutch; individual differences; formulaic speech

1. Introduction

This article presents an exploratory investigation into the perception of pronoun mixing by teenagers in the Netherlands. By pronoun mixing, we mean the use of an

informal pronoun in combination with a formal pronoun within a single text. Prescriptive norms caution against pronoun mixing, but when mixing occurs, it can often be interpreted as a strategic device, in the sense that mixing pronouns helps to balance conflicting needs, such as signaling respect for and acknowledging the need to observe certain formalities vis-à-vis the addressee on the one hand and expressing closeness on the other hand.

Previous research on pronoun mixing has focused on analyzing the production of pronoun mixing: what motivates language users to mix and in what contexts do we observe mixing? Inspired by the theme of the special issue, we now focused on the perception of pronoun mixing: how do addressees perceive being addressed with both T- and V-pronouns by the same source? We explicitly asked these students about their opinions on mixing as a form of folk linguistics. In Section 2, we provide the building blocks for our article by presenting a characterization of Netherlandic Dutch pronouns, an overview of previous research on pronoun mixing, and background on the student science project and folk linguistics which are the basis for this article. Section 3 presents the methodology of the questionnaire we used to explore perceptions of pronoun mixing in real-life examples as well as questions about briefly switching to V in contexts associated with the T-pronoun to express urgency or to be funny. Section 4 presents the results of the questionnaire, and in Section 5 we discuss the main findings and their implications for future research.

2. Building Blocks

This section provides the building blocks for our exploratory investigation into the perception of pronoun mixing in Netherlandic Dutch by teenagers. It presents a brief overview of Netherlandic Dutch address pronouns (Section 2.1), followed by a discussion of pronoun mixing (Section 2.2).

2.1. Background on Netherlandic Dutch Address Pronouns

We follow Brown and Gilman (1960) in the use of the abbreviation T (derived from Latin *tu*) for informal pronouns and V derived from Latin *vos*) for formal pronouns Netherlandic Dutch three T-forms in Netherlandic Dutch, namely the singular strong form *jij*, the weak form of *jij* *je* and the explicitly plural form *jullie*. There is one V-form, *u*. The forms *je* and *jullie* each have one form that fulfills all syntactic functions. The form *u* can be used in subject position and as an oblique form. The possessive form of *u* is *uw*. The oblique form of the pronoun *jij* is *jou* and the possessive form is *jouw*.

Table 1 characterizes these four pronouns according to the formal aspect of number and according to functional aspects such as directness, the availability of the address pronoun for generic uses, its association with formal or informal contexts, and the possibility of encoding inner group membership. The characterizations are based on the descriptive grammar ANS (Haeseryn et al., 1997), supplemented by existing literature that we cite in the clarification of the table underneath the table and, in the case of the use of *jullie*, in formal contexts based on our own observations. Table 1 shows that the four pronouns partly overlap in their usage and that each form has its own strengths and weaknesses. A plus sign indicates that there are no issues with the pronoun in that context, a minus sign that there may be some, +/– means that the form skews towards more rather than less acceptable in that context, and –/+ means that the form is less rather than more acceptable. Hence, the pronouns here appear to be ranked from most to least available in singular contexts, and from least to most available in plural contexts.

Table 1. Dutch second person pronouns and their uses.

Form	Singular	Plural	Informal	Formal	Generic	Outer Group
<i>jij</i>	+	—	+	—	+ / —	—
<i>je</i>	+	— / +	+	— / +	+	—
<i>u</i>	+	+ / —	—	+	— / +	+
<i>jullie</i>	— / +	+	+	— / +	—	—

Note that Table 1 presents the use of a pronoun to address a singular or a plural entity as separate cases, rather than as opposites of one binary concept: Pronouns vary in the degree to which they can be used in singular and/or plural contexts. Similarly, the fact that a pronoun is acceptable in informal contexts does not necessarily mean that it is unacceptable in formal contexts. Thus, they are not necessarily opposites. Hence, although we follow Brown and Gilman (1960, p. 254) in using the abbreviations T and V (from Latin *tu* and *vos*) to refer respectively to the informal and formal address terms, the use of these address terms is less binary than suggested by the existence of only two abbreviations. Vismans (2013) has also shown that in some situations both the formal and the informal form can be used and writes that when speakers reflect on what form they select, the sentence often begins with “it depends” (2013, p. 184), suggesting that the division of tasks between the pronouns is gradient rather than binary.

Jij is the strong informal singular pronoun. This form is not used for plurals, which makes the form more direct. The form *je* is a reduced form of *jij* and is considered more neutral and weaker than the strong T-form *jij* (Schoenmakers et al., 2024, p. 103). It can be used as an informal term of address, but also as an impersonal pronoun, such as in sentences like *je leeft maar één keer* ‘you only live once.’ Some literature suggests that only the weak pronoun *je* can be used as a generic form (Vermaas, 2002; Weerman, 2007; Aalberse, 2009; Gruber, 2013). Tarenskeen (2010), however, has shown that this is not true. She investigated the generic uses of address terms in the corpus of spoken Dutch and found that both *jij* and *je* can be used generically. She notes that “we do not tell our hearers much about themselves, as they often know themselves better than we do—at least, that is what we assume” (2010, p. 27). Since it is not often the case that a speaker will tell addressees about themselves, a generic reading is likely in declarative utterances. Unlike other literature, where it is assumed that only the weak T-pronoun *je* can be used as a generic pronoun and that other address forms are only used deictically, Tarenskeen (2010, pp. 75–76), in her analysis of a subset of the corpus of spoken Dutch, finds that the percentages of non-deictic uses in the weak pronoun *je* and the strong pronoun *jij* are very similar. Out of the 98 instances of the strong pronoun *jij* in her subset, 50 (51%) were used deictically, 33 (34%) generically, and 15 instances (15%) were ambiguous, whereas out of the 467 instances of the weak T-pronoun *je* in her subset, 247 out of 467 instances were used deictically (53%), 83 (39%) generically, and 37 (8%) of the instances were ambiguous. de Hoop and Tarenskeen (2015) observe that the V-form can also be used generically, but this use is less frequent. The generic interpretation is easily reached with conditionals and contrasts (Tarenskeen, 2010) but always requires some context for the strong pronouns *jij* and *u*. Using the strong address terms *jij* and *u* out of the blue does not yield a generic interpretation, whereas this out-of-the-blue use is possible for the weak form *je* (Tarenskeen, 2010, p. 76), hence the + for *je* as a generic form in Table 1 and the + / — for *jij*. Since *u* can be used generically, but not very often, this form is characterized as — / +.

Je is not used in just singular contexts. If a group of people is addressed, *je* can also be used to address the group after the group has first been addressed with the explicitly plural form *jullie*. The descriptive grammar ANS (Haeseryn et al., 1997) suggests that this use is

motivated by the desire to avoid multiple uses of the strong pronoun *jullie*, for example, as shown in (1), taken from Haeseryn et al. (1997, para. 5.2.4).

1.	Ik	weet	wel	dat	jullie	graag	vroeg	vertrekken
	I	know	PART	that	you.PL	keen	early	depart
	maar	zou	je	niet	eerst	even	helpen	opruimen?
	But	should	you	not	first	a little bit	help	clean up?

I know that you are keen to leave early, but shouldn't you help clean up first?

In specific circumstances, this formally plural form can be used to address a singular addressee as a way of defocalizing (Haverkate, 1984, p. 56), avoiding direct reference to the addressee. In (2), taken from Vermaas (2004, p. 65), a patient is trying to persuade a doctor to hospitalize her mother. (3) Although the patient is addressing only one physician, she uses the plural form *jullie* and thus addresses the doctor as a representative of doctors as a collective rather than as an individual.

2.	Jullie	moeten	zorgen	dat	ze	nu	opgenomen	wordt
	You.PL	must	ensure	that	she	now	hospitalized	gets

You (pl) have to make sure that she gets hospitalized now.

The use of a plural pronoun towards one doctor makes the request less direct than if the singular form *jij* had been used, and, at the same time, it is more solidary and informal than the polite form *u*. The pronoun *u* is a polite and formal pronoun that can be used in the singular and in the plural. It is our intuition that interlocutors who are addressed as *u* individually can be addressed as *jullie* in a group, but we did not find a reference to back this intuition. If the pronoun *jullie* is mentioned in the literature, it is characterized as the informal and solidary plural form and in some cases as an indirect form of *jij* (Vermaas, 2002; Haeseryn et al., 1997). If the pronoun *u* is used in the plural, sometimes the plural or dual reference is made explicit by adding the forms *allen* ('all') or *beiden* ('both') to the pronoun *u*.

Both Vermaas (2002) and Haeseryn et al. (1997) suggest that the pronouns *je* and *jullie* function as intermediate politeness forms. They are less direct and more neutral than the strong form *jij* and could function as a bridge to move from the polite and formal address form *u* to a more informal setting (Vermaas, 2004). den Hartog et al. (2022, p. 49) categorize Dutch as a language with a strong T preference. One possible reason for this T preference is the strong desire to belong to the inner group. van Zalk and Jansen (2004, p. 266) show that in Netherlandic Dutch the use of the V-pronoun *u* signals outer group, and hence its use can be face-threatening. This is in line with the observation by Vermaas (2002) that V sometimes signals social distance rather than respect. Table 1 shows that only the pronoun *u* signals outer group membership. The availability of the generic form *je* and the formally plural form *jullie* gives language users the opportunity to avoid outer group categorization of the addressee, while still being indirect and hence less face-threatening.

Associations are also context dependent. Leung et al. (2023, p. 546) have shown that consumers' pronoun preferences and pronoun responses differ according to the type of brand. Brands that are perceived to have cooperative intentions and are associated with friendliness and sincerity are perceived as warm; brands that are thought to possess executive skill sets and that are associated with efficiency are considered competent. If consumers associate a brand with being high in competence and low in warmth, the pronoun that consumers perceive as most pleasant is the V-pronoun. If a brand is perceived as high in warmth and low in competence, the preferred pronoun is T. The T-pronoun

functions as a default form if a brand scores equally high on the two scales (high in both competence and warmth or low in both competence and warmth). Note that it is not only the type of brand that affects the evaluation of the pronoun; the place of origin of the brand also matters. Consumers prefer the T-pronoun for brands from Spain, because consumers associate Spain with warmth, and the V-pronoun for brands from Germany, because consumers associate Germany with efficiency and skill.

2.2. Pronoun Mixing in Netherlandic Dutch: Against the Norm but with Potential Pragmatic Benefits

As we saw in Section 2.1, the formal and respectful pronoun *u* can signal outer group categorization and distance, which creates a barrier to using this pronoun. If the context requires both respect and/or indirectness on the one hand but also inner group membership on the other hand, this combination of communicative needs can be conveyed via the T-pronoun *je*, which, because of its generic use, is less likely to be interpreted as deictic, and *jullie*, because this plural form does not single out one addressee and is thus less face-threatening. Another option to balance conflicting needs vis-à-vis an addressee is to mix the V-form *u* with a T-pronoun (*jij*, *je* and/or *jullie*). Pronoun mixing is against the norm, but previous literature has argued for the pragmatic benefits of mixing. In Section 2.2.1, we briefly show how prescriptive websites warn against pronoun mixing; in Section 2.2.2, we summarize existing research on pronoun mixing.

2.2.1. Prescriptive Websites on Pronoun Mixing

Language prescriptivists tend to favor consistency in linguistic choices; once you make a choice, e.g., stick to the choice and be consistent (cf. Audring & Booij, 2009, p. 34). The desire to be consistent is also very clear in the domain of language advice in selecting address terms. In looking at websites that assist language users in choosing a suitable form of address, we invariably find that they advise consistency within one text. Websites do say that a company does not always have to use one form of address across media platforms: it is okay to use a different pronoun on social media than on the website, for example, but mixing forms within one text is considered undesirable, as can be seen in the following quotes. One website also warns against mixing across media platforms as shown in example 5. These examples are taken from a website that helps secretaries choose terms of address (example 3), the website for the Dutch Association for Professional Copywriters (4), and a company that helps other companies to write professional texts (5), so all contain advice from professional writers and editors.

3. Het is belangrijk om consistent te zijn in je keuze
It is important to be consistent to be in your choice

It is important to be consistent in your choice
(Secretary Plus, 2024)

4. Wat de keuze ook wordt: voer hem consequent door. Dat is een schone taak voor tekstschrijvers en redacteuren. Zeker als een organisatie de overstap maakt van u naar je, want oude formuleringen blijken nog her en der verstopt te zitten (...) Consequent gebruik geldt overigens alleen binnen dezelfde tekstsoort van een organisatie; niet per se voor alle teksten van die club. Neem bijvoorbeeld een woningcorporatie. Het is heel goed te verdedigen dat die via de website de lezers met je aanspreekt en in brieven kiest voor u. Tenzij het een brief is aan huurders van studentenwoningen.

Whatever the choice may be: be consistent. That is a quite a task for copywriters and editors. This is especially the case when an organization changes from *you.V* to *you.T*, because old wordings tend to be hidden (...) Being consistent only applies to one text genre in an organization, not necessarily to all texts of that group. Take, for example, a housing cooperative. One could successfully argue that the organization address its readers with *you.T* on the website and with *you.V* in letters, unless the letter is written to tenants in student dormitories.

(van Eerd, 2016)

Wat je ook kiest: wees consequent! En misschien wel het allerbelangrijkst: ga geen 'je' en 'u' door elkaar gebruiken. Welke keuze je ook maakt: voer het consequent door. Niets zo vervelend als een tekst die met 'u' begint, verder gaat met 'je' en weer eindigt met 'u'. Whatever you choose, be consistent! And perhaps most important, don't go mixing *you.T* and *you.V*. Whatever choice you make, apply the choice consistently. Nothing is as annoying as reading a text that begins with *you.V*, continues with *you.T* and uses *you.V* again at the end. (Letterdesk, 2021)

5. Online lees je weleens dat het oké is om klanten op de website en via social media aan te spreken met je of jij en bijvoorbeeld bij klachten of een aankoopbevestiging te switchen naar u. Ik vind dit onverstandig omdat het rommelig en wispelturig overkomt. Dus wat je ook kiest, voer de aanspreekvorm consequent door op alle kanalen en in alle geschreven en gesproken communicatie.

Sometimes you read online that it is okay to address clients on a website and on social media with *je* (T) and *jij* (T) and to switch to *u*, for example, when there are complaints or when confirming an order. I find this unwise, because it comes across as messy and capricious. So, whatever you choose, be consistent by using the same address term in all written and spoken communication.

<https://doorlies.nl/welke-aanspreekvorm-kies-jij/> (accessed on 2 August 2025)

2.2.2. Pronoun Mixing from a Theoretical Perspective

The observation that professional writing websites warn against pronoun mixing is a first indication that mixing does occur in 'the wild,' since one does not have to warn against variants that do not occur. The mixing of address pronouns has been extensively described in medieval European texts and in Shakespearean texts (see Aalberse, 2009; Brown & Gilman, 1960; Vermaas, 2002; Simon, 2003b; Taavitsainen & Jucker, 2003 for overviews). For modern European languages, it has been claimed that mixing no longer occurs due to at least two reasons. Brown and Gilman (1989) show that the default address pronoun between adults who frequently interact with each other has shifted from V to T. During the period where V was the default between adults, a brief switch to the T-pronoun could be used to show affect. Simon (2003a, p. 90) provides an example that shows a switch motivated by affect from Nibelungenlied. Gunther, the Burgundian king, talks with his friend and confidant, Siegfried. At the beginning of the conversation, both Gunther and Siegfried address each other with V, but once Gunther begins to talk about his embarrassing wedding night, both speech act participants switch to T.

Brown and Gilman (1989) refer to the system where the default pronoun is V and T is used in special circumstances to show affect as an 'affect' system. In an affect system, switches to T are briefly made in circumstances of heightened emotion, and interlocutors return to the V-form if the topic changes. Brown and Gilman (1989) argue that the affect system has been replaced by an interactive closeness system. Once adults frequently interact with each other, they switch to T as the default pronoun. The T-pronoun is no longer associated with heightened emotion and intimacy, as in affect systems; rather, the

use of T merely indicates that people know each other. Once the switch to T has been made, there is no reason to switch to V. So, interactive closeness systems have one moment for a switch: the decision to move from V to T; once this decision has been made, there is no longer a reason to switch back.

Apart from the difference between affect systems and interactive closeness systems, Simon (2003b) provides another argument for the observed loss of pronoun mixing in many modern European languages. Simon (2003b) argues that the possibility of mixing pronouns was lost in Standard German and Bavarian German because the concept of respect became grammaticalized, and the grammaticalization of respect impedes pronoun mixing. The use of the third person plural form *sie* towards an addressee to express politeness is a pragmatic strategy. Simon argues that over time this pragmatic strategy became part of the grammar, and the etymologically plural form is no longer considered merely a plural form but a polite form. He provides evidence for the separation of *sie* as a third person plural form and a politeness form by showing that, for example, case marking for the third person plural form *sie* is different from case marking for the second person honorific form *Sie*, although these forms are etymologically the same form. These morphogrammatical differences provide evidence for the hypothesis that the honorific form *Sie* has become grammaticalized into a separate form in the grammar.

Bennis (2007) shows that agreement behavior for the Dutch pronoun *u* is different from any other pronoun which could indicate that respect and is grammaticalized in Dutch as well. Although occurrences of pronoun mixing are indeed less frequent in modern texts than in older texts, pronoun mixing does occur in present-day Netherlandic Dutch. Oosterhof et al. (2017) created a corpus consisting of employment advertisements for highly educated candidates where both the pronoun *je* and the pronoun *u* were used. They found that there is a preference for *u*-forms to be used in non-subject functions. This pattern was expected for the Flemish advertisements, because *u* is the default non-subject form in both formal and informal texts in Belgian Dutch. Interestingly enough, they found a similar pattern in material from the Netherlands, where *u* is both a polite subject and a non-subject form. Oosterhof et al. (2017) relate the higher frequency of *u* in the non-subject position to the historical situation where *u* was only used in non-subject functions in Netherlandic Dutch as well.

Vismans (2016) analyzed switches between T and V in the radio show Casa Luna. He showed that switches can be used to express affect and that they can also be used as a form of irony or banter. The domain that Vismans (2016) analyzed is interesting, because it is in the context of a conversation between adults who do not know each other well (the interviewer and the interviewee may not have met each other before the interview). From the perspective of interactive closeness described in Brown and Gilman (1989), one would expect a symmetrical use of V in this context, but as shown above, present-day Netherlandic Dutch has developed a strong preference for the T-pronoun, even between adults who do not know each other. Vismans (2016) distinguishes three contexts where switching occurs. The first context is what he refers to as negotiation, the second context is the hopeful switcher, and the third context is the spontaneous shift. An example of an address pronoun switch during the address pronoun negotiation is provided in 6; before the interview begins, the selection of the pronoun is negotiated.

6. Interview Antoine Bodar (AB) by Colet van der Ven (CV) (taken from Vismans, 2016, p. 125)
CV: Welkom Antoine Bodar.
'Welcome, Antoine Bodar'
AB: Dankuwel.
Thank you(V)
CV: We zeggen gewoon je en jou op dit tijdstip van de dag.
We just say you (T subject and object form) at this time of day
AB: Oh ja? Zoals u wilt, zoals je wilt.
Is this so? As you (V), as you (T) like

The interviewer proposes to use the T-form, and the interviewee is trying to adapt to this new situation. The circumstance in which one speaker in a conversation will suggest being addressed with a certain address pronoun that goes against the intuition of the other interlocutor is also mentioned as a context for switching by Aalberse (2004). Whereas in the negotiation scenario the choice to use an address form is made explicit, Vismans' (2016) concept of the hopeful switcher is more implicit. It refers to someone who tries to address the interlocutor with T without discussing this choice explicitly in the hope that this form will be reciprocated. In some instances when, after a series of exchanges, the use of T is not reciprocated, the participant switches back to V to maintain a symmetrical address pronoun relationship where both interlocutors address each other using the same pronoun. The last context provided by Vismans, referred to as the spontaneous switch, concerns a change in address term after a period of address negotiation. It pertains to the occasion when the form of address appears to have been agreed upon and the conversation is already flowing, but then one of the participants spontaneously switches to another pronoun. One of the examples Vismans (2016) provides of spontaneous switches shows a kind of mock politeness; the interviewer and the interviewee use T with each other, but when the interviewer, Harm Edens, makes a sarcastic comment about the Christian political party's doing well (it is not doing well), the interviewee, Rik Torfs, switches to the V-pronoun, saying:

7. Ja, uw waarnemingsvermogen is bijzonder scherp gebleven.
Yes, your (v) sentence has remained exquisitely sharp.

Vismans (2016) also shows that affect can play a role in the selection of pronouns. For example, when an interviewee, Ronald Paul, is asked about his personal feelings about a movie, interviewer Ghislaine Plag uses the T-form, but when she refers to his status as a director, she uses the V-form, as shown in (8).

8. Heeft u als directeur dat ook paraat dat soort kennis?
Do you (V) as director also have that kind of knowledge at hand?

The effect of the type of topic in address pronoun choice is also discussed by Aalberse (2004), where websites from companies that mix address pronouns are discussed. The websites that mix pronouns have a feature in common: they provide services to customers concerning intimate matters, such as a page to help young mothers with their concerns, help for anonymous alcoholics, and a webpage for a swinger club. Both Vismans (2016) and Aalberse (2004) argue that pronoun mixing in these contexts, where the context requires both the T-form because of the private nature of the topic and the V-form to express respect, can be interpreted as strategic. Given that mixing is against the norm but can also be seen as strategic, the question is, how do addressees perceive pronoun mixing. Is it considered bad practice because it goes against the norm or can pronoun mixing help in balancing different needs with respect to the addressee? This article involves two complementary

studies that explore the perception of pronoun mixing among teenagers who are acquiring the norm against mixing.

The first study investigated the answers high school students gave to characterize examples of pronoun mixing as strategic or stupid. The second study tried to determine to what extent we can draw generalizations from the first study and to what extent the arguments that student pairs provided were shared by their peers.

3. Study 1 Student Science Project and Categorizing Mixing as Strategic or a Mistake

Study I focuses on the results of a student science project and in particular on what the results of this project tell us about students' perceptions of pronoun mixing. We first provide information on the general goal and the motivation for the student science project, followed by information on the participants of the project. We then present some general findings related to the examples that the students gathered, and we end by presenting the arguments the students used to categorize mixing as a strategy or as a mistake. This type of information is a form of folk linguistics which helps us to understand the beliefs of the participants about pronoun mixing.

3.1. Student Science Project

Pronoun mixing in present-day Dutch is not a common phenomenon on webpages anymore. Whereas some commercial websites dealing with sensitive topics used mixed address forms in Netherlandic Dutch twenty years ago (cf. Aalberse, 2004), a brief online search reveals that these sources no longer make use of pronoun mixing but have switched to the use of T only. The absence of pronoun mixing on webpages did not align with what we had started noticing in our daily lives, with switches between T and V being common practice in, for example, personalized advertisements in email messages or interactions between customers and cashiers in the supermarket. It seemed that pronoun mixing tended to occur more in personalized emails and advertisements than in more openly accessible forms of text. The observation that examples of pronoun mixing tend not to be openly accessible in combination with a request from the Bertrand Russell High School for a science project led to the student science project. The student science project was inspired by citizen science (Science Europe, 2018, p. 1). Citizen science is defined as “the practice of science by volunteers who are not connected to a research organization as professional researchers, but who cooperate with—or are supervised by—professional researchers.” In our case the volunteers were students working on a high school project in order to collect more insightful examples of pronoun mixing ‘in the wild.’ The project was set up with two goals: (1) to familiarize high school students with doing research, from gathering and coding data to thinking about the meaning of the data found and (2) to build a new corpus of examples of pronoun mixing.

3.2. Participants

The present study was conducted among Netherlandic Dutch-speaking students in the tenth grade of the pre-university curriculum (4 vwo) at the Bertrand Russell College in Krommenie, the Netherlands. The typical student in this class was 16 years of age. The student science project assignment was administered to 72 students divided between two classes, of whom a total of 20 student pairs and one single student emailed us their data to use for our research. The students gathered examples of pronoun mixing in the weeks before 7 December, and they analyzed the data they gathered in pairs in class on 7 December 2023.

3.3. Coding Schema for the Student Science Project

Students were asked to present at least five examples of pronoun mixing in a table in which they copy-pasted examples of pronoun mixing or sketched the situation of pronoun mixing (column IV). Table 2 shows an excerpt of the table we asked students to create. We asked them to indicate in column I the source of the example they found ('where did you read/hear the example'), to date the example in column II ('when did you read/hear the example') and to indicate in column III whether they considered the mixing a strategy or stupid ('strategy or stupid'). We also asked them to code the appearance of a pronoun in their example with a 1 and the absence of a pronoun in the example with a 0 in columns V–IX. Column IV shows a screen of a Whatsapp message which translates as: 'Hi . . ., When would it suit you-V to get to know each other for the babysitting? Are you_T perhaps available tonight?'. Column I indicated the message was created in Whatsapp and that the sender was the babysitter and the recipient the parent who needed a babysitter for their child. Column II indicates the message was sent on 28 May 2023. Column III indicates that the student finds the message strategic (it was a message they themselves created earlier). The formal pronoun is used to show formality at the start and the informal pronoun was used to create a connection between the babysitter and the parent who needed a babysitter. Columns V–IX show that the pronouns *je* (T) and *u* (V) are attested indicated by the number 1 and that the pronouns *jij*, *jou* and *jullie* were not used indicated by the number 0.

Table 2. Example of homework assignment for the collection and analysis of pronoun mixing examples.

I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX
Waar las/hoorde je het voor-beeld?	Wanneer las/hoorde je het voor-beeld?	Strategie of stom? Geef argumen-ten voor en tegen strate-gisch gebruik voor het voor-beeld	Foto/screenshot/situatiebeschrijving	Jij	Je	jou	u	jullie
WhatsApp Afzender: oppasser 1 Ontvanger: oppa-souder	28 mei 2023	Door het gebruik van 'u' kom je in eerste instantie formeel over en door het gebruik van 'je' in hetzelfde bericht maak je een connectie tussen de oppasser en de ouders van het oppaskindje. (Dit was strategisch.)		0	1	0	1	0

Column IV shows a screen of a Whatsapp message which translates as: 'Hi . . ., When would it suit you-V to get to know each other for the babysitting? Are you_T perhaps available tonight?'. Column I indicated the message was created in Whatsapp and that the sender was the babysitter and the recipient the parent who needed a babysitter for their child. Column II indicates the message was sent on 28 May 2023. Column III indicates that the student finds the message strategic (it was a message they themselves created earlier). The formal pronoun is used to show formality at the start and the informal pronoun was used to create a connection between the babysitter and the parent who needed a babysitter. Columns V–IX show that the pronouns *je* (T) and *u* (V) are attested indicated by the number 1 and that the pronouns *jij*, *jou* and *jullie* were not used indicated by the number 0.

By asking students these questions, we hoped to gain more insight into what context pronoun mixing occurs and with what pronouns mixing occurred. Apart from gathering more real-life examples of pronoun mixing, a central goal of the project was to let the students experience doing science both by coding examples of mixing as well as by thinking and arguing about the motivations of pronoun mixing in their selected examples. The arguments the students gave to justify their choices in categorizing mixing as either strategic or a mistake proved to be a form of folk linguistics, as we will discuss below.

3.4. General Results of Student Science Project

A total of 20 student pairs and one single student gathered 117 examples of pronoun mixing. Most of the examples included the pronoun *u* (109 times) and *je* (99 times), and a few included *jij* (7 times), the oblique form *jou* (9 times) and *jullie* (13 times). The examples where the singular form *je* or *jij* was mixed with the plural form *jullie* all included communication that was geared partly towards a group of people (sport team, group of students) and partly towards individual members of the group. Most of the examples gathered came from communications where the student (or their parent) was spontaneously involved; 10 examples resulted from an internet search. Out of the examples that were gathered via an internet search, eight came from the website [koningshuis.nl](https://www.koningshuis.nl), which provides all the speeches given by the king and queen, and two came from YouTube.

Out of the 107 examples that involved real communication with a student or a parent and a company or another person, 96 were written messages: messages on WhatsApp between students and (grand)parents, with the students' friends and between the students and employers, WhatsApp groups for sport teams, personalized ads the students received, messages about cookies on websites, confirmation of an order of sportswear or clothing, digital advertisements frequently on websites where individuals can sell and buy, such as Marktplaats or Vinted. Examples also came from professional emails written to the students or their parents, messages from the school on the school app, messages between teachers and students on Microsoft teams, and from a manual for vacuum cleaners. 13 examples involved experiences with spoken language, including an interaction between a friend of a student and the student's parents, encounters on the train, in the supermarket and the sport canteen, and a conversation between a student and a grandparent. The types of interactions the students gathered overlapped with the examples we gathered, but also showed some domains that we did not have access to. Examples of communications from the school to the students and parents showed examples of mixing *jullie* to address students and *u* to address parents; apps for sport teams tend to vary when addressing the complete team and individual members and show mixing between *jullie* and *je*, and some students struggled when addressing grandparents, who are both intimate contacts as well as deserving of respect because of their age.

3.5. Folk Linguistics and the Perception of Pronoun Mixing

One of the questions in the student science project was how students perceived pronoun mixing in the examples they gathered. We asked them if they thought the mixing in the examples they gathered was strategic or a mistake. The arguments the students gave to justify their choices in categorizing examples of mixing as a mistake or as a strategy proved to be a form of folk linguistics. In contrast to language attitude research, which aims to uncover unconscious attitudes to linguistic variants among language users, folk linguistics 'tries to dig deeper into people's conscious language attitudes on variants by asking them more direct questions' (Oberhofer, 2011, p. 20). Preston (1993, pp. 215–216) writes that: 'It should go without saying that sociolinguistic investigation of any sort, but particularly language attitude measures among respondents who hold such beliefs, will tap into these folk notions. Interpretations which ignore the powerful role that folk notions are bound to play at best lose an opportunity and at worst are very likely to misinterpret the findings of even carefully crafted experiments.' Understanding how students and other language users think about pronoun mixing will help when designing attitudinal experiments on pronoun mixing by including factors that are named as relevant by the students and also by taking into account individual variation among the students.

Before we present an overview of the arguments that students gave in categorizing examples of mixing as a strategy or a mistake, let us mention a caveat. It could be argued

that our questions may have been biased. We may have pressured the students into thinking about pronoun mixing as a pragmatic strategy rather than (just) a deviation from the norm. Despite our efforts to apprise students of the possibility of pronoun mixing being used as a strategy, students still felt that 48 examples were mistakes, 35 examples were categorized as strategic and 34 examples showed arguments in both directions. One could also claim that by mentioning the ideas that mixing could be both strategic and a mistake pressured students into using both labels. If it is true that they all used both labels because they felt pressured to do so, it is still interesting to see what criteria they used to distinguish between the two labels. Note too that students labeled more examples as a mistake than as a strategy.

The arguments students gave for interpreting mixing as a strategy roughly fell into two categories. (1) Either there was no clear default form, and T and V fulfilled separate functions. *Je-T* was perceived as being more friendly and *u-T* as being more professional; another factor was whether it was in an opening or closing statement versus within the heart of the message. (2) V was used in contexts where T was the default form, either as a form of humor or language play or to express urgency. The brief switch to V is facilitated in formulaic use and abbreviations because the pronoun is more likely to be perceived to be part of a chunk, e.g., not analyzed as morphologically complex and hence less associated with a pronoun choice.

The formula *danku* (thank you-V, traditionally with a space between *dank* and *u*, but written as one word in WhatsApp and the woordenlijst.org which lists the official spelling of Dutch includes both *danku* and *dankje* as interjections/a formulaic like words) was categorized as sounding *leuk* ('fun'), and the abbreviation AUB¹ (if you-V please) was considered to express more urgency. Students characterized switches in utterance without a default pronoun as a mistake (1) when the text contained spelling errors or other indications of sloppiness, (2) when the mixing was intrasentential, (3) when the mixing was frequent, and (4) when the students felt that there was an absence of strategic or conflicting needs and, hence, in their eyes, an absence of the need to employ a mixing strategy. An illustration of point 1 is a student pair who writes about an example that it is a mistake because 'the language errors in the text show that it was typed up too fast and not read back properly.'² Another student pair writes that mixing was a mistake because the website is unsafe anyway, and the texts on the website contain many mistakes.³ An illustration of an argument in line with point 2 is a student pair who argues that a particular example was a mistake 'because *u* and *je* are literally used within one sentence.'⁴ An argument in line with point 3 comes from a student pair who writes that an example of mixing is a mistake because 'it happened multiple times and was completely illogical to do.'⁵ An argument in line with point 4 is a student pair who writes that mixing is a mistake because no distinction is made between occurrences or topics.⁶ Another student pair writes that pronoun mixing in a manual for a vacuum cleaner was a mistake because 'there is no need to be strategic, since you already bought the vacuum cleaner.' Arguments in favor of mixing are the different functions or roles of the two pronouns used. For example, a student pair says mixing could be strategic because 'by using *je* you come off as more personal, but they want to finish it professionally (e.g., using *u*).'⁷

4. Study 2 Socratic Questionnaire

The first study gave us some insight into the factors that might play a role in the reception of address pronoun mixing by the students. More accepted it if there was a clear division of tasks between the pronouns, such as using a V-form for an opening or closing remark rather than when the forms seemed to be randomly mixed. Frequent switching back and forth in mixing seems more problematic than a single switch; intersentential

mixing seems more accepted than intrasentential mixing, and other characteristics of the text affect the interpretation of mixing: if the text contains signs of sloppiness, such as spelling mistakes, mixing is more likely to be interpreted as a mistake. Some students also indicated that they perceived or produced V-forms in contexts where T is usually used as a form of mock politeness, as discussed in Vismans (2016), or to be funny or to express urgency. Formulaic speech and abbreviations seem to be most used in mixing. Based on the arguments in the first study, we designed a brief follow-up survey to gain insight into domains and consensus and variation among the students' perceptions of pronoun mixing. Our research questions were: (1) how do students feel about pronoun switching in general? (2) how many students share the intuition that humor and urgency can play a role in the use of V-forms in situations that have T as the default, and (3) do students rank the acceptability of the mixing examples in the same way and, if not, is it possible to determine why students differ in their rankings?

4.1. Participants

Like the first study, the present study was conducted among Netherlandic Dutch-speaking students in the tenth grade of the pre-university curriculum (4 vwo) at the Bertrand Russell College in Krommenie, the Netherlands. The survey was administered to 72 students divided between two classes, of whom a total of 66 students both completed the study and agreed to their responses being used for this study. The questionnaire was filled out on 18 January 2024, which was six weeks after the student science project took place. Although not all of the students provided full responses throughout, we excluded only one participant, as this student answered only the first question. We collected no background data from these participants so that data collection could be integrated seamlessly into the typical classroom setting. Moreover, we had no hypotheses regarding any particular participant characteristic and no further inclusion or exclusion criteria. By collecting no additional information, we also ensured participants' anonymity.

4.2. Socrative Survey

We used Socrative for the survey, an online classroom quiz app that students at this school are all familiar with. The survey consisted of ten questions: four open-ended questions followed by six multiple-choice questions, provided in full in the Appendix A. All questions tapped into the responses students provided during the actual student science part of the project. The first two open-ended questions asked about a student's general opinion of pronoun mixing both before and after their lesson on that topic. The next two open-ended questions asked students to provide examples of pronoun mixing that had a positive or a negative effect on them. The multiple-choice questions asked about the student's perception of the real-world examples of pronoun mixing that the students had previously submitted as homework. We selected these examples based on the criteria for liking and disliking mixing that the students themselves had formulated in the first study, allowing us to formulate expectations of how each example would affect the addressees' perception of the speaker. This combination of questions allowed us to quickly gauge how students perceive pronoun mixing in different contexts.

4.3. Procedure

The students' regular Dutch teachers administered the follow-up survey during a regular lesson. They provided students with introductory information about the study, ensured that students knew that their participation was voluntary, and also provided them with a QR code and web link that led to the survey in the Socrative environment. Students were allowed to use their laptops to complete the survey. Upon entering the survey, students were presented with a written version of the oral information the teacher

had imparted. To continue with the survey and consent to their responses being used for research purposes, students ticked a box affirming they had understood and agreed. To opt out of the study, students could tick *no* or simply close the survey. The teacher then administered the rest of the survey to the class. Because the survey was created and shared using the first author's account, students' responses were shared directly with the researchers, without the teacher or the school's having access to the data. This study was reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committee of the researchers' institution.

Our investigation had four goals: (1) we wanted to know how students evaluated mixing before and after the class, (2) we wanted to find out how their peers perceived the forms of mixing that the students themselves had provided, used to express urgency or to sound funny, (3) we wanted to see to what extent students consciously noticed mixing before and after the class, and (4) we wanted to compare rankings of real-life examples and determine to what extent the criteria mentioned on the student science project predicted the evaluation of the examples.

4.4. Open-Ended Questions: General Perception of Pronoun Switching

After the initial consent question, we started the survey with four open-ended questions about how the students perceived pronoun mixing: did they notice mixing before and after the class, and when do they perceive mixing as positive and when as negative? The first question asked how students felt about pronoun mixing before they had the class on mixing. Out of the 66 students who responded to this question, 43 said that they had never noticed it. Some (also) mentioned that they felt it was wrong. One student said that they were surprised "that adults make such dumb mistakes." A total of 10 students said they considered mixing a mistake, five students felt that it was *raar* 'weird' or *apart* 'unusual,' and 18 mentioned that they did not mind it. Some students (five) also mentioned that they recognized mixing in their own behavior. A total of seven students did not answer the question asked, but instead reflected more generally on how they liked the class. What was interesting is that a large number of students (43/67, so 64%) expressed that they did not consciously notice mixing before the class but were simply focused on whatever the message was.

The next question was how students felt about pronoun mixing after they had had their pronoun mixing class. 19 students remarked that mixing happens more often than one would think, and 17 answered that they were more sensitive to the possibility and hence noticed it more. Nine students literally said that the class had had no effect. Others implied that it did not have an effect on what they thought about mixing. One student wrote: *apart je kunt er toch gewoon 1 kiezen* 'strange you can just select one.' In total, 23 students remarked that they thought mixing was wrong, sloppy or weird; others said that they did not care or were not disturbed by the use of mixing. Five students remarked that they now felt that mixing was a special style. One student said they were sensitive to mixing right after class, but not any longer, because they just listen to the message conveyed. One student did not mention mixing but did say that they learned that when peers use the informal pronoun with older people, this is because of a good connection with these older people and not out of a lack of respect. One student wrote *leuk* 'nice.' It is not clear whether they felt mixing was *leuk* 'nice' or whether this answer was an evaluation of the class itself.

The third open-ended question was about when pronoun mixing had a positive effect on students. 14 students wrote something that did not say anything about mixing but reflected on one address term in particular. 16 students reported that shifting from V to T could have a positive effect on them. This is seen as positive, because it shows the addressee is *jij-waardig* 'you.T worthy.' This type of shift is the type of shift that fits with an interactive closeness system: an interlocutor moves to T because of increased closeness

between the interlocutors. Note that this is not really pronoun mixing in the sense of an affect system. Four students reported that they like emails from companies with informal *jij* so that they feel close, but which ended with the pronoun *u*, because that is *netjes* ‘proper’ or *zakelijk* ‘professional.’ 11 students said they could not think of an example, two said that mixing never has a positive effect on them, and two said that mixing has no effect on them. Five students said that they do it when they are joking with older people, and two reported that using *danku* ‘thank you’ in combination with an informal pronoun is *grappig* ‘funny.’ Eight students left this question blank.

The final open-ended question asked about when mixing had a negative effect on them. 18 out of 66 students could not come up with an example or left the question blank. Two students said that mixing was always wrong, and 18 students implied that they felt mixing was wrong. They did not name a specific situation but wrote in their answers that mixing was *slordig* ‘sloppy,’ that it looked *minder professioneel* ‘less professional,’ that it is an indication of spam or an illegitimate business and/or that it is *lelijk* ‘ugly.’ 10 students cited problems with a specific pronoun rather than with mixing in general. Four students said they did not care, and two said they felt it was wrong in a formal context, such as in a school report. 16 students named specific situations or conditions that made mixing wrong for them, including the use in formal contexts such as a school report, an email from the city council, from a large company or a formal text in general (three students in total). Some mentioned that mixing is more wrong when the formal and informal pronoun switch frequently. These answers show that the norm against mixing is acquired and that this norm is considered to be most important in formal texts.

4.5. Perception of Fun and Urgency for V-Use in T-Contexts in Specific Real-World Examples

In the student science project, we asked students to gather examples of pronoun mixing, and we also asked them to hypothesize about the reasons for mixing. Some of the examples provided by the students were brief switches to V in T-contexts that they themselves used for very specific purposes, namely fun and urgency. They reported using the petrified abbreviation *aub* (*alstublieft* ‘if you.V please’) to express urgency and the use of the form *danku* (‘thank you V’) in informal texts because it sounded *leuker* (‘more fun’) than saying thank you with the T-form. Please note that the abbreviation *ajb* (if you.T please) is very marked and infrequent. We were interested in how peers perceived these brief switches to V in informal contexts that normally require the use of the T-form. Thus, for the present study, we asked all of the students if they recognized these uses. Question 5 concerned the abbreviation with the polite form *u*. We asked if they felt this form expressed more urgency than the abbreviation *ajb* ‘if you.T please’ with the informal pronoun *je*. We gave them five answer options for this question; Figure 1 below shows the distribution of the responses.

Almost half of the students (29 out of 66) confirmed that *aub* expressed a sense of urgency, whereas about a third of the students (21 of 66) did not feel a difference in urgency, 11 felt no difference whatsoever, 10 others felt a difference but not related to urgency, and 13 indicated that the form *ajb* is infrequent, which makes it hard to compare. The other answers included one student who ticked all five boxes, one who ticked both D and E (which cannot be true together), and one who checked both answer A as well as answer D. This answer is reported under ‘other.’

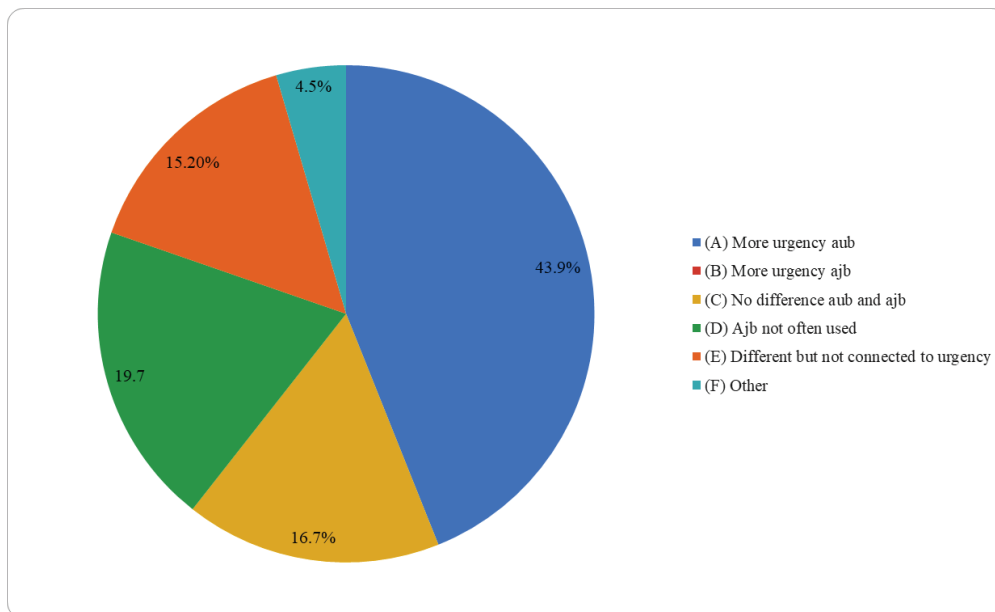


Figure 1. Responses to question 5. “Do you feel more urgency with aub than with ajb?”.

The other self-reported type of switching concerned the form *danku* (‘thank you V’) that students write (‘thank you V’) to their friends (for example, after sharing information on homework via WhatsApp) because it sounds leuker ‘nicer.’ We now asked all the students if they perceived *danku* (the students all leave out the space between dank ‘thank’ and u ‘you.V,’ which is a deviation from the norm, which requires a space between the pronoun and the verb) as nicer than dank je ‘thank you.T.’ Figure 2 shows the distribution of responses across all answer options. About a quarter of the students indeed perceived this form as nicer, but most of the students did not care.

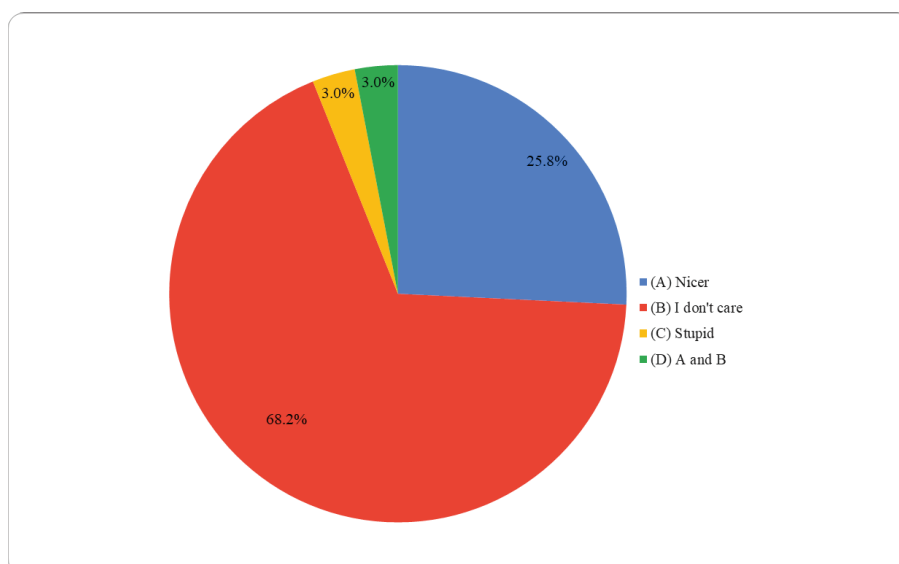


Figure 2. Responses to question 6. “Do you think it sounds nicer if someone says or writes danku ‘thank-you.V’ rather than dank je ‘thank-you.T’?”

Two students replied with answers A and B (*yes, I think it is nicer* and *I don’t care*). We did not know what to do with these answers and categorized them under ‘other.’ Most of the students (45) answered that they did not care. 17 out of 66 students said they did feel that *danku* is nicer, and two students found the use of *danku* instead of *dank je* stupid.

4.6. Ranking Real-World Examples of Mixing

The next questions (8 through 11) made use of the real-life examples the students themselves had shared and analyzed as either a mistake, a strategy or a bit of both. Frequent arguments used to classify mixing as strategic were that the pronouns had a clear division of tasks (opening or closing versus heart of the text) and did not occur within a sentence or when the switched form was part of formulaic speech such as *thank you*. Mixing was more likely to be classified as a mistake when the mixing was frequent, intrasentential or without a clear division of tasks between the pronouns. We selected four examples of mixing and asked students to evaluate them. We expected students to differ in their openness to accepting mixing, so we expected students to vary in how they liked the examples, but we also expected students to rank examples in the same order.

The first real-life example we showed the students (example A) was a bank offering courses in a customer loyalty program. The text is given in (8), with the relevant pronouns in boldface type.⁸ The example shows intrasentential mixing in quite an extreme way: the V and the T-pronoun are adjacent to each other. There is no clear division between tasks for the pronouns. Based on the arguments provided by the students while classifying examples, we expected students to have a negative view of this ad.

Bank loyalty program excerpt (Example A)

9. Heb **je** sinds kort een digitale spiegelreflexcamera
 Have you.T since short a digital single-lens reflex camera
- of wil **je** **uw** camera beter leren kennen?
 or want you.T your.V camera better learn.INF know.INF?

'Did you.T recently acquire a digital single lens reflex camera or do you.T want to get to know your.V camera better?'

Example B shown in (9) is an advertisement for a dance class. The addressee is first addressed with T, and the formulaic ending uses V. Because there is only intersentential mixing, because there is a division of tasks, and because the use with V is more formulaic, we expected the students to be neutral or positive about this example.

10. Dance lessons (Example B)

- Vink aan voor welke les **je** een proefles
 Select for which lesson you.T a try-out.lesson
 wil aanvragen.(...)
 want apply.INF(...)
- Voor actuele tarieven en lestijden kunt **u**
 For current prices and lesson.times can you.V
 terecht op onze website.
 land on our website.
- Voor vragen kunt **u** contact opnemen via (...)
 For questions can you.V contact contact via (...).

'Choose which time you.T would like to request a try-out lesson. (...) You.V can find current pricing and times on our website. You.V can contact (...) with questions.'

Example C, as in (10), is an ad in an online marketplace for stickers for a wheelie bin. The beginning of the message uses the weak informal pronoun *je*, the middle of the text uses the V-form *u*, and the very final sentence uses the stressed and very direct informal pronoun *jij* (*welke sticker kies jij* 'what sticker do you.T choose). Because there is switching without formulaic use, we expected appreciation of this example to be in between the previous two: we assumed that it would seem better than the bank example, because there

is no intrasentential switching, yet not as good as Example B (dance lessons), because the division of tasks between the pronouns is less clear.

11. ‘Choose which time you.T would like to request a try-out lesson. (...) You.V can find current pricing and times on our website. You.V can contact (...) with questions.’

Wheelie bin sticker ad (Example C)

Maak	uw	kliko	extra	herkenbaar	met
Make	your.V	wheelie bin	extra	recognizable	with
de	Kliko	stickers.			
the	wheelie bin	stickers.			
De	uitstekende	kwaliteit	van	de	sticker
The	outstanding	quality	of	the	sticker
zorgt ervoor					
ensures					
dat	de	stickers	goed	bevestigd	blijven
that	the	stickers	well	attached	stay
op	uw	container.			
on	your.V	bin.			
Uw	kliko	is	zodoende	altijd	te
Your.V	wheelie bin	is	thus	always	to
herkennen	in	een	groep	containers,	
recognize	in	a	group	bins,	
met	uw	eigen	persoonlijke	sticker.	
with	your.V	own	personal	sticker.	
Welke	sticker	kies	jij?		
Which	sticker	choose	you?		

‘Make your.V wheelie bin extra recognizable with the wheelie bin stickers. The outstanding quality of the sticker ensures the stickers remain firmly attached to your bin. Your.V wheelie bin can therefore always be spotted in a group of bins, with your own personal sticker. Which sticker do you.T choose?’

Example D as in (11) was an order confirmation for a web purchase at an international fashion chain, see (6). The message thanks the customer for their purchase and notes that the store will send the customer a notification when their order has been shipped, all using the V-form (three instances). The sender then switches to the T-form (two instances) to add that the customer will receive their shipment soon.

12. Order confirmation (Example D)

Bedankt voor uw aankoop.
Thanks for your.V purchase.

Wij sturen u een nieuwe mail wanneer uw
We send you.V a new email when your.V
bestelling onderweg is.
order underway is.

Binnenkort ontvang je je bestelling.
Soon receive you.T your.T order.

‘Thank-you for your.V purchase. We will send you.V a new message when your.V order is on its way. You.T will receive your.T order soon.’

Because there is a lack of frequent switching in this example, the sender should be viewed somewhat favorably, but we also expected some negative views: there is a less clear division of labor, as T and V both precede the noun *bestelling* (‘order’), and the order of using T and V could be problematic. When students indicated that they liked it when a store used both T and V, they explicitly indicated that they liked to be addressed with *je* first, to establish social contact and to end with a polite pronoun (in formulaic speech) to indicate professionalism. The ad goes against the order the students indicated they preferred in the citizen science homework (first T, then V) and against their wish to use V in formulaic speech, which would be indicators of opposition to mixing, but there is no intrasentential usage, which we expected to make the use more acceptable.

Figure 3 shows the responses to our questionnaire. The striped bars show the answers we expected based on the students’ arguments. The actual answers aligned with our expectations only for example D; we expected students to be either negative or neutral about this example, and this was indeed the case. We expected students to like example B the most; instead, we found that the number of dislikes for this example was the lowest. It might seem as though liking the most and having the least dislikes are the same thing, but there is a subtle difference. Nobody really disliked the example very strongly, but the example was also not evaluated very positively. Mixing seems to be somewhat accepted in this context, but not many students were enthusiastic about the example. If the students indicated that they liked mixing and were positive about mixing in more than one example, they were least likely to be positive about example B. If students indicated that they liked example B, they were not likely to like any of the other examples of mixing. Examples A and C were more often disliked, but also more often liked.

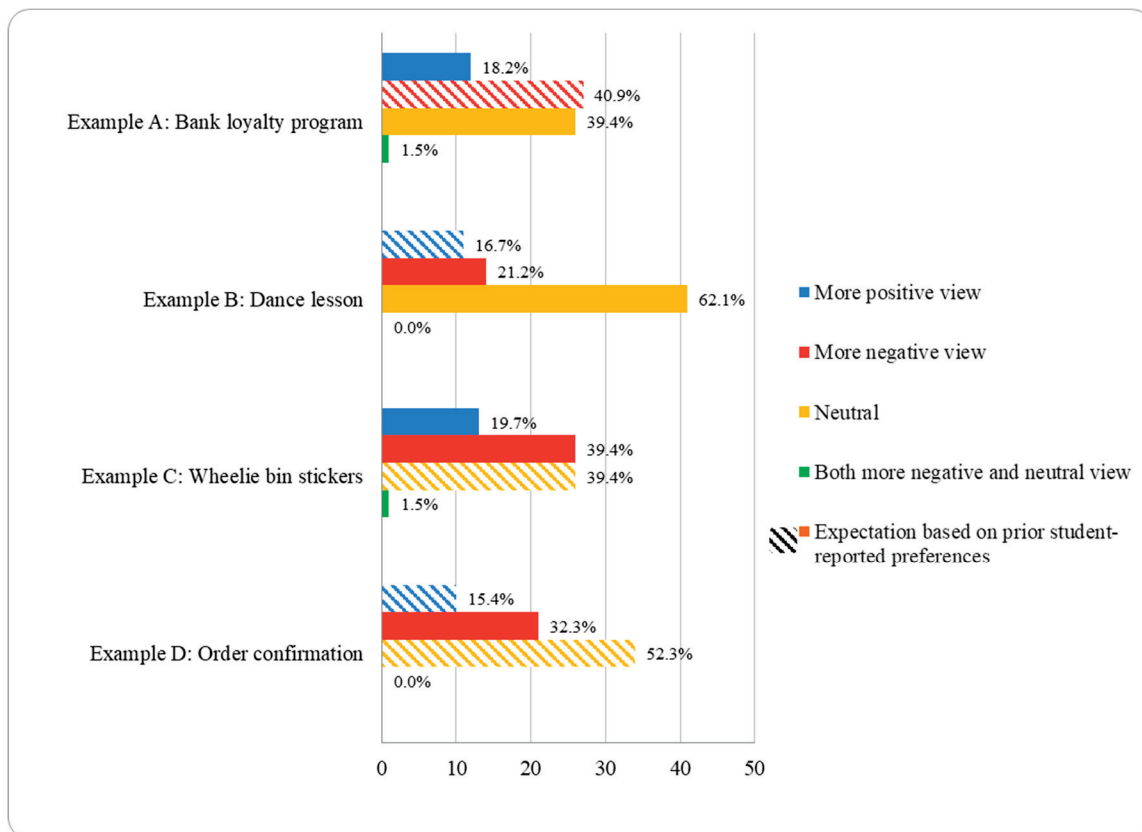


Figure 3. Summary of responses regarding real-life examples of pronoun mixing.

5. Discussion

This article explored the perception of pronoun mixing by Netherlandic Dutch high school students in two studies. The first study reported on arguments students provided to classify pronoun mixing in real-world examples as a strategy or as a mistake. Examples of an acceptable temporary switch to V in contexts that usually require the use of a T-form were humor and the expression of urgency via the petrified form AUB (if you_V please). The first study further suggested that pronoun mixing is most acceptable when (1) there is a clear division of tasks between the pronouns, (2) when the switch is intersentential rather than intrasentential, and (3) when the text is free of linguistic errors. The second study explored what generalizations could be made based on the results of the first study.

The general part of the questionnaire revealed in study 2 revealed that most students had never noticed pronoun mixing before the class, and some stopped noticing it again following completion of the student science project. If students notice mixing, it is easier for them to formulate what makes this unacceptable than acceptable. The observation by some students in the first study that a brief switch to V is possible as a form of humor was recognized by a quarter of the students. The idea that the petrified form AUB ('as you-V please) can express urgency was recognized by half of the students.

When we asked students to rank real-life examples, we expected—based on the results of study 1—that the examples that would be liked best would be in informal texts that would have clearly differential uses of the pronoun, would be intersentential in a neat text, and be moderate in the number of switches. These expectations were not all borne out. Examples that conformed to these characteristics were analyzed in the most neutral way. However, examples with intrasentential mixing were rated by some as most liked and by some as least liked. One finding of the ranking exercise was thus that there was a considerable variation among individual evaluations of mixing and types of mixing.

There were some students who strongly disliked any kind of mixing and others who were quite positive about mixing. If students liked some forms of mixing, they did not necessarily like the same examples. When one of us expressed surprise about the fact that some students indicated liking example A, which involved heavy intrasentential mixing, we asked an adolescent acquaintance if she could understand why students might have indicated they liked example A, and she responded, “It is like mixing sweet and salty popcorn: it works if both flavors are combined, but when you start with one flavor and then move to the other, such as in example B, it makes no sense. It is like you forgot what you wanted, but if you mix them, it is a style. You are nice and you show respect.” We concluded that some students may have reasoned in a similar manner and appreciated mixing as a style. Other students reserved mixing for more formulaic use. If students were negative about mixing, they were the least negative about formulaic uses. In the absence of demographic data, apart from the age and the education level of the students, it is impossible to determine whether a factor such as gender played a role in the variation among respondents’ perceptions. Future research could focus on these factors, perhaps among older age groups, where ethical permission to gather such data is more easily obtained.

Some of our results align with existing research. The role of humor in short switches to V was discussed earlier in Vismans (2016). For example, the observation that the students often did not notice mixing matches observations made by Rosseel et al. (2024). They investigated to what extent the presence of informal features (use of intensifiers, use of English and informal punctuation) affects the saliency of a pronoun switch in two conditions of business to customer communication. They provided various versions of a letter that informed customers about the benefits of the insurance they had just taken out. Rosseel et al. (2024) found that fewer than 1 in 15 respondents noticed that one of the differences between the versions was the choice of either T- or V-pronoun. This was true both for participants with a language-oriented background and those without a language-oriented background. They write: ‘One can question how salient the use of T/V pronouns actually is for the recipient of the message.’ Note, however, that Rosseel et al. (2024) investigate Belgian Dutch, whereas our data concern Netherlandic Dutch. For speakers of Belgian Dutch, the *j*-forms that are considered as informal neutral forms in Northern Dutch have an “import” association (Vandekerckhove, 2005, 2007) and are hence neither neutral nor very informal.

Although the Netherlandic Dutch and the Belgian Dutch situation cannot be directly compared, it remains true that the evaluation of mixed forms is often very unconscious. It would therefore be good to test the effect of the ads in a more controlled setting, such as in attitudinal research. Can we observe an effect of mixing on the appreciation of the sender, even if the recipients of the message are not consciously aware of the mixing? Do individual differences in conscious evaluation of mixing, such as liking or disliking intrasentential mixing, affect unconscious effects of appreciation? Controlling for topic engagement would be recommended here, as Jansen and Janssen (2005) report that if readers are not very involved with a topic, the pronoun choice does not matter to them.

Up till now research that has investigated the effect a term of address has on addressees has looked at the use of just one pronoun. As mentioned in the introduction, these investigations show that both T and V have negative and positive associations which are partially context dependent. de Hoop et al. (2023) show that V-pronouns are the preferred pronoun in Netherlandic Dutch HR emails, both in letters of rejection and letters of acceptance. Leung et al. (2023) show that brands associated with high competence align better with the V-pronoun whereas brands associated with warmth align better with the T-pronoun. Although HR tends to favor a V-pronoun in its communications, Sadowski

et al. (2024) show that using a T-form can have a positive effect on willingness to donate money. Leung et al. (2023) show that when a brand is strongly associated with competence and not so much with warmth, the V-pronoun is preferred, and when a brand is strongly associated with warmth and not so much with competence, there is a strong preference for the T-pronoun. If a brand scores low both on competence and warmth, or if it scores high both on competence and warmth, there is a preference for the default T, but the preference is less marked than when warmth is high and competence is low. Given that both pronouns have positive as well as negative associations, it would be interesting to test experimentally if mixed pronoun use could maximize the positive associations of both pronouns. For example, might it be the case that a product could be associated both with friendliness and professionalism if the right mix of pronouns were used? Would requests for a donation in a text that uses mainly *u* work better if a brief switch to *je* were made for the request itself because *je* is perceived as less direct than *u*?

We did not include examples of address titles such as Madam or Sir in our project, but while collecting data we found examples with the use of titles in combination with the pronoun *je*. The descriptive grammar ANS (Haeseryn et al., 1997) suggests that these formal titles only be used with the V-form, but this no longer seems to be the case, offering another way of balancing different needs vis-à-vis the addressee. Our explorative investigation has shown that mixing occurs in the daily lives of Netherlandic Dutch speakers and that the teenagers tended not to notice when it happened. We assume that not only teenagers but most Netherlandic Dutch speakers do not consciously notice mixing and that despite the fact that pronoun mixing goes against the prescriptive norm, mixing might provide an effective way to balance interlocutors' conflicting needs. If attitudinal research were to show a link between explicit opinions and implicit evaluations, this would imply that knowledge of pronoun preferences in the target audience is relevant and should be incorporated into personalized ads.

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Institutional Review Board Statement: Study 2 was approved by the Ethics Assessment Committee Humanities of the University of Amsterdam ("Pronoun mixing in Dutch revisited: perception of 'u' and 'jij' use by 4-vwo students" FGW-2239).

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study. The participants of Study 2 knew of the aim of the study and the data were gathered and stored anonymously.

Data Availability Statement: Data are stored on Figshare and available upon motivated request.

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Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Appendix A

These are the question-and-answer options students received in the Socratic questionnaire. Questions 6 through 10 also included images of examples of pronoun use; these images are omitted here, but the text is included.

#	Question and Answer Options							
1	Wat vond je vóór de les over aanspreekvormen van het mengen van <i>u</i> en <i>je/jij</i> ? 'Before the lesson about forms of address, what did you think of mixing you.V and you.T?'							
	(Open)							
2	Wat dacht je na de les over aanspreekvormen van het mengen van <i>u</i> en <i>jij</i> ? 'What did you think after the lesson about forms of address mixing you.V and you.T?'							
	(Open)							
3	Kun je een voorbeeld geven van wanneer het mengen van aanspreekvormen op jou een positief effect heeft? Leg uit waarom. 'Can you give an example of when mixing forms of address has a positive effect on you? Explain why.'							
	(Open)							
4	Kun je een voorbeeld geven van wanneer het mengen aanspreekvormen op jou een negatief effect heeft? Leg uit waarom. 'Can you give an example of when mixing forms of address has a negative effect on you? Explain why.'							
	(Open)							
5	Sommigen van jullie schreven dat ze tegen vrienden of klasgenoten normaal gesproken <i>je</i> zeggen, maar soms toch <i>danku</i> zeggen. Dat doen ze bijvoorbeeld om diegenen te bedanken voor een antwoord op een huiswerkvraag. Iemand van jullie schreef: " <i>Danku</i> klinkt leuker dan <i>dank je</i> ". Vind jij het inderdaad leuker als iemand <i>danku</i> zegt of schrijft dan <i>dank je</i> ? 'Some of you wrote that you normally say you to friends or classmates, but sometimes say thank-you.V. You do this, for example, to thank those who have answered a homework question. One of you wrote: "Thank-you.V sounds nicer than thank you.T." Do you indeed like it more when someone says or writes thank-you.V than thank you.T?'							
	A	Ja, dat vind ik leuker. 'Yes, I think it is nicer.'						
	B	Het maakt me niet uit. 'I don't care.'						
	C	Nee, dat vind ik stom. 'No, I think it is stupid.'						
	D	A and B						
6	Iemand schreef dat <i>aub</i> misschien gebruikt wordt om duidelijk te maken dat er haast is. Voel jij inderdaad meer haast bij <i>aub</i> ? (De hoofdletters in het voorbeeld kun je negeren.) 'Someone wrote that if you.V please might be used to make it clear that there is urgency. Do you indeed feel more urgency about please? (You can ignore the capital letters in the example.)'							
	AUB-voorbeeld Whatsapp 'thank-you.V example Whatsapp'							
	WIL JIJ AUB KAARTJES KOPEN? 'WOULD YOU.V PLEASE BUY TICKETS?'							
	Oke 'Ok'							
	Voor twee? 'For two?'							
	JAAA 'YAAAAS'							
	A	Ja, ik voel meer haast bij <i>aub</i> dan bij <i>ajb</i> . Yes, I feel a stronger sense of urgency with <i>aub</i> than with <i>ajb</i> .						
	B	Nee, ik voel meer haast bij <i>ajb</i> than bij <i>aub</i> . No, I feel more urgency with <i>ajb</i> than with <i>aub</i> .						
	C	Nee, <i>aub</i> en <i>ajb</i> geven voor mij evenveel haast weer, ze hebben op mij verder hetzelfde effect Nee, <i>aub</i> and <i>ajb</i> express the same sense of urgency; they affect me the same way.						
	D	Nee, want <i>ajb</i> komt volgens mij weinig voor, dus ik kan het niet goed vergelijken. No, <i>ajb</i> is used so infrequently that is hard for me to make comparisons.						
	E	Nee, voor mij is er wel een verschil tussen <i>aub</i> en <i>ajb</i> , en ik kom beide vormen tegen, maar dat verschil heeft niets te maken met haast of urgentie. No, I think <i>aub</i> and <i>ajb</i> are different, and I encounter both, but the difference is not related to a sense of urgency.						
	F	Other						
7	Door deze mengvorm denk ik positiever/negatiever over de afzender dan als er geen mengvorm was gebruikt. This case of mixing makes me think more positively/negatively about the sender than if no mixing had been used.							
	Mengvormvoorbeeld (bank) 'Mixing example (bank)'							
	Heb	je	sinds	kort	een	digitale	spiegelreflexcamera	
	Have	you.T	since	short	a	digital	single-lens reflex camera	
	of	wil	je	uw	camera	beter	leren	kennen?
	or	want	you.T	your.V	camera	better	learn.INF	know.INF?
	'Did you.T recently acquire a digital single lens reflex camera or do you.T want to get to know your.V camera better?'							

#	Question and Answer Options																																																																																																																																														
	A	postiever 'more positive'																																																																																																																																													
	B	negatiever 'more negative'																																																																																																																																													
	C	geen van beide 'neither'																																																																																																																																													
8	Door deze mengvorm denk ik postiever/negatiever over de afzender dan als er geen mengvorm was gebruikt. This case of mixing makes me think more positively/negatively about the sender than if no mixing had been used. Mengvormvoorbeeld (dansles) Mixing example (dance class) <table><tr><td>Vink aan</td><td>voor</td><td>welke</td><td>les</td><td>je</td><td>een</td><td>proefles</td><td>wil</td><td colspan="3">aanvragen.(...)</td></tr><tr><td>Select</td><td>for</td><td>which</td><td>lesson</td><td>you.T</td><td>a</td><td>try-out.lesson</td><td>want</td><td colspan="3">apply.INF.(...)</td></tr><tr><td>Voor</td><td>actuele</td><td>tarieven</td><td>en</td><td>lestijden</td><td>kunt</td><td>u</td><td>terecht</td><td>op</td><td>onze</td><td>website.</td></tr><tr><td>For</td><td>current</td><td>prices</td><td>and</td><td>lesson.times</td><td>can</td><td>you.V</td><td>land</td><td>on</td><td>our</td><td>website.</td></tr><tr><td>Voor</td><td>vragen</td><td></td><td>kunt</td><td>u</td><td colspan="2">contact opnemen</td><td>via</td><td colspan="3">(...)</td></tr><tr><td>For</td><td>questions</td><td></td><td>can</td><td>you.V</td><td colspan="2">contact</td><td>via</td><td colspan="3">(...).l.</td></tr></table> 'Choose which time you.T would like to request a try-out lesson. (...) You.V can find current pricing and times on our website. You.V can contact (...)											Vink aan	voor	welke	les	je	een	proefles	wil	aanvragen.(...)			Select	for	which	lesson	you.T	a	try-out.lesson	want	apply.INF.(...)			Voor	actuele	tarieven	en	lestijden	kunt	u	terecht	op	onze	website.	For	current	prices	and	lesson.times	can	you.V	land	on	our	website.	Voor	vragen		kunt	u	contact opnemen		via	(...)			For	questions		can	you.V	contact		via	(...).l.																																																																				
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	C	geen van beide 'neither'																																																																																																																																													

#	Question and Answer Options										
10	Door deze mengvorm denk ik positiever/negatiever over de afzender dan als er geen mengvorm was gebruikt. 'This case of mixing makes me think more positively/negatively about the sender than if no mixing had been used.'										
	Mengvormvoorbeeld (bestelbevestiging) 'Mixing example (order confirmation)'										
	Bedankt Thanks			voor for			uw your.V			aankoop. purchase.	
	Wij We	sturen send	u you.V	een a	nieuwe new	mail email	wanneer when	uw your.V	bestelling order	onderweg underway	is. is.
	Binnenkort Soon		ontvang receive		je you.T		je your.T		bestelling. order.		
	'Thank-you for your.V purchase. We will send you.V a new message when your.V order is on its way. You.T will receive your.T order soon.'										
	A	positiever 'more positive'									
	B	negatiever 'more negative'									
	C	geen van beide 'neither'									

Notes

- The abbreviation AUB stands for alsublieft (if you_V please) and the dictionary van Dale states that it functions as a 'versterking bij een nadrukkelijk verzoek' ('a reinforcement of an emphatic request'). Our personal experience is that the letters of the abbreviation can be sounded out in spoken language as a reinforcement as well.
- The student originally wrote in Dutch: 'want door de taalfouten in de tekst blijkt dat er te snel is getypt en niet goed is terug gelezen.'
- The student originally wrote in Dutch De website is sowieso al onveilig en de teksten op de website bevatten ook al veel taalfouten.
- The students originally wrote in Dutch: 'omdat er letterlijk in dezelfde zin 'u' en 'je' wordt gebruikt'.
- The students originally wrote in Dutch: 'omdat meerdere keren is gebeurd en totaal niet logisch is om te doen'.
- The students originally wrote in Dutch: er word niet onderscheid gemaakt in een gebeurtenis of onderwerp'.
- The students originally wrote in Dutch: 'want als ze je gebruiken dan kan het persoonlijker overkomen, maar ze willen hem wel formeel afsluiten'.
- The questionnaire contained screenshot images of each example. For privacy reasons, we are only including the text of each example here. The effect of formatting on pronoun use (for example, visual distance between pronouns may also impact how pronouns are perceived or used) falls outside the scope of this paper. The glosses are provided line by line, but the general translation is given for the text as a whole to better approximate the original presentation.

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Article

Perceptions of Forms of Address in European Portuguese in Online Metadiscourse or What Happens When You Use *você* in Court

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Abstract: The point of departure for this study is an incident in 2020 when a football manager testifying in a Lisbon court used the pronoun of address *você* and was reprimanded. With the aid of corpus linguistics, we qualitatively analyse the comments (understood as metacomments) that this case generated on media outlets and social media. The main conclusion is that the sociocultural foundations of EP (European Portuguese) address are polarised and unstable based on the following: the nexus between forms of address and the expression of (im)politeness is often rejected, with concerns that a complex system of address might impede an egalitarian society; despite this, discernment remains a core facet, expressed in the concern for finding appropriate sociolinguistic rules so as to arrive at forms understood as intrinsically (im)polite. Furthermore, a binary T/V dimension does not apply to the EP system, and although a N (neutral) dimension should be added, the polarised perceptions of EP address preclude clear candidates not only for the N platform but also, to an extent, for the V dimension. Fifty years after the 1974 ‘Carnation’ Revolution that initiated the transition to democracy in Portugal, EP conceptualisations of address show that sociocultural concerns for an egalitarian society coexist with persistent concerns for hierarchy and rules.

Keywords: European Portuguese; address; discernment; metadiscourse

1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to suggest that a metadiscursive approach to forms of address can further our understanding of the sociocultural foundations of these forms, particularly in complex, opaque systems such as European Portuguese (EP). The focus on metadiscourse on forms of address in EP attempts to shed light on the cultural and sociopragmatic norms governing why and how speakers select and use these forms to achieve their communicative goals. Our aim is, thus, to make a contribution to the study of forms of address located within the broader field of sociopragmatics.

To arrive at the sociocultural principles underlying address, we focus on a particular incident from 2020, highlighting the importance of address selection in EP and how this sociodiscursive practice can impact speakers’ lives. Jorge Jesus, who was football manager at the time for Benfica, a well-known team in Portugal, was summoned to testify in court amidst the Football Leaks investigations into corruption in football in October 2020 and used the pronoun *você* to address the prosecutor. The collective of judges at the court session reprimanded him and told him to use ‘Madam Prosecutor’ (*Senhora Procuradora*) instead. The case of the apparent infelicitous address on the part of Jesus was reported in the press¹ and social media and generated a number of comments from speakers, evaluating not only Jesus’s linguistic behaviour but also the complexity of EP forms of address in general. These comments constitute the data for this study, offering metapragmatic conceptualisations of the sociocultural foundations governing the selection and use of EP address, which are then qualitatively analysed so as to meet our research objective.

In the Introduction, we first focus on forms of address in EP and then explain the theoretical foundations of this study.

1.1. Forms of Address in EP

Address comprises the linguistic forms (words, phrases) used to refer to interlocutors (Braun 1988). As such, forms of address are deeply interpersonal items of prime social meaning and have traditionally been subsumed under a T (informal) or a V (formal) dimension, to be used reciprocally or non-reciprocally depending on a solidarity semantic or a power semantic, respectively (Brown and Gilman 1960).

In EP, address is morphologically divided into pronominal, verbal and nominal forms, each of which can syntactically occupy subject or object positions, as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Forms of address in EP.

Pronominal	Verbal	Nominal
<i>tu</i> + 2nd p. sing. <i>você</i> + 3rd p. sing. <i>vocês</i> + 3rd p. plural	2nd p./3rd p. sing. pro-drop 3rd p. plural pro-drop	<i>O senhor</i> ‘Sir’ / <i>A senhora</i> ‘Madam’ (preceded by definite articles <i>o</i> —masculine + <i>a</i> —feminine). Social titles (preceded by definite articles <i>a/o</i>): <i>Senhor</i> + First Name/Last Name—men; (<i>Senhora</i>) <i>Dona</i> + First Name—women. Academic titles (preceded by definite articles <i>a/o</i>): (<i>Senhora</i>) <i>Doutora</i> / (<i>Senhor</i>) <i>Doutor</i> ‘Doctor’; (<i>Senhora</i>) <i>Engenheira</i> / (<i>Senhor</i>) <i>Engenheiro</i> ‘Engineer’; etc. Occupational/professional titles (preceded by definite articles <i>a/o</i>): (<i>Senhora</i>) <i>Professora</i> / (<i>Senhor</i>) <i>Professor</i> ‘Professor’; (<i>Senhora</i>) <i>Ministra</i> / (<i>Senhor</i>) <i>Ministro</i> ‘Minister’; (<i>Senhora</i>) <i>Diretora</i> / (<i>Senhor</i>) <i>Diretor</i> ‘Director’, etc. Kinship terms (preceded by definite articles <i>a/o</i>): <i>a mãe</i> ‘mother’ / <i>o pai</i> ‘father’; <i>a tia</i> ‘aunt’ / <i>o tio</i> ‘uncle’; <i>a avó</i> ‘grandmother’ / <i>o avô</i> ‘grandfather’. +3rd p. sing./pl.

The notation of nominal forms in Table 1 is based on Oliveira (2009, p. 420), who provides a detailed illustration of the ample variety of nominal address forms in EP. In line with the pervasiveness of third-person address, Cook (2013, p. 271) posits a ‘nominal format’ encompassing the third-person verbal inflexion and noun-based forms such as “‘você”, nouns “senhor/senhora” and any other nominal expression used as a subject marker, both singular and plural’. She adds that ‘the nominal format has taken the lead in second person provision’ (Cook 2013, p. 272), which is a crucial observation to understand the current EP system of address, where the second person seems to have contracted as opposed to the expansion of third-person forms.

In the realm of the nominal format, it is also important to note that *o senhor/a senhora* are semi-pronominalised forms (Cintra 1972; Duarte and Marques 2023; Nascimento et al. 2018) and show signs of clear grammaticalisation, namely semantic bleaching and an increasing deictic value, in addition to syntactic functions close to pronouns, as explained by Duarte and Marques (2023). They also elucidate that *o senhor/a senhora*, like personal pronouns, perform the function of a subject or complement and are fully integrated into the sentence structure (Duarte and Marques 2023, p. 300). This is not the case with the other many possibilities for nominal address, which, from a grammatical standpoint, are third-person references retaining their full semantic content and are disambiguated as forms of address only by context. For example, whilst the noun phrase *a doutora* (‘the doctor’, feminine singular) in *a doutora não me disse isso* ‘The doctor didn’t tell me that’ can indeed be a third-person reference to a female doctor, it can also be a full-fledged form of address with second person meaning, depending on the context. It should also be noted that ‘doctor’ may refer to a level of education and not necessarily to a medical doctor; in fact, anyone in Portugal who has obtained a first degree in a university can be addressed by the title ‘doctor’.

The expansion of nominal forms in the V dimension, replacing the now obsolete (in standard varieties, at least) second-person plural pronoun *vós* (Cintra 1972), has promoted the expansion of the morphological third person, albeit with a second-person referential meaning. This has caused significant ‘grammatical rearrangements’ (Faraco [1996] 2017; Lara-Bermejo 2023), whereby second-person pronouns can be indexed to third-person subjects. This is unlike Brazilian Portuguese, for example, where ‘the rather systematic usage of etymological oblique pronouns in European Portuguese’ (Hummel 2020, p. 35) reinforces the contradiction between a controlling third-person subject form and its indexed oblique second-person pronouns. Another consequence of the expansion of the third person and the nominal format is the upset of strictly binary T/V dimensions. As this study discusses later, it is unclear which EP forms can count as V; in addition, the third-person *você* and the pro-drop/subject omission option warrant the consideration of a neutral dimension, mediating T and V—this is what Cook (1997, 2013, 2019) calls the N platform and Oliveira (2009, p. 421) calls the zero-form or avoidance tactic when referring to the pro-drop option specifically.

The complexity of intervening factors in systems of address (regional variation, identity, features of reverence, respect, formality, in/out-group) has also prompted Hummel (2020) to posit ‘crisis’, defined as ‘searching for solutions’, as a useful approach in address, and a defining feature differentiating it from other linguistic functions or forms. The address system in EP seems to be in crisis insofar as its complexity illustrates a search for solutions which have proven difficult to find—perhaps nothing illustrates this as well as the current pragmatic complexity of the address pronoun *você*, the pronoun that warranted the reprimand to Jorge Jesus. *Você* is the result of the grammaticalisation of the nominal form *Vossa Mercê*, which also explains why it maintains grammatical agreement with third-person forms despite its second-person semantics. This seeming grammatical inconsistency is fully echoed in the variegated pragmatic effects of *você*, which, on the one hand, may lend itself to interactions where a fairly neutral, socially distant form is necessary or to situations where speakers may wish to avoid the T pronoun *tu* whilst maintaining an equality-based address occupying a middle ground between intimacy and distance (Cintra 1972; Hummel 2020). However, on the other hand, *você* is often seen as an intrinsically impolite pronoun, potentially causing offence and often avoided for the same reason (Carreira 2004; Duarte 2011; Guilherme and Lara-Bermejo 2015; Hammermüller 2004; Lara and Guilherme 2018; Nascimento et al. 2018; Oliveira 1994, 2009). Explanations for this negative assessment of *você* are difficult to ascertain and, again, as shown by the Jesus case, this pronoun is a sign of the complexity and even ‘confusion’ affecting the EP address system nowadays (Gouveia 2008; Roque and Pinto 2023). The criteria governing the use of *você* are connected to age and social class to some extent, as pointed out by Carreira (2004) and Hummel (2020, p. 20), who clarified that the pronoun is ‘traditionally avoided by middle-class speakers, especially those who are older’. Regional variation is also a factor, with ‘regional evaluations’ differing on *você* (Hammermüller 2020); in fact, the pronoun is viewed as a polite V address in some parts of the country mainly due to its third-person grammatical features, but not in others. In view of this complexity, Hammermüller (2020, p. 251) thus posits isoglosses as a useful heuristic tool to approach the address system in EP, highlighting its ‘numerous many-layered islands of address-norm systems’.

The perception of forms of address is, therefore, subject to an understanding of (im)politeness, given the nodal connection between these concepts (Truan 2022), which the potentially offensive meaning of *você* illustrates well. Carreira (2004) further observes that the nuanced ‘regulation of hierarchy’ conveyed by linguistic address in EP makes these forms particularly suited for the expression of politeness, which she takes to be the linguistic expression of consideration for others. Politeness and other related concepts are, therefore, crucial for our analysis and are the focus of the following subsection.

1.2. Theoretical Framework

The vast research available on (im)politeness in the literature is usually divided into three different historical stages of research, or three ‘waves’, according to Grainger (2011). The first wave is based on the classical Gricean approach of Brown and Levinson (1987), which sees politeness as a facework designed to mitigate a face-threatening act and a necessary deviation from conversational maxims; the second wave is termed ‘the discursive turn’ as it understands politeness as an eminently discursive event, the meaning of which is to be disputed in discourse. An important distinction is posited between scholarly views of (im)politeness (also termed second-order (im)politeness) and the understandings of lay members in a community (first-order (im)politeness). Politeness and impoliteness are seen as first-order concepts to which second-order views must give voice as they unfold in discursive interaction—this might explain why this second wave is also called the ‘post-modern’ turn (Grainger 2011). In this light, politeness and impoliteness—or (im)politeness, to merge both terms—are the respective positively or negatively marked ends of ‘the entire continuum of verbal behaviour’ encapsulated in the notion of ‘relational work’ (Locher and Watts 2005, 2008). This means that such verbal behaviour can merely be appropriate or ‘politic’, or in other words ‘unmarked’ when it passes unnoticed. A discursive look at (im)politeness paves the way for the third wave of research in the field, the ‘interactional’ approach (Grainger 2011), emphasising the relational nature of (im)politeness whilst maintaining a robust second-order approach, namely ‘the fundamentally Austinian notion that speech is social action’ (Grainger 2011, p. 171) and, therefore, the underlying ‘moral norms of considerateness which bind individuals qua interactants’ (Goffman [1983], cited in Grainger 2011, p. 172). Our discussion of forms of address in EP is, therefore, also a discussion of how speakers conceptualise (im)politeness, given the interactional nature of address and how it can be perceived as (im)polite behaviour.

When defining impoliteness specifically, Culpeper (2011, p. 23) places emphasis on the violation of expectations as an essential factor—impoliteness comprises situated elements insofar as it is ‘a negative attitude towards specific behaviours occurring in specific contexts’; however, this negative attitude is founded on underlying ‘expectations, desires and/or beliefs about social organisation’—the previously alluded norms that bind individuals. This is a particularly useful take to apply to EP forms of address, which can be perceived as impolite or offensive when their deployment fails to meet the expectations of addressees. The impolite values attributed to *você* can then at least partly be explained in this way—the reduced semantics of the form preclude the deference conveyed by nominal forms, including titles and honorifics. When the addressee expects the latter but receives *você*, the ensuing conflict generates judgements of impoliteness.

The EP address system, thus, evinces a preoccupation with the elaboration of form, which may explain its complexity and which is also the reason why we find the concept of discernment useful to make sense of this complexity. Discernment politeness, or *wakimae*, as posited by Ide (1989), is the selection of the appropriate form based on the previous knowledge of social norms and collective expectations—the use of a specific form of address is, thus, discerned by speakers based on this knowledge and is ‘inherently dependent upon the speaker’s observation of the social conventions of the society of which he or she is a member’ (Ide 1989, p. 230). Discernment politeness is, thus, the automatic and, unlike Brown & Levinson’s proposition, non-strategic selection of forms, which are linguistic obligations deriving from societal conventions. This would allow for an appropriate match between form and interlocutor/context: a concern that the EP address system seems to evince. This selection, however, applies to a ‘stable society’ where everyone knows their sense of place and status (Ide 1989, p. 230). When this stability falters, then there is room for speakers to submit less passively to collective expectations and have a more ‘active choice’ in the advancement of their own intentions and communicative goals—volition (Hill et al. 1986, p. 348). As Hill et al. (1986) further elaborate, all languages resort to discernment and volition, albeit in unequal measure, with discernment providing a basis of shared social rules which bring ‘social punishment’ if ignored. It can, thus, be argued that

discernment politeness is not, in fact, politeness or positively marked behaviour, but rather a socially appropriate or political form of behaviour since it entails undertaking what is expected by following sociolinguistic rules (Watts 2005). It is the ‘enhanced’ use of forms of address based on ‘a correct assessment of the relevant socio-cultural factors’, which counts as over-politic, and thus polite and proper behaviour (Watts 2005, p. 62).

The concept of discernment applied to EP forms needs to be carefully pondered, mainly because it is historically situated, and its metapragmatic meaning differs from its second-order or technical meaning (Kádár and Paternoster 2015; Paternoster 2024). The primordial meaning of *wakimae* applies to the Japanese automatic selection of honorifics conveying individual rank and consists of obligatory choices that speakers cannot escape. When under the light of historical metapragmatics in the West, discernment bears a different understanding, as shown by Kádár and Paternoster (2015). They analyse the lay notion of discernment by tracing back the Italian verb *discernere* and its synonyms in Italian etiquette manuals in the 16th century, as these influenced the historical understandings of ‘discernment’ in Europe during the Renaissance; what they find is that these first-order meanings of discernment were not so much about the automatic selection of a form based on a pre-existent rule, but a term encapsulating the mental effort required to discern the appropriate form when the rules of appropriateness are unclear. Discernment is thus a ‘heuristic method to reach a decision on appropriateness in a specific interactional context’ (Kádár and Paternoster 2015, p. 381) more than the ability to behave non-strategically according to pre-existing rules. Paternoster (2024), thus, highlights the apparent contradiction between first-order notions of discernment (Discernment1) and second-order notions (Discernment2): whilst Discernment2 (that is, scientific notions of discernment) is rigid and based on ‘scripted’, ‘pre-negotiated behaviour’, Discernment1 (lay notions) is a ‘heuristic toolkit’ preparing speakers for ‘complex real-life situations’ when rules of social appropriateness are not easily discerned.

We argue that the address system in EP evinces a definite concern for the appropriate, non-strategic selection of a form to convey obedience to a pre-established rule that must be collectively followed, but also that the notion of discernment as a heuristic category, or ‘the intellectual capacity necessary to act appropriately’ (Kádár and Paternoster 2015, p. 381) is an accurate depiction of the workings of address selection in this language—especially because the opacity of EP address precludes the non-strategic, automatic selection of form. The rapid social changes in Portuguese society which have taken place since the 1974 ‘Carnation’ Revolution, signalling the end of the *Estado Novo* dictatorship and the beginning of democracy, impede a clear knowledge of socially appropriate rules and one’s sense of place in society, which is now more fluid as democratic equality advances. Whilst notions of hierarchy and rank remain important (as illustrated by Carreira 2004, who avers that the complexity of EP address forms is the linguistic coding of numerous possibilities to convey hierarchy, rank and deference), the march towards equality has thrown a hazy cloud over what used to be a rigid stratification and a clear knowledge of ‘one’s sense of place or role in a given situation’ (Ide 1989, p. 230). Discernment is closer to the mental reasoning underlying the selection of an appropriate address against a background of uncertainty than the sure selection of a form driven by safe knowledge of what the rules demand, as illustrated by the reprimand that Jorge Jesus suffered in court. Lacking a clear rule which would allow the (almost) automatic selection of form, Jesus opted for what seemed the safest option, the third-person pronoun of address *você*; the judges who reprimanded him, however, felt that he should have discerned or reasoned, that the semantic void of this pronoun was lacking in a formal setting. Judges and prosecutors must be addressed in such a way that clarifies their occupational standing and importance, warranting a nominal form—*Madam Prosecutor*.

Prompted by this opacity of address, which speakers feel interferes directly with the achievement of their communicative goals, they often engage in lay debates on social media, evaluating the appropriateness of forms of address and commenting on the difficulties they pose. An examination of these online debates, tantamount to the metadiscourse into

perceptions of EP address, could significantly further our awareness of emic conceptualisations and evaluations of address (what Eelen 2001 describes as speakers' 'common-sense' notions and Kádár and Haugh 2013 designate as the understandings of cultural insiders).

Metadiscourse is based on reflexivity, or 'to use language to communicate about the activity of using language' (Lucy 1993, p. 9), and it highlights that 'all linguistic choice-making implies some degree of consciousness' (Verschueren 2000, p. 445). This consciousness depends on how linguistic behaviour (addressing others in EP, in this case) is conceptualised by the participants themselves. In this light, metadiscourse is part of metapragmatics, broadly defined as 'the study of awareness on the part of ordinary or lay observers about the ways in which they use language to interact and communicate with others' (Kádár and Haugh 2013, p. 181), and is a lead-in approach to real speakers and how they rationalise their linguistic decisions. A further advantage of metadiscourse (or metalanguage), as explained by Culpeper (2011, pp. 72/73), is that it can offer 'articulations of prescriptive rules concerning behaviours in the light of particular social norms'. This is indeed what this study aims to explore—social norms as conceptualised by speakers that inform their decisions and selection of address forms, and the emic, common-sense notions that they carry with them and activate when engaging in interactions. This also means that metadiscourse on address often extrapolates from localised interactions to become wider in scope, focusing on the broader social normativity informing expected behaviours in society—in other words, the moral order, or the 'socially constructed set of understandings we carry with us from situation to situation. It is moral because it guides our sense of right and wrong, good and bad' (Domenici and Littlejohn 2006, cited in Culpeper 2011, p. 38).

The moral order is, therefore, part of speakers' social competence and encapsulates their expectations about what is appropriate or adequate—our sense of how things ought to be conveyed based on pre-existent normative understandings used as benchmarks to regulate our expectations (Kádár 2017; Kádár et al. 2019). It becomes salient when it is perceived to have been violated, triggering moralisation via metadiscourses of penalisation. The EP idiom *você é de estrebaria* 'você is in the stable' is a prime example of such negative assessments due to its fixed phraseological nature (there are other, albeit less stable, expressions such as *você é feio* 'você is ugly'). The fact that EP exhibits a fixed set of idioms that constitute, in practice, a metalanguage designed to evaluate address reinforces the sociocultural relevance of these forms and points to a third-layer moral order, one that transcends localised and group-based norms and undergoes a 'scale shift' (Kádár and Haugh 2013) invoking wider sociocultural tenets and expectations.

Investigating the nexus between forms of address and a third-layer moral order is all the more necessary given the previously mentioned background of uncertainty and the necessary intellectual reasoning it demands from speakers, which is often so burdensome as to trigger judgements of impoliteness, as illustrated by the Jorge Jesus case. This is further complicated by the fact that the recognisability of politeness and appropriateness is fundamentally reflexive and recursive (Kádár and Haugh 2013, p. 185); that is, evaluations of politeness 'reoccur or are repeated in a self-similar way over time and across social spaces', causing a 'circular relationship' between localised occasions when politeness is perceived to occur and the evaluation of politeness itself. It is this reflexive circularity that makes politeness (or (im)politeness) recognisable, with this recognisability hinging on evaluations that span past, present and future moments of recognisable (im)politeness evaluations (Kádár and Haugh 2013, p. 185). What happens, then, when such recognisability is hindered by the erosion of this historical—past, present, future—foundational basis in societies, such as the Portuguese, that have undergone rapid and dramatic social changes?

We argue that the metadebates found on social media expressing existing social concerns towards EP forms of address are an attempt to answer this exact question, hence demonstrating the importance of casting an analytical eye upon metadiscourses on EP forms connecting speakers' conceptualisations of address to wider interpretations of social relations and the foundations of society.

The paper unfolds in the following way: Section 2 explains the methodology for data collection and analysis; Section 3 presents the results extracted from the corpus, that is, the extended context of concordance lines pertaining to the Jorge Jesus case; and Section 4 concludes with a discussion of these results.

2. Materials and Methods

The materials for this study comprise a corpus of 476 manually collected comments on the Jorge Jesus case posted on Twitter (now X) or left on online versions of newspapers, including comments left on the Facebook accounts of newspapers. All comments were fully anonymised for the analysis and were collected after the fact, in April and May 2023, following two methods, depending on the platform as follows: on Twitter, the keywords *Jorge Jesus* or keyword combinations *Jorge Jesus + você*, *Jorge Jesus + juíza* ‘judge’ + *procuradora* ‘prosecutor’ were used, so as to locate tweets referring to the case. The comments themselves where the keywords occurred were manually collected (including tweets issued by mainstream media outlets pertaining to the case and featuring relevant keywords)² and also the ensuing replies and sub-replies that it generated. It should be pointed out that not all sub-replies included a keyword—they were, however, in response to original posts that did include keywords and were, thus, relevant commentaries on Jorge Jesus’s selection of address.

The other method consisted of locating online newspaper articles covering the incident and collecting the comments left on these articles, including one case where the newspaper posted the article on its Facebook page.³

This initial methodological step yielded a total of 476 comments, posted on 20 and 21 October 2020, with their distribution according to the platform illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2. Distribution of comments according to online platforms.

Online Newspapers	Twitter (X)	Total
414 comments	62 comments	476 comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• From the online versions of <i>Jornal de Notícias</i> and <i>Tribuna Expresso</i>: 94• From the broadsheet <i>Expresso</i>’s Facebook page: 320	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Including replies to tweets posted by mainstream media outlets (CNN Portugal and TVI)	

These comments were taken to be metacomments or metapragmatic comments since they pertained directly to Jorge Jesus being reprimanded in court due to his choice of address, and they were metapragmatic assessments of the appropriateness of forms of address (Truan 2022, p. 228), offering this study a core sociopragmatic view into what speakers believe are the sociocultural foundations of address selection and use.

After constituting the corpus, the next methodological step was to establish a coherent analytical approach, which was found with the help of corpus linguistics. A frequency list of lemmas was drawn from Sketch Engine, then narrowed down to nouns and adjectives, all the while using lemma as a search unit so as to better capture the range and use of a certain term. The extended context of the resulting concordance lines for each list was then subjected to a qualitative reading to ascertain the unfolding patterns of perceptions of address in EP. To ensure the manageability of the research, the frequency lists were shortened to ten examples each, with the ensuing concordance lines working as a practical sample of analysis.

Finally, it should be added that the reason why this study undertook a corpus approach, albeit quite a reduced one, was because it allowed us to obtain an objective view of the data despite the fact we were dealing with a small-scale dataset, the contents of which were to be analysed in detail. Frequency is a lead-in to a hopefully unbiased reading but not a controlled analytical category. As McEnery and Hardie (2012, p. 18) note, qualitative

analysis ‘is so labour-intensive that a large-scale study using the corpus may not be possible’, which is exactly the case here. We did find, however, that a corpus-assisted small-scale study was productive in terms of how useful corpus software can be to emphasise patterns that may have otherwise remained hidden, thus hindering the full thrust of the analysis.

3. Results

Jorge Jesus is a football personality who, in 2020, was the manager for Benfica, a top-tier team in the Portuguese league. In October of the same year, he was summoned to testify in court pertaining to Football Leaks, which was an investigation into corruption in football. Whilst in court, Jesus addressed the prosecutor as *você* and was reprimanded, with the collective of judges presiding over the session telling the football manager he should address her as *Senhora Procuradora*, ‘Madam Prosecutor’. The case was mentioned in the press and social media, generating metadebates on the acceptability of *você* and, interestingly enough, about the wider social meaning of forms of address in Portuguese society.

As explained in the methodology section, the first step was to examine a keyword frequency list of lemmas, where frequency works as a guide for exploring the contents of the corpus instead of a category of analysis itself (Table 3).

Table 3. Wordlist (lemmas) ordered by frequency in the Jorge Jesus dataset.

	Words	Frequency
1.	<i>tratar</i> ‘to address’	154
2.	<i>você</i>	104
3.	<i>senhor</i> ‘Sir’ / ‘Madam’	74
4.	<i>procurador</i> ‘prosecutor’	58
5.	<i>dizer</i> ‘to say’ / ‘to tell’	58
6.	<i>saber</i> ‘to know’	54
7.	<i>respeito</i> ‘respect’	53
8.	<i>dever</i> ‘duty’ / ‘should’	48
9.	<i>poder</i> ‘power’ / ‘can’ — ‘to be able to’	45
10.	<i>doutor</i> ‘doctor’	44
	2876 items 15,643 total frequency	

A brief overview of Table 3 is already revelatory of the social concerns affecting the EP address system; whilst the lemmas *tratar por* ‘to address as’, *senhor* and *procurador* pertain directly to the nature of the case itself, items such as ‘respect’ and ‘doctor’ immediately convey the concern for rank and deference that the system seems to evince.⁴ Furthermore, the modal verbs *dever* and *poder*, coupled with their deriving forms (namely the adjective *devido* ‘due’ and the noun *poder* ‘power’), indicate the heavily deontic conceptualisations of address.

The concordance lines for item 2, *você*, in Example 1, show the panoply of differing evaluations of this form:

- (1) Concordance lines—*você*
- Era suposto tratar por tu?* </s><s> No Minho, tratar por *você* não é falta de educação.
</s><s> O país só pode falar à moda de Lisboa?
‘Was he supposed to use *tu*? In Minho, to address someone as *você* is not impolite.
Can the country only talk in the Lisbon style?’
 - No Minho?! Onde?* </s><s> *Você* é rude como as casas, só ouvi usar a gente de Lisboa e soa como unhas num quadro a giz.
‘In Minho?! Where? *Você* is as rude as can be, I’ve only heard it from Lisbon people and it sounded like fingernails on a chalkboard.’
 - Cresci numa aldeia e sempre ouvi dizer que “você” é estrebaria*
‘I grew up in a village and I’ve always heard people say that *você* is for the stables.’
 - “Você” é má educação em qualquer parte do país.*
‘*Você* is impolite in any part of the country.’

The first aspect resulting from these concordance lines is the geographical sensitivity of the differing (im)politeness evaluations of *você*, which has been pointed out by a number of studies (Duarte 2010; Guilherme and Lara-Bermejo 2015; Hammermüller 2020; Lara and Guilherme 2018). What Example (1) shows, however, is how oscillating this criterion is—speakers from the same region, Minho, in north-western Portugal, find it acceptable in Minho and unacceptable in Lisbon (1a), whereas (1b) posits the exact opposite, using a powerful sound metaphor to convey the impoliteness of *você* in Minho, as opposed to its acceptability in Lisbon. Examples (1c) and (1d) state the impoliteness of the pronoun across the board, regardless of geographical region, with (1d) resorting to the felicitous expression *má educação* (literally ‘bad education’), which can mean impoliteness or rudeness, bad manners or even lack of knowledge or academic education (as in other Romance languages, the polysemic noun *educação* can both mean ‘politeness’, ‘manners’ or ‘education’ in EP), adding that evaluations of *você* surpass localised community standards and are intrinsically impolite at a wider, national level.

Clearly, the geographical impoliteness of *você* is not reliable, attracting as it does disparate pragmatic conceptualisations from speakers of the same region. Socialisation and upbringing emerge as factors which, thus, trump the regional criterion—examples (1c) and (1d) are relevant precisely because they point to the fact that the impoliteness of the pronoun is learned and based on the replication of what elders commonly say (that *você* is in the stables). This also connects to item 5 in Table 2, *dizer*, which is a verbal form encapsulating the learned aspect of impoliteness. The semantics of *saber* ‘know’, item 6, seem to be similar (Example 2):

- (2) Concordance lines—*saber*
- a. *Jorge de Jesus pode não saber falar no vosso entender pretensioso, mas não podem dizer que ele não é claro e directo. </s><s> Quantos dos que “sabem” falar mastigam as palavras e ninguém os entende, ou, levam os “entendidos em linguagem” a comprar banha da cobra?*
‘Jorge de Jesus may not **know** how to speak in your pretentious opinion, but you can’t say he isn’t clear and straightforward. </s><s>How many of those who “**know**” how to speak chew their words and no one understands them, or lead the “language experts” into buying snake oil?’
 - b. *Um pouco de humildade, reconhecendo as nossas fragilidades, sabendo fazer autocrítica, e reconhecendo os erros. </s><s> Na minha opinião faz parte do saber estar e viver em sociedade.*
‘A bit of humility, recognising our weaknesses, **knowing** how to self-criticise, and acknowledging mistakes. </s><s>In my opinion, this is part of **knowing** how to be and to live in society.’

Example (2a) praises Jesus’s direct style, seemingly deriving from his lack of knowledge of the Portuguese language, whilst equating knowledge and ‘knowing how to speak’ with deceitful language. This negative judgement might be connected with an insincere value that the speaker attributes to politeness and, in particular, to over-politic language (Culpeper 2011, p. 102) reflected in the mandatory use of terms that the speakers feel to be excessive, such as ‘Madam Prosecutor’. Comment (2b), however, is interesting in the connections it allows between knowledge and discernment, where being able to select a form of address equates to self-knowledge, to discern and reason the appropriate manner and to ‘be and live in society’, which Jesus lacked when selecting *você*.

As for the aspect of ‘respect’, the comments drawn from Table 3, are as follows:

- (3) Concordance lines—*respeito*
- a. *O Jorge Jesus teve uma postura de falta de respeito no tribunal. </s><s> De desprezo pela justiça e pela procuradora. </s><s> Um tribunal não é um café.*
‘Jorge Jesus was **disrespectful** in court. </s><s> He had an attitude of contempt for justice and for the prosecutor. </s><s> A courtroom is not a coffee-shop.’
 - b. *Só é desrespeito para quem ainda vê algo que não decadência e pedantismo na insistência em títulos honoríficos. </s><s> Sempre foram uma forma de manter o “respeitinho” e não de mostrar respeito.*
‘It’s only **disrespectful** for those who still see anything other than decay and pedantry in the insistence on honorific titles. </s><s>They’ve always been a way of keeping “**respect**” [little respect] rather than showing **respect**.’

This set of examples (3) shows differing cultural values at work—(3a) posits a nexus between the selection of form and the interlocutor/context in terms close to the category of discernment postulated by Ide (1989). Here, the formal context of a courtroom and judge preclude the informal *você*, with failure to meet this social rule triggering a penalty that Jesus indeed received due to his ‘disrespect’ and ‘contempt’. However, (3b) takes nominal addresses (titles and honorifics) as evidence of a failing moral order where a stifling notion of ‘respect’ (conveyed by the suffix *-inho*, resulting in the diminutive form *respeitinho*) takes over actual respect. Contrary to (3a), (3b) postulates that the selection of linguistic form is unrelated to respect. These conflicting views of social concerns entailed in the linguistic expression of ‘respect’ via the selection of an appropriate form of address and the dismissal of such concerns as ‘decaying’ and ‘pedantic’ are also shown when examining the modal verbs *poder* ‘can’/‘to be able to’ and *dever* ‘should’ and deriving forms (Example 4):

- (4) Concordance lines—*poder*, *dever*
- a. *Quando nos dirigimos a magistrado deve ser por “Sra Procuradora”, “doutor”.*
‘When we address a magistrate, it **should** be as “Madam Prosecutor”, “doctor”.’
 - b. *O tratamento por você revela apenas que o JJ não tem noção do respeito devido a terceiros com quem não há proximidade.*
‘Addressing as *você* simply means that JJ has no notion of the respect **due** to others who aren’t close.’
 - c. *O “você” por si só não é falta de respeito, ponto. </s><s> O tom, o que disse a seguir, etc, podem ser (e foram), mas ele podia ter sido perfeitamente educado e ainda assim usado o “você”.*
‘*Você* in itself is not disrespectful, period. </s><s>The tone, what he said next, etc., **may** be (and were) disrespectful, but he **could** have been perfectly polite and still use “*você*”.’

Examples (4a) and (4b) reveal the heavily deontic load of metadiscourses assessing the impoliteness of *você*. Whilst (4a) restricts the deontic negative judgement to a court of law, (4b) extrapolates this to a wider moral order, stating that addressing socially distant interlocutors by *você* fails to show adequate respect—respect which is ‘due’ for no other reason than the fact it is dictated to be so. However, (4c) shows a different take, relevantly removing the selection of forms of address from an intrinsic link to politeness.

In addition, the noun *poder* was used in the corpus to refer to the power of the judiciary, negatively assessed in its attempt to control language and impose a scripted use of nominal forms. The root of this linguistic display of authority is seen as a remnant of dictatorship, as shown by the use of terms such as ‘dictatorship’ and ‘fascism’ in the following add-on examples (although these lexical items are not displayed in the frequency list, a close qualitative reading of the concordance lines where they were employed made it possible to detect them):

- (4)
1. **Ditadura ‘dictatorship’**
A subserviência ainda é prática em muitas instituições, uma réstia dos tempos da ditadura que perdura no tempo
‘Subservience is still common practice in many institutions, the remnants of **dictatorship** that last in time’
 2. **Fascismo ‘fascism’**
A justiça portuguesa é que está habituada a uma posição de superioridade que até se reflete na linguagem. Resquícios do passado fascista . . .
‘It’s the Portuguese justice that is used to superiority to the extent that it’s reflected in language. The remnants of a **fascist** past. . .’

The lemma *doutor* yielded similarly conflicting examples (5):

- (5) Concordance lines—**doutor**
- Tem de tratar por “a senhora procuradora” ou “Sra. doutora”. </s><s> O “você” ainda que possa parecer respeitoso é informal.*
‘He has to address her as “Madam Prosecutor” or “Madam Doctor”. </s><s> Você, although it may seem respectful, is informal.’
 - O problema não é o regionalismo, é o **doutorismo**.*
The problem is not regionalism, it’s **doctorism**.
 - Mas Portugal é país **dedoutores**, sem doutoramento.*
But Portugal is a country of **doctors** without PhDs.

The obligatory choice of form posited by the deontic modality in (5a) is contravened by (5b) and (5c), both negatively evaluating the ostensible importance of nominal titles in Portugal. (5c) alludes to the fact that in this country, a Bachelor’s degree warrants the nominal address ‘Doctor’ (usually followed by a surname, but also a first name) without the need to obtain an actual doctorate. The country is, therefore, designated as ‘a country of doctors’, whereas (5b) resorts to suffixation (*doutor* plus the nominal suffix *-ismo*) to convey the conspicuous social concern with titles.

Turning now to the list of the most relevant nouns and adjectives found in the Jorge Jesus dataset, the results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Nouns and adjectives (lemma) ordered by frequency in the Jorge Jesus dataset.

	Nouns (Lemma)	Frequency	Adjectives (Lemma)	Frequency
1.	<i>senhor</i>	74	<i>procurador</i> ‘prosecutor’	33
2.	<i>respeito</i> ‘respect’	53	<i>bom</i> ‘good’	13
3.	<i>pessoa</i> ‘person’	49	<i>bronco</i> ‘boor/boorish’	12
4.	<i>doutor</i> ‘doctor’	44	<i>importante</i> ‘important’	11
5.	<i>educação</i> ‘education’ / ‘politeness’	43	<i>social</i>	11
6.	<i>tribunal</i> ‘court’	41	<i>português</i> ‘Portuguese’	11
7.	<i>país</i> ‘country’	38	<i>mau</i> ‘bad’	9
8.	<i>Portugal</i>	34	<i>superior</i>	9
9.	<i>juiz</i> ‘judge’	32	<i>correto</i> ‘correct’	8
10.	<i>falta</i> ‘lack’	29	<i>judicial</i> ‘judiciary’	8
1406 items 3820 total frequency			326 items 684 total frequency	

The noun list exhibits occurrences that have been analysed before (*respeito*, *doutor*, *educação*) and other cases pertaining directly to the incident in court (*senhor*—pertaining to *Senhora Procuradora*—*tribunal*, *juiz*). We focus on the concordance lines of *pessoa* ‘person’, *país* ‘country’, *Portugal* and *falta* ‘lack’:

- (6) Concordance lines—**pessoa**
- Portugal pequenino em que importante é tratar **a pessoa** pelo título e não por você. . . enfim o pedantismo de uma certa classe social deste país*
‘Little/Small Portugal where what’s really important is addressing **people** by their title and not as *você*. . . in short, the pedantry of a certain social class in this country’
 - É tido como falta de educação, no Minho ou noutro sítio qualquer, dirigir-se directamente a alguém tratando-o por “você”. </s><s> E isto vale para quem se dirige a uma Procuradora como a outra **pessoa** qualquer.*
‘It’s considered impolite, in Minho or anywhere else, to address someone directly as *você*. </s><s> And this goes for anyone who addresses a prosecutor as much as any other **person**.

Example (6) echoes the divergent evaluations not only concerning *você* but of forms of address in general and their nexus to a certain societal depiction of Portugal, pedantic and

class-ridden, as summarised in (6a) Example (6b), however, issues a declarative speech act enunciating impoliteness as an embedded feature in the form *você*, which is, thus, seen as intrinsically impolite.

We found similar results in the analysis of concordance lines for *país* ‘country’ and *Portugal*:

- (7) Concordance lines—*país, Portugal*
- É um país de Drs, Srs.. triste de quem precisa disso para se afirmar!*
‘It’s a **country** of Drs, Srs. . . sad for those who need it to assert themselves!’
 - É só vaidade em Portugal!!! </s><s> No estrangeiro quem são doutores são os médicos.*
‘It’s all vanity in **Portugal**!!! </s><s> In other countries, it’s the physicians who are doctors.’

Example (7) evinces an emergent cultural depiction of Portugal based on a conceptualisation of forms of address as excessive linguistic demands—these forms signal vanity in a country preoccupied with titles and social status (to note, 7a repeats the aforementioned idiom ‘a country of doctors’). However, the concordance lines pertaining to item 10 (*falta* ‘lack’ as in *falta de educação, respeito* ‘lack of education, respect’), summarised in Example 8, contradict this rebellion against a politeness of discernment:

- (8) Concordance lines—*falta*
- A sociedade tem regras!!!! </s><s> O nosso mal é este!!! </s> <s> Falta de civismo, educação e discernimento para entender o que é a instituição tribunal!*
‘Society has rules! That is what’s wrong with us! **Lack** of civility, education/manners and discernment to understand a court of law as an institution.’

Once again, we are left with polarised, conflicting conceptualisations as to the sociocultural meaning of forms of address. For every metacomment disassociating politeness from the selection of forms, the corpus shows countering conceptualisations and deep concerns for finding and following rules of social appropriateness via the selection of address—it is noteworthy that Example 8 uses the first-order term ‘discernment’ to encapsulate the mental effort to ‘understand’ how things work in a court of law, thus approximating the notion of ‘discernment’ to the heuristic effort described in the introduction of this study.

Example (9) displays relevant occurrences of frequent adjectives drawn from Table 4 (excluding *procurador* and *judicário*, whose frequency can be explained due to their direct connection to the incident in court):

- (9) Concordance lines—*bom, bronco, importante, social, português, mau, superior, correto*
- bom*
Tenho a quarta classe mas ensinaram-me a ter boa educação, ser humilde e a aprender.
‘I am only 4th-grade-educated but I was taught to be polite/have **good** manners, to be humble and to learn.’
 - bronco*
o tribunal tem regras e o Juiz deve ser tratado com a dignidade do cargo que exerce e todos sabemos que o treinador Jorge Jesus é um bronco sem cultura.
‘a court of law has rules and the judge needs to be addressed with the dignity his job demands and we all know the manager Jorge Jesus is an uneducated/uncultured **boor**.’
 - importante*
Preocupem-se com o que é mais importante na vida!!!!
‘Concern yourselves with what’s most important in life!!!!’
 - social*
Continuar a manter estas tradições frívolas de diferenciação só reforça a estratificação social em vez de a diluir numa sociedade mais igualitária.
‘Keeping these frivolous traditions of differentiation only reinforces **social** stratification instead of diluting it in a more egalitarian society.’

- e. **português**
Ele é português, se fala mal a sua língua concordo que tente aprender a falar corretamente a sua língua materna
 ‘He’s **Portuguese**, if he speaks his language badly, I agree that he should try learning how to speak his native language correctly’
- f. **mau**
*você ou dr não são sinônimos de **má** educação pelo contrário, simplesmente ainda há mto arcaísmo parolo na nossa sociedade. . .*
 ‘você or Dr are not synonymous with **bad** education on the contrary, there is simply still a lot of simple-minded archaisms in our society’
- g. **superior**
*Um bronco com dinheiro que se julga **superior** aos outros, nada mais.*
 ‘A **boor/boorish person** with money who thinks he’s superior to everyone else, nothing more, nothing less.’
- h. **correto**
 1. *Senhora procuradora, seria a forma mais **correta**, mas é do conhecimento de todos que o JJ tem esta maneira de falar. . .*
 ‘Madam Prosecutor’ would be the most **correct** form but it’s common knowledge that JJ talks this way. . .’
 2. *Mas está tudo doido??? </s><s> Você está **correto**, qual o problema?*
 ‘Has everyone gone mad??? Você is **correct**, what’s the problem?’

On the one hand, the examples above corroborate a politeness of discernment insofar as they evince the social penalties that come with a perceived breach of pre-established rules of appropriate address (Examples 9a, b, e, g and h1), where the football manager not only lacks the humility but also the knowledge to follow societal rules expressed by an appropriate selection of address in a court of law. Failure to follow rules by performing this selection triggers moralisation—Jesus is ‘boorish’, ‘uneducated’, speaks his own language badly and lacks the knowledge to select the ‘correct’ form. However, shifting conceptualisations of address counter this social concern for the knowledge and deployment of rules, as demonstrated in (9c), (9d), (9f) and (9h2). These metacommentarys see conceptualisations of address as evidence of an archaic society, excessively concerned with social distinctions and unimportant, ‘frivolous’ matters such as forms of address and the impoliteness of *você*.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

What can a qualitative analysis of the metapragmatic comments elicited by the reprimand issued to Jorge Jesus for his selection of address in court tell us about emic understandings of the sociocultural norms governing the use of forms of address in EP, which is the central concern of this study?

Firstly, the nexus between EP forms of address and (im)politeness is complex—as mentioned in the introduction to this study, (im)politeness hinges on recognisability, which, in turn, is based on relatively established evaluations across past, present and future moments of evaluation (Kádár and Haugh 2013). Perceptions of address in EP, however, are polarised to the extent that such recognisability has been eroded by social change, marked by the 1974 Revolution and the transition to democracy, resulting in the disparate assessments of the sociocultural significance of these forms.

On the one hand, concerns for discernment (understood here as concern for meeting socially shared expectations by following pre-established sociolinguistic rules governing the selection of address) remain. They are evinced in metadiscourses positing a specific nexus to politeness and an established moral order of authority and deference—addressing the interlocutor by means of a form conveying their due rank, which is in line with Carreira’s 2004 view that EP forms of address are linguistic encoders of deference and hierarchy. This is supported by the recurrence of fixed idioms (*‘você is in the stable’*) and a first-order lexicon of (im)politeness (*falta de educação, respeito, bronco. . .*) encapsulating the nexus between the selection of a form of address and a third-layer moral order. In addition, the recurrence of intrinsic impolite values is attributed to the form *você* and the negative evaluations of the football manager’s own identity (uneducated, boorish) when he failed to

meet expectations of perceived appropriate in his selection of address, which is seen as a linguistic operation ideally performed by diligently following pre-established rules. This would fit discernment politeness as posited by Ide (1989), but as the results also illustrate, knowledge of these rules is nebulous. It is prevented by the opacity of a system where the semantic meanings of address are difficult to grasp not only because of its grammatical second-person and third-person contradictions but also because of the spanning pragmatic values attributed to forms of address and mostly to *você*. This lends support to the view that discernment can be suitably seen as a mental inferential effort (Kádár and Paternoster 2015; Paternoster 2024) to arrive at appropriate forms hinging on speakers' ingrained cultural values which result from their socialisation and upbringing on the one hand, and their assessments of particularised contexts and interlocutors on the other.

However, metacomments dissociating the selection of address from the expression of politeness contravene the quest for pre-established rules imposed by discernment politeness. Fixed phrases such as 'a country of doctors' seconded by suffixation (*respeitinho*, *doutorismo*...) and loaded nouns ('pedantry', 'vanity') constitute a set of linguistic encoders of a heavily critical view of the EP address system, rejecting a negatively evaluated moral order which is excessively reliant on authority and formalisms. This is tied to the conceptualisation of *você* as a generally appropriate form and to negative evaluations of nominal forms, which are further evinced in the metacomments, effectively separating forms of address from the communication of politeness. In fact, whilst *você* is undoubtedly the most contentious and pragmatically complex form, results show that it is not the only one subjected to negative assessments—nominal forms such as titles and/or honorifics are also negatively conceptualised as over-politic behaviour; in other words, the 'substantive' semantic specifications of nominal forms (Cintra 1972), particularly those pointing to rank and social hierarchy—such as 'Madam Prosecutor', which is an occupational title—are perceived as excessive for speakers less concerned with rigid form–interlocutor matching. When examining cognitive strategies of EP address forms, for example, Oliveira (2013) finds that nominal address formulas such as a 'senhora dona + FN' (Mrs. + First Name) are often described by speakers using metaphors of light/weight and that such formulae are deemed too 'heavy'. This negative assessment of the formality (taken to be the proliferation of form) of nominal address is connected to equally negative evaluations of an over-politic, 'enhanced use' of forms of address conceptualised as an unreasonable imposition in an egalitarian society.

The pronoun *tu* and third-person pro-drop can be construed as the only forms gathering some consensus if we accept the fact that these forms do not attract much attention from speakers as some kind of 'consensus'. Some metacomments, regardless of whether they condone Jorge Jesus for using *você* to address a prosecutor in court, restrict *tu* use to familiar and intimate circles, such as that which the commenter in (1a) states. ('Was he supposed to use *tu*?') seems to be positing by default—the only form that Jesus could not have used, presumably because of its familiarity, is *tu*. However, the possible advancement of the T dimension in EP is an avenue of future research deserving serious consideration; for example, Cook (2019) mentions a language of globalisation that may have extended the English 'you' to other systems, whilst Pires (2023) laments a *tu-você* dyad responsible for the increasing 'desertification' of the wealth of EP forms of address. If there is indeed a tendency towards a standardised bipartite address, this can perhaps be explained by the grammatical simplicity of *tu*, with its referential second-person meaning matching its equally second-person grammar, the forces of globalisation and a more democratic view of address intending to dilute linguistic encoders of power and rank such as nominal address. This would be in line with the progression of democracy in Portugal, which has been ongoing since 1974, and some metacomments in this study seem to corroborate this when they negatively evaluate the remnants of 'fascism' encapsulated in the excess of nominal forms.

These variegated perceptions of EP forms of address lead us to a core observation pertaining to the nature of EP systems of address themselves—its complexity does not cor-

roborate a binary T/V distinction since none of the third-person forms available (Cook 2013 ‘nominal format’), especially *você*, gather consensus as suitable candidates for the V, or polite, dimension. Some authors (Cook 1997, 2013, 2019, seconded by Roque and Pinto 2023) thus posit a N dimension, ‘a noncommittal platform’ (Cook 2013, p. 278) of neutrality, where retaining some informal and formal features of both T and V. *Você* could be a likely candidate for N address, were it not for its ‘shifty’ nature (‘*você movediço*’, or shifty, as Roque and Pinto 2023, p. 254 call it). Indeed, the disparate assessments of this pronoun evinced in many of the metacomments of this study preclude a true value of neutrality, which is best found in the pro-drop option or subject omission (Roque and Pinto 2023). Whilst a tripartite T – N – V categorisation of the EP system of address seems undoubtedly useful, it would nevertheless be important to further investigate the pro-drop option as an actual form of address for two reasons. Firstly, it seems doubtful that an interaction of some complexity can be conducted by resorting to subject omission without the need to ever resort to a more substantial form, either pronominal or nominal. Secondly, the options to fill the position of the omitted subject (in other words, to know what this substantial form would be) are not straightforward. As Oliveira (2009, pp. 419–21) explains, ‘the verb form used is the one corresponding the pronoun *você*, but the pronoun itself is not expressed’. Nominal forms are also grammatically sound possibilities to express the subject of a third-person verb. In both cases (either by dropping *você* or by dropping a nominal form), the third-person pro-drop remains as an avoidance or zero-form tactic to some extent but loses its value of neutrality if we accept that it needs to be indexed to an expressed subject, which the speaker is attempting to elide.

This brings us back to the concept of ‘crisis’ that Hummel (2020) applies to systems of address—what the EP system seems to evince to a great extent is the search for sensible solutions that seem very hard to find. The polarised conceptualisations of address uncovered in this study point to a need to find appropriate forms to fill the T, the V and certainly the N dimensions, but, with the exception of *tu* in the T dimension, there are no clear answers.

To counter binary distinctions that do not adequately capture the actual use of polite or impolite forms (and, we would add, neutral forms), Terkourafi (2023) suggests a language continuum between strategic or content-based politeness and non-strategic or form-based politeness. Strategic or content-based politeness comprises creative strategies whose polite value comes from their meaning, requiring reflexive reasoning so as to better achieve particular communication goals. Non-strategic or form-based politeness consists of a ‘closed repertoire’ of polite meaning derived from ‘habitually discharged’ forms. Between a strictly binary strategic and non-strategic politeness lies a middle ground comprising forms to achieve politeness that are not fully driven by the speaker’s intention and based on an established repertoire of forms, but nor are they strategic and depending on the speaker’s agency. Applied to forms of address, this middle ground could be construed as the N platform that Cook (1997, 2013, 2019) argues for, providing a continuum linking the T dimension to the V dimension. In our view, this continuum could be useful to underpin not only the importance of discernment and normativity in EP address but also to better understand the T–N–V dimensions. Further research on EP forms of address and their nexus to unstable values of politeness would benefit from this view that speakers operate in social contexts and make their choices in a continuum ranging from established scripts of verbal behaviour to ‘agentive’ creativity. According to Jorge Jesus’s ‘habitually discharged’ repertoire, *você* would be adequate to address a prosecutor and was probably part of form-based politeness, with little agency involved. According to the judges, the setting required a more restricted selection of form, and Jesus breached established rules and repertoires by supposedly asserting his agentive volition when he used *você*. This clash of evaluations regarding expected forms of address, therefore, occurred due to the difficulty in drawing from socially shared, established scripts of verbal behaviour—the system of EP address seems too unstable to provide for that. Appropriate forms to fill the T, N and V dimensions would, thus, depend on speakers’ perceptions of particular forms of address. For example, if the favourable emic assessments of *tu* are confirmed and

increased in the future, this pronoun may stand to become part of a N-dimension repertoire whilst preserving its connotations of intimacy (which, in fact, is in line with a tendency observed by Cintra as early as 1972, predicting the expansion of *tu* beyond its restricted circle of intimacy). The same can be said for *você*, the expansion of which Cintra (1972) also predicted and has been equally suggested by Cook (2013), and which many speakers already perceive as dissociated from impoliteness and appropriate in a range of situations.

In summary, and by focusing on speakers' metadiscourses of address, this study uncovered at least part of the sociocultural foundations of the complex system of address in EP. These foundations are unstable and preclude socially shared norms of address, torn as they are between the following polarised conceptualisations: a politeness of discernment positing intrinsic politeness and the meaning of forms, thus linking address to a moral order of normative expectations based on pre-established rules of sociolinguistic appropriateness (leading to the outright rejection of *você* as intrinsically impolite); on the other hand, there is the rejection of the nexus form/politeness whilst criticising a failing moral order marred by excessive hierarchy and authority which is, thus, conceptualised as contrary to the demands of an egalitarian society (leading to the negative evaluations of nominal forms and to the acceptability of *você*). A metadiscursive examination has therefore allowed this study to reveal two truly conflicting sociocultural views underpinning the disparate evaluations and perceptions of EP address 50 years after the 1974 'Carnation' Revolution—the concern for abiding by established rules and respecting hierarchy, and the concern for more egalitarian, and necessarily less complex, linguistic address forms pointing to a less authoritarian path.

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Notes

- ¹ The newspaper articles on Jorge Jesus using *você* in court can be found by following these links: *Jornal de Notícias*, 20 October 2020: <https://www.jn.pt/justica/jesus-tratou-a-procuradora-por-voce-porque-e-que-nao-deve-faze-lo-12942310.html>, accessed on 17 July 2023; *Tribuna Expresso/Sic Notícias*, 20 October 2020: https://tribuna.expresso.pt/football-leaks/2020-10-20-Jesus-tratou-insistentemente-a-procuradora-por-voce-os-tres-magistrados-avisaram-no-que-era-senhora-procuradora.-Foi-repreendido?fbclid=IwAR1cSzYcKJE5Sz4iZ6BqZWk_3q3Vpf9tUVzJSrvSkb1r3ml6p4MBk60hENg, accessed on 17 July 2023; *Tribuna Expresso* Facebook post: https://www.facebook.com/jornalexpresso/posts/10158385969272949/?locale=ms_MY. Last accessed on 17 July 2023.
- ² The tweets posted by mainstream media outlets are available here: CNN Portugal—<https://twitter.com/cnnportugal/status/1318555212974608395>, accessed on 17 July 2023; TVI Notícias—<https://twitter.com/tviultimas/status/1318487303476609024>. Last accessed on 17 July 2023.
- ³ The link to the article posted on broadsheet *Expresso* Facebook account on 20 October 2020 is: https://www.facebook.com/jornalexpresso/posts/10158385969272949/?locale=ms_MY. Last accessed on 23 July 2023.
- ⁴ An important proviso is to be added—the frequency list was run based on lemma; this means that the ensuing concordance lines capture both masculine and feminine forms—*o senhor/a senhora; doutor/doutora*, etc.

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