languages

Special Issue Reprint

Perception and Processing of Address Terms

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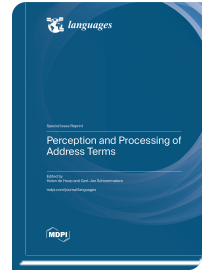
In many languages, speakers have a choice between a formal and an informal form when addressing others. The choice between these forms depends on several factors such as age, gender, education level, religion, social distance, individual preferences, etc. To date, little research has been conducted into how the use of a formal or informal form is processed by those to whom it is addressed. It is generally believed that people who are addressed with a pronoun they perceive as inappropriate in a given context may feel uncomfortable or even offended. Notoriously, informal pronouns prevail on social media, both for individuals and companies, but whether a formal or informal form of address is perceived as positive or negative may depend on the context of use. For example, in personal communication between companies and customers, some customers may prefer to be addressed with their formal rather than their informal pronoun, while at the same time, consumers may value the informal pronoun more than the formal pronoun in product advertisements. This Reprint provides new insights on how the use of a formal or informal form of address may affect the addressee.

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