ADDRESS PRACTICES IN ACADEMIC INTERACTIONS IN A PLURICENTRIC LANGUAGE: AUSTRALIAN ENGLISH, AMERICAN ENGLISH, AND BRITISH ENGLISH

Maicol Formentelli and John Hajek

Abstract

Following the recent development of address research in pluricentric languages (Clyne et al. 2006), the present study describes address practices in English-speaking academic settings and pursues two main objectives: (a) to provide a profile of address patterns in academic interactions in Australian English; and (b) to compare address practices in higher education across the three dominant varieties of English, namely American English, Australian English, and British English. The data on Australian English are drawn from 235 questionnaires completed by students, who reported on the address strategies adopted by students and teaching staff in classroom interactions in an Australian university. Data on American and British academic settings were retrieved from the research literature on the topic. The findings show a high degree of informality and familiarity in student-teacher relations in Australia, where reciprocal first names are the default pattern of address at all levels. By contrast, in American academia the hierarchical organization of roles and the different professional positions are foregrounded and reinforced through an asymmetrical use of titles, honorifics and first names. Finally, the British university setting displays a non-reciprocal usage of first names and titles between lecturer and students, which gradually evolves into a more generalised reciprocal use of first names, usually after extended contact and collaboration. We argue that the distinctive patterns of address observed in the three varieties of English reflect diverse social and cultural values systems at work in different speech communities.

Keywords: Terms of address; Academic setting; Pluricentric language; Australian English; American English; British English.

1. Introduction

Each time people engage in communication, one of the crucial decisions they have to make is how they are going to address each other. According to the language, this may involve the use of a formal or an informal pronoun, a first name or a respectful title. Forms of address are central to social interactions; they mark interpersonal relations as intimate or distant, and set the tone of a verbal exchange as official, casual, friendly or aggressive. The choice of address pronouns and nouns may be partly determined by personal preference and attitude towards the interlocutor, but it also necessarily reflects the cultural values shared by society at large. It is thus crucial that speakers be aware of the rules governing address practices to avoid incurring some kind of social sanction, especially when they approach a language as learners or become involved in intercultural communication.

Current research dealing with European languages from a cross-linguistic perspective has underlined the considerable variation and variability in address practice in various interactional contexts, both diachronically and synchronically (among others Clyne et al. 2006, 2009; Schüpbach et al. 2007; Clyne 2009; Hughson 2009; Norrby and Warren 2012; Hajek et al. 2013; Norrby and Kretzenbacher 2014; Norrby and Wide 2015; Placencia et al. 2015; Vismans 2015). These studies have contributed to the development of a new, comprehensive approach to address that overcomes some of the limits inherent in the power and solidarity dichotomy established by Brown and Gilman (1960) at the early stages of address research. Particularly innovative in more recent times is the attention given to patterns of variation in pluricentric languages, that is, languages with two or more codified national standards like German in Germany, Austria and Switzerland or Swedish in Sweden and Finland (Clyne 1992), showing how the use of address terms reflects the distinctive ethos of different speech communities within the same language.

The present contribution lies within this approach and aims to describe some aspects of address practice in English, "the most pluricentric […] of all languages" (Clyne 2006: 99). Quite recently, findings from a survey on address and introductions in the context of international conferences have suggested that different cultural values systems underlie the usage and perception of address forms in Australian, American and British English (Kretzenbacher et al. 2013), while other studies have claimed that variability across national varieties of English also occurs in other contexts of communication (Goddard 2012; Schneider 2008). This study focuses on the domain of academia and in particular on the address strategies employed by students and teaching staff in classroom interactions. It draws on data collected in an Australian university and pursues two main objectives: (a) to provide a profile of address in academic interactions in Australian English; and (b) to compare patterns of address identified in Australian higher education with those described in previous studies on higher education in Britain and the United States. To our knowledge, no extensive studies have been carried out so far on address in English in the Australian academic context,[1] nor have address practices in the university setting been contrasted in any detail across different varieties of English.

Australian English is increasingly considered one of the three most influential epicentric varieties of English along with the British and American varieties, and plays a leading role as a linguistic model especially in the Asian-Pacific region (Schneider 2013: 51). Moreover, latest statistics bear witness to a dramatic increase in international student enrolments in Australian universities over the last two decades (from ca. 2400 in 1988 to ca. 245,000 in 2010, Banks and Olsen 2011: 95), and in 2012 the country hosted 6% of the world's foreign students (OECD 2014: 345). Very characteristic of Australian universities is a high proportion of international students compared to other Anglophone countries, with almost 18% of undergraduates coming from overseas (the UK is comparable with a rate of 17%, while the US are further down with only 4%, OECD 2014: 354). In all three cases, the bulk of such students are not first language speakers of English. The growing interest in Australia as a desired place to pursue

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[1] An exploratory survey on the same Australian institution was carried out by the authors of this paper in 2009 as part of a larger project on address in Italian and English (see §4.1. below). The English set of data has been included in this more extended study and is complemented with additional data collected from 2012 to 2015.

tertiary education brings to the fore an important aspect of everyday university life: The management of teacher-student relations in academic activities and the delicate issue of how teaching staff are to be addressed. If the social rules and conventions of address are clear to Australian students, though we think this is not necessarily so, the appropriate address strategy to use in the academic context might be unclear and challenging for students from a different linguistic and cultural background. Our aim is to shed some light on address patterns in the Australian academic setting, which may provide a useful guide for both resident and visiting students of English-speaking universities, while at the same time broadening our knowledge of address practice in the English-speaking world.

2. Address practice in English: An overview

The research literature on address, following Brown and Gilman (1960), traditionally acknowledges a binary distinction between V-forms and T-forms to indicate formal and informal strategies of address. In this regard, English constitutes an exception amongst European languages for its lack of a T/V dichotomy in the pronominal system and of a grammatical codification of politeness in its verbs (Helmbrecht 2013). The status of the single second-person pronoun *you* in English is however controversial. For Cook (2014) the single second-person pronoun *you* epitomises neutrality (N) in address, hence the need for a tripartite N-V-T framework of analysis. Similarly, Clyne et al. maintain that *you* is a default neutral pronoun that "fulfils the functions of both T and V without being the equivalent of either." (2009: 38). Wierzbicka, on the other hand, claims that "[t]he English *you* keeps everybody at a distance" (2003: 47), though not to the same extent as V pronouns in other languages. In the academic context, the pronoun *you* can be exploited as an effective alternative to a formal title and an informal first name when addressing a lecturer. This strategy of avoidance in address practice is only apparently neutral, as the deliberate choice not to commit to either of the nominal forms offered by teachers may activate pragmatic inferences and feed asymmetry in classroom relations (Formentelli 2009a: 191-192).

The T/V dichotomy in English is encoded lexically by means of nominal forms that can be ordered along a scale of respect/distance and intimacy/familiarity: From honorifics (*sir*, *madam/ma'am*), personal or professional titles (*Mr*, *Mrs*, *Ms*, *professor*, *doctor*) generally followed by a last name or a full name, to first names and nicknames, and the large category of familiarisers and endearment terms (*mate*, *buddy*, *guys*, *honey*, *sweetheart*, *love*) (cf. Biber et al. 1999: 1108-1109; Dunkling 1990). The vast and heterogeneous repertoire of nominal address forms in English naturally leads to high sociolinguistic variation in use, within and across varieties of English. To quote a significant example, the exchange of first names among newly acquainted people is now considered the norm in American English (Murray 2002), while in British society it may still be perceived as awkward and inappropriate, especially by older generations (Bargiela et al. 2002: 4-5). Self- and other-identification in initial interactions among strangers also seems to follow very different patterns in the two English varieties, as asking and offering first names are "a much higher priority for Americans than for speakers from England" (Schneider 2008: 114). A wide range of variation also affects the nuances of meaning and the pragmatic functions of address forms. It is not

uncommon that the same vocative form is used to express opposite stances. The vocative *mate*, for instance, can be used to signal solidarity to both friends and strangers, but it can also turn into a powerful distancing device when it is combined with aggressive language (Formentelli 2007). In a similar way, Allan (2015) reports on the use of the racial slur *nigger* in films and points out how the intrinsically offensive term can be used as a marker of camaraderie among Afro-American people and, to a lesser extent, also in mixed groups of black and white speakers.[2]

When it comes to the academic context, the situation is not less complex. The repertoires available to teaching staff and students do not fully overlap (see figures below). Teachers have, for instance, access to potential address terms such as *young man/young lady* not available to students. On the other hand, students have to select the form of address for their teachers from among a whole gamut of expressions and combinations, many of which reflect the hierarchical organization of the institution. The honorifics *sir* and *madam/ma'am* encode a high degree of deference to faculty members. Other V-forms like *professor*, *doctor* or *Prof./Dr plus last name* explicitly acknowledge the addressee's academic role and professional attainments. The courtesy titles *Mr/Mrs/Ms/Miss* followed by a last name, on the other hand, are considered acceptable polite alternatives for teachers without a doctoral degree; the use of these titles for female lecturers, however, may at times reinforce stereotypes linked to gender, age, marital status, and sexual orientation (Fuller 2005; see also Pauwels 2001). Finally, the use of a lecturer's first name is also an option for students, and, if used, sets the relationship at a more informal and familiar level. More often than not, the rules of etiquette are not provided to newcomers to a university, nor do lecturers specify their preference for one or the other address form, so students have to surmise the appropriate form to use. The lack of clear instructions may further heighten variability in address practice in this interactional context.

3. Address practice in American and British academic settings

In what follows, a brief overview of research on address in American and British academic contexts is presented, as a background for the analysis of the data collected in Australia. The patterns of address described in each case study might differ slightly from what people do in other institutions within the same variety of English, as a result of the numerous countervailing factors underlying speakers' choices and preferences.[3] Nonetheless, findings related to local customs and practices constitute a valuable contribution to uncovering the multifaceted aspects of address and creating an overall picture that is valid on a more general level.

One of the first pieces of empirical research in this area dealing with academic relations dates back to the late 1990s, when Dickey (1997) conducted a series of interviews to identify forms of address and terms of reference used in American and

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[2] On the use of insults as solidarity markers and covert endearments in film dialogue see also Formentelli (2014).

[3] Indeed, it seems important to acknowledge that, when describing language practices in a speech community, one can only *ideally* consider them as the outcome of society as a unified whole. As far as address is concerned, variation and variability across speakers and similar contexts of interactions have been shown to be a relevant aspect of the phenomenon and need to be kept into consideration.

British universities. In her study informants reported that the generalised address form used towards students was first name. Only rarely were titles plus last name said to be used in addressing students and almost exclusively in very formal settings such as official faculty meetings. Address strategies towards the teaching staff were more variable and strongly influenced by the status of the teacher and student's year level at university, but also by institutional norms and personal preference. First names were reported being used by undergraduates to graduate student teachers, and less frequently to professors, for whom a title plus last name was felt to be more appropriate. Graduate students, on the other hand, were more likely to call a lecturer by his or her first name (Dickey 1997: 265). Since data on the two varieties of English are not discussed separately in the study, with the exception of some brief comments, it is difficult to discern distinctive aspects of American and British address. From Dickey's data, however, it is of little doubt that power relations encoded by different positions in the academic hierarchy are foregrounded in the choice of address terms.

Shifting the focus to an American college in California, Wright (2009) investigates students' reported strategies of address towards their professors in a variety of communication modes to verify to what extent the process of informalisation of address in American society (cf. Murray 2002) also applies to academic relations. In accordance with Dickey (1997), the results show students' clear preference for V-forms in email, phone messages and face-to-face conversation, with the title *professor* as the default option, followed by generic titles (*Mr/Mrs/Ms*) and the academic title *doctor*. Lecturers' first names are preferred by only a minority of students, and almost exclusively to address teachers with whom they are familiar or whom they consider to have an open and friendly personality. Students seem to take opposite stances on the use of first names. Some welcome this practice as an indication of being on a more equal footing in the classroom; others criticise it, feeling that it implies unnatural intimacy. In spite of this, most of the informants also report having addressed one of their professors by his or her first name at some point in their academic career, which possibly indicates a gradual shift towards more informal relations over time.

The assumptions made by student informants based on the address form selected by lecturers for themselves and explicitly stated at the beginning of the course are quite revealing (Wright 2009: 1085-1086). The title *professor* evokes great authority and professionalism, and is associated with challenging but enjoyable courses. The V-form *doctor* also indexes great competence in the subject, but makes the instructor sound less approachable and friendly. Conversely, first names correlate with laid-back friendly lecturers and interesting courses, but they also convey the idea that the teacher is less experienced and less knowledgeable in the field. No explicit information is provided on the address strategy used towards students, but some of the comments in the discussion of findings allude to a generalised use of first names.

A similar composite picture of address in American tertiary education is given in a very recent study on a state university in the American Midwest (Burt 2015). Data from direct observation and focus group interviews reveal that V-forms (academic or generic titles plus last name) are likely to be the only option for students when addressing lecturers, and lecturers themselves encourage this formal address practice to establish and maintain the appropriate social distance and acknowledge the power difference, especially with undergraduates. Graduate students occupy an intermediate position in the academic hierarchy and may be invited by lecturers to use first names,

even though not all of them profess to be comfortable with the T-form. The study also reports on the difficulties experienced by many undergraduate students in identifying the appropriate V-form to use with graduate teaching assistants and faculty members, due to the lack of explicit instructions, and the variety of available forms and their different connotations. From the opposite perspective, both undergraduate and graduate students are generally addressed by their first names by professors. More formal options like *Mr/Ms plus last name*, when used by the teaching staff, occur only rarely and are regarded by students as awkward and potentially offensive.

The preference for V-forms in addressing lecturers is also documented in British academic interactions explored by Formentelli (2009a), where students report approaching their lecturers with an honorific or a title plus last name, and only infrequently with first names. The shift from formal to informal address, however, appears to occur more commonly when compared to the American setting, as many of the British informants, both undergraduates and lecturers, acknowledge a move from V-forms to T-forms over time, following an explicit indication or as a result of frequent interactions and collaborations (see also Clyne et al. 2009: 99; Bargiela et al. 2002; Bousfield 2008: 94). Some students, on the other hand, seem to resist lecturers' invitations to use their first name, and more generally avoid both T- and V-forms in face-to-face interactions, resorting to neutral attention-seeking expressions (e.g. *excuse me*) and non-verbal strategies (e.g. gestures and eye contact). Interpersonal relations are more informal with teaching assistants in charge of seminars and laboratories, with whom first name use is the default strategy. Finally, all interviewed lecturers and students maintain the use of first names towards students, while the analysis of some video recordings of classroom interactions shows that even more informal vocatives such as the familiariser *mate* or the collective expression *guys* are sometimes employed by the teaching staff (Formentelli 2009a: 188-190).

What emerges from these studies is evidence of an asymmetrical distribution of T- and V-forms in the student-professor dyad in both American and British academic settings, which signals speakers' wish to acknowledge and foreground the different roles and responsibilities. Both students and teachers seem to be comfortable with the non-reciprocal use of names and titles in academia, as it reflects the hierarchical organization of the institution and helps to maintain a professional relationship. Conversely, a symmetrical use of address forms seems to be a marked and more controversial option especially in the American context: A reciprocal exchange of V-forms attracts unfavourable comments from students for the unwanted social distance it may create, while being on first name terms with a professor is either welcomed positively by students or perceived as a cause of unease and embarrassment. Similarly, in the British setting, address equality encoded by mutual first names is the norm at the lower level of the academic ladder, but is partly resisted when the addressees hold a higher teaching position. In that case, students may, as noted above, avoid using address forms altogether and resort to the neutral pronoun *you* and non-verbal attention-seeking expressions instead. This avoidance strategy partially defers the shift to using lecturers' first names in the British context, which are nonetheless largely adopted by students once the relationship develops into a more familiar rapport. Finally, the studies above suggest a quite different approach to address by American and British academic staff. While the former seem to be more concerned with establishing and maintaining the right degree of social distance in class by introducing themselves with an academic title

and favouring the use of V-forms, the latter appear more relaxed in this respect and often encourage over time the use of T-forms on the part of students to promote a more equal relationship.

4. Address practice in the Australian academic setting

4.1. *Preliminary words*

From 2009 to 2015 questionnaires on address strategies in the Australian academic context were distributed to students enrolled in the same second- and third-year level courses in Italian as a foreign language at a large Australian university, as part of a larger ongoing project on address in English and Italian universities.[4] In the same period, similar questionnaires were handed out in two Italian universities to students of English as a foreign language. The main aim of the project was to explore and compare address practice in English and Italian higher education combining a native language (L1) and a foreign language (L2) perspective. Preliminary results on Italian L1 and L2 address practice have appeared in recent works (Formentelli and Hajek 2013, 2015), while the data on English L1 address are still mostly unpublished. In this analysis we will focus exclusively on patterns of address in English in general, lecture-based courses taught in English, relying on the set of data collected in Australia.

4.2. *The data*

To date we have collected a total of 235 questionnaires completed by undergraduate students at the Australian university in question.[5] Australian English is the mother tongue of the overwhelming majority of respondents (90+%). A few non-native speakers of English are also included in the sample as a reflection of the international profile of Australian universities. Students come from a variety of bachelor's degrees, including Arts (156), Biomedicine (4), Commerce (10), Environment (8), Music (8), Science (41) and others (8). This enables a broad view of address practice in different departments and disciplines. The sample is quite homogeneous re the age of respondents, with 214 students (91.1%) aged between 18 and 25 years and 21 (8.9%) who are either older or did not provide their age. Gender distribution is uneven with 181 female students (77%) and 52 male students (22.1%). Two respondents did not indicate their gender (0.9%).

The questionnaire on English academic address was deliberately limited to one page to encourage accurate completion of all its parts. It opened with four close-ended questions designed to collect quantitative data on the address forms used in classroom

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[4] The questionnaires were also integrated into the teaching program – for students to reflect on and consider address practices in Italian L2 and English L1 classroom settings.

[5] Questionnaires as instruments for data collection have some intrinsic limitations (e.g. informants' projecting a positive self-image or providing responses they believe are expected from the researcher), but constitute a quick and effective way to gain a picture of the use of address strategies in the classroom, considering that these forms might not be frequent enough to be easily captured through audio and video recordings of naturally occurring interactions.

interactions. Informants could tick more than one box according to their personal experience, and multiple responses to the same question were therefore expected, given that students engage with various teachers during their studies. In the questions on how students address the teaching staff, a distinction was made between lecturers (of all ranks) and teaching assistants (tutors) in order to identify possible differences in address linked to the academic position of the interlocutor. In contrast, due to space limitations, we were only able to ask specifically about lecturers (and not teaching assistants) in the question concerning address strategies used towards students, assuming a more homogeneous behaviour with respect to the latter (cf. the findings of previous research presented in §3 above).[6] Moreover, one of the questions aimed to assess whether lecturers give students an indication of the address form they prefer, an aspect that previous studies have shown to be crucial in the management of academic relations. The second part of the questionnaire featured two open-ended questions to elicit comments on the social parameters influencing speakers' choices, such as age, professional status, level of familiarity, and so forth. Two closing questions shifted the focus to students' experience of address with teachers in secondary school to allow a comparison of address practices across contiguous levels of education.

4.3. *Results*

For the question "Which of the following address strategy do you use when you interact with your lecturers?" informants were provided with a range of options, encompassing V-forms (*sir*, *Prof. plus last name*, *Dr plus last name*, *madam/ma'am*, *professor*, *doctor*, *miss*, *Mr/Mrs/Ms plus last name*), T-forms (first name), and avoidance strategies (*excuse me* (without any name), I raise a hand). A blank space also allowed students to add strategies that were not explicitly listed. Students' responses are plotted in Figure 1, where V-forms are listed first and are followed by T-forms and avoidance strategies.

The graph captures the complex repertoire of strategies students draw upon when addressing their lecturers. First name turns out to be the form that the majority of informants reported using in interaction (152 respondents, 64.7%), which makes the T-form the default strategy adopted towards lecturers. V-forms lag far behind and reach a peak in the case of *Prof. plus last name* (27 respondents, 11.5%). The combination *Dr plus last name* and the honorific *sir* follow with 22 respondents (9.4%) and 20 respondents (8.5%) respectively. Other V-forms score much lower rates and include the title *professor* (12 respondents, 5.1%), *Mr/Mrs/Ms plus last name* (12 respondents, 5.1%), *miss* (7 respondents, 3%), *madam/ma'am* (6 respondents, 2.6%), and *doctor* (2 respondents, 0.9%). Avoidance strategies, on the other hand, seem to find favour with students, who frequently reported using the summons *excuse me* (127 respondents, 54%) or putting their hand up (119 respondents, 50.6%) to get the attention of their teachers without necessarily using a vocative form.

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[6] This is not to suggest that address practices from teachers to students are free from variation, as our data also partly show.
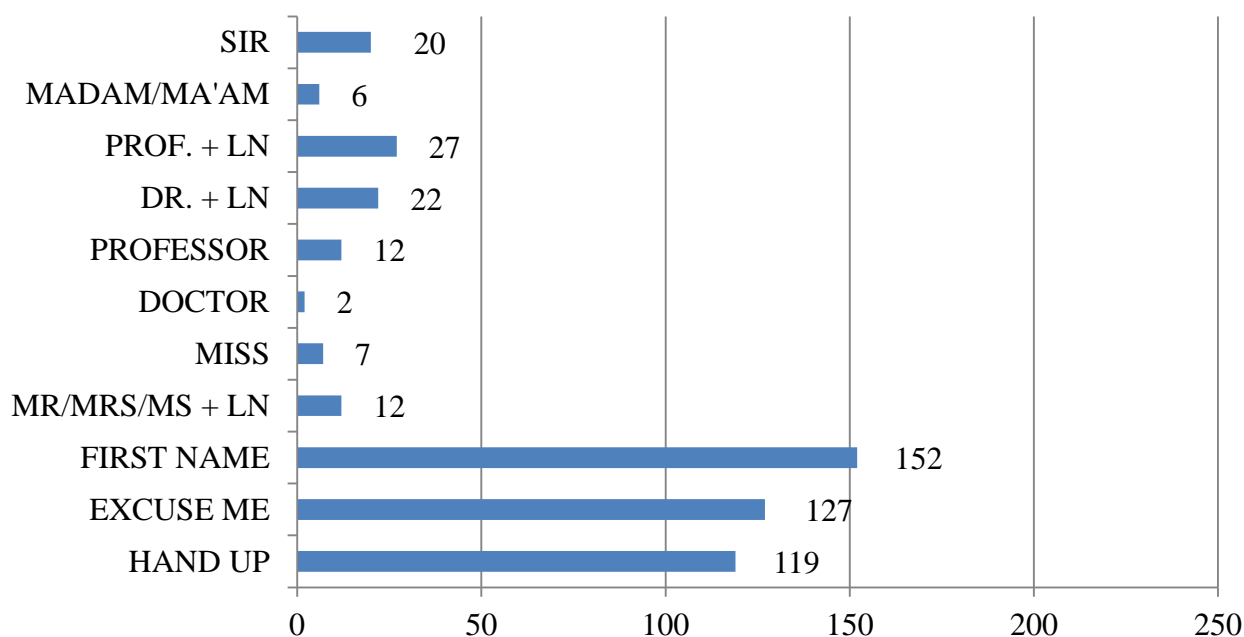
Figure 1 – Reported address strategies by students to lecturers (LN = last name)

Delving further into the data, it is possible to gain a clearer picture of students' address practice. In Table 1 informants' answers are organised in a different fashion, distinguishing among: (a) students who selected at least one V-form but no T-forms; (b) students who selected at least one T-form (in this case first name) but no V-forms; (c) students who selected both one T-form and one or more V-forms; (d) students who did not select any nominal form (and opted for one or both avoidance strategies).

Table 1 – Reported address strategies by students to lecturers

	No. of respondents	Rate
V-forms only	29	12.3%
T-forms only	114	48.5%
T-forms & V-forms	38	16.2%
No nominal forms	54	23.0%
Total	235	100.0%

The preference for T-forms over V-forms is evident in the distribution of data, as 48.5% of informants reported using first name as the sole strategy in addressing lecturers against 12.3% of respondents who only selected titles and honorifics. Informality in academic relations is thus taken for granted by almost half of the students who took part in our study. A reasonable number of informants also reported employing both T- and V-forms (16.2%) in addressing lecturers, which is likely to account for the shift from V-forms to first names as the relationship between the teacher and the student reaches a greater level of familiarity, or may simply reflect the use of different forms for different lecturer addressees due to the influence of social and contextual variables like age, professional status, level of familiarity, setting, and so forth (see §4.4. below). Finally, 23% of informants opted for verbal and non-verbal summonses that do not require the use of lecturers' names or titles. Quite interestingly, this is the second most commonly

reported strategy and indicates that students may decide not to use nominal forms altogether when interacting with a lecturer to avoid expressing either formality or informality. All in all, the distribution of forms in our questionnaires suggests that, alongside a prevalent pattern of informality conveyed by first name usage, a certain degree of variation and uncertainty seem to characterise students' address practice towards lecturers, which does not exclude the use of more formal strategies.

The patterns of address reported by students when they were asked what strategy they would use in interactions with teaching assistants/tutors are tendentially different, as can be observed in Figure 2.

A much higher degree of familiarity emerges as an intrinsic quality of students' relationships with teaching assistants, as shown by the dramatic increase of preferences for first names (209 respondents, 88.9%) and the considerable drop in the figures for all types of V-forms, which range from 2 to 8 respondents (0.9% - 3.4%). This might be explained by the fact that teaching assistants are closer to students in terms of age and academic status, as they are typically younger than lecturers and often undertaking postgraduate studies. Verbal and non-verbal summonses are still rather significant strategies for students, but are reported with slightly lower frequency (95 and 110 responses, 40.4% and 46.8% respectively) compared to classroom interactions with lecturers (127 and 119 responses, 54% and 50.6% respectively).
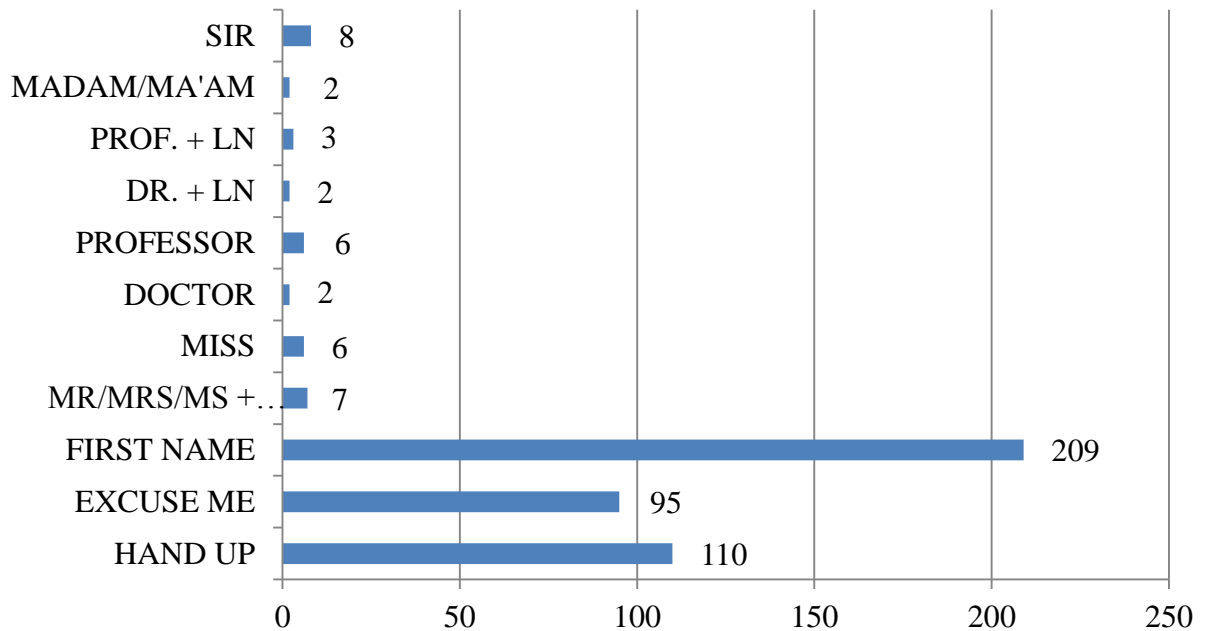

Figure 2 – Reported address strategies by students to teaching assistants/tutors (LN = last name)

Patterns of address towards tutors are also more consistent across the sample: Students are much more likely to converge towards T-forms as the default option. 196 of 235 informants (83.4%) stated that first name is the only address strategy they would use, while only 13 respondents (5.5%) reported using both T-forms and V-forms, and as few as 8 respondents (3.4%) selected one of the V-forms as the sole appropriate strategy. Use of avoidance strategies alone is also scaled down to 18 respondents

(7.7%), which indicates students' lower degree of uncertainty regarding how to address younger members of the teaching staff holding lower academic positions. Our results may also be reflective of the greater interaction made possible by smaller group teaching – which is more likely to occur in tutorials than in lectures. Table 2 shows the distribution of responses across informants.

Table 2 – Reported address strategies by students to teaching assistants/tutors

	No. of respondents	Rate
V-forms only	8	3.4%
T-forms only	196	83.4%
T-forms & V-forms	13	5.5%
No nominal forms	18	7.7%
Total	235	100.0%

In order to gain a better understanding of how address practices are established in the classroom, we asked informants the following question: "Have your lecturers ever told you how to address them (e.g. with first name, title plus last name, *sir*, *madam*, etc.)? If yes, how?". Only 83 informants (35.3%) answered affirmatively, while 151 informants (64.3%) ticked the 'no' box. Among the positive responses, the most frequently reported option was first name (67 respondents, 80.7%), followed by title plus last name (6 respondents, 7.2%), both first name and title plus last name (5 respondents, 6%), and unspecified answer (5 respondents, 6%). What we gather from these figures is that the use of T-forms towards the teaching staff is a practice that is well-established and encouraged in the Australian academic setting, but only partly decided from above, as most students seem to have a very clear idea of which form to select without explicit directions.

Moving to the opposite end of the student-instructor dyad, students were asked to report on the address strategies adopted by their lecturers towards them in classroom interactions. The options included T-forms (first name, the collective vocative *guys*), V-forms (*sir*, *madam/ma'am*, *miss*, *Mr/Mrs/Ms plus surname*, *young lady/young man*, full name, surname), summoning expressions (*excuse me*), gestures (pointing), and other strategies that informants might want to add to the list. Responses to the question are plotted in Figure 3.

T-forms are by far the forms most commonly employed by lecturers to address students, who are frequently called by their first name (192 respondents, 81.7%) or by means of the informal collective vocative *guys* (106 respondents, 45.1%). More variation is recorded in the usage of V-forms, which were nonetheless infrequently reported and regarded as marked. Both full name and last name only occur six times in our results (2.6%) and are likely to be used by lecturers to identify a specific student rather than to keep the interlocutor at a distance. A certain degree of respectful detachment may be encoded to students by means of *Mr/Mrs/Ms plus last name* (5 respondents, 2.1%), and the honorifics *sir* (2 respondents, 0.9%) and *madam/ma'am* (1 respondent, 0.4%), but once again these forms appear very rarely in the responses. The vocatives *miss* (12 respondents, 5.1%) and *young lady/young man* (25 respondents, 10.6%) qualify as the most frequently reported strategies among V-forms. One may wonder if these terms are really used to signal formality and respect in the classroom or

are rather uttered with a jocular and ironic tone.[7] Finally, 36 informants (15.3%) reported being addressed with the summoning expression *excuse me*, and 19 students (8.1%) recalled being singled out by lecturers with a gesture. The use of these strategies on the part of lecturers does not seem to be a way to avoid calling students by name or other nominal expressions, but simply reflects the fact that in large lecture-based courses it is difficult to have access to the identities of each single student. This hypothesis is confirmed by some of the alternative strategies described by students in the blank space provided in the questionnaire, which include a physical description of the addressees or their location in the room (e.g. "you in the pink, in the back row"- female student, BScience, 18-25 years old).
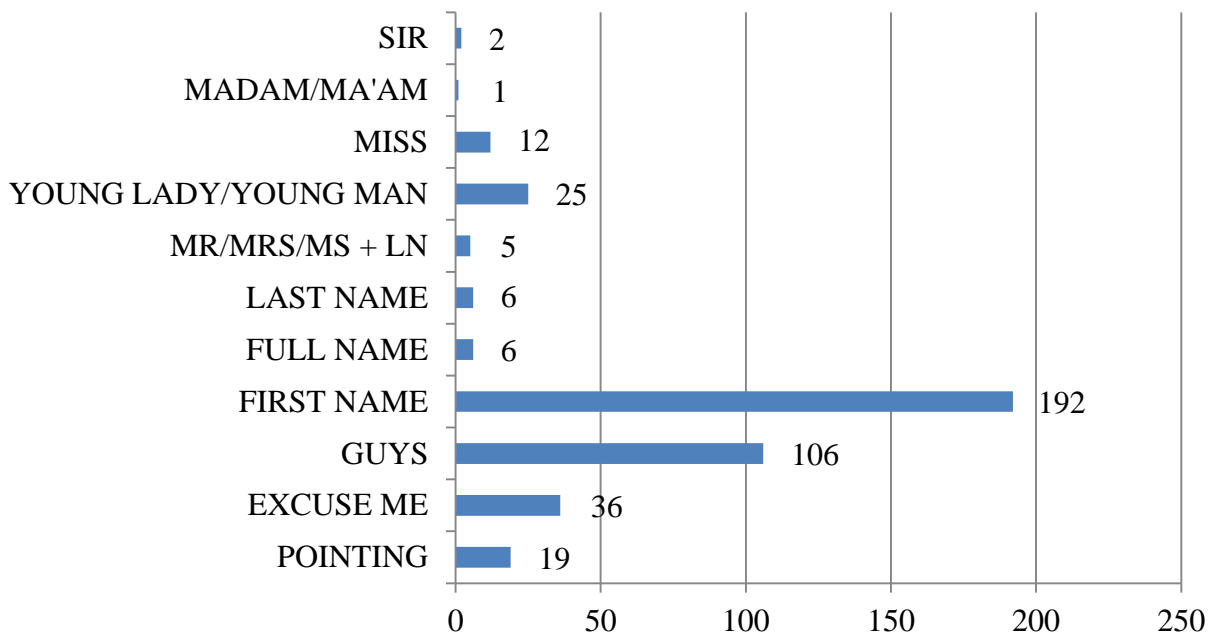

Figure 3 – Reported address strategies by lecturers to students

The great majority of students reported being addressed exclusively with first name or other T-forms (187 respondents, 79.6%). Both T-forms and V-forms are recorded in 35 questionnaires (14.9%), in which first names and the collective vocative *guys* occur with surnames, full names and various types of honorifics. Seven respondents (3%) reported using no nominal forms, and 6 students (2.6%) claimed that they only receive V-forms from their lecturers (i.e. the vocatives *miss* and *young man/young lady*). These figures are included in Table 3, which also features the rates already shown in Table 1 and Table 2 for the sake of comparison.

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[7] Indeed, the terms *young lady* and *young man* may be found to be diminishing and patronising, especially when used to address or refer to middle-aged and late middle-aged people (Kotzin 2009; Patterson 2013).

Table 3 – Reported address strategies to lecturers and teaching assistants/tutors by students, and to students by lecturers

	Address to lecturers	Address to teaching assistants	Address to students by lecturers
V-forms only	12.3%	3.4%	3%
T-forms only	48.5%	83.4%	79.6%
T-forms & V-forms	16.2%	5.5%	14.9%
No nominal forms	23.0%	7.7%	2.6%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.1%

From the data summarised in Table 3, we can draw some conclusions on address patterns in the Australian academic setting. A generalised usage of T-forms in classroom interactions stands out, instantiated in the widespread use of first names and the collective vocative *guys* by lecturers to students (up to 94.5% of responses if we sum the rates of the categories 'T-forms only' and 'T-forms & V-forms') and vice versa (up to 64.7% in addressing lecturers and 88.9% in addressing teaching assistants, again merging 'T-forms only' and 'T-forms & V-forms'). Symmetrical patterns of informal address are prominent in teacher-student relationships and are especially noticeable when teaching assistants are in charge of classroom activities. While the effect of symmetricality is weaker in student-lecturer interactions, it is still preferred (albeit to a lesser degree) all the way up to the top of the academic hierarchy. To a lesser extent, V-forms are also used in addressing lecturers (28.5% adding 'V-forms only' and 'T-forms & V-forms'), and more rarely to teaching assistants (8.9% combining the same two categories). Hence, asymmetrical patterns of address are also likely to occur in class, albeit not frequently, whenever students address their lecturers and tutors with titles and honorifics, but receive a first name or an equivalent T-form in return. Asymmetry does not seem to be fostered by the teaching staff, since we observed that first names are highly encouraged on their part. We can hypothesise some influence from the address practice at work in secondary schools, where asymmetrical address is the norm and is deeply ingrained: V-forms are overwhelmingly used to address teachers who respond with students' first names according to our informants. We expect that some of the younger students in their early years at university continue to refer to that model before gradually moving to more informal modes of address as their studies progress. Finally, a small proportion of V-form usage towards students is also reported by informants and may lead to reciprocal use of V-forms in the classroom. We also observed, however, that such forms for students mostly include vocatives like *miss* and *young man/lady*, which are prone to be used with an ironic tone and may thus be attributed to jocular friendliness rather than to distancing respect.

4.4. *Sociolinguistic and contextual parameters*

Qualitative data on the sociolinguistic parameters that guide speakers in the choice of address forms were elicited in the second part of the questionnaire to gain a deeper understanding of the patterns of variation in address practices in the Australian academic setting we explored. First of all, informants were asked to comment on the following question: "Have you noticed any difference in the way you address in English the different teachers of your course (e.g. according to age, professional status, gender,

level of familiarity)?". More than half of the informants (126 respondents, 53.6%) provided a negative response, and very often specified that all lecturers and tutors are addressed by their first name. A positive answer was given by 85 informants (36.2%), while 24 (10.2%) did not reply to the question. These figures indicate that, while the majority of students do not notice any variation in addressing the teaching staff and simply adopt the same strategy with everybody, about one third of students realise that there is room for variability in address in academic interactions based on social factors.

According to the comments of those who responded affirmatively, three main parameters can be regarded as particularly important when students have to decide which address form is more appropriate for a teacher: (a) age; (b) professional status; and (c) level of familiarity.

Thirty-five respondents reported that the age difference between student and teacher sometimes influences address practices; the interaction with an older lecturer or instructor, for instance, may prompt the use of more formal terms, see (1) and (2) below, or of avoidance strategies (3).

(1) Yes, older teachers get more respectful titles, e.g. *sir*, *Mr plus last name*. (Male student, BScience, 18-25 years old)
(2) Sometimes it differs with age and I will use *Mr plus last name* or *Ms plus last name* instead of a first name. (Female student, BArts, 18-25 years old)
(3) If is someone older/of a high title I might omit the name and just say *excuse me*. (Female student, BEnvironment, 18-25 years old)

The professional status of the interlocutor is also a defining parameter in address (33 respondents) and was sometimes mentioned in the comments along with age (e.g. in (3) above), since more established lecturers are generally older while tutors are typically younger. Some students reported using the appropriate title when lecturers have one (4), while tending to approach tutors in a more casual and personal way, especially if they are postgraduate students (5); others specified that more formal language is only used in addressing professors who hold a position of authority within the academic hierarchy, such as the dean of the faculty (6).

(4) If they have a title e.g. *Dr*, *Professor*, I generally use it. (Female student, BCommerce, 18-25 years old)
(5) It depends on their professional status (Doctor or student), and if they are a tutor (more of a casual address). (Female student, BEngineering, 18-25 years old)
(6) With my professors it is very informal, but if I address a professor with a higher position, e.g. dean of faculty, when I send a letter or an email I will use a more formal language, e.g. *Dear* rather than *Hi*. (Female student, BArts, 18-25 years old)

The level of familiarity with the interlocutor is also another central factor of address variation (23 respondents). It partly helps us to explain the shift from formal to informal strategies reported in the questionnaires, but also to account for avoidance strategies in address. Some students commented that they move from title plus last name to first name when they get to know their lecturers better (7) or if they have worked with them closely (8). For others the V-form is not an option and they are inclined not to use any

name until the relationship reaches a reasonable level of familiarity that entails the use of first names (9).

(7) I tend to address them using *prof. plus last name* when I first meet them and if familiarity increases considerably first name. (Female student, BArts, 18-25 years old)
(8) Yes, in English I will address someone by either their first name (if I have worked closely with them) or *professor*. (Female student, BScience, 18-25 years old)
(9) The more familiar I am with the teacher the more likely I am to use their first name as opposed to not use their name at all. (Male student, BArts, 18-25 years old)

The second question informants were asked to answer concerned the sociolinguistic parameters influencing address choice and variation in addressing students. It was worded as follows: "Have you noticed any difference in the way different teachers of your courses address you in English (e.g. according to age, professional status, gender, level of familiarity)?". Compared to the previous question, the proportion of negative responses increased substantially (159 respondents, 67.7%), in accordance with the lower degree of variation in the address strategies towards students reported in the first part of the questionnaire. Conversely, the number of informants who provided an affirmative answer reduced sharply to only 42 informants (17.9%). Almost as many respondents (34, 14.5%) decided to leave the space blank.

Age qualifies as a relevant parameter also in addressing students (13 respondents). Two main patterns of variation surface from the comments in the survey, both linked to the age of the lecturer rather than the age of the student. Older teachers were sometimes found to be more formal than younger ones, but with different outcomes. On the one hand, some older lecturers and tutors were said to resort to V-forms like *miss* or *Miss plus last name*, see (10) and (11), in line with the address strategies summarised in Figure 3. Some lecturers, on the other hand, were reported to use first names and other T-forms, but opting for a slightly less casual language, for instance by avoiding shortened names (12) and very informal collective vocatives (13).

(10) Older teachers/tutors use *miss* when addressing me. (Female student, BArts, 18-25 years old)
(11) Sometimes older lecturers address me as *Miss plus last name*. (Female student, BArts, 18-25 years old)
(12) Yes, the older ones tend to use more formal language, maybe Harriet instead of Hatty. (Female student, course unknown, age unknown)
(13) Yes, the older they are the more likely to call you by your first name and not by informal address terms (e.g. *guys*). (Male student, BArts, 18-25 years old)

The level of familiarity is also responsible for address variation towards students (14 respondents) and teachers were said to become "more informal with more familiarity" (male student, BArts, 18-25 years old). According to our informants, however, the use of students' first names is often prevented by the fact that teachers do not have access to students' identities (14), especially in large and crowded lecture rooms. Collective T-forms may be alternatively used in such circumstances to convey a friendly attitude to the audience (15).

(14) Some tutors don't seem to know each student's name, so sometimes tutors just point. (Male student, BCommerce, 18-25 years old)
(15) In smaller class sizes lecturers may use the first names of students, otherwise they often address students collectively (e.g. *guys*). (Male student, BArts, 18-25 years old)

The use of first names by lecturers in class is therefore linked also to another contextual parameter reported in the questionnaires (7 respondents), namely the setting in which the interaction takes place.

5. Address in a pluricentric language: Australian, American and British English

The new insights on address in Australian tertiary education presented in this study, combined with the findings from previous research in British and American university settings, constitute a solid base for some general remarks on address practice in academia across three major varieties of English. We are aware that the absolute and relative frequencies of forms described in the various surveys cannot be contrasted, due to the diverse methodologies employed in data collection and analysis, but we are likewise convinced that a comparison of address practices is still feasible in terms of reciprocal and non-reciprocal usage of T-forms and V-forms. In fact, in spite of the moderate degree of variation that emerges as one of the traits of address in academia, clear patterns of regularity can be identified nevertheless, associated with speakers' personal experiences during their studies and/or teaching activities. In line with earlier work by other scholars, e.g. Goddard (2012), we argue that the patterns of address described for the academic institutions examined here can be seen to reflect the distinctive social and cultural values of different national varieties of the same pluricentric language (but see note 3 above).

Table 4 summarises what informants in the various studies considered to be the default address strategies (T-forms or V-forms) adopted by teachers and students in American, British and Australian academic interactions, and the default patterns of address that come to the fore by combining the responses.

Table 4 – Address patterns in American, British and Australian academic settings

	American academic setting	British academic setting	Australian academic setting
Default address strategy with lecturers	V-forms	V-forms/T-forms	T-forms
Default address strategy with teaching assistants	V-forms	T-forms	T-forms
Default address strategy with students	T-forms	T-forms	T-forms
Default address pattern	Non-reciprocal, asymmetrical	Non-reciprocal, asymmetrical/ Reciprocal, symmetrical	Reciprocal, symmetrical

The use of T-forms by lecturers and tutors in addressing students is a common practice in all of the English varieties examined, as a sign of teachers' attempts to establish a more familiar relationship in the classroom, possibly thought to be conducive to more favourable learning conditions. The picture becomes quite heterogeneous when it comes to students addressing members of the teaching staff, with considerable differences arising across the three varieties. In American English, V-forms are preferred to T-forms regardless of the position held by the teacher, and both lecturers and teaching assistants are generally addressed with an academic title or an honorific. The promotion of V-forms by lecturers and teaching assistants and, at the same time, the positive evaluation of titles by students (cf. Burt 2015; Wright 2009) prove that the rapid expansion in the use of mutual first names between speakers of different occupational statuses documented by Murray (2002) for American English has not yet reached the academic context, at least as far as student-teacher relations are concerned. The approach of British students in interactions with their lecturers is more varied; informants reported using V-forms, but shifting to T-forms as soon as the relationship evolves to a more familiar rapport, usually after frequent contact and extended collaboration. British teachers often encourage the use of their first name in class, even though not all students feel comfortable with this practice and some prefer to avoid nominal address forms altogether (Formentelli 2009a). This is indicated in Table 4 by the alternation between V-forms and T-forms as the default address strategy to lecturers in the British academic setting. By contrast, address forms used by students to address British teaching assistants are rather informal, the default address strategy being T-form use. The Australian academic setting qualifies as the most informal of the three, with a more generalised use of T-forms in addressing lecturers and teaching assistants. Such a practice does not seem to be particularly rigorously prescribed from above and in general students orient to it as the expected, well-established social custom.

As a result of this distribution of T- and V-forms, three main default patterns can be said to characterise address practices in the Anglophone academic settings in question: (a) Non-reciprocal, asymmetrical; (b) Non-reciprocal, asymmetrical/Reciprocal, symmetrical; and (c) Reciprocal, symmetrical. Pattern (a) best describes address practices in American universities, where the hierarchical organization of higher education and the different professional positions are foregrounded and reinforced by the use of nominal address forms. This may have to do with what Goddard (2012: 1046), when assessing American cultural scripts, describes as "an individual's entitlement to have and to project a positive self-image [...] and the obligation to recognise and respect the achievement and status of one's interlocutors". The British academic setting configures itself as a more dynamic domain as far as address is concerned, and can be summarised in pattern (b): In the British context, the non-reciprocal and asymmetrical use of T-forms and V-forms reported in lecturer-student relations co-exists with the reciprocal and symmetrical deployment of T-forms between students and teaching assistants. The mutual exchange of first names in the classroom, however, is not restricted to the lower ranks of academia and often finds its way to the upper echelons of the academic hierarchy, endorsed by professors and following the natural development of more personal and familiar relationships with students. The asymmetrical patterns of address in British higher education suggest that "the consciousness of social distinction and something like social hierarchy remain a predominant part of the social landscape" in the UK (Goddard 2012: 1041), while the

increasing symmetrical usage of T-forms constitutes a clear signal of a gradual shift through extended contact to a more generalised equality in address in the academic context. This gradual shift appears to be supported by a more notable tendency in British English also towards avoidance of nominal address through use of *you* and summoning gestures, for instance, which appears to be a mediating strategy to prevent explicit hierarchy marking. Finally, interpersonal relations in the Australian academic setting are more clearly shaped along pattern (c), with reciprocal use of first names most generally preferred in student-teacher interactions. In this symmetrical usage of T-forms across the different ranks of academic hierarchy lies one of the distinctive aspects of Australian interactional style, namely informality, instantiated in "the purposeful rejection of any overt show of respect, with implications of familiarity, friendliness, and equality" (Wierzbicka 2003: 111). That said, our results point to some variability nevertheless: Australian students do demonstrate some sensitivity to the age and status of their academic interlocutors – an indication that such factors can temper what is otherwise thought to be a pervasive egalitarian ideal.

6. Conclusion

We opened the paper by acknowledging the pervasiveness of address in communication and the great variation and variability that characterise the use of address forms, their meanings and the interpersonal stances they convey. Moving from the most recent developments in address research in pluricentric languages we aimed to describe English address practices in the domain of academia, with a primary focus on Australian tertiary education and, in a comparative fashion, on American and British university settings. Our findings show that different patterns of address are followed by academic teachers and students in the three main varieties of English, as a manifestation of the diverse social and cultural values at work in different speech communities. Due to limitations of space, this study has been restricted to the academic domain in these three dominant varieties of English, and our observations about pluricentric differences in academic address are perforce also somewhat generalized. We believe that many significant aspects of address still remain to be uncovered, in particular the possible degree and nature of variability within the same national variety due to such factors as regional identity, area of study, size of universities, and so forth. At the same time, an additional fruitful area for future research may be, for instance, the description of address practices in non-dominant varieties of English, such as the "world Englishes" (Kachru 1997) spoken in countries with English-colonial heritage in Africa and Asia (see for example Afful and Mwinlaaru 2012), or the address strategies employed in academic settings where English is adopted as a lingua franca (Formentelli 2009b: 235). The contact between English and local languages and cultures, as well as the kaleidoscope of speakers' linguistic and cultural backgrounds typical of these contexts of interaction are very likely to give rise to fascinating patterns of address that need to be documented in order to enrich our understanding of how different styles of address in English shape human relations on a global scale.

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