

An Analysis of the Generalization of the Address Term Teacher and Its Causes in Shandong Province, China

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Article Detail:	Abstract
<p>Received: 16 Jun 2025; Received in revised form: 09 Jul 2025; Accepted: 11 Jul 2025; Available online: 14 Jul 2025</p> <p>©2025 The Author(s). Published by International Journal of English Language, Education and Literature Studies (IJEEL). This is an open access article under the CC BY license (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).</p> <p>Keywords— Sociolinguistics, teacher, Generalization of address terms</p>	<p>The address term “teacher” is very common in Shandong Province. Taking Jining as an example, the author studies the phenomenon and causes of the generalization of the address term “teacher” by means of questionnaire survey. The research shows that most Jining citizens distinguish occasions when using “teacher”, and there is a consistent trend in the distinction of occasions. In addition to some service industries such as shopping malls, restaurants and hospitals affected by their own causes, the address term “teacher” can be used in almost any situation. But in different occasions, the use of “teacher” has different characteristics. As for the causes of the generalization of the address term “teacher”, in addition to the internal factors of language, there are other social factors. And the phenomenon of the generalization of the address term “teacher” will play a positive role in social development.</p>

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Literature Background

Nowadays, with convenient transportation and developed network, the opportunities and frequency of face-to-face and online communication have increased greatly. In order to promote better communication between people, it is particularly important to know how to address each other. This involves a lot of appellation generalization in Chinese, including the address term “teacher”.

Academic studies on the address term “teacher” mainly started from Huang Nansong (1988), focusing on the evolution of the address term “teacher”, such as Wang E, Yang Qing (2005), Tian Zhengping, Zhang Xiaoqian (2007), Xie Jingjing, Zhao Yingjie (2010) and

He Yanping (2011). At present, many scholars have conducted research from the perspectives of pragmatics, cognitive linguistics and sociolinguistics. For example, Guo Mo (2013) and Long Deyin (2021) analyzed the phenomenon and causes of the generalization of the address term “teacher” from the perspective of pragmatics, and Rong Chenpu (2005) and Yang Cheng (2014) analyzed the phenomenon and causes of the generalization of the address term “teacher” from the perspective of cognitive linguistics. From the perspective of sociolinguistics, most scholars, such as Zha Li Li (2010), Ji Yingchao (2016), Xu Chongqing (2021), Zhang Jun (2022) and Lin Xiufeng (2023), respectively analyzed the phenomenon and causes of the generalization of the address term

“teacher”. Among them, several scholars selected a certain region to carry out specific research on the address term “teacher”, such as Gao Xiaocen and Cui Shan-jia (2016) in Jinan City, Chen Huimin (2020) in Chongqing, and Zhang Xuanguang (2021) in Pingdingshan, respectively, on the phenomenon and causes of the generalization of the address term “teacher”.

1.2 Thesis Statement

The so-called "generalization", different types of addresses have different forms of expression. The generalization of social appellations refers to the use of address terms with certain characteristics of social relations to address people without such characteristics of social relations (Su Jing, Lu Jia, 2002). The word “teacher” belongs to the category of social appellation, and its social relationship is characterized by "imparting knowledge and educating students". Then, using the address term “teacher” to address those who do not actually directly "impart knowledge and educate students", in other words, using “teacher” to address non-teachers is a generalization of the address term “teacher”. From the end of the 20th century to now, “teacher” as a kind of address is quietly popular in society, which is to a certain extent a mirror of our social development and change, reflecting social life and mass cultural psychology. In Shandong dialect, the use of “teacher” is very common, with its wide range of use, high frequency and little restrictions. Regardless of gender, education, or professional status, almost anyone can be called a “teacher”. Strangers also call each other “teacher”.

1.3 Research Gap

It can be seen that the use of the address term “teacher” is very common, but there are few studies on this phenomenon in specific regions, especially the studies on Jinan, the capital city of Shandong Province, lack a comprehensive and systematic analysis of the

causes. Therefore, the author takes Jining of Shandong Province as an example to discuss the generalization of the address term “teacher” and analyze the causes behind it, including internal factors of language, and there are also social factors, historical factors and cultural factors.

II. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Model

In order to ensure the effect and quality of the investigation, the scope of the investigation mainly involves a main urban area and a county-level city of Jining, namely Rencheng District and Zoucheng. The respondents were mainly local people who were born and lived in Jining, as well as those who went out to work or study for less than one year and were less influenced by foreign dialects. Jining locals who go out to work or study for a long time, or foreigners who come to Jining to work or study, are not included in the survey. This paper adopts the method of observation, questionnaire and interview, mainly using the method of questionnaire. The method of observation can roughly know who uses the address term “teacher” in what occasions, so as to facilitate the preparation of questionnaires. The method of interview runs through the observation method and questionnaire method, interviewing people of different occupational types about the use of the address term “teacher”. The three methods are interrelated and complement each other.

2.2 Framework

First of all, in order to make the survey objects representative, comprehensive and accurate, the author determined specific survey objects, including the following six occupations: government workers, employees of enterprises and institutions, doctors, teachers, students, and individuals; Then, 15 to 35

people in each occupation were selected as survey objects, and a total of 150 questionnaires were issued, of which 147 were valid.

Secondly, the questionnaire mainly involves the following two aspects: on the one hand, the basic information of the respondents, such as gender, age and occupation. Second, the use of the address term “teacher” in Rencheng District and Zoucheng of Jining mainly includes the following questions: (1) Do Jining citizens often use “teacher” to address others? (2) Are Jining citizens often called “teacher” by others? (3) On what occasions does the generalization of the address term “teacher” appear? Therefore, the author selected 7 typical occasions in the questionnaire (when in government agencies, asking for directions, taking a taxi or bus, in shopping malls, in food markets, in

restaurants), and how the questionnaire fillers address others on these occasions. The purpose of the questionnaire survey is to comprehensively understand the personal information of the respondents and the use of the address term “teacher” (referring to the frequency of use of the address term “teacher” and the tendency of the people called “teacher” in terms of age and occupation), so as to analyze the extent and causes of the generalization of address term “teacher”.

Finally, after collecting relevant information, the author interviewed at least one person from each occupation to further inquire about the specific situation of the respondents using the address term “teacher”, including the causes and attitudes.

III. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

3.1 The User of the “Teacher” Address: the Saluator and the Addressee

Table 1. Distribution of gender, age, education and occupation of the sample

	类型	人数	百分比
性别	男	69	46.9%
	女	78	53.1%
年龄	18-35 岁	23	15.6%
	36-45 岁	57	38.8%
	46-55 岁	46	31.3%
	56 岁以上	21	14.3%
学历	初中及以下	58	39.5%
	高中（含中专）	40	27.2%
	大专及本科生	38	25.9%
	研究生及以上	11	7.4%
职业	国家机关工作人员	17	11.6%
	企事业单位员工	35	24.5%
	医生	23	15.6%
	教师	20	12.9%
	学生	35	23.8%
	个体	17	11.6%

Table 1 shows the distribution of sex, age and occupation for 147 valid samples. Of these samples, 73 percent frequently used the address term “teacher”; 24 percent occasionally use the address term “teacher”, but not very often; Only 3 percent never use the address term “teacher”. In addition, 65 percent are often referred to as “teacher”, 28 percent are occasionally referred to as “teacher”, and only 7 percent are never called “teacher”. In general, “teacher” is the most widely used appellation in Jining, and the generalization of the address term “teacher” is very common in Jining City.

About what occupations can be called “teacher”, there is a consistent trend among Jining citizens, as high as 73 percent of the citizens believe that everyone can be called “teacher” regardless of occupation. 26 percent said intellectuals should be called “teacher”, 11 percent said civil servants should be called “teacher”, and 10 percent said workers should be called a “teacher”, with only 2 percent saying that individuals and private business owners should be called “teacher”.

It is worth noting that 80 percent of Jining citizens

believe that everyone can be called by the address term “teacher”, while the choice of the remaining 20 percent is mostly determined by the occupation of the respondents themselves. Therefore, the address term “teacher” is not restricted by professional status. In Jining, no matter what kind of occupation the other party is engaged in, it can be called “teacher”. To sum up, the use of “teacher” in Jining city is very popular, mainly used to address middle-aged people and older than themselves, and does not distinguish gender and professional identity, almost everyone can be called “teacher”.

3.2 The Use of “Teacher” Addresses in Different Occasions

Within the language community, people have the same language attitude and follow certain language usage norms. While emphasizing the consistency of speech communities, we do not ignore the differences within speech communities. Instead, by examining this difference, we can learn more about the structures within speech communities. Table 2 is about the use of the address term “teacher” in different occasions.

Table 2. The use of “teacher” addresses in different situations

场合	称谓语	百分比	称谓语（被称）	百分比
问路	老师	44%	老师	48.1%
	亲属称谓语	35%	亲属称谓语	28.3%
	其他	21%	其他	23.6%
商场购物	导购员	26.6%	女士/先生	61.8%
	老师	25.3%	老师	14.5%
	其他	48.1%	其他	23.7%
餐厅就餐	服务员	70.5%	女士/先生	71%
	老师	9.4%	老师	10.8%
	其他	20.1%	其他	18.2%
医院	大夫/医生	92.7%	姓名	35%
	老师	3.6%	老师	29%

就诊	其他	3.7%	其他	35%
打车/ 公交车	师傅	72.1%	乘客	13.5%
	老师	25.1%	老师	56.4%
	其他	2.8%	其他	30.1%
菜市场 买菜	老板/老板娘	30.5%	亲属称谓语	33.2%
	老师	33.6%	老师	33.8%
	其他	35.9%	其他	33%
政府 机关 办事	名字/ 姓+职称	34.4%	名字/ 姓+职称	45%
	老师	45.2%	老师	33.3%
	其他	20.4%	其他	21.7%

Table 2 show that Jining citizens use the address term “teacher” in many occasions, but the frequency of use is different. Therefore, “teacher” is the most frequently used by Jining citizens. In the three occasions of "asking the way", "buying food in the vegetable market" and "working in the government organ", “teacher” is the first address, among which "asking the way" uses the “teacher” address the highest frequency, far higher than "master" and relatives address frequency. But in the service sector, things are different.

When shopping in the mall, people are more accustomed to calling the "shopping guide", while the service staff of the mall is more accustomed to calling the consumer "madam" or "sir". The address term “teacher” can only be ranked second, but the frequency gap with the former is not large, and it can be basically equal. When dining in a restaurant, the frequency of use of the “teacher” address is low, the mainstream address is "waiter" and "madam" or "sir", most people do not use the “teacher” address. In the hospital, people generally use "doctor", "doctor" and other proper nouns to call medical staff, but medical staff in addition to directly address the patient's name, often use “teacher” to call patients. When taking public transportation, "master" is the most important

address used by people to address the driver, followed by “teacher”, and “teacher” is the most important address when the driver addresses the passenger. The reason for this difference is closely related to the nature of work in the service industry. People in the service industry use a specific set of industry terms, depending on the nature of their work. At the same time, in order to show respect for consumers, service staff generally address consumers as "madam" or "sir". In addition, the driver this group is also more special, the general "master" is the most common name, but there are still many citizens also call the driver “teacher”.

3.3 Attitudes and Causes of the Use of Address Term “Teacher”

Finally, the author conducted an interview and found that most of the interviewees expressed their love for this address term, only a few others expressed no feelings, and no one hated this address term. As for the underlying causes, combined with the questionnaire data and the interview results, this paper analyzes the internal factors of language and many factors in society from the perspective of sociolinguistics.

3.3.1 The Absence of Address Terms in Chinese

With the development and changes of society, there may be some new occupations that have not existed before or some people with special identities. The social change is so rapid, but the development of the address is slow, which will cause a certain new occupation or a certain class of people with special status of the address lack. Although the absence of a certain type of address is inevitable, the whole process of interpersonal communication still has to operate normally, so people will temporarily borrow other address terms to replace the new occupation or new identity that has not been properly addressed, which reflects the self-regulating function of language. In this case, the appropriate address is usually chosen as the alternative object, and the frequency of use of the chosen address is thus greatly increased. In Shandong Province, the use of “teacher” is more frequent than other address terms, and the semantic generalization of “teacher” is also more obvious due to the trend of high-frequency words. At this time, “teacher” does not only refer to the person who imparts culture, technology, or is worth learning in a certain aspect, but can refer to some new occupation or new identity, or even any kind of person in any context. As mentioned above, when pedestrians ask for directions on the road, they do not know the age, identity and status of the other party, and they do not feel respectful enough to call them casually, and they also call them “teacher”. When asking a stranger for help, addressing the stranger as “teacher” is appropriate, which not only obfuscates the profession, avoids embarrassment, but also shows respect and courtesy.

3.3.2 The external causes of the generalization of the address term of “teacher”

3.3.2.1. The Recognition of the Status of Teacher” from Public

Public recognition of teacher’s social status has been one of the outstanding traditional cultures in China

since ancient times. Throughout the long history, although teachers have different sources, different identities, different knowledge abilities, and are limited by historical factors and class status, they all play a very important role. Therefore, except for some special historical periods, the social status of teachers has always belonged to the upper echelon. In addition, the modern society is getting more and more educated, and the use of “teacher” to address others is gradually generalized to show politeness and respect for each other.

3.3.2.2. The Five-thousand-year Influence of Confucianism

Shandong Province is known as the hometown of Confucius and Mencius, among which Jining is the birthplace of Confucianism. Confucianism demands that people treat others with respect and courtesy. Deeply influenced by Confucianism, people in Shandong like to address others as “teacher”. For example, in many occasions where the address term “teacher” is used, the relationship between the two parties is not close, and most of them are just strangers. For the smooth progress of communication, a polite address term should be chosen on the basis of the lack of address term to establish the starting point of communication. Based on this, “teacher” is a better choice. Because “teacher” is originally called someone who is worth learning in some aspects, it not only expresses the willingness to communicate, but also shows the attitude of respect.

3.3.2.3. The Consistent of Public Psychology of Contemporary Society

Language is the embodiment of the user's psychological activities and the carrier of the social relationship between the two sides. The diversification of occupations in modern society makes Chinese addresses difficult, and the word “teacher” solves the difficulty of addressing this

dilemma. Moreover, the statements such as “stylist Wang” and “makeup artist Li” do not conform to daily language habits, and give people a strange and arrogant feeling to a certain extent, and addressing “teacher Wang” and “teacher Li” is conducive to the formation of correct social distance. It shows the respect and appreciation of the user, does not discriminate against any occupation, and shows respect for the occupation that can create its own value.

IV. CONCLUSION

“Teacher” is currently the most widely used by Jining citizens, and is not limited by gender, education and professional status, almost all people can be called “teacher”. Most Jining citizens distinguish occasions when using the term “teacher”, and there is a consistent trend in the distinction of occasions. In addition to some service industries such as shopping malls, restaurants and hospitals affected by their own causes, the “teacher” address can be used in almost any situation. But in different occasions, the use of “teacher” address has different characteristics. As for the causes for the generalization of the address term “teacher”, in addition to the internal factors of the Chinese language, such as the lack of Chinese appellations, there are other social factors, such as teacher’s status is widely recognized by the public, the address term “teacher” are in line with the public psychology and the influence of Confucianism on Shandong for thousands of years. All these reflect the positive role of “teacher” appellation generalization. If the address term of “teacher” is understood and used by more people, it will promote the economic development and tourism development of Shandong, and also play a positive role in foreign exchanges, providing a respectful, polite and friendly beginning for better communication.

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