

# ADDRESS TERMS USED BY ONLINE SHOP SELLERS TO THEIR FEMALE TEENAGE CUSTOMERS AND YOUNG MOTHER CUSTOMERS IN FACEBOOK

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## Abstract

This study is about address terms used by online shop sellers to female teenage and young mother customers as well as their similarities and differences in Facebook. It is supported by theories of address terms by Crystal (2009), Kuntjara (2012), Wardhaugh (2006), and Holmes (2001). She observed eight online shops, four for female teenagers and four for young mothers, ten comments from each shop. The finding reveals three types of address terms were used to female teenagers and five types of address terms were used to young mothers. The similarities are all address terms are female type address terms; formal name did not occur; and several same address terms types occurred in both types of shops. The differences are kinship terms variation in online shops for female teenagers and young mothers; intimate name and other types occurred in online shops for young mothers; and the frequency of each type.

Key words: address terms, age, online shops.

Address term plays the most important part in communication since it affects whether our communication can be accepted by the interlocutor. In offline (face-to-face) communication, Holmes (2001) explains that language choice is influenced by some factors, such as the participant, setting, topic, and function (p.8). On the contrary, according to Crystal (2009), language used in the online world is more informal than the language used in the offline world and people usually do not have any considerations in using language in online (p. 82).

In this globalization era when the Internet has grown so fast, there is an emergence of a new kind of shopping named online shopping. In online shopping, it is rather difficult to know the customers' real identity because they do not meet to see each other. This fact makes the language used in online shops (include address terms) can be different from the language used in the face-to-face communication, like what Crystal (2009) states in his book (p.77). Because of that, the writer intends to know more about it by conducting this research.

According to Jakarta Globe (2010), the popularity of online shopping has grown in Indonesia since 2008. Then according to '99 New Social Media Stats for 2012' article by Cara Pring (2012), most of the online shops in Indonesia are operated in Facebook. In addition, from Singapore Management University in Digital Media in Indonesia's data (2011), we can see that Facebook is very popular among Indonesians. For those reasons, the writer chooses four online shops for female teenage customers and four online shops for young mother customers. The data are ten comments uttered by sellers to the customers in each shop. The writer does not limit the gender of the sellers because from what she has seen in the online shops, she feels that the address terms used by male and female sellers are more or less the same and there is no significant difference between them.

In her research, the writer combines some theories of address terms from several scholars. In short, there are five types of address terms, namely intimate name, formal name, intimate pronouns/kinship terms, initial endearment, and zero address terms.

The first type of address term, intimate name, expresses solidarity and minimizes status differences (Holmes, 2001, p.268). For example, a boss talks to her secretary, "Good morning *Sue*. Lovely day." Furthermore, Brown and Ford argue that intimate name usually indicates equality and familiarity (as cited in Wardhaugh, 2006, p.268).

As stated by Brown and Ford, the second type, namely formal name, can be classified into three kinds: title (T) alone (Professor, Madam), last name (LN) alone (Smith), title + last name (TLN) / multiple naming (Mr Smith) (as cited in Wardhaugh, 2006, p.268). In addition, they also

state that formal name indicates inequality and unfamiliarity. In addition, as stated by Holmes (2001), formal name is a kind of negative politeness which pays people respect and avoids intruding on them. (pp.268-69).

The third type is kinship terms. A quoted from Saeedeh Esmae'li's journal (2011), kinship terms are used to refer to family members and other relatives (p. 184). Moreover, one may use such terms to address non-relatives but familiar persons in order to show intimacy or respect.

The fourth type, initial endearment, is mostly used in English speaking countries rather than in Indonesian. The terms of endearment (e.g. dear, sweetheart, honey) usually show intimacy if used by the same status speakers (Kuntjara, 2012, pp.63-4).

The last type, zero address terms, is usually used when people are in doubt as to how to address another, they can avoid that by not using any address term at all (Wardhaugh, 2006, p.270).

Since the language used in offline (face-to-face) communication is rather different from online communication and online shops in Facebook is quite popular nowadays, this research was conducted to find out about the address types used in online shops for teenage customers and young mother customers as well as their similarities and differences.

## METHODS

To collect the data, the writer chose four online for female teenage customers and four online shops for young mother customers. For the customers, the writer assumed all customers in shops which sell merchandises for teenagers are female teenagers (teenagers until early 20 years old) and all customers in shops which sell baby stuffs are young mothers. The writer did it since the real identity in the online world is difficult to identify. People in online communication sometimes do not use their real identity. As stated by Turkle, cyberspace is self-consciously reflexive space, an arena where 'you are who you pretend to be' (as cited in Cavanagh, 2007, p.120). The instrument in this research was the writer herself because she was the one who collected and analyzed the data. The data are the first ten comments uttered by sellers to the customers in each shop (the seller's response to the customer's comment in the online shop's Facebook photo). The writer took the first ten comments she found in the online shop as her data by taking notes of the conversation every day until she could collect the target number of the conversations.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Address Terms in Online Shops for Female Teenagers

As illustrated in Table 1, there are three types of address terms used by the sellers to their female teenage customers. They are initial endearment (17 times), kinship terms (13 times), and zero address terms (Ø) (10 times).

**Table 1. Address Terms Used in the Online Shops for Female Teenagers**

No	Type	Address Term	Female Teenagers
1	Intimate name	-	-
2	Formal name	-	-
3	Kinship terms	<i>sis, siss, sist, sista</i> (older sister)	13 (32.5%)
4	Initial endearment	<i>say, saii</i> (baby/babe)	17 (42.5%)
5	Zero address terms	Ø	10 (25%)
6	Others (... + ...)	-	-

The initial endearment terms that can be found in this research are *say* and *saii* (clipping of Indonesian endearment term '*sayang*' which has almost same meaning to 'baby' or 'babe' in English) as we can see on the example below:

C: *Bahan apa?*

(What is the material?)

S: *Twistconee.. Mw saii?..*

(Twistconee.. Want it saii?)

In addition, the use of kinship terms in this research are *sis*, *sis*, *sist*, *sista* (clipping of English kinship term ‘sister’). The example is:

C: *Brp sist&bhnya apa?klo cotton a mau..*  
 (How much & what is the material? If it is cotton, I want)  
 S: *iya siss.. 85rb*  
 (Yes *sis*.. 85rb)

Then, for zero address terms (Ø), the example is:

C: *sis ini ada wrna apa aja?*  
 (*sis*, what colour do you still have?)  
 S: *masi lengkap..ada warna putih sama pink..:*  
 (still complete.. white and pink..:))

At last, there are three types of address terms which cannot be found in the online shops for female teenage customers. They are intimate name, formal name, and others.

### Address Terms in Online Shops for Young Mothers

Table 2 shows that there are five types of address terms used by the sellers in the online shops for young mothers: kinship terms (17 times), zero address terms (Ø) (12 times), initial endearment (8 times), others types (kinship terms + formal name and kinship terms + intimate name) (2 times), and intimate name (once).

**Table 2. Address Terms Used in the Online Shops for Young Mothers**

No	Type	Address Term	Young Mothers
1	Intimate name	<i>Al</i>	1 (2.5%)
2	Formal name	-	-
3	Kinship terms	<i>mbak, mba, mb</i> (older sister); <i>sis</i> (sister); <i>uni</i> (older sister); <i>bund, bun</i> (mother)	17 (42.5%)
4	Initial endearment	<i>say</i> (baby/babe)	8 (20%)
5	Zero address terms	Ø	12 (30%)
6	Others (Kinship terms + formal name)	<i>Mba Uli Hutabarat</i>	1 (2.5%)
	Others (Kinship terms + intimate name)	<i>Mba wul</i>	1 (2.5%)

Kinship terms, which are most often used in online shops for young mothers, have different variations from the online shops for female teenagers. The variations are *mbak*, *mba*, *mb* (the clipping of Indonesian kinship term ‘*mbak*’ which means older sister), *sis* (the clipping of English kinship term ‘sister’), *bund* and *bun* (the clipping of Indonesian kinship term ‘*bunda*’ which means mother), and *uni* (the Sumatran kinship terms which means older sister). The difference on the variation can be seen in the use of terms *mbak*, *bund*, and *uni*. The examples of each address term are:

C: *Klo diinjek ada lagunya ya mb*  
 (If I step on it, will there be any song played mb?)  
 S: *Iya mba, ada musiknya klo diinjek. Mau?*  
 (Yes *mba*, a song will be played if it is stepped on. Do you want it?)

C: *Klo ukuran kaki 22cm ada bun ??*  
 (Do you have a size for 22cm bun??)  
 S: *Bund maaf br baca commentnya,klo 22cm GāK-ada bund,plg besar 13,5cm :D*  
 (Bund sorry for just reading your comment, I do not have any size for 22cm bund, the largest is for 13,5cm :D)

C: *yang pink gak ada foto yg di buka ris?*  
 (Do you have a photo of opened sample for yellow color ris?)  
 S: *Disegel uni, GāK-bs dibuka : )*  
 (It is sealed *uni*, cannot be opened :))

Next, the uses of zero address terms (Ø) in online shops for young mothers are similar to the uses in the online shops for female teenage customers:

C: *nih tuk anak usia brp ci...???*  
 (for what age is this for ci (older sister)??)  
 S: *0-3 bln*  
 (0-3 months)

There is no variation in the initial endearment type used in the online shops for young mother. There is only *say* (clipping of Indonesian endearment term ‘*sayang*’ which has almost same meaning to baby or babe in English):

C: *ada warna lain ga sis?*  
 (do you have another colour sis?)  
 S: *ga ada say...*  
 (there is no other colour *say*...)

As predicted by the writer, there are others types besides the five types that she can combine from the theories she used. Others types that could be found in the online shops for young mothers are kinship terms + formal name and kinship terms + intimate name as mentioned in the following examples:

C: *nanya dl blh ya mba, snuzzler ini bisa dipake dmn aja ya? apa hanya bs di stroller? thx u.*  
 (may I ask first *mba* (older sister), where can I use this snuzzler? Is it only for stroller?  
 Thx)

S: *bisa di troller dan di carseat mba Uli Hutabarat*  
 (can be used for troller and car seat *mba Uli Hutabarat*)

C: *Msh adā ḡ<sup>a</sup> barangnya?*  
 (Is it still available?)

S: *Ini tinggal wrn merah sm coklat mba wul, mau??*  
 (We only have red and brown *mba wul*, do you want it??)

The least used address terms type in the online shops for young mothers is intimate name. The following is the example:

C: *selimut yg ada palanya itu bukan nih?*  
 (is it the blanket which has the head cover?)  
 S: *Bukan Al, ada jg yg ada tutup kepalanya, ada di album ini jg, mau gw tag??*  
 (No *Al*, there is another one which has the head cover, it is also in this album, do you want me to tag you??)

### Similarities of Address Terms Used in the Online Shops for Female Teenagers and Young Mothers.

Table 3 summarizes the total use and also percentage of address terms used in online shops for female teenagers and young mothers in order to see the similarities and also differences.

**Table 3. Percentage of Address Terms Used in the Online Shops for Female Teenagers and Young Mothers**

No	Type	Female Teenagers		Young Mothers	
		Address Term	Total	Address Term	Total
1	Intimate name	-		<i>Al</i>	1 (2.5%)
2	Formal name	-	-	-	-
3	Kinship terms	<i>sis, siss, sist, sista</i>	13 (32.5%)	<i>mbak, mba, mb</i>	17 (42.5%)

		(older sister)		(older sister); <i>sis</i> (sister); <i>uni</i> (older sister); <i>bund, bun</i> (mother)	
4	Initial endearment	<i>say, saii</i> (baby/babe)	17 (42.5%)	<i>say</i> (baby/babe)	8 (20%)
5	Zero address terms	∅	10 (25%)	∅	12 (30%)
6	Others (Kinship terms + full name)	-	-	<i>Mba Uli</i> <i>Hutabarat, Mba</i> <i>Wul</i>	2 (5%)

As revealed in Table 3, there are some similarities between the address terms used in online shops for female teenage customers and online shops for young mother customers. First of all, all of the address terms used are female type address terms, for example *mbak* (clipping of Indonesian kinship term 'mbak' which means older sister), *sis* (clipping of English kinship term 'sister'), *bun* (clipping of Indonesian kinship term 'bunda' which means mother), and *say* (clipping of Indonesian endearment term 'sayang' which means with baby or babe in English). It happens probably because of the characteristics of online world itself. In online world communication, it is quite difficult to know the real identity of the sellers. It sometimes makes them feel that the customer's identity is not really important. It is in line with Crystal's theory (2009) which argues that in online world conversation, the speakers do not really care about the interlocutor, sometimes they do not care about the interlocutor's background (p.82). Along with that, the sellers usually generalize and assume their customers are female based on the type of stuffs they sell (female clothes and baby stuffs) since they cannot know about customers' real identity, and then they choose to use some address terms that are familiar in the online world. This argument is concluded from the informal conversation between the writer and the seller. When the writer asked the sellers about their considerations in choosing address terms, most of the sellers answered that they did not have any particular considerations or reasons. Some of them also said that they only used the address terms often found in the online communication or followed the address terms used by their customers.

The second similarity is formal name did not occur in both types of online shop. It happens possibly because people in the online world tend not to care about the interlocutor. Besides, people in online communication usually talk in a more informal way than in the offline (face-to-face) communication. As a result, the formal name type was not used in the online shop. It supports Crystal's theory (2009) which tells about the characteristics of online language which is less formal than the offline world (p.82).

The third similarity is that kinship terms, initial endearment, and zero address terms are used in both types of online shops. Then in each type, there are also same address terms used in the online shops whose customers are assumed to be female teenagers and young mothers from the merchandise they sold:

a. Kinship term 'sis'.

*Sis* can be found in both types of shops maybe because of its popularity in online language. The informal conversation with one of the online shop sellers indicated that since the sellers could not know about the customers' real identity, they chose to use the most popular address terms in the online shops in order not to offend the customers. By using this address term, the sellers tried to show their intimacy to the customers, so they would become closer and the communication will not be uncomfortable.

b. Initial endearment 'say'.

One of the online sellers further mentioned that besides *sis*, *say* is the second mostly used in the online world. The use of endearment term *say* can be found easily in the online world, but it is so difficult to find in the offline (face-to-face) communication (Crystal, 2009, p. 102). It possibly happens because in offline communication, this term is mostly used between people

who have close relationship and it is quite unusual to use it to someone who is not very close to the speaker. As stated by Crystal in his theory about online language (2009), the terms of endearment in online has been used differently (p.102). It is usually used to people who know each other (related to the social relationship) in offline (face-to-face) communication to show personal desire. However, in online communication (in this context is the online shops), it is only used by the sellers to show their intimacy to the customers in order to promote their merchandise and persuade the customers to buy it.

c. Zero address terms

Zero address terms is quite popular in the online communication probably because it is the safest way to address the customers if the sellers are in doubt or do not know how to address the customers. It is in line with Wardhaugh's theory (2006) that states when people are doubt how to address someone, they can choose not to use any address term at all (p. 270). The sellers in this research used zero address terms as classified by Wardhaugh (2006). They chose not to use any address term probably because they do not know the customers' real identity (age, sex, and also ethnicity). It is possible that the sellers thought that not using any address term is safer than choosing an address term which might make the customers feel offended.

### **Differences of Address Terms Used in the Online Shops for Female Teenage Customers and Young Mother Customers.**

From Table 3 above, it can be seen that there are also some differences between the address terms used in both types of shop. The first difference is the address terms' frequency. In the online shop for teenagers, the highest frequency is initial endearment (17 times), followed by kinship terms (13 times), and the lowest is zero address terms (10 times). On the other hand, in the online shops for young mothers, the highest is kinship terms (17 times), then zero address terms (12 times), initial endearment (8 times), followed by others (2 times), and the last intimate name (once).

The second difference is kinship terms types in female teenager customer online shops (*sis*, clipping of English kinship terms 'sister') and young mother customer online shops (*mbak*, Javanese kinship term which means older sister; and *bun*, clipping of Indonesian kinship terms *bunda* which means mother). From the informal conversation between the writer and the sellers, there are some possible reasons which affect it. It happens because both types of shops' (female teenage customer and young mother customer online shops) sellers make a generalization in using the address terms. Since it is difficult to know about the customers' real identity, they made a generalization in calling their customers from the most often used address terms in online shop. To female teenage customer online shops they used '*sis*' since most of the customers are assumed to be teenagers, then for young mothers customer online shops they used '*mbak*' or '*bun*' since they assume the customers are young mothers who are older than teenagers. From this, we can see that age variable, which really gives influence to offline language use, still gives influences to online language use, although it is not as big as the influence in the offline communication.

In addition, from the informal conversation between the writer and the sellers, sellers in the shops for female teenagers preferred using *sis* rather than using *mbak*, which were often used in the young mother shops, probably because *sis* shows more intimacy than *mbak* which shows intimacy and also respect. The sellers also chose *sis* because it shows solidarity and equality, since *sis* can mean older sister, younger sister, or same age. Moreover, since the sellers cannot know the customers' ethnicity, people might assume that *sis* is more neutral to all ethnicity than Javanese term *mbak* (older sister) or Chinese term *cece* (older sister) which are often used in offline shops. Another thing happens to the young mother online shops, sellers tended to use *mbak* rather than *sis*. It is maybe because the sellers assume the customers are older or at least at the same age as the sellers. Consequently, they chose *mbak* or *bun* which shows both intimacy and respect to the customers. Most of the sellers used of *mbak*, which comes from Javanese address term, rather than other kinship terms in Indonesia possibly because *mbak* kinship term has been very popular and used not only in Java island but also in other islands. As we can see in talk shows or other programs in television, *mbak* is often used by the presenter or guest to address each other although the presenter and the guest are not Javanese. It shows that this term has been used not only by

Javanese but also other ethnicity and it has become a popular term among Indonesians. Another kinship term which is very popular in young mother shops is *bun*. This term can be so popular maybe because according to some sellers, people nowadays feel that *bun* is more prestigious than other terms such as *ibu* (mother) and they also believe that *bun* is a term for young mother. Because of that, the sellers chose to use *bun* rather than *ibu* (Indonesian terms that means mother) in order to make the customers feel happy since it is more prestigious and also for young mother.

In online shops for young mother customers, there is an interesting finding; which is the use of Sumatran kinship term *uni* (which means older sister). At first, the customer greeted the seller by using intimate name. Then, the seller responded to her by using Sumatran kinship term *uni*. It makes the writer want to know more about it. Because of that, the writer opened the customer's profile to know where the customer comes from. Then, the writer thinks there are two probabilities why it could happen. First, it happened probably because the seller knows the customer personally in the real (offline) world since the customer greeted the seller by using intimate name. This kind of thing might happen also in the first type of shop, the shops for female teenage customers; as long as the sellers and the customers know each other personally. The second probability is the seller also did the same thing as the writer did (opening the customer's profile to look for the origin of the customer) so that she knew the customer is from Sumatra (Bukittinggi), then addressed her by using Sumatran kinship term in order to show intimacy and solidarity.

The third difference is intimate name and others types occurrence in the shops for young mothers. Intimate name type occurred only one time with the address term *Al*, followed by others type (combination between kinship terms and full name) which occurred once with the address terms *Mba Uli Hutabarat* and others type (combination between kinship terms and intimate name) with the address term *Mba Wul*. There are some reasons to explain the occurrence of intimate name and others types. It is possibly because the seller knows the customers personally, so she called the customer directly with her first name. It supports Wardhaugh's theory that intimate name shows equality and familiarity (2006, p.268). The same thing happens to the others type which combines the kinship terms and intimate name / formal name. The sellers chose to address the customers by using the customer's name maybe because they know the customers personally. As for the kinship terms before the name, it is probably because the customers are older than the sellers so they use '*mba*' in order to show their respect. Besides, another possibility is the automatic tagging in Facebook. So, when the seller writes down the customer's name who has become her friends in Facebook, Facebook will tag the profile name.

## CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

In this research, it could be seen that there are three out of six types of address terms used by the online shop sellers to their female teenage customers. The most often used is initial endearment (17 times), kinship terms (13 times), zero address terms (10 times). On the contrary, intimate name, formal name, and others types were not found in the teenage customer online shops.

A different thing happened to online shops for young mothers. There are five out of six types of address terms used by the sellers to their young mother customers: kinship terms (17 times), zero address terms ( $\emptyset$ ) (12 times), initial endearment (8 times), others types (kinship terms + formal name and kinship terms + intimate name) (2 times), and intimate name (once).

Furthermore, it could be concluded that there are some similarities and differences between address terms used in both types of online shops. The first similarity is all the address terms used in both types of online shops are female type address terms. The second similarity is formal name did not occur in the both types of shop. This is in line with the theory in chapter two about online language characteristics which is less formal than offline language. Then the third similarity is kinship terms, zero address terms, and initial endearment occurred in both types of online shops.

On the other hand, there are also some differences between the address terms used in the two kinds of shop. The first is related to the frequency of each address term's type. The second difference is related to the occurrence of kinship terms types in female teenager customers online shops (*sis*) and young mother customer online shops (*mbak*, *bun*). Then the last difference is the occurrence of intimate name and other types in the shops for young mothers. It is noticed that the finding of this study corresponds with all the theories used in the chapter two, especially to

Crystal's theory about online language's characteristics that is used in more free way than offline language (2009).

The writer hopes this study can contribute to the study about language use since there are only few studies about online language especially address terms. The writer expects that there will be more research about other sides in addressing that the writer has not investigated yet. For example, it will be more interesting if there is an interview which intends to dig out about the sellers' considerations in using certain address terms.

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