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Sociolinguistic Rules of Address
in Polish and English

A need for a contrastive sociolinguistic study of Polish and English has been recognized by many methodologists and linguists. It has been stressed many times that it is not enough to know the grammar and pronunciation of the language in order to speak it appropriately, i.e., in order to be understood properly and to be accepted by the members of the society speaking the language. In other words, not every utterance that is grammatically correct is acceptable and appropriate. Without obeying social rules of linguistic behaviour it is not always possible to achieve the aims one wants to achieve by using the language. Uttering grammatical but not appropriate /i.e., demanded by the social context/ sentences one may offend, infuriate, puzzle, get a wrong response or not get one at all, or at best be recognized as a stranger. Of course it is not the case that one should avoid being recognized as a non-native speaker at all costs. But it is safer to speak with many grammar and pronunciation mistakes than to speak impeccable English and violate the above mentioned rules of linguistic behaviour. While in the former case any deviation from social norms will be excused on the grounds of one's poor command of the language, in the latter case one might be accused of deliberate breaking of rules, and not of a deficiency in one's knowledge of sociolinguistic rules. There might be mentioned cases reported by some fairly advanced Polish learners of English staying and working for some time in English-speaking countries. They complain of difficulties in getting on socially with their colleagues, of being treated with seemingly unaccountable aloofness and reserve. In most cases their problems can be attributed to their unawareness of sociolinguistic rules, i.e., rules spe-

cifying who speaks what language variety/form/ to whom, when, and to what end. Hence repeated postulates for including these rules in teaching programs can be found in various recent publications concerning teaching foreign languages. But in order for those rules to be taught, they must be first formulated for both languages /i.e., Polish and English/, analysed and compared, and only then incorporated into teaching materials. And this is the ultimate quest of the sociology of language to "describe the generally accepted social organization of language usage within speech community, ... to disclose the language usage norms" p.46, /Fishman, 1969/.

So far only some rules of this sort have been formulated for the English language. One of the not very numerous analyses is S. M. Ervin-Tripp's Sociolinguistic Rules of Address /1969/.

The way of addressing people constitutes not a trivial problem in the light of the above remarks. Sociolinguistic rules of address will make the subject of the present article: Polish rules of address will be formulated and compared with the findings of S. M. Ervin-Tripp.

But first some methodological problems of contrastive sociolinguistics call for clarification. Before starting any contrastive analysis the necessary level of comparability must be established, that means, it has to be made sure that the varieties from both languages that are to be subjected to analysis are parallel, in other words, equivalent in their social function /cf. Janicki, 1977/. Only then the juxtaposition can be meaningful. As Ervin-Tripp's analysis is restricted to a western American academic community the same limitation should hold true for the Polish part. The restriction coincides with the original intentions behind this paper because, bearing in mind future didactic needs, most naturally the standard variety should be of the prime concern here, and the standard variety is most likely of all to be spoken by any adult academic community.

Rules involved here are descriptive and not prescriptive. They may not be in conscious awareness, they may not represent actual processes going on in a speaker's mind, but they form a way of representing a logical model of a part of knowledge that any adult speaker of the community must possess in order to function as a member of that community. This knowledge is often re-

ferred to as communicative competence to distinguish it from linguistic competence, i.e., the knowledge of grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary /Hymes, 1971/. This knowledge is likewise needed by a non-native speaker in order to be accepted and properly understood.

Next the problem of social categories arises. They may have different meanings in different communities. For example, adult may denote a person of different age in Poland than in some African country. The specific nature of the categories must be discovered by ethnographic means.

For Ervin-Tripp the dividing line between adult and child is school-leaving age, at around age eighteen, but she mentions that an employed sixteen-year-old might be classified as an adult. The same distinction seems to be true of the Polish community.

Status-marked situations are for the author settings such as the courtroom, a large faculty meeting, where status is clearly specified, and the form of address of each person derived from his social identity. For the Polish part of analysis we would like to extend the scope of status-marked situation to cover any formal conversation held at the place of employment or connected with one's occupation to distinguish it from any informal talk.

Rank refers to a hierarchy within a working group, or to ranked statuses. A senior alter /in age or position/ has the option of dispensing the speaker from offering T+IN /- title+last name/, or P+T /-pan/pani+title/ in Polish by suggesting that he use a first name.

The identity set refers to a list of occupational titles or courtesy titles accorded people in certain statuses, e.g., Judge, Doctor, Professor.

If the name of the person is unknown, there is no address form /or Ø/ available and one simply no-names the addressee. In Polish the avoidance of any form of address is also possible and is most often employed when there is an uncertainty as to which category to ascribe the addressee considering his age and social status.

The address forms to be accounted for might fit in frames like "Look, _____, it's time to leave" for the English part, and _____, czy ma pan/czy masz ostatnie wydanie...?" for Polish.

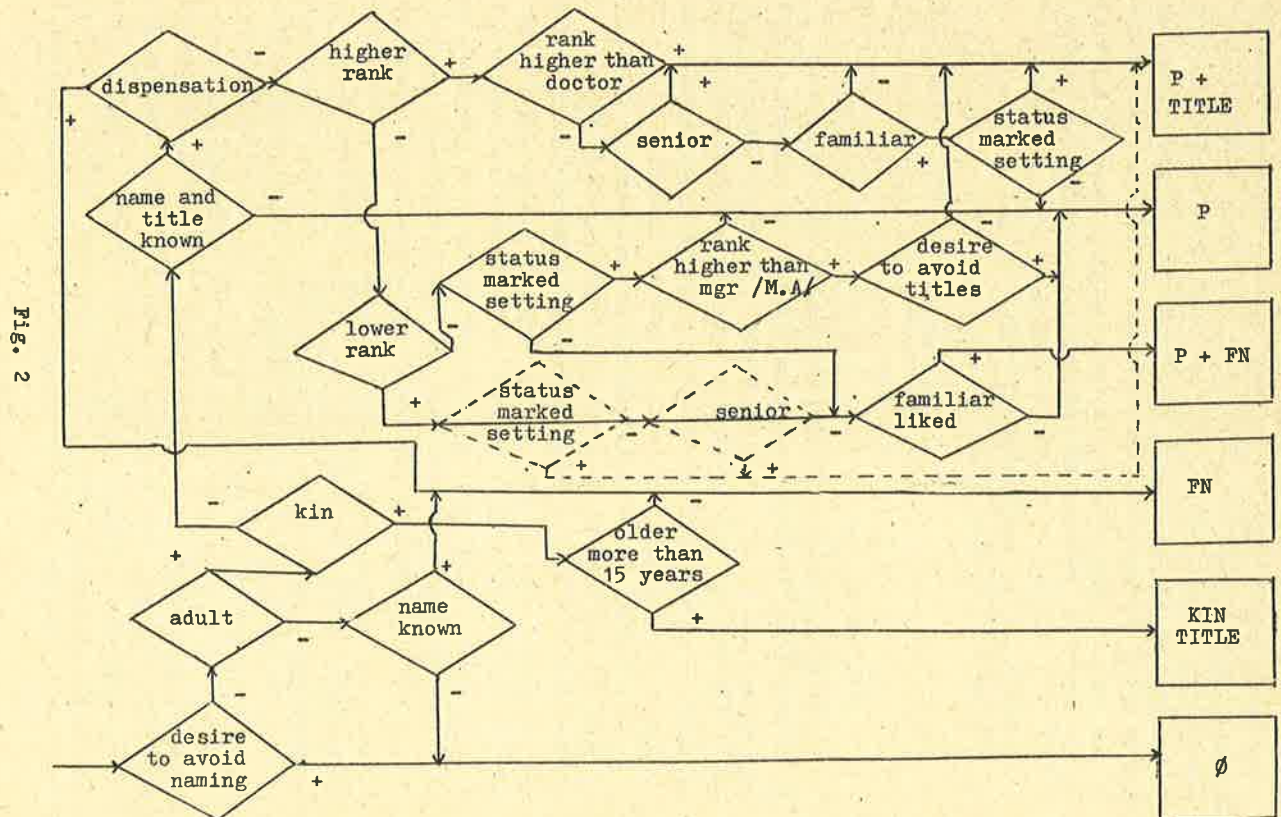
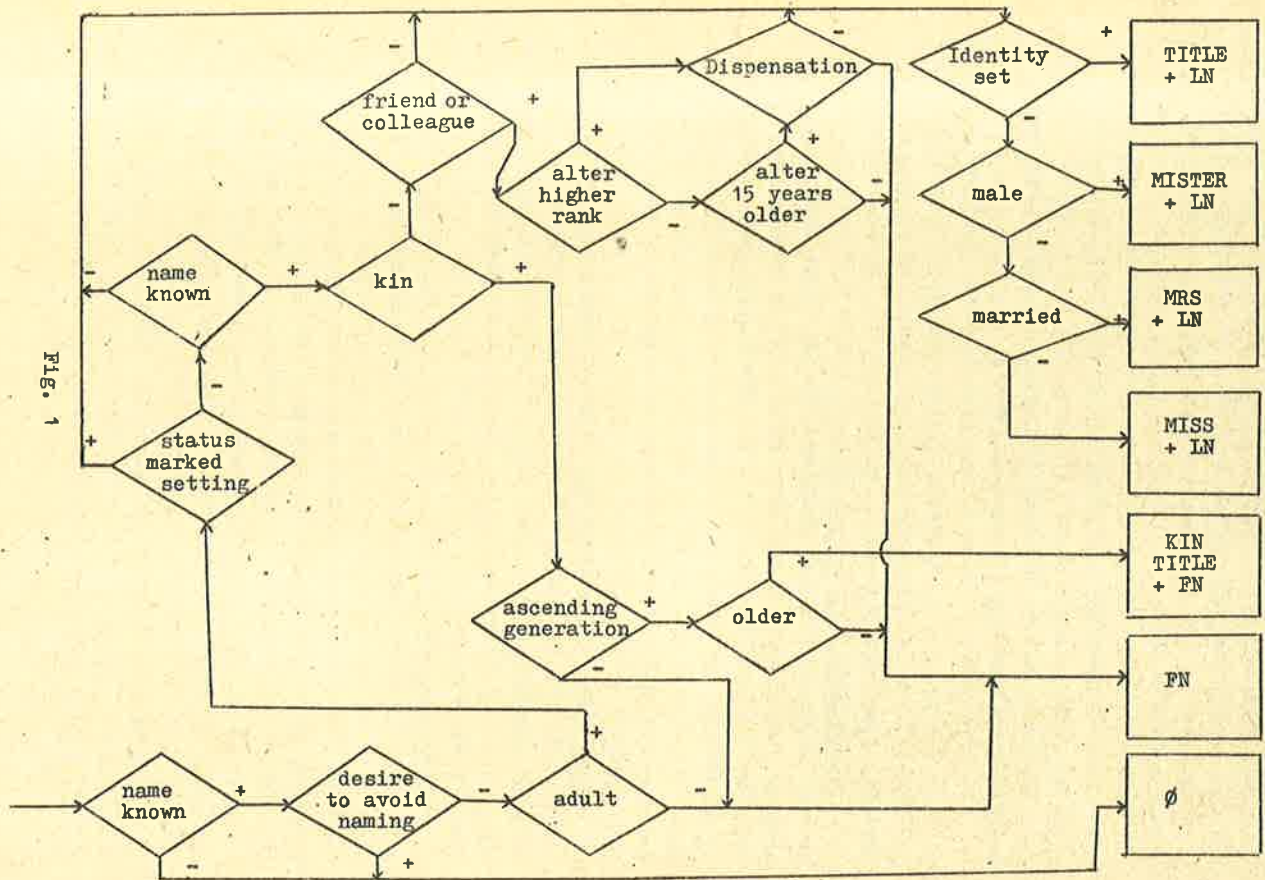
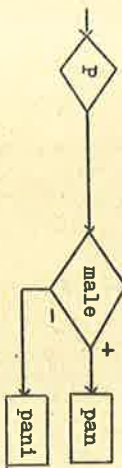


Figure 1 represents an American address system. It is a slightly improved version of Erwin-Trip's presentation quoted after Roger T. Bell /1976/. IM- last name, FM- first name. In a Polish address system /Figure 2/ P is always realised either as pan or pani, according to the sex of the addressee. The selector of sex has not been included in the diagram because of the limitation of space. It might be represented as a supplement rule:



The choices within the address systems are represented in terms of a model like the logical algorithms of computer programming making use of \diamond to represent a yes-no decision point, and \square an order to carry out a particular action. The entry point is on the left and each path through the diagram leads to one of the possible alternative forms of address.

Both diagrams constitute generalizations made on the basis of data, in the case of the Polish address system on the data collected by means of a questionnaire and observation. Therefore the individual set of rules or the regional dialect of a reader of this article may differ in some details from that reported in Fig. 2. Besides there are many options realised as shiftings at certain points in the sociolinguistic rules. But since the diagram is believed to represent norms that are shared by all normally functioning members of an academic community, then any deviation from them conveys a message. The use of the more deferential form to an equal or subordinate can either mean that they are receiving respect or being put off at a distance. The recognition whether it is the former or the latter depends on many contextual factors, such as, the position and authority of the addressee and the speaker, the situation, the relationship between the speaker and the addressee, etc. For example, in Polish a doctor addressing a senior teacher at secondary school might use pani magister, i.e., P + TITLE, to show deference. Giving the same form his subordinate at university he is being excessively formal and stresses

social distance.

It seems possible to make some inferences of even more general nature on the basis of Figure 2. The inferences will constitute sociolinguistic rules that hold true for a Polish academic community and in this way form a part of ethnography of communication.

1. P+TITLE is most often used in status marked settings, when addressing persons of higher rank, or persons of the same or even lower rank when they are seniors in age or authority.
2. P+TITLE is given to show reverence, esteem, or to create a social distance.
3. Dispensation, i.e., invitation to call each other by first names neutralizes all differences in status or age. /It is a rule that the suggestion is made first by the person senior in age or rank/. It most naturally occurs between persons of the same/not much different age or rank manifesting familiarity and/or liking.
4. P+FM might be given to show liking or/and familiarity when addressing a person of the same or lower rank, especially in an informal situation.
5. P is generally used to address persons of unknown name and/or title, persons of the same or lower rank, or to avoid giving titles in order not to create a social distance or formal situation.
6. There is a tendency to avoid using P+IN as an address form among the members of an academic university personnel. If used it is nearly exclusively given to a person of lower rank. /P+IN is extensively used when addressing students/.

When comparing the American and Polish rules of address the most conspicuous difference seems to be the greater sensitivity of Poles to the social variable of rank, to even small differences in prerogatives of different social standings. There is also much more limited employment of first names. In an academic American community "when introducing social acquaintances or new work colleagues, it is necessary to employ first names so that the new acquaintance can first-name each other immediately. Familiarity is not a factor within dyads of the same age and rank, and there are no options"p.227. In Polish familiarity is essential and any

new acquaintance, regardless of his age and rank, receives P or P+ TITLE, which seems to be a reflection of a more general rule in Polish which requires that any adult unfamiliar person be addressed by P. To call anyone FN dispensation is indispensable.

That explains why some Polish scholars styling at American universities and using TITLE + IN or MR/MRS/MISS + IN to their new colleagues are regarded as aloof or excessively formal. On the other hand MR/MRS/MISS + FN is not possible in English, and a foreigner employing this form of address to show familiarity or liking is misunderstood again.

Other differences concern the choice of available forms. MR/MRS/MISS alone is not an appropriate form by Fig. 1, while it is perfectly all right in Polish, though with one exception: the distinction between married and unmarried women is not manifested in Polish forms of address, and the equivalent of Miss is not used. Moreover, in Polish P + TITLE is used in place of TITLE + IN. KIN TITLE is used to single out one particular relative from among a few of the same title to avoid a mistake.

On the whole it seems justified to say that in Polish the existence of numerous criteria of choosing an address form, such as, age, authority, the smallest distinctions in social status, familiarity, emotional attitude towards the addressee permits the expression of delicate nuances of relationship and implied meanings.

S t r e s z c z e n i e

Tematem analizy są reguły socjolingwistyczne formalizujące sposoby zwracania się do rozmówcy w języku polskim i w amerykańskiej odmianie angielskiego. Spełniając metodologiczne wymagania socjolingwistycznych badań kontrastywnych analiza ogranicza się do odpowiadających sobie, tj. spełniających tę samą funkcję społeczną, odmian obu języków. Z tej przyczyny oraz mając na uwadze przysze zastosowanie wyników w dydaktyce, a ściślej w opracowywaniu materiałów do nauki języka angielskiego, autorka zajmuje się odmianą standardową obu języków, używaną w środowisku akademickim. Wyniki analizy dla języka polskiego przedstawione są w schemacie nr 2 oraz w sześciu regułach, dla angielskiego w schemacie nr 1 opracowanym przez S. M. Erwin-Tripp w Sociolinguistic Rules of Address /1969/. Porównanie reguł w obu językach pozwala na wyciągnięcie ogólnych wniosków ujmujących różnice w sposobach tytułowania w polskim i amerykańskim środowisku akademickim. Opracowanie reguł socjolingwistycznych pozwoliło na zastosowanie ich w nauczaniu oraz umożliwił uczącym się osiągnięcie kompetencji komunikatywnej w obcym języku.

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