

## **A Socio-linguistic Interpretation of the Social Meanings of Kinship Terms in Shona Urban Interactions**

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### **Abstract**

*This article provides an interpretive analysis of Shona native speakers' use of kinship terms of address as forms of communicative resources to invoke social meanings in non-kin relations. Two types of data were used for the analysis of social meanings: (a) field notes from participant observations taken of naturally occurring interactions in public and private spheres over an 8-month period (from September 2001 to May 2002) in and around the city of Harare, Zimbabwe, and (b) transcriptions of semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted with 40 Shona native speakers of varying ages, gender, educational status, occupation and religious affiliation. I demonstrate that the current explanatory address system models are apparently inadequate in their representation of both the complexity and distinctiveness of social meanings. Hence, I advocate the use of more interpretive, ethnographic approaches for the discovery of social meaning.*

### **Introduction**

The description and analysis of kinship terminologies has traditionally assumed a central place in Western anthropological studies of kinship since Morgan (1870). Kinship terms, according to Leach (1958) are 'category words by means of which an individual is taught to recognize the significant groupings in the social structure into which he is born' (p. 143). Leach's definition represents the dominant conceptualisation of kinship terms that limit their use to 'real' kinship relationships. Anthropological studies on some non-Western languages and societies, however, note the fluidity of kinship terms of address. Titiev's study of Hopi kinship terms reveals that kinship terms have nothing to do with genealogical connections (Titiev 1967: 37). Thomas's study of the Australian kinship terms suggests that kinship terms do not necessarily always indicate ties of blood but might be used to express status or to refer to matters of obligation and privileges (1906, Chapter 12).

There is also a fairly extensive and growing body of sociolinguistic literature on modes of address in general, including, but not limited to, the use of kinship terms in address, in different languages and societies. For

example, following the classic studies of Brown and Gilman (1960) and Brown and Ford (1961), research on personal address has been conducted in a wide range of languages such as Egyptian Arabic (Parkinson 1985), German (Winchatz 2001; Amendt 1995; Delisle 1986; Kempf 1985), Hindi (Mehrotra 1977; Misra 1977), Icelandic (Haugen 1975), Italian (Bates and Benign 1975), Japanese (Takao 1976), Javanese (Geertz 1960), Jordanian Arabic (Farghal and Shakir 1994), Shona (Mashiri 1999; 2003), Spanish (Fitch 1991; 1998), Yoruba (Oyetade 1995), and Yiddish (Slobin 1963), to name a few. Philipsen and Huspek's (1985) annotated bibliography of address terms research tries to capture the trend and extent of the research. Both this bibliography and the list given above show a conspicuous absence of studies on African languages and societies, except just a couple. Fasold (1990: 30) notes that, 'Indigenous languages of the Western hemisphere and African languages have received much less attention.' The present effort is therefore intended to contribute towards redressing this discrepancy.

The existing studies of African languages either make cursory statements on the use of kinship terms in non-kin interactions or attempt to apply current parsimonious models. Yet, as Oyetade admits in his study of Yoruba address forms based on Brown and Gilman's (1960) two-dimensional 'power and solidarity' model, 'The dichotomy of power vs. solidarity becomes blurred with respect to Yoruba kinship terms of address' (1995: 515). Following Oyetade's observation of the inadequacy of Brown and Gilman's (1960) model on Yoruba, I suggest two hypotheses for the present study. First, I advocate that using the speakers' and addressees' own situated interpretation of their communicative experiences reveals varied forms of social meanings of address [kinship] forms than the current parsimonious models. Second, following Hymes' (1962) and Philipsen's (1989a; 1992) cultural communication theory, I attempt to illustrate that the use of kinship terms as communicative resources in non-kin interactions does not only reflect the uniqueness of Shona [African] culture, but also shows the practical value of the terms in managing human relationships in urban settings.

Before I demonstrate how the data presented in this article prove these hypotheses, I attempt to define social meaning in relation to literal meaning in the context of address systems with a view to illustrating the communicative utility of kinship terms in non-kin interactions. I also attempt to provide a brief outline of the theoretical development in address studies. This outline helps to validate the methodological shift suggested in this study.

For many years, a central issue to the study of human communication, both in Communication studies and Sociolinguistics has been how interlocutors express their understandings of their relationships to one another and their communicative intention (Altman and Taylor 1973; Burgoon and Hale 1984; 1987; Wood 1991). 'These authors as well as others

in a variety of fields, made the point that in human interaction, every communicative act encodes both a referential meaning and a social meaning' (Winchitz 2001: 338). The former is also known as literal meaning [a term that I prefer to use since the term 'referential' has caused serious confusion] and the latter is designated by such terms as relational, indexical, presentational, or interpersonal meaning. Parkinson (1985) provides a succinct summary of what constitutes social meaning when she said that the social meaning of a communicative act expresses 'who the speaker believes he is, who he believes the addressee is, what he thinks their relationship is, and what he thinks he is doing by saying what he is saying' (5).

Social meaning is also understood by distinguishing it from literal meaning. Literally, kin terms are used to designate family [nuclear and extended] relations among relatives (e.g. father-daughter, mother-son, brother-sister, etc) (Farghal and Shakir 1994: 242). When a speaker selects and uses a kin term of address to encode social information in an interaction, that is, to maintain or enrich social interaction with an unrelated individual, the term acquires a social or indexical meaning. In this context the social meaning of the kin term will only become clear if the speaker and the addressee have the same understanding of its literal meaning or if the context of use makes it abundantly clear (where the addressee may not know the literal meaning) what the speaker implies. Both the cultural knowledge that the addressee shares with the speaker and the context of talk enables the addressee to interpret the social meaning of the address term.

The second-person pronoun has been the most frequently studied personal address form that has been used to investigate social meaning. One reason theorists have been interested in the personal pronoun is because it has provided a powerful entry point to understanding the dimensions of social relationships (Winchitz 2001: 339). Brown and Gilman (1960) were the first to propose a link between pronouns of address and social meaning.

Brown and Gilman (1960) propose a two-dimensional parsimonious model of social meaning (Burgoon and Hale 1984: 194, Winchitz 2001: 339). Following Brown and Gilman (1960), Brown (1965) suggests that all expressions of social meaning can be mapped into a two-dimensional space with the vertical axis being power and the horizontal axis being solidarity. In other words, Brown suggests that there exist two semantic dimensions of social meaning that are universal to all languages and along which all expressions of social meaning can be located in semantic space.

Brown and Gilman (1960) define the power semantic as asymmetrical. It determines which pronoun is used on the basis of the difference in social status (or power) between the speaker and the addressee. When an imbalance of power is symbolized in speech, it is usually done by those with more

power using the informal pronoun and receiving the formal pronoun from those with less power (Wanchatz 2001: 339). The solidarity semantic however, represents more balance between individuals and is symmetrical. Brown and Gilman note that, 'The similarities that matter [for the solidarity semantic] seem to be those that make for like-mindedness or similar behaviour dispositions' (258). Interlocutors often display solidarity by addressing or referring to each other using either the formal or informal pronoun.

Brown and Gilman applied their model on Indo-European languages, mainly Western European (excluding contemporary standard English) and postulated that these languages have pronouns, which can be used for marking the social and affective status of the participants in a communication act. They proposed T and V (from the Latin *tou* and *vos*) symbols to represent familiarity and politeness, respectively. This distinction is analogous to that between first name (FN) and title last name (TLN) in English and Shona, for instance. Brown and Gilman 'put forward a hypothesis for the origin and spread (within a particular social and historical framework) of differentiated second person address in European languages and for the stimulus diffusion of their semantic system into adjacent language areas' (McGivney 1993: 20).

Although many other researchers eventually adopted and applied Brown and Gilman's two-dimensional model to varied languages and cultures, several theorists have challenged its adequacy (Fitch 1991; Burgoon and Hale 1984; 1987; Danziger 1976; Friedrich 1972). Fitch's (1991) study of terms of address in Colombia calls Brown and Gilman's model 'deterministic' (256). She points out that,

A deterministic theory like Brown and Gilman's suggests a mechanistic, formulaic view of meaning construction: 'If objective social condition A, B, and C exist, address X is used to mean Y. Conversely, if X is used, social conditions A, B, and C are inferred to exist.' Such an approach cannot account for creative or strategic uses of language, nor can it incorporate the subtleties of metaphors that enrich and complicate the literal and conventional uses that are encompassed by such models (256).

Fitch, like Takao (1976), instead, adopts a cultural approach, which seeks to discover the meanings of address terms shared by a particular group of people. Fitch argues that personal address terms serve a referential 'pointing' function (i.e. by addressing another person, a speaker invokes personal identities and establish a definition for the relationship between speaker and addressee). In her study of situated meanings of Colombian *Madre* terms, Fitch shows how certain permutations of *Madre* invoke particular norms (e.g. to show affection or respect) and also indexes particular Colombian cultural premises about personhood and relationships. This

interest in examining the meaning of particular communicative acts to those who use and produce them (Hymes 1972; 1974; Philipsen 1992) is what inspires the present study.

Some researchers have attempted to increase the number of dimensions from Brown and Gilman's two. Friedrich (1972), for example, in his study of Russian pronoun use proposes the addition of a third dimension by separating intimacy as a third dimension. Winchatz (2001: 362) commends the addition saying, 'This separation allows such German social meanings as closeness, friendship, isolation, liking, ... to be more easily accounted for, as these are not necessarily aspects of solidarity relationships but rather more often come into play when interlocutors share something between each other. But, Winchatz still admits that,

Although Friedrich (1972) did make an important move to distinguish solidarity and intimacy as two distinct meanings that cannot be represented in the same dimension of semantic space, ... German social meanings relating to the atmosphere or conversational level between interlocutors (e.g. conversableness and structured) also appear to have no place in Friedrich's three-dimensional model (362).

Winchatz, following Burgoon and Hale (1984) goes on to propose his eight-dimensional model for German. Although Winchatz says that the eight themes are still inadequate for describing the use of *Sie* in German, his results prove that any study of communication that start from the language user rather than predetermined universal criteria will yield results that are peculiar to that culture. Many years ago Hymes (1972) urged researchers to examine the 'means of speech ... and their meanings to those who use them' (2). Such an approach focuses on the variety of meanings speakers bring to their interactions and, in turn, would open up a way to get at the nuanced particulars of social meaning that present-day theories ignore (Philipsen 1992; Wanchatz 2001).

The present study is a response to Hymes's (1972) call by performing a grounded analysis of Shona speakers' situated experiences of kinship terms of address in non-kin interactions. Kinship terms are a good example of communicative resources to use for making these interpretations since different cultures and societies have different systems of kinship terms. For example, European and African societies only share nuclear family relations that bear the same semantic constants, which can be expressed in similar kinship terms.

Although kinship terms can also be used as personal reference terms, and the terms used in address may not be the same used in reference (Yassin 1977: 128), this study is limited to those kinship terms interlocutors use in face-to-face interaction where situated experiences influence their choices. However, the results of this study may provide a springboard for

research that compares and contrasts social meanings that derive from the use of kinship terms in address and reference.

### **Method**

Two types of data were used for the analysis of social meanings: (a) field notes from participant observations taken of naturally occurring interactions in public and private spheres over an 8-month period (from September 2001 to May 2002) in and around the city of Harare, Zimbabwe, and (b) transcriptions of semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted with 40 Shona native speakers of varying ages, gender, educational status, occupation and religious affiliation. I observed the use of kinship terms in offices at the University of Zimbabwe, in banking halls, bus and petrol queues, grocery stores, restaurants, street markets and parking bays, church gatherings for two congregations of different denominations, and family settings.

I conducted interviews with individual respondents and groups, sometimes, to elicit the Shona speakers' intentions reflected in and interpretations of communications in non-kin interactions. Although Wood, Kroger and Leong (1986: 162) suggest that, 'Most [native] people are not able to articulate the rules of address just as they are unable to spell out the rules of grammar', the interviews revealed that Shona speakers do have relatively systematic ideas about the ways they use language and what these uses mean to them.

Semi-structured interviews were desirable since they are flexible and allow the interviewer to vary the questions as he moves from one interviewee to another probing categories of social meaning. I came into the interviews with a set of kinship terms whose occurrence I intended to test. Hence, this was the only predetermined variable. Respondents were allowed to relate stories of encounters and relationships in which other people had addressed them using kinship terms at one time or another. These stories constituted important metacommunicative discourse, which provided crucial information on the social meanings that respondents attributed to the address choices of themselves or others.

Participant observation served two purposes. First, it complemented the interview method, as I was able to record the use of kinship address forms in varied interactive situations, some described in interviews. Hence I got the opportunity to compare my observations with the Shona speakers' interpretations and descriptions of their communicative behaviour. As Silverstein (1981), cited in Briggs (1983: 256) suggests, the meaning of the most pragmatically creative and least referential signs [kin terms, in this case] lies beyond the 'limits of awareness' of native speakers. Hence, the significance of such forms will only be fully grasped when they are studied in use, not as repeated and glossed in interviews (Briggs 1983: 254). When

using participant observation, the ethnographer, therefore intends to get close to those studied as a way of understanding what their experiences and activities meant to them. As a native speaker of Shona myself, I also used my intuition to decipher social meanings in the observed interactions.

Second, participant observation allowed me to work out the speakers' contextualisation cues that accompanied the speakers' use of kinship terms and influenced the addressees' interpretation of the social meanings deriving from those usages. I systematically recorded my observations basing on any metacommunicative forms I heard in everyday talk about the social meanings of varying kinship terms.

I transcribed the interviews and in the process captured some phonological features such as length and tone, as I considered them part of the speakers' cues that shaped the addressee's interpretations of the kinship terms. I numbered the utterances from the interviews and the field notes, in which the kinship terms occurred, for easy extraction and evaluation. I analysed the utterances to extract the key words or phrases representing the social meanings understood and described by the speakers. I then grouped kinship terms according to categories of social meanings, noting the number of categories in which each kinship term occurs and the meanings that it connotes.

### **Social Meanings of Kinship Terms in Non-kin Interactions**

The kinship terms discussed here are only those that featured prominently in the transcribed talk and/or participant observations of the participants in this study. First, I make an overview of the social meanings that Shona speakers express through their use of varying kin terms. Second, the social meanings found for the kinship terms are applied to the existing models to test their adequacy for Shona.

The kinship terms selected from the transcribed talk and from the participant observations for discussion in this article are those that featured for not less than five times for any social meaning that they expressed.

#### *Age 'zera'*

A speaker can choose any of the kinship terms acceptable in the culture to express age difference between him/her and the individual with who he/she speaks, acquainted or not. The speaker is the point of reference, in that he or she chooses to use any of these kinship terms with another individual by deciding whether the addressee is older or younger than him- or herself.

I boarded a bus from the University of Zimbabwe in October 2002. An older woman carrying a baby on her back entered the almost full bus and stood holding the roof rails for support. A young male student noticed her and offered her his seat saying, "*Uyai mugare apa amai.*" (You can come and

sit here mother). Out of gratitude, the woman volunteered to call the young man 'mwanangu' (my son), when she said, "Wazvita zvako mwanangu" (Thank you my son). In another case, one nursing sister at a general hospital dressed an elderly man's swollen eye. When she finished she announced, "Zvaita manje baba!" (You can go now father!). In gratitude, the patient responded, "Inga waita zvako muzukuru." (Thanks very much grandchild).

The participants in this study revealed that they normally make a quick assessment of their addressee, especially in brief or incidental encounters to arrive at the terms of address they could use. For example, Chengetai, age 36, said:

*Unogoonawo pamasangana pachokuti mupfana here, unogona kumuti munin'ina, kana ngatitii pamusika uchida kutenga mafruits unogona kuti anoita marii nhai sisi. Semiso mungada kunzi chii? Ndogona kungokutii mukoma, sometimes kana muri same age neni ndinogona kungokutii blaz. (By looking at an individual you can judge quickly if he can be younger than you then you can call him younger brother, if you go to the market to buy some fruits you can address the female vendor saying how much do they [the fruits] cost sister. What would you like to be addressed as? I could call you older brother, if I take it that we are of the same age, I can call you brother).*

However, some married female participants said that when they feel that the kinship term that the speaker has chosen expresses the social meaning *age* correctly but that meaning conflicts with their marital status, they would quickly respond with *mukuwasha*, 'son-in-law' as a way of guiding the speaker to the social meaning of *respect* instead.

#### **Adulthood (kuyaruka)**

*Adulthood* is related to the social meaning *age*. However, the former is often determined by the addressee's behaviour and marital status. The legal age of adulthood in Zimbabwe is 18 years, but the participants revealed that if an individual does not behave as is expected of an adult or a married person they would still regard them as a child. Batsi, age 30 who works as a shop assistant with one bakery in the city said, "Kana ndikaona munhukadzi anoratidza kuti ayaruka asi akapfeka mini ndingamuti sisi." (If I see a female customer who looks like an adult but wearing a mini-skirt, I can choose to call her sister).

Oliver, age 29, working as a bar attendant at one night club in the city, says that he addresses all the women who patronize the club, some of them old enough to be his mother, as *sisi*, as 'they do not appear to be mothers plus I don't think that *'vanoda kunzi vanamai.'* (They do not appear to be mothers. Moreover, I don't think they themselves would want to be called

mothers). In September 2001, I attended a wedding ceremony of a friend, which was conducted at one of the Pentecostal congregations in the suburbs. One of the church elders stood up to congratulate the newly weds. He said, “*Ndinoda kuti makorokoto kwauri mwanangu Fanuel newe Ezabel, but imi mose*[to the congregation] *kubva nhasi hapana achabvumirwa kuvadaidza nemazita avo. Mava kungoti baba namai chete.* [Members of the congregation acknowledged by cheering.] (I want to congratulate you my son and daughter Fanuel and Ezabel, but from this moment on, I do not expect any one of you in this congregation to address them with their first names. You shall simply call them father and mother).

Both Oliver and the church elders’ comments and other participants as well show the weight of one’s marital status in governing how they should be addressed. In Shona culture, perhaps as in many other African cultures, when a woman or man reaches adulthood there are certain expectations from society and responsibilities that come along with maturity. It appears that wearing a mini-skirt and frequenting night clubs, if you are a woman, is not associated with adulthood, hence the individual is addressed with a term that would normally be meant for a child (Mashiri 2001a; Vambe and Mawadza 2001). Hence, commercial sex workers, in spite of age, are commonly metaphorically referred to as ‘*vanasisi* or *vanasisi vebasa*’ (Tafadzwa, age 39) (sisters, or working sisters). It therefore appears that getting married is an accomplishment deserving acknowledgement that should be expressed through kinship terms of address that connote adulthood.

#### *Affection (kudalkufarira/kurezva)*

Affection between non-kin involves friendliness or fond attachment. Nathan, age 66, who was a cadre in the Zimbabwe African People’s Union (ZAPU) that was led by Joshua Nkomo, said that Nkomo was popularly addressed and referred to as *baba* ‘father’ or *mudhara wedu* (*umdhala wethu*, in Ndebele), ‘our dear old man/father’, ‘to show great affection people had for him’. In December 2001 my four-year old son gave his pre-school teacher a Christmas present on the last day of school. On receiving the present the teacher knelt beside the boy and recited the following:

*Mazvita baba vangu!*  
*Wazvita zvako murume wangu.*  
 (Thank you my father!  
 You have done well my husband.)

Julius, age 62, a church pastor with a Harare congregation said that when he addresses small girls who attend Sunday school at his church, he calls

them either *mwanangu* (my child) or *muroora* (daughter-in-law). Mary, age 45, an English teacher at one high school said that when she expresses gratitude to students for running errands for her she often uses the term *mwanangu*. The possessive stem *-ngu* (mine) indexes motherly warmth and love in the same way real mothers use when praising, thanking or encouraging their own children. Addressing little boys as *baba*, *murume wangu* or *mukuwasha*, and little girls as *muroora*, symbolises a cultural belief that all little boys grow up to be fathers and sons-in-law, while little girls grow up to be mothers and daughters-in-law.

### **Respect (*kukudza/kunyara*)**

The social meaning *respect* expresses one's 'admiration for, honouring of, or deference toward another individual, the state of being esteemed or admired by another, or both (Winchitz 2001: 358). Wenger (1983: 271) says that, "deference refers to treating others with the proper ritual care'. Most of the participants stated that there are two types of respect: (1) *kukudza* (lit. to respect) or *kunyara* (lit. to be ashamed of), and (2) *kukudza* (repect). The difference between the two is summarised by Tabeth, age 37 who said,

*Pane mustreet kid anochengeta mota muna First pedyo nepandinogadzirwa musoro. Anoti kana ndapaka mota ouya oti, 'Ndinosaurs ndakachengeta mota amaiguru. Ini ndinoti hakusi kukudza chaiko. Munhu anenge achiengerera mari chete. Asi zvakaaita vana vangu, mai vanotishandira vakuru zvokuti hazviiti kuti vanzi sisi saka vanongovakudza vachiti gogo. (There is one street child who volunteers to watch over cars at a parking bay in First street very close to the hair saloon I go to. When I leave my car he comes over and says, 'I will be watching the car auntie. I do not think his respect is genuine at all. He will simply be patronising me to give him a tip. Contrary, I have a maid who is elderly. My children respectfully call her grandmother instead of sister.)*

The respect that the street child car-watcher expresses would fall under type (2) while that expressed by Tabeth's children to the maid falls under type (1) above. The social meaning *respect* in (1) is often expressed to or exchanged between individuals who know each other, yet that in (2) is expressed to or exchanged between strangers. These two forms of respect can be categorised as 'relationship' and 'encounters' (Gutek 1995: 7). A 'relationship' may occur when individual X has repeated contact with a particular individual Y in a social or business interaction. The individuals may get to know each other and build trust over time as that between real kin, as they develop a shared history.

Josephine, age 43, a secretary at an Insurance company said that she addresses an elderly colleague as *ambuya* (grandmother) because she has 'benefited from her grandmotherly advice for many years' and they support

each other in personal matters. I observed that when I worked with a group of Methodist students in 2001 as a spiritual advisor they often addressed me as *baba* connoting respect for my advisory role. I also observed that the terms *sekuru* (paternal/maternal uncle/grandfather) has come to possess, among other uses, a specialised use, viz. to address low status older employees (e.g. messenger, gardener, driver, cleaner, guard, caretaker, waiter). In all the instances mentioned here, the speaker who uses the term *sekuru* is younger than the addressee.

The participants in this study also stated cases where an individual may be older but is obliged to address a younger person using a kin term of respect in recognition of the latter's higher social status or what his or her role symbolises. Examples include, Dorcas, age 48 a nursing sister/midwife at a general hospital who is addressed by maternity patients as *ambuaya* (grandmother) because of her midwifery role; Alice, age 39, a lodger who addresses his much younger landlord and his wife as *baba* and *amai*, respectively, for their parental role of giving Alice shelter, and Moses, age 50 who says members of the church he goes to address their young single female pastor as *amai*, to index her shepherding role. In all the three cases and similar ones, the social meaning *respect* is created through 'impersonalisation' (Wood 1991: 147). Impersonalisation in this sense means that the terms of address the maternity patients, Alice and Moses and his church mates use to refer to their addressees identify these addressees not as individuals, but as members of categories of midwives, house owners and pastors respectively. Hence, it is possible that the terms may not mark genuine respect, but mere patronage.

Contrary to 'relationships' described above, an encounter typically consists of a single interaction between individuals (Gutek 1995: 8). Typical examples are service encounters. This brings us to the social meaning *politeness*.

### ***Politeness***

Being polite is showing good manners toward another person, being courteous, or considerate (see Penman 1990; Wood and Kroger 1991; Holtgraves 2001; Mashiri 2003). Participants in this study stated that when a speaker uses a kinship term normally meant for a superior relative, to address another individual, the social meaning of *politeness* might be a component of what is being expressed between the interlocutors.

Many participants stated this general use: '*Ndinenge ndichitaura nemunhu mukuru wandisingazivi*'. (Amos, age 28) (I would be addressing an older stranger.). This rule dovetails with Goffman's (1967) comment on 'face' when he said that, 'The person in our urban secular world is allotted a kind of sacredness that is displayed and confirmed by symbolic acts' (46). These

symbolic acts are achieved, often unconsciously, through the manipulation of communicative devices. Commenting on the use of Japanese honorific forms, Wenger (1983: 267) says, 'The nature of respect, which is conveyed by honorifics is not easy to characterise. While honorifics are primarily a public symbol of respect, they do not necessarily indicate a "real attitude" of respect.'

I observed that there are many instances where a woman attempting to get a ride in a passing vehicle may pip through the driver's window at a traffic light and shout, '*Muri kusvikawo kupi mukuwasha?*' (How far are you going son-in-law?) or a vendor at a flea market might encourage a female stranger to buy his ware, saying, '*Tine masun-glasses-ka aya ambuya!*' (Would you like these sun-glasses mother-in law). The use of kinship address terms in this manner is meant to 'manage face' (Holtgraves 2001: 342), that is, the speaker is constrained by cultural rules of demeanor to avoid any language behaviour that may embarrass either the addressee or the speaker him- or herself, or both or might suggest any desire to diminish horizontal distance.

There are cases where the addressee may misinterpret the social meaning of the address term used by the speaker. In this case the address may contest the address term usage immediately. Chenai, age 31, a shop assistant in one of the low density suburbs narrated an incident where she greeted an older male customer saying, '*Masikati sekuru.*' (Good afternoon grandfather), to which the man responded, '*Handisi sekuru vako ini. Unonditi sekuru kuti ndachembera here? Sekuru vari kumusha, muno mutaundi hamuna sekuru!*' (I am not your grandfather. Do I look that old for you to call me your grandfather? Grandfathers live in the country side, not here in town).

### ***Friendship (ushamwari/usahwira)***

The term *friendship* was chosen to subsume the state of same-sex companionship and the state of being playmates or buddies. Some of the participants interpreted friendship this way: Roger, age 19, a college student said, '*Shamwari munhu wezera rangu, wandakakura naye tikadzidza tese. Ndingangoti muface wangu wepadyo.*' (I would say that a person I call a friend is an age-mate, someone I grew up with and went to the same school. He is really a close acquaintance). Chengetai, age 22, a university student said, '*Ini munhu wandinoti shamwari munhu ari pedyo neni, sahwira chaiye. Ndiye munhu wandinoudza masecrets iye achindiudzawo ake. Tinofarira zvimwe chete.*' (A friend is someone very close to me, a real companion. She is the person I confide in and she in me. We have mutual interests).

Most participants interpreted the social meaning *friendship* and *closeness* to refer to the same thing. The common elements of *friendship* revealed by these statements are representative of what most participants in this study expressed, that 'friendship is characterised by the ideals of equality, mutual

obligation, mutual knowledge and openness' (Dillard, Wilson, Tusing and Kinney 1997: 305). This means that friends typically share similar status and backgrounds (Hays 1988; Allan 1989; Rawlins 1992), depend on each other in times of need (Hays 1988; Rawlins 1992), share common history and knowledge and display their 'real' selves to each other.

Interviews and participant observation showed that while older male friends exchanged the kinship term *baba* or *bambo* (father) more than younger friends, both categories exchanged the term *sekuru* (maternal uncle). Older men who became friends through marrying women who were friends or relatives then they eventually became close friends themselves, spontaneously allocated each other 'fictive' younger and older brotherly positions, thus addressing each other as *babamukuru* (uncle) and *babamudiki* (uncle), respectively. The English kinship term *aunt* (*tete*) featured quite prominently among, both young adult and older female friends. However, only married women friends exchanged the term *amai*. The kinship terms that the friends exchange in all the cases cited here display affection and respect at the same time or affectionate and respectful reciprocity (Gaines, Jr. 1997: 360). Male friends' use of the term *sekuru* and female friends' use of the English address form *aunt* to express the social meaning *friendship* makes sense since in 'real' Shona kinship relationships, one shares a joking relationship with his [her] maternal uncle and her [his] aunt.

### ***Intimacy***

The social meaning of *intimacy* was not as salient as other social meanings in the participants' talk and use of kinship terms in non-kin relations. Reference to intimacy was made only a total of six times. This could be because some people count intimacy as rather similar to closeness or friendship. However, it was clear from the interviews and observation that the key participants in this study understood intimacy to refer to a very close relationship, including characteristics such as affection. Tendai, age 29, is very affectionate to his boss, thus he addresses her as *mama* 'mother', in informal interactions; the boys at a college in Harare address one janitor as *uncle James*, to connote their intimacy with him and some sixth form students at one school call their Shona teacher *sekuru*, in informal interactions.

There are also a few cases where I observed Christian young men jokingly addressing their lovers as *ma-sisters* (sisters) and the lovers in turn addressing them as *ma-brothers* (brothers). This playful and idiosyncratic use of language by lovers to index intimacy is not unique to Shona. Altman and Taylor (1973) suggest that personal relationships are unique entities created by specific individuals within a specific historical context. Shared meanings and expectations arise within such relationships and these meanings and norms are unique. Empirical studies to show that this is a cultural universal

in romantic relationships and friendships were done (e.g. Baxter and Wilmot 1985; Bell, Buerkel-Rothfuss, and Gore 1987). 'Relational culture' was the term coined to describe the unique symbolic meanings, and patterns of interaction that emerge within close relationships, often bearing little resemblance to public language rules (Fitch 1998: 142).

### *Solidarity*

While the social meanings of *friendship* and *intimacy* are based on mutual penetration of individuals' psychological worlds, a feeling of solidarity 'can exist when an interest outside of the self is held common to more than one individual. It is a feeling of unity or commonality between people that can be based on group membership' (Winchitz 2001: 358). For example, solidarity can be grounded on a group, organisation, club, and so forth. According to the Shona participants in this study, a speaker and hearer exchange kinship terms that express equality, but mutual respect. Willard, age 26, said that among youth members of the church that he goes to, boys and young adults address each other using the honorific title *mukoma* (brother), or *mukoma*, followed by first or surname (e.g. *Mukoma* Willard/*Mukoma* Majoni) regardless of the age of either the speaker or addressee and girls reciprocally address each other as *sisi* (sister), or *sisi*, followed by first or surname (e.g. *Sisi* Maria/*Sisi* Guchu).

James, age 39, a member of one of the African Independent churches in Harare stated that all male members of the church (including children) address each other and are also addressed by all their female folks as *madzibaba* (lit. fathers) or *madzibaba* followed by surname. Similarly, all female members (including children) address each other and are addressed by their male counterparts as *madzimai* (lit. mothers) or *madzimai*, followed by the surname. James explained that young members may address each other or may be addressed by adults using the title, *madzibaba* or *madzimai*, followed by their first names (e.g. *Madzibaba* Peter or *Madzimai* Esther).

The kin terms *mukoma*, *sisi*, *madzibaba* and *madzimai* create a personalised identity, that is, they function as identity markers. Besides, the respectful reciprocity that the terms express connote a levelling effect and a sense of one big family bound together by the same faith. The naming or addressing system, especially that used by the members of the African Independent group cited above, defines in-group from out-group members, a key element of solidarity. The use of sibling kin terms is not unique to Shona. This is similar to the use of *sister* in feminist discourse and the use of *brother* among unrelated black folks in the United States of America 'to express a deep bond of belonging with others of the same ideology or ethnic origin' (Larkey, Hecht and Martin 1993: 308).

I observed that some male young adults normally address a stranger whom they approximate to belong to their generation using the slang terms *blaz* 'brother' for a male and *sisi* or *sistez* (sister) for a female. It is common to hear someone calling out to a stranger on the street, '*Inguvai nhai blaz?*' (What time is it brother?) or '*Muri bho here sistez?*' (How are you doing sister?). Mashiri (2003) reveals that commuter omnibus conductors and touts use these terms very often when addressing same generation passengers that they meet for the first time or who seem familiar. There is an element of assumed generational solidarity, however not as strong as that assumed among members of organised groups as the examples of church members cited above indicate. One way of distinguishing addresses from the social meaning of the addresses exchanged among members in organised groups and among strangers is to refer to the latter as familiarity rather than solidarity. This distinction would be in line with Brown and Gilman (1989) and Wood (1991) who suggested that the solidarity dimension might need to be split into two dimensions, 'distance (or familiarity) and affect (or liking)' (Wood 1991: 151).

#### *Knowing Other*

This social meaning, according to the participants in this study refers to how well or not well one knows the other person or for how long or how well the person is acquainted with another. Many of the participants stated that they would use kinship terms to vocatively address strangers to attract their attention on the street, for example. Peter, age 19 said that if he wanted to ask for time from a woman he would say something like, '*Pamusoroi ambuya, dzingaitewo nguvai?*' (Excuse me mum [mother-in-law], what time is it?). Commenting on the use of kinship terms in Jordanian Arabic, Farghal and Shakir (1994) said that, 'The best way to get the attention of a stranger on the street is to use a honorific kin term' (242).

Shelton, age 57 said that he addresses Jonathan, age 35 as *munin'ina* (young brother) since Jonathan and Shelton's young brother have been best friends since they were children and visit each other's home so often that to Shelton, Jonathan is almost his brother.

#### *Associative Relationship (ukama ruswa)*

This is a relationship where an individual assumes some remote kinship with another that is associated with some common characteristic, experience or link with some third person. Many participants in this study talked of remote kinships based on similarity of totem with the other individual or a member of his or her family. Jane, age 39 a high school teacher said that she addresses one male colleague as *sekuru* since he has the same totem as Jane's mother. Abel, age 44 said that he addresses his neighbour as *mukoma*

since they share the same totem. A woman who is my sister's best friend addresses me as *bhudhi* (brother). Although individuals who share these associative relationships hardly know much about each other or each other's families, certain rights and obligations may end up being given to them. Some functions that are normally fulfilled by true relatives may be wholly or partly taken over by these 'relatives'.

### *Spiritual Relationship*

This is a pseudo-kinship commonly found among Christian societies. (Parkin (1997: 124) says that, 'this is a ritualised kinship that has to be created deliberately through ritual'. The participants in this study identified the social meaning of spiritual relationship as connoting God-parenthood. James, age 16 said that he addresses one member of the church he goes to as *amai*, her children as *sisi*, *mukoma* or *munin'ina* respectively, since the woman helped on his baptism and mentors him spiritually as well. James said that he even addresses this woman's husband, who is not a church member as *baba*. Tandi, age 29 said that she addresses one woman member of her church as *amai* since she mentored her and assisted her baptism and confirmation into full membership of the women's fellowship. People in these relationships are under mutual obligations of generalised reciprocity. They give each other gifts, give mutual manual and moral support at festival times or when misfortune strikes, and sometimes lend each other money.

### *Status*

The participants in this study used the term status to represent expressions of social meaning that refer to the position, level, or rank of one individual in comparison to another. 'Whether a speaker views the other individual with whom he or she is speaking as inferior, equal or superior to him- or herself' (Winchartz 2001: 359) can be expressed through kinship term use. In one wage increase negotiation meeting between an employer and low scale employees at one organisation, an older male employee stood up during discussion time and addressed the much younger employer: '*Imi ndimi baba vedu, hapana zvatingaiteba. Kana tanzwa nzara tinochemawo kwamuri sewana wenyu.*' (You are our father and we depend entirely on you. When we become desperate we plead with you to help us out).

Charles, age 35, a church minister said that members of his congregation refer to him as *baba* (father) and he addresses the adult members as *vanababa* (fathers) or *vanaamai* (mothers) in return, respectively. However, Charles addresses his Bishop as *baba* and receives either *baba* as well or *mwanangu* from him. Charles's analogue shows three levels of social status within the same organisation. From Charles's example and observations of other

participants in this study, it appears that status and power sometimes merge into one another. Yet, they are still different social meanings.

### *Power*

According to Oyetade (1995: 515-6), following Brown and Gilman's (1960) model:

Power refers to authority or superiority of one person over another. It is therefore non-reciprocal, in that two people may not have power over each other (in the same direction). A power relationship obtains, for instance, in communication involving a boss and a subordinate member of staff... In such circumstances, according to Brown and Gilman, the person that wields power over the other uses T(u), and receives the deferential V(ous) from the addressee, who is supposed to have no power.

In Charles's example, it appears that his Bishop has both authority and power over him whereas Charles has authority over members of his congregation but may not have real power over them. While the Bishop can address his ministers under him using the kinship term *mwanangu*, the ministers cannot return the same address to him. Moreover, he has real power over his ministers. Except this case, the dimension of power does not quite apply to Shona as it is conceptualised by Brown and Gilman. Brown and Gilman's concept of asymmetrical address arising from power differentials subordinates age to status. This means that if the person in authority is younger than the subordinate, the former will address the latter using his/her first name while the latter address returns with a title of respect or surname. Charles's observation above shows that although he has 'power' over members of his congregation, they reciprocally exchange kinship terms of respect. The analogue given here shows that the concept of power or status derives its meaning from particular cultural settings. Brown and Gilman's notion is based on Western culture, while the data presented in this study reflects the norms of an African culture.

### *Distance*

The term *distance* was more prominent in the talk of women participants when describing the social meanings available for kinship terms. The terms that are often used to express distance are the in-laws relational address terms: *mukuwasha/mukwambo/tsano* (son/brother-in-law), *ambuya* (mother-in-law), *muroora* (daughter-in-law), *tezvara* (father-in law). According to most participants, distance implies a lack of spatial proximity of one type or another, which can represent a lack of emotional or relational proximity between interlocutors. This makes sense since in Shona culture in-laws have an avoidance relationship, both linguistic and behavioural.

Lucy, age 29 who works as a petrol attendant explained that when she noticed that one regular client was attracted to her and wanted to be too friendly with her she started addressing him as *mukuwasha* and keeping their conversation brief and official as a way of not allowing him to come too close to her. Some male participants said that they use the term *ambuya* to address women adults in business interactions to express and maintain distance between them. Interlocutors also use these terms in both formal and informal service encounters. Vendors at the market freely use these terms to address their clients or one another and commuters in the same vehicles use any of these terms as well for one another (see Mashiri 2003).

### *Patronage*

Although most participants in this study did not use the word patronise, it was clear from their explanations and the emotions they displayed that the forms of language behaviour they described involve the social meaning of *patronage*. Hummert, and Ryan (2001: 254) define patronage as 'modification of talk that is based on stereotypes of incompetence and dependence'. Some common characteristics of patronising speech are 'feigned deference' (McGee and Barker 1982) (e.g. using words that sound polite while winking a third person), 'disrespectful speech' (Ryan, Hummert and Boich 1995: 152), sometimes indicating impatience, and exaggerated praise. The forms of talk are often accompanied by non-verbal features which co-occur with them, for instance, winking at a third person, patting the addressee and gazing contemptuously. Any given message perceived as negative may contain one or more of these features.

Farai, age 31 explained an incident that occurred with her driving instructor when she was taking her driving lessons. She said that the instructor commented, '*Ambuya munodriwa kunge murume chaiye kwete zvinoita vamwe vakadzi. Vanoita kunge vari kunanidza purema yemwana nokutya*' (Lady you drive like a man. You are different from some woman learners who drive a car as if they are pushing a pram with a child inside, through fear). Farai said that she contained her anger by remaining silent since she needed the licence but she found his comments demeaning. I observed an incident in a computer orientation course where one older man had difficulties grasping the instructions the young instructor gave in English. Hence, he would always raise his hand to ask for help. When his hand was up the instructor would say, '*E-e, tsano isai zvenyu ruoko rwenyu pasi, ndinoziva dambudziko renyu. Ndichasvikako!*' (There is no need to raise your hand Sir. I am aware of your problem and I will come over!) The instructor spoke slowly and placed great stress on the kinship term *tsano* to connote his impatience with the slow learner. The older man eventually dropped from the course.

Moreblessings, age 38 explained an incident where she stood in a bus line holding her purse in hand when one young man standing behind her commented, '*Muchabirwa ambuya!*' (Be careful lady. You are risking losing that money to thieves). Moreblessings said that she was annoyed by the man's comments, hence she replied, '*Munoti handizivi zvandiri here mukuwasha. Asi ndimi mbaoha yacho kani?*' (Excuse me Sir. I know what I am doing. I hope you are not announcing your intentions to steal from me). This response is not only effective in establishing the independence of the patronised person, but it also attacks the 'face' of the patroniser by calling attention to his failings as a communicator, just as the patronising attacked the 'face' of the recipient (Hummert and Ryan 2001: 260).

Tracy, age 43, a nurse with a general hospital for more than 14 years and now working at a nursing home in the city says that patronising talk is commonly used with older patients when talking them into taking their medication. She says endearment terms such as *muroora* (daughter-in-law), *vamwene* (mother-in-law) and other non-kin terms such as *vasikana* (girls) and *zimhandara* (A young healthy girl) are used for women, while terms such as *sekuru* (grandfather), *chikomba changu* (sweet-heart) (**often winking at another nurse**) and *mukuwasha* (son-in-law), are used for men. Tracy said that such communication strategies usually 'get the job done.'

### Concluding Remarks

The presentation of the native Shona speakers' interpretations of how they use kinship terms as address resources in non-kin interactions and the social meanings deriving from these uses has revealed two things. First, it has shown that the more parsimonious two- or three-dimension models of scholars such as Brown and Gilman (1960), Brown (1965), Friedrich (1972), Danziger (1976), and others cannot adequately account for the important distinctions and communicative complexities expressed through kinship terms in Shona. Second, this study has provided evidence that support Hymes' (1972) view that only situated ethnographic data of speakers' communicative choices and their interpretation of these choices can enhance our understanding of the distinctive and complex systems of interpersonal relating that underlie daily interactions.

But, as a way of highlighting some of the limitations of the parsimonious models we need to see the extent to which these models would account for the social meanings revealed by Shona kinship terms when they are used as explanatory tools. The basic principle of Brown and Gilman's model is that all social meanings in every language can be mapped somewhere onto the vertical axis power or the horizontal axis of solidarity. There are many of the 15 social meanings of the Shona kinship terms that can be subsumed under these axes. For example, such social meanings as power, status and

respect could be mapped under the power axis, and the *associative relationship*, *spiritual relationship*, and *solidarity*, among others, could be mapped onto the solidarity axis.

The adequacy of the two-dimension model becomes questionable when one attempts to subsume the social meanings of *intimacy*, *patronage* and *knowing other*, for instance, under these axes. While solidarity can be described as a feeling of commonality or unity between individuals based on group membership, intimacy, on the other hand, refers to how interlocutors are attached by something emotional between and within them rather than something outside the relationship. Therefore, 'although solidarity and intimacy could, theoretically co-exist, *solidarity* does not subsume *intimacy*, as is the case in Brown and Gilman's (1960) two-dimension model' (Winchatz 2001: 361). The social meaning of patronage, according to Shona speakers, refers to a speaker's conversational attitude.

In summary, it is clear that the two-dimension model tends to lump together some social meanings that Shona speakers perceive as distinct and separately meaningful. Many researchers of address systems adopt Brown and Gilman's model because of its simplicity (e.g. Hudson 1996). Brown (1965) hailed this simplicity, thus, 'we need some scheme for classifying relations more narrowly, a scheme that will help us see regularities and to understand them' (73). However, the present study has revealed that probably the model's inadequacy is a consequence of this simplicity.

Friedrich (1972), for example attempted to expand the two-dimension model to three by separating intimacy from solidarity. This split allows such Shona social meanings as *friendship*, *intimacy*, *knowing other* to be easily accounted for. In spite of this important move, Friedrich's three-dimension model inherits the Brown and Gilman model's limitation of combining distinct meanings such as power and status, for example. Although power and status can go hand in hand, a person of a higher status than another does not necessarily have power to influence that person. The example of a church minister and members of his congregation is an obvious example. The minister occupies a higher status than members of his congregation in the church hierarchy, but may not have real power to influence them. Thus, while Friedrich's model moves in the direction of a model that can account for the distinctiveness of complex semantic systems, it still cannot adequately account for all social meanings found for the Shona case.

Burgoon and Hale (1984) have taken significant steps to address the inadequacies of the parsimonious models by introducing a 12-theme model. They argue that interlocutors can express their relational messages along 12 distinct but interrelated themes. When they tested these themes empirically in their (1987) study, they then reduced them to 8 dimensions: immediacy-affectation (intimacy 1), similarity-depth (intimacy 11), receptivity-trust (intimacy 111), composure, formality, dominance, equality, and task oriented.

Burgoon and Hale's (1987) model allows for more complexity and finer distinctiveness between meanings to emerge. When the data from the Shona case are applied to Burgoon and Hale's (1987) eight-dimension model, the Shona meanings: *distance, friendship, intimacy, knowing other, politeness, status* and *power*, can be accounted for. However, many other meanings, which did not fit neatly in the previous models, such as *age, adulthood, respect solidarity, etc.* remain unaccounted for.

This brings us to Winchitz's 25 dimensions model based on data on German. This model is derived from the use of the pronoun *Sie*. The model is quite elaborate and accounts for most of the Shona social meanings. Still, there are some dimensions such as *anger, arrogance, rejection, isolation, coldness, conversableness, structured, personal*, which are in the German case, but are not reflected in the Shona speakers' interpretation of the use of kinship terms. Other Shona dimensions such as *patronage, associative relationship, spiritual relationship*, remain unaccounted for by Winchitz's 25 dimensions model in the same way they were not accommodated in the other models discussed above.

The question that remains to be asked is, does the 15 dimensions model suggested for Shona adequately represent all the possible social meanings that the kinship terms can express in non-kin interactions as interpreted by the native speakers? The answer is yes/no. Its no in the sense that when kinship terms are used as terms of address to non-kin addresses multiple social meanings may be expressed simultaneously. But, the answer is also yes, in that this model moves away from determinate, parsimonious schemes that claim universality to more interpretive, ethnographically based ones formulated with reference to "the speaker's intent or the addressee's interpretation of the speaker's intent" (Kendall 1981: 237).

This study, therefore explicates a culturally distinct system of meanings for a particular communicative resource as expressed and interpreted by the interlocutors themselves. This approach allows research in this area to 'expand our knowledge of the links between culture and communication, resulting in the possible enhancement of cultural understanding between individuals and societies' (Winchitz 2001: 366). The present study will, hopefully act as a springboard for similar research in African address systems, especially the creative use of kinship terms in non-traditional settings.

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