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VIETNAMESE

Gender in addressing and self-reference in Vietnamese

Variation and change*

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1. Introduction

Vietnamese, called *Annam* under Chinese domination, today known to its native speakers as *tiếng Việt nam*, is the official language of Vietnam and

belongs to the Viet-Muong branch of the Mon-Khmer subfamily of Austro-Asiatic languages. It is spoken by about 76 million people (Dodd & Lewis 1998). The Northern standard language is based on the Hanoi dialect. The Southern standard dialect is based on the speech of people living in Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City). There is also a Central standard dialect focused on the speech of Hue. The Hanoi dialect is closest to the writing system, which encodes all those contrasts that are found in all dialects. The dialects form a continuum from north to south. With regard to tone, Northern and Southern dialects share many features, while Central dialects stand on their own. Vietnamese is spoken not only in Vietnam, but also in parts of Cambodia, Laos and Thailand. After the political victory of the North in 1975, people fled the country in great numbers. There are about two million Vietnamese people living all over the world, half of them in North America.¹

In the several centuries of Chinese domination, Vietnam used Chinese characters (*chữ Hán*) in education and official communication. By the 13th century, the Vietnamese had created their own writing system called *chữ Nôm*, based on Chinese characters with Sino-Vietnamese pronunciation (see Đào 1973: 55). In the 16th century, Alexandre de Rhodes, a French Catholic missionary who was a gifted linguist, invented a new writing system based on Roman scripts, *chữ Quốc ngữ* 'national script', for religious texts. This system is phonological in nature. Since the beginning of the 20th century, it has served as the official writing system of Vietnamese.

2. Selected structural properties of Vietnamese

A large proportion of the vocabulary of Vietnamese is of Chinese origin as the result of the intensive Chinese cultural influence during ten centuries of Chinese rule. These lexical items are usually known as Sino-Vietnamese. Most Sino-Vietnamese (SV) items have Vietnamese (VN) counterparts, which are interchangeable in most cases, e.g., *đàn bà* (VN) / *phụ nữ* (SV) 'woman'. Except for many Sino-Vietnamese compounds where the usage of Vietnamese counterparts is considered inappropriate, Vietnamese forms can be used in almost any context, while Sino-Vietnamese forms occur mainly in formal contexts and written language. The overuse of Sino-Vietnamese is regarded as pompous and awkward; the overuse of Vietnamese forms for Sino-Vietnamese compounds is seen as uneducated and improper. However, there have been

concerted efforts by nationalists to replace Sino-Vietnamese forms with Vietnamese ones where possible.

Vietnamese does not have grammatical gender. It is a classifier language which demands the use of a classifier when a noun is combined with a numeral. The choice of classifier depends on features such as animateness, humanness, social position and attitude of the speaker, to name a few. For instance, *con* 'animal' is used for animals and insects (*con kiến* 'an ant'), and *cái* 'thing' for inanimate objects (*cái bàn* 'a table'). However, *con* also can be used for inanimate objects to emphasize motion, e.g., *con thuyền* 'a boat'. Objects can have classifiers according to their shape, e.g., *cây* for stick-like objects (*cây bút* tree + pen 'a pen'), *tờ* for sheet-like objects (*tờ giấy* 'a piece of paper'), *tập* for books (*tập vở* 'a notebook'). A person can have different classifiers, including a common noun such as *người* (*người lính* person + soldier 'a soldier') or *nhà* (*nhà thơ* house + poetry 'a poet'), a kinship term (*anh/chú/ông* older brother/uncle/grandfather + soldier 'a soldier'), depending on the age of the speaker compared with that of the referent; or classifiers such as *thằng* 'fellow', *tên* 'name' exhibiting semantic derogation, e.g., *thằng lính* 'a soldier', *tên cướp* name + rob 'a robber'.

In a noun phrase with a numeral, a classifier must be used between the number and the noun: numeral-classifier-noun, e.g., *ba người con* three + person + offspring 'three children' (Nguyễn 1987; see also Löbel 2000 for a detailed description of the occurrence vs. non-occurrence of classifiers).

Vietnamese is a monosyllabic language. Each syllable usually constitutes a word. The canonical syllable structures are (C)(w)V(C), in which V, i.e., the only obligatory element, can be a vowel or a diphthong.² Any consonant can occur initially, but only a limited number of consonants can occur finally. Every syllable has a tone. There are six phonemic tones (their Vietnamese names are *ngang*, *huyền*, *sắc*, *nặng*, *hỏi* and *ngã*) to distinguish words with identical consonant and vowel sequences. In Southern dialects, the tone *ngã* merges with the tone *hỏi*.

Variation of the basic word order SVO is significant in Vietnamese, as might be expected in the virtual absence of other overt indicators to express the syntactic relations of words to each other. Vietnamese is morphologically isolating and makes use of modifiers rather than of affixes to express tense and voice of verb forms, e.g., *nó ăn* he/she + to eat 'he/she eats', *nó đã* (past morpheme) *ăn* 'he/she ate', *nó ăn rồi* (already) 'he/she has already eaten', *nó chưa* (not yet) *ăn* 'he/she has not eaten yet'. There are no case markers in Vietnamese, and thus a noun can function as subject, object, or any other syntactic role without changing its form (Nguyễn 1977, Thompson 1965, Ngô 1984).

3. Terms for human referents

This section is concerned with Vietnamese terms for person reference that are used in addressing, reference and self-reference. As there is no grammatical gender in Vietnamese, this is an important area where gender differences are expressed and constructed. The respective terms can be derived from personal nouns, common nouns, kinship terms, pronouns or proper nouns. In this section, I shall describe each subsystem separately, in order to establish what might be called a protosystem, against which I can then outline the changes that are taking place.

3.1 Personal nouns

A personal noun can be formed from a verb or adjective with a classifier. The classifier precedes the noun in Vietnamese forms and follows the noun in Sino-Vietnamese forms. For instance, Vietnamese forms such as *người đọc* person + read 'a reader', *người bệnh* person + sick 'a patient', *thầy thuốc* master + medicine 'a physician', *thầy dạy* master + teach 'a teacher' have the corresponding Sino-Vietnamese forms *độc giả* 'a reader', *bệnh nhân* 'a patient', *bác sĩ* 'a physician', *giáo sư* 'a professor', respectively.

Some verbs, nouns or adjectives can function as nominal address forms for the interlocutor, e.g., *đẻ* 'to give birth' > 'mother', *cưng* 'to dearly love' > 'sweetheart', *vú* 'breast' > 'wet-nurse', *nhỏ* 'small' > 'you'.

Except for lexical gender words such as *vua* 'king' vs. *hoàng hậu* 'queen', *hoàng tử* 'prince' vs. *công chúa* 'princess' and certain kinship terms (cf. Section 3.2), all human nouns and occupational terms are used for both women and men. As Vietnamese does not have affixes, gender-specification is achieved by special morphemes used as modifiers (e.g., Sino-Vietnamese *trai/gái*, *nam/nữ* 'male/female') or classifiers, e.g., *bạn trai* 'a male friend/boyfriend' vs. *bạn gái* 'a female friend/girlfriend'; *ông hiệu trưởng* 'Mr Principal' vs. *bà hiệu trưởng* 'Mrs Principal'; *cậu giáo* uncle + teach 'a male teacher' vs. *cô giáo* young lady + teach 'a female teacher'; Sino-Vietnamese *nam sinh* 'a male student' vs. *nữ sinh* 'a female student'.³ These forms are used in normal or formal contexts. There is no asymmetry in these 'male'/'female' morphemes, but the two particular Vietnamese special designations, *thằng* (male) and *con* (female) occur only in solidarity contexts and will be discussed in Section 5.4.

3.2 Kinship terms

The system of kinship terms that may be used as address terms is shown in Table 1, which represents the Southern dialect. In the table, the slash symbol marks a male-female couple of the same generation. For example, *cậu* is mother's brother, and his wife is *mợ*. Three generations of relatives are shown in the table, separated by double lines.

Table 1. Vietnamese kinship terms

<i>ông</i> grandfather		<i>bà</i> grandmother	
<i>bác / bác</i> father's older brother / his wife	<i>cô / dượng</i> father's sister / her husband	<i>cậu / mợ</i> mother's brother / his wife	<i>dì / dượng</i> mother's sister / her husband
<i>chú / thím</i> father's younger brother / his wife			
<i>ba</i> father, dad		<i>mẹ</i> mother, mom	
<i>anh</i> older brother		<i>chị</i> older sister	
<i>con</i> offspring (term of self-reference in speaking to older generations)			
<i>em</i> younger brother or sister (term of self-reference in speaking to siblings)			

Table 1 shows the terms as they would be if the speaker was a member of the youngest generation. In South Vietnam, a child can use the term *con* 'offspring' for self-reference when speaking to members of the older generations.⁴ In the third generation, younger brothers or sisters address their older brother and sister as *anh* or *chị*, respectively, and use the term *em* 'younger brother/sister' for themselves.

Kinship terms differentiate the grandparents by gender (grandmother and grandfather), but not by lineage (paternal or maternal). However, children usually use *ông nội* and *bà nội* to refer to their paternal grandfather and grandmother, and *ông ngoại* and *bà ngoại* to refer to their maternal grandfather and

literary Vietnamese (poetry, novels, folk tales, lyrics, songs, etc.).

Among the third person pronouns, the gender distinction is made only in the pair *chàng/nàng*. The rest can refer to both females and males. The third person singular pronoun *hắn* is used generically in spoken language, but in written language, it usually refers to males. *Ngài* is generic as a religious term, but in diplomatic contexts, the term *ngài* 'you' exclusively implies male. This is because certain important positions or occupations were taken only by men: politicians, physicians, professors, and lawyers. Today, if the addressee were female, *ngài* 'you' would not be employed; instead, the kinship term *bà* 'grand-mother' would be used, as in *bà thủ tướng* 'Mrs Prime Minister', or *bà Đại sứ* 'Mrs Ambassador'. There is a generic pronominal term that originates from a noun: *minh* 'body'. In sentences such as the following *minh* is used as a reflexive pronoun:

- (1) *Mỗi học sinh phải mang sách của mình.*
each student must bring text book of self
'Each student has to bring their own textbook.'

Minh can serve as a personal pronoun for both genders meaning 'I, you (sing)' and 'we (inclusive)' in colloquial language. The special use of this term will be further discussed in Section 5.2.

Apart from the plural pronouns *họ* (3PL) and *bay* (2PL), plurality can also be indicated by the use of two plural markers, *chúng* and *các*. For instance, *ngài* is pluralized by *các*, i.e., *các ngài*. The other singular pronouns can be pluralized by *chúng*, e.g., *chúng nó* 'they', *chúng ta* 'we (inclusive)', *chúng tôi* 'we (exclusive)', *chúng mày* 'you (PL)'; see Emeneau (1951) and Thompson (1965) for detailed discussions of personal pronouns.

The choice of a particular pronoun carries social significance beyond the denotative meaning of the pronoun. A child can tell how upset his or her parent is by the address term the parent uses. A husband can understand how his wife feels about what he has said by her choice of words. An observer can presume certain background information about the social class, education, individual traits and origin of a person when they first meet by the use of address terms.

Names can also serve as address terms. They can be used to refer to the speaker, the hearer or someone not present. Using proper names for self-reference occurs more in female speech than in male speech (cf. Lương 1990: 108). In many cases, proper names are seen as neutral terms to avoid embarrassment in situations where the social hierarchy is not clearly defined. This issue will be discussed in Section 5.

4. Male/female relations in idiomatic expressions

In Vietnamese, there are some idioms and folk sayings which denigrate women in certain situations, but no similar ones exist for men in the same situations. For instance, the abusive term *gái già* girl + old 'old girl, spinster' refers to a woman who remains single after a certain age. If a married woman does not have children, she may receive the comment:

- (2) *Gái độc không con.*
girl poisonous no offspring
'Only bad women cannot have children.'

Referring to a married woman who already has children, the term *ngà dòng* 'a woman having children' carries a negative meaning, something like 'a used-up woman', but there is no similar term for a married man. When a woman cheats on her husband, she is referred to as *gái lộn chồng* girl + mistaken + husband 'an unfaithful woman'. There is no comparable expression for a man in the same situation. These asymmetries clearly indicate a society where moral criteria are much more strictly applied to women than to men. Similarly, if a woman is left by her husband, something must be wrong with her, as indicated by the saying:

- (3) *Gái chồng rẫy, phi chồng nợ thì tật kia.*
girl husband leave not bad.lot this so bad.habit that
'An abandoned wife must certainly have a bad character.'

Women are also judged by their physical attributes. For instance, a wide mouth is a good thing in men but a bad one in women:

- (4) *Đàn ông rộng miệng thì tài, đàn bà rộng miệng điếc tai láng giềng.*
men wide mouth then talent women wide mouth deaf ear neighbor
'A man with a wide mouth is stylish, a woman with a wide mouth is noisy.'

If a woman's hair is naturally curly, she must be a jealous person:

- (5) *Quăn quăn tóc trán là người hay ghen.*
curly hair forehead be person often jealous
'Women with curly hair are often jealous people.'

the relative status of the people with whom they came into contact. The use of address terms, though complex, was relatively well-defined.

As the 20th century progressed, a number of social changes created a more fluid social system. Urbanization led to closer contacts among castes, classes and social groups, and occupational mobility resulted in greater flexibility in social status. Women, whose roles were formerly well-defined as largely domestic and reproductive, began participating in the more public spheres of education and later business, commerce, and politics. To some extent, these changes were a reflection of the influential French colonial system, which provided a European perspective for at least the upper echelon of Vietnamese society. Vietnam encountered additional social forces for change: Many years of civil war brought the country into close contact with occidental cultures, not only French, but also American. These contacts conspired with the other social changes to "democratize" Vietnamese society, which in turn affected the Vietnamese system of person reference.

Women are more restricted in the terms they use, and are thus more sensitive to their social effect. When choices of address terms change in any of the subsystems described above, those changes are more likely found in the speech of women than men.

One of the essential characteristics of the system is that the terms are highly context-sensitive. When speakers choose terms of address, self-reference and reference in Vietnamese, they must be aware of the social nuances of the situation. Consequently, there is a tendency to avoid certain terms in specific contexts. For example, in the first half of this century, in rural areas, a young wife might avoid using any specific terms to refer to herself or to her husband. The conversation below, which is a well-known witticism in Vietnam, illustrates this avoidance. In (11), the young wife addresses her husband using *ai*, an indefinite pronoun meaning 'someone, everyone, anyone' in a statement or 'who' in a question. In the husband's reply, he teases his wife by using the literal meaning of the pronoun. In the last utterance, the first two *ais* refer to the wife and husband, respectively; the second two *ais* have the literal meaning of an interrogative pronoun 'who', which is perfectly understood.

- (11) Wife: *Ai ơi, về ăn cơm!*
 someone voc return eat rice
 'Hey, someone, go home for lunch!'
 Husband: *Ai gọi ai đấy?*
 who call who PRT
 'Who is calling whom?'

- Wife: *Ai gọi ai chứ còn ai gọi ai nữa?*
 someone call someone PRT still who call who then
 'I (someone) am calling you (someone), who else (who) is calling you (who)?'

The use of some common nouns as terms of address or self-reference with special meanings is quite common. For instance, in (12), a young woman refers to herself as *người ta* 'people' when speaking to her boyfriend:

- (12) *Hôm qua không tới làm người ta chờ mãi.*
 day pass not come make people wait ever
 'I (people) waited (for you) for a long time yesterday but (you) did not come.'

Here, the girl is blaming her boyfriend for not coming. She uses *người ta* for self-reference and no term at all for the addressee. The unmarked use in this case would be the kinship terms *anh* 'elder brother' for the addressee and *em* 'younger sibling' for self-reference (*Hôm qua anh không tới làm em chờ mãi*). These kinship terms would show normal intimacy, but that is not what the girl wants. She wants to convey the message that she is upset, so she chooses a term that literally refers to herself as a third party *người ta* and omits any explicit reference to her boyfriend.

Depending on the context, *người ta* can be used to refer to the addressee or a third person, as in (13). Here, a girl speaks to her boyfriend about another girl whom she considers her rival. She uses *tôi* for self-reference to show aloofness and jealousy, the first *người ta* for that girl (her rival), and the second *người ta* for the addressee:

- (13) *Tôi đâu có đẹp như người ta để được người ta*
 I not have beauty like people in.order.to get people
ngó tới.
 look.at PRT
 'I know that (I am) not as beautiful as her (people) to get your (people's) attention!'

Although the speaker in (12) and (13) can be female or male, women are more likely to speak this way than men. The speakers indicate a certain deliberate distance in a close relationship by referring to themselves or to the addressee with a common noun otherwise used for a third party, *người ta* 'people/they', in intimate contexts.

Between females or when speaking to a person of the opposite gender, a speaker who uses *minh* for self-reference usually employs a proper name to address the interlocutor. This usage is common among young and middle-aged people in urban settings.

Between males, *minh* can be used for self-reference when speaking to a close friend, or to a person the speaker first meets in non-formal contexts who is younger or the same age. However, if the conversation is between a male and a female, they need to be close friends in order to use the term *minh* for self-reference. If they are not close friends, the man would be regarded as impolite regardless of his age, and the woman might be regarded as flirtatious if she was about the same age. However, this usage is acceptable if the woman is much older than the man.

In Southern dialects, except among married couples, speakers use the term *minh* only for self-reference, but in North Vietnam, *minh* can refer to either the speaker or the addressee. This leads to different possible meanings for sentences like (17):

- (17) *Mình sẽ gặp ông Tam sáng mai.*
body will meet Mr Tam morning tomorrow

A Southerner would understand that it is the speaker who will meet Mr Tam tomorrow morning; but the sentence is ambiguous for a Northerner, since it can also mean 'You will meet Mr Tam tomorrow morning'.

Among friends, *tớ* 'servant' can occur as the first person to show a close relationship. A friend speaks to another friend in (18):

- (18) *Cậu đừng nói nữa, tớ chán lắm rồi!*
mother's.brother not say more servant fed.up much already
'You should not speak any more, I (servant) am already fed up!'

Sentence (18) can be used by female as well as male speakers. The kinship term *cậu*, though it refers explicitly to a male, i.e. 'mother's brother', can be employed in Northern dialects to address a female friend.

In Southern dialects, the term corresponding to Northern *cậu* and *dường ấy* side + that 'you' is *bỏ* 'large basket'. It means something like English 'buddy'. Generally this term is used between people of the same age and it is very common, especially in female speech, perhaps because women show intimacy more easily than men and are more open towards friends.

Another popular term among Saigonese youngsters is *nhỏ* 'little'. It can be used to refer to someone who is younger or the same age. In (19), the speaker

is talking to her friend about another girl or woman who might not be their friend. The speaker uses *tui* for self-reference, *nhỏ* 'little' for the third person, and *bỏ* 'large basket' for the addressee:

- (19) *Tui thấy nhỏ đó coi bộ siêng hơn*
I see little that see appearance hard.working than
bỏ nghen.
large.basket PRT
'I think that girl (little) seems to be more hard-working than you (large basket).'

The term *nhỏ* 'little' can also refer to the interlocutor. For example, a female speaks to her female friend in (20):

- (20) *Mai nhớ nhớ chờ ta đi học với nghe.*
tomorrow little remember wait.for I go study with PRT
'Tomorrow you (little) remember to wait for me to go to school.'

The pair *ta ... nhỏ* 'I ... little' as used in (20) is very common between female students. Male students do not use the term *nhỏ* to address male friends, but only to address close female friends or mostly girlfriends. In speaking to a lover, a male speaker can select the kinship term *anh* 'elder brother' for self-reference. In this case, *nhỏ* means something like 'sweetheart' or 'honey' in English. The term *nhỏ* in this situation can be replaced with *bé* 'small' with the same intimacy. The term *bé* resembles the meaning of English 'baby'. Young children can also be addressed as *bé*.

In the next section, I will show that terms of address, self-reference and reference have changed in contemporary Vietnamese society, especially the terms women use in all types of relationships. Although the sociocultural organization of Vietnam differs from Western countries, the sociolinguistic behavior of females and males is susceptible to the same pressures for variation and change.

5.3 Terms of address and self-reference in various female-male encounters

Beginning in the first decades of the 20th century, partly under the influence of new values brought by the French, there was a social revolution against traditional values and rules. Its effects are especially noticeable in asymmetric power relationships such as those between masters and servants, teachers and

economic reforms, housekeeping has again become a desirable job in Vietnam. Not only do housekeepers use terms appropriate to their age to refer to themselves, but their employers no longer use the pair *tao ... mày* 'I... thou' when speaking to their housekeepers as they did before, unless the context is appropriate, i.e. when the speaker is older but wants to show familiarity between the two of them. Masters now, depending on their age, can use *tôi* 'I' or *con* 'offspring' to refer to themselves, and *chị* 'elder sister', *đi* 'mother's sister' or something similar to refer to the servant. The servant can now use the term *tôi* or *con* to refer to herself when speaking to the masters. In addressing young masters, the housekeeper can use *cô* 'father's sister' or *cậu* 'mother's brother'.

5.3.2 Teachers and students

When a teacher is talking to younger students in formal contexts, a male can use *thầy* 'master' and a female can employ *cô* 'father's sister' for self-reference. This usage reveals another asymmetry, because women cannot be referred to as *thầy* even though the word literally means, simply, 'teacher'. When the term is applied to women, it is for fortune-tellers instead of teachers, and in this instance it is always qualified as *bà thầy*, that is, the gender must be specified as female even though the word is not marked as male.

In many places, when speaking to teachers who are as old as their parents, students use *con* 'offspring' for self-reference. The term *con* 'offspring' was very common before 1975 in South Vietnam, and especially before 1954 in both North and South Vietnam. Today, the most common term used by students for self-reference is *em* 'younger sibling'. Using *tôi* 'I' when speaking to teachers is extremely rare, even among adult students, since it is considered too egalitarian in this relationship.

Currently, students can also refer to themselves by using proper names when speaking to their teachers. This use was not possible in the past when students used only *con* 'offspring' to refer to themselves. Using proper names for self-reference occurs mainly among young students and female students, but not among older male students in either North or South Vietnam, because this is considered "feminine".

Under current social conditions, address and self-reference sometimes pose a problem for adult male students. Before 1945, it was very rare for Vietnamese women to receive higher education or any formal education at all. After 1954, when Vietnam became independent, women slowly achieved almost the same rights to education as men. Many young women now become post-secondary school teachers. At the same time, many people, especially men, have a chance

to go back to school in their middle age.

Adult male students can easily use the typical term *em* 'younger sibling' to refer to themselves when speaking to a male teacher, whether the teacher is older or younger. However, when the teacher is female and younger than the male student, it is extremely difficult for the student to choose a term for self-reference. The traditional term for addressing female teachers, *cô* 'father's sister' is awkward. If the student is much older than the female teacher, the student can use *tôi* 'I' for self-reference. If the student is not very much older, the pronoun *tôi* does not sound polite enough, because the pair *cô ... tôi* is usually employed by a male speaking to a younger girl when the man is socially superior. In this case, if he were to use the term *em* 'younger sibling', it would diminish his masculinity. Men in this position usually resort to either using their proper names or avoiding any terms at all for self-reference. Sometimes adult male students use the term *cô giáo* father's sister + teach = 'female teacher' to refer to the female teacher and the term *học trò* study + person = 'student' to refer to themselves. This term shows intimacy in a pleasant and rather humorous way, because the term *học trò* is normally used only to refer to elementary students, not to adult or university students, and the term *cô giáo* 'female teacher' is an occupational term that is not normally used as an address term.

Female adult students have no problem using the term *em* when speaking to younger teachers, whether female or male. Avoidance usually occurs exclusively in the speech of male adult students in this case.

Teachers can also address their students by their proper names. Using proper names shows greater intimacy in this relationship. For instance, in (22), a teacher speaks to his student, *Nam*, by name:

- (22) *Ngày mai thầy sẽ đưa Nam ra bến đò.*
 day tomorrow teacher FUT lead Nam to landing ferry
 'Tomorrow I (teacher) will go with you (Nam) to the ferry-landing.'

The student in (22) might be a male or female, child or adult, but must be younger than the teacher. In referring to himself by his occupation, *thầy* 'teacher', the teacher is using the most neutral of all terms for self-reference. Female teachers use proper names more than male teachers; such usage is regarded as more gentle and intimate in solidarity contexts.

5.3.3 Neighbors and work mates

In informal contexts, saying *em* 'younger sibling' for self-reference when speaking to an acquaintance or neighbor is quite common among women in

since it was considered to be an exclusive term for people of the dominant class. However, when the current Vietnamese socialist government had to carry out economic reforms and open its economy to the Western world in the late 1980s and especially in the 1990s, the term *ngài* 'you' returned as an address term in diplomatic contexts.

In the last two decades, the term *đồng chí* 'comrade' has gradually disappeared. It became a relic of the war years. Instead, kin terms such as *ông* 'grandfather', *bà* 'grandmother', *anh* 'older brother' or *chị* 'older sister' are now used in public communication situations such as television, radio and newspapers.

5.4 Women and men as couples

Among married couples, more intimate address terms have come into common use. In traditional Vietnamese society, and still in many parts of present-day Vietnam, husbands were masters in their families. They made all the important decisions and had great power over their wives. Women were supposed to obey their husbands in every situation. When guests came to visit or to dine, wives worked in the kitchen and were not allowed to eat at the same table with their husbands and their guests.

Before 1945, husbands could legally have more than one wife. The first wife could buy a concubine for her husband in order to have a servant in the house or to bear her husband's children if she herself as the first wife did not have any sons.

The asymmetry in the relationship between husband and wife was reflected in the terms of address, reference and self-reference they used. The husband generally could use the pair *tao ... mày* 'I ... thou' when speaking to his wife in normal situations, but a wife was never allowed to select that pair when speaking to her husband, since this was considered too familiar. In (26), taken from the 1939 novel *Làm Lễ* ('Being a concubine'), a husband speaks to his concubine about his first wife:

- (26) *Tao chỉ có thể vì tiền lương cô mày*
I only have that since money salary father's.sister thou
giữ cả.
keep all
'I only have that much, because my first wife (your aunt) keeps all money.' (Mạnh 1939: 144)

Here the husband uses the term *tao* 'I' to refer to himself, *mày* 'thou' to refer to the concubine, and *cô* 'father's sister' to refer to his first wife. The kinship term *cô* is also the term the concubine uses to address the first wife.

If the concubine had children, her children would be obliged to call the first wife *mẹ* 'mother' and they would call their biological mother *chị* 'elder sister', because the concubine's role was to give birth for the husband and his first wife. In many cases, the children of the concubine use the term *bé* 'little' to refer to their biological mother, which is also the term the first wife employs to refer to the concubine.

Since 1954, there has been a law forbidding men to have more than one wife. However, mainly in the South, some men still have concubines. Today, children of the concubine use the term *mẹ* 'mother', not *chị* 'elder sister', to refer to their biological mother as well as to the first wife.

Another expression that reflects the asymmetry in the relationship between husbands and wives is the third person singular pronoun *nó* 'he/she'. A man can use this term to refer to his wife in normal situations, but again it is forbidden for a wife to make use of it in referring to her husband. Even among many young and educated people, this asymmetry still holds. The husband's use of *nó* 'she' in public might be a way to show off the power of the husband over his wife in front of a third party, or at least to show he is the decision-maker in his family, whether or not this is true. However, today men use the term *nó* less often. They usually employ polite terms to refer to their wives in the third person, such as *nhà tôi* 'my house', *bà ấy* 'that grandmother'. Sometimes they combine the two; for instance in (27), the man uses *nhà tôi* 'my house' and *nó* 'he/she' to refer to his wife:

- (27) *Tôi hỏi nhà tôi, nhưng nó bảo anh không muốn*
I ask house I but he/she say elder.brother not want
bán chiếc xe cũ.
sell CL vehicle old
'I asked my wife (my house), but she said you (elder brother) did not want to sell the old vehicle.'

Among working class people, this use of terms is quite common and is considered polite. However, a wife cannot use the same terms in that way to refer to her husband, although both expressions, *nhà tôi* 'my house' and *nó* 'he/she', can be employed to refer to a husband and a man, respectively. Instead of the pronoun *nó*, she must say *nhà tôi* or *ông ấy* 'that grandfather', or something similar. In this respect, the asymmetry between husbands and wives is preserved in the working class.

- (32) Tôi nghĩ ông nên hỏi lại bà xã
 I think grandfather should ask again grandmother village
 chuyện này.
 matter this
 'I think you (grandfather) should check with your wife (grandmother
 village) again about this.'

The speaker uses *ông* 'grandfather' to refer to his friend and *bà xã* grandmother + village 'wife' to refer to the friend's wife. The speaker in (32) may be young or middle-aged.

In Vietnam, girls bear their father's last names. Wives do not legally adopt their husbands' names after they get married, but they are usually referred to by their husbands' first names preceded by a kinship term: *bà Vinh* grandmother + Vinh 'Mrs Vinh' (the wife of Vinh), *đì Nhiễm* mother's sister + Nhiễm 'Mrs Nhiễm' (the wife of Nhiễm). Today, when many women work outside the family, have a career and their own social status, wives are more often referred to by their maiden names (i.e., their former names).

In urban settings, husbands can use proper names without a kinship term or other qualifier to address their wives and also to refer to them when speaking to friends and acquaintances. In rural areas, where women either do housework or work in the field, husbands rarely use maiden names to refer to their wives, and this usage never occurs with middle-aged and old couples.

Among young and middle-aged couples, when the kinship terms *anh* and *em* are used for addressing each other, they do not pose any problem if husbands are older than their wives. When husbands are younger than their wives, we now find women changing the way in which they refer to their husbands and themselves. In years past, when wives were normally homemakers and their husbands were breadwinners, wives considered themselves to be under their husbands' protection. Hence, using the term *em* 'younger sibling' to refer to herself was natural for a wife, whether or not she was the younger in the marriage. The wife automatically assumed a lower status in the family: That was a woman's place. In urban settings now, if husbands are younger than their wives, wives – particularly educated ones – consider the term *em* for self-reference to be either humorous or embarrassing. In this case, proper names come to the rescue: Wives refer to their husbands and to themselves by proper names, or they use *anh* 'elder brother' to address their husbands and their own proper names to refer to themselves.

In referring to their girlfriends, men usually use only proper names without the special designation *con*. With young couples today, using proper names has

become very common so that among urban people, women sometimes use proper names to address older boyfriends and the term *em* 'younger sibling' for self-reference:

- (33) Chiều qua em tính tới Hưng mà trời mưa quá.
 afternoon pass younger.sibling intend come Hung but sky rain much
 'Yesterday afternoon I (younger sibling) wanted to come to see you
 (Hung), but it rained so heavily.'

The girl in (33) uses *em* 'younger sibling' to refer to herself, and the man's name, *Hung*, to refer to her boyfriend. This use of proper names would have been regarded as inappropriate a generation ago, because when addressing an older person, the speaker was expected to use an appropriate kinship term followed by the proper name, such as *anh Hưng* 'elder brother Hung', *chú Hưng* 'father's younger brother Hung'. Proper names without a preceding kinship term were used only to address younger persons. In (33), by omitting a kinship term before her boyfriend's name, the speaker erases the hierarchy implied in age differences and makes the relationship as between best friends. However, she shows her respect for her boyfriend in her use of *em* 'younger sibling' for self-reference. Her use of his proper name is innovative, and a positive indicator of equality.

Intimate address terms such as *cưng* 'sweetheart' or *bé* 'little, baby' have also become common among young couples. Although these terms are mainly used by men to address their wives or girlfriends, young women sometimes use *cưng* 'sweetheart' to address their men, something that was considered improper for women in the past.

To summarize, the asymmetry in the relationship between husbands and wives is partly reflected in the terms men use to refer to their wives. Men can use certain terms when speaking or referring to their wives. In contrast, wives are not allowed to make use of these terms when addressing or referring to their husbands. The privilege of being a man is shown in a familiar folk saying:

- (34) Khôn ngoan cũng thế đàn bà, dẫu rằng vụng dại
 smart still be women although clumsy silly
 cũng là đàn ông.
 still be men
 'No matter how smart she is, she is still just a woman; no matter
 how clumsy and silly he is, he is still a man.'

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WELSH

The politics of language and gender in Wales

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Notes

References

1. Introduction

Welsh (*Cymraeg*) is an Indo-European language, a member of the Celtic subgroup. It is closely related to Breton and Cornish, and more distantly to Irish, Scottish Gaelic and Manx. It is currently spoken by approx. 500,000 speakers, i.e. 20% of the population of Wales, one of the countries which make up the British Isles. It has been under heavy pressure from English since the 16th century, but since the 1960s a growing demand for language rights has resulted in greater official status for the Welsh language, and it is now used in a wider range of domains than previously.