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The Distribution of Person-Referring Expressions in Natural Conversation

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This article outlines a methodology that integrates past approaches to the subject of address and reference, which will allow for the systematic and quantitative analysis of which person-referring expressions are preferred by whom, and when they are used. Our purpose is to make a case for examining personal reference as it occurs in natural conversation and to outline a way to make this possible. We present our methodology and highlight certain practical problems that arise, along with suggested responses. This includes a discussion of the coding scheme that has been developed and applied to a corpus of natural conversation. The desired result of this article is to give a clear account of the aims and constraints of our project. We discuss the differences

between our methodology and those of other studies (noting the improvements and the difficulties), and the use this project might make of concepts drawn from subject areas such as conversation analysis and pragmatics (e.g., topic, politeness, the role of sociological variables). We also present a summary report of the results of the pilot study.

There is a substantial literature, from several different disciplines, that deals with personal reference. Usually the articles have concentrated on one functional aspect, either as used to address (Braun, 1988) or as used to refer to someone other than the addressee (Murphy, 1988). Sometimes only particular fields of personal reference, such as kinship terms (Lévi-Strauss, 1969) or pronouns (R. Brown & Gilman, 1960), are discussed. Our project integrates many of these approaches so as to consider *all* linguistic expressions that are used to refer to people. We use the term "person-referring expression" (or PRE) as a general term to cover all the linguistic means of talking about people.[1] Usually these will include pronouns, names, titles, and kin terms.

We begin with the reflection that every time a speaker mentions (refers to) a person there is a range of different (mainly linguistic) means available. Once the decision to refer explicitly has been taken, a further choice must be made from among this range to select the actual expression used. What must be recognized is that even when grammatical constraints have been taken into account, the speaker has more than one option of expressions that could be used. Some general social factors come into play; as anthropologists we are particularly interested in the role of *kinship relations* in affecting the choice of PRE.[2] However, as demonstrated by much of the previous work in this area, many other factors must also be considered, as well as kinship. Hence, we ask many of the same questions that previous researchers have asked, including what types of expression are used by whom to refer to whom.

Early analyses (R. Brown & Gilman, 1960; R. Brown & Ford, 1964) proffered explanations of pronoun choice in terms of power and solidarity. Yet these variables were constant throughout a single conversation, and so they could not explain why some utterances contain PREs. This is especially so in the case of vocatives, because the speaker could, in principle, explicitly refer to the intended addressee in every turn and yet generally does not. This leads us to a second, more fundamental, question regarding the factors that determine the choice of a PRE: What types of utterances contain these expressions? Only more detailed analyses of language use can answer these questions, such as those that allow for face considerations (Goffman, 1967; P. Brown &

Levinson, 1978, 1987). However, even the principal analyses of politeness offer only anecdotal evidence. They lack the empirical support that can only be achieved from the analysis of corpora of natural conversation. And although recent studies have taken up this challenge (e.g., Blum-Kulka, 1990), their main concerns have been with politeness phenomena in general, with its many manifestations, and not with the usage of PREs.

It must be stressed that when we talk of person reference we are *not* restricting ourselves to talk about (typically nonpresent) third parties. Person reference includes both address terms and reference terms as they are often described in the literature. We believe that attention to the very real functional and contextual differences between address and reference terms may obscure the factors that are common to all PREs. For the present it suffices to note two points. First, third-party reference is not context free and therefore is prone to influence by the same social factors (such as the relationship between the conversants, the setting, and relationships between the conversants and the referent) that influence address term usage. A clear case is the avoidance of the use of names for both affines and the deceased that has been very widely reported in the ethnographic record. Depending on both whom one is speaking with and the relationships of the conversants to the person one wishes to refer to, the use of a name is or is not appropriate. Second, address terms (which we call "vocatives" in order to reduce confusion) refer in the philosophical sense of the word. For example, when there are several people present that share a name, its use may occasion the same problems (who is being referred to?) that trouble reference to an absent third party (see the discussion in Sacks & Schegloff, 1979, and Moerman, 1988). Discussions of address terms in the literature are often restricted to consideration of kin terms, titles, and names; we class as vocatives *all* PREs that refer to the addressee, which includes pronouns. When the distinction is made between pronouns and other PREs, such as kin terms, names, and titles, we call this latter class "explicit PREs" because they uniquely specify the addressee in the vast majority of cases, whereas the denotation of a pronoun is inherently contextual.

METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

Our general approach to the analysis of PREs is to take our data from natural conversation. We have developed and applied a coding

scheme to a corpus consisting of families talking as they cook and eat a meal. We later give reasons why we favor this observational approach over the more common experimental method of presenting informants with a questionnaire or vignette. First, though, a few words are required to defend the viability of quantification in this study.

This project sets out to examine the distribution of PREs in natural conversation, and quantification allows us to move beyond mere intuitions to examine the actual patterns of usage. The subjective experience of conversants' own usage differs from the actual pattern of usage in that the former is prone to underestimate the range of expressions used and how this varies in different conversational contexts. Thus, in order to get an accurate description of usage, and an account of the variations that occur, some form of distributional analysis is required. This way allows us to examine one of the key claims that the literature has made regarding person reference, namely that different patterns of reference characterize different social groups (R. Brown & Gilman, 1960; Levinson, 1977; Murphy, 1988). Because we are examining the use of words (e.g., the relative frequencies of *dad* or *you* by different speakers), it seems prima facie plausible that simple counts may give sociologically revealing results. For example, a recently married man may avoid the use of any form of name to address his parents-in-law, choosing instead to use pronouns or the complete avoidance of any PRE. This might be in marked contrast to the use of PREs by the parents-in-law. Our project aims to examine such usage patterns and to find correlations between such patterns and relatively stable social features of the conversants. The items that we are counting (linguistic expressions) are easily identified, and the units over which we are counting (utterances and turns) are relatively discrete, even as they occur in natural conversation with its elisions, overlaps, and interruptions.

It would appear, then, that the level of analysis we adopt is suitable for quantification unlike, say, the more fine-grained analyses of conversational structures. This type of interactional analysis has been in the forefront of the study of talk in its natural setting. However, it does not include quantification in its repertoire of tools. Indeed, in a recent article Schegloff (1993) issued several serious warnings concerning the use of descriptive statistics to establish the significance of an observation. First, he argued that even the most simple statistic requires "an analytically defensible notion of the denominator" . . . or, more explic-

itly, "environments of possible *relevant* occurrence" (p. 103). His example is of a study that attempts to assess sociability between different age groups using measures such as "laughter per minute" and "backchannels per minute." Being undeniably responsive forms of interaction, it is clear that a denominator in units of time will not catch the relevance, or lack of it, of the various instances, or noninstances, of laughter and backchannel utterances—"a denominator will be needed that is *analytically relevant to what is to be counted* because it is *organizationally related to it in the conduct of interaction"* (p. 104). Time is not an appropriate unit with which to count; so much is clear from Schegloff's argument, as well as the simple observation that different participants speak for different lengths of time and at different rates.

Whereas the turn (or utterance) is a unit that is also too global to satisfy Schegloff's doubts regarding the finely tuned and organizationally sensitive mechanisms of laughter and backchannels, it seems a sensible and safe unit to use as a denominator regarding the use of PREs. Whereas conversation analysis seeks to account for the structures of conversation per se, the aim of the present study is to examine the social context in which certain expressions are used. The question here is not the position of a PRE within an utterance, but the *type* of utterance in which it occurs, with type being classified according to the coding protocol to be outlined here. We are not assuming that use of PREs is a measure of some higher-order property such as sociability—although claims may be made later in an empirical, post hoc manner.

Schegloff was also critical of a lack of clarity about the range of possibilities for a given item to be considered an occurrence (the numerator). Forming a definitive criterion as to what constitutes a backchannel signal (to use Schegloff's example) is more difficult than defining PREs. We have suggested syntactic criteria underlying common intuitions that determine the boundaries of the subcategories of PREs, although there are undoubtedly some gray areas (e.g., terms such as *everyone* and *someone,* as well as the philosophical controversy about the various ways in which reference is actually achieved; see Kripke, 1972/1980; Evans, 1982). Within these subcategories there will, of course, be phonological and intonational variations of the tokens (Zimmerman, 1993) that are overlooked by our coding protocol, but an investigation of these variations falls beyond the scope of the present study.[3] Person reference is not as sensitive to interactional consider-

ations as the product of backchannels is, so these variants can be taken to be tokens of the same phenomenon.

Schegloff (1993, p. 108) made another point that is more pertinent to the present study. He pointed out that one can avoid using a person reference "filler" and yet still achieve reference. It is possible to reformulate an utterance in such a way that a PRE is unnecessary. To use his example, instead of asking, "When does X finish work today?", one could ask, "When does the working day finish?" Schegloff (p. 109) stated that:

> alternative realizations are not necessarily similar *sorts* of objects: Some are words, others are whole sequences, yet others are reconstructions of the forms of talk to circumlocute the problematic reference altogether. So if we count different forms of personal reference, we will need to figure out how to incorporate all the possible *forms of occurrences*, quite apart from figuring out which nonoccurrences to count as relevant.

What Schegloff suggested is that the use of PREs is not the only linguistic means by which one may refer to a person. Counting the incidence of PREs will not give us the number of times that participants refer to people, and any quantitative analysis based solely on referring expressions will not give a full account of reference mechanisms. There are other means of referring, circumlocution for instance, and the challenge that Schegloff posed is how one can reliably characterize these other strategies.

The argument that Schegloff presented, however, seems based on an infirm concept of reference. In what way is one actually referring to X when one circumlocutes, as in the earlier example? Perhaps we can say that the speaker "has X in mind and hopes to lead the addressee to infer that X is being referred to," but that is only a little clearer. In any case, the present study is concerned with the explicit use of linguistic referring expressions and not with referential intentions that may underlie speech nor the strategies by which on-record reference to people is avoided. Our coding guidelines are thus explicit and comprehensive as to what does and does not constitute a PRE, and into what subcategory of PRE an instance falls. Our method allows us to demonstrate, for example, that a particular category of person will use a particular PRE when talking to or about another category of person. In any one case, persons have the option to refer to their addressee with a vocative ("explicit" reference as opposed to implicit reference with a pronoun) in

every utterance. Thus, it is possible to gain an idea of the social or conversational context in which vocatives are more or less commonly used. Any such distribution of vocative mention requires an explanation in both social and interactional terms.

Indeed, once we have a clearer idea of the social factors that influence the ways in which we explicitly refer, we might begin to understand the more indirect ways by which we refer. Schegloff's example covers this point. A son- or daughter-in-law might avoid PREs altogether in addressing a parent-in-law. The parent-in-law might not be so constrained. Our admittedly crude scheme is able to record this: For this dyad, the junior affine uses no vocatives, whereas the senior affine uses many, leading us to conclude that the correlation of pattern of PRE use with social relation is not arbitrary.

Having argued that the use of quantification methods is valid and appropriate in this study, we now explain why the method of coding natural corpora is preferred to eliciting data form questionnaires and scenarios. First, it has been shown (Gumperz, 1982, p. 62) that self-report regarding code-switching is fallible. If informants can be mistaken about which language variety they use under various circumstances, it is likely that they are prone to err regarding when and how they refer to people. Second, anthropological analyses have treated kinship terminologies in isolation from the linguistic context in which the kin terms are uttered. Against this, Zeitlyn (1993) argued that kinship terminologies should instead be studied in their full linguistic context, with the data coming from naturally occurring conversations. Third, analyses of terms of address and reference elicited by means of questionnaire and interview are only sensitive to the choice of expression and not to the choice of mentioning it at all. Only recorded conversations can enable an analysis of expressions that are freely chosen and allow an examination of *when* certain choices are made. This permits a test of native speaker intuitions (e.g., the intuitions that English children address their parents with kin terms, whereas parents address their children with names). It also allows the investigation of the type of utterance in which vocatives might occur (e.g., greetings, or those utterances that intrinsically threaten the face of the hearer) and the investigation of whether any group uses vocatives more than others in the same conversational context. Similar questions can be asked regarding reference to third parties. Murphy (1988) offered evidence that choice of reference term is sensitive to the social relationships between

speaker and addressee, speaker and referent, and addressee and referent. However, he used a controlled scenario method, which cannot allow an analysis concerning *when* different types of referring expressions are used.

METHODS

Our data are in the form of transcribed tape recordings of naturally occurring conversation.[4] This naturalistic approach has the drawback of being extremely messy. There is no control and no fixed choice of variables on which to concentrate, nor is there any guarantee that we have not lost vital information in the absence of nonverbal data (we discuss this later). In order to be systematic in the face of a large quantity of unstructured data, we have coded the conversation for certain features in which we might be interested. We here discuss all aspects that have been coded, along with the problems (theoretical and practical) that have been encountered using this method.

Social Invariants

The findings included in this article come from the analysis of a single corpus, consisting of 1,242 utterances (mostly in English), spoken by five people in the setting of an evening meal. The dinner-time setting determines the speech event under study, with its specific scene, participants, and rules of interaction (see Blum-Kulka, 1990). Four of the participants are members of the family — mother, father, and two children — and the fifth is a visitor on familiar terms with the family. The setting and identity of the participants are among the stable variables that remain constant for the duration of the conversation. These include (1) the cultural and socioeconomic contexts — the speakers are a White, middle-class, Jewish-American family and a guest/visitor from the east coast of the U.S., whose first language is English — and (2) the relationships among the participants (e.g., kin relations, age and gender differences).

It is from these salient variables that one can infer the relative status

and intimacy of each participant, the hidden variables that have been shown to be relevant to choice of address term (R. Brown & Gilman, 1960; R. Brown & Ford, 1964). There are two main objections to this step, both of which dissolve if the values are estimated on a crude ranking scale. First, it might be argued that variables such as relative status and intimacy do not afford absolute estimates from an etic viewpoint. On what basis can an outsider formulate a scale by which to value the status of, say, the father or the intimacy between the mother and child1? How might an outsider judge whether the father is of higher or lower status than the mother or, if there are certain pairs within the family, which are more intimate than others? Estimates about such particulars have too little basis or precision to be accepted, but safe estimates are possible regarding larger matters. This can be achieved by ranking each variable on a crude three-point ranking scale. Thus we can assume, taking age as the critical factor, that the parents are of a higher status than the visitor, who is of a higher status than the children, and that parents are each of roughly equal status, as are the children. The family is assumed to be on equally intimate terms with each other, compared to the visitor[5] who is more distant (see Table 1).

Second, it has been argued that variables such as intimacy and status are often themselves subject to negotiation and alteration in the course of the interaction. For example, P. Brown and Levinson (1987) suggested that deft use of politeness strategies can act as a "social accelerator" to alter intimacy and distance. Whereas this phenomenon is indeed possible, it will not threaten the validity of our estimations as the degree of negotiation possible in any one interaction, especially among

TABLE 1
Crude Values of Relative Social Status and Intimacy for Participants

	Status
High	Mother, father
Middle	Visitor
Low	Child1,[a] Child2

	Intimacy
Close	Mother, father, Child1, Child2
Medium	Visitor
Distant	

[a]We refer to the participants by their relationship to the others. Child1 (female) is older than Child2 (male).

family members, will never be so large as to cross the boundaries of our coarsely defined scale. Indeed, the possibility of such negotiation and manipulation when manifestly practiced by interactants presupposes that they have a defined relationship with concomitant appropriate styles of speech.

Coding the Corpus

PREs (Person-Referring Expressions)

The aim of this project is to examine the distribution of PREs in natural conversation and to investigate any correlations between linguistic entities and the conversational and social contexts of their use. We define a PRE as an expression that refers to a single person or set of people, whether it be the addressee, another participant, or absent party. The data analyzed in our pilot study include approximately 1,100 of these expressions—almost one per utterance—and three aspects of these expressions have been coded. First, there is the *form* of the PRE, whether a pronoun, name, kin term, title, or descriptive term (e.g., *the one who . . .*). Earlier discussions of personal reference (Murphy, 1988) failed to take account of the kinship terms. The distinctions among these categories hold reasonably well at the semantic level, and it is hoped that a more formal classification system can be created on the basis of their syntactic properties (see Zeitlyn, 1993, Table 1). A PRE can be made up of several such types, rendering it "compound" (e.g., *Mr. Jones* = title + name). Combinations are limited by syntactic rules so as to disallow PREs such as **uncle my Brian*. A provisional schema reflecting syntactic rules for combining English PREs is presented in Table 2. From this we see that each category can be distinguished according to its vertical profile of checks and crosses. Whereas kin terms and titles are syntactically quite rigid, restricted to following only possessive pronouns and titles, respectively, names and descriptive expressions are more free. Where necessary, the presence of an intimacy marker is coded. This allows us to account for nicknames, endearments, and honorifics, which can be applied both to names (*Jimmy*) and kin terms (*Mom*).

Compound PREs are coded according to how many ancillary persons are "named" in order to achieve reference. Whereas compound

TABLE 2
Provisional Schema of Syntactic Rules That Govern Combinations of PREs in English

	Null	Possessive Pronoun	Kin Term	Name	Title	Descriptive
Null	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Possessive Pronoun	x	x	✔	?[a]	x	✔
Kin term	✔	x	x	✔	x	✔
Name	✔	x	x	✔	x	✔
Title	✔	x	x	✔	✔	x
Descriptive	✔	x	x	x	x	x

Note. A cell contains a check if the category in the column can follow the category in the row.

[a]This seems to be a borderline case, *My Johnnie* can be used to refer to someone absent, distinguishing him from someone else's husband/friend/child called Johnnie. It is quite marked, however, when referring to the addressee.

PREs always consist of more than one basic element (e.g., *Sir John, Joe Bloggs*), the compounds often refer to the same person and reference would be maintained (e.g., to Joe Bloggs) if the elemental terms alone (e.g., *Joe* or *Bloggs*) were used. However, certain compound PREs express relationships among persons (including kin relations) and in doing so "name" others besides the referent. For instance, *my mother, Jerry's girlfriend, your stepmother's uncle,* and *a friend of a friend* refer via "reference" to others. These expressions are *oblique* PREs and for analysis are broken down into their constituent parts. The number of simple PREs in an oblique expression was equaled with the number of people have been referred to in total.

A second aspect of PREs that was coded was the linguistic realization of the expression: A record is required of what actually was said — number, case and gender of pronoun, first name, and so on — to enable further analysis if required.[6] Third, we coded the conversational role of the person, or set of persons, to whom each PRE referred. Conversational role was coded according to the principles outlined later that are used to categorize the participants according to where they stand in relation to the conversation (e.g., as addressee, participant hearer, overhearer, or absentee). These three aspects of PREs (expression, realization, and role of referent) were all coded onto one tier in order to preserve the contingent relations among them.

The coding of PREs requires no more technical grasp than is outlined in the preceding discussion and therefore it was left to one

coder (AW). In order to be sure that coding was reliable, a random sample was selected to be coded by three untrained coders, and Cohen's kappa (Cohen, 1960) was calculated, along with the proportion of codes for which two out of three agreed. The coding of PREs yielded an exceptionally high score, ($k = 0.90$), with two out of three coders agreeing for every instance. One problem in coding PREs arose from confusion in some cases as to whether a name was being used to refer to a person or to refer to the name itself. Disagreements also arose concerning whether *you* was singular or plural (an idiosyncrasy of English).

Conversational Role

For each utterance, each of the five persons at the dinner table was assigned a conversational role according to his or her orientation to the illocutionary act of that utterance. There are five alternative roles available for each person for any one utterance; namely speaker, addressee, side participant, overhearer, and nonhearer. The distinctions among these roles derive from Goffman (1981) and Clark and Carlson (1982), who each illustrated their arguments with handpicked isolated examples. We now present a brief discussion of the theoretical and operational difficulties of applying these distinctions to a natural corpus.

1. *Speaker*. Every utterance will have a unique speaker and consists of one speech act. Identifying the speaker will generally be unproblematic so long as the quality of the recording is of a reasonable standard. Although finer categories of participant category have been developed (Goffman, 1981; Levinson, 1988) that distinguish between, say, the speaker and the source of the illocutionary act, these have been found to be too narrowly defined to be applied reliably to natural data. Instead we have made the same "default assumptions" routinely made by interactants themselves (see Hanks, 1990, pp. 152-153; this point is discussed in Zeitlyn, 1992). Thus, the speaker is assumed to be the source of the illocutionary act unless otherwise stated.

2. *Addressee*. Although there have been various attempts in the literature to offer a theoretical definition of addressee (see Clark & Carlson, 1982; Levinson, 1988), there has been little attention paid to the problem of implementing the definition in natural conversations

consisting of more than two participants. Although definitions might differ, most would accept that the addressee of a particular utterance is a ratified participant. Thus, in the corpus considered here we have a maximum of four candidates who might form the set of addressees for any one utterance of the corpus, because there are four people who can reasonably be expected to hear the utterance. We next consider the criteria that coders used to identify the addressee set for each utterance.

The default assumption was that all four participants were to be included as addressees unless there was evidence to suggest that the set might be smaller. We proposed a number of constraints that serve the purpose of narrowing this set, consisting of grammatical, semantic, and interactional information. These constraints can be placed in a hierarchy according to the strength of each criterion. The first, most powerful, cue is the physical whereabouts of the participants. This is based on the assumption that all addressees have to be participants in the conversation. Although all interactants are present most of the time, some leave the room and go out of earshot; in these circumstances they can safely be assumed to fall out of the candidate set of addressees. Another powerful cue is the use of vocatives. These serve to define the addressee set precisely to include just those persons "explicitly addressed" by the use of a vocative, although the ultimate destination, or "target" of the illocutionary act may be somebody else, as in *Mary, can you tell John to sit up straight*. A third, less powerful, cue derives the interactional definition of addressee as the participant with the right to reply (Lyons, 1977) or the person to whom the speaker expects to turn over the speaking role (Goffman, 1981). Thus, as analysts, we might be able to establish the addressee retrospectively in terms of who speaks after the utterance in question. This is most applicable to question/answer adjacency pairs, where we can assume that, in general, the answerer was the person to whom the question was addressed and that the answerer is addressing the questioner. Of course, this assumption is not watertight because the subsequent speaker may be different from that addressed by the original speaker (e.g., in the case of interruptions, or talking out of turn). These occasions are usually marked by the breakdown of smooth turn-taking (e.g., by simultaneous speech, retraces, etc.) that provide evidence that the cue has been ignored.

A final criterion that helped define the set of addressees rests on the content of the utterance and the body of knowledge of each participant.

This criterion can be used when considering questions, which are usually addressed to those capable of answering them. For instance, the question *How was school today?* is taken to be addressed to someone who went to school (pupil or teacher). However, because many utterances are not concerned with the communication of information, and because, of course, we do not have privileged access to the interactants' knowledge and life histories, this criterion can only be applied in clear-cut cases. It is not applicable to the many utterances that do not carry specialized informational content.

It is clear from the preceding discussion that we are not incorporating visual indicators (such as gaze and gesture) into our set of criteria.[7] This appears at first to be a serious omission. For instance, part of Goffman's (1981) definition of "addressed recipient" is in terms of the visual attention of the speaker (see Levinson, 1988, especially p. 179, for further discussion). However, there are two reasons access to this information will not assist our project. First, gaze does not remain steady in the course of an utterance but frequently wavers between participants and empty space (Goodwin, 1981). Thus there is no one-to-one relation between direction of gaze and addressee. Second, it appears that selecting addressee is far from the only role played by gaze during conversation: It is efficacious in other factors such as intimacy and floor-apportionment (Abele, 1986; Kalma, 1992). In short, we would argue that although gaze provides important information regarding the issue of who is being addressed, especially at the fine-grained level of analysis employed by conversation analysts (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974; Goodwin, 1981), it is not appropriate for application to large amounts of natural corpora. If gaze were to be included, it would be necessary to distinguish the "strength" of gaze: Whereas a stare is probably a more powerful cue than a vocative, a glance certainly is not.

3. Participant hearer. Following Goffman (1981), there is a separate category for those hearers that are ratified by the speaker (and believed to be monitoring the conversation) but not addressed. For the purposes of the present study, we assigned this role to all those present who are neither speaker nor addressee.

4. Overhearer. This is the role assigned to those persons who are not ratified by the speaker (either because they are not in the immediate vicinity or because they are thought not to be monitoring the conversation) but are within earshot. Examples of this category include those

persons in the same room as someone who is talking on the telephone (for those utterances spoken by the telephonist) or persons who are watching television while there is a conversation in the room.

5. *Absentee*. This describes all persons who are not present at all or who are believed to have passed out of earshot of the utterance in question (e.g., anyone who leaves the room and shuts the door upon exiting). Note that eavesdroppers would fall into this category as they are thought not to be present. We have taken the speaker's position in the assigning of conversational role, because it will be the speaker who chooses any PRE used, and this choice will in part depend on where the referent is relative to the speaker.

To check for coding reliability, the same procedure was carried out as it was for the PRE codes. Again, little or no training was given to coders in relation to this aspect of the corpus, save a discussion of the points already made. The coding of the addressee sets yielded a reliability score using Cohen's kappan of $k = 0.69$. This is just acceptable despite being a conversative figure, because a hit was not granted if the coders agreed on all but one of the addressee set. Two out of three coders agreed on the addressee set in 88% of the utterances. Agreement figures for other conversational status codes are similar as they are derived from addressee codes.

Speech Acts

In order to analyze systematically the occurrence and form of PREs, one needs a way to code the type of utterances in which they occur. There are many aspects of verbal interaction that might be considered and many ways in which to characterize them. We outline here the particular coding systems by which the corpus was segmented into discrete units and coded according to the taxonomy of verbal response modes developed by Stiles (1992). As well as being systematic, applicable to natural conversation data, and well-conceived, this taxonomy is appropriate because it is sensitive to the microrelationships between speaker and hearer, and this was relevant to our later discussion of face-work.[8]

The unit, conveyed by an utterance, is defined in much the same way as the "idea unit" (Chafe, 1980, pp. 13–15; Crookes, 1990, p. 187) and represents individual points of contact between the speaker's

experience and the addressee's experience. These points of contact are individually coded according to how the two streams of experience are related in that utterance. There are three principles according to which these units are classified: the source of the experience, the speaker's presumptions about the other's experience, and viewpoint. The first principle is concerned with the content of the utterance, or "source of experience." Each utterance must concern either the speaker's or the other's experience. "For example, in the informative utterance, 'I want to go fishing,' the *source of experience* is the speaker, whereas in the attentive utterance, 'Do you want to go fishing?' the source of experience is the other" (Stiles, 1992, p. 14). Second, each utterance either makes presumptions about the other's experience or does not presume anything of the other's experience. The two earlier examples do not presume anything, whereas in the utterance *Go fishing* the speaker presumes to know what the other is able and inclined to do. Third, there is the viewpoint, or frame of reference, within which the utterance is presented. That is, every utterance represents some form of experience either from the speaker's own personal viewpoint or from a viewpoint that is shared with the other. The cited examples all use the speaker's frame of reference, but "by contrast, the more acquiescent utterance, 'You want to go fishing' takes the other's frame of reference, in effect representing the experience as the other views it" (Stiles, 1992, p. 15).

For every utterance, each principle applies in terms of two possible values—speaker or other—generating a total of eight categories, or Verbal Response Modes (VRMs for short), that Stiles labeled according to Table 3. For instance, a "Disclosure" is a VRM whose content

TABLE 3
Taxonomy of VRM Categories

Source of Experience	Presumption About Other's Experience	Frame of Reference	VRM Category
Speaker	No	Speaker	Disclosure
Speaker	No	Other	Edification
Speaker	Yes	Speaker	Advisement
Speaker	Yes	Other	Confirmation
Other	No	Speaker	Question
Other	No	Other	Acknowledgement
Other	Yes	Speaker	Interpretation
Other	Yes	Other	Reflection

Note. Based on Stiles (1992, p. 16).

concerns the speaker's experiences, that makes no presumptions of the other's experience, and that uses the speaker's frame of reference; this amounts to talk about the speaker's private (and thus unobservable) thoughts, feelings, and so forth (e.g., *I want to go home*). Talk about publicly observable events (*I went home*) differs only in having a frame of reference that is shared with the addressee (and thus is scored as "Other"), rendering the VRM as "Edification."

Because coding this aspect of the corpus required a technical grasp, the coder (AW) had to undergo a lengthy training period, and agreement scores were collected with the collaboration of other similarly trained coders.[9] Intercoder agreement was acceptable based on Cohen's kappa ($k = 0.87$ for form, $k = 0.76$ for intent), and two out of three coders agreed for 96% of the utterances.

Topic

Topic is another aspect of discourse that can play an important part in explaining the distribution of PREs. The use of vocatives might serve as an explicit marker to signal a change of topic, as might the anaphoric pronominalization of absent persons (Givón, 1976). Monitoring topic has proved difficult for two main reasons. First, it is not clear how to define a change of topic. At one extreme, every utterance can be considered as marking a change of topic insofar as it modifies the content of the conversation. Although we would not accept this position, some utterances do signal a shift of subject matter. It seems that we must appeal to a tacit criterion of continuity that is highly intuitive. Second, the rambling nature of natural conversations is such that topic shifts in any one utterance are unlikely to be sharp enough to be considered a boundary; however, over several turns it will be clear that a boundary has been crossed. Enç (1986) suggested that this

> may be explained by pointing out that a particular sentence which is a comment on an established topic a) may represent the next topic if the speaker decides to talk about the proposition expressed by that sentence, or b) may be taken as a comment on another topic if the speaker expects the addressee to infer easily what the topic is. (pp. 203–204)

Coding for changes of topic occurring in single utterances is likely to be sensitive only to the more sudden changes flagged by explicit markers,

that is "discontinuous discourse" (Ochs Keenan & Schieffelin, 1976). Topic shifts can be instigated by a speaker as in:

> (1) Father: ((to visitor)) Did we ever tell you about the time
>   when we went camping?

They can also be produced by an outside event:

> (2) Mother: ((to all)) We have to find out which days are
>   available. ((phone rings)) Can somebody get that please?

Sometimes a topic shift will involve a change in the participation structure or even an interruption as in:

> (3) Child: . . . and then we're going to take the medicine dropper and
>   put oil into the =
>   Mother: = Jenny, do you want some more meat?"

Intercoder agreement scores were calculated using Cohen's kappa on the basis of a random sample that was coded by three untrained coders. The result was $k = 0.66$ when considering three possible categories: *no change, new topic,* and *reversal of topic.* This figure rose to $k = 0.73$ when the last two categories were collapsed into one (*change of topic*). Two out of three coders agreed on whether there was a change of topic for 98% of all utterances.

Politeness Strategies

We are interested in whether certain uses of PREs might be explained as an aspect of politeness. Although there are stable relationships among participants at the family dinner table, there are also events occurring as the conversation progresses that might affect the microrelationships of the participants and that might be mediated with forms of politeness. We first pursued this in terms of the original proposals of P. Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987, pp. 65–68). Demands are made; favors sought; compliments, insults, warnings, and commands given, all of which may impinge on one's positive and negative face wants to a greater or lesser extent. Speakers are generally motivated to mitigate such behavior with politeness.

As a first attempt to map PRE use with politeness strategies outlined by P. Brown and Levinson, we attempted to code all face-threatening actions represented by utterances as they occurred in the conversation, marking the degree of imposition of the act (on a scale of 1–3), and whether the face-want threatened was positive or negative. However, intercoder agreement scores based on Cohen's kappa for this aspect were too low to merit further analysis ($k = 0.22$; two out of three agreed on 85% of the utterances). We propose two possible reasons that account for this result. First, the Brown and Levinson works that were used as the basis of our coding were clearly not intended as manuals for this type of operation. Operationalizing politeness has proved to be a troublesome task, which they admitted in their revised thesis (P. Brown & Levinson, 1987), especially when taking natural conversation as the starting point. Second, we were using transcribed material that includes only the linguistic content of the utterances spoken. Not only are we denying ourselves metalinguistic information such as intonation and prosody, but we do not have any clues of the weightiness of any possible face threat, because we do not know whether the speaker is using (or exploiting, see Lakoff, 1989) a politeness strategy. Coding this aspect thus relied heavily on coder intuitions. The low intercoder agreement scores on this aspect confirm the difficulties of identifying face-threatening acts independent of their linguistic realization. Agreement can be expected to improve once clearer guidelines regarding the operationalizing of face-threatening behavior are formulated. Only when this is achieved can the findings here be taken with any authority (but see Wilson, Kim, & Meischke, 1991, for a successful attempt to achieve coder agreement when operationalizing politeness in nonnatural conversation).

Another means to investigate the link between PRE use and politeness considerations is offered by Stiles's (1992) taxonomy of speech acts, outlined earlier (see Wilson & Zeitlyn, 1994, for a fuller review). According to Stiles's scheme, the intent of each utterance is to be coded according to three principles (source of experience, presumptuousness, and frame of reference) that together create eight possible categories that represent different types of microrelationship to the hearer. One of Stiles' guiding assumptions is that each category carries with it an associated set of grammatical features. This enables the linguistic form of the utterance also to be coded according to grammatical rules with the same eight categories. Thus a declarative sentence in

the first person (*I* or *we* that does not include the hearer) may be coded
as a Disclosure form, whereas a sentence whose subject is first person
plural (*we*) and includes the hearer is to be coded as a Confirmation
form. In this way, an utterance may share the same code for intent and
form or have different codes, as in the following examples (Stiles, 1992,
p. 10):

> (1) "Sit down" (pure Advisement).
> (2) "Would you like to sit down?" (Question form with Advisement intent).
> (3) "I'd like you to sit down" (Disclosure form with Advisement intent).

From the preceding, it is clear that by reformulating one's intent in a
grammatical form that is typically reserved for other types of intent one
is performing a strategy akin to facework. Indeed, Stiles proposed
(1981) a connection between his classification scheme and the politeness
work of Brown and Levinson, which hinges on his notion of presump-
tuousness. The four intent categories that are considered presumptu-
ousness may be said to be intrinsically face-threatening: Advisements
are those utterances that threaten negative face; and Confirmations,
Interpretations, and Reflections threaten positive face. The intrinsic
threat can be dissipated by using a nonpresumptuous linguistic form
such as examples (2) and (3).

RESULTS

Distribution of PREs

Upon review of the general distribution of PREs, a picture will
emerge as to which participants use each category and with what
purpose. First, we considered two different classes of PRE, namely kin
terms and names, to see if there was a connection between the linguistic
structure of the expression (whether the kin term or name appear on its
own or as part of a compound expression) and the conversational status
of the referent. Tables 4 and 5 show the findings resulting from this
analysis for kin terms and names, respectively.

There is a clear relationship between the form of expression in
which a kin term occurs and the conversational status of the referent.

TABLE 4
Distribution of Kin Terms According to Speaker and Referent

			Conversational Status of Referent		
			Participant		
Speaker	Self	Addressee	Hearer	Overhearer	Absentee
Child1	0	16	1/1[a]	0	0/2[a]
Child2	0	1	0	0	1/3[a]
Mother	0	0	0	0	0/5[a]
Father	1	0	1	0	1/6[a]
Visitor	0	0	0	0	1/3[a]
Total	1/0[a]	17/0[a]	2/1[a]	0/0[a]	3/19[a]

[a]Second entries denote terms used as part of a compound expression.

TABLE 5
Distribution of Names According to Speaker and Referent

			Conversational Status of Referent		
			Participant		
Speaker	Speaker	Addressee	Hearer	Overhearer	Absentee
Child1	0	4	0	0	3/8[a]
Child2	1	8	0	1	5/8[a]
Mother	0	6	4	1	12/11[a]
Father	0	2	0	0	3/17[a]
Visitor	0	3	0	0	2/3[a]
Total	1/0[a]	23/0[a]	4/0[a]	2/0[a]	25/47[a]

[a]Second entries denote terms used as part of a compound expression.

All kin terms used as vocatives form basic expressions (*Mommy*), whereas nearly all (86.4%) of kin terms that are used in reference to absent third parties exist in elements of a compound expression (*Tommy's Dad*). Although this suggests that there might be a difference between how kin terms are employed (in basic or compound expressions) and to whom they are used to refer, it should be noted that all vocative uses of kin terms are spoken from child to parent. It is possible to use compound expressions to address certain kin in, say, *Hello, Aunt Betty,* but such cases do not occur in our data and have not been examined.

A similar pattern emerges for the distribution of name elements, namely that when used to refer to addressee, only a basic expression is used (though again, the sample of conversants in the pilot study is too narrow to make strong claims; e.g., there are no titled dignitaries present). Names that are used as part of compound expressions all refer

to absent parties, although basic name expressions are used for this purpose also (35.2% compared to 13.8% for kin terms).

Thus far, our analyses have not examined the social relations among speaker, addressee, and/or referent. All kin terms used to address were addressed to the parents by the children; but the vocative function of PREs can be analyzed in more detail by examining how each participant addresses the others throughout the course of the conversation. This can be seen from Table 6. Figures represent the percentage of turns that contain the address term in question. For example, we can see that within all the turns spoken between the parents, 11.1% contain a pronoun of address (*you*). Assuming that for every turn there is an opportunity to include a term of address, these normalized figures are in a form to test simple hypotheses as to how the different participants, or classes of participant (parent, child, visitor), address one another. For instance, we can see clearly the pattern of usage that confirms the native speaker intuition that parents use names to address their children, and receive kin terms. Also, we can see that there is a noticeable absence of name usage between the parents (0 compared to 25.5% between the children) and that the visitor uses names only rarely (to address only children) and receives them even less (only from parents).

The results show that certain categories of speaker (e.g., children) address certain categories of person (e.g., their parents) with one particular category of PRE (kin terms). At the level of analysis employed in the present study, these findings are relatively stable and are not subject to interactional phenomena. To this extent, the use of vocatives reflects the stable relationships between the participants. As mentioned in the

TABLE 6
Distribution of PREs Used as Vocatives (%)

Speaker	Addressee			
		Parent	Visitor	Child
Parent	Pronoun	11.1	32.4	44.4
	Name	0	1.4	4.6
	Kin term	0	0	0
Visitor	Pronoun	20.8	Does not apply	21.3
	Name	0		6.4
	Kin term	0		0
Child	Pronoun	21.2	20.6	25.5
	Name	0	0	25.5
	Kin term	17.2	0	0

earlier discussion of coding, there is variation within these categories (e.g., we have considered *Mom* and *Mommy* to be instances of the same kin term). This variation can itself be examined using a more sensitive protocol, and it is quite possible that interactional considerations are required to explain the variation. The results also indicate some variation regarding the frequency with which different pairs use vocatives at all. For instance, we find that the parents use fewer vocatives per turn when addressing each other than when addressing, for example, their children. To cast further light on this finding, it is necessary to examine the conversational context in which PREs occur and to investigate the type of utterances that give rise to PREs. This leads us to the second question: Which factors are responsible for the use of PREs in the first place?

Topic Change and PRE Use

Whereas the choice of PREs may vary according to the social group-ings of the participants, this factor alone cannot account for the full range of PRE use. A further factor that warrants investigation is topic. It seems prima facie plausible that different PREs will occur in topic introduction, even though the person referred to may have no social relationship with the speaker or addressee. For instance, a character is first introduced with a name to established reference, after which reference may be maintained with pronoun use. In addition to this, topic introduction may be ac-companied by the use of a vocative either to signal a change in the addressee set or to bring attention to the new topic. In order to investigate the relationship between the distribution of PREs and the topic of ut-terance we examined the presence of vocatives and those utterances that heralded a change or reversal of topic. Of 202 utterances that initiated topic change, 27.5% included vocatives (name or kin term); of 1,036 utterances that did not initiate topic change, 15.8% included vocatives. A chi-square test reveals that vocatives were used in a significantly higher proportion of utterances that serve to change the topic in some way than utterances that did not ($\chi^2[1] = 15.081, p < .001$).

PRE Use as Politeness Strategy

There are two reasons the use of vocatives might be related to politeness strategies and facework as outlined by P. Brown and

Levinson (1978, 1987). These reasons emerge once we understand vocative use as optional means by which the speaker may index his or her microrelationship to the addressee. Within daily discourse this relationship will change as the conversants engage in facework (Goffman, 1981); thus this relationship often undergoes minor changes in the course of daily discourse, and these changes may be reflected in the minor variations of vocatives that are used, including the use of nicknames.

Stiles (1992, p. 106) claimed that the use of utterances with presumptuous intent is related to the status of the participants. The higher one's status relative to the addressee, the more presumptuous will be the utterances he or she produces. By coding for Stilesian speech acts we could obtain an index of presumptuousness; that is, the proportion of utterances spoken whose intent was presumptuous. These indexes were measured in our data for all utterances spoken by parents and children, for those utterances that contained PREs referring to addressee (including pronouns), and for those that contained an explicit PRE such as a name or kin term (see Table 7).

We considered two hypotheses concerning presumptuousness. The first states that different participants speak with different proportions of presumptuous utterances (e.g., parents' utterances will have a higher index of presumptuousness than those of the children). There was found to be no distinction between parents and children, $t(10) = 0.176$, $p > 0.5$, thereby refuting this hypothesis and casting doubt on Stiles's link between presumptuousness and status. The second hypothesis states that utterances containing vocatives are more likely to be presumptuous than those utterances lacking vocatives. A further distinction was made between vocatives that are pronouns, and explicit vocatives such as

TABLE 7
Comparison of Presumptuousness Indices for Utterances With and Without Vocatives

	Child1	Child2	Mother	Father
All utterances	0.182(262)	0.181(183)	0.218(239)	0.160(356)
Utterances containing vocatives	0.300 (50)	0.261 (23)	0.370 (46)	0.309 (56)
Utterances containing explicit vocatives	0.421 (19)	0.444 (9)	0.333 (6)	0.500 (2)

Note. Decimal values are the proportion of each speaker's utterances that were presumptous. Figures in parentheses are the number of utterances indexed.

names and kin terms, so we can ask whether the type of vocative was linked to the index of presumptuousness. There was found to be a significant difference between the index of presumptuousness of utterances with vocatives and those lacking vocatives, $t(6) = 6.681$, $p < .001$. Furthermore, there is a significant difference between the presumptuousness of utterances that included vocatives of any form (pronouns or explicit names) versus explicit vocatives only, $t(6) = 2.766$, $p < .05$. Those utterances containing vocatives, and especially explicit vocatives, are more presumptuous than those that do not (see Figure 1).

Although the presence of a vocative itself is not what makes an utterance presumptuous, the use of a vocative might serve as a signal for that utterance's intent. In order to explain the role of a vocative, we need to look closer at the types of vocative used and the position they take in the utterance. However, vocatives do not only play a role in presumptuousness. This may be seen in cases where an illocutionary act is repeated, with the same presumptuousness, but with an added (as in the following example) or changed vocative, for example, by taking away an intimacy marker (*Jenny* becomes *Jennifer*). An exchange at the beginning of the transcript provides a good example. The visitor's first question is not answered because either (1) Mother interrupts, (2) Child1 has not heard it, (3) Child1 has heard it but does not assume that it is addressed to her, or (4) Child1 has understood she was being addressed but has refused to answer. The follow-up question is essentially the same in terms of its index of presumptuousness, except that the restated question includes a PRE making the addressee explicit. The use of an explicit vocative seems motivated not by the illocutionary act (or degree of presumptuousness) but to overcome the deictic problems encountered with the first question.

> Visitor: How are you?
> Mother: Well anyhow Sally's here.
> Visitor: So Jennifer what's doing?

This reveals some of the complications that may beset a simple account of the relationship between the use of PREs and an utterance's presumptuous, and beyond that, politeness. Such episodes are illuminating, though rare, and full analysis of them requires reference to interactional factors. These unusual cases, therefore, warrant fine-grained qualitative analysis of the sort that Schegloff (1993) advocated.
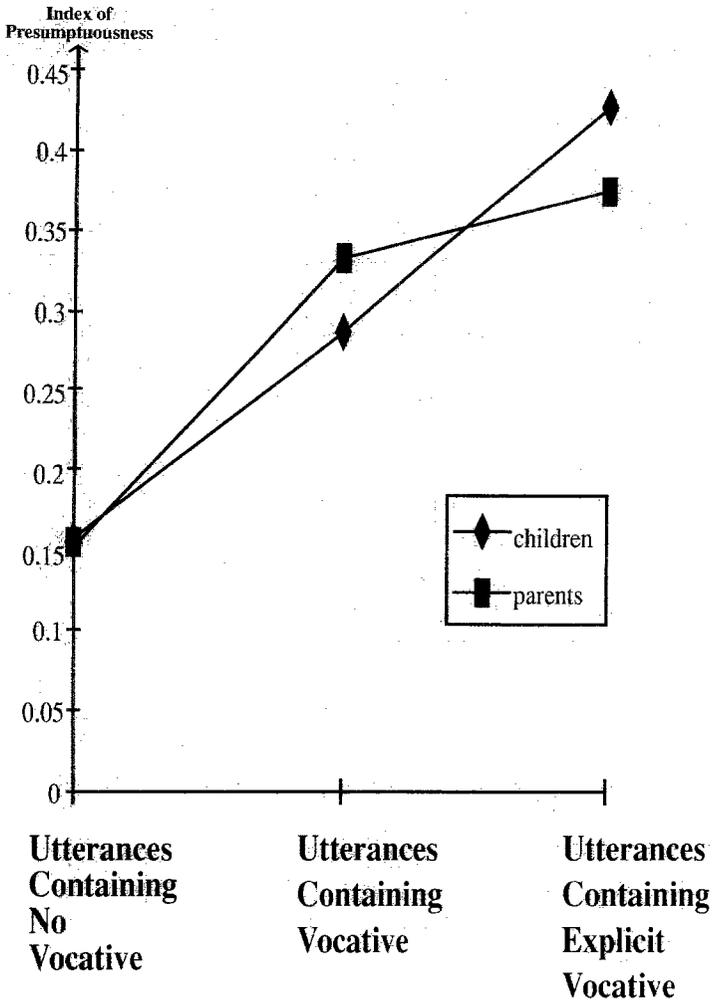
FIGURE 1   Presumptuousness of utterances according to the vocatives within.

CONCLUSION

Bakeman and Gottman (1986) stated that the two features that characterize systematic observation are a predetermined coding scheme and the need for intercoder reliability. Our pilot study has concentrated on establishing the feasibility of coding natural conversations with

regard to certain variables. Although it has proved unproblematic to identify the PREs and to code them for a particular category (name, pronoun, kin term), the identification of the conversational status of the referent is subject to the theoretical and practical considerations discussed earlier. In order to make practical use of the distinctions derived from Goffman, agreement between coders has to be sufficiently high. This has required the formulation of nontechnical criteria, and we have presented a hierarchy of constraining factors. Similar problems have emerged regarding the coding of topic, but coder intuitions in this area have proved acceptably reliable. The most troublesome aspect coded was face-threatening behavior. This problem will be tackled by formulating more explicit criteria (see Wilson et al., 1991). Assuming these difficulties can be overcome, some basic analysis can, and has been, performed regarding the distribution of PREs against stable variables (e.g., the status of the participants) and variables pertaining to the utterance (e.g., the speech act intended by the speaker).

There are a number of considerations that may affect the decision to use PREs and the choice of PRE. These include: (1) grammatical factors that determine the presence, or absence, of pronouns that act as anaphora, (2) factors concerning the organization of the conversation. Use of PREs may be motivated by the need to specify the addressee or to initiate dyadic conversation. This hypothesis may be tested by analyzing whether the use of an address term increases the likelihood of being responded to by that person. Because it is dependent on interactional issues, the exploration of this hypothesis will require an approach more in line with conventional conversation analysis, and more caution in decontextualizing the phenomenon (Zimmerman, 1993). (3) The choice of PRE might be affected by the topic of conversation and by topic boundaries. First mention of a person might warrant a more informative referring expression than a pronoun, and we have shown that PREs referring to the addressee are proportionally greater in topic-changing utterances than in nontopic-changing utterances. This refinement of Sacks and Schegloff (1979) owns much to the work of Walker and Whittaker (1990). (4) Social factors might play a role in the distribution of PREs that refer to addressee. The more socially distant participant, Visitor, is less often addressed by name or pronoun, nor does she address the parents (of higher social status) by name at all. Politeness strategies might also constrain the choice of term in certain situations.

In this article, we have discussed the details of the methodology of

the project including the assumptions on which we have based our
coding protocol. We have shown that it is possible to conduct quanti-
tative distributional analyses on the use of PREs as they occur in natural
conversation and explain their distribution (in part at least) in terms of
the social relations of the participants, considerations of topic manip-
ulation, and politeness strategies. Our data consist of the transcript of a
single conversation, which on its own represents a sample far too narrow
from which to draw any general conclusions. The data set is somewhat
restricted because the stable variables are fixed for the duration of the
conversation. Nor is it possible to manipulate the number of events that
may be of special interest, such as topic shifts and face-threatening
behavior. However, it does serve as an exemplar from which similar
analyses can be performed on a larger data set and across different
situations and cultures. The most robust finding to emerge from our
analysis of this transcript is that, whereas parents use names to address
their children, children do not use names to address their parents but
instead use kin terms. We take this systematic demonstration of native
speaker intuitions as a vindication of our methodology. More tenta-
tively we have revealed possible connections between the mention of a
vocative and some pragmatic aspects of conversation, namely to initiate
a change in the topic of conversation and to underscore a presumptuous
utterance. These hypotheses can be examined more closely only when
the sample size is extended. Our project will proceed by applying the
coding scheme outlined here to similar data from other languages and
cultures, allowing the prospect of cross-cultural comparisons.

Here we have concentrated mostly on address, leaving aside the ways
in which people refer to others not addressed. This has been because (1)
there were too few cases of reference to participants in conversation and
overhearers to offer any meaningful statistics at this stage, and (2) the
number of absent persons referred to was too small considering the much
wider range of social relationships possible among speaker, addressee,
and referent. The consideration of a larger data set will permit the valid
analysis of third-party reference along the same lines as the analysis of
vocative use reported here. A larger data set will also permit the inves-
tigation of variation between types of vocative such as the variants on kin
terms (e.g., the same child may use *Mom, Mommy,* and *Mother* to the
same person). This brings us back to the theoretical position outlined at
the beginning of this article: Sociopragmatic factors affect the choice of
PRE. Stable patterns in the social context such as the roles of parents and

children are reflected not in the linguistic systems of pronouns, names, or kin terms taken in isolation but in the manner in which the whole repertoire of such expressions is deployed. It may well turn out that the social correlates of PRE use are of greater importance in the study of language and social interaction than conceptual distinctions such as those between address and reference terms.

NOTES

1   We assume this to be a universal natural category; we know of no language or culture that lacks persons, however variably defined.

2   Some interesting cases have been reported from Australia, where kinship relation affects pronominal usage (Schebeck, 1973; Merlan, 1989).

3   For example, a child may address her mother as "Mom" but, when addressing her father, refers to her as "Mommy." We plan further research to investigate this type of variation.

4   We are grateful to Catherine Snow and Shoshana Blum-Kulka for providing the source data for the pilot, collected in 1986. The data set is described in Blum-Kulka and Snow (1992).

5   The visitor is responsible for making the recordings and is known to the family from having worked in the same school as the mother.

6   Transcripts were originally in the CHAT format so that the computer package CLAN could be used to compute frequency counts, string searchers, and interactional analyses (see MacWhinney & Snow, 1990; MacWhinney, 1992; and Wilson & Zeitlyn, 1994).

7   Although some of the meals from the original research were recorded on video, these recordings cannot be made available in order to protect the participants' privacy.

8   In a separate publication, we both discuss the relationship between Stiles' approach to speech acts and conventional speech act theory, and express reservations about Stiles, in particular with regard to some of his criteria for segmenting discourse (Wilson & Zeitlyn, 1994).

9   We are indebted to William Stiles, Tracy Gebing, and Anna Rayne for their assistance.

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