Pragmatics of address in the first and second language classroom in Germany and Australia

A comparative study of the learning and use of address forms by adult L2 learners of German and Italian in Australia, and L2 learners of English and Italian in Germany in the university context.

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Short description and aim of the project

The correct use of address forms (e.g. pronouns, titles) is essential for appropriate communication but is known to be difficult for L2 learners. This is especially the case when the address systems are known to be very different and/or complex in languages such as *German* (e.g. *du/Sie* 'you') and *Italian* (e.g. *tu/Lei/voi* 'you'), even more when compared to *English*.

We compare the effect of different L1 on address behaviour in both L1 (English and German) and L2 (English, German, and Italian) settings. This will allow us to understand what kinds of transfer effects there might be, and how these might be addressed for improved pedagogical outcomes and for more effective communication.
The aim is to describe possible differences in people's behaviours and provide a model of addressing practices which can be useful in improving intercultural communication and thereby help students learn languages better.

Research questions

- What forms of address do teachers and students use in tertiary language courses at Australian and German universities?

- What similarities and differences are there between address behaviour in academic communication in the target language and in the surrounding official language (i.e. English in Australia and German in Germany)?

- What are the explicit or implicit norms of address behaviour between students and teachers in Modern Languages departments?

- How do these norms compare with address behaviour more generally in academic settings and elsewhere?

Method/Design

Data will be collected (in-classroom and online) by means of:

- questionnaires for students
- questionnaires for teaching staff
- discourse completion task/DCT (students only)
- interviews with teaching staff
- focus group discussions (teaching staff and students)

Corpus

- **quantitative data:** sociolinguistic questionnaires, discourse completion tests of 25 students per L2
- **qualitative data:** interviews, focus group conversations, classroom observation

Some preliminary results from the DCT

- Learners follow mainly the addressing system in their L1 and transfer patterns to L2.

- Occasionally, learners create hybrid forms (e.g. *Lieber Dr. Alfred* 'Dear Dr. Alfred') which can be explained by students' awareness of pragmatic differences between the languages.

- Different patterns of formality and informality lead to a variety of different patterns mainly in Australian students.

- Usage of honorifics and greeting formula are often translated 1:1 from L1 into L2 (e.g. *Hallo Dr. Brodmer* 'hello Dr. Bodmer' … *danke für Ihre Zeit* 'thank you for your time').

Results from interviews and questionnaires:

- Teachers' address strategies are mainly based on the model of the national language (usage of *tu* or *du* + first name in Australia, usage of *lei* and first or second name in Germany).

- The practice in the L2-classroom has a high impact on the acquisition of address strategies by the students.

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