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A Comparative Study of Chinese and American Address Terms

Shiqi Hao, Shaoan Zhang, and Fan Zhu

In cross-cultural situations, choices of address terms often reflect cultural differences. Although a good number of studies have discussed address terms in mono-linguistic settings, literature directly related to cross-cultural address terms is scarce. The current study intends to investigate common forms of address terms in Chinese and American cultures. Two hypotheses are examined: 1) Differences between Americans and Chinese in their choices of address terms are governed by cultural norms such as politeness, as well as by contexts or styles, and 2) The Chinese students in the U.S., who are undergoing the process of assimilation and acculturation, tend to accommodate the American culture and be more like the Americans in their choices of address terms.

Twenty-seven American and 24 Chinese subjects completed a 12-item survey. Data was analyzed by descriptive statistics and visual presentations and through the Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests of population difference. The results indicate that while most American respondents tend to use either first name or no name in most informal settings or status conscious settings, Chinese respondents under the context in China would use more diversified choices. In addition, acculturation plays a role in Chinese respondents' language change in terms of the choices of address terms. The relationship between age and the choice of address terms is also discussed.

Since the 1980s, the Chinese government has encouraged students to study abroad and has welcomed people from other countries to go to China to study and work. In recent years a large number of Chinese students and scholars have come to the U. S. to study. The number of Chinese international students in the United States has grown by 15 percent over the past few years composing the second largest group of international students in the country. According to the

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Institute of International Education (2005), there were 62,523 students from China among the 565,039 foreign students in 2004/05. Meanwhile the number of Sino-American international education programs (between Chinese and American universities) is growing rapidly. Cross-cultural communication and exchange between Chinese and Americans has become routine, and study of cross-cultural communication has therefore become an important issue in education for both nations. Scholars and students from China and in the U.S. need to learn about cultural differences as well as similarities in order to engage in successful cross-cultural communication. While it is difficult to adjust to weather, food, driving habits, cultural adaptation is more challenging. One of the challenges is learning and using address terms in a foreign language context. Norris (2001) points out, for second language learners, “developing the control over address systems involves the acquisition of the pragmalinguistic forms available, the sociopragmatic rules linking particular forms with contextual variables, and an ability to marshal both types of knowledge in language use” (p.253). An inappropriate choice of the address terms hinders communication between the speaker and the addressee. This becomes particularly crucial in cross-cultural contexts. Without understanding the social norms and cultural aspects of the target language, foreign language learners or second language learners may fail to use the proper address terms in a particular speech context, or they may not properly transfer the usage of address terms from native to target language.

Address terms are an interesting aspect of sociolinguistic studies. The address terms denote “a speakers’ linguistic reference to his/her collocutor(s)” (Braun, 1988, p.7). How one addresses others often reveals social and interpersonal relationships. In addressing others, speakers evoke personal identities, and create and define relationships such as close/distant, personal/professional, peers/rank-differentiated, etc. (Fitch, 1998, p.34). Fitch (1998) classifies address terms into five categories: second-person pronouns, proper names, kinship terms, titles, and nicknames and adjectival terms. Second-person pronouns consist of all the ways to address one or more persons as “you.” Proper names include first name (FN), last name (LN), second name (2N), FN + 2N, and full name (F). Kinship terms include terms that suggest biological relationship, and they can be used both literally and metaphorically. Titles, opposite to kinship terms, reflect non-kinship relations or positions (e.g. educational, social, and organizational positions). Finally, nicknames and adjectival terms are terms derived from FN or LN, or terms referring to personal characteristics, ability, or physical appearance, such as color of skin, hair, or eyes.

Systems of address terms, which comprise “the totality of available forms and their interrelations in one language” (Braun, 1988, p.12), are culture-specific. In cross-cultural situations, choices of address terms often reflect

cultural differences. In other words, every culture or society has its own rules or norms governing the choice of address terms that are appropriate for use between two or more people engaged in linguistic interaction or conversation. Wardhaugh (2002) discusses one difference between English and French regarding address terms usage. In English when one is not sure about how to address the interlocutor, it is acceptable to avoid this difficulty by not using any address terms at all. One can simply say “Good morning” or “Good morning Sir.” However, in France one cannot say “Bonjour,” “Merci,” or “Pardon” without using any address terms because the speaker would be considered either impolite or deficient.

Although past literature directly related to cross-cultural (American and Chinese) study of address terms is scarce, a number of studies have been made on mono-linguistic address terms over the past few decades. Numerous studies have noted the role of “politeness” and “solidarity” and differential power in the speakers’ choice of address terms (Brown & Ford, 1961; Moles, 1978; Hong, 1985; Cheung, 1990; Huong, 2000). Moles (1978), in his study of the usage of address terms, pronouns, and languages by Quechua-Spanish bilinguals in Peru, found that address terms illustrated different degrees of respect besides confidence. Jayapal (1986) examined address terms in Tamil and found certain correlations between various types of Tamil address terms with social variables. Huong (2000) notes from his study of politeness in modern Vietnamese that Hanoi speakers consider politeness to be not only an *individual* communicative strategy but also an observance of social norms of behavior.

Many others have investigated the linguistic changes in choice of address terms with societal changes (Fang & Heng, 1983; Cheung, 1990; Ju, 1991; Song, 1994). But all these studies were concerned with mono-cultural settings—most often in a Chinese culture. It would be interesting to investigate language change as concerns address term choices in a multicultural and multilinguistic environment such as in the United States. Wardhaugh (2002) summarizes a variety of social factors that usually govern our choice of terms: particular occasion, the social status or rank of the other, gender, age, family relationship, occupational hierarchy, transactional status, ethnicity or degree of intimacy. Wardhaugh (2002) also indicates that different societies and cultures certainly have different norms or preferences in their choices of address terms. China and the United States are two distinctive countries with distinctly different cultures. One important assumption for this study is that those societal and cross-cultural differences must be reflected in their choices of address terms.

Studies investigating the use of address terms in cross-cultural or cross-linguistic contexts are not many. Liddicoat (2006) examines English native speakers’ learning of the personal address system of French. The address terms under investigation are *tu* vs. *vous*, names, and titles from authentic instances of French use. Liddicoat found that, “Learners were able to develop insights into

the nature of the system as a reflection of relationship, rather than seeing it as a set of rules to be applied to classes of interlocutors, and were able to develop strategies for further investigating instances of use” (p.77). Liu (2007) discusses and explains the learning difficulty of family address terms in terms of cross-cultural and cross-linguistic differences between Japanese and American English. By adopting the Acculturation Model in second language acquisition, Liu proposes that, “the sociolinguistic studies of language forms and functions should be an indispensable part of second/foreign language learning” (p.1).

The current study intended to investigate common forms of address terms in two cultures—Chinese and American. The main purpose of this study was to investigate cross-cultural variations in the choices of address terms though some common rules that govern the choice of address terms such as politeness and solidarity will also be examined. This study also investigated the changes that occurred among Chinese students studying in the U.S. as concerns their choices of address terms. Two hypotheses were examined in this study: 1) Differences between Americans and Chinese in their choices of address terms are governed by cultural rules (norms) such as politeness, solidarity, status classification, as well as by contexts or styles, and 2) Chinese participants, who are undergoing the process of assimilation and acculturation, tend to accommodate the American culture and be more like Americans in their choices of address terms.

Method

Samples

A total of 51 subjects (27 Americans and 24 Chinese) comprised the sample. Of these 27 Americans, 25 grew up in the United States, two grew up in other Western countries (Australia and Canada), 15 were females and 12 were males, 21 were Euro-Americans, two were African Americans, and four were other minorities. The age ranges for the Americans are as follows: Eleven were between 20-35, four were between 36 and 45, and 12 were above 45. In terms of education, 21 had done or were doing graduate studies, two attended two- or three-year college and four had four-year college education. In terms of profession, seven were university faculty members, 14 were graduate or college students, four were businesspersons, one was a schoolteacher, one did not identify. As for the Chinese respondents (11 females and 13 males), they all grew up in China and all but two came to the United States to study or do research. Their age ranges were as follows: Fourteen were between 20 and 35, eight were between 36 and 45, two were above 45. Thirteen received or were receiving graduate degrees, nine received four-year college education, and two

had two- or three-year college education. By profession, except two, the Chinese respondents were pursuing graduate degrees at a southeastern U.S. state university.

Instrument and Procedure

The instrument was a 12-item survey (see Appendix), which was constructed in two equivalent versions (English and Chinese) — one for the American participants and the other for the Chinese participants. In order to examine the language change, in the Chinese version, the 12 items were measured twice — one set referred to their experiences before they came to the United States and one set referred to their current experiences. The survey was conducted in the fall semester of 2002. The instrument addresses how the participants from two different cultures make their choices of address terms in various occasions such as formal or informal settings, orally, and in writing. The survey for the Americans was posted through the school LINGGRAD (Linguistics Graduate Student Organization) email network and the version for the Chinese students was posted through the school Chinese Student and Scholars email list-serve. We also personally administered the survey to some American graduate research assistants, and faculty members of the College of Education at this university.

Variables and Address Terms

This study included the following variables: 1) cultural background (Chinese and American), 2) age, 3) gender, 4) education, 5) profession, 6) linguistic style such as formal style, informal style, intimacy style, etc. In this study we examined the following address terms: no name (NN), first name (FN), last name (LN), first and last name or full name (FULL), title + last name (TLN), kinship name (KN), nickname (NIN), request routine (RR), etc.

Results

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests of population difference as an alternative to Chi-Square test on the 12 items indicated that while the two groups (Americans and Chinese-then) significantly differed on five items ($p < .05$) (i.e., informal greeting to superiors, informal letter-writing, expecting to be addressed by subordinates, addressing a stranger for help and addressing younger family members), the two groups (Americans and Chinese-now) differed significantly only on one item (informal greeting to superiors) ($p < .05$). In this section, we first present the differences and similarity in terms of frequencies of using each category of the address terms, and then we report the language changes of the

Chinese participants in their choices of address terms prior and posterior to their American experience.

Distributions of the Choices of Address Terms by the Two National Groups of Participants

Table 1 illustrates the distributions of the American and Chinese respondents' choices of addressing terms in ten different settings. In informal greetings to friends (see Setting 1 in Table 1), while about 52% of the Americans chose FN, and 48% chose NN, and the percentages were reversed for informal parting (Setting 2 in Table 1), the Chinese participants' responses were diversified: although about 46%, and 42% of the respondents would choose NN for informal greeting and informal parting, a considerable percentage (38%, and 29%) of the respondents would choose LN or FULL in the two informal settings when they were in China.

As for informal greeting to superiors (see Setting 3a in Table 1), status consciousness is reflected by the fact that for both cultural groups a majority of them (52% and 83% respectively) would choose TLN, although sharp differences can also be found among the two groups: about 44% of the American respondents would use either NN or FN, none of the Chinese respondents would choose NN or FN when they were in China. When addressing superiors formally (see Setting 3b in Table 1), far more Chinese respondents than their American counterparts tended to use TLN. Still, cultural differences are reflected by the fact that while about 29% of the American respondents chose either NN or FN to superiors, none of the Chinese would do so prior to their American experience.

As for informal letter writing (see Setting 4 in Table 1), no substantial differences were found between the two groups. Although a small portion of the Chinese used LN or FULL and none of the Americans used either of them, the great majority of the respondents for both groups would use FN in informal letter writing. This difference is more salient when we compare the situation for formal-letter writing as shown in Table 1 (Setting 5). While 63% of the Americans would choose NN even for formal occasions, approximately 80% of the Chinese would use either TLN or FULL when writing formal letters before they came to the States.

When asked how they would expect to be addressed by subordinates (see Setting 6 in Table 1), about one third of the American respondents will choose either NN, FN, or TLN, but a great majority (92%) of the Chinese respondents would choose TLN when they were in China.

As illustrated in Table 1 (Setting 7), when seeking help from a stranger, most American respondents will use request routine (RR) (e.g., excuse me),

whereas most Chinese respondents would choose a title (e.g., either a title like Mr. or Miss, or honorific titles such as Teacher, Master).

When addressing family members (see Settings 8a and 8b in Table 1), the American and Chinese respondents differed to some extent when they addressed younger people, but they did not differ substantially when addressing older people. Both Americans and Chinese respondents would choose kinship terms, nicknames, or first names. When Americans address younger people, in terms of descending percentage, the order is FN-NIN-KN, whereas when they address older people the order is KN-FN-NIN. For the Chinese respondents, the order is the same: KN-NIN-FN for both occasions although a few of them would use TLN when addressing elders.

Overall Comparison of the Two Group Participants' Choices of Address Terms in Selected Informal and Formal Settings

Table 2 illustrates the overall comparisons of the American and Chinese respondents' choices of address terms in informal and formal settings. When summarizing the data across four informal settings (informal greeting to a friend, informal parting, informal letter-writing, and informal greeting to a superior), 50% of total responses for the Americans indicated FN, 36% indicated NN, and 13% indicated TLN, whereas only 27% of the total responses for the Chinese (Pre-America experience) indicated FN, 25% indicated NN, and 23% indicated TLN. When summarizing the data for two formal settings (formal letter-writing and formally addressing a superior), the difference is obvious—a great majority (81%) of the Chinese would/will choose TLN, whereas 48% of the American respondents will choose TLN and 44% of the American respondents will still use FN on formal occasions.

Consideration and Motivation in Choosing Address Terms for the Two Groups

Table 3 illustrates results of the participants' responses to a question about their consideration/motivation in the same cultural and cross-cultural contact. From Table 3, we see that the two groups did not differ much in their consideration and motivation when selecting address terms, instead, a similar pattern was found for both cultural respondents. A majority of both the American (75%) and Chinese respondents (70%) will choose "politeness" as the most important consideration for both occasions, and approximately one-fifth to one-third of the Americans and approximately one-fifth to a quarter of the Chinese will choose "respect" as the most important consideration for same-cultural and cross-cultural situations (i.e., the one being spoken to, addressee or collocutor, is from the addresser's own nation/cultural background or from a different cultural background or nation) respectively.

Table 1

Comparison of American and Chinese Responses to Choices of Address Terms

Setting	Group	Choice of Addressing Terms (%)									
		KN	NIN	NN	FN	LN	FULL	T	TLN	RR	Other
1	American			48.1	51.9						
	Chinese			45.8	16.7	37.5					
2	American			51.9	48.1						
	Chinese			41.7	29.2		29.2				
3a	American			25.9	18.5	3.7			51.9		
	Chinese					8.3	8.3		83.3		
3b	American			3.7	25.9				7.4		63.0
	Chinese								66.7		33.3
4	American			18.5	77.8				3.7		
	Chinese			12.5	62.6	8.3	8.3		8.3		
5	American			63.0	3.7	7.4	22.2		3.7		63.0
	Chinese						37.5		41.7		20.8
6	American			37.0	33.3				29.6		
	Chinese			4.2		4.2			91.6		
7	American			11.1				3.7		85.2	
	Chinese			4.2				91.7		4.2	
8a	American	7.4	18.5		74.1						
	Chinese	45.8	33.3		20.8						
8b	American	74.1	7.4		14.8				3.7		
	Chinese	87.5	4.2						8.3		

Notes: For settings, 1 refers to informal/familiar greeting; 2, informal parting; 3a, informal greeting to superior; 3b, addressing superior formally; 4, informal letter-writing; 5, formal letter-writing; 6, expected to be addressed by subordinates; 7, addressing a stranger for help; 8a, addressing younger family members; 8b, addressing older family members. KN = kinship name, NIN = nickname, NN = no name or (greeting + no name), FN = first name, LN = last name, FULL = full name, T = title, TLN = title + last name, RR = request routine.

Table 2

Overall Comparison of Address Term Choices in Some Informal and Formal Settings by Nation

Choice	Four Informal Setting Counts		Percent Within Setting Counts		Two Formal Setting Counts		Percent Within Setting Counts	
	Group		Group		Group		Group	
	American	Chinese	American	Chinese	American	Chinese	American	Chinese
NN	39	24	36%	25%	1	0	2%	0%
FN	54	26	50%	27%	24	0	44%	0%
LN	1	13	1%	14%	1	0	2%	0%
FULL	0	11	0%	11%	2	9	4%	19%
TLN	14	22	13%	23%	26	39	48%	81%

Notes: NN = no name or (greeting + no name), FN = first name, LN = last name, FULL = full name, TLN = title + last name.

Table 3

Comparison of Survey Responses by Group (Consideration/Motivations)

Group	Same-Cultural Contact				Cross-Cultural Contact			
	S	P	R	O	S	P	R	O
American	70.4*	18.5	11.1		55.6	33.3	11.1	
	(19)	(5)	(3)		(15)	(9)	(3)	
Chinese	75.0	25.0		16.7	54.2	20.8	8.3	
	(18)	(6)		(4)	(13)	(5)	(2)	

Notes: S = solidarity, P = politeness, R = respect, O = other. *The first row numbers refer to the percentage of the total sample endorsing that category, and the numbers in parentheses refer to the number of respondents endorsing that category. Due to missing data, the Chinese responses here only refer to the post-America (now) experiences.

Chinese Participants' Changes in Their Choices of Address Terms

Table 4 demonstrates the language change of the Chinese respondents that took place after they came to the United States as compared to what they preferred prior to their stay in the United States in terms of percentage and counts for each language setting or contact.

As shown in Table 4 (Setting 1), while only 17% of them would use FN before coming to the US, now about 63% would choose FN for informal peer greeting, and for informal parting, the increase in the respondents who chose FN is 38% (from 29.2% to 66.7%). As for informal greeting to superior (see Table 4 Setting 3a), none of the Chinese respondents would choose FN before coming to the U.S but about 21% of them would do so now. Changes are also reflected by the remarkable percentage drop (from 66.7% to 29.2%) of those participants who would choose TLN when formally addressing their superiors (see Table 4 Setting 3b).

As shown in Table 4 (Setting 4), although the patterns for choices of address terms for informal letter writing remained the same for Chinese participants as compared with their prior and posterior to American experiences, changes are more obvious for the formal letter writing setting (Table 4 Setting 5). Approximately 37% of the Chinese reported using either NN or FF now while none of the Chinese participants reported using these terms before they came to the States.

In the imaginative setting (e.g., Table 4 Setting 6) where they were addressed by a subordinate, while only a couple of the Chinese respondents would expect to be addressed by NN and none of them would expect to be addressed by FN before they came to the United States, eight percent of them would expect to be addressed by NN and 54% of them would expect to be addressed by FN at the time of participation in this study.

As shown in Table 4 Setting 7, when seeking help from a stranger before they came to the United States, only 4.2% of the Chinese participants would use request routine, and 92% of them would use (honorific) title, now about 96% of them would choose request routine, and none of them reported using the (honorific) title.

When addressing family members (see Settings 8a and 8b in Table 4), more Chinese respondents now tended to use FN for both occasions (33% vs. 21% for addressing younger family members and 45.8% vs. 0% for addressing older or elder family members).

Table 4

*Comparison of Chinese Responses to Address Term Choices Then and Now**

Setting	Time	Choice of Address Terms (%)									
		KN	NIN	NN	FN	LN	FULL	T	TLN	RR	Other
1	Then			45.8	16.7	37.5					
	Now			33.3	62.5				4.2		
2	Then			41.7	29.2		29.2				
	Now			20.8	66.7		12.5				
3a	Then					8.3	8.3		83.3		
	Now				20.8				79.2		
3b	Then								66.7		33.3
	Now								29.2		70.8
4	Then			12.5	62.6	8.3	8.3		8.3		
	Now			12.5	66.7	8.3	8.3		4.2		
5	Then						37.5		41.7		20.8
	Now			16.7	20.8				29.2		33.3
6	Then			4.2		4.2			91.6		
	Now			8.3	54.2	8.3			16.7		
7	Then			4.2				91.7		4.2	
	Now			4.2						95.8	
8a	Then	45.8	33.3		20.8						
	Now	29.2	29.2		33.3		8.3				
8b	Then	87.5	4.2						8.3		
	Now	45.8	8.3		45.8						

Notes: *"Then" refers to the time before they came to the U.S., and "Now" refers to the time after they came to the U.S. For settings, 1 refers to informal/familiar greeting; 2, informal parting; 3a, informal greeting to superior; 3b, addressing superior formally; 4, informal letter writing; 5, formal letter writing; 6, expected to be addressed by subordinates; 7, addressing a stranger for help; 8a, addressing family younger members; 8b, addressing family older/elder members. KN = kinship name, NIN = nickname, NN = no name or (greeting + no name), FN = first name, LN = last name, FULL = full name, T = title, TLN = title + last name, RR = request routine.

Table 5 illustrates the language changes for the Chinese respondents' choices of address terms on some selected informal and formal settings as compared with their American counterparts. Dramatic changes were found for the Chinese respondents on the overall summary of the four informal and four formal settings. While 54% of the total responses indicated the choice of FN for post-American experience, only 27% of the total responses indicated the choice of FN when the Chinese participants recalled their experience prior to their stay in the United States.

Although for the two formal settings the changes for the Chinese participants were not so distinctive, their changes in terms of choices of address terms for the four informal settings were obvious: while 27% of the responses indicated the choice of first name in the past, now 54% of the responses indicated doing so now. A remarkably fewer number of responses indicated using last name and full name now as compared with responses that indicated using last name and full name before (2% vs. 14% and 5% vs. 11%).

The overall change patterns of the Chinese participants, as shown in Table 5, when compared with the general usage pattern of the American counterparts, is that Chinese participants tended to be more similar to the Americans in terms of their choices of address terms than they did prior to their American experience. This may serve as evidence supporting the hypothesis that, in their process of acculturation and assimilation, Chinese participants would more often than not accommodate their way of addressing people to their American coworkers or community at large.

Table 5

Address Term Choices in Some Informal and Formal Settings by Chinese Respondents (Then and Now) as Compared with American Respondents*

Choice	Four Informal Setting		Percent for Americans	Two Formal Setting		Percent for Americans
	Counts	Percent Within Setting		Counts	Percent Within Setting	
	Time			Time		
	Then	Now		Then	Now	
NN	24	16	36%	0	4	2%
FN	26	52	50%	24	0	44%
LN	13	2	1%	0	0	2%
FULL	11	5	0%	9	0	4%
TLN	22	21	13%	39	39	48%

Notes: *"Then" refers to the time prior to their American stay as compared with "Now" (posterior to their US experiences). NN = no name or (greeting + no name), FN = first name, LN = last name, FULL = full name, TLN = title + last name.

Discussion

In this study, several inferences may be drawn. Firstly, our hypothesis seemed to be supported by data that differences between Americans and Chinese in their choices of address terms are governed by cultural rules (norms). Most of the American respondents tended to use either FN or NN in most informal settings and even in some formal settings or status conscious settings. In comparison, the Chinese respondents under the context in China would use diversified choices—more Chinese than the Americans would consider the status classification and choose TLN even in some informal settings. As for the formal settings where social status is conscious, most Chinese respondents would choose the more respectful TLN. As noted by Brown and Ford (1961), TLN indicated inequality and unfamiliarity while (mutual) FN indicated equality and familiarity. One explanation for the differences between the two cultural groups is that although China has been undergoing rapid social change toward egalitarianism and equality, its cultural rules or linguistic norms remain deeply rooted in social hierarchy and status consciousness whereas the people of the United States, as members of a more democratic society that stresses equality, tend to use unmarked address terms that ignore or devalue social status. Thus, using FN or NN reinforces “familiarity” or “solidarity” for Americans while the use of title conscious address terms helps the Chinese express their “humbleness,” “politeness,” or “respect.”

Secondly, age may also be an important factor that determines the respondents’ choices. While most of the Chinese respondents belong to young or middle-age groups, about 44% of the American respondents are above 45. In most contexts, it would be appropriate for the elders to address the younger ones by first name or greeting with no name in both American and Chinese cultures.

Thirdly, the Chinese respondents are a special group, representing those who came to the United States to study, and who had been undergoing acculturation or assimilation and undergoing a process of linguistic change. These respondents were well-educated intellectuals, bilingual (fluent in English and Chinese), and sensitive to linguistic changes—their acculturation to the American culture may have already begun far before they came here. Giles and Powesland (1975) observe that accommodation through speech can be regarded as an attempt on the part of the speaker to modify or disguise his persona in order to make it more acceptable to the person addressed. Accommodation theory certainly interplayed in the Chinese respondents’ language change in terms of their choices of address terms.

Implications

First, since previous research on address terms in American and Chinese cultures is sparse, the findings of the current study fill this lacuna. They shed light on the similarities and differences in address term usages in various social and cultural contexts within the two cultures. They also prove that the application of address terms is governed by social norms and cultural rules. The findings may help Americans understand that Chinese use of formal address terms does not mean detachment or disinterest. On the contrary, it means politeness and respect. With this knowledge, misunderstanding in cross-cultural communication may be reduced or avoided.

Second, this study provides insightful information in teaching/learning English as a foreign language and teaching/learning Chinese as a foreign language. Address terms are important linguistic mechanisms in that they reflect the speaker's attitude toward the addressee and the addressee's interpretation of his or her relationship with the speaker. Therefore, inappropriate choice of address terms hinders effective communication between the speaker and the addressee. Oftentimes, it is difficult for foreign language learners to choose the appropriate form of address in a given foreign context or to understand the criteria that determine the correct choice. Therefore, foreign language teachers should pay close attention to foreign cultural learning, and be aware that understanding culture-specific items could be challenging to learners. Some strategies foreign language teachers may adopt are: connecting target address terms to their actual use in specific, authentic, social, and situational contexts, translating dialogs between Chinese and English with the focus on address terms, and watching dialogs or movies in the target language and identifying the address terms used, etc.

Third, through the analysis of Chinese respondents' language change concerning the choices of address terms, the current study demonstrates that acculturation plays a crucial role in cultural learning in study abroad context. Therefore, in order to be both linguistically and socio-culturally competent in the target language, second language learners should take the initiative and acculturate to the target culture. Learners should be open-minded and motivated in learning target norms and conventions and hold positive attitudes toward the target language and culture. In addition, learners should take the opportunity to interact with native speakers; thus through practice, they could utilize and internalize the proper linguistic items that are associated with social norms and cultural rules in a given context. In a multilingually and multiculturally diversified nation like the United States, apart from linguistic acquisition, cross-cultural or multicultural awareness might be crucial to successful second language learning, and so to speak, to acculturation.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Our analysis is based on self-reported data for artificially constructed scenarios, and the respondents' answers were based on their memories. Obviously, the patterns or the conclusions we have drawn here are more a reflection of what these groups *think* they would do or *recall* having done in those various scenarios than what they actually do. Moreover, limited by the sample size (51 participants) and data-collection, readers should be cautious to generalize the findings of this study to American and Chinese communities at large. At best, the results of this study would target only typical college or university communities.

For future research, it is recommended to use a more representative (diversified) and larger sample. It would be of relevant interest to compare respondents in China with those immigrants of Chinese who have lived in the U.S. for some years. The length of their stay in the US may also be an interesting factor because it is an indicator of the degree of their assimilation to the American mainstream culture among other social factors.

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Appendix

A Survey of Cross-cultural Study on Address Terms**Part I**

Please mark only one choice that you think best describes your answer to each question. You may check (place an X) or underline either the letter of your choice (A, B, C, or D) or the option, and as for “other,” please provide a specific answer.

1. In daily informal greetings to a colleague or friend with whom you are very familiar, how do you usually address him or her?
 - A. Greeting(s) (e.g., “Hi/Hello/Good morning”) + No Name (NN)
 - B. First Name (FN)
 - C. Last Name (LN)
 - D. Full Name (F)
 - E. Gender Title (e.g., Mr./Mrs./Miss/Ms.)+Last Name (GTLN)
 - F. Professional or Rank Title (e.g., Prof./Dr.) +Last Name (RTLN)
 - G. Other _____

2. In daily informal leave-taking to someone you are familiar with, how do you usually address him or her?
 - A. Leave-taking routines or terms (e.g., “See you”/ “Bye-bye”) + No Name (NN)
 - B. Leave-taking routines or terms (e.g., “See you”/ “Bye-bye”) + First Name (FN)
 - C. Leave-taking routines or terms (e.g., “See you”/ “Bye-bye”) + Last Name (LN)
 - D. Leave-taking routines or terms (e.g., “See you”/ “Bye-bye”) + Full Name (F)
 - E. Leave-taking routines or terms (e.g., “See you”/ “Bye-bye”) + Gender Title (e.g., Mr./Mrs./Miss/Ms.) + Last Name (GTLN)
 - F. Leave-taking routines or terms (e.g., “See you”/ “Bye-bye”) + Professional or Rank Title (e.g., Prof./Dr.) + Last Name (RTLN)
 - G. Other _____

3. In formal greetings to someone with whom you are familiar, but also subordinate to in rank or position, how do you usually address him or her?
 - A. Greeting(s) (e.g., “Hi/Hello/Good morning”) + No Name (NN)
 - B. First Name (FN)
 - C. Last Name (LN)
 - D. Full Name (F)

- E. Gender Title (e.g., Mr./Mrs./Miss/Ms.)+Last Name (GTLN)
 - F. Professional or Rank Title (e.g., Prof./Dr.) +Last Name (RTLN)
 - G. Other _____
4. When seeking help or asking a stranger for direction, how do you address the person?
- A. Greeting(s) (e.g., “Hi/Hello/Good morning”) + No Name (NN)
 - B. Request Routine (e.g., “Excuse me”) + “Sir/Madam/Miss”
 - C. Other _____
5. How would you expect your subordinate(s) to address you?
- A. Greeting(s) (e.g., “Hi/Hello/Good morning”) + No Name (NN)
 - B. First Name (FN)
 - C. Last Name (LN)
 - D. Full Name (F)
 - E Gender Title (e.g., Mr./Mrs./Miss/Ms.) + Last Name (GTLN)
 - F. Professional or Rank Title (e.g., Prof./Dr.) + Last Name (RTLN)
 - G. Other _____
6. In a very formal context (e.g., at a meeting), how would you call your boss or superior?
- A. Greeting(s) (e.g., “Hi/Hello/Good morning”) + No Name (NN)
 - B. First Name (FN)
 - C. Last Name (LN)
 - D. Full Name (F)
 - E. Gender Title (e.g., Mr./Mrs./Miss/Ms.) + Last Name (GTLN)
 - F. Professional or Rank Title (e.g., Prof./Dr.) + Last Name (RTLN)
 - G. Other _____
7. In writing an informal personal letter to a friend, how would you address him or her?
- A. Greeting(s) (e.g., “Hi/Hello/Good morning”) + No Name (NN)
 - B. First Name (FN)
 - C. Last Name (LN)
 - D. Full Name (F)
 - E. Gender Title (e.g., Mr./Mrs./Miss/Ms.) + Last Name (GTLN)
 - F. Professional or Rank Title (e.g., Prof./Dr.) + Last Name (RTLN)
 - G. Other _____
8. In writing a formal letter or invitation to a friend, how would you address the person?
- A. Greeting(s) (e.g., “Hi/Hello/Good morning”) + No Name (NN)

- B. First Name (FN)
- C. Last Name (LN)
- D. Full Name (F)
- E. Gender Title (e.g., Mr./Mrs./Miss/Ms.)+Last Name (GTLN)
- F. Professional or Rank Title (e.g., Prof./Dr.) +Last Name (RTLN)
- G. Other _____

9. How do you usually address your family members who are elder or older than you?

- A. Kinship Name (e.g., Dad, Mom, Aunt, Uncle, Brother, Sister)
- B. Nickname
- C. First Name (FN)
- D. Full Name (F)
- E. Intimacy terms (e.g., “sweet-heart”, “honey”)
- F. Other _____

10. How do you usually address your family members who are your younger generation or younger than you?

- A. Kinship Name (e.g., Son, Daughter, Brother, Sister)
- B. Nickname
- C. First Name (FN)
- D. Full Name (F)
- E. Intimacy terms (e.g., “sweet-heart”, “honey”)
- F. Other _____

11. When you address somebody of a similar cultural background (e.g., a similar or the same ethnic group or nationality), what do you consider most important before you address the person?

- A. Solidarity B. Politeness C. Respect D. Other _____.

12. Generally speaking, when you have a conversation with somebody of a different cultural background, which of the following would you consider as most important when you address the person?

- A. Solidarity B. Politeness C. Respect D. Other _____.

Part II

Please mark only one choice. You may highlight or underline either the letter of your choice or the option, and, as for “other”, please provide a specific answer.

1. What is the country in which you grew up?

- A. China B. the United States C. Other

2. What is your ethnicity?
 - A. Euro-American
 - B. African American
 - C. Asian_____ (specify which country, i.e., Chinese, Korean, Japanese)
 - D. Other_____ (specify which country.)

3. What is your gender?
 - A. Female B. Male

4. What is your age range?
 - A. Below 20 B. 20-35 C. 36-45 D. Above 45

5. What is the highest level of education that you have received?
 - A. high school B. two or three year college C. 4-year college
 - D. graduate studies

6. What is your current profession?
 - A. Faculty member B. Elementary or secondary school teacher
 - C. Business-person D. College student E. Other _____

7. If you are a student, please indicate your major or program_____.