



PRONOMINAL ADDRESS IN GERMAN

RULES, ANARCHY AND EMBARRASSMENT POTENTIAL

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Choice of address forms, a socially crucial feature in German communication, is context-dependent on situations (a) where the unmarked form of address is *du* (T), (b) where it is *Sie* (V), and (c) where the two systems (a and b) coexist. The first two situations are, apart from their fuzzy edges, rather clearcut. The third situation, however, appears anarchic and has a high embarrassment potential. In an empirical study based on 72 interviews conducted in three regions of the German speaking area, the three prototypical situations are explored. A number of potentially conflicting rules and preferences for ambiguity are isolated. These include individual preferences, network preferences and perceptions of social distance, based on factors such as relative age, emotional closeness of interlocutors, and perceived commonalities between them. In spite of the complex interplay of competing rules and preferences and the consequent embarrassment potential, German speakers appear to reject any imposition from outside of a particular address form. This study is part of a larger, Australian-based project comparing the address systems of French, German and Swedish.

INTRODUCTION

In the German-speaking area, the choice of address forms was rather clearcut until the 1960s. Rules relating to the use of T vs. V pronouns (*du* vs. *Sie*) as well as titles rested on detailed rules for the rites of passage both of an adolescent reaching the age when he or she acquired the right to be addressed with the V pronoun, and the ritual that had to

be followed for two acquaintances to turn a mutual V relationship into a mutual T one. Social changes in the last third of the 20th century triggered sociolinguistic developments that, among other things, all but dissolved the reliable rules of address – without, however, collapsing the multitude of address forms and their combinations into a simpler system. As a consequence, forms of address in German are a frequent topic of public debate and can, in socially sensitive situations, possess a high embarrassment potential.

Research into German forms of address has taken into account the sociolinguistic landmark studies mentioned in the introductory article of this issue. Kretzenbacher (1991) uses ‘distance’ as his main parameter in the diachronic and synchronic functional description of German systems of address pronouns. Clyne (1995, 130–131), departing from the narrow frame of the T/V dichotomy, presents a model of seven different modes of pronominal address in German. A similar approach is adopted independently by Hickey (2003) in his concept of the coexistence of a binary and a scalar system. Bayer (1979) shows the existence of two competing (and sometimes conflicting) conventions of address forms in contemporary German – one based on an unmarked pronoun (*Sie*) for formality vs. a marked one for intimacy, the other based on an unmarked pronoun for solidarity (*du*) vs. a marked one for social distance. Glück and Sauer (1997, 120–125) confirm those two conventions of address forms. They distinguish between a more traditional, bourgeois convention – where, amongst adult speakers, *du* is reserved for relatives and close friends, while *Sie* is used as the default pronoun for everyone else – and a convention based on egalitarian, socially progressive attitudes (and often only applied temporarily and situation specific), where *du* is the default pronoun.

The aim of this article is to systematize the two competing systems of address in German already noted in earlier research and to show how and where they overlap and thereby create potential for embarrassment. It will also show that, in spite of the two competing systems, there are still clearcut rules that lead to the generally accepted use of T and V in many standard situations. Finally it will explore what variation, including national and regional variation, exists between the two systems.

The data analysed in the present article were collected as part of the project *Address in some western European languages* (see Norrby, and Warren in this issue). The project employed a range of methodologies to examine changes in the address systems in French, German and Swedish, as used in five countries (France, Germany, Austria, Sweden and Finland respectively), including focus groups, interviews, participant observation, and chat groups. A focus group was arranged at the start of the project, to help in understanding attitudes, perceptions, expectations and experiences of members of the speech community. A second focus group, towards the end of the project, made it possible for our

informants to react to progress findings and their interpretation. Each focus group comprised about 16 members, between 18 and 75 years of age, of both sexes, and from a cross-section of occupations. The interviews included a short questionnaire and a series of open-ended interview questions on the informants’ own address usage and their attitudes to and perceptions of others’ usage. This article is based on 72 interviews conducted in three locations within the German-speaking area: Mannheim, Leipzig and Vienna (24 interviews in each site), complemented by data from the first focus groups held at each site.¹

THREE PROTOTYPICAL ADDRESS SITUATIONS FOR GERMAN

Focus group data led us to the following three prototypical address situations (Clyne et al. 2006):

- situations in which reciprocal *du* is the unmarked form of address;
- situations in which reciprocal *Sie* is the unmarked form of address;
- situations which demonstrate the coexistence of the two systems.

The existence of these three situations was confirmed in the interview data. While the focus of this article is on the third situation, we will briefly exemplify the first two contexts and draw attention to the fact that, although relatively clearcut, they may nevertheless display ‘fuzzy edges’.

UNMARKED DU-SITUATION

Firstly, there is a non-negotiable context for *du* use by and to family and close friends. For example, all informants address their parents and are addressed by them with *du* (cf. Table 1. All abbreviations in the following tables are explained in Endnote 2).

	T – T		n/a
Father	70	100%	2
Mother	72	100%	-
Total	142	100%	2

Table 1 How do you address your parents? How do they address you?²

However, the situation may become fuzzy and less clearcut with peripheral family members, e.g. with the parents of the spouse or partner or with brothers- and sisters-in-law.

While no informant would expect to use *Sie* or be addressed as *Sie* in communication with their parents, this form as well as non-reciprocal use of address forms is used with parents of spouse or partner (cf. Table 2).

	T – T		V – T		V – V		V – T/V		A – T		n/a
Mannheim	17	73.9%	4	17.4%	1	4.3%	1	4.3%	-		1
Leipzig	20	83.3%	3	12.5%	-		-		1	4.2%	-
Wien	17	85.0%	2	10.0%	1	5%	-		-		4
Total	54	80.6%	9	13.4%	2	3%	1	1.5%	1	1.5%	5

Table 2 How do you address your partner’s parents? How do they address you?

Reciprocal *du* is by far the most common form of address in this situation. Reciprocal *Sie*, avoidance of direct pronominal address (A) and non-reciprocal address involving *Sie* use by the informant while he/she is addressed as *du*, make up just under 20% of reported instances.

Age of informant	T – T		V – T		V – V		V – T/V		A – T		n/a
21-30 (N=22)	13	61.9%	5	23.8%	2	9.5%	-		1	4.8%	1
31-40 (N=26)	23	95.8%	1	4.2%	-		-		-		2
41-50 (N=4)	4	100%	-		-		-		-		-
51-60 (N=7)	7	100%	-		-		-		-		-
61-70 (N=9)	6	66.7%	1	11.1%	1	11.1%	1	11.1%	-		-
71-81 (N=4)	2	100%	-		-		-		-		2
Total	55	82.1%	7	10.4%	3	4.5%	1	1.5%	1	1.5%	5

Table 3 How do you address your partner’s parents? How do they address you? Summary by age

This variation seems to be influenced mostly by the age of the informants (cf. Table 3) which in turn may to some extent reflect the length of the relationship and indicate that a reciprocal *du*-relationship with the partner’s parents needs time to grow (Clyne et al. 2004). This was discussed in particular in the Mannheim focus group: younger parti-

cipants exchanged anecdotes about their parents trying to assess whether the time had come to address their current boyfriend or girlfriend as *du* or whether that would be premature, that is, whether it constituted an inappropriate commitment. There is hardly any gender variation (cf. Table 4), whereas the regional variation apparent in Table 2 seems to be due mainly to the slightly younger sample from Mannheim.

Gender	T – T		V – T		V – V		V – T/V		A – T		n/a
Female (N=41)	32	82.0%	3	7.7%	2	5.1%	1	2.6%	1	2.6%	2
Male (N=31)	23	82.1%	4	14.3%	1	3.6%	-		-		3
Total	55	82.1%	7	10.4%	3	4.5%	1	1.5%	1	1.5%	5

Table 4 How do you address your partner’s parents? How do they address you? Summary by gender

UNMARKED *SIE* SITUATION

The second context, an unmarked *Sie* situation, is found in interactions with strangers and authorities, in interactions involving hierarchical relationships, and generally in formal contexts. This situation is illustrated by general service encounters and interactions with authorities:

	V – V	V – T/V
<i>How do you address a shop assistant where you don’t shop regularly? (General service encounters)</i>	98.6%	1.4%
<i>How do you address public authorities/ police officers? (Encounters with authorities)</i>	100%	-

Table 5 Address in general service encounters and in encounters with authorities

However, fuzzy edges are apparent in this context as well. While all but one of our informants see reciprocal *Sie* as the unmarked form of address with shop assistants in shops where they do *not* shop regularly, the situation with shop assistants in shops that are regularly frequented by the informants shows some variation:

	V – V		V/T – V		T – V		T – T	
<i>How do you address a shop assistant where you don't shop regularly?</i>	71	98.6%	1	1.4%	-		-	
<i>How do you address a shop assistant where you do shop regularly?</i>	64	88.9%	-		1	1.4%	7	9.7%

Table 6 Address in general service encounters

Even in general service encounters, a degree of familiarity with the environment and/or with the interlocutor may promote variation.

THE COEXISTENCE OF TWO SYSTEMS: AMBIVALENT CATEGORY

While problems at the fuzzy edges of unmarked *du* and unmarked *Sie* situations are repeatedly mentioned by the informants, the real problems lie in the third situation, where the two systems coexist or overlap in an ambiguous manner. It is in this context that embarrassment potential is likely to occur. This is caused by uncertainty as to which pronoun to use, or by the coincidence of T and V partners in a group where T and V choice is determined by network practice rather than individual relationships.

The two extremes in the perception of the ambivalent category are illustrated by two quotations from the Mannheim focus group. On the one hand, one participant (male, home duties, 40+) described the transition from *Sie* to *du* as '*Das ist teilweise der größte Schritt, den man manchmal tun könnte*' [this is to some extent the biggest step you could take sometimes]. On the other hand, the Mannheim group endorsed the dichotomy of a '*ganz herzliches, freundliches, warmes Sie*' [a totally cordial, friendly, warm Sie] and the '*ganz interesseloses du*' [completely indifferent *du*]. So, while the social importance of the difference between the two address pronouns is emphasised by one informant, a clearcut association of the V pronoun with formality and the T pronoun with intimacy does not necessarily hold.

The choice between the two conflicting systems can be made according to the preference of the individual, the preference of a network and, most importantly, the perception of social distance.

INDIVIDUAL PREFERENCE

Sociopolitical attitudes of an individual, for example, can influence their personal preference for one or the other system of address in situations where those systems compete.

Until recently at least, there was a vague association of a T address with ‘leftist’ attitudes in Germany (Noelle-Neumann and Köcher 1997, 806). As it is now usually not possible to predict people’s criteria for T and V, address in German may be a challenging game:

Das ist ja das Spannende der Kommunikation, [...] ich kann einfach leider nicht immer voraussetzen, dass der das so versteht, wie ich das sage.

[That is the exciting thing about communication [...] unfortunately I can’t always assume that they interpret it [*du*] the way I mean it.]

(Leipzig, female psychologist, 30)

NETWORK PREFERENCE

Individuals belong to several different networks, some of which may have T and some V as their preferred pronouns of address. This can lead to embarrassment if members of the two networks meet. A typical network would be the workplace. In our questionnaire, we asked for terms of address used with superiors at work, work colleagues and clients respectively (cf. Table 7).

Overall, reciprocal T is clearly more prevalent among colleagues than with superiors, whereas *Sie* is the unmarked form in relationships with clients. The answers showed hardly any variation according to the gender of our informants, and only little variation according to the age groups they belong to.

	T		T/V		V		n/a
<i>How do you address your superiors at work? How do they address you?*</i>	23	32.9%	5	7.1%	42	60.0%	2
<i>How do you address your co-workers? How do they address you?*</i>	44	62.9%	14	20.0%	12	17.1%	2
<i>If you have clients, how do you address them?</i>	6	9.5%	2	3.2%	55	87.3%	9

Table 7 Terms of address at work (superiors, colleagues and clients)

* reciprocal use of address pronouns in all instances

Among the under 30s, reciprocal T between work colleagues is highest, while in the same age group reciprocal V between them and their superiors has a generally high frequency.

This might have to do with the fact that younger staff have mostly junior status in the hierarchy, while a considerable part of them come from universities and extend the general mutual T among students to their colleagues. The three research locations, however, show substantial variation, which will be discussed below.

SOCIAL DISTANCE

The perception of social distance seems to be the overriding factor for choosing either the T or the V form. The following answer to a general question about German address pronouns (‘What do you think of the *du* vs. *Sie* forms in general?’) is representative of the general perception of the crucial role social distance plays in choosing one form of address:

Sinnvoll ist die Unterscheidung [...]. Du zeigt, dass man gleich alt ist, oder dass man sich gut kennt, oder dass man auf einer persönlichen Ebene ist.

[That makes sense, that distinction [...]. *Du* shows that you are the same age or you know each other well or you have close relations with each other]

(Leipzig, female university administrator, 28)

Social distance is determined by a number of factors, as can be seen from the above extract, and from the way our informants answer the question of how they and their neighbours address each other (cf. Table 8): ‘*Nur die Nachbarschaft allein ist kein Grund, per du zu sein*’ [Just being neighbours is not sufficient reason for being on *du* terms] (Vienna, female retiree, 81).

	Total informants	%
T – T	17	24.3
T/V – T/V	24	34.3
V/T – V/T	5	7.1
V – V	24	34.3
n/a	2	

Table 8 How do you address your neighbours? How do they address you?
T/V and V/T are used to distinguish between frequency of T and V use: T/V signifies generally reciprocal use of T or V, whereby T-use is more frequent; V/T refers to reciprocal use of T or V, but V is generally preferred.

Factors influencing T/V-use with neighbours mentioned by the informants are:

- relative age (19 instances)
- emotional closeness (4 instances) and commonalities in lifestyle (2 instances)
- length of co-residence (5 instances).

Generally, relative *age* seems to be an important factor of low social distance. That it is always relative, not absolute, age, is apparent from the wide age range considered appropriate for switching from T to V in addressing young people:

mean age	17.6
median age	18
age range	13 – 30
St Dev	2.88

Table 9 From what age should a person be addressed with V?

Experiencing unexpected address forms is often not only a signal for the co-existence of two systems, one of which has T and the other V as the unmarked form. It can also be a symptom of different perceptions of social distance by communication partners. Unexpected *du* signals that the informant perceives the social distance as greater than his or her interlocutor; unexpected *Sie*, that the informant perceives the social distance as lower than his or her interlocutor. Such experiences are overwhelmingly described as awkward or negative.

	positive		ambivalent		negative	
unexpected T (N=38)	2	5%	8	21%	28	74%
unexpected V (N=23)	-		10	43%	13	57%
Total	2	3%	18	30%	41	67%

Table 10 Have you ever been addressed with a form you didn't expect? Summary of Yes-answers

In slightly more than a third of all interviews (25 out of 72), our informants link experiences of unexpected address forms with reflections on the relative age of interlocutors. Of those 25 informants, 18 (predominantly in the age group between 31 and 40 years) remembered being addressed with V by interlocutors younger than themselves. Thus, the constellation of expecting a T-form but receiving a V-form appears to be far more memorable than the opposite. Ten out of the 18 linked the experience of receiving an

unexpected V address by a younger interlocutor to the realization that they were getting older. Two informants (both females in their mid-thirties) remembered having been unexpectedly addressed with *du* by a younger interlocutor and both were positively surprised. However, all five informants who recalled being addressed with *du* by interlocutors older than themselves resented it, considering it as condescending. These last five were all in their twenties or early thirties, and four of them were female.

One factor that can sometimes override the common age group is what Werner Kallmeyer (2003) calls '*gemeinsame Lebenswelt*' [perceived commonalities]. In answering the question 'Have you ever been addressed with a form you didn't expect? When, by whom?', a male informant from Mannheim told of his astonishment at being addressed with *Sie* because of his age and in spite of his perception of a *gemeinsame Lebenswelt*:

Ich fand's eher etwas belustigend und zwar war das in der Jugendarbeit wo ich eigentlich in einer Jugendgruppe war [...], die zwar eine gewisse Bandbreite des Alters abdeckt, aber man war so genau so Gruppenmitglied wie der etwas Jüngere und der hat mich dann gesiezt.

[I found that a bit humorous; it was in youth work, where I was actually in a youth group [...] which does, however, cover quite a broad range of ages; in any case, you were just as much a member of the group as someone who was a bit younger, and that person then addressed me as *Sie*]

(Mannheim, male manager, 33)

Other instances, e.g. answers to the question 'Would you like to be addressed more as *du* or *Sie*? If so, why, if not, why not?', emphasize this factor of affinities:

Es kommt darauf an, wo ich mich bewege. In einem Umfeld, was mir völlig fremd ist, möchte ich natürlich gesiezt werden, aber in einem Umfeld, wo ich mich zu Hause fühle, weil ich das öfter erlebe, dann duz ich. Das muss nicht nur in meiner Wohnung sein.

[That depends on where I am. In an environment that is completely strange to me, I certainly want to be addressed with *Sie*, but in an environment I feel at home in because I have experienced it more often, then I use *du*. That does not have to be just in my home.]

(Leipzig, female retiree, 65)

*Das ist schwierig, das kommt von dem, was man gemeinsam macht
oder miteinander zu tun hat.*

[That's difficult, it depends on what you do together or what you have
to do with one another.]

(Leipzig, female administrator, 36)

When a situation is ambivalent in relation to whether T or V is to be considered the unmarked form of address, individual or network preferences appear to indicate tendencies. When individual preferences are difficult to assess and network preferences do not apply – due either to lack of a shared network or to the fact that interlocutors belong to different networks with different address form preferences – perceived social distance becomes the overriding basis for address form decisions. Social distance is determined by factors such as relative age of the interlocutors, emotional closeness and *gemeinsame Lebenswelt*.

NON-RECIPROCITY

Non-reciprocity of address terms is found in long-term relationships, such as between pupil and teacher or with parents of childhood friends. It is typical of relationships where there is a considerable difference in age (children of neighbours, children of friends). For instance, 33 of the 72 informants report non-reciprocal T/V-use with their best friend's parents. While there is widespread distaste for non-reciprocal communication between adults in our interviews, such longstanding relationships with substantial age differences are the one exception:

*Ausser³ dort wo es sich eingebürgert hat und wo die Unterschiede
ganz klar sind, sprich kleine Kinder [...] Grosseltern des Freundes [...],
ausser in solchen Fällen finde ich unsymmetrische Anrede sehr
gewöhnungsbedürftig.*

[Except for where this has become the practice and where the differences are very clear, such as young children [...] friend's grandparents [...], apart from cases like that I don't find asymmetrical address unacceptable.]

(Mannheim, male student, 28)

OK mit Bekannten seit Kindheit, z.B. Freunde der Eltern.

[OK with friends since childhood days, such as your parents' friends.]

(Vienna, female orthoptist, 34)

Non-reciprocal address terms can also be used as a transition strategy, such as one enabling a teacher or professor entering a T relationship with a former student after the final examinations. As has been pointed out earlier (cf. discussion of Table 2), they are also present in relationships with the partner's parents.

NATIONAL/REGIONAL VARIATION

The data on which this article is based are probably not rich enough to make strong claims about national and regional variation. We will be focusing on national variation once our data collection is closer to completion. In this section we are concentrating on features for which our current data suggests that national or regional variation is salient. It concerns address in the workplace.

Of the three research sites the one where *du* is used most in the workplace is Vienna. As indicated in Table 11, nearly half the Vienna informants exchange T with superiors at work, in contrast to nearly one in three in Mannheim and just over one in five in Leipzig.

	T – T		T/V – T/V		V – V		n/a
Mannheim (N=24)	7	29.2%	3	12.5%	14	58.3%	-
Leipzig (N=24)	5	21.7%	1	4.4%	17	73.9%	1
Wien (N=24)	11	47.8%	1	4.4%	11	47.8%	1
Total	23	32.9%	5	7.1%	42	60.0%	2

Table 11 How do you address your superiors at work? How do they address you?

Table 12 shows that about 80% in Vienna exchange T with other colleagues as opposed to less than 60% of the Mannheim sample and just over half of those in Leipzig.

Table 13 shows that almost all instances of title use in addressing superiors and same-level colleagues at work were reported by Vienna interviewees, as were more than two-thirds of the instances of teachers and professors being addressed by titles.

	T – T		T/V – T/V		V – V		n/a
Mannheim (N=24)	13	56.5%	4	17.4%	6	26.1%	1
Leipzig (N=24)	12	52.2%	8	34.8%	3	13.0%	1
Wien (N=24)	19	79.2%	2	8.3%	3	12.5%	-
Total	44	62.9%	14	20.0%	12	17.1%	2

Table 12 How do you address your other co-workers? How do they address you?

Use of titles with:	Superiors at work	Work colleagues at same level	Teachers	University teachers
Mannheim	-	-	1	1
Leipzig	1	-	-	4
Vienna	7	3	18	12
Total	8	3	19	17

Table 13 Number of interviewees in each research site reporting use of titles

The use of both T and titles in Vienna seems paradoxical, but it is a carryover from the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The high frequency of T use in both the military officers' corps and state bureaucracy has been a characteristic of Austrian German since that time (Spross 2001, 121–123), and seems to have spread from there into the wider community, particularly in workplace settings. With regard to titles, this continued use is corroborated by similarities between contemporary usage in Austria and the Czech Republic, both of which are among the successor states of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. This frequent use of titles differs from both west and east German usage (Ehlers 2004). Vienna informants reported *du*-only workplaces, for instance social work, medical practices and among special school staff. *Sie* is reportedly used more by older people who are no longer part of a workplace network.

The slightly more conservative address usage at work in Leipzig than in Mannheim can be explained by a longstanding distaste for the imposition of *du* within the GDR Communist Party. Within the age group between 31 and 40, for instance, 80% of our Leipzig informants, but only 38.5% of those in Mannheim, address their work superiors with V. For those in their twenties, however, the percentage (60%) is the same in both research sites. We will be monitoring our remaining interview data to ascertain if the

more conservative tendency holds more generally for those who were adults before the German unification of 1990.

In Mannheim, informants reported *du* use at particular workplaces, such as pubs, alternative national service training, factories, archaeological digs and generally in casual forms of employment. In other workplaces such as hospitals, Mannheimers described *du* as being limited in use among people at the same hierarchical level. The Leipzig informants seem more likely to exercise individual variation with colleagues, whereas the participants from Mannheim and Vienna are more likely to follow network preference at their place of employment.

REJECTION OF ANY IMPOSITION

Most of our informants use *du* to a greater or lesser extent in the workplace. This, however, often appears to be the result of informal agreement on a network preference rather than of formal policy, given that individual comments in interviews indicate the rejection by some of pressure to use T in the workplace. This is illustrated by the following responses to the question ‘How do you feel about companies who prescribe the T form (e.g. IKEA)?’:

Ich finde, das kann man nicht von oben vorgeben, [...] das muss jeder für sich selbst entscheiden, [...] das finde ich nicht in Ordnung.

[I don’t think that can be prescribed from above [...] everyone has to decide that for themselves [...] I don’t think that’s OK.]

(Mannheim, male journalist, 32)

ein bisschen unsinnig [...] nicht die Firma hat das zu bestimmen [...] [es ist] im Grunde ein Eingriff in die Privatsphäre.

[a bit silly [...] it’s not something that the firm can decide [...] [it’s] basically an intrusion into our private sphere.]

(Mannheim, male TV technician/manager, 40)

One of our Leipzig informants even drew parallels to the pressure to conform during the GDR regime:

Ich finde, das kann man nicht machen. Das ist zu diktatorisch. Da kommt mein DDR-Bürger raus. Das ist nämlich die Diskrepanz auch zu vielen Westdeutschen[...] Ich hab mir zu DDR-Zeiten nichts vorschreiben lassen, das fällt für mich in diese Kategorie. Wenn ich in einem Betrieb arbeite, muss ich schon die Belange des Betriebs einhalten, aber das geht ja schon in persönlichen Bereich und das sollte man schon trennen.

[I don't think one should do that. That's too dictatorial. That's my GDR background coming out. You see, that's the discrepancy [between me and] a lot of West Germans, too [...] I didn't allow anyone to force me into anything in GDR times, and for me this is very similar. If I work within a company, I certainly do have to keep to the rules of that company, but this enters into the private sphere and that should be kept apart, shouldn't it?]

(Leipzig, female retiree, 65)

Interestingly, the most vocal opposition to an imposed T came from some of our Mannheim participants (cf. the first two examples in this section). One 36 year-old female journalist in Mannheim recalled pressure to use *du* to her (female) professor at university:

wurde man förmlich zum Du gezwungen, mir ist es dann auch passiert, dass ich meine Vorgesetzte, sprich meine Professorin, ständig gesiezt hab aus Versehen, also weil es mir einfach peinlich war, die zu duzen und die wollte halt plötzlich, dass ich sie duz.

[you were literally forced to use *du*. What happened to me was that I constantly called my superior, that is, my professor, *Sie* because I was simply embarrassed to use *du* and she suddenly wanted me to address her as *du*.]

(Mannheim, female journalist, 36)

This confirms participant observation at a German university, where junior staff and PhD students refused to agree to a T relationship with a professor in his 60s because it would create the impression of symmetrical relations which did not exist.

The above examples illustrate, therefore, rejection of overt imposition of a particular address form, as follows:

- the rejection of (implicit or explicit) company policy to use T or V in some workplaces;
- the reversal to V as a reaction to previous political or ideological pressures to use T;
- the rejection of imposition from professors of the post-1968 generation on junior staff to exchange T with them.

CONCLUSIONS

On the whole, the interview data bear out what we had already gleaned from the focus groups. In analyzing the data we have taken into account that in contemporary German, there appear to be three prototypical groups of address situations: one each with reciprocal T and reciprocal V respectively as the unmarked form, and one group of situations where the two systems coexist, with the opposing tendencies towards unmarked T on the one hand and towards unmarked V on the other hand.

It is particularly this last group of situations that appears to lack unambiguous rules and therefore to be anarchic. In fact rules do apply in those situations, even if they are many and contradictory. They relate to individual preferences, network preferences, and perceptions of social distance between interlocutors. Insecurity as to which rule is the overriding one in a given situation produces a high embarrassment potential, particularly in the light of the high frequency and social significance of address forms in discourse. This embarrassment potential, however, is tolerated, since the distinction between T and V address is overwhelmingly seen as useful and any imposition of one or the other form is widely rejected.

In addition, some social factors co-determine the choice of address terms in German: speakers' perception of social distance is the overriding factor, and is in turn determined by variables among which (relative) age and a *gemeinsame Lebenswelt* [perceived commonalities] appear to be the most important. Variation concerns different perceptions of social distance between individuals or groups, such as the differences in the emphasis of commonalities in workplace networks shown by our informants in Western Germany, Eastern Germany and Austria respectively, which can be traced back to different developments in the social history of those regions.⁴

ENDNOTES

- ¹ National and regional variation is to be seen over a wide range of parameters and we will analyze it in more detail in a later study. The amount of data processed at this stage does not allow us to make it a focus of this paper, apart from mentioning some variation in the section on national and regional variation below. Where data are not specified as to their regional distribution, regional variation is not seen as salient for the purposes of this paper and from the amount of data analyzed as yet.
- ² Key to abbreviations used in tables:
- | | |
|---------|---|
| T | use of T-form (du) |
| V | use of V-form (Sie) |
| T/V | use of T- or V-form |
| A | avoidance of pronominal address |
| n/a | not available |
| T–T | reciprocal T |
| V–V | reciprocal V |
| T/V–T/V | reciprocal use of either T or V (depending on individual relationship) |
| V–T | nonreciprocal use: informant addresses interlocutor with V, is addressed by them with T |
| V–T/V | informant addresses interlocutor(s) with V, is addressed by them with T or V |
| A–T | informant avoids direct address, is addressed by interlocutor with T |
| % | percentages are based on actual responses |
- ³ It is not possible to reproduce the German 'scharfes s', which is represented here by 'ss'.
- ⁴ Our thanks are due to the Australian Research Council for funding this project, to our in-country research assistants Kristin Gogolok, Daniel Kraft, Sandra Lachmann and Maria Weissenböck for collecting the data, and to the editors of this issue and the two anonymous reviewers for valuable comments and suggestions.

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