

Original Research Article

## Address and Referring Expressions in Students-Lecturers E-Mail Correspondence: A Case of University of Cape Coast Postgraduate Students in Ghana

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**Abstract:** Address and reference terms have attracted a lot of attention in sociolinguistic research. The present study contributes to these works by investigating the kind of address and referring expressions used by postgraduate students when they share e-mails with their lecturers and their colleagues as well as how age, gender and familiarity affect these terms. Using Brown and Ford's (1961) study on Address in American English as a conceptual framework, a Discourse Completion Tasks (DCTs) questionnaire was designed and used to retrieve data from fifty-six (56) respondents who were all postgraduate students. The data revealed that postgraduate students mainly used five (5) forms of address terms in e-mails to lecturers: titles, attention getters, kinship terms, personal names and nicknames, and six (6) referring expressions (of lecturers) in e-mails to their colleagues: titles, kinship terms, personal names, nicknames, course titles and generic reference. The study concludes that, whereas age and gender greatly affect address terms and referring expressions in students-lecturers e-mails, familiarity does not present that much considerable influence on the address terms and referring expressions used in students-lecturers e-mails.

**Keywords:** Address terms, emails, students, lecturers, referring expressions.

## INTRODUCTION

The interface between language and society is manifested through a variety of communication events. The exchange of e-mails between students and lecturers is one of these. E-mails have brought lecturers and students closer together, eliminating some of the traditional barriers between students and professors. E-mails are quite frequent in a speech community such as a university and are used to communicate not only between students and lecturers, but also between students, non-teaching staff, and practically all other members in that speech community.

One other critical element of the interface between language and society is the address terms (Afful, 2006b). This may equally be said of referring expressions or reference terms too. The numerous studies conducted on address terms and reference terms show how important both are in a speech community as they have consistently proved very useful in providing a wider view into the nature of societies and cultures by pointing out its importance, functions and values (Amini, 2020). As Awoonor-Aziaku (2021) explains, the linguistic item used to refer to a person while he or she is not there is not always the same as the one used to address him or her in a one-on-one interaction. In a communicative encounter, a reference term is used to describe a human referent who is either present or not; it is normally nominative rather than vocative. In the words of Murphy (1988), a reference term is the usage of an expression to identify a person.

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This means that the individual is typically not included in the dialogue but is only referenced. The implication is that the way in which we address someone directly and the manner in which we address the same individual in his or her absence are not always similar. This type of reference may vary according to certain social elements or variables such as age, gender, familiarity, or status (Afful, 2006). The most frequent determinant of the usage of direct address formulae is the relationship between the two participants: the speaker and the hearer (Awoonor-Aziaku, 2021). However, when selecting a term of reference, the speaker must consider not just his or her relationship with the hearer, but also how to portray the referent appropriately.

Direct address and reference terms have been extensively researched pragmatically and sociolinguistically. Recent studies (e.g. Afful, 2006; Afful, 2007; Afful & Mwinlaaru, 2012; Afful & Nartey, 2013; Awoonor-Aziaku, 2021) have examined the use of address and reference terms in a variety of Ghanaian social settings. In spite of the numerous studies, it appears that the usage of address phrases and referencing expressions in e-mail correspondence between students and lecturers has been understudied. The interest of this paper is, hence, on emails shared between students and lecturers, and the address terms and reference terms used during this encounter. Stated differently, the current study extends the literature by examining the types of address and reference terms used by postgraduate students while exchanging e-mails with lecturers and colleagues, as well as the effects of age, gender, and familiarity on these terms at the University of Cape Coast.

The following questions guide the study:

1. What address terms do post graduate students use when they share emails with their lecturers?
2. What referring expressions (reference terms) do post graduate students employ when they share emails with their lecturers?
3. How do social variables such as age, gender and familiarity affect the choice of address terms and reference terms in the e-mails of post graduate students to their lecturers?

## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

### *Conceptual Framework*

This study employed Brown and Ford's (1961) work on Address in American English as its conceptual framework. According to Brown and Ford (1961), the relationship between the speaker and his addressee determines the choice of linguistic forms. What this means is that the relationship between people will determine how they will address each other or refer to the other in certain contexts. People do not just choose any address term at all to use. Brown and Ford's study on Address in American English establishes two major forms of addresses in American English which are: the use of the first name (FN) and the use of a title with last name (TLN) and these forms are governed by the relationship between the speakers. The relationship between the speaker and the addressee appear to be very important when it comes to address terms. The earliest work on address terms by Brown and Gilman (1960) in an attempt to explain the semantics of the pronouns of address, makes it clear that there is a covariation between the pronoun used and objective relationship existing between speaker and addressee. This current study as mentioned earlier, is equally trying to also establish the relationship between the social variables: age, gender, and familiarity and students-lecturers e-mails. Drawing data from four different sources, Brown and Ford established two major patterns of addresses: reciprocal and nonreciprocal patterns where the reciprocal pattern of mutual FN is largely between older people (age) and people of the opposite sex (gender). Mutual TLN however, was basically based on the degree of acquaintance (familiarity). With regards to the nonreciprocal pattern, FN and TLN are highly based on age difference and occupational status. Following Brown and Gilman (ibid), the present study examined the kind of address terms and referring expressions used by post graduate students when they send e-mails to their lecturers as well as the relationship between certain social variables like age, gender and familiarity.

### *Previous Studies on Address Terms and Referring Expressions*

A lot of studies have been conducted in both academic and nonacademic contexts covering a range of disciplines on address and referring expressions (reference terms). This section of review of related literature will examine such studies under the following subtopics:

- a. Influence of social variables on Address and Reference terms
- b. Studies conducted in various disciplines on address and reference terms

### *Influence of social variables on address terms and reference terms.*

In the numerous studies conducted on address and reference terms, it is clear that their usage is influenced by certain social or socio-cultural variables. Brown and Gilman's (1960) work which happens to be the earliest work on address terms and has influenced a lot of other studies on address terms, highlighted the semantic power and solidarity in relation to address terms. The work divided into five sections focused on the semantics of the pronouns of address and the expressive between the pronoun used and characteristics of the person speaking. Using 20 European and Indian languages, the writers revealed how familiar pronouns are used by interlocutors who belong to the same level and in

instances where one is superior, may decide to use formal or informal pronouns to address the subordinate while the subordinate only uses formal pronouns. Reading Brown and Ford (1961), this aspect of power manifest where there is a nonreciprocal address terms used between interactants because of age and occupational status.

The issue of power and solidarity is blur in works like Oyetade (1995), Aliakbari and Toni (2008) and similar others but their studies discover that the choices of address terms made by interlocutors are guided by the perceived social relationship that exist between them. The different categories of address terms used in Yoruba and Persian languages respectively, appear to be based on other equally important social variables such as age, gender, status, personality, familiarity among others. Oyetade's (1995) paper, gathering data from short radio and TV plays, unobtrusive observation of actual usage, and introspection, revealed how socio-cultural factors such as age, social status, kinship and the beliefs and norms of the Yoruba people in Nigeria influence the use of address terms. By specifically examining the effect of age and gender on the choice of address forms in Chinese personal letters, Cao (2007) discovered that, the address system for members of different generations is completely asymmetrical, while the addressing practices for members of the same generation is characterized by both asymmetry and symmetry in the family setting. In the non-family setting, the use of address forms is totally asymmetrical for persons of different generations and symmetrical for persons of the same generation. With that of gender, he concluded that females tend to use intimacy-oriented terms to emphasize their emotional bond with recipients, while males tend to use status-oriented terms to stress role-relationships.

### ***Studies conducted in various disciplines***

Address terms and Reference terms are not limited to a single discipline. Research has been conducted in different domains such as politics, education, health, media, religion and so many others. This shows that address terms and reference terms are used in every speech community and play a very important role in communication. Fang and Heng's (1983) paper which is generally concerned with the changing address norms in China since the founding of the people's Republic in 1949, has an aspect of it discussing why official titles rather than 'tongzhi' which means 'comrade' are preferred by certain Chinese officials. Similarly, in an analysis of Australian political news interview, Rendle-Short (2007) revealed that even though journalists and politicians address their co-participant by name, there are differences both in choice of address term and in the positioning of terms with the news interview: while journalists tend to use prepositioned address terms when addressing politicians either by their institutional role or by their title plus last name (TLN), politicians, on the other hand, always address journalists by first name (FN) and have more flexibility in terms of where they position the address term. He again adds that whereas journalists tend to use address terms as a technique for managing the organizational aspects of the political news interview, politicians tend to use address terms within adversarial environments, as a resource for taking the turn, for resolving overlapping talk, or for delaying a 'dispreferred' response. Address and reference terms may not be the direct focus of Obeng's (1997) paper but he discusses how politicians in their interactions use language in diverse ways to show politeness and save face-threatening acts. Kuo (2003) and Jaworski and Galasinski (2000) are other works on address and reference terms in politics. Just like politics, attention has also been paid to the media in terms of address terms. Edu-Buandoh (1999) as cited in Afful and Mwinlaaru (2012), discussed the role of politeness and power on the naming practices of both the hosts/hostesses in radio panel discussions in Ghana. In a collected corpus from Cameroonian youth on social media such as Facebook and WhatsApp, Ebongue's (2018) investigation showed that terms of address and the way they are utilized, present some specificities in their various forms of typologies to keep the same spontaneity and immediacy in social media written exchanges as in speech. Many other domains such as religion (Dzameshie, 1997), health (Elizabeth, 1989) and sports (Rendle-Short, 2009) have also received some studies conducted to address terms in them.

Many more studies conducted on address terms and reference terms are found in the academia or the education sector, specifically at the tertiary level like the university. Murphy (1988), Dickey (1997) Afful (1998), Harris, McCreedy and Herr (1999), Afful (2006b), Afful (2007), Afful and Mwinlaaru (2012) and Afful and Mark Nartey (2013) are some of the studies conducted on address terms and reference terms in the academia. Murphy (1988) explains personal reference as "the use of an expression to pick out a person." His article explored the social factors involved in how speakers choose a referring expression in a given situation. Using scenarios that asked how participants would refer to a particular person in a given situation, Murphy conducted five experiments and the results showed that speakers were sensitive to the level of intimacy between the speaker and referent, between the addressee and the referent, and between a nonparticipating audience and the referent. The results again revealed that the relation between the speaker and the addressee also influenced choice of referring expression. In a single study, Afful and Mwinlaaru (2012) discussed both address terms and reference terms and came out with three major findings. First, students used three principal forms of address, namely titles, kinship terms and nicknames for faculty. Second, students used titles, personal names and nicknames as the major reference terms for faculty and finally, address terms and reference terms functioned as symbols of domination and resistance to domination as well as markers of identities which were co-constructed by students. Findings of some other studies (Afful, 2006; Harris *et al.*, 1999) have shown how first name (FN), title plus last name (TLN), personal names, descriptive terms and catch phrases are the modes of address used by some university students in addressing faculty members.

To sum up, this review has looked at what some scholars have done to address terms and referring expressions. It is clear from the various articles that a lot has been done on address terms in both academic and nonacademic contexts and in different domains. However, the same cannot be said about referring expressions. It has not received as much attention as address terms have. Again, apart from Dickey (1997), Afful and Mwinlaaru (2012), and a few others, we did not come across a single study looking at both address terms and referring expressions. More importantly, all the numerous studies conducted on address terms and referring expressions have not focused on e-mails which this study intends to do. These gaps are what this study intends to fill. The focus of the present study is to investigate into the address terms and referring expressions used in student-lecturers e-mails.

## METHODOLOGY

In doing this research, the researchers employed both qualitative and quantitative research approaches. The researchers used descriptive qualitative research to describe the types of address terms, and the reasons of using each type of address terms and referring expressions used in post graduate students' e-mails to lecturers. The quantitative approach was also used in order to find out the exact number of occurrences of each of the address terms and reference terms used in post graduate students' e-mails to lecturers.

### Study Setting

The study was carried out at the University of Cape Coast, Ghana. For the programme of study of the respondents, four programmes were identified which were: Commerce, English Language, Literature in English, and Arts Education. The majority of the respondents however fell under English Language.

### Data Collection Procedure

Data were mainly collected using Discourse Completion Tasks (DCTs) questionnaire. The researchers designed a DCTs questionnaire by formulating scenarios with follow-up questions for respondents who were all post-graduate students to respond to. The scenarios were created based on the social variables that the researchers intended to test: age, gender and familiarity. The ages of the respondents ranged between 25-30, 31-36, 37- 42, 43- 47, 48- 52, and 53 and above. That for the lecturers were between, 31-36, 37-42, 43-47, 48-52, 53-57, 58-62. The reason for this was to try and map on students' age and responses to that of the lecturers in order to establish if students' age and that of the lecturers affect the way they (students) address them (lecturers). Again, the age intervals were 5years and this was so because the researchers believe, people belonging to such age interval may tend to behave similarly and may also be treated similarly by people. Gender was also taken into consideration during the formulation of the DCTs questionnaire. The questionnaire demanded students to state their gender and also, the scenarios included whether the lecturer was a male or a female. The scenarios again included social distancing between the students and the lecturers in order to test if familiarity affects the way students address or refer to lecturers in e-mails. The questionnaire had 24 scenarios with two questions for each scenario. In all, 56 students responded to the questionnaires through a link shared on different post graduate social media platforms. The scenarios were very easy to understand and relate to, and the follow up questions were also very straight forward (see Appendix). The tables below show the demographic representation of the respondents.

**Table 1: Gender of Respondents**

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	30	53.6
Female	25	44.6
Unclear	1	1.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 1 shows that more males responded to the questionnaire than females.

**Table 2: Age Range of Respondents**

Age Range	Frequency	Percentage (%)
25-30	9	16.1
31-36	26	46.4
37-42	16	28.5
43-47	3	5.4
48-52	0	0
53 and above	2	3.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>100</b>

From Table 2, it can be seen that a lot of the respondents fell between the ages of 31-36 years.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section analyzes and discusses the data collected in order to answer the research questions put forward at the beginning of the paper.

### *Address Terms used by post graduate students in e-mails to lecturers*

The data revealed five major forms of address terms used by post graduate students in e-mails to lecturers, namely: *Titles, Attention Getters, Kinship Terms, Personal Names* and *Nicknames*. The table below shows the frequency distribution of these address terms as they occurred in the data.

**Table 3: Frequency Distribution of Address Terms**

Types of Address Terms	Frequency	Percentage
Titles	56	100%
Attention Getters	2	3.6%
Kinship Terms	6	10.7%
Personal Names	17	30.4%
Nicknames	4	7.1%

Total number of respondents = 56

### **Titles**

This constitute the major set of address terms used by post graduate students when they share e-mails with their lecturers. It is clear from Table 3 that all 56 respondents made use of titles at some point when responding to the questionnaire. The common titles used by postgraduate students are Academic Titles and some Honorific Terms like, Sir and Madam.

Starting with academic titles, the data revealed that post graduate students use such academic titles like Doctor and Professor as well as their short forms Doc., Dr. and Prof. It was realized that both male and female students use more of the short forms of the titles than the full forms. However, female students happen to use the full forms more than the male students and they are mostly used to address mature male lecturers than the young ones. Some examples from the data are:

#### *Scenario 1.*

*You want to send your term paper to your lecturer who is a male and between age 31-36 years old through e-mail to read through for you. You are very close to this lecturer and you both can share personal issues with each other.*

#### **Question 1. How would you address him in the salutation?**

Some responses: **Hello Doc., Hi Dr., Dr., Dear Doc.**

#### *Scenario 18*

*You have been asked by your lecturer who is a male and between age 58-62 years old to submit your assignment to him through e-mail. You are not close to this lecturer and you interact with each other only for official purposes.*

#### **Question: How would you address him in the salutation?**

Some responses: **Dear Professor, Dear Doctor, Dear Dr., Hello Doc., and Hello Prof.**

The second group of titles used by postgraduate students are *Sir* and *Madam*. These are not as frequent as the academic titles. However, their usage is very important. The social variables age, and familiarity do not greatly affect these.

### **Attention-getters**

These are devices a speaker uses at the beginning of a speech to capture an audience's interest and make them interested in the speech's topic. The realization was that the attention getters commonly used in post graduate students' e-mails to lecturers are dear, hello, and hi. In most instances, these are attached to titles but two (2) of the respondents used it alone as an address term. See the example below:

#### *Scenario 7.*

*You want to send your term paper to your lecturer who is a FEMALE and between age 31-36 years old through e-mail to read through for you. You are very close to this lecturer and you both can share personal issues with each other.*

#### **Question: How would you address her in the salutation?**



A response; **Hello, find attached my term paper...**

### **Kinship Terms**

The data recorded six (6) respondents' use of kinship terms out of fifty-six (56). From the data, only female lecturers were addressed by kinship terms. The use of kinship terms is not affected by gender on the part of the addresser as both male and female students used these kinship terms to address female lecturers. The interesting aspect is that postgraduate students do not use kinship terms to address male lecturers in e-mails. Students find it very convenient to use kinship terms for female lecturers than male lecturers in e-mails. Again, age and familiarity do not affect the use of kinship terms in postgraduate students' e-mails which is contrary to the findings of Brown and Ford (1961) where young men often use 'ma'am' for mature women in America. Find the examples below:

#### *Scenario 7*

*You want to send your term paper to your lecturer who is a FEMALE and between age 31-36 years old through e-mail to read through for you. You are very close to this lecturer and you both can share personal issues with each other.*

**Question: How would you address her in the salutation?**

A female respondent: **Hi, ma'am**

#### *Scenario 23*

*You have been asked by your lecturer who is a FEMALE and between age 53-57 years old to submit your assignment to her through e-mail. You are not close to this lecturer and you interact with each other only for official purposes.*

**Question: How would you address her in the salutation?**

A male respondent: **Hello mummy**

### **Personal Names**

Out of the 56 respondents, 17 made use of personal names in different scenarios. It was realized that postgraduate students make use of four (4) different forms of personal names. They are:

1. Title + First Name (TFN). Eg. Dr. Lena
2. Title + Last Name (TLN). Eg. Dr. Mwinlaaru
3. Title + Full Name (TFLN). Dr. Vera Odoom
4. First Name only (FN). Joyce

It can be said that TFN is not a very common usage among postgraduate students. Its usage is greatly influenced by gender and age as it is mostly used to address young female lecturers as compared with TLN which is commonly used to address male lecturers. Both TFN and TLN are not very much affected by familiarity. With regards to TFLN, it is also rarely used and familiarity and age exert great influence on its usage. Mature lecturers whom students are not familiar with attract this type of address term. FN also has few usages and it is mostly used by young students to address young lecturers. Students do not use this type of address term often because they may perceive it as not a very polite way of addressing somebody in higher position or older. As Ervin- Tripp (1972) notes, a younger person needs permission from an older to use FN. The use of FN, TFN, and TLN adds to what Brown and Ford (1961) say about nonreciprocal patterns in the usage of FN and LN being governed by age and occupational status. In this case, more of age.

### **Nicknames**

It is very clear from Table 3 that four (4) of the respondents made use of nicknames. Postgraduate students address their lecturers by their nicknames which are internally derived nicknames. That is, the nicknames are derived from the names of the lecturers. Some use only the nicknames (NN), others use title + nickname (TNN). The realization is that both male and female students use nicknames in e-mails to address male young lecturers. From the data, it can be said that age and social distance (familiarity) affect the use of nicknames in addressing lecturers. Postgraduate students use NN and TNN for male lecturers who are young and they (students) are familiar with as seen in the example below:

#### *Scenario 1.*

*You want to send your term paper to your lecturer who is a male and between age 31-36 years old through e-mail to read through for you. You are very close to this lecturer and you both can share personal issues with each other.*

**Question: How would you address him in the salutation?**

Some responses: **Micky, Hello Danny, Hello Dr. Mike.**

### **Referring Expressions (Reference Terms) used by Postgraduate Students in E-mails to Lecturers**

The data revealed six (6) forms of referring expressions used by post graduate students in e-mails to their colleagues. They are: Titles, Kinship Terms, Personal Names, Nicknames, Course Title (Name) and Generic Reference. The table below shows the frequency distribution of these referring expressions by respondents.

**Table 4: Frequency Distribution of Referring Expressions**

Types of Referring expressions	Frequency	Percentage
Titles	42	75%
Kinship Terms	4	7.1%
Personal Names	33	59%
Nicknames	6	10.7%
Course Title (Name)	1	1.8%
Generic Reference	1	1.8%

Total number of respondents = 56

### **Titles**

It is clear from table 4 that the referring expressions post graduate students use most are titles. Forty-two (42) out of the Fifty-six (56) respondents used titles in referring to different lecturers in e-mails to their colleagues. The common titles postgraduate students use are academic titles and honorific terms like sir and madam. However, students make use of the academic titles more than the honorific terms, sir and madam.

The academic titles used by postgraduate students are Doctor and Professor and their short forms, Doc., Dr., and Prof. Students in referring to lecturers in e-mails to their colleagues tend to use the short forms more than the full forms. The use of these titles is not affected by gender both on the part of the students and the lecturers. Social distance is equally not affected as students address both lecturers they are familiar with and those they are not virtually the same way. Age, however can be said to affect how students use titles to refer to lecturers in e-mails to their colleagues as most young students prefer to use the short form of the title than the full form and most mature students avoid the use of titles completely. Again, mature lecturers happen to be referred to by the full form of titles than young lecturers. Examine the following scenarios:

#### *Scenario 1*

*You want to send your term paper to your lecturer who is a male and between age 31-36 years old through e-mail to read through for you. You are very close to this lecturer and you both can share personal issues with each other.*

#### **Question: How would you refer to him in an e-mail to your colleague?**

Response from some young students: **Doc, Dr.**

#### *Scenario 24*

*You have been asked by your lecturer who is a FEMALE and between age 58-62 years old to submit your assignment to her through e-mail. You are not close to this lecturer and you interact with each other only for official purposes.*

#### **Question: How would you refer to this lecturer in e-mail to your colleague?**

A response: **Professor**

The second set of title is the use of the honorific terms like sir and madam. The usage of these terms is very limited. Most young lecturers are referred to by these titles than mature lecturers but their usage is not affected by familiarity.

### **Kinship Terms**

This is another way postgraduate students refer to lecturers in e-mails to their colleagues. The data recorded four (4) respondents' use of kinship terms. The realization is that students use kinship terms to refer to female lecturers rather than males in e-mails to their colleagues. The common ones are Mummy, Ma, and Aunty and they are used by both young and mature students to refer to mature female lecturers. Kinship terms are not really affected by social distance as students use them to refer to both lecturers they are familiar with and those that they are not. For example:

#### *Scenario 12*

*You have been asked by your lecturer who is a FEMALE and between age 58-62 years old to submit your assignment to her through e-mail. You are very close to this lecturer and you both can share personal issues with each other.*

#### **Question: How would you refer to this lecturer in an e-mail to your colleague?**

A response: **Aunty Pearl**

*You have been asked by your lecturer who is a FEMALE and between age 58-62 years old to submit your assignment to her through e-mail. You are not close to this lecturer and you interact with each other only for official purposes.*

**Question: How would you refer to this lecturer in an e-mail to your colleague?**

A response: **Ma**

**Personal Names**

This is the second highest category on referring expressions used by postgraduate students to refer to their lecturers in e-mails to their (students) colleagues. The commonly used personal names are:

1. Title + First Name (TFN)
2. Title + Last Name (TLN)
3. Title + Full Name (TFLN)
4. First Name only (FN)
5. Last Name only (LN)

The observation is that female lecturers are usually referred to by TFN more than their male counterparts. With this, age and familiarity did not exert much influence on. Students use TFN to refer to both lecturers they are close to and those they are not, and whether young or mature but the younger female lecturers are mostly referred to this way. Another observation is that while most male lecturers are referred to by TLN, TFLN is used to refer to most female lecturers especially the mature ones. With regards to FN, age and gender affect it greatly as young female lecturers are mostly referred to this way. LN cuts across gender, age and familiarity. Its usage does not follow any particular pattern. See the following examples:

*Scenario 11*

*You have been asked by your lecturer who is a FEMALE and between age 53-57 years old to submit your assignment to her through e-mail. You are very close to this lecturer and you both can share personal issues with each other.*

**Question: How would you refer to this lecturer in an e-mail to your colleague?**

Some responses: **Prof. Leticia Zuyiri, Professor Esi Ocran, Dr. Esi Darko, Prof. Jane Asare**

*Scenario 5*

*You have been asked by your lecturer who is a male and between age 53-57 years old to submit your assignment to him through e-mail. You are very close to this lecturer and you both can share personal issues with each other.*

**Question: How would you refer to this lecturer in an e-mail to your colleague?**

Some responses: **Dr. Oko, Dr. Ansah, Prof Afful, Prof Osei, Dr. Nkansah**

*Scenario 1*

*You want to send your term paper to your lecturer who is a male and between age 31-36 years old through e-mail to read through for you. You are very close to this lecturer and you both can share personal issues with each other.*

**Question: How would you refer to him in an e-mail to your colleague?**

Some responses: **Dr. Mwinlaaru, Dr. Abban, Dr. Mensah, Dr. Assan, Dr. Opoku.**

*Scenario 7*

*You want to send your term paper to your lecturer who is a FEMALE and between age 31-36 years old through e-mail to read through for you. You are very close to this lecturer and you both can share personal issues with each other.*

**Question: How would you refer to this lecturer in an e-mail to your colleague?**

Some responses: **Joyce, Dr. Anita, Theresa, Dr. Ama, Dr. Lena, Dr. Helen.**

**Nicknames**

This constitute a smaller group of referring expressions used for lecturers. Only six (6) out of the fifty-six (56) respondents made use of nicknames. It can be said from the data that the nicknames commonly used by students to refer to their lecturers are the internally derived nicknames. That is, those nicknames derived from people's original names. Two forms are common: Title + Nickname (TNN) and Nickname only (NN). Gender, age and familiarity greatly affect its usage. Nicknames are commonly used to refer to young male lecturers that students are familiar with, even though few female lecturers also attract nicknames. Another realization is that, young students make use of nicknames more than the mature ones. For example:



#### Scenario 1

You want to send your term paper to your lecturer who is a male and between age 31-36 years old through e-mail to read through for you. You are very close to this lecturer and you both can share personal issues with each other.

#### Question: How would you refer to him in an e-mail to your colleague?

Response from a female between 25-30 years: **Mike**

Response from a male between 37-42 years: **Dr. Mike**

Response from a male between 25-30 years: **Prof. Micky**

#### Course Title (Name)

Students in general, sometimes use the title or the name of the courses that lecturers teach to refer to them to their colleagues. A lecturer may be referred to as the Grammar lecturer or the Semantics lecturer. The data revealed that this type of referring expression is not commonly used by postgraduate students to refer to lecturers in e-mails. Only one (1) male respondent out of the fifty-six (56) respondents made use of this to refer to a mature female lecturer. See example below:

#### Scenario 11

You have been asked by your lecturer who is a FEMALE and between age 53-57 years old to submit your assignment to her through e-mail. You are very close to this lecturer and you both can share personal issues with each other.

#### Question: How would you refer to this lecturer in an e-mail to your colleague?

Response: **The Literature lecturer**

#### Generic Reference

This is also not a common referring expression used by postgraduate students. The only one found in the data was used to refer to a female lecturer.

#### Scenario 9

You have been asked by your lecturer who is a FEMALE and between age 43-47 years old to submit your class list to her through e-mail. You are very close to this lecturer and you both can share personal issues with each other.

#### Question: How would you refer to this lecturer in an e-mail to your colleague?

A response: **The woman.**

## CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

This paper set out to investigate into the address terms and referring expressions used by postgraduate students to address and refer to their lecturers in e-mails. The analysis of the data reveals three main findings. The first is that postgraduate students use five (5) major forms of address terms in e-mails to their lecturers, which are, Titles, Attention Getters, Kingship Terms, Personal Names and Nicknames. Second, postgraduate students make use of six (6) main referring expressions (of lecturers) in e-mails to their colleagues, namely, Titles, Kingship Terms, Personal Names, Nicknames, Course Titles and Generic Reference. The third is that the choice of the various address terms and referring expressions is to a very large extent, influenced by one or more of the social variables, age, gender and familiarity. Another realization is that mature students tend to be polite and formal in their choice of address terms and referring expressions. One major implication for this study is that it adds to the growing literature on address terms and reference terms as this has dealt with quite a new area which is the virtual community. It is also significant for further studies into address terms and reference terms of undergraduate students' e-mails. It also has implication for pedagogy as knowledge of address terms and referring expressions by teachers can help them guide their students who have interest in exploring that field.

## APPENDIX

### Discourse Completion Tasks (DCTs)

#### Part I: Information on Respondents

1. Gender : Male Female
2. Age:  
25 – 30

31 – 36

37 – 42

43 – 47

48 – 52

53 and above

3. Field of Study.....

4. Level of Study:

Masters

PhD

Part II: Discourse Completion Tasks

**Instruction:** You will be asked to read some brief situations and respond to a question in each case. Please imagine a real person you know who best fits the description provided and write an answer that shows how you would act in an actual situation. Kindly write your responses in the spaces provided. If a situation genuinely does not fit anyone you know in actual life, simply write N/A in the space provided. The responses should be in the following forms: Dear Sir, Dear Madam, Hello Doc, Hi Prof., Dear Professor, Dear Joyce, Dear Dr. Opoku, Mike, Micky, etc. If there is any other apart from those in the list, please specify.

**Scenario 1:** You want to send your term paper to your lecturer who is a male and between age 31-36 years old through e-mail to read through for you. You are very close to this lecturer and you both can share personal issues with each other.

1. How would you address him in the salutation?

.....

2. How would you refer to the same lecturer in an e-mail to your colleague?

.....

**Scenario 2:** Your lecturer who is a male and between age 37-42 years old has asked you to submit your term paper to him through e-mail. You are very close to this lecturer and you both can share personal issues with each other.

1. How would you address him in the salutation?

.....

2. How would you refer to the same lecturer in an e-mail to your colleague?

.....

**Scenario 3:** You have been asked by your lecturer who is a male and between age 43-47 years old to submit your class list to him through e-mail. You are very close to this lecturer and you both can share personal issues with each other.

1. How would you address him in the salutation?

.....

2. How would you refer to the same lecturer in an e-mail to your colleague?

.....

**Scenario 4:** Your lecturer who is a male and between age 48-52 years old has asked you to submit your thesis topic to him through e-mail. You are very close to this lecturer and you both can share personal issues with each other.

1. How would you address him in the salutation?

.....

2. How would you refer to the same lecturer in an e-mail to your colleague?

.....

**Scenario 5:** You have been asked by your lecturer who is a male and between age 53-57 years old to submit your assignment to him through e-mail. You are very close to this lecturer and you both can share personal issues with each other.

1. How would you address him in the salutation?  
.....
2. How would you refer to the same lecturer in an e-mail to your colleague?  
.....

**Scenario 6:** You have been asked by your lecturer who is a male and between age 58-62 years old to submit your assignment to him through e-mail. You are very close to this lecturer and you both can share personal issues with each other.

1. How would you address him in the salutation?  
.....
2. How would you refer to the same lecturer in an e-mail to your colleague?  
.....

**Scenario 7:** You want to send your term paper to your lecturer who is a FEMALE and between age 31-36 years old through e-mail to read through for you. You are very close to this lecturer and you both can share personal issues with each other.

1. How would you address her in the salutation?  
.....
2. How would you refer to the same lecturer in an e-mail to your colleague?  
.....

**Scenario 8:** Your lecturer who is a FEMALE and between age 37-42 years old has asked you to submit your term paper to her through e-mail. You are very close to this lecturer and you both can share personal issues with each other.

1. How would you address her in the salutation?  
.....
2. How would you refer to the same lecturer in an e-mail to your colleague?  
.....

**Scenario 9:** You have been asked by your lecturer who is a FEMALE and between age 43-47 years old to submit your class list to her through e-mail. You are very close to this lecturer and you both can share personal issues with each other.

1. How would you address her in the salutation?  
.....
2. How would you refer to the same lecturer in an e-mail to your colleague?  
.....

**Scenario 10:** Your lecturer who is a FEMALE and between age 48-52 years old has asked you to submit your thesis topic to her through e-mail. You are very close to this lecturer and you both can share personal issues with each other.

1. How would you address her in the salutation?  
.....
2. How would you refer to the same lecturer in an e-mail to your colleague?  
.....

**Scenario 11:** You have been asked by your lecturer who is a FEMALE and between age 53-57 years old to submit your assignment to her through e-mail. You are very close to this lecturer and you both can share personal issues with each other.

1. How would you address her in the salutation?  
.....
2. How would you refer to the same lecturer in an e-mail to your colleague?  
.....

**Scenario 12:** You have been asked by your lecturer who is a FEMALE and between age 58-62 years old to submit your assignment to her through e-mail. You are very close to this lecturer and you both can share personal issues with each other.

1. How would you address her in the salutation?  
.....
2. How would you refer to the same lecturer in an e-mail to your colleague?  
.....

**Scenario 13:** You want to send your term paper to your lecturer who is a male and between age 31-36 years old through e-mail to read through for you. You are not close to this lecturer and you interact with each other only for official purposes.

1. How would you address him in the salutation?  
.....
2. How would you refer to the same lecturer in an e-mail to your colleague?  
.....

**Scenario 14:** Your lecturer who is a male and between age 37-42 years old has asked you to submit your term paper to him through e-mail. You are not close to this lecturer and you interact with each other only for official purposes.

1. How would you address him in the salutation?  
.....
2. How would you refer to the same lecturer in an e-mail to your colleague?  
.....

**Scenario 15:** You have been asked by your lecturer who is a male and between age 43-47 years old to submit your class list to him through e-mail. You are not close to this lecturer and you interact with each other only for official purposes.

1. How would you address him in the salutation?  
.....
2. How would you refer to the same lecturer in an e-mail to your colleague?  
.....

**Scenario 16:** Your lecturer who is a male and between age 48-52 years old has asked you to submit your thesis topic to him through e-mail. You are not close to this lecturer and you interact with each other only for official purposes.

1. How would you address him in the salutation?  
.....
2. How would you refer to the same lecturer in an e-mail to your colleague?  
.....

**Scenario 17:** You have been asked by your lecturer who is a male and between age 53-57 years old to submit your assignment to him through e-mail. You are not close to this lecturer and you interact with each other only for official purposes.

1. How would you address him in the salutation?  
.....
2. How would you refer to the same lecturer in an e-mail to your colleague?  
.....

**Scenario 18:** You have been asked by your lecturer who is a male and between age 58-62 years old to submit your assignment to him through e-mail. You are not close to this lecturer and you interact with each other only for official purposes.

1. How would you address him in the salutation?  
.....
2. How would you refer to the same lecturer in an e-mail to your colleague?  
.....

**Scenario 19:** You want to send your term paper to your lecturer who is a FEMALE and between age 31-36 years old through e-mail to read through for you. You are not close to this lecturer and you interact with each other only for official purposes.

1. How would you address him in the salutation?  
.....
2. How would you refer to the same lecturer in an e-mail to your colleague?  
.....

**Scenario 20:** Your lecturer who is a FEMALE and between age 37-42 years old has asked you to submit your term paper to her through e-mail. You are not close to this lecturer and you interact with each other only for official purposes.

1. How would you address her in the salutation?  
.....
2. How would you refer to the same lecturer in an e-mail to your colleague?  
.....

**Scenario 21:** You have been asked by your lecturer who is a FEMALE and between age 43-47 years old to submit your class list to her through e-mail. You are not close to this lecturer and you interact with each other only for official purposes.

1. How would you address her in the salutation?  
.....
2. How would you refer to the same lecturer in an e-mail to your colleague?  
.....

**Scenario 22:** Your lecturer who is a FEMALE and between age 48-52 years old has asked you to submit your thesis topic to her through e-mail. You are not close to this lecturer and you interact with each other only for official purposes.

1. How would you address her in the salutation?  
.....
2. How would you refer to the same lecturer in an e-mail to your colleague?  
.....

**Scenario 23:** You have been asked by your lecturer who is a FEMALE and between age 53-57 years old to submit your assignment to her through e-mail. You are not close to this lecturer and you interact with each other only for official purposes.

1. How would you address her in the salutation?  
.....
2. How would you refer to the same lecturer in an e-mail to your colleague?  
.....

**Scenario 24:** You have been asked by your lecturer who is a FEMALE and between age 58-62 years old to submit your assignment to her through e-mail. You are not close to this lecturer and you interact with each other only for official purposes.

1. How would you address her in the salutation?  
.....
2. How would you refer to the same lecturer in an e-mail to your colleague?  
.....

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