Evolving Address Terms in Jordanian Arabic: Implications for English Language Learning and Cross-Cultural Communication

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Abstract

This study investigates the evolving nominal terms of address in the urban community of Irbid City, Jordan, within a broader sociolinguistic framework. Based on 500 instances of naturally occurring address terms collected over six months through non-paticipant observation in public settings like cafés, markets, and service encounters, the study examines how address practices vary across generations, genders, and social-classes. Using qualitative content analysis within a sociolinguistic variationist framework, the findings reveal a decline in traditional kinship-based terms and the emergence of innovative address forms, particularly among younger speakers. These changes reflect broader social transformations and evolving identity dynamics. A comparative analysis with English-speaking contexts highlights linguistic evolution similarities, particularly the informality trend. However, while English address systems increasingly favor first-name usage and gender-neutral terms, Jordanian Arabic exhibits a restructuring process that blends traditional and modern influences. Additionally, the study highlights the implications of address term variation for English language studies, particularly in second language acquisition and cross-cultural communication. Misalignment in address norms between Jordanian and English speakers can lead to pragmatic challenges, emphasizing the need for intercultural awareness in language learning. These findings contribute to broader sociolinguistic discussions, particularly regarding linguistic change, social identity, and globalization's impact on verbal interaction. The study underscores how address terms function as markers of both cultural continuity and adaptation, offering context-specific insights that may contribute to broader understandings of global linguistic trends in address practices. Future research could explore similar transformations in other non-Western languages, further enriching the discourse on language contact and sociolinguistic variation.

Keywords: address terms, linguistic change, generational variation, social identity, cross-cultural communication, English language learning

1. Introduction

People use language to communicate with each other in their daily life. Through communication, people can express their minds, thoughts and feelings. They can also interact and build relationships with others. However, communicating effectively is not an easy task as it seems. People can reach an effective communication if interlocutors recognize their thoughts, feelings and desires. One common issue related to communication is addressing practices. Address terms are typical linguistic behaviors in everyday life interaction and constitute one of the "most obvious ways in which the relationship between language and community is reflected" (Levinson, 1983). Mensah (2021) states that address terms usage is an essential component of communicative competence which is related to language use in social situations. Furthermore, address terms comprise an essential part of verbal behavior that could easily identify norms, practices, and behaviors of a society. To suppose that address terms serve as conveyors to better understand the overlapping between language and society, researchers should take into account that societies infrequently remain static; they, especially modern ones, are highly dynamic with regard to creating new verbal behaviors among speakers of one group, and among various groups (Afful, 2007).

The motivation for this study arises from an extensive review of address systems in the literature. Early research, beginning with Brown and Gilman (1960) and Brown and Ford (1961), focused on power dynamics in address terms across languages. Subsequent studies extended this focus to English and other European languages in various settings (Ervin-Tripp, 1972; Moles, 1974; Lambert & Tucker, 1976). However, Braun (1988) called for a broader perspective, emphasizing the need to investigate address systems in non-European languages, such as Arabic and Korean. This call led to critiques of traditional address theory, particularly questioning the universality of power and solidarity as central dimensions. Recent research has explored address forms in intercultural settings, highlighting the role of sociolinguistic and sociocultural competence in effective communication (Norrby & Wide, 2015; Larina, 2018; Astrit & William, 2019). The increasing influence of globalization has contributed to shifts in address norms, as seen in the tendency toward informality in English, where first-name usage has become dominant (Leech, 1999). Linguists have documented similar patterns of change in other languages, including Indian and German (He & Ren, 2016; Bruns & Kranich, 2021), suggesting that evolving social structures influence address behavior across linguistic communities.

In light of the documented evolution in address terms globally, there is a pressing need to revisit the state of address usage in Jordanian Arabic, particularly as existing studies may no longer capture contemporary patterns. Jordanian society, just like most societies, has undergone profound changes in the last couple of decades which affect its linguistic behavior as much as its social, cultural, and economic domains. Al-Shamayleh (2021) and Saidat (2010) conclude that the most crucial changes in Jordanian society that have an influence on Jordanians' linguistic behaviors are urbanization, dialect contact, intercultural contact, and globalization. The fact that several kinds of changes related to globalization and urbanization have been already observed in various linguistic phenomena such as phonetics, phonology, and syntax in Jordanian dialects enables us to hypothesize that Jordanians' choices of address terms will also prove to be susceptible to these ongoing sociocultural changes, particularly that some evidence is provided to suggest that there is a real disparity between existing stereotypes of historical Jordanian dialects and contemporary ones (Al-Wer, 2007; Saidat, 2010).

Address terms, along with their socio-pragmatic, semantic, and structural dimensions, are subject to change over time as societies evolve. In the Jordanian context, earlier studies such as Farghal and Shakir (1994), Al-Khatib (2003), and Larina (2018) have provided valuable insights into the cultural norms governing politeness, familial relationships, and social hierarchy. However, these works primarily focus on traditional, standardized forms and do not fully capture the effects of recent sociocultural shifts. As Miller (2007) has pointed out, many descriptions of Arabic dialects are outdated and overlook ongoing variation. Given that language is continuously shaped by changing social conditions (Mougeon, Beniak, & Valois, 1985), there is a need for updated empirical studies that document how address terms are currently used in Jordanian Arabic. Al-Khatib (2003) alluded to the possibility of a shift in Jordanian address norms, yet little systematic research has explored this development. Furthermore, while previous variationist studies in Jordan have focused predominantly on phonological features, especially in Amman (e.g., Abdel-Jawad, 1989; Al-Wer, 2007), pragmatic aspects such as address term usage remain underexplored.

This study aims to fill this gap by providing a qualitative, community-based analysis of address term variation and change in Irbid City, one of Jordan's major urban centers. It explores how generational, gender-based, and social-class differences shape address practices, and how these reflect broader linguistic trends, particularly regarding the shift toward informality and the impact of social and cultural transformations on address terms. In doing so, the study also draws on relevant comparisons with English to highlight the global relevance of these changes. The comparison with English was selected due to its global status, its influence on Jordanian youth through media and education, and its contrasting politeness norms. English represents a widely studied language with documented shifts toward informality and egalitarianism in address terms, making it a useful benchmark for examining parallel or divergent trends in Jordanian Arabic. Additionally, many Jordanians are bilingual or have significant exposure to English, especially in urban contexts like Irbid. This comparison helps illuminate cross-cultural pragmatic challenges, particularly for learners of English or Arabic as a second language.

To guide this investigation, the study addresses the following research questions:

1- What are the current patterns of address term usage in urban Jordanian Arabic as spoken in Irbid City?

2- How do sociolinguistic variables such as generation, gender, and social class influence the choice of address terms?

3- What evidence suggests a shift from traditional to innovative address term variants, and what factors are driving this change?

2. Method

This study examines cultural practices reflected in address term usage through observations of spontaneous conversations.

2.1 Participants

The sampling method aimed to capture a wide range of everyday interactions in Irbid City, Jordan. The observed interlocutors were categorized by generation (young vs. old), gender (male vs. female), and social class (low vs. high), three key sociolinguistic variables that are well-documented in the literature and known to influence language variation and identity (Labov, 1972; Eckert, 2012; Holmes & Meyerhoff, 2017). These factors were chosen due to their relevance to the study's objectives and their cultural significance in Jordanian society, where distinctions based on age, gender, and socioeconomic status are widely recognized. The influence of these social variables has also been well-established in Jordanian linguistic research. Age, gender, and social class have been shown to affect various linguistic phenomena, including phonological variation and syntactic patterns such as Abdel-Jawad (1989), Al-Wer (2002), Al-Tamimi (2001), and Al-Ali and Arafa (2007). While much of the existing research focuses on these structural aspects of language, the current study shifts attention towards pragmatic variation, specifically address terms usage, hence, this study is intended as a contribution to the qualitative community-based studies on linguistic variation and change of Jordanian address system as spoken in Irbid City.

Generational categorization was determined through observable physical cues (e.g., gray hair, wrinkles, posture) along with linguistic features (e.g., speech rate, intonation, vocabulary). This classification enables an apparent-time analysis to track linguistic change across age cohorts. Gender differences were examined to assess variation in address term usage and identify whether men or women exhibit more innovation. Social class was inferred through participants' affiliation with visibly stratified economic environments, following the framework of El-Omari (2002). Observations were conducted in a variety of public spaces, such as upscale restaurants, working-class cafés, boutique shops, and local markets, where social and economic distinctions are typically apparent through dress, language, behavior, and setting. While these assessments were necessarily observational, they were guided by sociolinguistic principles and applied consistently across all fieldwork contexts to ensure reliability.

2.2 Instrument and Data Collection

A structured data recording sheet was designed to document spontaneous address term usage and relevant contextual details. The sheet consists of two main sections: contextual details , includes information about the location, its socio-economic classification, time of observation, and type of interaction (e.g., transactional, casual, formal, or informal conversations). The second section includes address term documentation, recording the exact term used, the gender, age group, and social class of both the speaker and addressee, and the perceived relationship between interlocutors (e.g., acquaintances, strangers, and colleagues). Additional notes were taken when necessary to capture contextual nuances (see Appendix A for the data recording sheet). To minimize observer bias, we adopted a non-intrusive approach, carefully avoiding any interference in the interactions we observed. Consistent criteria were applied for identifying social variables (age, gender, and social class), and data were recorded objectively using a structured data recording sheet. This ensured that the same data collection procedures were followed across different speakers and settings. Additionally, a pilot observation phase was conducted to help refine and standardize the categorization process.

2.3 Data Analysis

This study adopts a qualitative methodology, not as a limitation but as a deliberate choice to explore the nuanced social meanings and pragmatic functions of address terms in everyday Jordanian interactions. While quantitative approaches such as multivariate regression can effectively measure statistical correlations, they often fall short of capturing the sociocultural dynamics and identity constructions embedded in actual language use. The current analysis is grounded in systematic observation, contextual interpretation, and content analysis, which allow for a deeper understanding of how address terms reflect shifting norms, social hierarchies, and interpersonal relationships.

To analyze the data, a total of 500 address terms were extracted directly from naturally occurring conversations documented in various public settings such as cafés, markets, and service encounters, ensuring the authenticity of the speech data. ATLAS.ti24 was used as the primary tool for coding and organizing the data. This software enabled efficient annotation, categorization, and retrieval of terms across diverse social and situational contexts. A coding scheme was developed in ATLAS.ti, allowing address terms to be classified into key thematic categories: formal vs. informal usage, kinship-based vs. innovative forms, and patterns shaped by the social variables of age, gender, and social class. Each term was tagged in the software with attributes related to the speaker's social profile (generation, gender, and social class), the type of interaction, and the perceived function of the term (e.g., to express respect, affection, solidarity, etc.).

To ensure coding reliability and consistency, a pilot coding phase was conducted on a subset of the data to refine the categorization system and verify clarity of code definitions. While formal inter-rater reliability measures were not conducted due to time constraints, we took several steps to ensure consistency and objectivity in the analysis. We cross-checked the categorizations with established linguistic frameworks and, when necessary, consulted with colleagues to validate our decisions. These steps helped ensure that the classification of address terms and social variables remained both reliable and consistent throughout the study. In sum, ATLAS.ti provided a structured framework for organizing, visualizing, and analyzing address term patterns in relation to social variables, helping to uncover how pragmatic functions and social meanings evolve within contemporary Jordanian Arabic.

Table 1. Summary of the coding schema used to categorize address terms in the dataset

Code Category	Description	Example Term
Traditional Terms	Older forms like teknonyms and kinship terms used in formal/deferential contexts	*ʕammi*, *ḥaadʒ*
Modified Traditional Terms	Phonologically or semantically altered kinship terms	*ʕammo*, *xaalto*
Respect Titles	Terms indicating respect not based on kinship	*sitt*, *sayyid*
Casual/Innovative Terms	Borrowed, abbreviated, or trend-based terms	*dada*, *boss*, *ya ḥub*
Customized Semantic Use	Traditional titles used with new, context-specific meanings	*muʕallim*, *ʔustaað*

Table 1. Summary of the coding schema used to categorize address terms based on formality, sociocultural context, and typical user characteristics. Each category reflects distinct linguistic strategies identified during qualitative content analysis.

3. Results

Based on the methodology outlined above, 500 instances of address terms were successfully collected in various interactional situations by urban Jordanians in Irbid City. These terms reflect emerging addressing practices, modifications of existing ones, and a declining use of others. Accordingly, the collected terms of address are classified into four patterns depending on the underlying socio-interactional and psychological dimensions of the contexts in which the terms occur. The aim of this classification is to illuminate the different uses and mutable functions of the variants in terms of their behavioral variability which indicates how social and linguistic changes are perceived differently by different speakers.

3.1 Categories of Current Jordanian Address Terms

3.1.1 Traditional (Old-fashioned) Terms with Restricted Uses

Tecknonyms, according to Braun (1988), are some forms of address which mark an addressee as a father, a brother, a wife or a daughter of someone else by expressing the addressee's relation to another person. They are innate elements of Arab culture and one of its characteristics, they also show "we-orientation" and "we-identity" of Arabs. These terms such as [*abu Ahmad*] " the father of Ahmad" ,

kinship terms [*ʕam*] " uncle" [*xaleh*] " aunt" , and some terms of respect [*ḥaadʒ/eh*, xityaar/*eh*] " old man/woman" were among the most frequent address terms in the Jordanian society over the past few decades, as claimed in the literature (Braun, 1988; Farghal & Shakir, 1994; Larina, 2018) and supported by evidence from the present study. However, due to the cultural and social changes in Jordan, the importance and usage of these terms have undergone significant modification in both their semantic meanings and pragmatic constraints. Kinship terms and tecknonyms have gradually become "old-fashioned". The frequency of their usage has considerably fallen even in the old town of Irbid City. Observations indicate that occurrence of such terms was the least and limited to very specific situations, involving interactional situations among the older generation, typically those in their 60s and 70s, or sometimes directed towards them. Nowadays, kinship terms and tecknonyms are nearly obsolete and have been replaced by new, innovative variants.

According to the collected data, the use of address terms among interlocutors of the older generation is typical; they follow specific patterns. For them, there are rigid rules for addressing others: terms of respect, tecknonyms, and kinship terms are the only appropriate ways to address both familiars and strangers; whether in informal or formal situations. The following exchanges illustrate this general tendency (see Appendex B for Arabic phonetic symbols):

(1) (Two old males in front of a shop)

"*ya abu khaled, elʔasʕaar huun ʔarxaṣ*"

"You the father of *Khaled*, the price here is cheaper"

(2) "*ma raḥ tlaqi ʔanḌaf min ʃuġilnaa ya ḥaadgeh*"

"You will not find better than our work *old lady*"

Interestingly, it is common among old people to ask others about their eldest son's name to employ tecknonyms in addressing as in the following interaction:

(3) An old male (in his 70s) in a service center to the employee:

"*em ʔeiʃ ʔinti*?

"What is your eldest son's name?

"*em kareem*. " the mother of Kareem"

"*ya em Kareem, bdi ʔaġayyer raqami*"

"You the mother of Kareem, I would like to change my number"

These traditional terms form the basis of their linguistic repertoire. Furthermore, observations show that kinship terms are mainly employed by the older generation to address younger speakers using the linguistic phenomenon of "address inversion" (Braun, 1988). Address inversion involves using of terms, mostly kinship terms, which do not express the addressee's but the speaker's role. For example, a mother addressing her son as [*mama*] "my mother", or a father addressing his daughter as [*baba*] "my father". In the Jordanian community, it is common to hear an older woman addressing an unknown young lady as [*ya xalti*] "my aunt" or an old male addressing an unknown young man as [*ya ʕammi*]. Consider the following exchanges:

(4) "*ya xalti, wein ʕiyadit doktoor el-khateeb (LN*)?"

"You aunt, where is Dr. Al-Khatib clinic?"

In different situations, it is observed that even if younger speakers utilize new terms to address older people such as [*ante, unkl*] " aunt, uncle", the older speakers insist on using the terms they are familiar with, so older speaker do not show any desire for linguistic transition. Older people show their dissatisfaction with the addressing practices they perceive from the younger generation.

3.1.2 Alternatives to Outdated Traditional Terms

As a resistant attitude towards the traditional use of tecknonyms and kinship terms, the younger generation replaced them with various prevailing terms that reflect the current socio-cultural values. However, the changes were not sudden or random; there were two main stages of change. Generally, This category includes semi-formal terms, which are updated or borrowed address forms that strike a balance between tradition and modernity. Examples include *ʕammo, xaltu, ustaaz,* and *sitt*, often used to respectfully address strangers in formal or public settings.

In the earlier stage, middle-aged speakers introduced new varieties of address terms to replace the old ones. Initially, they constructed new variants by phonologically modifying the old terms. For example, speakers started using kinship terms such as [*ʕammo*] instead of [*ʕam/ ʕammi*] "uncle", [*xaalto*] instead of [*xaltii/ xaleh*] "aunt", *[ʔax, ʔuxt, ʔuxti*] instead of [*xayyeh/ xayyeti*] "sister", *[ʔummi*] "mother" instead of [*yamma*]. These modified terms known as "distant kin terms" were extended beyond their usage for relatives. These terms are used honorifically to address older strangers to enhance the process of interaction and promote a sense of solidarity. At the same time, speakers avoid using the traditional kinship terms, which are considered rustic. It is worth noting that distant kinship terms are distinguished from the affectionate ones used for relatives, as the former are used without personal names. The following are exchanges in which middle-aged speakers employ new, modified forms of distant kin terms to address older people:

(5) "*ṣabaḥ elxeir ʕammu*"

"Good morning *ʕammu*"

(6) "*ya xaltu bteqdari tedfaʕi elfatuureh huun*"

"Aunt, you can pay the bill here"

The second type of alternative variants involves introducing some Arabic terms or borrowed ones that convey respect and politeness, forming a respectful addressing pattern. These terms are employed by middle-aged speakers who may not necessarily know their addressees. They are used not only to show respect in both formal and informal interactions but also to indicate the speaker's, rather than the addressee's, social rank, educational level as well as regional origin. The most popular terms of respect which are used as alternatives to old, traditional terms include the following: [*Sayyid*] "Mr.", [*Siidi*] "Sir", [*ʔustaaz] "*Sir/well- educated or well- dressed man", [*Sayyidah] "*Mrs.*",* and *[Sitt]* "Mrs.". Consider the following exchange, noticing address term function in addressing:

(7) "*Ya sitt itfaḌalii min huun elmadxal*"

"Mrs., come on, the entrance is here"

The possibility of using such titles as address terms on their own without being followed by a first name or last name like their English equivalents "Mr./ Mrs./ Miss", makes them suitable in contacting strangers. This stage of address practice, which is initiated by adults, could be labeled as an "intermediate" stage, and the terms included function as "semi-formal" terms of address, creating a compromise between the old, traditional terms of the older generation on the one hand and the new, innovative ones of the younger generation on the other.

The second stage of change involves introducing some casual, modern terms by younger speakers of both genders and social classes. The casual terms mainly include borrowed terms and attention-getters. This stage is initiated by youths who try to tone down traditional terms usage and create new variants that conform to their new linguistic style. Although the occurrences of such usage are less frequent than the previously mentioned terms, their existence marks a new linguistic trend among youths. For example, attention-getters such as [*law samaḥt*] "excuse me" and [*ʕfwan*] "sorry" were by far the most frequently occurring terms used by youths to address older people. It could be that using such terms is the safest solution to avoid using "old-fashioned" terms and to express respect for older people at the same time, while the terms [*ante*] "aunt" and [*unkl*] " uncle" were observed among younger speakers of high-social status and young females in general. Other terms like "*hey*" and "*hi*" were also recorded. The younger speakers' motive behind such usage could be a strategy to avoid using traditional terms to differentiate them from other speakers.

In contrast, young males of low- social status introduce the term [*dada*] "lady/ madam" to address any unknown female regardless of her age. The term [*dada*] is widely spread among young males, but it is only observed in informal situations such as shops and bus stations. Moreover, there are no occurrences of this term among females; its main equivalents are [*ʔanisseh*] "Miss" or *[ʔuxt*] "sister".

3.1.3 Customized Terms with Semantic Shifts

This pattern includes regular terms that speakers of younger generation and/or low-social status adapt and then customize their uses and meanings according to their needs or the situational contexts. Customized terms of address are mainly characterized by deactivation of the actual social features of the regular terms to express totally different meanings. Moreover, several traditional address terms are reintroduced to the addressing repertoire with semantic changes because rapid development of technology has transformed the dynamics of interpersonal interactions between people. Each individual, nowadays, has a wider circle of relationships. Adapting various address terms is one way to manage such relations. Observation of actual interaction provides a rich model of customized address terms.

[*muʕalim*] and [*ʔustaa* ð] "male teacher" are the most outstanding customized address terms in the Jordanian community. Both [*muʕalim*] and *[ʔustaa* ð] literally means "teacher" and supposed to be used only in schools. However, (26) Instances of *[ʔustaaz* ð] and [*muʕalim*] were to address people other than real teachers. According to the contexts, the terms were observed between strangers in the street or between friends. The following situational contexts illustrate the difference between the real and customized usage of [*muʕalim*] and [*ʔustaa* ð].

(8/a) a pupil asks his male teacher in a study center:

"*maʕlaʃ ʔustaa ðtʕeed hay elnuqTah*?"

"Teacher, could you please repeat this point?"

(8/b) a young male addressing another one in the street:

"*ya ʕustaa ðraḥ insakker kman rubʕ saaʕah*"

"Oh master, we will close in fifteen minutes"

(8/c) two males chatting:

"*ya mʕalim ʔaxadit elmarkiz elʔawwal*"

"Oh master, you won first place"

In example (8/a), a pupil addresses his teacher during a private lesson "*ʔustaa* ð", so the addressee here is a real teacher, while in (8/ b and c), the terms are customized to mean "a man" in (8/b) with showing a sense of respect and an "admirable friend" in (8/c) in which the

speaker addresses his friend once they met to express his admiration and praise his friends' capability to achieve such a prize. By addressing his friend [*ya muʕalim*], the speaker does not refer to his friend as a real teacher because he is younger than being in such a position, but the customized usage here could maintain their friendship as it emphasize positive qualities.

The meaning of the traditional religious Arabic and Islamic terms [*ḥaadʒ /ḥaadʒeh*] [male /female pilgrim] and [*ʃeix*] [leader/ chief] are also customized by Jordanian speakers. The term [*ḥaadʒ*] originally refers to any Muslim has already gone to Mekkeh and the term [*ʃiex*] normally indicates a man who heads prayers, recites the Qur'an, or leads a tribe. However, these two terms are extended to respectfully address any person viewed to be religious, it is also correlated with the way of dressing; a person who always wears the traditional Jordanian dress is more likely to be addressed as [*ḥaa*dʒ]. Then, another change in usage of these terms occurred, they are observed regularly among speakers of low-status in their casual interaction to address either familiars or strangers to denote only the old age of the addressee, so these two terms could be translated as "old man".

The importance of researching address terms emerges from the fact that they are not only a linguistic tool for sociality, but also a domain for linguistic creativity as new social and cultural usages and meanings can be constructed as demands arise. Generally, younger speakers often feel a need to distinguish themselves from others. The customized terms they introduce successfully indicate their social identities and provide profound insights into their norms, values, beliefs and linguistic style preferences.

3.1.4 Newly Emergent Terms

Analysis reveals a wide variety of innovative terms emerged out of a need to express ever-changing relationships. Jordanian speakers resorted to different methods to come up with new variants of terms. These innovative terms suddenly spread out because of speakers' desire to employ new linguistic behavior. In this study, one creative linguistic process is carried out in the formation of these innovative terms. The process involves word formation by removing some segments of already existing words to create synonyms such as [*ya ḥub*] instead of [*ya ḥabibi/ti*] [my love], [*ya ruḥ*] instead of [*ya ruḥi*] [my soul], and [*ya galb*] [my heart] instead of [*ya galbi*]. Younger speakers generally show preference to the use of initials and abbreviations of nouns as address terms. This process of word formation could confirm the linguistic change that Jordanian Arabic witnessed. The motivation for such linguistic abbreviation is that such terms sound more contemporary and trendy, hence standing out from all other interlocutors.

Innovative terms are generally sourced from different social backgrounds and encode different cultural meanings. The underlying meanings of these new terms demonstrate that there is cultural influence when forming any address term. Thus, culture-specific rules govern the actual use of address terms. And each term marks speaker's "cultural affiliations and cultural identities" (Mensah, 2021). Innovative address terms are therefore a paradox especially for those who are not familiar with the traditions of the community. Profound understanding of such usage requires understanding the social originating meanings of each term. Generally, creative linguistic processes result in a variation of address terms that make the Jordanian address system more complicated.

Table 2. Distribution of address term types by age group, gender, and social class

Term Type	Typical Users	Gender	Social Class	Examples
Traditional terms (tecknonyms, kinship)	Older adults (60+)	Both	All classes	*abu Khaled, ḥaadʒeh, ya ʕammi*
Modified kin terms / Semi-formal	Middle-aged (35–59)	Both	Mostly middle/upper	*ʕammo, xaltu, ustaaz, sitt*
Casual/borrowed (attention-getters)	Young adults (18–34)	Both (esp. females)	Upper and middle	*ante, unkl, madam, boss*
Informal male variants	Young men (18–34)	Male	Lower	*dada, muʕalim, ya zalameh*
Customized respectful terms	Middle-aged	Male	Lower	*ʔustaað, muʕalim, ḥaadʒ, ʃeix (extended)*
Abbreviated/love-related terms	Youth (esp. young females)	Both	Mostly middle/upper	*ḥub, ruḥ, galb*
Globalized/borrowed trendy terms	Youth (esp. females)	Female	Middle/upper	*askim* (Turkish), *canim* (Korean), *hi, hey*

Table 2. Summary of the coding schema used to categorize address terms based on formality, sociocultural context, and typical user characteristics. Each category reflects distinct linguistic strategies identified during qualitative content analysis.

3.2 Factors Relating to Changes of Addressing System

3.2.1 Linguistic Factor

The previous results identify trends in the process of word formation which suggest that linguistic factors could contribute to changes in address terms in the Jordanian dialect as discussed previously. Jordanians tend to use shortened and abbreviated names such as pet names, nicknames, and the first letters of a family name or a job title. Additionally, It is becoming increasingly popular for Jordanians to use shortened forms of some familiar intimate nouns such as [*ya ḥub*] instead of [*ya ḥabibi*] "my love" or [*ya ruḥ*] instead of [*ya ruḥi*] "my soul". This could result from the linguistic economy principle in language communication (Vicentini, 2003; Crystal, 2008) and a tendency towards the least effort in language evolution (de Lima, 1995). The linguistic economy principle is concerned with people's tendency

towards brevity in language and the minimum possible effort at different levels: lexical, phonetic, morphological, and syntactic. Speakers themselves subconsciously tend to communicate as efficiently as possible, usually by reducing the length and complexity of language. This trend is clearly evident in the language of the younger generation. Younger speakers' use of linguistic economy strategies is driven by the nature of modern communication especially in digital contexts, where brevity is a basic feature. This finding is consistent with Dawaghreh and Suliman's (2024) conclusion that there is a growing strong tendency for Jordanians to employ and utilize several strategies of linguistic economy to save time and effort while writing. However, Linders and Louwerse (2023) state that the law of least effort also applies to spoken dialogue. Many young informants also state that the reason behind using shortened address terms is to make speech more natural and less formal. Other informants state that their motivation for clipped personal names is to achieve stylistic and aesthetic effects.

In addition, another reason why Jordanians prefer to use shortened address terms is the nature of the syllabic structure in the Jordanian dialect. According to Al-Wer (2007), Jordanian Arabic has eight possible syllable structures: CV, CVC, CVCC, CVV, CVVC, CVVCC, CCVC, and CCVVC. However, the most frequent syllable patterns in words are disyllabic. The results show that many terms of address now have disyllabic counterparts, whose usage seems to depend primarily on the rhythm of the utterance, contributing to a smoother flow in conversation. These kinds of terms are superimposed over the Jordanian addressing system, leading to a general preference among Jordanians. In addition to being rhythmic, preferences for disyllabic words may also arise from linguistic, social and cognitive factors. For example, from a linguistic perspective, the Jordanian address system has phonological constraints that generally favor disyllabic words which influence word formation processes. Since disyllabic words can be easily managed for inflection and derivation, speakers are able to modify words and address terms to express specific and accurate meanings. Culturally, Jordanian Arabic is one of the languages and cultures that have a natural tendency towards disyllabic words, similar to English, Chinese, and Japanese. From a cognitive dimension, disyllabic words, including address terms, are often easier to recall and more natural and fluid to pronounce.

Finally, the use of shortened and abbreviated address terms by the younger generation reflects serious cultural shifts towards efficiency in communication triggered by technological advancement and changing cultural behaviors. This trend has essential implications. Firstly, it contributes to the evolution of language by introducing innovative terms into daily communication. Secondly, the creative use of these address terms could widen the gap between the older and younger generations, leading to potential misunderstanding.

3.2.2 Globalization and Language Contact

Globalization, language contact, and international networks significantly influence the Jordanian address system and have brought it into contact with the addressing practices of other languages. Because of globalization, Jordanians have access to a wide range of address systems that they creatively employ in their daily communication. The previous results present several examples of how globalization and language contact shape and reshape the usage of address terms. For example, among Jordanians, there is a tendency to adopt simple and universal address terms that can be understood by interlocutors from different countries and cultures to facilitate communication. "Mr.", "Mrs.", "madam", and "boss" can be a useful choice in a multicultural context instead of culturally specific address terms such as tecknonyms and kinship terms. Moreover, to avoid miscommunication, Jordanians have started using some neutral address terms that fit interlocutors of different genders, ages, social classes and backgrounds. Furthermore, language contact has driven speakers to mix address terms from different languages. For example, Jordanian speakers mix the English address term " Mr." with the Jordanian title[*mudeer*] " manager" or the English term " Boss" with the Jordanian [*el kbeer*] to become [*el Boss el kbeer*]. These examples emphasize Jordanians' ability for cultural adaptation; they show an increased awareness and sensitivity to balancing between their traditional norms and intercultural practice. In addition, in the era of globalization, the global influence of American norms is evident in Jordanian address term choices. American norms are generally based on showing intimacy instead of respectful distance (Sifianou, 2013). American and English-speaking cultures usually emphasize casual interaction and display positive politeness, thus influencing other cultures to adopt intimate and informal address terms. As a result, Jordanians are adopting more terms that display solidarity such as nicknames and pet names. Another example of American influence on the Jordanian addressing practices is reduction in the use of honorific titles not only in daily interactions, but also in professional business settings. It could be a general trend toward flattening of hierarchies; this means less emphasis on formal titles and more use of first names. Furthermore, because Turkish and Korean cultures, particularly Korean pop, Turkish dramas, and movies are popular among Jordanian young speakers, especially females, they are starting to adopt Turkish and Korean words and use them as address terms such as " *askim*" (my love) and "*canim*" (my dear), making them trendy. This trend is driven by the pervasive influence of global media. Such usage asserts the fluid nature of language and how it develops as a result of global connectivity.

However, despite the huge influence of American culture and the English language, Jordanians do not simply adopt English address terms and use them as they are. Instead, Jordanians have creatively adjusted them. Sifianou (2013) states that under the influence of globalization and language contact, terms of address have to "adjust to a far more interrelated but also diversified and uncertain world than the previous one was". It turns out that globalization and international networks considerably affect how Jordanians address each other, leading to more simplification, mixing, and casualization. Such changes indicate serious social implications, such as shifts in the hierarchical structure.

4. Discussion

Traditional teknonyms and kinship terms are the norm in the Jordanian address system. However, an incremental increase in customized

and innovative variants is evident among younger speakers. Middle-aged and younger age groups have mitigated the usage of traditional variants, allowing modern, innovative terms to accelerate. This shift highlights Jordanians' ability to balance traditional norms with intercultural influences, demonstrating increased awareness and sensitivity to evolving social dynamics. Analysis indicates that younger and older interlocutors behave differently regarding address term choice: older speakers tend to be more conservative, while younger speakers are more innovative. Notably, younger speakers use modern address terms far more frequently than older generations. This compelling finding suggests that the emergence of innovative address terms may indicate linguistic change in progress, with the younger generation leading this shift. These new terms are not merely linguistic innovations; they signify linguistic evolution, as they reflect contemporary social identities and cultural adaptation.

4.1 Social Meanings and Identity Construction

The study confirms that cultural norms and values are deeply embedded in addressing systems. Jordanian speakers utilize address term variants not only for communication but also to construct, sustain, reject, or reshape relationships. Unlike previous studies, which focus primarily on politeness and solidarity, this analysis identifies novel functions of address terms within the Jordanian dialect. These functions are context-dependent, varying based on social settings and relationships. This flexibility reinforces address terms as essential tools for negotiating identity and belonging. The collected address terms also encode various social meanings, including familiarity, generational dynamics, social identity, and emotional expression. This interplay between language and society aligns with variationist theory, which posits that linguistic variants are not just alternatives to one another but also encode distinct social meanings. The findings highlight how address terms serve as representatives of complex social networks.

4.2 Comparative Analysis: Jordanian Arabic and English Address Systems

These sociolinguistic changes in Jordanian Arabic parallel developments in English-speaking societies, though with different cultural manifestations. A comparative analysis reveals both unique and universal patterns of linguistic change, influenced by globalization, social mobility, and intercultural communication.

4.2.1 Politeness Strategies: Formality vs. Casualization

Politeness conventions in address terms reflect broader cultural norms regarding social hierarchy and respect. In Jordanian Arabic, politeness strategies rely heavily on honorifics, kinship terms, and teknonyms (Farghal & Shakir, 1994). Older generations continue to use terms such as [*ḥaadʒ*] " pilgrim" for respected elders and [*ʕamm*] " uncle" or [*xaalto*] " aunt" for strangers, maintaining deference in interactions. Titles such as [*ʔustaa*ð] "teacher/sir" and [*sayyid*] "Mr." remain widely used in formal settings (Al-Natour, Bataineh, & Alomari, 2024).

Conversely, English has experienced a decline in formal honorifics and an increase in informality (Bruns & Kranich, 2021; Leech, 1999; Murray, 2002). The use of titles such as "Mr.," "Mrs.," and "Miss" has significantly decreased, particularly in professional and educational settings, where first-name usage has become the norm. For example, while Jordanian university students commonly address professors as "Doctor" or [ʔustaað] English-speaking students are often encouraged to use first names (e.g., "John" instead of "Professor Smith"), signaling a cultural shift toward egalitarianism (Murray, 2002). These observed patterns can be more fully understood through theoretical frameworks such as politeness theory and indexicality. The findings of this study align closely with Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, particularly in how speakers manage face-threatening acts through address term selection. Traditional Jordanian address terms such as *[ʔustaa*ð] "teacher", [*sitt*] "madam", and [*ḥaadʒ*] "pilgrim" function as markers of negative politeness, maintaining respectful distance and social hierarchy. In contrast, younger speakers' use of innovative or informal forms, such as "boss", [*ya ruḥ*] " my soul", and [*galb*] "heart", reflects strategies of positive politeness, emphasizing solidarity and in-group alignment. These shifts demonstrate how politeness strategies evolve alongside changing cultural expectations.

Address terms in this context also operate as indexical signs (Silverstein, 1976; Eckert, 2008), signaling social identity traits like age, gender, and social rank. For instance, using [*muʕalim*] " teacher" for a peer conveys admiration and masculine solidarity, rather than literal reference. Such uses show how address terms not only reflect but actively construct social meaning, serving as tools for negotiating relationships and cultural affiliation.

4.2.2 Familiarity and Social Distance

Address terms in both languages reflect shifting boundaries between formality and familiarity. Jordanian Arabic has long maintained a balance between politeness and social closeness through kinship-based address terms (Braun, 1988). Address inversion, where a person refers to a younger speaker with a kinship term ([*ya xalti*] "aunt" or [*ya ʕammi*] "uncle"), reinforces traditional social bonds (Al-Khatib, 2003). However, this strategy is declining among younger Jordanians, who prefer borrowed informal terms like boss or madam (Al-Khawaldeh & Rabab'ah, 2024; Sifianou, 2013).

Similarly, English has transitioned toward greater familiarity in address terms, even in professional settings (Brown & Ford, 1961). Whereas terms like "Sir" and "Madam" were once common in British and American English, today they are largely reserved for customer service interactions. Instead, English speakers now favor universal first-name usage and informal greetings such as "Hey" or "Hi" (Murray, 2002). For example, corporate environments that once used last names (e.g., "Mr. Johnson") have shifted to first-name addressing (e.g., "James"), reducing social distance.

4.2.3 Recent Changes and the Impact of Globalization

Recent linguistic changes in both languages have been driven by technology, media influence, and intercultural communication. In Jordanian Arabic, borrowed English and Turkish terms are reshaping address practices. Younger speakers now use terms like [*unkl*] "uncle" and [*ante*] "aunt," influenced by global media (Dawaghreh & Suliman, 2024). Additionally, Jordanian speakers abbreviate intimate terms (e.g., [*ḥub*] instead of [*ḥabibi*] “my love”), reflecting a linguistic economy similar to trends in English (Vicentini, 2003). English, too, has adapted to social and technological changes. Digital communication has contributed to new address norms, including the rise of gender-neutral terms and informal virtual greetings (“Hey guys,” “Y’all”) (Bruns & Kranich, 2021). Additionally, the influence of American media has globalized informal English terms, leading even non-native speakers to adopt "dude," "bro," and "mate" in casual contexts (Sifianou, 2013).

The emergence of innovative address terms among younger Jordanians reflects not only linguistic creativity but also deeper sociocultural transformations. These terms often serve to establish solidarity, mark informality, and signal modern or urban identities distinct from those of older generations. Many of these innovations—such as clipped affectionate forms (*ḥub*, *ruḥ*, *galb*) and borrowed expressions (*askim*, *canim*, *boss*)—are driven by increased exposure to global media. Turkish dramas, Korean pop culture, and American films and television have introduced new norms of emotional expression and casual interaction, which younger speakers localize and incorporate into everyday speech. For example, terms like *askim* and *canim*, used mostly by young women, signal both intimacy and trend-consciousness, while male speakers favor informal variants such as *muʕalim* and *dada*, which denote peer rapport or playful politeness. Gender also influences these patterns. Young women appear more inclined to adopt affectionate and stylized address forms, often reflecting borrowed or hybrid expressions, while young men introduce terms that convey familiarity and assertiveness in informal or transactional settings. These differences illustrate how address terms can encode not only relational intent but also gendered social identities. Generational change is another major factor: innovative terms often emerge as a rejection of the formal and hierarchical address systems preferred by older speakers, aligning instead with egalitarian and individualistic values increasingly associated with urban youth culture. In this way, innovative address terms function as linguistic markers of change, reshaping interpersonal norms, redefining politeness, and illustrating the adaptive nature of Jordanian Arabic in a globalized sociolinguistic environment.

4.2.4 Implications for Language Learning and Intercultural Communication

These sociolinguistic differences have significant implications for language teaching and cross-cultural communication. Addressing norms are deeply embedded in cultural expectations, and non-native English speakers often transfer their native addressing conventions into English interactions, leading to potential misunderstandings. For example, Jordanian learners of English might struggle with the expectation of first-name usage in professional settings, perceiving it as overly casual or disrespectful. Conversely, English speakers learning Arabic may find the use of kinship terms puzzling when addressing strangers. Raising awareness of address system variation can enhance pragmatic competence in English learners from Arabic-speaking backgrounds. English discourse analysis can also benefit from insights into Jordanian Arabic’s dynamic addressing practices, particularly in how linguistic shifts mirror broader cultural changes. Additionally, understanding these differences can aid in refining intercultural communication strategies, ensuring smoother interactions between Arabic and English speakers in professional and educational contexts. The evolution of address terms in Jordanian Arabic and English reveals a shared movement toward informality but differing pathways of evolution. While English has largely abandoned traditional titles, Jordanian Arabic adapts through hybridization, blending old and new forms. These findings illustrate how sociolinguistic variation reflects broader cultural shifts, highlighting the intersection of language, identity, and globalization.

5. Conclusion

This study has analyzed the current addressing behaviors in Irbid City, Jordan. Because of the decline of tecknonyms and kinship terms, Jordanian interlocutors start coming up with other address terms to create increasingly ever-fluid relationships. Consequently, some address terms have been used with semantic shifts and several others have emerged. Speakers of younger generation initiate the use of such new address terms, leading linguistic change that aligns with Al-Khatib’s (2003) indication that the Jordanian address system is a possible candidate for change. This process of change has accelerated due to linguistic, social, and technological factors. Understanding the deep influence of these factors gives thorough insights into the interaction between a rapidly changing, diverse society and language use. The address terms observed in this study reveal a rich variety of embedded social meanings that provide significant insights into the nature of the interaction and the dynamics between interlocutors. These terms do more than merely identify individuals; they communicate nuanced implications about the relationships at play. For instance, they reflect levels of familiarity and intimacy, highlight generational differences and hierarchies, and emphasize aspects of social identity. Additionally, address terms often convey subtle attitudinal and emotional indicators, offering a glimpse into the speakers' feelings, respect, or even tensions within the interaction. This multifaceted nature makes them a valuable tool for understanding the social structure underlying communication. The focus on generation, gender, and social class was guided by both foundational sociolinguistic theory and their cultural salience in Jordanian society, ensuring the analysis was both contextually meaningful and methodologically grounded.

The patterns of change identified in Jordanian Arabic aligns with broader theories of linguistic change, including Labov’s (1994) variationist approach, which emphasizes the role of younger speakers in driving language innovation. The gradual abandonment of traditional address terms in favor of more adaptive and hybrid forms mirrors patterns observed in other languages, including those found in English. However, while English-speaking societies tend toward simplification and informality, the Jordanian system appears to be

undergoing a restructuring that blends traditional norms with modern influences.

These findings contribute to ongoing discussions about language contact, pragmatics, and the sociolinguistic effects of globalization, emphasizing the importance of examining linguistic evolution within a comparative framework. They also offer practical implications for second language acquisition, where learners must navigate culturally specific address norms; for intercultural communication, where mismatches in address norms may lead to pragmatic misunderstandings; and for language pedagogy, by informing the design of materials and curricula sensitive to sociopragmatic variation. Furthermore, the findings may inform fields such as interpersonal communication, digital discourse analysis, and language policy, especially in multicultural or multilingual contexts. By situating the study of Jordanian Arabic within a global framework, this study enhances our understanding of both local variation and global sociolinguistic processes. Future research could extend these insights by examining address term innovations in other non-Western speech communities, contributing to a more inclusive and comprehensive model of linguistic change across cultures.

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Authors' contributions

Hiba Yousef: prepared the research instrument, collected the data, analyzed the data, wrote the abstract, results, discussion, conclusion, references, and overall proofreading. **Roswati Abdul Rashid:** modified the research instrument, assisted in data interpretation, contributed to revising the discussion and theoretical framework, and overall proofreading. **Kasyfullah Bin Abd- Kadir:** verified the research instrument, reviewed the methodology, write literature review, and overall proofreading.

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Appendix A

The Data Recording Sheet

Name of the consumption site ……... Level H □/L □

Type (clothing/ accessories /grocery/ restaurant /cafe/ study house)

Place where it is located ……

Day …… exact time ……

Interaction	Exact term of address	Variables of the interlocutors			
		Estimated age			
		Young		Old	
		M	F	M	F

Appendix B

List of Phonetic Symbols

Consonants

ء	Glottal stop	ʔ
ب	Voiced bilabial stop	b
ت	Voiceless dental stop	t
ث	Voiceless interdental fricative	θ
ج	Voiced palate-alveolar affricate	ʒ
ح	Voiceless pharyngeal fricative	ḥ
خ	Voiceless uvular fricative	x
د	Voiced dental stop	d
ذ	Voiced interdental fricative	ð
ر	Voiced alveolar liquid	r
ز	Voiced alveolar fricative	z
س	Voiceless alveolar fricative	s
ش	Voiceless palate-alveolar fricative	ʃ
ص	Voiceless emphatic alveolar fricative	ṣ
ض	Voiced emphatic dental stop	Đ

ط	Voiceless emphatic dental stop	T
ظ	Voiced emphatic interdental fricative	Ď
ع	Voiced pharyngeal fricative	ʕ
غ	Voiced uvular fricative	ġ
ف	Voiceless labiodental fricative	f
ق	Voiceless uvular stop	q
ك	Voiceless velar stop	k
ل	Voiced alveolar lateral	l
م	Voiced bilabial nasal	m
ن	Voiced alveolar nasal	n
ه	Voiceless glottal fricative	h
و	Voiced labiovelar glide	w
ي	Voiced palatal glide	j

Based on the International Phonetic Alphabet

Geminate consonants are doubled (e.g. “fakkar” “he thought”

Vowels

Vowels	Description
i	High, front, short, unrounded
e	Mid. Front, short, unrounded
a	Low, central, short, unrounded
u	High, back, short, rounded
o	Mid, back, short, rounded

Long vowels are represented as double short ones (ii, ee, aa, uu, oo).