Forms of Address in Clerics'Communication: A Comparative Study

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Abstract

Forms of address are among the most significant markers of social relations in a society. They are in fact complicated indicators of power relationships and politeness criteria in a community. Having such significance as its source of inspiration, this study investigates the influence of social context, level of intimacy and age of the addressee on the choice of address forms in Iranian clerics' speech community. In other words, the present paper first tries to show how these factors affect subjects' choice between familiar you, /to/, and differential you, /šoma/, in Persian. The findings of the study is then compared with those of Keshavarz (2001) to see if clerics speech community show different patterns for using address forms from those of Persian speakers at large. The results of the study indicated that these variables, although influential to some extent, were not noticeably so especially when the findings of this study were compared with those of Keshavarz. In fact, there were noticeable differences between clerics and non-clerics in their pattern of using address forms.

Keywords: terms of address, clerics, speech community

Introduction

It is widely attested that language is a dynamic and variable phenomenon. This variation can simply be observed even in the speech of a single speaker of a language. Besides linguistic factors, many other such as age, sex and education can be the underlying reasons for this variation. However, these underlying reasons of variation in one's speech are not always as straightforward and naturally existing as the above factors. In many cases, people, irrespective of their age, sex or any built-in personal characteristic, deliberately modify their speech for some specific social and/or individual purposes. It seems true, as widdowson (2007, p. 67) asserts that "communication is not only a matter of the parties finding a form of words which will serve most efficiently to indicate what reference and force they intend. It also involves finding words that will have the desired effect. That is to say words which are tactically effective in regulating the position of self in relation to other".

One of the most outstanding elements of any language, which bears direct relation to the social relations of the interlocutors and the context, is its system of deixis. Itis, as Levinson (1989) believes, the single most obvious way through which the relationship between language and context is understood. Deixis, which roughly includes three categories of spatial, temporal and person, is actually used to accomplish the task of pointing via language. Among the categories of person deixis, one directly related to this study is the social deixis used to refer to the second person (i.e. the second person pronoun).As stated by Keshavarz (2001) social deixis is concerned with social roles that an individual plays in a speech event. Yule (1996) also defines social deixis as concerned with the choice of some forms rather than others in light of social context. A fairly well known example of social contrast encoded within person deixis is the distinction between forms used for a familiar versus a nonfamiliaraddressee in some languages. This is known as T/V distinction from the French forms Tu (familiar) and vous (non-familiar) and is found in many languages including German (Du/Sie) and Spanish (Tu/Usted) [and Persian (to/šoma)] (ibid).

Grammatically speaking, the equivalent word for Tu is in most languages considered as the singular pronoun whereas Vous is counted as its plural counterpart. However,this grammatical distinction is more described than observed. Though this grammatical distinction does not hold for some languages, they may still have two forms of pronouns to refer to second person singular; one polite and formal, and the other casual and informal.Ample evidence can be found

of language users using both pronouns to refer to an individual. The point is that the choice of either of the pronouns rather than the other is by no means an arbitrary one and is, in fact, a systematic choice usually knowingly made with respect to many interacting social and interpersonal determining factors.

Forms of address of different languages have been studied and interpreted from a variationist point of view (see for example, Bates & Benigni, 1975; Chandrasekhar, 1970; Cintra, 1972; Parkinson, 1982; Paulston, 1976; Oyetade, 1995). In their seminal work, Brown and Gilman (1960) presented two semantic dimensions namely solidarity and power, as determining the choice between familiar and non-familiar pronouns.The non-reciprocal power semantic, which involves an unbalanced use of the pronouns by the two interlocutors (i.e. TU-VOUS or VOUS-TU), implies the power of the VOUS user. The solidarity semantic is however expressed via reciprocal address (i.e. TU-TU or VOUS-VOUS). Citing historical evidence, Brown and Gilman (ibid.) found an increase in the reciprocal address, which they regarded as the "Triumph" of the solidarity "semantic over""power semantic".

Studying the Spanish pronominal address, in Argentina, Peru and Puerto Rico, Sole (1970 cited in siguenza-oritz, 1996) reported that males use TU more than females do. The same study also showed that the frequency of reciprocal TU is much higher in same-sex interactions than cross-sex interactions. The probability of using TU with subordinate female workers was also significantly higher than that for males. This, the researcher believed, can be interpreted in light of the social dominance of males in the societies that were studied.

Studying Spanish speakers from many different countries Marin (1972 cited in siguenzaoritz, 1996) found that tu is the non-marked form for people below 40 even in their first encounter and without regard to gender. Keller (1974 cited in siguenza-oritz, 1996) studying Spanish Speakers residing in New York found a significantly greater use of USTED with adults outside the home and an equal use of TU and USTED within the home domain. Garcia and Davis (1986) also found support for the higher frequency of TU within the home domain. Nevertheless, it can be implied from the literature that there is neither a single variable nor the combination of variables in an additive fashion, which are affecting the choice of address forms but the interaction of a number of variables. Paez-Urdaneta (1980), for instance, listed four major variables that can correlate with the choice of pronominal address: 1) biological factors

such as age 2) social factors such as group membership 3) factors related to the speech event such as the topic or the presence of a third person 4) factors related to the mode of interaction such as friendship with the addressee. The point is that the influence of the above factors as well as many others is not equal for different speech communities within a single linguistic community. Lambert and Tucker (1976), for example pointed out that all French communities and all groups within a community are not similar in their T/V usage. They found different patterns of T/V use by French speaking people from different parts of the world. This lends support to the fact that the members of different social and occupational groups sometimes use language in fundamentally different ways.

Having this fact in mind, the present study intends to see how variables such as formality of the context, level of intimacy between the interlocutors and age of the addressee affect the forms of address used by Iranian Shiite clerics and how different they are from the address forms used by other Persian speakers. In sum, the study tries to answer the following questions:

1. How does the formality of the situation affect the choice of address forms?
2. What is the role of intimacy and distance in the choice of address forms?
3. How does the age of the addressee affect the choice of address forms?
4. What are the probable differences between clerics and non-clerics in their choice of address forms?

Method

Participants

The participants of this study were 75 Persian speaker Shiite clergymen living or studying in Qom. Their age ranged from 16 to 56 but about 70 percent of the participants were between 30 to 40. They were originally from different cities of Iran and were also studying at different levels of clerical studies. Some of the participants had university degrees as well. An important point about the participants is that they were not necessarily involved in religious affairs (e.g. giving religious lectures, teaching religious issues or etc.). In fact, many of them were employees of nonreligious institutions (e.g. software companies, social welfare organization, public libraries etc.). However the common point they all shared (which was the criterion for their selection) was that they all were studying or had degrees in clerical studies.

Instrument

The data for this study were collected by means of a modified questionnaire taken from Braun (1988) model. It consisted of two major parts namely the formal and informal situations. In each part of the questionnaire, 12 addressees were specified and the participants were asked to mark the form of address (i.e. /to/ or /šoma/) they usually use for addressing the specified addressee in the provided situation. No personal information except the age and the level of study were asked to be provided by the participants.

Procedures

Data collection procedures started in August 2001 and lasted for about one month. Prior to the administration of the questionnaire the participants were assured that, their answers would be kept confidential. They were also informed about the aim of the study to help them understand and answer the questions more easily. It should also be mentioned that the data collection procedures were carried out by the help of a cleric research assistant who was an insider to the group. After the data collection procedures, all incomplete questionnaires were discarded and the rest were codified for analysis. After the data were collected and analyzed, the findings of the study were reported to three clerics for the sake of gaining a better insight in the interpretation of the results. These three clerics who were consulted in the interpretation phase were chosen from among the primary participants of the study. They were 35, 31 and 23 years old.

Results

Formality of the context

Analysis of the data revealed that the formality of the context does not have a noticeable effect on the use of address terms for clerics. In fact, in cases of paternal uncle and aunt there was no difference between formal versus informal contexts at all. Also, the change of address forms from informal contexts to formal contexts for father, mother, and maternal uncle was by no means noticeable. The informal contexts however entailed a quite noticeable increase in the use of /to/ and thus a decrease in the use of /šoma/ in the cases of brothers, sisters, wife and children both over and below 12. A very interesting and significant point is that except for addressing younger sisters, younger brothers and children below 12 in informal contexts, there were no other case in which the use of /to/exceeds that of /šoma/ in number. Even in these three cases the difference was absolutely small. It can then be concluded that although the use of /to/

in addressing some of the cases has increased from formal to informal contexts, this change is neither categorical nor noticeable to a great extent. **Figure 1** and **2** summarize the data in both formal and informal contexts.

Intimacy and Distance

The other independent variable that was studied for its probable effects was the level of intimacy between the addressor and the addressee. To this end, three of the addressees, namely the wife, brothers and sisters were categorized as intimate kins whereas paternal and maternal uncle as well as paternal aunt was categorized as distant kins. This categorization is done with regard to the relative nature of intimacy and distance. It was in fact believed that the first group is in an acceptably more intimate position in comparison with the other group. In case of brothers and sisters, because they were each two separate items of the questionnaire (i.e. younger and older) the mean of the two frequencies were calculated for analysis. The analysis of the data revealed that in both formal and informal situations, distant kins received more /šoma/ than did intimate kins. However, the difference was still very small. Paternal uncle and aunt received the maximum number of /šoma/ (100%) in both contexts confirming their highest degree of distance accordingly. Of the six cases chosen for this analysis, the "wife" received the least percentage of /šoma/ in both contexts. This can lend support to their higher degree of intimacy.
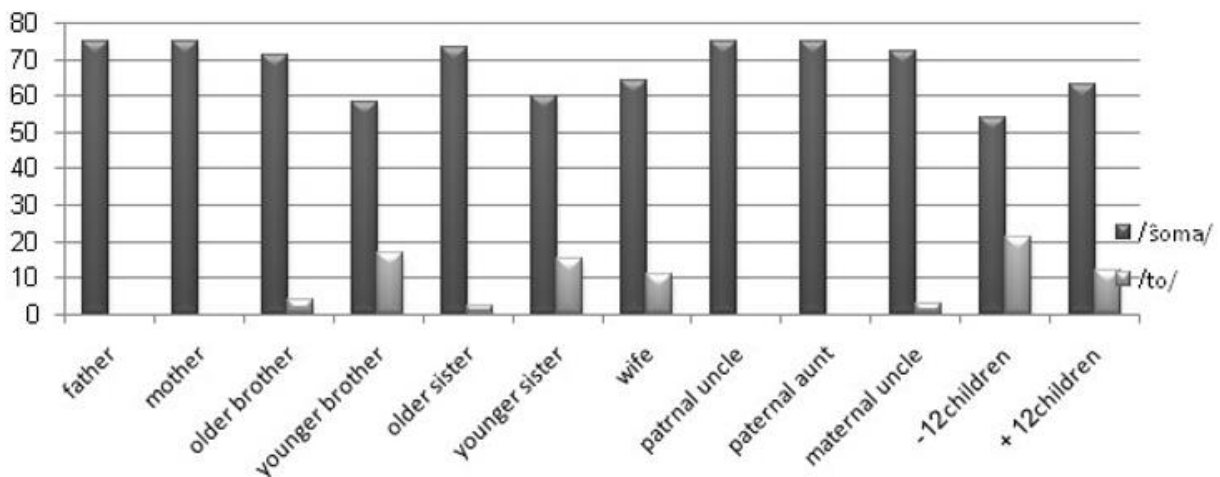
**Figure 1:** Pattern of the use of /to/ and /šoma/ in formal contexts
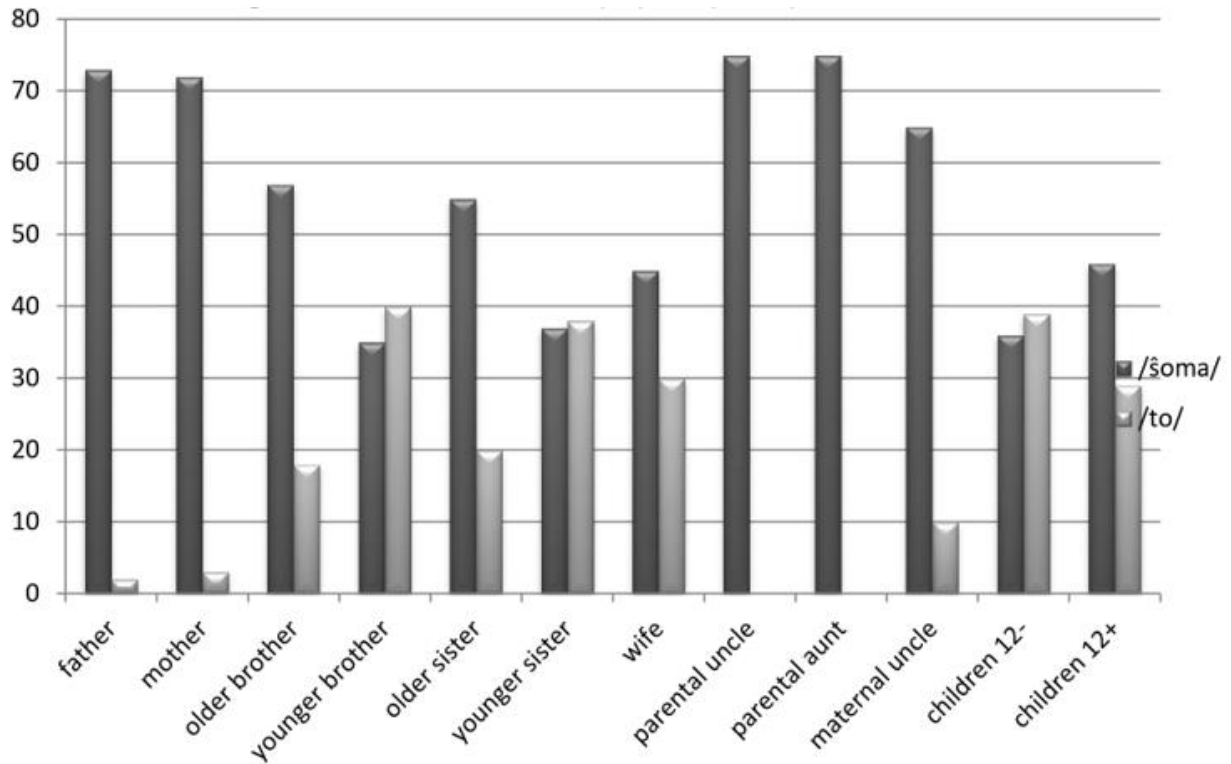
Figure 2: Pattern of the use of /to/ and /šoma/ in informal contexts
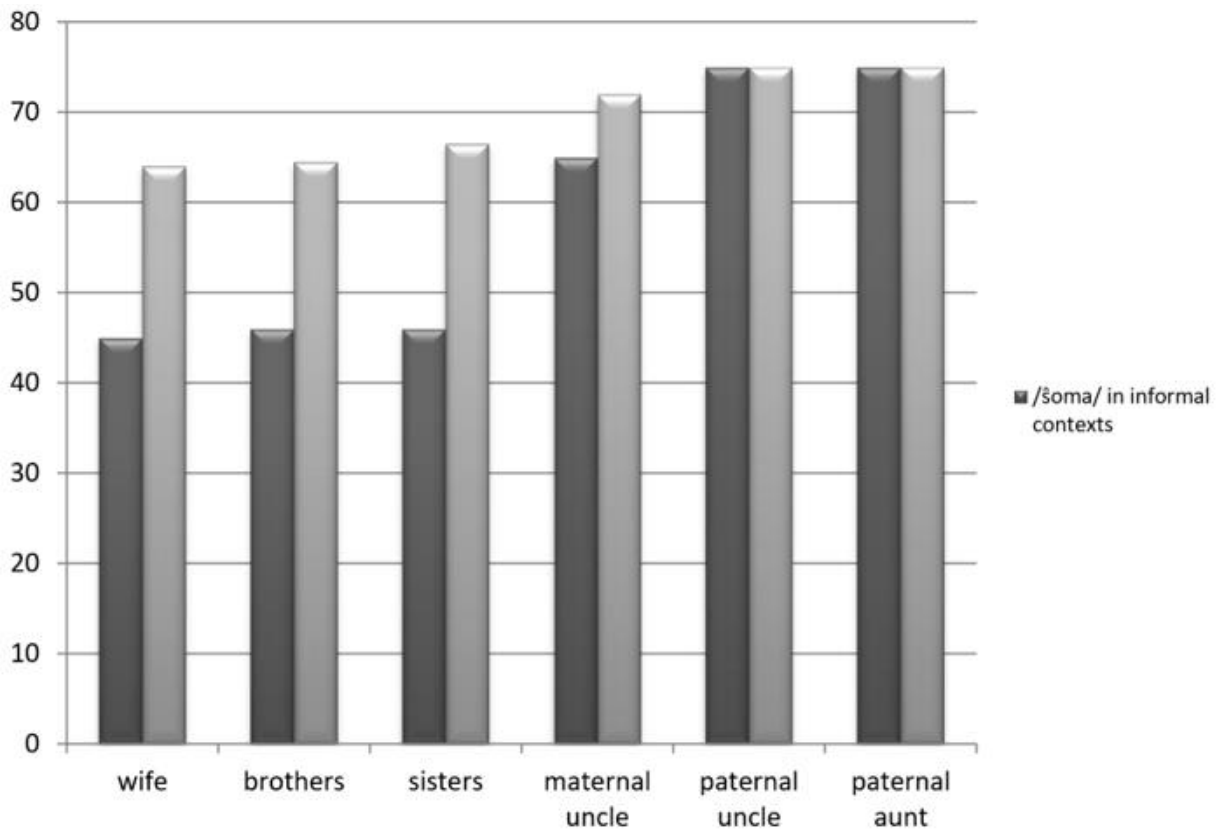
Figure 3: Interaction of the use of /šoma/ with intimacy in formal and informal contexts

Age of the addressee

In this section of the study, the address forms for three pairs of the addressees were analyzed to see if the age of the addressee has an influence on the address form, they receive. Older brothers and sisters were thus compared with their younger counterparts. Children over 12 were also compared with those below 12. The comparison of the pairs showed that in bothcontexts the older member of the pair was addressed by /šoma/ more than the younger member was. As figure 4 shows in informal contexts younger brothers ranked the last in receiving /šoma/ whereas in formal contexts this position was held by children below 12. This categorical influence of age on the use of address forms can be interpreted in light of the Islamic and Iranian culture of the participants which lay great emphasis for respecting the older kins.
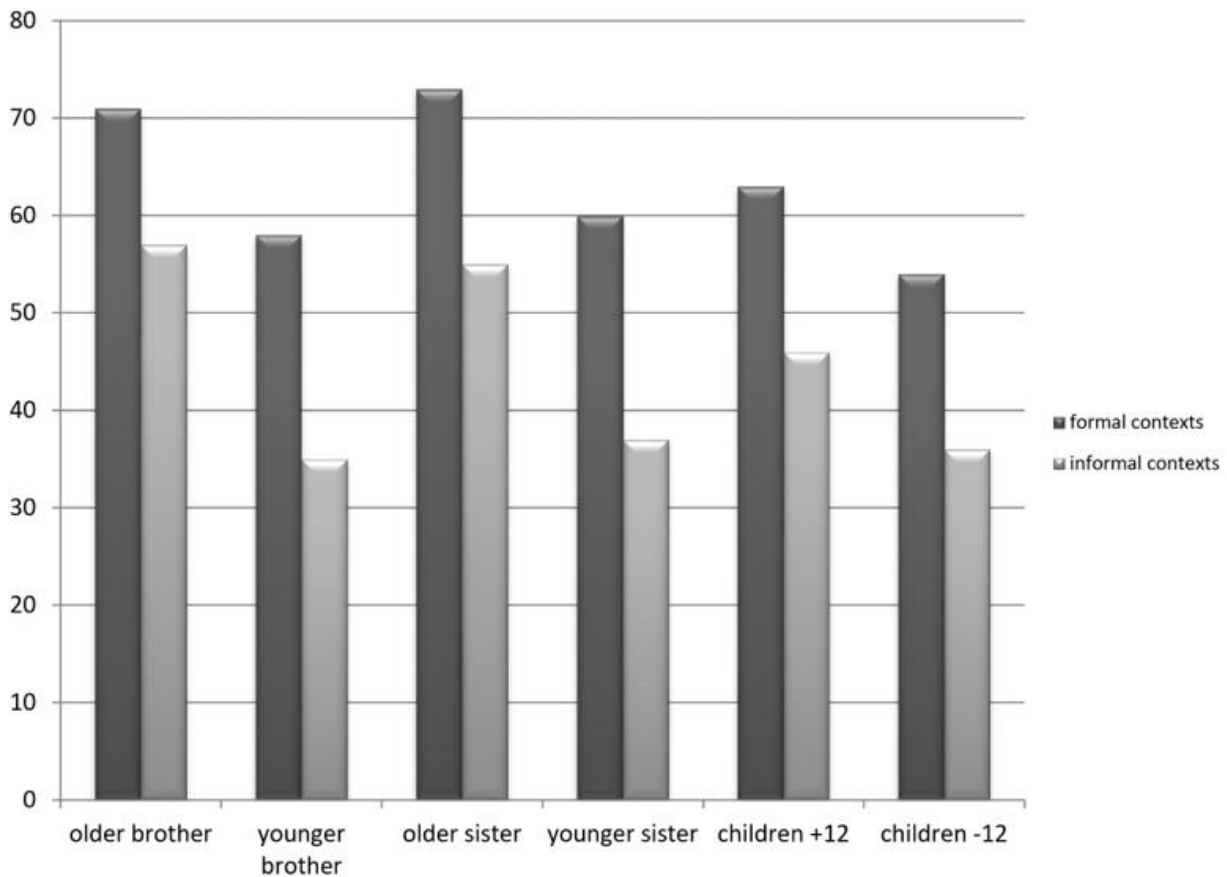
Figure 4: Interaction of the age of addressee with the polite form /šoma/

Differences between clerics and non-cleric Persian speakers in their useof address forms

In this part of the analysis the findings of this study were compared and contrasted with those of Keshavarz (2001) to see how differently Iranian clerics use these two forms of address from the non-cleric Persian speakers. The comparison of the data showed that although there are

many similarities between the two groups, there is also a noticeable degree of difference. The findings of Keshavarz's study revealed that the frequency of /šoma/ for addressing fathers and mothers in informal contexts were 80% and 76.67% respectively. These percentages were 97.3 and 96 for the participants of this study. Keshavarz (ibid.) also reported that the use of /šoma/ in informal contexts for older brothers and sisters were 32% and 28.67% respectively whereas in this study they were 76% and 73.3%. The interesting point is that the younger brothers and sisters in this study received more /šoma/ than the older brothers and sisters in Keshavarz's study. It was also reported by Keshavarz (ibid.) that the percentage of /šoma/ addressed to younger brothers and sisters in informal contexts were 14 and 10.67 respectively. However, these percentages were 46.6% and 49.3% in this study. The use of /to/ in informal contexts was also more than /šoma/ in that study while this was the reverse here.

The similar point between the two studies was that both found an increase in the use of /šoma/ and a decrease in the use of /to/ when the context shifted from informal to formal. However, this change in the patterns of use was much more noticeable in Keshavarz's study than in the present one. In fact as reported by Keshavarz the use of /šoma/increased from 12%, 32%, 28.67%, 14%, 10.67%, 9.33% and 12% to 60.67%, 68.69%, 47.33%, 34.67%, 52%, 41.33% and 46.67% from informal to formal contexts in cases of spouses, elder brothers, elder sisters, younger brothers, younger sisters, children under 12 and children over 12 respectively. This proves that although formality of context had an influence on the use of address forms in both studies, this influence was very trivial for the participants of the present study (i.e. clerics) while it was interestingly significant for non-cleric Persian speakers. **Table 1** summarize how the formality of context were influential in clerics' speech community).

As far as the sex and age of the addressee is concerned, the former had little effect in both contexts, while the latter had an obvious effect in both contexts especially in informal contexts. Quite differently, Keshavarz reported that both age and sex were defining factors in his study with the former outweighing the latter in informal context and the latter outweighing the former in formal contexts.

Table 1: Formality of context and clerics' speech community

	Spouse	Older brothers	Older sisters	Younger brothers	Younger sisters	Children under 12	Children over 12
/šoma/ in informal contexts	12	32	28.67	14	10.67	9.33	12
/šoma/ in formal contexts	60.67	68.67	47.33	34.67	52	41.33	46.67

Discussion and Conclusion

The results of this study indicated that in clerics' speech community variables such as the formality of the context or level of intimacy, though influential in the choice of one address form rather than the other, is not much so in comparison with that in non-cleric communities. This lend support to the fact that language is a dynamic tool whose application is dependent on many different variables and that different groups within a single linguistic community may use language in fundamentally different ways. Such categorical differences in the use of language between different groups can be sign of their intra-group solidarity and inter-group distinctiveness.

As was noticed in the result section of this study, one of the outstanding points about the clerics' speech community is their tendency to use /šoma/ much more often than /to/. this noticeable over tendency for the use of /šoma/ led the researcher to discuss the point with some clergymen to see how this issue is interpreted and justified by them. Three clerics who had also participated in the study were chosen for this purpose. They all referred to some more or less similar points in this respect. They firstly justified this behavior (i.e. over tendency to use /šoma/) on the grounds that /to/is a rather impolite form of address and its use for addressing someone may be interpreted as an act of degrading someone's face irrespective of his or her age and level of intimacy. More interestingly, they referred to the issue that /šoma/, although a quite polite form of address is not among the absolutely polite forms of address. These participants referred to some forms such as /hazrat-e-a:li/,ha:j-a:qa/,/hajkhanu:m/ and etc. as more polite than mere /šoma/ (see Keshavarz,1988 for more information about the use of such terms and the effect of Islamic revolution on Persian address).

The other point that was referred to by these clerics as the justification for clerics' over tendency to use /šoma/ was a social issue. They all, directly or indirectly, asserted that because of their social status, clerics are expected to be more polite in their use of language than others are. In fact, they believed, many terms and expressions that are neutral for the ordinary speakers of Persian to use are considered as impolite if they are used by a cleric. This can certainly be attributed to the role of religious guides clergymen play in the society.

In sum, we can conclude that the use of language varies in light of many different variables. However, the influence of these variables is not the same for all speakers of the language. Some variables may seriously affect the language of one group of the society but be much less influential on the speech another group. All these confirm how interrelated and inseparable language and society are.

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