Brother Bell's Audience Design: Forms of Address among Latter-day Saint Young Adults

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In this paper, I analyze forms of address between Latter-day Saint (Mormon) young adults. In American English, title + last name (TLN) is typically used for older, superior, or unfamiliar addressees while first name (FN) is directed towards younger, subordinate, or familiar addressees (Brown & Gilman 1960). In the Mormon context, the TLN form is *Brother* or *Sister* followed by a surname (Fogg 1990). While many other studies analyze address forms between individuals with varying power or age differences (Brown & Ford 1961; Wood & Ryan 1991; Murray 2002; Dickey 1997), this study focuses those who are of similar age and power—particularly, young married individuals—and what factors determine the form of address used.

A survey was administered to most of the young, married members of a Latter-day Saint congregation in northeastern Georgia. This congregation was selected due to its particularly high percentage of younger couples. Participants were asked to indicate, for each of four different situations, what form of address they would use for each other participant. They also rated on a scale of 1 to 5 how well they know the person. In total, I collected 5147 forms of address from 31 individuals.

The four situations were modeled after Bell's (1984) Audience Design, which consists of four audience types: *addressees*, *auditors*, *overhearers*, and *eavesdroppers*. *Addressees* are known, ratified, and addressed participants in a conversation. *Auditors* are ratified and known but remain unaddressed; *overhearers* are neither addressed nor ratified, but are known by the speaker; and *eavesdroppers* are unaddressed, unratified, and unknown. Bell proposes an implicational hierarchy in that if one linguistic variable is affected by one audience member, it must also be similarly affected by members closer in proximity to the speaker (Bell 1984:160).

I use the data collected by these surveys to show that the form of address used between equals is determined by a number of variables. Not surprisingly, familiarity is the strongest factor in predicting whether TLN or FN is used. However, when the person is present but not specifically addressed (corresponding to Bell's *auditor*), TLN is used more than expected, even when the speaker knows the person well (Figure 1).

The sex of the speaker and addressee are key factors as well. Independent of how well they know each other, women used a significantly higher percentage of FN with other women than men did with men (Figure 2). This is especially true if the other woman is an *addressee* or an *auditor*. Additionally, men are more affected by an auditor and are less likely to use FN than women.

Finally, age difference was not a predictor of which form of address was used, and only reflected social networks among the population. Specifically, people within 6 years of age (or rather, if they were once teenagers at the same time) tended to know each other better and were thus more likely to use FN with each other. Consequently, an age difference of over 6 years resulted in an increased use of TLN, even if the addressee was significantly *younger* than the speaker. This is unexpected since TLN is usually reserved for those older than the speaker.

The findings of this study show that the robust and productive address system in the Mormon community is determined by factors other than age and familiarity as it is in other communities. Additionally, this shows that there is in fact variation between equals which can be partially explained by Audience Design. This study also puts into question the implicational hierarchy of Audience Design since speakers, especially men, use less FN with an *auditor*, while the other three audience types were not affected in this way.

Figure 1: Percentage of first name use in the four situations for each of the five familiarity levels, showing that FN is used less for auditors.

Figure 2: Percentage of first name use by gender for each situation, showing that women use more FN than any other gender interaction.
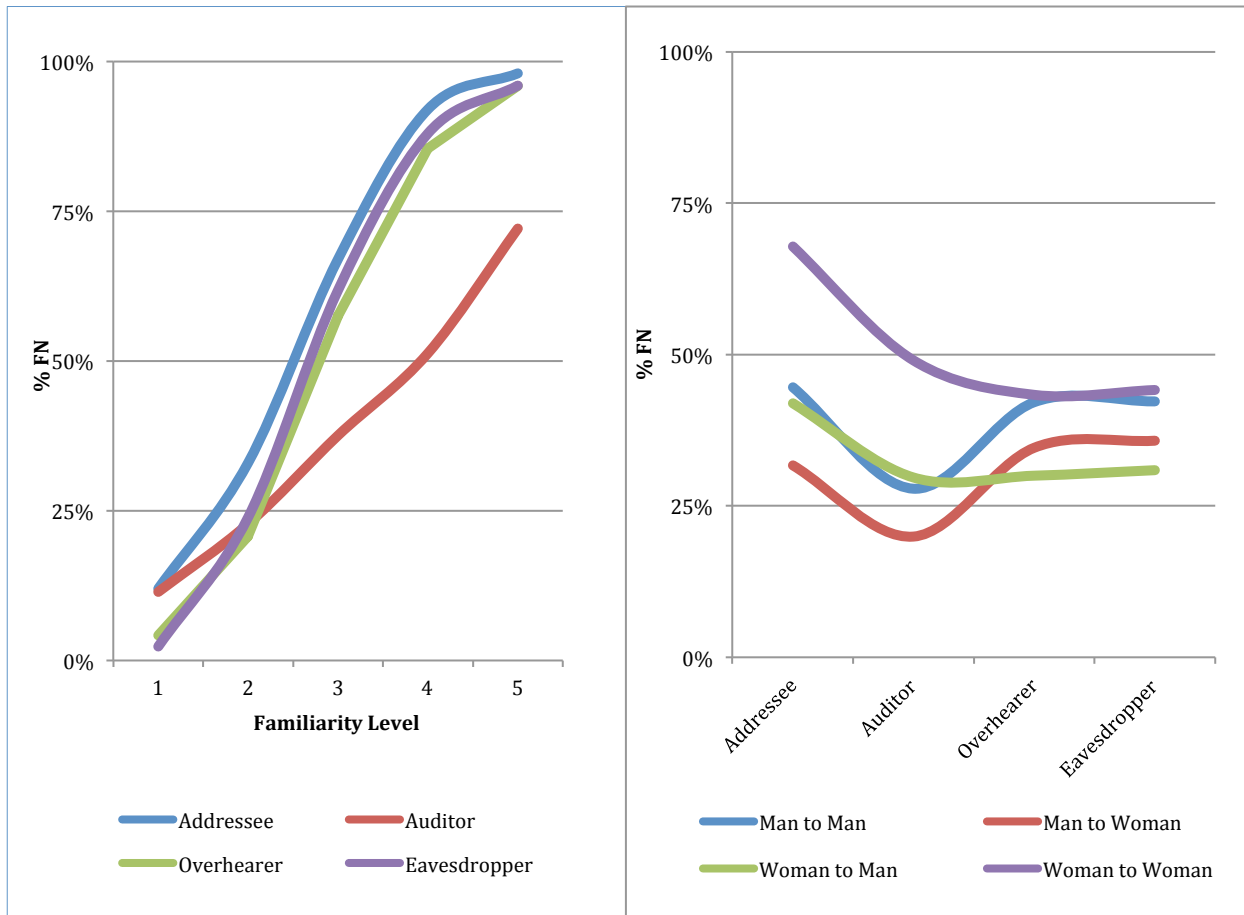
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