A New Look at Address in American English: The Rules Have Changed

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This essay replicates the landmark research done by Roger Brown and Marguerite Ford (1961) on forms of address in dyadic encounters in American English–more specifically, on the choice speakers make between the use of an addressee's first name and his or her title plus last name. The results show that many of the rules governing address have changed greatly over the past two generations: the use of first names is more common now in encounters involving two newly-introduced adults, in other adult encounters in which there is a difference between the speaker's and addressee's occupational status and/or a 15-year-or-greater difference between their ages, and in encounters in which the speaker is a child and the addressee is an adult. These changes are linked to Americans' evolving perceptions of what criteria are important in determining a social pecking order, and to semantic shifts in Americans' concepts of *distance*, *formality*, *intimacy*, and *status*.

I

In the introduction to their article "Address in American English," Roger Brown and Marguerite Ford state that "[t]he principal option of address in [dyadic encounters in] American English is the choice between use of the first name . . . and use of a title with the last name" (1961, 375). In the course of that article, Brown and Ford work out an empirically-based system of usage in terms of two major dimensions, intimacy (based on shared values and frequency of contact) and status (based on age and occupational differences), noting that

> [t]he Mutual TLN [title plus last name] goes with distance or formality and the Mutual FN [first name] with a slightly greater degree of intimacy. In nonreciprocal address the TLN is used to the person of higher status and the FN to the person of lower status. One form expresses both distance and deference; the other form expresses both intimacy and condescension [1961, 380].[1]

Brown and Ford based their conclusions on conversational data collected from four sources. First, they examined "thirty-eight plays written by American authors, performed since 1939, and anthologized in three volumes of *Best American Plays*" (1961, 375; the titles of the plays are not provided, but readers are referred generally to Gassner 1947, 1952, and 1958). The plays were chosen deliberately to reflect a broad geographic, ethnic, and socioeconomic cross-section of the United States, as well as a diverse medley of situations.

Brown and Ford's second source of data consisted of 214 dyadic encounters involving 82 employees from a drafting firm located in Boston. As they explain, "[f]or 2 months . . . [one of the male employees] took advantage of leisure moments to jot down for us instances of linguistic address overheard from his fellow workers" (1961, 376).

Third, Brown and Ford used written questionnaires completed by 34 male business executives aged 30 to 38. The men were from diverse geographic regions in the United States, and had been gathered together as the result of being named Alfred P. Sloan Fellows at MIT during 1958-59 (1961, 376).

Finally, Brown and Ford borrowed some of their data from the Psychological Field Station of the University of Kansas. They made "an extended study of 10 'specimen records,' each of which record the events and conversations in a full-day of the life of a child," and "work[ed] with a set of brief 'behavior settings observations' made on 56 [additional] children" (1961, 376). It is not clear exactly when these data were originally recorded, though Brown and Ford acknowledge the Directors of the Field Station from 1954.

The variety in these four groups of data and the general scientific rigor with which Brown and Ford undertook their study lend credence to their final analysis, the details of which, as will become clear, do not suffer for their lack of intuitive, common-sense appeal. Here I wish to suggest, however, that in the 40 years since Brown and Ford's essay was published, either the conventions of address or the basic concepts of *distance*, *formality*, *intimacy*, and *status*—or perhaps both—have changed for a large portion of the American public.

Impressionistic and anecdotal evidence for such changes is plentiful. An increasingly large number of undergraduates, for example—no longer just those who are old enough to be labeled "nontraditional," or

who are especially precocious—address me and other of their professors, whom they may have just met, by our first names. Conversely, more and more titled professionals seem to *prefer* to be called by their first names, though sometimes in conjunction with their titles. Thus has been created the "title plus first name" form of address, as in "Dr. Laura" Schlesinger, the ubiquitous author and television show host, and "Dr. Phil" McGraw, the psychotherapist who appears so frequently on Oprah Winfrey's talk-show.[2]

Again, I note that children, even very young children, now seem often to address their playmates' parents on a first-name basis—and, in fact, are not infrequently prompted to do so by the parents themselves (cf. Spencer 1998). And finally, if my memory is correct, the vast majority of the telemarketers, journalists, cashiers, garage attendants, restaurant servers, bank tellers, and others with whom I have interacted over the past few years have called me by my first name, often even asking me directly what that name is (if they have not read it off a credit card or account statement, say), though these people and I have routinely been strangers with little chance of meeting one another again.

Two questions therefore suggest themselves: First, have the sociolinguistic rules that govern address in American English—or again, the semantic underpinnings of those rules—indeed changed to such a degree that Brown and Ford's appraisal is obsolete, and if so, what are the new rules? Second, if the rules or their semantic underpinnings have changed, how can we account for these changes? It is these two questions to which I will turn in the remainder of this essay.

II

To answer the first question posed above requires some near replication of Brown and Ford's research—not just the methods *per se*, but the basic tenets underlying them. Brown and Ford (1961, 375) note, for example, that

> [t]o discover the norms of address in American English we require a large sample of usage. The range of the subject population is vast but the uniformity must be great. Some sensible compromise is required between the stratified national sample dictated by the scope of the problem and the unsystematic observation of one's friends dictated by the probable simplicity of its solution.

For the present study I was able to analyze over 9,000 dyadic encounters involving personal address. Those encounters derive from four discrete sources intended to parallel Brown and Ford's as nearly as possible.

My first source of data is two one-hour episodes of each of 38 television shows produced in the United States since the fall of 1997. Combined, these shows represent a diverse assortment of geographic regions and a demographically broad cross-section of characters; they yielded 4,332 instances of address in dyadic encounters, 3,416 of which involved an addressee's first name or title plus last name. (The appendix lists the names of the shows I used.) Brown and Ford (1961, 375-76) say of their data derived from plays that

> [o]f course these materials are not a record of actual speech from the characters named but are the speech constructed for those characters by playwrights. Probably playwrights accurately reproduce the true norms of address. . . .

I wish to voice the same general disclaimer and express the same level of confidence about my television data and the writers who produced them.

I also analyzed the actual usage of 37 people involved in 217 dyadic encounters in a Kansas City, Missouri, accounting firm. Following Brown and Ford's example, I persuaded an acquaintance who worked at the firm to "take advantage of her leisure moments" over a two-month period to write down every instance of address that she overheard from her fellow workers. Again in the manner of Brown and Ford (1961, 376), my informant recorded for each speaker and addressee his or her approximate age, gender, and general occupation in the multi-level hierarchy (for my purposes, that hierarchy was divided into Partners, Senior Associates, Junior Associates, and Receptionists/Clerks/Other Staff).

Third, I relied on written questionnaires completed between September 1997 and December 2000 by 389 of my undergraduate and 47 of my graduate students at Kansas State University, as well as by 621 of their parents and 309 of their grandparents. Again following Brown and Ford (1961, 376),[3]

> [e]ach [informant] was asked to write down the full names and positions of four persons whom he was accustomed to see nearly every day at his place of business [or school], and he was to distribute his selections so as to include: one person equal to himself in the organizational hierarchy with

whom he was on close or intimate terms, one person equal to himself with
whom he was on distant or formal terms, one person superior to himself
in the organizational hierarchy, one person subordinate to himself in the
hierarchy. After listing the names the informant was asked to write down
for each person listed the exact words that he (the informant) would
customarily speak in greeting that person for the first time each day.

All the student respondents were instructed to assume that their "organi-
zational hierarchy" included everyone affiliated with the university; for
the parents and grandparents, questionnaires were given only to those
people whose "place of business" provided the opportunity for the four
kinds of hierarchical interactions Brown and Ford described.[4]

Finally, I collected the actual usage as produced by 392 people in
214 dyadic encounters, all of which I recorded between June 1998 and
December 2000 in diverse midwestern locations. To follow Brown and
Ford's model, each interaction involved at least one child.

In the specifics of analyzing all my data I again copied Brown and
Ford (1961, 376):

FN was taken to include full first names (e.g., Robert), familiar abbrevia-
tions (e.g., Bob), and diminutive forms (e.g., Bobbie). . . . Titles for the
purpose of this classification include, in addition to Mr., Mrs., and Miss,
such occupational titles as Dr., Senator, Major, and the like.

Moreover, I disregarded those instances of address that combined titles
and first names (see n. 2), regardless of their source; I will discuss them
separately elsewhere.[5]

In deriving their exact protocol from their four groups of data,
Brown and Ford (1961, 376) first examined

[a]pproximately one-third of the plays . . . in an effort to discover rules
that would summarize all of the instances of address they contained. The
resulting provisional rules were then tested against a second set of plays
and underwent some revision. The revised rules proved adequate to the
description of all instances of address in a third and final set of plays. The
. . . data [from the other three sources] were used as additional checks on
the rules induced from the plays. . . .

While I initially attempted to follow Brown and Ford's procedure here,
the great degree of variability in each of my sources of data ultimately
persuaded me that it would be necessary to report the protocol as well
as the many exceptions to it. Brown and Ford present their conventions

of address as categorical or near-categorical rules: their protocol accounts for all the data from all their sources, or at least appears to. As will become clear shortly, however, my data are variable enough that they demand a somewhat fuller accounting.

The question therefore also arises as to whether any of my sources of data contributed more to that variability than did the others—that is, whether the variation in the questionnaire data, say, is significantly different from that in the television data (see n. 4). But the answer is negative: the F-distribution in a standard analysis of variance comparing the levels of variation in my four sources of data consistently revealed p values less than 0.05. In the tables that follow, then, I generally present my data without regard for their specific source.

III

Brown and Ford's data revealed two major reciprocal patterns of address in American English, one involving first names (FN), the other involving titles plus last names (TLN). They explain (1961, 376-77) that

> [t]he vast majority of all dyads . . . exchange FN (Mutual FN). Indeed, where the actual name is not known there occur sometimes what may be called generic first names; these include the Mack, Jack, and Buddy of taxi drivers. Mutual TLN is most commonly found between newly introduced adults. The distinction between the two patterns is, primarily one of degree of acquaintance with the degree required for the Mutual FN being less for younger people than for older people and less where the members of the dyad are of the same sex than where they are of different sex.

And my data duplicate some of these findings. It is still true, for example, that mutual FN is the most frequently occurring form of address in American English; indeed, this pattern occurred in 1,041—or nearly 75%—of my reciprocal dyadic encounters. It is also true that "generic first names" still occasionally occur, though in my data such names tend toward the likes of *man*, *bitch*, *dude*, *dog*, and *girl(friend)*, and may occur even when the actual name is known.

On the other hand, mutual TLN is no longer the undisputed norm between newly-introduced adults, and for a large minority of Americans the difference between mutual FN and mutual TLN is no longer "primarily one of degree of acquaintance": 426 first-time encounters occurred between adults in my television data, and in 149 of them (35%) mutual FN was used. And it is also no longer true that "the degree [of

acquaintance] required for the Mutual FN" is "less for younger people than for older people and less where the members of the dyad are of the same sex than where they are of different sex." In fact, the narrow range of percentages shown in table 1 depicts clearly that, in my television data, no significant difference exists between the use of mutual FN among the newly-introduced members of three age groups and both genders (using a standard multivariate analysis of variance, or MANOVA, the level of significance = $p < 0.01$).

Table 1: % of Mutual FN Address in Newly-introduced Adults.

Age of Speaker/Addressee*	Gender of Speaker/Addressee	
	same	different
young → young	38	35
young → middle-aged	36	36
young → old	34	33
middle-aged → young	36	36
middle-aged → middle-aged	35	35
middle-aged → old	34	35
old → young	36	35
old → middle-aged	35	34
old → old	35	35

*For convenience, *young* refers to speakers aged 20 to 35, *middle-aged* to speakers 36 to 50, and *old* to speakers above 50 (all age assignments are approximate). The speaker/addressee relationship in each category is indicated with a right-facing arrow, thus: Speaker → Addressee.

(MANOVA level of significance: $p < 0.01$)

The third dominant pattern of address in Brown and Ford's (1961, 377) data involves nonreciprocality—that is, one person in a dyad uses FN and the other uses TLN:

> There are two kinds of relation that can generate this pattern. The first is a difference of age: children say TLN to adults and receive FN; among adults an elder by approximately 15-or-more years receives TLN and gives FN to his junior. The second is a difference of occupational status: this may be a relation of direct and enduring subordination (e.g., master-servant, employer-employee, officer-enlisted man); it may be a relation of direct but temporary subordination, involving someone in a service occupation (e.g., waiter, bootblack) and a customer; it may be an enduring difference of occupational status that does not involve direct subordination (e.g., United States senators have higher status than firemen).

It is this pattern with which my data conflict the greatest; in fact, if Brown and Ford's assertions are intended as categorical rules, my data do not support them at all.[6]

Regarding the age-related hierarchies that Brown and Ford describe, it is no longer true that "children say TLN to adults and receive FN," or that "among adults an elder by approximately 15-or-more years receives TLN and gives FN to his junior." In the first instance, the data in table 2 suggest that, although adults do still address children with FN 100% of the time, it is no longer possible to predict with great certainty *how* a child will address an adult: TLN still occurs more often than FN, but FN was used 42% of the time. As far as I know, none of these involved a child addressing a relative or teacher, and when I queried the principals of the three public elementary schools in the town in which I live (two registering surprise that I even asked the question), they told me that students are expected to use TLN with their teachers. On the other hand, as early as 1988, 24 of the public schools in New York City allowed students to use FN with their teachers (because "it's respectful to children, as well as warm and friendly" [Spencer 1998, 178]).

In the second instance, too, the data in table 2 reveal that well over half—58%—of adult speakers used FN when addressing other adults 15 or more years older than they; not surprisingly, 100% of those older adults used FN when addressing other adults 15 or more years younger.

Concerning occupational status as a cause of nonreciprocal TLN/FN, the data in table 2 show clearly that relationships of "direct and enduring subordination" are no longer as important as they once were. Such relationships now elicit the FN pattern 28% of the time when the lower-status person is the speaker (when the higher-status person is the speaker, he or she uses FN 100% of the time, which is what Brown and Ford predict). Interestingly, the beginnings of change in this portion of Brown and Ford's protocol are apparent in the resolutions made as early as the mid-1980s by the upper management of some large corporations to abolish many of their executives' titles—including *senior vice president*, *first vice president*, *executive vice president*, and *assistant vice president*—"to create a more shirt-sleeves, first name style" (Christiana 1987, 8). I note, too, that this trend is limited not just to American businesses: shortly after Tony Blair took office as Prime Minister of England in 1997, he vowed to eliminate the titles of the members of the British cabinet (Underhill 1997, 16).

Table 2: % of FN in Expected Nonreciprocal TLN/FN Encounters.

By Relative Age of Speaker/Addressee*

child → adult	42	adult → older adult	58
adult → child	100	older adult → adult	100

By Relative Occupational Status of Speaker/Addressee

	Person in Lower-status Position	
	Speaker	Addressee
Direct and enduring subordination	28	100
Direct but temporary subordination	37	100
Enduring differences of occupational status	18	100

*The speaker/addressee relationship in each category is indicated with a right-facing arrow, thus: Speaker → Addressee. And the designation *older adult* refers to an adult 15 or more years older than the speaker/addressee.

Relationships of "direct but temporary subordination . . . involving someone in a service occupation" also have a limited impact on invoking TLN/FN in my data, for the lower-status person used FN in 37% of such encounters when he or she was the speaker (when the higher-status person was the speaker he or she used FN 100% of the time, which follows Brown and Ford's protocol). FN again seems to be replacing TLN, and again apparently to create a more informal and friendly context: I queried several restaurant servers, department store employees, and telemarketers regarding their use of FN with me, and their response was almost always that they were merely following the formal policies of their companies or the explicit directions of their supervisors, and that the ultimate goal was, in the words of one, "to let the customer know we care."

Finally, table 2 indicates that "enduring differences of occupational status not involving direct subordination" elicited FN 18% of the time when the lower-status person was the speaker (once again, as Brown and Ford's protocol predicts, FN was used 100% of the time when the upper-status person was the speaker). It is worth noting, too, that in my data situations of this sort often elicited a different nonreciprocal pattern. On one episode of NBC's *The West Wing*, for example, President Bartlett summoned his former pastor, also clearly a close personal friend, to the White House for spiritual counsel, and the pastor, after entering the Oval Office, candidly admitted that he no longer knew how to address Bartlett—as "Mr. President" (i.e., by a title alone, the most formal form of address in Brown and Ford's protocol) or, as was

typical earlier in their relationship, by his first name, Jed. Bartlett hesitated for only a moment before saying, "Call me 'Mr. President,'" then explained that the deference was toward the status of the office, not the man holding the office.

In all five of these situations—two involving differences of age, and three involving differences of status—the discrepancy between Brown and Ford's data and mine indicates a shift toward reciprocality; in other words, the playing field for the speakers in these dyads has levelled somewhat over the past 40 years. And it is clear that this levelling has uniformly originated with those speakers who, in Brown and Ford's protocol, were being addressed with FN and were expected to respond with TLN—in other words, those who were at the lower ends of the dyadic pecking orders in question. This is an important point to which I will return later.

Because differences in two factors–age and status–generate the TLN/FN pattern, the question naturally arises as to whether one of those factors is more important than the other. Is there "proof that a difference on either dimension alone is able to generate the nonreciprocal pattern"? (Brown and Ford 1961, 377). Or, put another way, what form of address is used when the older person has the lower-status position (for example, as when a 65-year-old college student addresses a 45-year-old professor, or a 45-year-old Dean addresses a 65-year-old professor)?

According to Brown and Ford, the numerous instances of such encounters in their data were resolved uniformly "in accordance with occupational status," which they believe "is to be expected in a society whose values are more strongly linked to achieved personal attributes than to ascribed attributes" (1961, 377). In my data, too, status outweighs age: first, we can see in table 2 that while FN is now used to some degree in all those encounters in which Brown and Ford predict TLN/FN, it occurs more frequently in the two age-related scenarios than in the three status-related ones. Second, and more compellingly, in the encounters in which TLN/FN occurred in my data and the older speaker also had the lower-status position, on only one occasion did the older person use FN. (For the record, and because the exchange was especially interesting, I note that the exception involved me and one of my older students. I was 44, the student 72, and we were speaking privately in my office. "Congratulations, Mr. Smith," I said, in deference to his age. "Students rarely get perfect scores on my exams." "Thanks, Tom," he replied—then, his self-consciousness betraying his

own uncertainty as to the norms of address in such situations, he added, "or should I call you 'Professor'"?)[7]

<center>IV</center>

My empirical data do therefore support the impressionistic data offered earlier: at least some conventions of address in American English, or perhaps the semantic concepts of *distance, formality, intimacy,* and *status* that underlie those conventions, or both, have indeed changed for a large portion of the American public since Brown and Ford conducted their study. But what accounts for those changes?

By way of beginning an answer to this question, I first want to be clear about the fundamental differences between the three options for change discussed in the above paragraph. If only the conventions governing address have changed, then Americans still understand *distance, formality, intimacy,* and *status* in the same way as they were understood two generations ago, but no longer attach the same importance to age and/or occupational status in determining a social pecking order (that pecking order may no longer exist, or the various levels in it may have shifted). But if only the semantic concepts of *distance, formality, intimacy,* and *status* have changed, then the pecking order exists as before, but Americans have developed different ideas about what these four concepts entail. And of course the third option combines the first two: either the pecking order no longer exists or the levels in it have shifted, and so have Americans' notions of *distance, formality, intimacy,* and *status.*

The evidence supports this last option. First, sociologists have demonstrated that the levels of prestige Americans attach to a variety of occupations changed between 1964 and 1989. Hodges, Siegel, and Rossi (1964) had previously shown that these levels remained remarkably constant between 1925 and 1963. When another nationwide survey (having nearly 1200 respondents) was conducted in 1989, however, the investigators learned that while "[t]here was no upending of the prestige ladder, . . . a startling number of occupational titles saw their prestige change" (Nakao and Treas 1994, 17). In fact, of 160 occupational titles surveyed, 71 (44%) experienced a statistically significant change from the prestige levels that had been recorded in 1963: 57 increased, 14 decreased. For the most part, the relative rank-ordering of the occupations remained the same; what changed was the quantity of prestige associated with many of the jobs. Interestingly, many white-collar

professions—particularly those in technical fields, sales, and administra-
tive support—were given lower ratings of prestige, whereas—as the
researchers put it—"the picture [was] almost uniformly one of . . .
gains" for blue-collar workers, for those having service- and labor-
oriented jobs, and for those in the farming industry. Overall, the
investigators concluded that "[t]he American public no longer views
workers at the bottom of the occupational ladder as being so distant
from those on the middle rungs" (Nakao and Treas 1994, 17).

This shift in perceptions parallels the shifting indices of usage in
TLN and FN between Brown and Ford's data and mine. Of course the
cause-and-effect relationship cannot be proven, but I believe it is no
coincidence that Americans have, during roughly the same period of
time, both compressed the middle and lower portions of the occupational
pecking order in terms of prestige and re-evaluated the meaning of
"nonreciprocality" in terms of TLN/FN address. In other words, surely
it is much easier for a speaker to use FN when an addressee is perceived
as closer to him- or herself on the scale of occupational prestige, even
if the relative ordering of the two has not changed.

The pecking order for age has shifted as well, and in more clearcut
ways. By rearranging some of the data in table 1 and the top half of
table 2, I can show that Brown and Ford's rules for nonreciprocal
encounters are still valid when occupational status plays no role. In fact,
TLN is used in more than 96% of such greetings, but only when the
difference in ages is about 40 years or more. Therefore a 19-year-old
undergraduate student addressing a professor in his late 50s or early 60s
is much more likely to use TLN than if addressing one in his mid-40s.

Whether my informants generally have different semantic under-
standings of *distance*, *formality*, *intimacy*, and *status* than did Brown and
Ford's is a difficult question, not least because semantics is a discipline
that evolves rapidly and, at least in the estimation of some, cannot be
considered apart from syntax and pragmatics. I will therefore reserve for
a more appropriate venue all the formalistic considerations necessary to
entertain the question in the detail that it deserves, and say here merely
that my data do suggest these four terms are being perceived and used
differently now than they were when Brown and Ford were collecting
their data.

Briefly, the denotations of *distance* and *formality* seem to have taken
on an intensifier, such as *very* or *extremely*, so that what Americans
presently regard as "distant" and "formal" would have been perceived

two generations ago as "very distant" and "extremely formal," and what Americans of that earlier period regarded as "distant" and "formal" is now viewed as much less so. In the same way, *intimacy* is no longer based on "frequency" of contact as much as on simply "contact;" and it is the product of "shared" values—which Brown and Ford (1961, 377) say "may derive from kinship, from identity of occupation, sex, nationality, etc., or from some common fate"—only in the broad, nationalistic (or even global) sense. *Status*, too, is no longer based on "age differences [of 15 years or more]," but on age differences of 40 years or more (what would probably have been regarded formerly as "extreme age differences"); and no longer just on "occupational differences," but on "differences resulting from occupations that are perceived to be relatively far apart on the prestige scale."

The greater informality that has resulted from this semantic shifting is apparent throughout my data, and actually continues a trend that Brown and Ford noticed in their own work (1961, 377): "in English of the past . . . the Mutual FN is farther displaced from the Mutual TLN. . . ." Then, explaining how they arrived at this conclusion, Brown and Ford say that "In six American Plays . . . written between 1830 and 1911 the reciprocal FN between adults clearly implies a much longer and closer acquaintance than it does in contemporary usage (377)." We can infer that, if what appears to be a well-established trend continues, the day is perhaps not far off when nearly all Americans will use mutual FN with one another, thus rendering the mutual TLN and nonreciprocal TLN/FN exchanges virtually obsolete. (It is interesting, too, that this ongoing inclination toward greater informality mirrors what Brown and Ford [1961, 380] call a "conscious egalitarianism" that is developing in the second-person pronominal usage in the European and Indian languages which Brown and Gilman [1960] studied.)

Thus the United States appears to be in the midst of a major shift in norms governing address. Long-established social theory (see, e.g., Centers 1947) predicts that those Americans who will be most responsible for sustaining this trend are those in the lower echelons of the various pecking orders—the young, and those with proportionately less occupational prestige. Those at the top, like those at the top of most stratified groups, have too great a vested interest in maintaining the *status quo* to initiate change: they reap the verbal respect of their subordinates and control whether (and how fast) their linguistic relationships become more intimate. As Brown and Ford put it, "The

gate to linguistic intimacy is kept by the person of higher status" (1961, 381). They later explain further:

> The superior is the pacesetter because the willingness of the person of lower status to enter into association can be taken for granted and there is little risk that a superior will be rebuffed whereas the risk would be great if the inferior were to initiate acts of association. (384)

And we have seen that the increase in mutual FN in what Brown and Ford had formerly classed as nonreciprocal encounters supports this: in every instance, the move toward greater reciprocity has been initiated by speakers in the lower categories of age and occupational status.

<div align="center">V</div>

Brown and Ford's formal protocol for FN and TLN in American English can be summarized with a series of questions that adult speakers and listeners of the mid-20th century unconsciously used in selecting and interpreting forms of address:

> 1. Does the addressee have a higher occupational status? If so, use TLN. If not,
> 2. Is the addressee more than 15 years older? If so, use TLN. If not,
> 3. Is the addressee a relatively new acquaintance? If so, use TLN. If not,
> 4. Use FN.

For children, the protocol was much briefer:

> 1. Is the addressee an adult? If so, use TLN. If not,
> 2. Use FN.

Of course, the rules are not really as simple as I have stated them here (e.g., in rule one for adults, what does "relatively new" mean? and in rule two, how much higher must the addressee's occupational status be?), but my representations do give some idea of the sequential decision-making process that the speakers in Brown and Ford's data followed.

The same questions, however, would have to be modified to account for a large proportion of the late 20th century adult speakers in my data:

> 1. Does the addressee have an occupational status that is much higher? If so, use TLN. If not,
> 2. Is the addressee more than 40 years older? If so, use TLN. If not,
> 3. Is the addressee a relatively new acquaintance with whom I feel uncomfortable using FN? If so, use TLN. If not,
> 4. Use FN.

And for children:

1. Is the addressee an adult with whom I feel uncomfortable using FN? If so, use TLN. If not,
2. Use FN.

These rules, too, are not as clearcut as they appear, but they make the point that the norms of address in American English have changed considerably over the past two generations.

I have suggested that these changes are the result both of a modification to the social pecking order in the United States and of a semantic shift in Americans' understanding of the concepts *distance*, *formality*, *intimacy*, and *status*. I have also suggested that the origins of this modification and shift can be found in an alteration of cultural values begun and sustained by those in the lower echelons of the age and occupational status pecking orders—an alteration which, if it continues in the same direction in which it is presently moving, will probably one day result in the almost exclusive use of FN.

Brown and Ford produced a landmark study, one that presented for the first time a clear picture of how Americans address one another, and why. But the rules presented in that study have changed as the natural product of parallel changes in American norms and values, and we should expect such changes to continue as the culture in which they operate continues to evolve.

Appendix

The 38 one-hour television shows used as data:

All My Children	JAG
Ally McBeal	Judging Amy
As the World Turns	L.A. Doctors
Baywatch	Law & Order
Baywatch Hawaii	Law & Order: SVU
Beverly Hills 90210	Nash Bridges
Boston Public	NYPD Blue
Buffy the Vampire Slayer	Once and Again
Chicago Hope	One Life to Live
CSI: Crime Scene Investigation	Passions
Dark Angel	The Practice
Diagnosis: Murder	Providence
The District	Star Trek: The Next Generation
Ed	Star Trek Vogager

ER   Third Watch
The Fugitive   Touched by an Angel
General Hospital   Walker, Texas Ranger
Gideon's Crossing   The West Wing
Guiding Light   The X-Files

Notes

1. Brown and Ford's research actually extended the work of Brown and Gilman (1960), who examined the synchronic/diachronic variable use of second-person pronouns in 20 languages used in Europe or India (e.g., French *tu/vous* and German *du/Sie*). It also expanded to American English an intense interest that had, to that point, existed only with regard to other languages. Up through the 1950s, this interest was primarily anthropological and psychological; then, with the burgeoning of sociolinguistics in the 1960s, the intellectual curiosity over how people address one another, and why, spread to yet another group of scholars. In all, a substantial body of research spanning half a century existed by the mid-1980s, a comprehensive review of which can be found in Philipsen and Huspek (1985). (One frequently-reprinted article deserving of special mention is Ervin-Tripp [1969], which actually offers a more detailed protocol for address in American English than Brown and Ford's. I do not use the protocol in the present essay only because, as Ervin-Tripp states clearly, it is more impressionistic than empirical, and intended to be a logical model rather than a psychologically real description of verbal behavior.) Scholarly interest in address systems has continued since the mid-1980s, but at a somewhat slower pace. In American English, much of that work has centered specifically on gender-related issues (e.g., Hinton 1992 and Sutton 1992), though other languages continue to receive more comprehensive attention (e.g., Parkinson 1985 and Potter 1999).

2. The "title plus first name" formula does not appear in the protocols of Brown and Ford (1961) or Ervin-Tripp (1969), and its creation and use seem not yet to have been studied formally, at least with regard to American English. Those who favor it, however, are almost certainly attempting to appear more affable and approachable without altogether abandoning their credentialed authority—or, in Brown and Ford's terminology, they are at once reducing the distance and formality, increasing the intimacy, and preserving the status between themselves and those with whom they interact. I should note, too, that the "title plus first name" formula is not restricted to only those professionals who are in the public eye, as my examples may suggest: my chiropractor and my dentist both call themselves "Dr. David," a favorite clergyman prefers "Pastor Jack," and a colleague from another university favors "Dr. Dave" (and has even published a textbook subtitled *Dr. Dave's Guide to Writing the College Paper* [Williams 2000]).

3. To avoid the stylistic awkwardness that would result from changing the several instances of *he*, *his*, *him*, and *himself* in the following passage (and elsewhere) to *he or she*, *his or her*, *him or her*, and *himself or herself*, I have

retained the original masculine pronouns as Brown and Ford wrote them. I do, however, intend that they refer to members of both genders.

4. I will acknowledge formally (as Brown and Ford did not) that questionnaires, by their inherent design, rely on informants to know and report the truth, which may not always be possible or, from the informants' perspective, even desirable. In other words, informants' perceptions must be trusted, and so also their lack of desire to second-guess what the researcher considers to be "correct" answers (Labov 1975). When questionnaires provide the only data for a study, it is impossible to know exactly how those data vary from data that might have been gathered through other, perhaps more reliable—but also much more time- and energy-intensive—means (such as participant-observation). However, when data from multiple sources are pooled together, as I have done in the present study, a simple analysis of variance can be used to determine whether the data from any one source vary widely from those from the other sources. As will become clear shortly, the test showed my questionnaire data to be statistically reliable.

5. I should be clear at this point that all my data resulted from convenience rather than true randomness; in other words, my informant populations were defined by opportunity, not chance, which statisticians routinely warn against (Linn 1983, 240; Davis 1990, 6). To say that I again followed Brown and Ford (as well as the great majority of researchers in the social sciences), though true, would be too easy; a more responsible explanation is that early on I had to weigh the relative ease of convenience sampling against the possibility that my conclusions would be invalid for the larger population my informants represent (i.e., all users of American English). For the purposes of this study I willingly make such a trade, believing that it was the sort of "sensible compromise" Brown and Ford would endorse.

6. Brown and Ford do not provide percentage frequencies for any of the patterns they document; as I noted earlier and mention again here, we are left with what appear to be categorical rules of address, and have to wonder whether such categoricality truly occurs (surely not) or reflects some majority of cases (more to the point, *what* majority of cases). Lacking these frequencies, of course, I cannot measure the statistical significance of my data against Brown and Ford's, and am left with what appear to be merely very interesting trends.

7. As a final note to this section, I will observe (purely impressionistically) that one scenario in which the nonreciprocal use of TLN/FN may especially resist change involves relationships that are established early in our lives, then end, then reform later in our lives after the relative age- and status-positions in question have changed (see Mundy 1998). For example, I find it difficult to break the habit of TLN when I see former high school teachers, even though there may exist only 10 years' (or less) difference in our ages, even though my occupational status as professor now surpasses theirs, and even though they invite me to use FN.

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