Abstract

The overall purpose of this study is to provide a descriptive analysis of the different terms of address that Palestinian interlocutors may choose from to address each other in different contexts. The study also correlates the choice of address forms in Palestinian Arabic with social variables including interlocutors’ relationship, formality of context and participants’ social characteristics of age, gender, education, occupation, spoken dialect, etc. The hypothesis is that variations in the forms of address are correlated with age, sex, educational and occupational rank of the interlocutors as well as the setting, intimacy and social distance. With naturally-occurring examples of address forms gathered by 8 fieldworkers in the research site of Gaza, it was found that that the choices interlocutors make are dictated by the perceived social relationship that exists between them with kinship and degree of acquaintanceship being very significant. Examination of the data also reveals that interlocutors’ social characteristics of age, gender, occupation, education, etc. are also highly significant in the choice of address forms. For example, people who share the same gender, age, or occupational and educational rank show what Brown & Gilman (1960) referred to as reciprocal use of address terms while persons who differ in any of these categories tend to use forms of address non-reciprocally. These variations in address behavior among Palestinian speakers are discussed and explained based on the social functions of address forms and the cultural norms of the Palestinian community.