

# ADDRESS FORMS IN EGYPTIAN LITERATURE<sup>1</sup>

Gabriel M. Rosenbaum

*The Hebrew University, Jerusalem*

## Introduction

In many languages it is customary in everyday communication to use different forms of address, depending on the status of the speakers within the social hierarchy or the speakers' relative kinship or intimacy. Differential address forms are expressed through grammatical changes (ask in the use of the third person in addressing the second person, or the plural in addressing a single person), or by the use of epithets and titles which serve as address forms, or a combination of the above.

Whenever there is a change in the status of the speakers within the social hierarchy or in their mutual relations, there is a rite of sorts in which the speakers signal to each other their wish to change the character of the address forms. In French, for example, there is the verb *tutoyer*, and in Hungarian there is the verb *tegeződni*; these verbs mean, in French and Hungarian cultures, "to start using the non-formal personal pronoun *tu* or *te*", respectively. Expressions fulfilling a similar function in colloquial Egyptian Arabic are *بلاش تكليف* or *ما تعملش تكليف* as well as the expression *خلي البساط أحدي*, all of which mean "without formalities".

The use of differential address forms is receiving growing attention in sociolinguistics. Today there are many studies which describe systems of address forms in various languages, cultures and societies. Some of the better known studies are: Brown & Ford 1964; Brown & Gilman 1964; Ervin-Tripp 1972. A chapter on the subject is included in many books dedicated to sociolinguistics.

A study done by Parkinson (1985), encompasses most address forms used at present in Egyptian society. The findings of his study fit to a large extent my own impressions as to the use of address forms in Egyptian Arabic, both in oral communication and in written texts.

There are some studies which deal with the use of address forms in literature, and I will mention only one: *Structural Implications of Russian Pronominal Usage* by Friedrich, in which he demonstrates how the system of address forms in the Russian language answers various needs of literary works. Friedrich describes a variety of symmetric and asymmetric relationships between addresser and addressee which are expressed through the use of address forms. In order to simplify the description of the phenomenon, I will deal here with two basic addresser-addressee situations:

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is based on a chapter from my PhD thesis: *The Language of Dialogue in Modern Egyptian Drama (Mainly Since 1952)* and on further research.

Equality or inequality of addresser and addressee in the social hierarchy or in their mutual relationships.

I believe that there is no need to discuss here the diglossia in Arabic-speaking societies. I want only to mention that there are address forms in *fushā*, the standard language, which are used in formal communication, oral or written. Egyptian *‘āmmiyya* has a larger variety of address forms which are used in everyday communication.

In contemporary Egyptian Arabic dozens of address forms have become established, some of them dating from the period before the 1952 revolution. Some address forms changed function after the revolution, and new forms were created. The intensive use of address forms in everyday communication in Egyptian society has brought about the creation of new address forms, as well as a dévaluation in the status of some common address forms and their replacement by others, considered more “respectable”. The title *bāšmuhandis*, for example, meaning literally “chief engineer”, has become an address form for any engineer. Today people of various trades, including manual ones, may be addressed as *bāšmuhandis*. Another version of this address form is *yā handasa* (lit.: Your Engineeringness). This address form (or the more popular form *yā handaza*) at times replaces the address form *bāšmuhandis*.

Only a few of those will be described below. The following is a table with address forms which will be mentioned here:

#### Address Forms (a selection)

باشا	baša	before 1952: official titles (very respectful) after 1952: “mister”, “sir” (neutral/polite)	
بيه (بيك/بك)	bēh		
Address form	Transliteration	Meaning	Function
حضرة / حضرتك	ḥaḍrit/ḥaḍritak	sir, the honorable, your honor, your excellency	polite
سيادة/سيادتك	siyādit/siyādtak		polite/more polite
سعادة/سعادتك	sa‘ādit/sa‘ādtak		very polite/respectful
افندم/يا فندم	afandim/yā-fan-dim	(1) your honor, your excellency (for males & females) (2) yes? sir?/ma’am?	very polite/ respectful
ست	sitt	Mrs, Ms, lady, mistress	polite
هانم	hānim		more polite
ست هانم	sitt-i hānim		very polite/respectful

سيدي / سيد	sīdi/sayyid	mister	polite
معلم	miʿallim	“boss”	very polite/respectful (among the working classes)
يا ولد	yā-walad	“hey you” (lit.: boy!)	familiar/ disrespectful
يا واد	yā-wād		↓
يا وله / يا له	yā-walah/yā-lah		↓
ياد	yā-d		more familiar/ disrespectful
بنت	bint	“hey you” (lit.: girl!)	familiar/ disrespectful
بت	bitt		more familiar/ disrespectful
يا ... انت	yā ... inta	“you...”, “... you”	(structures stressing disrespect)
انت ... انت	inta ... inta		
يا ... يا	yā ... yā		
يا ...	... yā		

Some Egyptians disapprove of the high frequency of address forms in communication and, at times, of the very existence of certain address forms. This disapproval is occasionally given expression in letters to the editor. Magīd Ṭūbya, a well known Egyptian writer, refers in a satirical way to the change of values in Egyptian society, and consequently to the change of prestige of various address forms:

For a tip of half an Egyptian pound you can acquire the title of *bēh* from a waiter in a popular coffee-shop.

If you are an owner of a car and have paid the “car-boy” half an Egyptian pound he will bid you farewell with the title “Doctor” or *bāšmuhandis*.

If you give him one complete Egyptian pound he will award you with the title *bēh*, but if you award him five Egyptian pounds (which is unlikely), he will give you a great salute bidding you farewell with the title *miʿallim*!!

The *miʿallim* has become more important than the engineer, the doctor and the nuclear scientist! (Ṭūbya 1996: 16-17)

As is the custom in satire, the description here is exaggerated, since in Egyptian society the title “doctor” still enjoys higher esteem than the title *miʿallim*.

### The Functions of Address Forms in Egyptian Literature

This study is based on dramatic literature as well as prose literature. It should be noted that dialogues in modern Egyptian drama, are written for the most part in the colloquial. Writers of prose may use the two languages.

The differences in using address forms in drama and in prose are due to the difference between these two genres: Whereas the narrator in prose may interfere and express his own views, or tell us the views of the characters, in drama there is no narrator and the characters speak for themselves. This will be evident in some of the following examples.

Let us now consider some examples from Egyptian literature (as mentioned above, the address forms which are reviewed here do not constitute an exhaustive repertory of address forms in Egyptian Arabic, but only a selection).

The first two examples are taken from narrative prose, showing the presence of the author in the text: In the first example, the narrator refers to the way Ḥasan's wife addresses him: *كانت تدعوه "سيدي"، ولا تقعد في حضرته إلا إذا أذن لها* — "She used to address him as «my master» and never sat in his presence unless he gave her permission" (Maḥfūz n.d.: 263).

In the next example, we have both the author's interference and the use of an address form in a dialogue. The title *'amm* which literally means "(paternal) uncle", is used also as a popular form of address:

وفي الاسبوع الثالث نزلت الخادمة الصغيرة الغبية من العمارة وفي يدها خطاب... وتلقاها عم جابر البواب، ليسألها في لهجته الأمرة التي يخطب بها كل خدم العمارة:  
— رايحة فين يا بت!!

"In the third week the silly young maid came down from the building carrying a letter in her hand. *'Amm* Gābir, the doorman, met her asking her in his commanding voice with which he addressed all of the building's servants:

— Where are you going, *bitt*!?" (Abdalquddūs 1978: 220)

From this excerpt we see also the relativity of social status, when the doorman, a position not enjoying high prestige in society, feels himself superior to others and addresses them accordingly.

Narrative texts do not usually open with address forms. In drama, address forms appear many times already at the outset of a play, supplying the audience with instant information. The next example is taken from the beginning of a play, in which the scene is that of a simple coffee shop. The play opens with voices coming from a recorded tape. These voices are calling to *'Aṣṣūr*, the hero of the play, using a variety of address forms which enable the audience to comprehend quickly *'Aṣṣūr*'s social standing:

الأصوات . انت ياد انت جا قهوجي.  
(تصفيقات)... ياد يا عصفور... انت يا له.  
يا جدع انت فين القهوة...

The voices Hey, you, *yād, qabwagi* [the owner of a coffee shop or someone who works there].

(Applause) *yād, ʿAṣfūr*, you, *yā lab*.

Hey, man, where's the coffee? (Bakir 1981: 110).

At the opening of the play *as-Sibinsa*, whose plot is set in the pre-revolutionary period, Darwiš, the sergeant major at the police station, answers the telephone. At the other end of the line is the station commander, who is looking for the commander of the provincial police. The sergeant major buttons up his jacket immediately and speaks in a fearful tone while using a variety of polite address forms, very intensely. Note the double use of the word *afandim* here which in its first appearance means "yes?":

درويش افندم... سعادة الحكمدار ذاته. افندم سعادة الباشا...  
 (يزرر جاكته ويتحدث في خوف شديد)... لسه يا سعادة الباشا اول  
 سعاده ما يوصل اقول لسعاده يكلم سعادتك... يا سعادة الباشا...  
 لا يا افندم [...]

(Wahba 1966: 8)

Beyond the comic effect created by the intensive use of polite address forms and titles in this scene, the playwright succeeds in clarifying already in the opening lines of the play the hierarchical relations between the sergeant major and his superiors, and also in recreating the atmosphere of the period preceding the 1952 revolution, during which the title Pasha was extremely important.

When two speakers who have unequal status in the social hierarchy, or in their mutual standing, address each other, each of them is expected to use address forms which reflect this inequality. The following dialogue is also from a beginning of a play. The differentiation here is created through the use of the address form *bitt*, the feminine counterpart of *wād*, contrasted with the polite address form *sitt*. Thus, from the very first lines of the play the difference in status between the two women is clear, before we get acquainted with the characters themselves:

ناعسة (تغني) يا نعلتين في العلامي [...] (منادية) شلباية... بت يا شلباية...  
 شلباية (وهي تدخل مسرعة) ايوه يا ستي...

Nā'ca (Singing) Two palm trees standing on high [...] (Calling) Šilbāya, *bitt*, Šilbāya.

Šilbāya (Entering in a hurry) Yes, mistress. (Našāṭi & Sa'id n.d.: 371-372)

In the following example Zaydān, the land owner, addresses one of the village guards with the familiar/disrespectful form *wād*, while the guard replies with a sentence composed of three words, each of which is a polite address form:

زيدان (ينادي احد الخفراء)... واد يا عبد السميع...  
 عبد السميع افندم حضرة البيه...

Zaydān (Calling one of the guards) *Wād*, ʿAbdassamīʿ.

ʿAbdassamīʿ Yes, sir (*afandim*), Your Excellency (*ḥadrit*) the *bēh*. (Wahba 1967: 51)

A change in tone accompanied by the use of the common polite address forms changes their function and transforms politeness into contempt and derision. (By the same token, a change in tone may transform a disrespectful address form into one expressing affection.) Appropriate stage directions in drama may stress the ironic use of the address forms, as in the following example, in which Su'ād addresses Muḥammad, who is courting her:

سعاد [...] (بتمثيل) وعائز ايه حضرة جنابك؟  
Su'ād (Acting) And what does Your Honor want? (Idrīs 1974a: 66)

The address form *ganāb* used here is a very respectful address form used mostly in formal communicative situations. The next example is a similar one, this time from prose: The wife, in a quarrel with her husband about preparing supper, asks: "Would your honor be kind enough to tell me, what I am supposed to be doing here?!" (Mursī 1993: 188).

Later on, the husband pays his wife with her own coin:

"طيب اقدر اعرف حضرتك عاوزه ايه دلوقت؟!"

Well, may I know what your honor wants now?! (Mursī 1993: 191).

In the play *Ā'ilat ad-dūgrī*, Muṣṭafa expresses his anger at his brother Sayyid. The word which expresses that anger is non other than the address form *hadritak* which is used ironically:

مصطفى سید  
مصطفى  
اللي يتصرف في ملك غيره لازم يتسجن...  
ومين اللي عمل كده بقي؟!  
حضرتك!!

Muṣṭafa Whoever deals in property which he does not own should be put in jail.

Sayyid Who dared do this?!

Muṣṭafa Your Excellency!! (Āšūr, 1976: 205).

An addressee usually becomes aware of address forms when he perceives a deviation from normal usage. Whole scenes may revolve around the awareness of the characters participating in the conversation of the address forms being used and thus the use of address forms becomes part of the plot. Addressees may demand to be addressed in a certain form, or they may protest against the use of certain address forms, etc.

In many cases an addressee who was not addressed in a form reflecting the high status he deserves, in his opinion, may demand to be addressed in a form which he thinks is his due. In the play *Kullu 'āyiz yitgawwez Ṣallūḥa*, Idrīs and Firyāl are employed as doorman and cook, respectively, by the same family. Idrīs is in love with Firyāl and courts her. Firyāl is not willing to have Idrīs call her by name only, without an address form: "فاهم...؟؟" — "Also, I don't want you to call me just plain Firyāl, see?" (Ḥamāda 1990: 49). Idrīs protests against Firyāl's demand to be addressed with an address form, while she addresses him by name only:

ادريس يعني اقول يا ست فريال هانم؟؟ ايه العنطرة دي!!

لا عنطرة ولا فنطرة... انا نبهت عليك قبل كده ما تندهلش  
خالص... انا حرة...  
اشمعنى انت بتندهي لي كده خاف؟؟... يا ادريس هات تاكسي  
ادريس  
لست يا ادريس ابعت المكوجي... وليه ما تقولليش يا سيد  
ادريس... يعني انا اللي واقع من قعر القفة.

Idrīs You mean I should say mistress Firyāl? Why do you give yourself such airs?

Firyāl Airs or no airs, I warned you before not to call me at all. I am a free person.

Idrīs Why can you call me just by my name? "Idrīs, get a taxi for the mistress", "Idrīs, call the laundryman". Why don't you call me "Mr. Idrīs"? Am I too lowly for that? (Hamāda 1990: 49-50).

In the following scene the addressee, Bilya, protests against the use of the address form *yā wād* by Sūma. The protest is strengthened by the stage direction "shouts". Bilya, an apprentice in a coffee shop, demands to be addressed as *mi'allim*, which in his social milieu is considered an address form which expresses esteem. Sūma does not recognize his right to this address form and refuses to address him thus:

يا واد يا بلية. سومة  
(يلتفت إليها صارخا)... جرى ايه... ما قلنا ميت مره بلاش يا واد دي. بلية  
(تضع الانبوبة) بسم الله... خضتني يا واد حابس حابس. سومة  
جرى ايه يا سومة هو انا مش الي عينك واللا ايه... دانا معلم كبير بلية  
مدور قهوة بحالها.  
امسك الانبوبة بلاش لا... انت لا معلم ولا حاجة سيب المعلمة سومة  
لصاحبها.

Sūma Bilya, *yā wād*.

Bilya (Turns to her and shouts) What's the matter with you? Didn't I tell you a hundred times not to call me *wād*?

Sūma (Putting down the gas cylinder) Oh, great, you've really scared me, *yā wād*.

Bilya What's the matter, Sūma? I'm not good enough for you? Is that it? Even though I'm a big boss (*mi'allim*), running a whole coffee shop?

Sūma Hold the cylinder. No, there's no need. You're not a *mi'allim* or anything else. Leave the title of *mi'allim* to those that deserve it. (Raḥmī 1988: 14)

In the following example, the one protesting against the omission of a polite address form is the addressee's father. Nine-year-old Sa'd, son of land owner as-Sunbātī, is playing with ten-year-old 'Awaḍ, the son of a farmer. After 'Awaḍ calls Sa'd by his first name, as is the wont of children, as-Sunbātī rebukes 'Awaḍ: سعد حاف "How dare you call him just plain «Sa'd», *yā walah*? Call him mister Sa'd, *yā walah*, go away, you dog!" (Idrīs 1974a: 59).

The next two examples are from prose: In the first one, the dialogue takes place between neighbors in the street:

— جرى ايه يا ولد؟!  
— ما تقولش واد.

— What's happened, you *walad*?

— Don't say *wād*. (Ḥusayn 1988: 105)

In the second one, Mrs. Tawhīda reacts angrily when she is addressed by her first name, without the polite address form *hānim*: «وكادت الهانم ان تشهق، بل وتصرخ... في الولية قائلة... «توحيدة في عينك وعين اللي خلفوك» «The lady almost choked, and screamed in the woman's face, saying: «How dare you call me Tawhīda, damn you and those who brought you into the world»» (Mursī, 1993: 269).

The curse *'ama fi 'enak* — “May your eye go blind”, is said usually in colloquial Egyptian by an addressee after being addressed as *'amm*, much to his chagrin, as is the case here:

الشاب      انا ما اعرفهاش والنبى يا عمى.  
فرحات      عمى في عينك. قلنا مليون مرة انا الضابط النوبطشي.

The youth I swear by the prophet that I don't know her, “uncle”.

Farahāt What “uncle” are you talking about? [Lit.: May your eye go blind]  
Haven't I said a million times that I'm the duty officer? (Idrīs 1974: 38-39)

Occasionally an addressee may resist being addressed with a polite address form, because of modesty or a wish to change the status of the relationship existing between him and the addresser. The addressee here expresses his dissatisfaction for being addressed as “mister” (*ustād*) in letters from a girl with which he has been hoping to develop romantic relationship: كانت تستخدم كلمة «استادي» في مخاطبتي... «She was in the habit of using the word *ustād* occasionally when corresponding with me. I felt uneasy with her and with the word she used” (Šalaš 1994: 430).

Kassāb, in the next example, opposes being addressed as *bēh*:

نسرین      اتفضل يا كساب بيه...  
كساب      لا... كساب بس... انا عمري ما كنت بيه... ومش مهم ابقى بيه.  
Nisrīn Please, Kassāb *bēh*.

Kassāb No, just Kassāb. I was never a *bēh*, and I'm not interested in becoming one. (Salāma 1990: 72).

Kassāb, beside being modest, has romantic aspirations with respect to Nisrīn, and tries to bring about a change in their relationship through changing the way she addresses him, or to have that change in relationship confirmed by the change in address form.

In a story by 'Abdalquddūs, the hero who is frustrated because he knows that he cannot attain a girl from a higher social stratum than his, refers directly to the role address forms play in society: ولكن... الثورة لم تحطم الجدار الذي يفصل بين

«اللاسي» و«السي» — “But the revolution has not broken down the barriers between «Mister» and «Non-Mister»” (‘Abdalquddūs n.d.: 36).

In two similar scenes in the play *Šaqqā fi l-Gīza*, the addressee protests the use of polite address forms, in the hope of changing the status of the relationship existing between him and the addressers. Ḥamāda, tries to seduce the beautiful ‘Aliyya and later on Samīḥa, and tries to change the nature of the relationship by changing the address forms. He appears at first in the disguise of Galāl, and later on in the disguise of ‘Abbās:

[...] (يحاول تقبيلها).	حمادة
(في دلال وهي تتمتع) جلال بيه...	علية
(في حرارة) جلال بس، ارجوك...	حمادة
(في انوثة) جلال...	علية

Ḥamāda	[...] (Tries to kiss her)
‘Aliyya	(Coyly, avoiding his kiss) Galāl <i>bēh!</i>
Ḥamāda	(Warmly) Just plain Galāl, I beg you.
‘Aliyya	(Femininely) Galāl. (Ḡurāb 1967: 109)

Later on, in a similar scene, Ḥamāda makes the same demand of Samīḥa (Ḡurāb 1967: 117).

### Conclusion

The use of address forms is common in both prose and drama, but in drama it is more extensive than in prose, not only because dialogues are usually more dominant in drama than in prose and consequently reflect everyday acts of communication, but because this is an excellent method for conveying/revealing to the audience easily, quickly and fully vital information about the characters, more often than not even before the unfolding of the plot. For this purpose, a large variety of address forms is used (much of which could not be shown here; a more complete study is in preparation).

The Egyptian reader/spectator, who is familiar with these address forms, can identify their function on the spot and come very quickly to understand the relational hierarchies among the characters, before they become clear through the development of the plot.

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