

Assignment 2: Nonsexist address term?

Data due October 31

Assignment due November 28

In this assignment we will investigate the use and meanings of the address term *Ms.* This term was ‘created’ in the 1930s and saw increased usage in the 1960s and 1970s. It was intended to be used as a neutral title parallel to the use of *Mr.* for men. However, as soon as it was created and began to be used, it gathered meanings that were not neutral and were associated with the gender ideologies and social movements of its time.

This assignment is based on an article by Janet M. Fuller in *American Speech*. You may consult this article if you wish (and compare our data with hers):

Fuller, Janet M. (2005). “The uses and meanings of the female title *Ms.*” *American Speech* 80,2: 180-206.

Gathering Data

You need to print out eight (8) copies of the questionnaire and present it to four men and four women. These people should be of varying generations so that we can investigate whether the use and interpretation of these terms has changed. You can easily get eight by asking strangers in a public place (especially if there is a line where people are waiting and have nothing to do anyway; get permission from management of any private establishment before doing this though).

Your results are due October 31. You cannot be late with this, because I need to compile the data in a timely manner. If your data are not in on September 31, you will lose ALL points for the data portion of the assignment.

Coding

You must use the Excel spreadsheet to code your data. You have lots of time to make your observations; I suggest not leaving the coding for the last minute. (Excuses such as “the computer lab was full” are not acceptable!) The categories on the spreadsheet are self-explanatory, and you will have a menu of possible entries for most cells.

When you submit the file, make sure you have saved it with a new name in the following format:

lastname-1235-assignment2.xls

Replace “lastname” with your last name. Mine would be:

kiesling-1235-assignment2.xls

Submit your file using the digital dropbox on in the “tools” section of courseweb (not email). This is a two step process. First you upload the file (“Add File”, and then you have to send it (“Send File”). Send the file to “Instructor.”

Analysis and write-up

I will collate the data from the entire class, and then provide the data in spreadsheet format, available on courseweb. Knowledge of Excel or a similar spreadsheet program won't be essential, but it wouldn't hurt to go through a quick tutorial before I post the data (let me know if you'd like a specific format other than Excel). I will also provide a couple of views (charts and/or tables) of the data, for which you will need no extra knowledge of statistics or spreadsheet programs. You can organize and present the data any way you want (using just the charts and tables I give you, adding your own, or just using your own).

Your written report should contain the following (with *approximate* word counts):

1. A short **introduction** summarizing the most important facets of the data and your most important conclusions. 50-75 words.
2. An **explanation** of how you approached respondents and any comments they gave you while they were filling out the assignment or after, and any difficulties or biases you think may be in your data. 100-150 words.
3. A **description** of the patterns you see in the data. In other words, who makes what choices, in which circumstances, more often than others? Are differences big or small? 300-600 words.
4. An **analysis** of why you think these patterns hold, based on our class discussions and readings up to now. You might want to focus on the kinds of questions I've asked in class. If you are unsure, look back in your notes and homeworks at the issues we have focused on. For example, in this section of the course we have been especially concerned with how gender ideologies affect how people interpret and use words and linguistic features differently. In this case, how does a person's understanding of gender ideologies affect how they use *Ms.*?

Here are some questions to consider. DO NOT just answer these questions directly! This is a writing, prose assignment and these questions are to get you started thinking:

- How do these patterns fit into gender ideology?
- Is the use of these address terms a gendered practice? How? Why?
- What gender stereotypes can be connected to the patterns, and what purpose might those stereotypes serve?
- Is ordering organized or constrained in a gendered way (by institution, network, speech activity, speech events, frames, and genres)?
- How do the different address terms position the speakers, and why would those positionings be more or less masculine or feminine?
- What does the use of these terms imply?
- Do these address terms encode a particular kind of 'mapping of the world'? How?

900-1200 words (but highly variable!).

The total length of the assignment should be between 1300-2100 words (approximately 4-6 typed double-spaced pages).

Finally, remember that this assignment is like a test. I am trying to see whether you have learned the concepts we have discussed well enough to apply them to new data. Approach the assignment in some ways as you would an exam!