

Original Paper

Address Terms Used among Male Basketball Players at a Ghanaian University

Afful, Joseph B. A.^{1*} & Opoku-Addo, Kennedy²

¹ Department of English, Faculty of Arts, University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast, Ghana

² Wesley Girls' High School, Cape Coast, Ghana

* Afful, Joseph B. A., Department of English, Faculty of Arts, University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast, Ghana

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Abstract

In the last three decades, there has been an increasing interest among scholars in the use of address terms across domains such as academia, politics, religion, family, friendship, and sports. The present study examines the range of address terms and the factors that influence their use among male basketball players in a Ghanaian university. In this study, we draw on the notion of community of practice. An ethnographic research approach, comprising mainly participant and non-participant observation and interview, was adopted in collecting our data. Two key findings emerged from the analysis. First, Ghanaian male university students used four major categories of address terms while playing basketball: personal names, descriptive terms, nicknames, and ethnic-related terms. Second, in general, these address forms constituted an isogloss or idiolect, identifying the male basketball players as a distinct community of practice. These findings have implications for the sociolinguistic research on address terms in the domain of sports, gendered language, and further research on communication in sports.

Keywords

address forms, basketball players, ethnography, Ghana, sports communication

1. Introduction

Sports communication continues to be a very important branch of communication, although it has not elicited as much interest as communication in other domains such as the media and politics. Written sports reports and radio or television sports commentaries (e.g., Wallace, 1981; Ferguson, 1983; Ghadessy, 1988; Romaine, 1994) are recognized as two important discursive formations. In particular,

commentators' comments, remarks or descriptions of proceedings of a game or event, usually during live broadcast, are interesting aspects of sports communication. Also involved in these gamuts of sports communication are sports personalities (players, coaches, and technical team) and the media as well as different permutations of interactions such as player-technical team (including coach) interactions, player-spectator interactions, player-player interactions, and pre- and post-match press conferences.

In particular, player-player interaction occurs on or off the field of play. In such interactions verbal behaviours of varied forms are enacted. These verbal behaviours occur at either the macro level (e.g., speech acts) or micro-level (e.g., lexico-grammatical resources) of discourse. They also include subjective and affective content such as conjectures, intentions and thoughts of the players, overviews of spectacular moments of a game, comments about actions and decisions of players or other agents of the play (Delin, 2000). Indeed, an essential verbal behavior in player-player interaction is address term. We consider an "address term" in the present work as a word or expression that is used to designate an addressee in a one-on-one dyadic situation (Oyetade, 1995; Afful, 2006), distinct from Dickey's (1997) "reference term" which denotes a person being talked about without him or her being present, although both terms may overlap. Address terms are considered not only as identificationary in terms of the other person/s in an interaction but also as important linguistic expressions by which a person's attitude and interpretation of his or her relationship with a listener or addressee is reflected. The interest that the present research holds lies in the fact that the group in the research site being discussed (that is, a team of basketball players in a university) has rarely featured in such sociolinguistic endeavours on address terms.

In what follows, we first introduce the conceptual framework of the paper, focusing on one key perspective underpinning the present study and the relevant literature. We then state the aim of the study, followed by a discussion of the methodology. The findings of the analysis are, on one hand, situated in a socio-cultural context (a university community in Ghana) and a group (male basketball players who are university students) and, on the other hand, interpreted in terms of their implications for sports communication, gendered language, and further research in sociolinguistics on address terms.

1.2 Conceptual Background

In this section, we sketch the conceptual terrain of the study by discussing a) a key sociolinguistic concept and b) pertinent empirical studies on address terms used among the youth, especially students.

1.2.1 Notion of Community of Practice

The notion of interest in this study is community of practice. This concept was developed by Lave and Wenger (1991), Wenger (1998), and popularized in relation to research on language and gender by Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1998, 1999). As Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1998: 490) contend, a community of practice is:

an aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in some common endeavour. Ways of doings, ways of talking, beliefs, values, power

relations—in short, practices—emerge in the course of their joint activity around that endeavour.

Three features identified in the literature in characterizing a community of practice include mutual engagement, a joint enterprise, and a shared repertoire (Wenger, 1998). These features demonstrate a sense of commonality through social (that is, non-linguistic) and linguistic practices that unite interactants. The non-linguistic or social practices concern routines, ways of doing things, stories, gestures, symbols, genres, and actions whereas linguistic practices foreground the use of verbal behaviour or particular ways of using language acceptable to the group members and their well-being.

Following from the above, we can easily consider student basketball players as a homogeneous group in terms of their obvious rationale: to have fun by playing basketball, away from the hustle and bustle of intensive academic activities. More importantly, they are involved in a “joint negotiated enterprise; and a shared repertoire of negotiable resources accumulated over time” (Wenger, 1998, p. 76). These university students are likely to develop linguistic resources (here, a lexicon of address terms) which will distinguish them from other members of the same university community such as the administrative and supporting (e.g., sanitation and transportation) staff. Male students may engage in some regular practices while playing basketball but our interest in the present study is in their use of address terms. Characterizing this group of university students as a community of practice is important for this study as it highlights students as members of a group, though they may at different times be members of other groups in the university such as discipline-specific groups (e.g., Students of English Association, Faculty of Arts Students Association) and old students’ association (e.g., Mfantsipim Students’ Association) or ethnic-related associations (e.g., Brong Ahafo Students’ Association).

In general, the usefulness of such a single-pronged conceptual paradigm lies in recognizing university basketball players as a fairly homogeneous group who through various forms of interaction constitute (make) and reconstitute (remake) their own social worlds through written and spoken language, jargon, heroes, rites etc. (Lussier & Kimball, 2014); but are also themselves made and remade in the process. As Omrčen and Pečarić (2018) claim, sports teams represent groups of people who share the same goals, practices and possible expectations, so that consequently they may be said to develop their own culture.

1.2.2 Previous Studies on Address Terms among Students

Although since Brown and Gilman’s (1960) study that investigated pronominal address systems in several European languages, there have been other sociolinguistic studies conducted in social institutions and practices such as politics (Jaworski & Galasinski, 2000; Fetzer & Bull, 2004), geographical areas (Norrby & Camilla, 2015), religion (Sequeira, 1993; Dzameshie, 1997; Wharry, 2003), and media (Edu-Buandoh, 1999), it is only recently that we have begun to notice studies on address forms in academia paying attention to students (e.g., Walsh, 1996; Dickey, 1997; Afful, 1998, 2006, 2010; Formentelli & Hajek, 2013).

Given that Cutting (2000) is a wide-ranging study on topic choice and humour in student seminars, it is not surprising that she marginalizes students' use of address terms. More illuminating studies such as those by Crozier and Dimmock (1999) and De Klerk and Bosch (1996, 1999) have focused on nicknames as address terms. In particular, De Klerk and Bosch (1999) associate nickname formation with linguistic creativity and verbal playfulness and interpret the pervasive use of nicknames among students (especially, adolescents) as indexical of peer group membership and cohesion. Several studies conducted in different geographical settings (e.g., Abel & Kruger, 2006; Lin, 2007; Arhin, 2010; Dornyo, 2010; Omrčen & Pečarić, 2018) have suggested the cultural underpinning of nicknames. Moreover, Kajee's (2005) work which is conducted among South African university students in an online discussion reveals that students' "virtual identity" is predicated on their use of nicknames as address forms, icons, and language use.

Mambwe and Da Costa's (2015, p. 54) statements that "nicknaming as a practice is part and parcel of sports" and that such a "practice is as old as sports are" justify the claim that nicknames of athletes or sports teams are immanent to language for specific purposes. Nicknames are given to athletes (cf. Abel & Kruger, 2006; Awad, 2012; Babane & Chauke, 2015; Kennedy & Zamuner, 2006; Skipper, 1989, 1992), sports teams (Lawson & Phillips, 1985; Ndimande-Hlongwa, 2010), coaches (Skipper 1989), even the lines (three forward positions) on a skating rink (e.g., hockey lines or number lines—Chernoff, 2017). It is worth noting some sports that have received attention in the literature: football (soccer) (Awad, 2012; Babane & Chauke, 2015), baseball (Abel & Kruger, 2006; Skipper, 1984), hockey and baseball (Kennedy & Zamuner, 2006), rugby (Wilson, 2010), and American football (Skipper, 1989). Omrčen and Pečarić (2018) also explored the semantic structure of boxers' nicknames of predominantly English origin. Wilson's (2010) study, though not explicitly focused on students, is useful here as it deals with the domain of sports. This study is based on a small corpus of talk by members of a New Zealand rugby team collected, using ethnographic fieldwork. The study analyses the range of discourse functions of speech acts that contain address terms, claiming that there is little in the way of sociolinguistic research on sports teams in New Zealand. The above claim by Wilson (*ibid*) is in line with our own claim in the present study as we note that the use of address terms among university students in the domain of sports is under-researched. Another point of departure concerns the sporting event or game that is considered in the present study: basketball.

A further set of illuminating studies include those by Dickey (1997), Li (1997), Kiesling (1998), Wong and Leung (2004). Li's (1997) study identifies the bicultural identity of the Chinese in Hong Kong, including university students, as evinced in their "borrowed" identity from the West and their indigenous identity. On his part, Kiesling (1998) focuses on one specific address term, *Dude*, reported to be commonly used among American male students as a solidarity term and a marker of an in-group, a fraternity in a college. Also, Wong and Leung (2004), through detailed interviews and questionnaires administered to undergraduates in Hong Kong, investigate their use of address terms. Wong and Leung

(2004) found that students' use of address terms among themselves in Chinese is more common than it used to be in the past; their choice of English address forms was determined by the field of study, the culture of secondary school, and peer group pressure.

Three studies that highlight the use of address terms in the same provenance as the present study include Sekyi-Baidoo (2000), Afful (2006), and Diabah (2020). The common ground on which these three studies are predicated concerns the group of interactants: university students. It is interesting to note that whereas Sekyi-Baidoo and Afful devote attention to university students from the University of Cape Coast, Diabah's (2020) focus is on university students from University of Ghana—both in Ghana. On one hand, Sekyi-Baidoo and Diabah's studies focus on insults or "profane language" respectively as a marked form of code choice by male university students in male-oriented university halls, *Atlantic Hall* in the University of Cape Coast, and *Commonwealth Hall* in the University of Ghana during hall celebrations. On the other hand, Afful (*ibid*) highlights the socio-pragmatic factors that underpin the use of address terms among students in Ghana, employing observational and interview data supplemented by his intuition. Two key findings emerged from this study. First, it was observed that Ghanaian university students used four major forms of address terms: personal names, titles, descriptive phrases, and catch phrases. Second, these address terms were conditioned by the context of situation and socio-cultural indices such as solidarity, gender, age and pragmatic factors.

While Diabah (2020) and Sekyi-Baidoo (2000) examine "insults" and "profane language" respectively, Afful's earlier studies only mention insults as tangential among male students. Indeed, in the present study, the focus, like Afful (2006), is on the range of address terms among university students. Though the provenance of the present study is similar to that in Diabah (2020) and Afful (2000), it will remain to be seen whether some of the address terms in the present study may be "insults" or "profane language". Moreover, in line with some studies such as Skipper (1989), Wilson (2010), and Omrčen and Pečarić (2018), the present study is located in the domain of sports.

1.3 *The Aim of the Study*

The review of the studies on the use of address terms among students has indicated the dearth of research on the use of address terms in the domain of sports. Whereas few studies have been conducted on address terms used by students while playing sports such as rugby (e.g., Wilson, 2010), as far as we know, none has paid attention to basketball, a game that is increasingly becoming popular in Ghanaian educational institutions (especially, Senior High Schools) through sponsorship by various corporate organizations. Thus, the present study explores the use of address terms among male basketball players in a Ghanaian public university based on their spoken discourse. We focus on the range of address terms and the factors that influence their use.

2. Method

2.1 Research Site

The academic setting for this study is University of Cape Coast (UCC), a public university in Ghana, established originally in 1962 to train teachers for the country's secondary and training colleges. As an English-medium university, UCC conducts its teaching, learning, and research through faculties and schools, to provide several academic programmes to about 70, 000 local and international students (including those students involved in various distance education programmes or alternative programmes).

We chose this educational setting because of our familiarity with its members, notably, students, faculty, administrative and other supporting staff. Our interest lies with the male basketball players among the students whose ages ranged from twenty to twenty-five, given that playing basketball requires physical strength, mental toughness, endurance, and speed in moving round within a limited time. Further, these male students were studying for a range of qualifications, at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Majority of the students who were playing basketball were, however, undergraduate students as the postgraduate students seemed to spend more time on their studies because of the depth and breadth of their programmes of study.

UCC has sports centres in the various residential halls and a main sports centre. The centres selected for the present study are the basketball courts at Kwame Nkrumah Hall and Atlantic Hall (two of the mixed residential halls at the university). This choice is attributed to the fact that most basketball players visit these courts, especially during the weekends, and interact during play or observing play. Also, one of the researchers in the present research, an undergraduate student then, was familiar with the male basketball players at UCC. (From hence, this researcher will be referred to in the present work as student-researcher.) The other researcher (faculty) had appreciable knowledge of basketball. Thus, we could easily understand the verbal behaviour of the basketball players.

2.2 Data Collection and Analysis

The research was conducted by observing male basketball players playing at the University of Cape Coast. We aimed to capture the utterances of these basketball players, by paying attention to the variety of address terms used. These address terms used by the players were recorded in a three-month period (February-April 2015).

The student-researcher employed an active participant observation and collected the data, using an adapted observation checklist of Afful (2006) in order to understand the ensuing interactions. When the student-researcher was actively involved in playing any basketball game, it was virtually impossible to record the data and play simultaneously so mental notes were made during those sessions and recorded as soon as possible. Additionally, observation was done mainly on the touchlines of the basketball court but in situations where there were a lot of spectators, the student-researcher observed from the balconies overlooking the basketball courts with the permission of the student-tenants of the particular

rooms.

In order to have naturally occurring data, we decided not to let all the players know they were being observed. The assistant captain of the university's basketball team and close associate of the student-researcher (also a basketball player) were the only ones who were aware that the student-researcher was recording their verbal behaviour at the basketball court in order to satisfy the ethical consideration of seeking their consent. It was thought that if all the basketball players became aware of the ensuing observations, they might hold back on their usual chit-chats on the basketball court; thereby, halting the progress of the whole research. This idea helped a great deal in the research process as the basketball players, oblivious of the observations and recordings carried on with their usual talks every week end. We sought in this way to avoid the Observer's Paradox. We also partly relied on our intuition during the whole research process, given our knowledge of the game of basketball.

Following the data collection, we analyzed the data. Also, results from the observation check list were compared to findings from an earlier work on address terms (Afful, 2006) to observe the differences and similarities between the present study and other earlier work.

3. Analysis and Discussion

The ensuing discussion in this section is facilitated by unedited samples of interactions or exchanges from the fieldwork. The address terms used have been italicized as part of the exchanges which were themselves noted to be in Pidgin English, a non-standard variety of English commonly used among educated Ghanaian youths in, especially, Senior High Schools and tertiary institutions. Four categories of address terms were used by the male basketball players at the University of Cape Coast. These were Descriptive Phrases (DPs), personal/real names, nicknames, and ethnic-related address terms.

3.1 Descriptive Phrases

Afful (2006) observes that a Descriptive Phrase (DP) provides a description of a person to enable him or her to know that he or she is being addressed. He further remarks that when addressees are not known by their names but ought to be distinguished from others around, DPs are used. Observations of the basketball players in the present study indicated that DPs were used.

The DPs in the present data set were grouped under four main categories: a) the DPs consisting of an insult and a headword, b) the DPs which ranged from simple noun phrases to more complex ones, c) the descriptive phrases that involved the use of "Old Boy", and d) domain-related terms. In Afful (2006), the first group of DPs involved three basic terms: "Kwasea Boy" ("stupid boy", "naughty boy", and "foolish man"). He also averred that these terms are denotatively and culturally pejorative (Agyekum, 2010), recalling similar observations made by Diabah (2020).

In the data collected in the present study, there were some instances of these types of DPs identified in Afful (2006). The headword was either "man" or "boy". Some examples of DPs consisting of insults

and a headword include “John man” (dunce), “Fucking man” (silly person), and “Gyimi Boy” (mentally retarded boy). An instance of this occurrence is demonstrated below:

Extract 1

Maxwell (pointing at Jude to join his team): *Gyimi Boy*, why you keep long that? (*Retarded boy*, why have you kept so long in coming?)

Jude (obliging): E no be me o, then I dey rep quiz. (It is not my fault I was writing a quiz).

In the above sample, the DP “Gyimi Boy” has not been used to insult the addressee; rather it is markedly used to confirm the friendly relationship between the two players, thus supporting Afful’s (*ibid*) view that these address terms evince neutrality and a pleasurable mood.

The second type of DPs was the ones which consisted of simple noun phrases and the more complex noun phrases. Afful (*ibid*) provides examples like “Young man” and “Lady in red”. In the present study, some players were referred to as “Boy” and “Man in sleeveless”. This type of DPs was used reciprocally. In other words, when a player was addressed as “boy”, the addressee replied by using the same form of address term. Instances of this form of address are presented below:

Extract 2

Dennis: *Boy*, you come shaa wa o! (*Boy*, you have definitely lost your touch)

Benjamin: *Boy*, you dey give me pressure! (*Boy*, you are pressurizing me)

Extract 3

Fletcher: *Old Boy*, you come improve was o! (*Old Boy*, you have really stepped up your game)

Akwasi: *Old Boy*, make you no flatter me. (*Old Boy*, do not flatter me).

As can be seen in the excerpts, both players are addressed by the same term, “Boy” and “Old Boy” as they are all males. It is important to note that no offense is meant in their use. Besides, it is interesting to note that “boy” is used by the basketball players who are not actually boys but young adults. Obviously, “Old Girl” was never used in the study, as observed in Afful (*ibid*) as the participants in the study consisted of only male students. Moreover, in the present data set “Old Boy” was not used to show that students were alumni of the same pre-tertiary institution, as argued by Afful (2006), but were often used on a friendly basis and to show a sense of identity.

There were other forms of address which were used non-reciprocally. These included “Man in sleeveless” and “Guy in white shorts”. It was often the case that in using these address terms non-reciprocally, the addressor did not genuinely know the names of the addressee. An example is shown in the following interaction:

Extract 4

Nii (signaling for the ball to be passed to him): Yo, *Man in sleeveless*, I make free (Man in sleeveless, I am ready for a pass)

Abu: All right, take ball. (All right, you can have the ball)

In Sample 4, “Man in sleeveless” could not be used to refer back to Nii as he was not in a sleeveless shirt. Abu, who was in a sleeveless shirt and in Nii’s team, understood that he was the one being asked to pass the ball.

Finally, an interesting form of DP that was observed in the study involved the type which described the basketball players according to their positions played in a team in a field of play. This type included address terms like “Middle man”, “Handler”, “Centre man”, and “Front man”; these terms can be said to constitute the lexicon of basketball. They were not found in the data set of Leeds-Hurwit (1989), Oyetade (1995), and Afful (2006), as their studies did not consider the use of address terms in the context of sports. An occurrence of this type in the data set is illustrated below:

Extract 5

Fianku: *Handler*, I beg, go dey your position (*Handler*, please move to your position)

Albert: I hear. (I have heard you.)

The above exchange shows the use of a domain-related address term. This type of address term was observed to be used interchangeably. Here, the word “interchangeably” means, depending on the position being played by the basketball players, the appropriate terms could be used to refer to any player during a particular period. This also means they could not be used reciprocally as there had to be one “Centre man” at a time. Another interesting feature of this type was that it was normally confined to two playing teams at a time. When the address term “Handler” was used, it referred to any of the two handlers playing in each team.

Thus, DPs were mostly used in a face-to-face interaction and mainly provided descriptions to distinguish one basketball player from another. We observed that in some cases where the interlocutors knew their names, DPs were still deployed. It is not clear what could be the reasons in such a case.

3.2 Personal Names

The next category of address terms used among the basketball players while on the field was the personal or real names. Dakubu (1981) refer to these as basic names, adding that their range can be quite complex. According to Afful (2006), personal names assume different forms as they could be indigenous, Europeanized, Arabic or others and usually consist of first names and a surname or last name. Afful remarked that the indigenous names normally reflect the distinct family names which are not affected by any form of Westernism or colonialism. Names like these were found in the study and they included “Tetteh”, “Opoku”, and “Fianku”.

In considering the set of personal names, we observed that there were possible dyadic patterns: the reciprocal use of First Name (FN), the non-reciprocal use of Last Name (LN), and the non-reciprocal use of FN, as postulated by Brown and Ford (1961). The first name is the one that usually precedes all the other names in order of preference. In the present study, it was observed that both the FN and LN were frequently used among the basketball players as address terms. This occurrence is illustrated below:

Extract 6

Dennis: *Kenneth*, you for make we score this team. (*Kenneth*, let us strive hard to score this team)

Kenneth: Yeah, *Ofori*, we for do hard. (Yes, *Ofori*, we should try hard)

In the above instance, both the FN and LN have been employed as address terms. Dennis Ofori decided to address Kenneth with his FN but Kenneth decided to address Dennis with his (Dennis) LN, which is Ofori. In other occurrences, both interlocutors were addressed with their FNs, as illustrated below:

Sample 7

Jude: *Mark*, come listen something. (*Mark*, come and listen to something)

Mark: *Jude*, you dey like worry! (*Jude*, you are bothersome)

As seen in this instance (Sample 7), both interlocutors opted for FNs in addressing their mates to possibly indicate more familiarity. The absence of the full form may be due to the high formality associated with its use. Given that playing basketball is generally a leisurely activity, it makes sense for the players to use more informal forms of address terms, as exemplified in the use of FNs and LNs (refer to Samples 6 and 7).

Despite the casual context within which basketball is played among male students at UCC, it is interesting to note that the players did not use terms of solidarity (e.g., *Azei*, *Buddy*, *Charlie*, *Komfo*, and *Paddy*), and Romanized initials/alphabetisms (e.g., *J.Y.* for Johan Yaw and *T.A.* for Teaching Assistant), and secondary names such as hypocoristic names (day-names which also reflect the sex of bearer or addressee and employ reduplication for their phonetic realizations) such as *Kuukuu* (name for a male person born on Wednesday among the Akan, a major ethnolinguistic group in Ghana) which were reported in an earlier study in the same setting by Afful (1998). This may be attributed to the fact that the present study was on a relatively smaller scale and restricted to one domain, sports.

3.3 Nicknames

Nicknames are considered as names that are thrust upon one by family, playmates, friends and other close acquaintances (De Klerk & Bosch, 1999). De Klerk and Bosch also posit that nicknames seemingly amplify striking characteristics of an individual. We noted that nicknames were also used by the basketball players in our data set. Even though we refrained from using any statistical tools to explain our data, we observed that nicknames were most frequently used in our data set.

Three forms of nicknames were evident. The first type of nicknames dealt with those that seemed to be “honorary” and “temporary”. With this type, the name was “thrust” on players for a maximum of two days when a player performed an extraordinary feat or virtually had a good day on the court. The name of a known basketball figure would then be associated with the player till the awe of the move dies down (probably in a day or two). An instance of this occurrence is shown below:

Extract 8

Isaac: (after shooting a three pointer): You people see what I do? (Did you people see that?)

Mark: *Rydee*, you be *Jordan* or what? (Are you now an impersonation of *Jordan*?)

Jude: Yeah, we go call you *Jordan*? (We would call you *Jordan*.)

In the above instance, Isaac had shown dexterity in handling of the basketball to outwit his opponents. Other players referred to him as “Jordan” after the famous basketball legend in the USA, Michael Jordan, who is regarded by connoisseurs of the game as the greatest player in his generation. Throughout the ensuing games, Isaac was referred to as “Jordan”; the name fizzled out, however, with time.

The second type of nicknames dealt with those names of famous basketball players that had been adopted by the players. Unlike the first type, they were seemingly permanent. They included names like “Shaq”, “Kobe”, “Wade”, and “LeBron”. These names are well known by most basketball followers as they are skillful individuals whose impact is heavily felt during each game they grace.

Extract 9

Kenneth: *LeBron*, next time you for make wey Shaq. (*LeBron*, next time you should tackle Shaq)

Thomas: Alright, *Kobe*, game on (I hear you, *Kobe*).

The above instance of address terms portrays the use of these particular nicknames; both players addressed each other with names of famous basketball players, to indicate their prowess in playing basketball.

The above use of nicknames contrasts with the use of what Afful calls “academic” and “non-academic” nicknames in other studies (Afful, 1998, 2010). In particular, in Afful (2010), some of the non-academic nicknames derived from sports such as boxing (*Azuma Nelson*) and football (*Abedi Pele*). While Azuma Nelson, the celebrated Ghanaian boxer in the featherweight division was inducted into the Hall of Fame by the World Boxing Council, Abedi Pele was noted for his skills and instincts for scoring spectacular goals in soccer. It is also worth noting that the use of these “non-academic” nicknames in the present study did not suggest a dominant teasing function, as noted in earlier studies (De Klerk & Bosch, 1997, 1999); the difference in communicative functions of nicknames in these two sets of studies could stem from the different levels of students involved. These “non-academic” nicknames used as address terms seek to test “peer group bonds” or what Baxter (2002, p. 85) simply calls “peer approval”.

The third type of nicknames dealt with neither sports, in general, nor basketball, in particular. These names were probably nicknames of the players prior to their admission into the university as most of these names tended to be names they used in their *alma mater*. It was also noticed that some of these names portrayed physical or biological characteristics of individuals. For instance, a noticeably skinny player was addressed as “Skinny” or someone fair in complexion was addressed as “Red”. Other nicknames of this type included names of musicians, public figure or corrupted form of one’s personal

name. These included nicknames like “Castro”, “Obama”, and “DMX”. Let us consider this type in the following exchange:

Extract 10

Jude: *Obama*, you sneakers be wild o. (*Obama*, I adore your sneakers)

Benjamin: *Legacy*, u sure? (Are you sure, *Legacy*?)

The above illustration demonstrates the use of the last type of nicknames in the study. This set of nicknames seems to dominate in the studies by Arhin (2010) and Dornyo (2010), who focused on nicknaming practices among undergraduate students at UCC in various domains. To the next concern of the study we now turn.

3.4 Ethnic-related Address Terms

In this section we report on the findings concerning how ethnicity influences the use of address terms used among male basketball players, who admittedly come from different ethnic backgrounds in Ghana. Ghana boasts of being a multilingual country with several ethnolinguistic groups living together in various cosmopolitan and urban cities, one of which is Cape Coast, where University of Cape Coast (UCC) is located. It needs to be remembered that UCC is an equal-opportunity university for all, irrespective of one’s nation, ethnicity, class, gender etc.

While the student-researcher knew most of the basketball players on a personal basis and thus their ethnicities, we did not, however, know the ethnicities of all the players. Nonetheless, it was noted that sometimes this knowledge of the ethnicity of some of the players often did influence the use of address terms. For instance, the frequent use of “Gyanobi” which means “child of a Ga” (one of the ethnic groups in the country constituting about 5% of the populace) was mainly used by interlocutors who were either from the Ga ethnic group or could speak Ga language. They mostly used these address terms for each other. In rare instances, basketball players from other ethnic groups used the address term “Gyanobi” to tease mates with a Ga descent.

Extract 11

Marcus: (walking towards the rim) *Gyanobi*, you dey like talk Ga too much

(Child of a Ga, you like speaking in Ga too much)

Bortey (shooting a ball): Abi I no want make you understand. (The intention is for you not to understand).

Marcus (chuckling): So you dey? (Is that how you are?)

Bortey (smiling): You know know? (Did you not know?)

In the example above (11) involving two male basketball players who are obviously acquaintances, “Gyanobi” is used to denote the other interlocutor’s ethnicity. This does not cause any tension between the interlocutors even though the addressor is known by the researcher to be a Fante (a sub-group among the Akans, a major ethnic group in Ghana spoken by about 44 percent of the total population as a first language). This goes to portray the peaceful nature of Ghanaians and also shows how ethnicity

signifies the identity of a sub-group that belongs to a much larger group. Interestingly, “Fantsenyi”, as observed in Afful (2006), was also used to address anyone who was of Fante descent or could speak Fante fluently in the field. The players who used this address term were not of any particular ethnic background; anyone could use it to designate any Fante-speaking basketball player on the field. Indeed, addressing a mate by these expressions illustrates what Doran (2004, p. 107) calls “ethnic specificity”. Also, it was observed that some terms were peculiar to players of the same ethnic group. An example is how some Fante basketball players addressed one another as “Opaddy”, meaning “my friend”. This address term seemed unique to the Fante speakers as it was rare for players from other ethnic groups to use this term. Afful (2006) had also observed the use of ethnic-related terms among students in non-academic interaction. In the present study some of these terms were used as address terms on the basketball court.

Other ethnic-related terms found in the present study include “Efo” (an Ewe word meaning “Chief”). (Ewe is one of the major ethnic groups in Ghana.) Find the example below:

Extract 12

Thomas: *Efo*, you go handle next game. (*Ewe chief*, you would play the role of the handler in the next game.)

Ike: No yawa, my mind dey. (No problem, I understand you).

In the above illustration, “Efo” is used to describe Ike probably because he is an Ewe. Ike, however, does not seem to be perturbed that Thomas, who is a Ga, humours him as “Efo” but goes on playing as if he had been addressed with his real name. We admit that there could have been other languages involved in the ethnic-related terms but the above-mentioned address terms were the only ones observed during the period of the study.

Ethnicity is usually a sensitive issue as it symbolizes an individual’s pride, identity, and self-worth. During the period of observation, very few of the basketball players took offence when any ethnic-related address term was used. These terms were used in a playful way; thus, highlighting solidarity and camaraderie among the basketball players at UCC. By flagging ethnicity in these address terms and using them in playful ways, male students divest them of their negative social signification in mainstream Ghanaian discourse, thus creating a semantic field of address terms within which ethnic origins could be benign. In this sense, similar to Doran’s (2004) work, such ethnic-related terms ironically affirm the bonds of shared membership in a multi-ethnic community called Ghana, represented by the basketball players at UCC.

4. Conclusion and Implications

The study aimed to report findings on the range of address terms used by the basketball players in University of Cape Coast and the factors that influenced their use among the male basketball players during the field of play.

Concerning the linguistic repertoire of basketball players at UCC, four categories of address terms were identified: Descriptive Phrases (DPs), personal names, nicknames, and ethnic-related terms. An aspect of descriptive phrases, insults, as well as ethnic-related were markedly used, showing the light-hearted nature of the basketball players. Also, it was further observed that some address terms were used reciprocally and some non-reciprocally, based on the situation of the addressees. Further, the use of the lexicon of address terms reflected a community of practice in terms of their shared repertoire (here, the address terms).

The above findings have some implications. First, the study contributes to the scholarship on sports communication (Delin, 2000; Ferguson, 1983; Ghadessy, 1988; Romaine, 1994; Wallace, 1981) and reveals address terms as a key verbal behaviour among male basketball players in the field of play. Most importantly, it was realized that the varying use of address terms by male basketball players formed part of the construction and re-affirmation of friendship, camaraderie, acceptance and belongingness to an already existing community. Basketball players at UCC constitute either a subculture or a cohesive in-group, whose identity is revealed by its naming behaviour. Closely linked to the above implication is the fact that this study has also contributed to the existing knowledge on address terms (Brown & Gilman, 1960; Brown & Ford, 1961; Oyetade, 1995), albeit from the sports domain. Earlier sociolinguistic studies had been conducted on address terms in various socio-cultural milieu (e.g., Dakubu, 1981; Afful, 1998; Norrby & Camilla, 2015) and various domains such as workplace, academic (Formentelli & Hajek, 2016), religion (Dzameshie, 1997; Wharry, 2003), media (Edu-Buandoh, 1999), home, and politics (e.g., Fetzer & Bull, 2004; Jaworski & Galazinski, 2000).

Given the findings and implications, it would be worthwhile if future research is replicated to cover the use of address terms used by female basketball players; thus, adding to the scholarship on gendered language. Further, a study can be conducted on a different university campus among basketball players to find out the extent to which findings in the present study can be generalized to other campuses in Ghana or elsewhere. These sets of study can enhance our understanding of sports communication, in general, and address terms, in particular.

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