

This is a repository copy of *Dude in British English: towards a non-gendered term of address*.

White Rose Research Online URL for this paper:

<https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/192794/>

---

**Article:**

Pastorino, Valeria (Cover date: 6 July 2022) *Dude in British English: towards a non-gendered term of address*. *York Papers in Linguistics*, 2 (17). 2. pp. 13-28.

---

**Reuse**

Items deposited in White Rose Research Online are protected by copyright, with all rights reserved unless indicated otherwise. They may be downloaded and/or printed for private study, or other acts as permitted by national copyright laws. The publisher or other rights holders may allow further reproduction and re-use of the full text version. This is indicated by the licence information on the White Rose Research Online record for the item.

**Takedown**

If you consider content in White Rose Research Online to be in breach of UK law, please notify us by emailing [eprints@whiterose.ac.uk](mailto:eprints@whiterose.ac.uk) including the URL of the record and the reason for the withdrawal request.

# DUDE IN BRITISH ENGLISH: TOWARDS A NON-GENDERED TERM OF ADDRESS

VALERIA PASTORINO

University of York

## *Abstract*

This article explores the reported use of the term of address *dude* in British English in the United Kingdom through the analysis of the responses to a sociolinguistic self-report study on the participants' use of this term of address. To assess the general use of *dude* in this variety of national English in the United Kingdom, several social variables will be considered, as well as the social relationships between speakers and addressee. Furthermore, the main hypothesis of this article is that *dude* is now used - by British English native speakers that have been brought up in the United Kingdom - as an inclusive term of address and speakers are not concerned with the addressee's gender when they choose to use this term of address. The statistical analysis shows that younger speakers use *dude* to address all genders equally, while older speakers prefer using this term mostly to address male interlocutors. Moreover, the quantitative results show that *dude* presents a high degree of informality and familiarity since speakers reported the highest use of this term of address with addressees with whom they have close relationships, such as close friends and siblings.

## *1. Introduction*

While there has been much research on how the term of address *dude* is used in multiple national varieties of English (Heyd, 2014; Kiesling, 2004; Urichuk & Loureiro-Rodríguez, 2019), none have focused on the use of this term of address in British English in the United Kingdom. For this reason, the research question that is being investigated in this article is: How is *dude* used in British English in the United Kingdom? The main aim of this study is to provide a clear description of the use of this term of address by British English speakers brought up in the United Kingdom.

Several terms of address that were once only used by male speakers to address other male speakers, are being adopted by other genders (Rendle-Short, 2009) causing a shift in their use (McConnell-Ginet, 2003:84). Therefore, the hypothesis of this study is that *dude* is used in British English in the United Kingdom as an inclusive term of address, and speakers are not concerned with the addressee's gender when they choose this term of address. To answer the research questions and investigate the hypothesis of this article, a triangulation approach made of both a macro-analytic survey and a micro-analytic investigation of the reported use of *dude* was used (Rendle-Short, 2009). Thus, this study investigates how different sociolinguistic variables and the social relationships between the speaker and the addressee affect the use of *dude* in British English in the United Kingdom.

After giving an overview on the most influential studies on terms of address and describing the research background of *dude* as an address term, the methodologies implemented in this study will be outlined. First, a general description of the chosen methodology will be proposed, and it will be then illustrated in detail. Subsequently, the results of the study will be presented in order to answer the main research question and investigate the hypothesis. Finally, in the discussion section, the results will be discussed considering the correlations between the results of this analysis and other studies in the field.

## 2. Previous research on terms of address

Terms of address have been widely explored in linguistic research, and the interest in the way speakers address their interlocutors goes back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when Gedike (1794) started exploring the use of German vocatives. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the main contributions to this field were concerned with the use of personal pronouns in languages like Latin (Chatelain, 1880), Italian (Johnston, 1904), and English (Stidston, 1917). However, towards the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, several scholars began to underline the importance of terms of address in conveying politeness and solidarity (Brown & Gilman, 1960; Brown & Levinson, 1978) and in the strategic construction of human relationships (Fitch, 1991; Leech, 1999). Since then, address studies have “focused on social etiquette and politeness, solidarity and distance” (Ton, 2019:26) and on investigating terms of address as determined by cultural, social, and geographical settings (Koul, 1995). An example of the latter can be found in Zhang (2002), which explores the importance of terms of address to convey cultural messages in Chinese English. Later, Wardhaugh (2006) discussed and highlighted the importance of social factors, solidarity, and politeness as a whole in the choice of terms of address, paving the way for more recent address studies, that implement both pragmatic and sociolinguistic perspectives (Alba-Juez, 2009; Kiesling, 2004; Rendle-Short, 2009).

The term of address analysed in this paper (i.e., *dude*) falls under what Leech (1999) categorised as familiarisers, referring to the informal and familiar relationship existing between the user of these terms and the addressee. The interest in familiarisers, such as *guys*, *mate*, *man*, *bro* or *dude* has increased in the last decades as scholars consider research on these terms of address to be a fruitful field for sociolinguistics as well as for pragmatics (Ton, 2019:24). Several scholars have analysed this specific category of terms of address through contrastive studies (Alba-Juez, 2009; Heyd, 2014). For example, in her contrastive study on the familiariser *dude* and the German *Alter*, Heyd (2014) recognises several similarities between these terms of address, ranging from phonological properties to sociolinguistic stylization. Nevertheless, her findings also show that *dude* and *Alter* are functionally different. In her study, she argues that this is “due to the very different identities associated with usage of the words in American and German societies” (p. 291). However, the differences in their function could also be traced back to differences in the semantics of the two terms of address.

A diachronic study on *dude* (Hill, 1994) gives evidence of the journey that this term has endured since it was first documented. *Dude* was first used as a reference term used in the north of England and western Canada in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Then, the term reappeared in western America in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century as a literary reference term. And it is in America that, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, *dude* became common as a term of address in informal speech following what Hill has called the “great *dude* shift” (p. 323).

Alongside contrastive studies and diachronic studies, also research on the use of specific familiarisers in certain geographical regions has become more and more influential. Following this path, *dude* has been first investigated with regard to its use in American English (Kiesling, 2004). In his study, Kiesling examines the use of *dude* in Pittsburgh (Pennsylvania, USA) through a sociolinguistic self-report survey and an analysis of talk-in-interaction (p. 290). Kiesling’s analysis is based on the notion of social indexicality, and he argues that *dude* indexes a stance of “masculine solidarity and heterosexism” (p. 283). On the other hand, the results in Kiesling suggest that the use of this term of address is not confined to male speakers, as a small part of female speakers tends to use *dude* to address other female speakers. The combination of the two methodologies implemented in Kiesling (2004) has later on become widely used in the analysis of familiarisers, e.g., Rendle-Short’s (2009; 2010) studies on *mate*.

Urichuk & Loureiro-Rodríguez (2019) replicated Kiesling's (2004) sociolinguistic self-report survey to describe the use of *dude* and other familiarisers in Canadian English in the region of Manitoba. The findings in their study show that *dude* is mostly used by male speakers to address other male speakers in Canadian English. However, *dude* is also the only term of address in their analysis that is reported by female speakers as used to address both male and female speakers, regardless of their gender. The same tendency observed in Urichuk & Loureiro-Rodríguez (2019) about female speakers reclaiming the use of *dude* has been noticed by Rendle-Short (2010) in her study on the use of *mate* in Australian English.

The research presented in this section has laid out the absence of an analysis of *dude* as a term of address in British English in the United Kingdom. The different findings in Kiesling (2004) and Urichuk & Loureiro-Rodríguez (2019) leave a gap in the research about the geographical region where, as Hill (1974) states, *dude* has been documented for the first time and is still used (McConnell-Ginet, 2003:85). Research on the different use of certain terms of address in American English, Canadian English and Australian English has already been conducted (Norrby et al., 2019), demonstrating a "significant variation among speakers of different national varieties, different scenarios and age groups" (p. 375). Furthermore, the results in Rendle-Short (2009) on the process of reclamation of the term of address *mate* by female speakers of Australian English and the subsequent similar findings in URICHUK & LOUREIRO-RODRÍGUEZ (2019), make space for the hypothesis that this study examines on the gender-neutrality of *dude* in British English.

### 3. Sociolinguistic self-report survey

The methodology of the self-report study was chosen in order to give an overview of the reported use and perception of these terms of address by speakers of British English brought up in the United Kingdom, focussing on the relationships between the speakers that use *dude* to address each other. This methodology has been largely used to describe address forms and their use in relation to relationships between speakers (Kiesling, 2004; Rendle-Short, 2009; Urichuk & Loureiro-Rodríguez, 2019). In replicating this methodology, the survey was meant to measure the self-reported frequency of use rather than real use. In doing so, it is possible to directly examine the speakers' perception of these terms of address.

A total of 633 respondents speaking British English and raised in the United Kingdom were surveyed to understand their use and perception of *dude* as a term of address. An additional 178 participants were surveyed but have not been included in the statistical analysis, as they stated they did not speak British English or they did not complete the entire study.

At the very beginning of the survey, each participant was given information about the study. They were furthermore informed that by accepting the terms they were giving their consent to participate in the study. All data were completely anonymised.

The self-report survey comprised four parts and was created using the survey tool Qualtrics. The first part of the survey was used to collect the sociodemographic information of the respondents, such as their age range, gender, sexuality and wherein the United Kingdom they were brought up. This not only allowed to address the main research question of this study and investigate the general use of this term of address, but also to confirm or reject the hypothesis that *dude* as a term of address is not used to address only men anymore, but it has gained a sort of neutral nuance.

The second part of the survey was entirely on *dude*. The first question asked the participant whether they used that particular term of address. In case of negative response, the survey only

asked the participant their opinion on which characteristics are peculiar of a person that uses *dude* to address other people. These responses were then qualitatively analysed.

On the other hand, in the case of a positive response, the respondent was asked about the gender and sexuality of the people they usually address with that particular term. Then, they had to express their use of the term of address based on the relationship they have with the addressee. This was measured by making the respondent rank their use of the address terms within a particular relationship using a Likert scale. The five-point Likert scale went from 'I would never use this term to address a person with whom I have this relationship' to 'I always use this term to address a person with whom I have this relationship'. The relationships analysed were close friend, sibling, romantic relationship, acquaintance, stranger, parent or guardian, boss, professor (Kiesling, 2004). Finally, they were asked the reason why they used this term to address other people. To investigate the hypothesis of this study, the methodology in KIESLING was partially changed. In fact, in this study's version of the self-report survey, the participants could choose between "male", "female" "non-binary" and "all genders equally" when asked about the gender of the addressee with whom they use the term of address. Although previous studies on the topic have used a binary distinction to describe gender (Kiesling, 2004; Urichuk & Loureiro-Rodríguez, 2019), this study will comply with the non-binary approach to gender discussed in Eckert & Podesva (2021). This choice was made because, as McConnell-Ginet (2003) argues, social labelling - and so, also terms of address - are part of the linguistic resources for gender construction.

In the next section, the steps undertaken during the data cleaning and the statistical analysis processes will be described.

### *3.1 Data cleaning and statistical analysis*

The choice of branching the survey in case of negative responses to the first question allowed the participants to have a good user experience in responding to the survey, as the questions were drawn from their previous responses. However, the same choice has led to a dataset with several blank spaces. Therefore, the dataset was cleaned and divided into several subsets using Excel before proceeding with the analysis. During the cleaning steps of the dataset, the sociodemographic information regarding age groups and geographical regions were united under fewer categories. The respondents had been able to choose between five age groups (18-24; 25-34; 35-44; 45-64; 65+) and twelve geographical regions that correspond to the usual geographical division of the United Kingdom (North East; North West; Yorkshire and the Humber; East Midlands; West Midlands; East of England; Greater London; South-East; South West; Wales; Scotland; Northern Ireland). The final categories used during the analysis were representative of the labels 'Gen Z' (18-24), 'Millennials (25-44) and 'Middle aged' (45+). As for the geographical regions, they were simply incorporated in the labels Northern England, Southern England, Midlands, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The statistical analysis of the survey was conducted using Excel and Qualtrics. The descriptive statistics regarding the Likert scale measuring relationships was conducted using the Reports function on Qualtrics, while the analysis of the sociodemographic variables was conducted in Excel, as was the inferential statistics regarding the sociolinguistic variables. Several chi-square tests of independence were conducted, to determine if the values in the dataset could be expected - that is if they matched the null hypothesis values. Using inferential statistics, it was possible to assess whether there was a relationship between the variables analysed.

A different path was taken for the qualitative analysis of the open questions about the reasons behind the respondents' use (or non-use) of *dude*. These responses were written by the

participants themselves, so the analysis of these text responses was faced manually, categorising them under different headings. When a response fell under multiple headings, the data were analysed taking into account every category mentioned in the response. This choice was made to give a more detailed report of the speakers' perceptions about these words.

#### 4. Results

The sociolinguistic self-report survey on *dude* has shown that 46.92% of the respondents (297 responses) uses the address term *dude* in everyday life. On the other hand, the remaining 53.08% of the respondents (336 responses) have never used *dude* as a term to address other people. When asked about their perception of people that do use this term of address, the respondents that do not use it gave responses that have been categorised during the analysis under the headings shown in Figure 1.

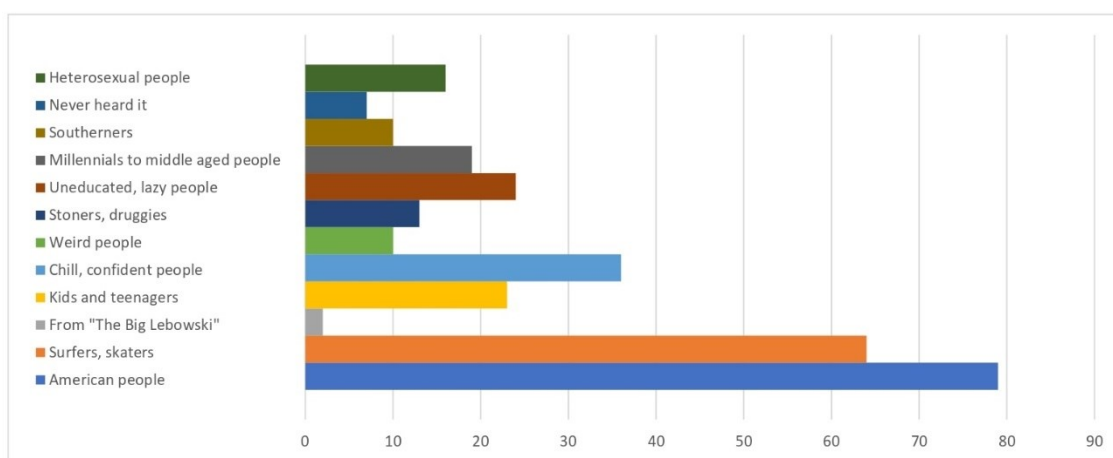


Figure 1: Responses of speakers that do not use *dude* to: “what is your perception of people that use *dude* as a term of address?”

From Figure 1 the almost immediate connection of *dude* with American English as well as American culture is clear. This is noticeable not only from the great number of responses under the heading 'American people' but also from the association with the late '90s movie "The Big Lebowski". In this movie, the main character's nickname is 'The Dude'.

In the following sections, different variables related to the use of *dude* will be analysed to shed light on its use in British English in the United Kingdom.

##### 4.1 Relationship between use of *dude* and sexual orientation of the speaker

Using Figure 1 as a starting point, the demographics of the respondents have been analysed in order to assess whether they support these perceptions or not. The first variable that will be discussed is sexuality, as 16 speakers have responded that *dude* is seen as a term of address that would be used by heterosexual people.

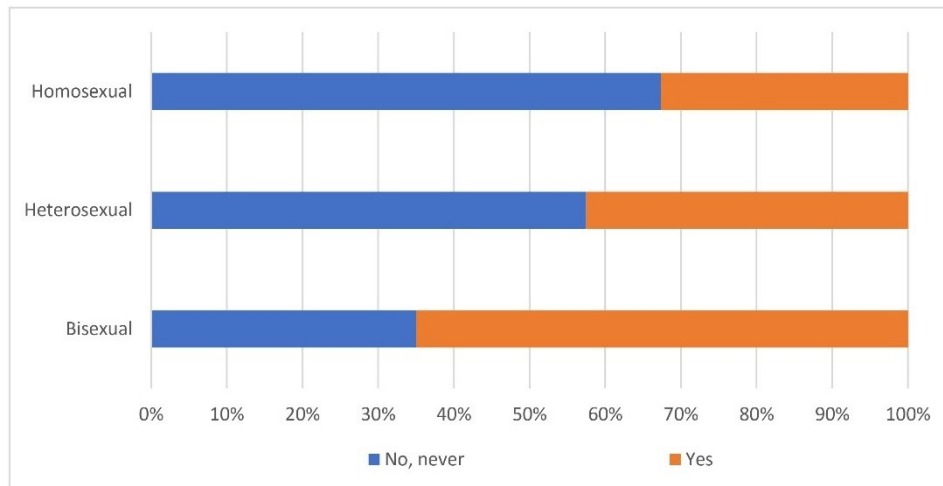


Figure 2. Percentages of responses to “do you address individuals as dude?” by sexual orientation of the speaker. As shown in Figure 2, in percentages homosexual participants use *dude* less than heterosexual participants. However, the percentage of bisexual speakers that use *dude* as a way to address other people is higher than the percentage of speakers who do not use this term of address. To assess whether there is a significant relationship between the sexual orientation of the speakers and their reported use of *dude*, a chi-square test was conducted. The chi-square test of independence showed that the relation between these variables is significant:  $\chi^2=25.06$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p<.001$ . The null hypothesis can therefore be rejected, and it is possible to state that there is a difference in the reported use of *dude* given the sexuality of the speaker.

#### 4.2 Relationship between the use of *dude* and the place where the speakers grew up

From what Figure 1 shows, speakers that do not use *dude* perceive this term as used by ‘Southerners’. Figure 3 shows the reported use of *dude* by the region where the participants were brought up. Northern Ireland speakers have a high percentage of positive responses that assess their use of *dude*. The responses in Figure 1 suggest that there is a perception of this term as being stereotypically used by Southerners and Figure 3 shows that speakers from Southern England have the second-highest percentage of *dude* used as a term of address.

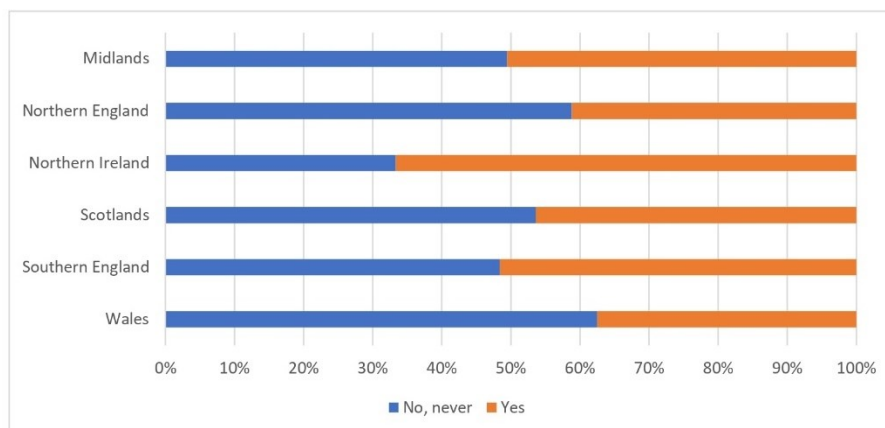


Figure 3. Percentages of responses to “do you address individuals as dude?” by the region where the respondents were brought up

A chi-square test of independence was performed to check whether the relation between these variables was significant. Since the responses in the 'southerners' category shown in Figure 1

came from participants that grew up in England, the chi-square test was only performed using the responses from Southern England, Northern England and the Midlands. The chi-square test of independence result demonstrates that the relation between the geographical region where the speakers were brought up and the use of *dude* is not significant:  $\chi^2=4.59$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p=.10$ . The null hypothesis cannot be rejected, and there is no difference in the use of *dude* within different regions of England. Thus, another test was conducted to check whether there is a difference in the use of *dude* between England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The result was again not significant:  $\chi^2=4.08$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p=.25$ , showing that there is no significant difference in the use of *dude* based on the geographical regions in which the speakers grew up.

### 4.3 The use of *dude* and the age of the speakers

Younger respondents that do not use *dude* as a term of address responded that they perceive it as a term used by older speakers, such as millennials and middle-aged people. By contrast, older participants perceive *dude* as a term used by the younger generation, from children to teenagers. Since the survey was only open to people that are at least 18 years old, there is not a children perspective on this issue. However, one of the respondents stated that they use *dude* “to express that someone (usually my kids) is doing something wrong” (Anonymous respondent, female, 35-44). The response of another participant that does not use *dude* but has reported cases when they hear other people using it, states that they usually hear “a parent calling *little dude* a kid under 5 years old” (Anonymous respondent, male, 18-24). Figure 4 below shows the self-reported use of *dude* by the age of the speakers.

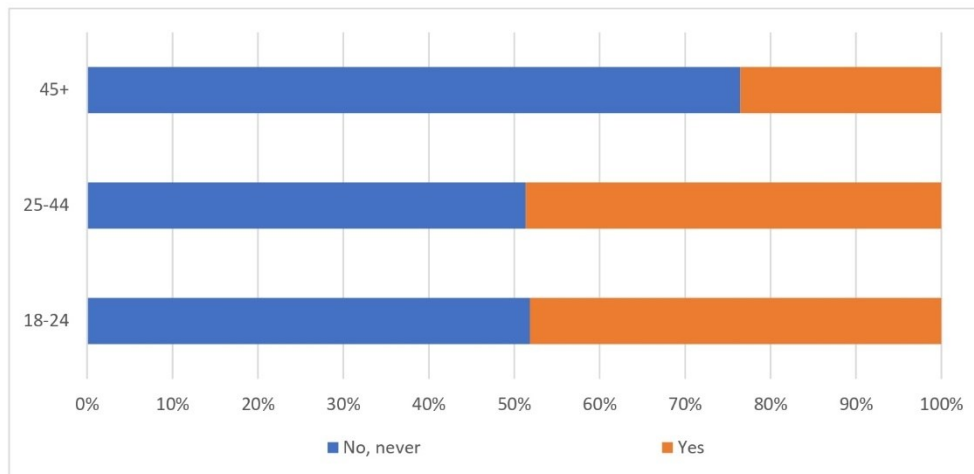


Figure 4. Number of responses to “do you address individuals as *dude*?” by age of the respondents

Since the number of respondents for each age group is not homogeneous, a chi-square test of independence was conducted to assess whether we are dealing with two independent variables or not. The result was significant:  $\chi^2=7.90$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p=.02$ . Therefore, the result of the chi-square test is such that the null hypothesis can be rejected, and it is possible to conclude that the use of *dude* to address people is dependent on the variable ‘speaker’s age’. However, the similarities between the age groups 18-24 and 25-44 is clear in Figure 4 already. To test their relationship, another chi-square test has been conducted on these two age groups only, and the result was not significant:  $\chi^2=0.008$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p=.92$ . Of course, the use of *dude* is still influenced by the variable age of the speaker. However, the last chi-square test has demonstrated how, in proportion, Gen Z (18-24) and Millennials (25-44) seem to agree on their use of *dude* while differing from the age group 45+.



#### 4.4 Why do speakers use *dude*?

The speakers who responded that they use *dude* in everyday life were asked the reason why they use it and whether they think that their use of *dude* tells something about them to their interlocutors. The participants' 297 responses to this question were categorised under the headings shown in Figure 5.

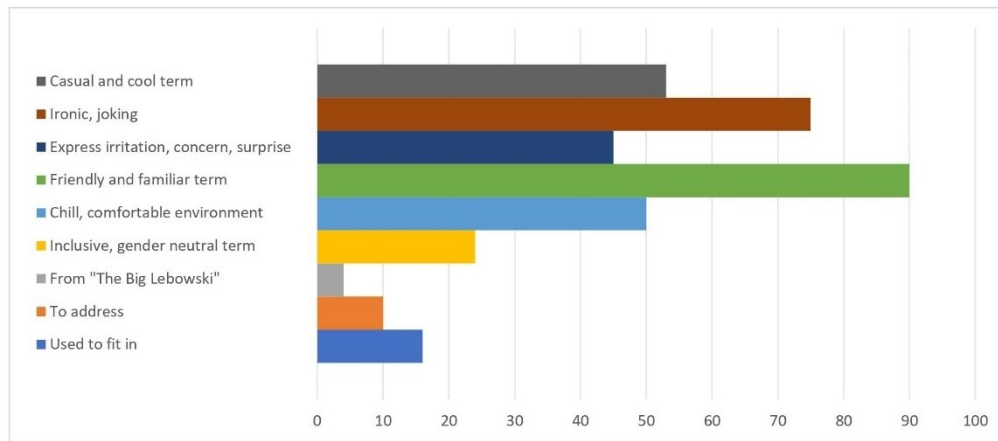


Figure 5. Responses of the speakers that use *dude* to: "Why do you use *dude* to address people? Do you think it tells something about you to the person you are talking to?"

As is noticeable from the headings in Figure 5, there is no explicit reference to American English as was the case with the perceptions of non-users of *dude*. However, a small part of the speakers that use this term of address has stated that they do see a connection with the movie "The Big Lebowski", which in this setting represents the inherent American heritage of *dude* as a term of address and reference as well.

More than 50 participants use *dude* because they think it is a cool, casual term. For them, using this term means embodying these characteristics. As the other 50 respondents admitted, they use *dude* as a term of address to create a chill and comfortable environment within the conversation. This is confirmed by their responses, which will be represented here by what two of the respondents wrote about their use of *dude*: "I would hope those I address as *dude* would perceive me as someone with a chilled aura" (Anonymous respondent, female, 18-24); "I'm a cool kid, so I use *dude* as a reflection of my crippling anxiety; it is a way to be more confident and maintain my chill reputation amongst peers" (Anonymous respondent, non-binary, 25-44). Furthermore, the second response is also an example of how *dude* is used for fitting in with peers, as more than 15 respondents have confirmed.

#### 4.5 *Dude* used as a gender-neutral term of address

Respondents to the survey also perceive *dude* as an inclusive and more gender-neutral way to address people, as shown in Figure 5. Several respondents stated that they use this term of address because of this characteristic: "I use *dude* as a gender-neutral way to address people in an informal way. I use it to try and help people feel relaxed and at ease during the conversation" (Anonymous respondent, female, 18-24); "I find it to be more informal and colloquial as well as non-specific towards any particular gender to show people that I'm quite open and accepting towards them" (Anonymous respondent, female, 18-24).

Since all the respondents that have shared their perceptions about the inclusivity and gender-neutrality of this term of address are females, Figure 6 shows how the speakers of different

genders have responded to the question “What is the most common gender of the individuals you address as *dude*?”.

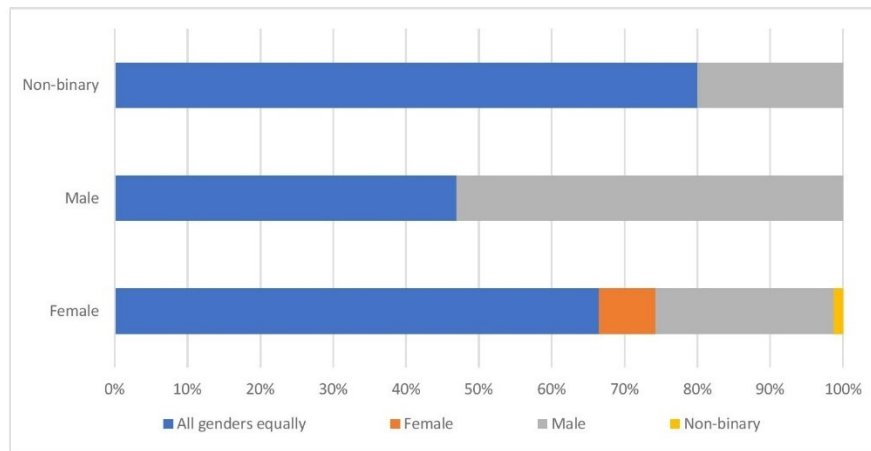


Figure 6. Percentages of responses to “what is the most common gender of the individuals you address as *dude*?” By gender of the respondents

Figure 6 shows that only female respondents have responded that they most commonly use this term of address with other female interlocutors. Furthermore, it is females too that have stated their use of *dude* with non-binary addressee only, confirming again their use of *dude* as an inclusive term. Instead, male and non-binary participants have responded that they either use *dude* only with males or with no distinctions between genders. Since the use of *dude* by the gender of the addressee seems to be very visually different across genders in Figure 6, a chi-square test of independence was performed to see if, in proportion, there is an actual difference given by the dependency of these variables. The chi-square test was performed on the three genders of the addressers and the 'male' and 'all genders equally' category for the addressee's gender variable, as these two are the ones found in the responses of all the three genders analysed. The result was significant:  $\chi^2=13.28$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p=.001$ , the null hypothesis is therefore rejected. This result showed that the gender of the addresser influences who they choose to address as *dude*, at least for what may concern the gender of the addressee.

Figure 7 shows the gender of the people addressed as *dude* by the age of the speaker using the term of address. In order to check if there is a change in how *dude* is used for what concerns the gender of the addressee, a chi-square test of independence was conducted. The chi-square test was performed on the three age groups and the addressee's gender categories 'male' and 'all genders equally'. The result of the chi-square test was significant:  $\chi^2=14.94$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p<.001$ . The significant result suggests that there is a difference in the gender of people addressed as *dude* by age of the addresser.

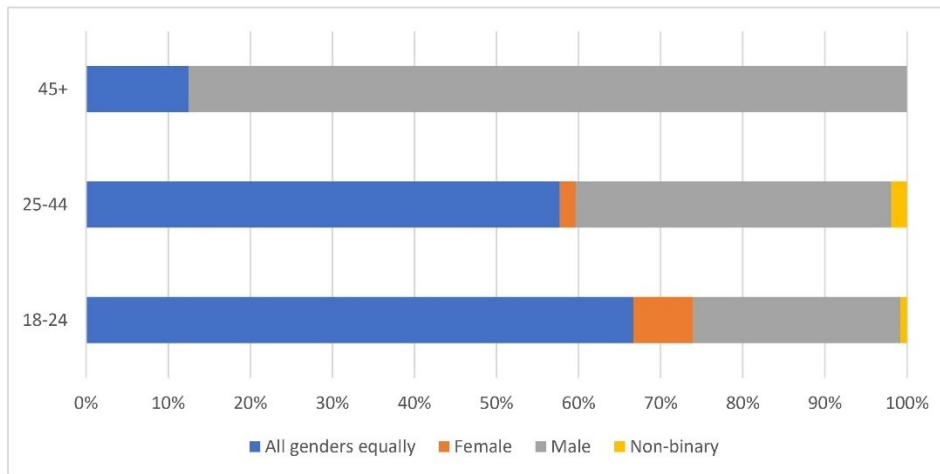


Figure 7. Percentages of responses to “what is the most common gender of the individuals you address as dude?” By age of the respondents

The previously predominant use of *dude* for male addressees is also visually clear in Figure 7. From the results in percentages, it is noticeable how middle-aged people (45+) tend to use this term of address with males, with more than 85% of the responses stating it. The situation is different with the reported use of Millennials (25-44), with less than 40% of the respondents from this age group stating that they tend to use this term to address males. The use of *dude* to address ‘all genders equally’ starts to increase reaching its peak with the use of *dude* reported by Gen Z (18-24).

However, Figure 7 also shows how the pattern of use of *dude* by Millennials and Gen Z is visually similar. To better investigate the hypothesis of this study, separate chi-square tests have been conducted on the categories, analysing them two by two. First, a chi-square test has been performed on the age groups ‘18-24’ and ‘25-44’. The result was not significant,  $\chi_2=3.05$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p=.08$ . The null hypothesis cannot be rejected, therefore there is no difference in the choice of the addressee’s gender between Gen Z (18-24) and Millennials (25-44). This result suggests that the main difference in use is between the ‘45+’ age group and the other two age groups. To confirm this, two other tests have been performed. The result on age groups ‘18-24’ and ‘45+’ was significant:  $\chi_2=13.35$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p<.001$ . In the same way, the result of the chi-square test on age groups ‘25-44’ and ‘45+’ was significant too:  $\chi_2=6.25$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p=.01$ .

The multiple chi-square tests performed on the age groups have therefore shown that Millennials (25-44) and Gen Z (18-24) use *dude* across genders in a similar way, while middle-aged people report a different use of *dude* by gender of the addressee. These results suggest that there has been a change in the last decades in the use of *dude*, concerning the use of this term of address based on the gender of the addressee. Furthermore, the test conducted on the gender of both addresser and addressee has shown that female and non-binary speakers seem to have led - and are still leading - this new use of *dude* that disregards its previous masculine connotation.

#### 4.6 How is *dude* used across different relationships between the speakers?

As Figure 5 showed, the main characteristic of *dude* as a term of address is its light-hearted friendly connotation: “if I call you *dude* it means I count you as a friend” (Anonymous respondent, female, 18-24). This is strictly related to its use as an informal term of address. In fact, speakers tend to perceive *dude* as “informal and lighthearted” (Anonymous respondent, female, 18-24). Using the responses of the participants to the study, it was possible to create

the graph in Figure 8 showing the use of *dude* based on the relationship between speakers and addressee.

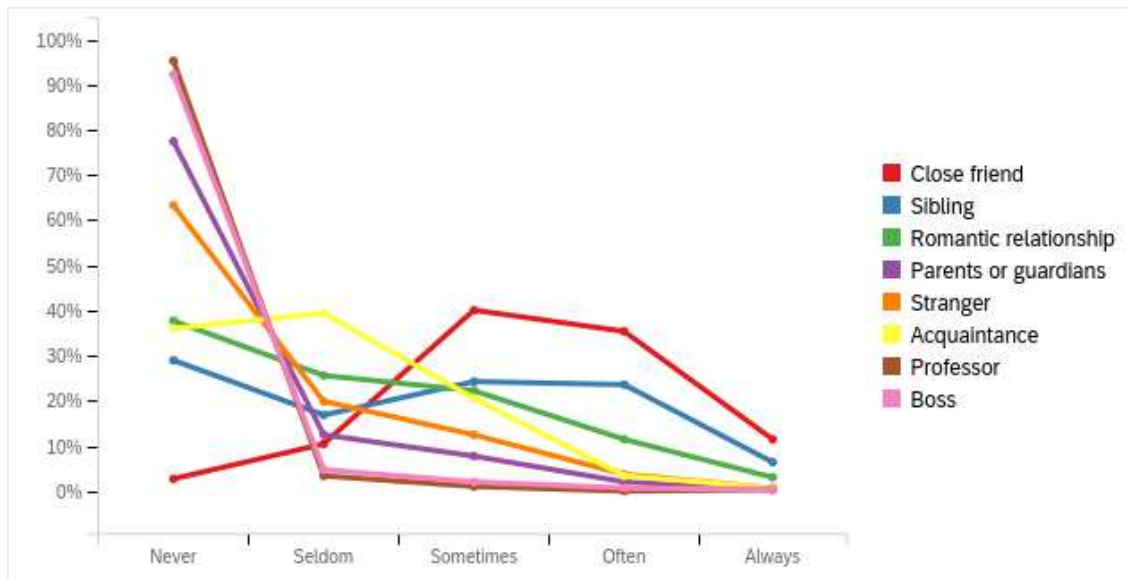


Figure 8. Responses in percentage to "how likely are you to address people as *dude* based on the relationship you have with them?"

In addition, Table 1 summarises the exact percentages of reported use, based on the relationship between the speaker and the addressee.

	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
Close friend	3%	10%	40%	35%	11%
Sibling	29%	17%	24%	24%	6%
Romantic relationship	38%	26%	22%	11%	3%
Parents or guardians	77%	12%	8%	2%	0%
Stranger	63%	20%	12%	4%	1%
Acquaintance	36%	39%	21%	3%	1%
Professor	95%	3%	1%	0%	0%
Boss	92%	5%	2%	1%	0%

Table 1. Percentages of use of *dude* based on the relationship between speaker and addressee

The speakers' responses have shown that they rarely use a term of address as *dude* with interlocutors that fall in the categories of "boss" and "professor". These categories have almost the entirety of the responses on the lowest point of the Likert scale, that is never (respectively 92% and 95%). This confirms the responses in Figure 5, where the speakers qualified *dude* as an informal term of address which, as Figure 8 shows, does not apply for relationships where the language used is usually more formal. Furthermore, 77% of the speakers have responded

that they would never use *dude* to address a parent or a guardian. In the same relationship, 12% of the respondents have stated that they seldom use this term of address and 8% of the speakers have responded that they do use it sometimes. Some of the speakers seem to use the same level of formality when speaking with professors, bosses or parents: “it doesn’t mean I’m not confident with parents, professor etc. You just know that you need to speak formally and respect them” (Anonymous respondent, female, 18-24). However, as the purple line in Figure 8 shows, there is a portion of speakers that makes a difference between these relationships and the respective level of formality of their speech, choosing to use *dude* with parents or guardians more than with professors or bosses.

Table 1 shows that 63% of the respondents have stated that they would never use *dude* as a term to address strangers. However, 32% of them admitted to using *dude* between seldom and sometimes to address strangers. One of the responses explains one of the uses of *dude* to address a person that the speaker does not know: “to strangers, often as an attempt to deescalate a tense situation by using relatively friendly language” (Anonymous respondent, non-binary, 25-44). Therefore, this further demonstrates that speakers are aware of the inherent stance of friendliness of *dude* and they consciously use it for specific purposes. As Figure 8 and Table 1 both illustrate, romantic relationships and acquaintances show almost the same percentage (respectively, 38% and 36%) of responses of people that would never use it in those contexts. However, they differ at the seldom point where it is possible to notice how 39% of the respondents may seldomly use *dude* with acquaintances.

As for romantic relationships, it is interesting that 62% of respondents would use *dude* as a way to address their partner from seldom to always. Nevertheless, one of the respondents has stated that they perceive *dude* as a “platonic term of endearment” (Anonymous respondent, female, 18-24). The reported intrinsic stance of friendliness of *dude* as a term of address has already been discussed, and the fact that the heading ‘close friends’ has the lowest percentage of ‘I would never use it’ responses in Figure 8 and Table 1 only confirms this use. Relationships such as siblings and close friends seem to follow the same pattern. They both present the two highest percentages of responses for reported use under sometimes, often and always.

## 5. Discussion

In the following sections, the results of the self-report study will be discussed in comparison with prominent studies in the field. Each section will address the main research question about the general use of *dude* in British English in the United Kingdom and the hypothesis of this study about its gender-neutrality, in light of the results that have just been outlined. Furthermore, the limitations of the self-report study will be discussed in order to provide a clear explanation of the conditions under which the results should be interpreted.

### 5.1 Speakers’ perceptions and reported use of *dude*

The perceptions on the use of *dude* confirm the results in Kiesling (2004). The participants that do not use *dude* associate this term of address with ‘stoners’, ‘surfers’ and ‘skaters’ in the same way as, in Kiesling, users of *dude* were associated with ‘druggies’ and ‘skaters’ (p. 288). However, since this study did not take information about the drug use of the participants, it is not possible to check whether these are only perceptions or there is a real connection between drug use and the use of *dude* as a term of address. A result of the sort can be found in a study about the use of brocatives - e.g., *dude* - in the Manitoba region in Canada (Urichuk & Loureiro-Rodríguez, 2019). The authors reported that “there was no difference in brocative use between

self-reported drug users and non-users” (p. 368). The possible connection between the use of *dude* in the United Kingdom and the speakers’ consumption of alcohol and drugs remains an area for further research.

The analysis of the responses about people that use *dude* has shown that it is perceived as being used by 'working-class' speakers. However, the self-report survey did not include a question about the socioeconomic status of the respondents. As a result of the absence of information regarding the socioeconomic status of the speakers, it was not possible to investigate whether these perceptions were real. This is a point for further analysis on this term of address in British English in the United Kingdom.

The results of the self-report study provide evidence that the sexual orientation of the speaker plays a role in the choice of using *dude* as a term of address. Furthermore, the results show a wider self-reported use of this term of address by bisexual individuals rather than by heterosexual respondents. This evidence differentiates the use of *dude* in British English in the United Kingdom from the use of the same term of address in American English reported in Kiesling (2004). In fact, Kiesling describes the use of *dude* in American English in the early 2000s as demanding “strict heterosexuality” (p. 282). The perception of *dude* as a term of address used mostly by heterosexual individuals is however still noticeable, as the responses from the speakers that do not use *dude* have demonstrated.

### 5.2 How is *dude* used across different relationships between the speakers?

The results about the use of *dude* based on the relationships between the speakers mostly confirm the findings about American English (Kiesling, 2004) and Canadian English (Urichuk & Loureiro-Rodríguez, 2019). This is the case with the reported non-use of *dude* to address interlocutors that fall under relationship categories such as ‘professor’ or ‘boss’. Thus, the findings in this study confirm the informality of *dude*. Furthermore, the results uphold the friendliness indexed by this term of address (Kiesling, 2004), since the ‘close friend’ category is reported as being the relationship in which *dude* is used the most.

Several participants have reported their use of *dude* to address their children as previously showed in section 4.1.3. The use of this term as a way for parents to address their kids was not found in any of the previous studies on *dude*, and as a result, the relationship category ‘son/daughter’ was not implemented during the creation of the survey for this study. However, the use of *dude* to address children and the power dimension regarding this specific term of address remains an area for further research since, in their analysis of families’ dinnertime interactions, Pauletto et al. (2017) have demonstrated how, in the context of parents/children interactions, terms of endearment are exclusively used by the parents to address their children and never the opposite.

Another result of this study that differs from the use of *dude* found in American English is what Kiesling (2004) has described as intimacy (p. 287). The results in Kiesling suggested that *dude* was not used in romantic relationships: it did not index intimacy. However, the findings in this study show how 67% of the respondents use *dude* to address their partners. This percentage of use suggests that, in British English, *dude* indexes a wider type of closeness that goes beyond the boundaries between ‘close friend’ and ‘romantic relationship’. The use of *dude* in British English rejects the findings in Kiesling, which described *dude* as used in “the small zone of ‘safe’ solidarity between camaraderie and intimacy” (p. 291).

### 5.3 *Dude* used as a gender-neutral term of address

The hypothesis of this study concerns the use of *dude* as a gender-neutral term of address. Therefore, the hypothesis is that this term of address has shifted from being a masculine term of address to being used regardless of the gender of the speakers. The same shift has already interested the term of address *mate* in Australian English (Rendle-Short, 2009) and it has been noticed by McConnell-Ginet (2003) for terms of address such as *man* and *you guys*.

The results of the self-report survey have shown that this change is led by non-binary and female speakers belonging to the 18-24 and 25-44 age groups. From the findings in this study, it seems that what affects the use of *dude* in British English is at the interface between age and gender. In fact, non-binary and female speakers aged 18-44 report their use of *dude* which is different not only from men but also from other non-binary and female speakers aged 45+. The fact that this shift is female-led is not uncommon, due to what Labov (2001) calls gender paradox. This paradox lies in the fact that “women conform more closely than men to sociolinguistic norms that are overtly prescribed but conform less than men when they are not” (p. 292). Applying the gender paradox to this study, it is not possible to think of this new use of *dude* in the sense of a prestige/stigmatised or standard/non-standard variant (or prescribed norm, in the Labovian sense seen above).

However, as explained above, this shift lies at the intersection between gender and age and, as Eckert (2000) states, young generations often lead linguistic change regarding the use of innovative forms. In this sense, it is possible to see *dude* as an innovative, gender-neutral form that, as the respondents to the survey have reported, is currently seen as being ‘non-specific towards any particular gender’ (Anonymous respondent, female, 18-24). Although the principles cited above have been discussed in phonological variables’ environments, this study follows the views of Tagliamonte (2006) who argues that linguistic variables can be analysed at any linguistic level “ranging from phonetics to discourse, from phonology to syntax” (p. 75).

### 5.5 *Limitations*

For what concerns the self-report study, the main limitation of this methodology stemmed from the fact that the survey was shared on social media only. This distribution method has led to not having control over the demographic characteristics of the respondents. As a result, there was an overall inhomogeneous number for each demographic group. However, the choice of distributing the survey via social media has also meant reaching a greater number of respondents as well as more geographical regions.

## 6. *Conclusions*

*Dude* is a light-hearted and friendly term of address, that is used in British English in the United Kingdom mostly to address close friends. The results in this study corroborate previous research on *dude* in American English and Canadian English indicating that *dude* indexes solidarity in informal and close relationships, such as close friends and siblings. The connection between *dude* and the informal setting and relationship between the speakers is also demonstrated by the rare reported use of this address term within relationship categories such as ‘professor’ or ‘boss’. Surprisingly, the analysis has shown that *dude* is sometimes used in British English in the United Kingdom to address interlocutors that fall under the category ‘parent or guardian’.

The perceptions of the non-users of *dude* suggest that there is a correlation between the use of this term of address and the place where the speakers that use it were brought up. However, the quantitative analysis of the responses of the users of this term of address have shown that there is no significant relation between these variables. The connection between *dude* and the American culture seems to be strongly perceived by the speakers that do not use this term of address. On the other hand, the users of *dude* do not associate this term of address with its American heritage and have stated that they use it to index coolness and friendliness in a chill and casual environment.

The findings in this study reject the masculine connotation that *dude* had in previous research, as it is now used by female and non-binary speakers as much as by male speakers. Moreover, it is reported as being used to address individuals of all genders equally and several respondents have described this term of address as ‘inclusive’ and ‘gender-neutral’, suggesting that *dude* is perceived as non-gendered among the participants in the survey and that the hypothesis of this study can be accepted. The shift described in this study is being led by female and non-binary speakers that fall under the age categories 18-24 and 25-44. In fact, the results of the survey demonstrate that older speakers use *dude* to address almost solely male interlocutors, with a small percentage of respondents using it regardless of the addressee’s gender.

This study demonstrates the potential for additional studies in the field of address terms, that focus on the gendered (or non-gendered) use of terms of address. Further research on the use of traditionally masculine terms of address (e.g., *man*, *bro*) with regard to British English should be conducted, to assess whether this is a trend or something concerning this term of address only. The changes regarding the use of terms of address highlight the importance of examining their use across different social categories and demographics both quantitatively and qualitatively, to better understand the speakers’ perception and use of address terms.

## References

- ALBA-JUEZ, L. (2009). “Little Words” in small talk: Some considerations on the use of the pragmatic markers *man* in English and *macho/tio* in peninsular Spanish. In Leow, R. P., Campos, H., & Lardiere, D. *Little words: Their history, phonology, syntax, semantics, pragmatics, and acquisition*. Pp. 171-181. Georgetown University Press.
- BROWN, P., & LEVINSON, S. (1978). Universals in Language Usage: Politeness Phenomena. In Goody, E. (Ed.), *Questions and Politeness: Strategies in Social Interaction*. pp. 56-310. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- BROWN, R. W. & GILMAN, A. (1960). The pronouns of power and solidarity. In Sebeok, T. A. (ed.). *Style in language*. 253–276. Cambridge (MA): MIT Press.
- CHATELAIN, E. (1880). Du pluriel de respect en Latin. *Revue de Philologie*. 4. 129–139.
- ECKERT, P. (2000). *Linguistic variation as social practice*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- ECKERT, P., & PODESVA, R. J. (2021). Non-binary approaches to gender and sexuality. In Angouri, J., & Baxter, J. *The Routledge Handbook of Language, Gender and Sexuality*. pp. 25-36. Routledge.
- FITCH, K. (1991). The interplay of linguistic universals and cultural knowledge in personal address: Colombian Madre terms. *Communication Monographs*. 8. 254–272.
- GEDIKE, F. (1794). *Ueber Du und Sie in der deutschen Sprache*. Berlin: Johann Friedrich Unger.
- HEYD, T. (2014). Dude, Alter! *Pragmatics and Society*. 5(2). 271–295.



- HILL, R. A. (1994). You've Come a Long Way, Dude: A History. *American Speech*, 69(3), 321–327.
- JOHNSTON, O. M. (1904). The use of “ella”, “lei” and “la” as polite forms of address in Italian. *Modern Philology*. 1 (3). 469–475.
- KIESLING, S. F. (2004). Dude. *American Speech*, 79(3), 281–305.
- KOUL, N. (1995). Personal names in Kashmiri. In Koul, N. (ed.) *Sociolinguistics*:  
LABOV, W. (2001). *Principles of linguistic change: Social factors*. Vol 2. Cambridge: Blackwell.
- LEECH, G. (1999). The distribution and function of vocatives in American and British English conversation. In Hasselgård, H. & Oksefjell, S. (Eds.), *Out of corpora: studies in honour of Stig Johansson*. pp. 107-118. Rodopi.
- MCCONNELL-GINET, S. (2003). "What's in a name?" Social labeling and gender practices. in Holmes, J. & Meyerhoff, M. (eds.) *The handbook of language and gender*. pp. 69-97. Oxford: Blackwell.
- NORRBY, C., SCHÜPBACH, D., HAJEK, J., & KRETZENBACHER, H. L. (2019). Introductions at international academic conferences. Address and naming in three different varieties of national English. In Kluge, B., Moyna, M. I., Simon, H. J., & Warren, J. *It's not all about you: New perspectives on address research (topics in address research)*. Pp. 376-395. John Benjamins Pub Co
- PAULETTO, F., ARONSSON, K., & GALEANO, G. (2017). Endearment and address terms in family life: Children's and parents' requests in Italian and Swedish dinnertime interaction. *Journal of Pragmatics*. 109. 82–94.
- RENDELE-SHORT, J. (2009). The address term mate in Australian English: Is it still a masculine term?. *Australian Journal of Linguistics*, 29(2), 245–268.
- RENDELE-SHORT, J. (2010). 'Mate' as a term of address in ordinary interaction. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 42(5), 1201–1218.
- STIDSTON, R. (1917). *The use of Ye in the function of Thou: A study of grammar and social intercourse in fourteenth-century England*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- TAGLIAMONTE, S. (2006). *Analysing Sociolinguistic Variation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- TON, T. (2019). A literature review of address studies from pragmatic and sociolinguistic perspectives. In Kluge, B., Moyna, M. I., Simon, H. J., & Warren, J. *It's not all about you: New perspectives on address research (topics in address research)*. Pp. 23-45. John Benjamins Pub Co.
- URICHUK, M & LOUREIRO-RODRÍGUEZ, V. (2019) Brocatives. Self-reported use of masculine nominal vocatives in Manitoba (Canada). In Kluge, B., Moyna, M. I., Simon, H. J., & Warren, J. *It's not all about you: New perspectives on address research (topics in address research)*. Pp. 355-372. John Benjamins Pub Co.
- ZHANG, H. (2002). Bilingual creativity in Chinese English. Ha Jin's In The Pond. *World Englishes*. 21 (2). 305–315.

Valeria Pastorino  
 Department of Language and Linguistic Science  
 University of York  
 Heslington  
 York  
 email: valeriapastorino12@gmail.com