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And the postcode darlin'. Vocative variation in service encounters on the telephone in northern England

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[Running head: Vocative variation in telephone service encounters]

Abstract

The chapter presents the results of an investigation of vocative use in telephone service encounters in the British housing market. The investigation is based on 300+ "mystery shopping" telephone calls placed with estate agents servicing four socio-economically different areas of a city in northern England. The results show that vocative use in service telephone interactions is nonreciprocal and restricted to estate agents. The frequency of vocative use as well as choice of vocative type by estate agents (first name, last name, honorific, endearment) is socio-economically stratified and sensitive to socio-ethnic group membership projected through callers' accent and name. Variation in vocative type within individual calls allows the agent to explicate an asymmetrical role relationship for the purpose of transactional control.

Keywords: vocatives, endearments, service encounters, telephone interactions, British English, Northern England

1. Introduction

It is generally understood that vocatives contribute to the relational aspects of a service encounter. Few studies, however, examine in detail the interactional work carried out by vocatives and the communicative purposes for which they are used by service providers, beyond concluding that they serve to express politeness and add to the personalisation of the encounter (Felix-Brasdefer 2015). With regard to telephone service encounters, this personalisation is generally discussed as being part of institutionally prescribed rapport building behaviours vis-à-vis customers, where they are seen as indicators of high service performance quality (e.g. Friginal 2009; Hultgren 2017). However, comparatively little is known about the role vocatives play in the instantiation of the telephone service encounter in situ, e.g., in terms of its generic structure, turn and topic management, participant footing (Goffman 1981), or vocative variation according to customer groups or tasks[1] within a service encounter. This is even though research on vocatives provides detailed functional descriptions of address term systems (e.g. Leech 1999; Poynton

[1] See, however, Staley (2018) for restaurant service encounters and Placencia (2001) for public service encounters.

1990 for British, American and Australian English), discourse pragmatic functions of vocatives (McCarthy & O'Keeffe 2003; Rendle-Short 2005; Clayman 2010, 2012, 2013), pragmaticalization processes around certain address terms (e.g. Kleinknecht & Souza 2017), the social indexicality of address term choice (Wolfson & Manes 1980; Rendle-Short 2009; de Lopez 2013; Martínez 2018), as well as the impact of socio-political changes and shifting politeness conventions on choice of address term (Jaworski & Galasiński 2000; Hultgren 2017).

The present study interrogates this gap between research on telephone service encounters and research on vocatives and address through an analysis of vocative use in a small corpus of telephone service encounters. The corpus comprises telephone calls placed with real estate agents servicing four socio-economically different areas of a city in northern England. The calls were collected as part of a field experiment on linguistic discrimination in the property market. In the experiment, female participants from eight different regional British and ethnic minority groups, indexed by accented speech and personal names, requested an appointment to view a house or apartment for sale listed on an online real estate platform. Two dimensions of contrast present in the data will be illustrated: Variation in vocative use according socio-economic and socio-ethnic characteristics of the service seeker, and emblematic switching of vocatives for interactional purposes. The analysis will show that notwithstanding potentially institutionally prescribed forms of providing personalised service, vocative use in telephone service provision is strategic and selective. It is sensitive to the socio-economic context, perceived socio-ethnic addressee characteristics, and the moment-by-moment unfolding of the interaction in relation to topic management and participant footing.

The present analysis is based on (1) the formal and functional diversification of vocatives in English, (2) the social practices of addressing and naming interlocutors in interaction, and (3) the specific function of addressing and naming in telephone service encounters, which operate under the specific conditions of being mediated, linguistically and interactionally standardised through scripts, and institutionally monitored through recording (for performance assessment and quality control). Those three areas will be discussed in Section 2. Section 3 describes the data collection and analysis procedure. Section 4 presents, first, quantitative evidence that suggests that vocative use is socio-economically stratified and sensitive to socio-ethnic group membership projected through callers' accent and name. Second, three examples of linguistic microanalyses of vocative use are presented, which show that while being a prima facie means of personalising the service encounter (Friginal 2009; Hultgren & Cameron 2010; Hultgren 2017), vocatives are at the same time used as a strategic means for controlling the sequence of the service encounter through controlling topic and turn management. In this way, estate agents make use of the pragmatic functions of vocatives as they have been described for a variety of institutional and non-institutional types of talk (e.g. Leech 1999; McCarthy & O'Keeffe 2003; Rendle-Short 2010; de Lopez 2013; Kleinknecht & Souza 2017).

The example analyses focus in particular on endearment use. The use of endearments with female strangers in service provision in Anglophone contexts has often been remarked on (e.g. Zwicky 1974; Poynton 1990; Leech 1999; Beal 2004; Wales 2006; Culpeper & Gillings 2018), but rarely recorded "in the wild" for British English and analysed in the context of their use. As will be shown, they are drawn upon as a resource for establishing and maintaining a specific type of interactional control which is based on a power and status differentiated relationship steeped in intimacy and affectivity meanings and which withdraws agency from the interlocutor.

Theoretically, the analysis is grounded in a social semiotic understanding of language use (Halliday 1978), in which vocative *use* in communicative interaction is seen as an instance of context-based language *choice* for the purpose of expressing specific social indexical interpersonal meanings vis-à-vis the interlocutor (Ochs 1996; Silverstein 2003). Vocative choice represents a socially constructed instantiation of the language system which reflects and re-constructs the situative and cultural context of its use.

2. Vocatives

The terminology used around the linguistic phenomenon underlying the communicative action of addressing and naming the interlocutor is somewhat fuzzy. For instance, Braun (1988) and Staley (2018) distinguish between "bound and free forms of address", McConnell-Ginet (2003) and Clayman (2013) between "free vocatives" as "address terms" and "bound pronouns" as "referring expressions", while Leech (1999) defines "vocative" as one subtype of "address term". Rendle-Short (2007, 2009, 2010) refers to the "vocative use" of "address terms"; Poynton (1990) refers to "names" and "forms" used in "vocation". Sometimes "vocative" and "naming" are used interchangeably (Hultgren 2017). For an analysis of vocative use in a specific communicative context, however, it appears useful to distinguish between the vocative as a form with semantic meaning and pragmatic functions, and the situated interactional phenomenon of addressing and naming.

For the present purposes, a "vocative" is understood as a nominal element (a proper name, other noun, adjective; sometimes accompanied by a determiner) which is independent of the argument structure of the clause in which it occurs (Leech 1999). It is grammatically optional, can occur with every clause type in initial, medial or final position, and it can also stand alone. It is set off from surrounding talk by special intonation (Zwicky 1974), which gives it a status similar to parenthetical expressions (McConnell-Ginet 2003), peripheral adverbials or inserts (Leech 1999).

2.1 Forms and semantic meaning

The semantic core meaning of vocatives is to refer to the addressee of the utterance (Leech 1999) while at the same time encoding socio-culturally relevant categories, such as age, gender, social status, kinship, occupation, or (religious) belief systems (Braun 1988). Without reference to those categories but making instead use of a distinction between “familiar” and “distant and respectful” personal relationships, Biber et al. (1999) describe eight semantic categories for British and American English, namely, endearments, family terms, familiarisers, familiarised first names, first names (FN), title and last name (TLN), honorific (HON), plus a category “other” whose members are more difficult to describe in terms of familiar and distant-respectful relationships (e.g., ad hoc vocatives, indefinite pronouns, or invectives).

Leech (1999) maintains that FN and TLN have a contrastive social marking function in English similar to the one expressed through the pronominal system in other languages. But, as Zwicky (1974) and Braun (1988) point out, all categories in a vocative system are “sociolinguistically marked” (Zwicky 1974: 796) by virtue of being categorically different components of the same system. Sociolinguistic markedness is the result of the contrast between the vocative categories. And the potential of this contrast is activated when speakers decide to choose from one category rather than another. For that reason, speakers’ choice from the categories available in a vocative system is socially informative – importantly, primarily about the speaker. It provides information about the dyad from the perspective of the speaker and information about the speaker themselves. According to the early description by Zwicky (1974), the meanings expressed in the chosen vocative include the following:

- speakers' attitude toward the addressee,
- their assumptions about required levels of politeness and formality,
- their status with respect to the addressee,
- their assessment of the degree of intimacy of the relationship,
- their understanding of type of interaction and the roles of speaker and addressee within,
- their membership in a subculture,
- their social class and regional provenance, and
- their personal style.

From the perspective of the addressee a vocative refers to them in two ways: first it identifies them as the addressee of the talk, and second it identifies and positions them socially – however not in any objective sense. It is an other-positioning based on the speaker's assumptions about them.

Not all noun phrases can be used as vocatives, which led Zwicky (1974) to conclude that vocatives are "idiomatic", i.e. have to be learned by speakers as separate items. This highlights that vocative systems develop and are diversified in step with the addressing and naming requirements in a particular group at a particular time and that "social meaning is the reason for and product of vocative system differentiation" (Braun 1988: 259). The more variants in the system, the more detailed encoding of differences in socio-culturally relevant categories becomes available to the speaker. However, by being selective about what is linguistically encodable – through the number of contrasting variants available in the system – vocative systems foreground a particular set of socio-cultural aspects, social identities, identity positions and social relations, which can be indexed through their use (Braun 1988; Poynton 1990; Silverstein 2003). This includes restricting choice among variants for different groups of a community, often including differentiation on the basis of age or gender (Kramer 1975; Poynton 1990; McConnell-Ginet 2003). The gendering of English vocative systems includes a greater range of options available to men and a greater range of options available for referring to female addressees. The latter includes what Poynton (1990) calls "proliferation" of vocatives across usage contexts, such as the systematic availability of endearments not only in intimate relationships and private context but also with (female) strangers in public and institutional contexts.

The specific social-indexical quality of a vocative variant arises from the interplay of contrastive forms in the system as a whole. But because the variants arise out of locally relevant social identity categories, vocatives are unlikely to be "affectively neutral" (Zwicky 1974: 796). Therefore, in addition to making deictic reference to the addressee of the utterance, a second intrinsic meaning component of vocatives is expressing social deixis for both speaker and addressee.

2.2 Pragmatic-communicative functions

From a pragmatic perspective, vocatives fulfil three main communicative functions: 1) summoning addressee attention, 2) addressee identification, and 3) establishing or maintaining social relationships (Biber et al. 1999). Leech (1999) mentions a fourth "emotive function" (expressing speaker's affective state), which is associated with extraordinary prosodic prominence. In addition, Wolfson and Manes (1980) suggest "zero"-use of vocatives, which signals that relationship maintenance is deemed unnecessary by the speaker or withheld.

Because of their intrinsic interpersonal orientation and their association with interactional sequence through signposting the directionality of turns at talk, vocatives cannot be clearly distinguished from pragmatic markers, which also have interpersonal and sequence marking functions (Fraser 1996; Ajmer 2002). While this appears to be a property of vocatives in general, non-name vocatives have been shown to develop into pragmatic markers (Heyd 2014; Kleinknecht and Souza 2017; Martínez 2018). High frequency of use makes them vulnerable to pragmaticalization, in the process of which the vocative loses its deictic meaning and addressing function while acquiring affective-emphatic and discourse organisation functions. As a result of pragmaticalization, non-name vocatives can be used with different degrees of deictic anchoring, making the interpretation of whether or not the interlocutor is actually addressed more tenuous. For example, when they are used with an emotive function, such as in exclamations or interjections ("oh dear", "oh boy"), or as a pragmatic marker ("it's been rough, mate"), as opposed to being used to summon and identify the addressee, they presuppose less distinct deictic anchoring (Heyd, 2014; Martínez, 2011). The referential meaning of a pragmaticalised vocative is assumed to be semantically bleached (Dickey 1997) and, therefore, potentially less transparent in terms of social deixis. According to these analyses, the English vocative system includes non-name vocatives with reduced semantics (or that can be used with reduced semantics) (e.g. "man") and semantically transparent vocatives (proper names). The evidence suggests that semantic bleaching (and in some cases phonological reduction) in the process of pragmaticalization tends to affect predominantly familiarisers ("man", "mate", "brother", "bro", bruv", "blood", "blud") used in male peer-groups for solidary ingroup naming and addressing (Heyd, 2014; Kleinknecht & Souza 2017; Martínez 2018). The degree of pragmaticalization and semantic bleaching of endearments and their interpersonal and discourse-related functions are less well observed, described and understood.

The three broad pragmatic functions in combination with the semantic vocative categories and their ambiguous grammatical status as vocatives or pragmatic markers are a discourse-pragmatic resource that can be exploited by speakers for various types of interaction management. In particular when the vocative is seemingly redundant because the directionality of the talk is established or knowable in advance, such as in telephone calls, vocative use becomes a marked interactional choice which momentarily foregrounds the participant framework of the encounter, rendering it more personal and intimate than the preceding talk

(Rendle-Short 2010; Clayman 2010; Rubino 2016). This attention-summoning property of vocatives foregrounds prior and ensuing talk (Clayman 2010; Rendle-Short 2010), making it stand out from the turn in progress, and directs the addressee to attend to it. In this "stand-out" function, the vocative has a "signalling or supportive function in relation to the perceived discoursal event" (McCarthy & O'Keeffe 2003: 7). This enables interpretations of a vocative in context as being related to discourse structure marking, topic management or various types of speaker positioning. For example, vocatives can be used to support maintaining, shifting as well as closing topics (Hood 2010; Kiesling 2004; Rendle-Short 2010; Clayman 2010). Similarly, speaker positioning through vocatives can construct speaker stances ranging from affiliation, connection and agreement with the addressee (Kiesling 2004) to disaffiliation, antagonism and hostility (Formentelli 2009; Clayman 2010; Rendle-Short 2007, 2010). Vocatives also occur in contexts where speakers wish to foreground the genuineness, sincerity and independence of their talk (Clayman 2013) or as mitigators or aggravators in the context of face threatening acts or conflict (Rendle-Short 2010; Hood 2010). Depending on the semantic meaning of the vocative variant in a given context, the vocative itself may or may not perform a function other than attention soliciting and foregrounding. Vocative variant choice, however, infuses the foregrounding with social indexical meanings which are open to interpretations of appropriateness by the addressee, e.g., because they index a relationship as too familiar or too distant or otherwise dissonant with the context.

2.3 Addressing and naming

The terms addressing and naming refer to speakers' actual address behaviour, i.e. the instantiation of the vocative system in context. Addressing and naming are two facets of a vocative-based interactional strategy that is employed in order to construct and control participant frameworks (through attention soliciting and holding), which are invested with socially relevant meaning (through vocative variant choice). *Naming* refers to the socially indexical labelling of the addressee through the choice of vocative variant; *addressing* refers to the frequency and sequential positioning of vocative use in the encounter. Addressing and naming, thus, refer to the situated use of vocatives, their embeddedness in communicative encounters, and their function for both the construction of the interpersonal relationship between the participants and the pursuit of the communicative purposes they have.

In the case of English, context-based address behaviour needs to be considered against the backdrop of the grammatical and interactional optionality of vocation. The vocative system as a whole is an optional resource for realising social meanings in discourse and for introducing those social meanings into an interaction in the first place. Speakers' choice from the system, as well as their choice to use the system at all are, therefore, entirely driven by extralinguistic factors (Braun

1988). Wolfson-Manes (1980), Poynton (1990) and McConnell-Ginet (2003) emphasise speakers' agency in the decision to address the interlocutor or not, and the choice between vocative variants for naming them. Naming and addressing choices are always governed by speakers' reasons for wanting to class, gender, age, or racialise the addressee at any given moment in the interaction (Poynton 1990). This includes "strategic switching" (Mazzon 2003) of vocative variants to name the addressee during an interaction, e.g., as an expression of positive or negative affect.

Two factors are predominantly relevant in naming and addressing choices: aspects of speaker and addressee's pre-existing social identities and the dynamics of the interaction they are engaged in (Poynton 1990). The interaction dynamic is relevant in three interrelated ways: (1) in terms of interlocutors' role relationship in the encounter, (2) the unfolding of its activity structure, and (3) in terms of power, social distance and affect that interlocutors bring to bear on the role relationship. Through the choice of vocative, speakers construct socio-culturally recognizable positions for themselves and the addressee, which can be shifted, maintained or challenged depending on the sequential positioning and the indexical meanings the vocative variant realises in the context of use. A speakers' naming and addressing choices signal to the addressee the speaker's understanding of social distance and power relations. With the naming and addressing choices in the response moves, the addressee either complies with and contributes to first speakers' construction of the relationship in terms of social distance, power and affect, or challenges and resists it. In this way, addressing and naming re-create macro-social categories of identity construction and differentiation at the level of the micro-social interactional context in “micro-contextual real-time” (Silverstein 2003: 199).

2.4 Addressing and naming in telephone service encounters

Research on vocatives in service encounters typically discusses naming and addressing choices in the context of the larger phenomenon of relational work carried out by service providers in order to personalise the commercial interaction and manage it towards satisfactory outcomes for the business (e.g. Placencia 2008; Felix-Brasdefer 2015; Staley 2018). Relational work is associated with the construction of “outstanding customer experience”, which has been identified as one of the few factors in commercial service provision where companies are able to differentiate themselves from their competition in the field (Jagodziński & Archer 2018).

Service provision on the telephone has been most extensively researched in relation to call centres. Call centres have been described as a hyper-rationalised (Hultgren 2017) service environment – geared and shaped more than face-to-face service provision towards maximising efficiency, predictability, control, and sameness of service, including sameness of customer experience. The data in the present study do not come from call centres, but directly from locally operating real estate agencies. The service calls do, however, share the characteristics of standardisation, routinisation and monitoring that have been described for call centre service provision.

Relational work to be carried out by the call centre agent as part of the service interaction is linguistically regulated through call scripts and guidelines, both with respect to what the agent has to produce (e.g. a standard greeting) and in terms of how to do it (e.g. "with a smile") (Cameron 2000; Hultgren 2017). The standardisation and routinisation of agent performance that is the desired outcome of the linguistic regulation of the interaction is reinforced through performance monitoring and assessments. These assessments tend to be carried out on the basis of score sheets where observable and countable instances of agents' communicative behaviour in the form of the production of linguistic forms (e.g. caller's name) and interactional moves (e.g. greeting), are recorded and tallied up. According to current industry standards, the use of the caller's name is a marker of relational work carried out and associated with high service performance quality (Friginal 2009; Forey & Lam 2013; Hultgren 2017). In order to be able to recreate "outstanding customer experience", language use is regulated to achieve a routinised and automatised customer orientation, which includes prescriptions of the number of times a caller has to be addressed with their name.

Despite their centrality to agents' prescribed rapport building behaviours from an industry perspective, relatively little attention has been paid to vocative use in service calls in research on call centre talk. Vocatives have been described as a personalisation strategy in which the use of callers' names, in particular their first names, contributes to creating the impression of interpersonal involvement and solidarity between call centre agent and caller (Cameron 2000). Hultgren (2017) expands on this notion by defining vocative use in service encounters as "hyper-rationalized politeness". Vocatives are agents' go-to relational feature for efficiently framing the service interaction as an individualised service without significantly adding to the duration of the call. However, the default interpretation of vocative use in service calls as an instrument in the expression of politeness and rapport may be an oversimplification, considering the indexical meaning of naming and addressing, their function of foregrounding the participant framework as well as prior and following talk, their openness to context-based interpretations, and the contribution they make to the nature of the development of the interpersonal relationship in the moment-by-moment organisation of the interaction.

3. Data and analysis

The telephone service calls for the present analysis comprise a small corpus of pre-existing mystery shopper calls to real estate agencies that were collected in the context of a study of language-based discrimination in the Sheffield (UK) property market (Baumgarten, Du Bois & Gill 2019).[2] The telephone interactions were

[2] The data was collected in a covert research design reviewed and approved by the University of Sheffield Research Ethics Committee.

elicited through a variation of the verbal guise technique (Garret et al. 2003), in which the same communicative task – requesting a viewing of a residential property listed as for sale on an online real estate platform – was carried out according to a pre-prepared script by different speaker groups. The groups were differentiated on the basis of two socially indexical dimensions: regional or foreign language accent in English and ethnic personal name. The accent-name combinations in the data set were designed to index prominent majority and minority groups in the area, according to most recent census data (UK Census 2011). They represent established ethnic minorities (Asian (Hindi/Urdu), Middle Eastern (Arabic/Farsi)), recent European Union migrant groups (Polish, Spanish, Romanian), local white British communities (Northern English), and include for both majority and minority groups one overtly prestigious accent: French and Southern-Standard British English (Coupland & Bishop 2007; Jaworska & Themistocleous 2018). For the purposes of comparison between UK majority and minority groups they are grouped here as Regional British and Ethnic Minority. The accent and name combinations further index to the service provider whether they operate in a broadly mono- or intercultural context.

For the mystery shopper calls one female persona was designed. The persona was a "first time buyer", i.e. a person seeking to purchase their first property, and was fitted with socio-economically desirable characteristics[3] in the context of homeownership in the UK. As such she would be a sought after customer

[3] For example, profession, income level, mortgage lending pre-approved by a bank.

for a real estate agency, but not be expected to have any in depth knowledge of the property market or the typical processes and procedures involved in accessing real estate agent services. The persona was enacted on the telephone by a total of 29 female participants (between 25 and 42 years old), who had self-identified as having an audible accent in English. For each participant the accent was combined with a matching generic ethnic personal name (e.g. “Eva Martinez” with a Spanish accent) in order to overtly signal minority or majority group membership. The participants were provided with a script that contained information about the persona and the wording of the call opening move. They were instructed to make the viewing request and then follow through the call in a conventionally polite way until completed. “Conventionally polite” was not specified further to allow participants autonomy and the use of their own socio-pragmatic and pragmalinguistic strategies in conducting the call. Non-native[4] language use and culture-specific communication styles were not controlled for; they presented additional stimuli for service providers to make socio-ethnic inferences about the caller they were serving.

More than 300 calls were made in response to house-for-sale listings in four different socio-economic areas of the city. The areas were distinguished with respect to income levels and ethnic diversity according to census data. Overall, the participants spoke to more than 25 different real estate agencies servicing the area.[5]

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[4] All non-native English speakers in the study were either enrolled at a UK university or held at least one academic degree in English.

[5] The estate agents in the data are predominantly female. Gender-related effects on vocative use were not observed.

No caller spoke more than once to an individual agency. The calls were recorded and manually transcribed. All identifying information was changed. It is important to stress that the data were not collected for the purposes of contrastive address analysis. They contain vocatives that pattern in contrasting ways.

Figure 1 shows the typical call sequence. The calls follow a linear sequence of communicative tasks. Completion of each communicative task requires one or more interactional moves by the interlocutors. Typical of institutional interaction, rights and obligations are unevenly distributed (Agar 1985; Ehlich & Rehbein 1994; Arminen 2005). The estate agent has a gatekeeping function providing access to the service (Baumgarten et al. 2019). All call tasks except for the initial service request are initiated by the estate agent, but collaboratively completed by caller and agent. The manner of collaboration is elicited, steered and controlled by the estate agent.

Figure 1. Typical call sequence. Minimum set of communicative tasks in bold; [] indicates optional place in the sequence

Agent greeting, self-identification and offer of service
Caller greeting, self-identification **and viewing request**
Agent property availability check
Response to viewing request
Registration (caller contact details)
[Financial background check]
Additional business offer (caller's property preferences)
Mortgage advice offer
Arranging the mortgage appointment
[Arranging the viewing]
[Put on hold]
Summary of transaction (what was agreed on)
Viewing confirmation (when and how it will be sent to caller)
Offer of further service
Viewing cancellation procedure
Transitional talk
Thanking and complimenting
Leave-taking

For the analysis all instances of vocative use in the data were categorised according to vocative variant and speaker. Vocative use by the estate agents was related to the indexed socio-ethnic group membership of the caller and the socio-economic area in which the call was placed. Subsequent qualitative linguistic discourse analysis (Gumperz 1982; Couper-Kuhlen & Selting 2018) examined each vocative for its function in the sequential context of the call interaction.

4. Results

4.1 Vocative types and variation (frequencies)

All callers receive vocatives from the real estate agents in some of their calls.[6] Table 1 shows the ratio of calls with and without vocative use across socio-ethnic caller groups.

Table 1. Calls with and without vocatives (VOC) per socio-ethnic group

	with VOC (%)	without VOC (%)	Average VOC freq.	Standard Deviation
REGIONAL BRITISH	**63.4**	**36.6**		
Northern (N=35)	62.9	37.1	2.95	1.96
Southern-Standard (N=36)	63.9	36.1	3.08	1.34
ETHNIC MINORITY	**49.4**	**50.6**		
French (N=45)	48.9	51.1	2.13	1.61
Hindi (N=38)	42.1	57.9	2.06	1.52
Middle Eastern (N=46)	47.8	52.2	2.78	2.69
Polish (N=31)	67.7	32.3	2.19	1.75
Romanian (N=36)	38.9	61.1	2.35	2.06
Spanish (N=45)	55.5	44.5	2.8	2.17

Regional British and Ethnic Minority callers are treated differently. Whereas two thirds of the Northern and Southern-Standard calls feature vocative use by the estate agent, less than half of the Middle Eastern, French, Hindi, and Romanian calls include direct personal address of the caller by the agent.[7] In the calls that feature vocatives, they occur at a similar frequency of two to three instances per call.

In all groups FN is by far the most frequently used vocative type (Table 2), making it the basic unmarked address choice in the context of the service call. The Ethnic Minority callers trigger a greater range of vocatives, including the negative

[6] Reciprocal vocative use occurs only infrequently in our data and is not further discussed here.
[7] The difference between the Regional British and Ethnic Minority groups is significant at $p < .05$. (Pearson chi-square $\chi^2(1, N = 312) = 4.0637$, $p = .043$.

politeness expressing TLN (*Miss*, *Ms*) and honorific (*Madam*). The proportion of intimacy-indexing address through endearments (e.g. *sweetheart*, *love*, *luv*, *ma love*, *ma luv, luvvie*, *ma darlin'*, *darling, dear*) is almost identical in the Regional British group, but varies considerably within the Ethnic Minority group, from being not used at all with Middle Eastern callers to 19.7% with Spanish callers. This suggests that the realization of the interpersonal dimension of the role relationship between caller and estate agent, and the need and nature of the relational work in the service telephone call is a) linked with socio-ethnic identity traits that agents ascribe to the callers or interpret from callers' way of using English and b) appears to be sensitive to *different* socio-ethnic group membership projected through language use and name. The latter also shows that there is differentiation between groups along the lines of minority and majority UK groups.

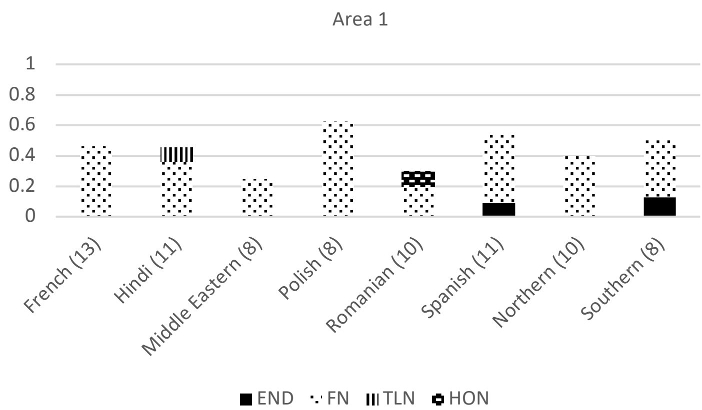
Table 2 Vocative types (percent)

	Endearment	**FN**	**TLN**	**Honorific**
REGIONAL BRITISH	**9.56**	**88.97**	**0.74**	**0.00**
Northern (N=65)	9.23	90.77	0.00	0.00
Southern-Standard (N=71)	9.86	88.73	1.41	0.00
ETHNIC MINORITY	**9.25**	**83.22**	**5.14**	**2.74**
French (N=47)	4.26	95.74	0.00	0.00
Hindi (N=33)	3.03	60.61	21.21	15.15
Middle Eastern (N=61)	0.00	95.08	1.64	3.28
Polish (=47)	12.77	85.11	2.13	0.00
Romanian (N=33)	12.12	81.82	3.03	3.03
Spanish (N=70)	19.72	74.65	5.63	0.00

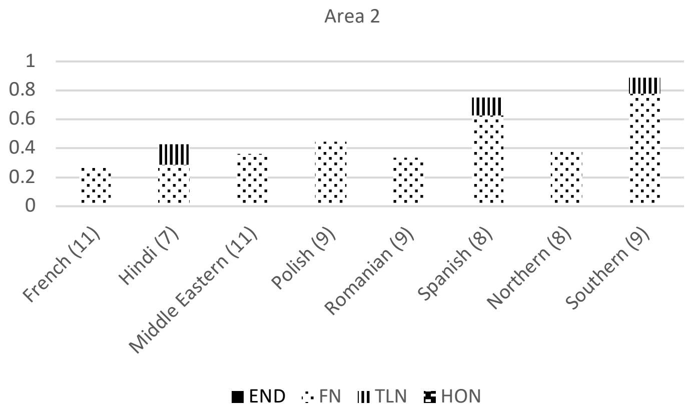
Vocative use also appears to be sensitive to the socio-economic area in which the listed residential property is located. Figure 2 shows that vocative use is most frequent and most diverse in calls placed for properties in the socio-economically weakest, but ethnically most diverse area of the city (Area 4). Endearments are particularly frequent in Area 4 calls as well, which suggests that they might be local, "class"-related, social identity markers relevant for speaker identity projection and hearer positioning.

Figure 2. Vocative use by socio-economic area (percentage of calls to the area): Area 1 socio-economically intermediate/high; average ethnic diversity (approx. 84% white residents = UK average); Area 2 socio-economically intermediate, below average ethnic diversity (>95% white residents); Area 3 socio-economically intermediate, above average ethnic diversity; Area 4 socio-economically intermediate/low; above average ethnic diversity (according to UK census 2011)

a)

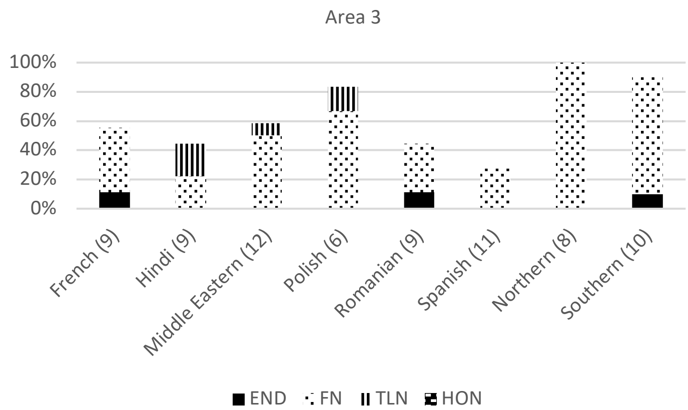


b)



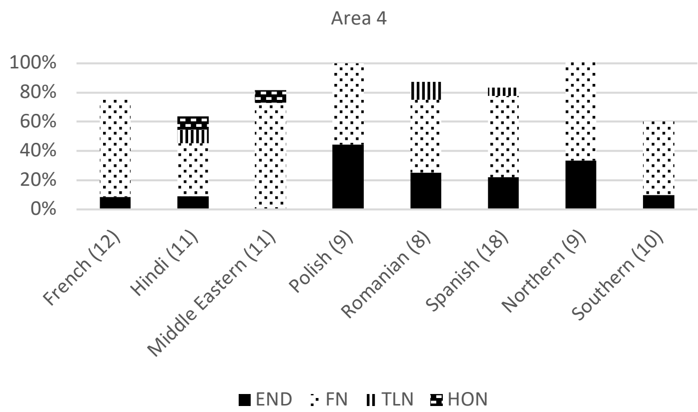
Area 2
1
0.8
0.6
0.4
0.2
0
French (11)
Hindi (7)
Middle Eastern (11)
Polish (9)
Romanian (9)
Spanish (8)
Northern (8)
Southern (9)
END
FN
TLN
HON

c)



Area 3
100%
80%
60%
40%
20%
0%
French (9)
Hindi (9)
Middle Eastern (12)
Polish (6)
Romanian (9)
Spanish (11)
Northern (8)
Southern (10)
END
FN
TLN
HON

d)



Area 4
100%
80%
60%
40%
20%
0%
French (12)
Hindi (11)
Middle Eastern (11)
Polish (9)
Romanian (8)
Spanish (18)
Northern (9)
Southern (10)
END
FN
TLN
HON

This quantitative picture of variation in vocative use suggests context-based decision-making by the service provider rather than default-like deployment of a go-to means of personalising the interaction. Decisions are taken, first, in relation to whether or not to address at all, where majority group callers are more likely to receive it; second, in relation to which vocative to use for addressing and naming the caller, where choice from the vocative system appears to be sensitive to assumptions about the caller's group membership as well as the socio-demographic make-up of the clientele the estate agent serves in different areas of the city.

The remainder of the chapter will discuss three examples of endearment use to show the interactional indexical potential of vocative variant choice in specific sequential environments within the service call. They illustrate that vocative variation is interactionally motivated and that speakers exploit the contrastive meaning potential of vocative types. The focus on endearments follows from the quantitative results which revealed them as the second most frequent choice in the calls and the one with the greatest variation across socio-demographic categories present in the data.[8] Endearments have been described as generic tokens of Anglophone service encounters (Poynton 1990; Wolfson & Manes 1980), but are thought to be typical of Northern England in particular (e.g. Beal 2004). They also appear to be enregistered (Agha 2007) as tokens of "Northern friendliness" and congeniality (Leech 1999; Wales 2005; Culpeper & Gillings 2018). In contemporary British English, they are, however, also used to assume a position of

[8] The use of endearments was also commented on as an unexpected feature of the estate agents' behaviour by callers from the Ethnic Minority groups in the debriefing after the experiment.

social authority or compliance expectancy as the interpersonal frame in which the action is being pursued (Baumgarten 2021). The present data likewise suggests that ascriptions to endearment use of solidarity politeness and rapport enhancement are not fully borne out by the interpretive options opened up by endearment use in situ.

4.2 Endearments

While there is occasional reciprocal use of first names by estate agents and callers, endearments are exclusively used by the estate agents. At the point of endearment use, the caller's name is usually available and has been used before. Endearments occur in three contexts in the calls: First, as a means of rapport enhancement (Spencer-Oatey 2000) in relational talk moves, in particular in conversational routines ("bye, love"); second, as a means of emphasising the estate agent's position as service provider ("what I can do for you, my love"). The focus here is on a third context of occurrence, in which the transactional talk does not run smoothly and the caller causes interactional trouble, e.g., by asking for clarification or rejecting offers, or can be interpreted as acting less than totally competent. The endearment indexes a re-definition of the existing role relationship between caller and service provider by decreasing social distance and increasing familiarity at the moment where interactional moves and goals are not fully aligned.

(1) Spanish caller Maria (Maria), estate agent, female (Agent); client registration

```
1    Agent   and your current address please
```

2 (0.42)
3 Maria is twenty two
4 (0.53)
5 Maria p[enn]ington view road
→ 6 Agent [yes]
→ 7 <<fast>number twenty <u>two:</u>>
→ 8 Maria yeah
→ 9 p[pennington]
→ 10 Agent [and the post]code
11 °hh
→ 12 Maria <<pp<(pennington)view road>
→ 13 Agent luvley[9]
→ 14 and the postcode darlin'
15 Maria is eff one

Agent's request for Maria's address represents a routinized task orientation in the context of registering the caller on the agency's database. This information giving activity requires "the participants to accomplish and to make explicit their substantive understanding on a turn-by-turn basis" (Firth 1996: 250). Information giving and uptake is asynchronous, however, resulting in a momentary deviation from the conventional transactional sequence as pursued by Agent. Agent's uptake token "yes" (line 6) of the house number is delayed and overlaps with Maria's continuing the address-giving with the street name. Agent produces a second uptake of the house number with a fast repetition "number twenty-two" with prosodic prominence on "two" which Maria interprets as a confirmation request for the whole street address. Maria confirms correctness ("yeah", line 8) and starts

9 [luvle]: local pronunciation variant of 'lovely'

repeating the street name. Agent overlaps and claims back the floor with her next transactional move very early in Maria’s turn, asking for the postcode (line 10), but Maria continues restating the street at reduced loudness. Agent completes the sequence with “luvley”, which although it represents a high-grade positive assessment (Pomerantz, 1984) is hearable as “the definitive closure of a task section” in a service encounter (Lindström et al., 2019: 92) rather than an assessment of the quality of information itself (Antaki 2002). Turn-initial “lovely” in institutional contexts also marks “the pivot between two interactional episodes under [the institutional agent’s] control” (Antaki 2002: 20). At the moment of use, it explicates an asymmetrical role relationship and marks an instantiation of the social identities of service seeker and service provider in which the discursive right of judging “how the interaction is going and what must come next” (Antaki 2002: 21) resides with the service provider. The verbatim repetition of the request for the postcode (and the postcode darlin’, line 18) contains the endearment in utterance and turn-final position – the vocative placement typically associated with establishing and maintaining social relationships (Leech 1999). The shift to a familiar, colloquial register by introducing the intimacy-indexing endearment underscores the asymmetry in the discursive roles established in the preceding utterance. Placement and semantics of the endearment explicate a momentary change in the caller-agent status relationship towards greater asymmetry and inequality but, conversely, reduced social distance and heightened affectivity, placing the caller in a paradoxical subordinate but interpersonally close position.

As this change in footing is linked with the general vocative property of foregrounding prior and ensuing talk for the addressee, it embeds the new relationship for Maria in an orientation to non-smooth talk, namely that Agent has to ask the question a second time and that Maria failed to respond when the information was first requested.

The second example comes from a little later in the same call in the context of the financial background check which estate agents use to assess the viability of the caller as a customer and the likelihood of completing the sale. The questions target whether the caller has a so-called "agreement in principle" to finance a property purchase from a financial lender. The question how this agreement was achieved (line 1) is often used as a preamble to launch a pitch for additional financial services ("mortgage advice") the estate agency provides. Pivoting from information gathering into an offer of mortgage advice is a larger interactional project (Levinson 2013) the agent pursues.

(2) Spanish caller Maria (Maria), estate agent, female (Agent); financial background check

```
1    Agent   °h did you go thru straight (.) directly through
2             your bank for yu for your mortgage
3    Maria   yea[:h]
4    Agent      [ye]ah
5            (0.78)
6    Agent   ((smack)) would you be interested in speaking to
7            our mortgage advisor at agency one
8            he’s an independent mortgage advisor
9            [°h]
```

```
   10     Maria    [m:]
   11     Agent    it’s just a free ten minute chat
   12              he’s searchin’ fifty plus lenders
   13             °h so he might be able to get a beˀer deal than
   14              what your actual bank’s given ya
   15              [°h so if]
→ 16   Maria   [m: no]
→ 17           thank [ye]
   18     Agent          [(if)]
→ 19   Maria   i could try that and
→ 20           but i i think that i’m happy with the [with the]
→ 21   Agent                                [<<high
   22              pitch>okay>]
   23     Maria    one that i ha[ve]s
→ 24   Agent            [th]at’s fine ma darlin’
   25    Agent    °h when do you want to view this property
```

In line 16 Maria interrupts Agent’s sales pitch to turn down the offer of additional mortgage advice. Clearly the dispreferred response option to the offer framed as highly desirable (“free ten minute chat”, “get a better deal”, lines 11-14), Maria minimises disaffiliation by couching her rejection in thanks (line 17) and a contingent account (Heritage 1984) of her personal grounds for not accepting. She uses increased loudness on “no”, “try” and “happy” (lines 16, 19, 20) to underscore her point, blocking Agent’s opportunities for re-opening the offer. Agent overlaps with a high-pitched, increased loudness assessment “okay” (line 22) and interrupts Maria’s account with a project-closing assessment-cum-vocative “that’s fine ma darlin’” in line 24. In this two-step way, “okay” marks both conceding to Maria’s account and Agent’s first bid to bring the topic towards a close; the formulaic minimiser "that's fine" as second sequence-closing assessment includes the vocative in utterance-final position and terminates Maria's account. The endearment connects Agent's move with a shift of the participant footing towards greater asymmetry and decreased social distance, orienting Maria to the acceptance of her reasoning by the person in control of the interaction and to the fact that that topic is now closed. Agent has regained control of the interaction, which allows her to move on to the next transactional step. In both examples the endearment is used to close down a topic and facilitate a topic shift after the caller's interference with the estate agents' transactional purpose at that stage of the interaction.

In some calls, a mortgage advice appointment with the estate agencies' financial advisors is framed as a pre-condition to being able to view the property. In the final example, Deeba asks whether she could view the property first and come back later for the mortgage advice.

(3) Hindi caller Deeba, estate agent, female (Agent); arranging the viewing

```
 1   Deeba   could you just fix the viewing of the property
 2           (.) for now
 3           °hh a:nd i will get back to you
 4           when i've got or i'll get back to you as soon as
 5            i can for °hh eh: the: mortgage advice
 6           (0.33)
 7   Deeba   if that's [okay]
 8   Agent             [ ri:]ght okay
 9           °hh well i do need to phone the vendors anyway
10           cuz this particular one is through the vendor
11           so i'll i'll give you a call back
12           (0.87)
```

→ 13 Deeba o:kay=

→ 14 =[so can you not con]firm eh:

→ 15 Agent [is that alright]

→ 16 Deeba °hh m eh can you not confirm whether or not you

17 can eh

→ 18 (0.24)

→ 19 Deeba give me a viewing time on (-) eh thursday after

20 five then

21 (1.02)

→ 22 Agent the vendors do the viewings luvvie=

→ 23 =i'll need to confirm that they'll be in

24 (.) °h that's why i said i'll i'll phone them now

25 and then i'll give you a call back

26 (0.18)

27 Deeba alright

28 okay

29 (.) that [sounds great]

30 Agent [is that alr][ight]

31 Deeba [yeah] (.) that sounds

32 fine

The exchange in lines 1-11 fails to establish common ground (Clark 1996) between Agent and Deeba, culminating in Deeba's request for clarification which overlaps with Agent's pre-closing request for confirmation "is that alright" (lines 14, 15). It reveals different levels of knowledgeability regarding the viewing scheduling procedure for the specific property in question. Agent's elliptical account in 9-11, however, presupposes equal knowledge status. In line 16, Deeba moves out of the projected closing (Button 1987) by re-launching the clarification request, punctuated by an audible inbreath, hesitation, silent pauses, marking effort or cognitive processing. “Then” (line 20) marks the request as contingent with or emerging from Deeba’s interpretation of Agent’s account in lines 9-11.

Agent’s response “the vendors do the viewing luvvie” comes after a long pause (line 21). It is an explication of her earlier elliptical “this particular one is through the vendor” (line 10). Notably, the utterance does not contain the information requested by Deeba. Instead, Agent asserts her “epistemic sovereignty” (Heritage 2013: 382) over the matter of scheduling viewings. This first part of the response frames Deeba’s lack of knowledge as a lack of knowledge about the viewing procedure in general rather than a potential local non-understanding of the way Agent herself phrased the issue. The endearment acts as turn-internal pivoting device (Clayman 2012), facilitating Deeba’s orientation to Agent’s reiteration of the scheduling procedure. The use of diminutive “luvvie” with the local pronunciation ([u]) contrasts markedly with Deeba’s formal request for confirmation. In addition to foregrounding an asymmetrical social relationship, the phonetic contrast introduces an additional nonlocal-local difference between Deeba and Agent. At this juncture of the interaction, Agent marks her superior epistemic status as explainer, while the foregrounding through the endearment orients Deeba to her lack of knowledge of the transactional process and understanding of Agent’s explanations. From this footing, Agent continues to re-trace her steps explaining the scheduling procedure and Deeba signals understanding and topic closure (lines 30, 31).

5. Conclusion

Vocatives are instrumental in recreating macro-social cultural categories of identity construction and differentiation at the level of the micro-social interactional context. They are a linguistic means to invoke categorial differentiation in interaction, through self and other positioning in the process of identity projection and ascription. If vocative use is a local instantiation of ideologically patterned categories of differentiation, then vocative variant choice, frequency and moment of use is a realisation of the speaker's orientation towards their understanding of operant macro-social conditions.

Vocative variant choice in interaction is constrained by what speakers deem appropriate in terms of the generic features of the communicative encounter, by what social relationships are "indexable" in terms of a given socio-demographic context, and by which options are available in the vocative system of the language used. These features – generic conventions, "indexables", and vocative system – can also resource interlocutors in different ways with respect to the options and opportunity they have for naming each other. In institutional encounters, in which rights to self- and other-positioning are unequally distributed, vocatives underpin the assigning and taking up of positions towards each other. Their semantic meaning helps to make intelligible the nature of that positioning.

The present data show selective vocative use and strategic variation in naming and addressing callers. Notwithstanding the conditions of standardised service provision over the telephone and a general prescribed orientation towards rapport building in order to create the impression of individualised service where the customer feels directly involved, vocative use is far from consistent. It follows that naming and addressing need to be considered as contingent decisions by the institutional agent related to the management of the call and its desired outcomes. The data show that accessing vocatives as a resource for interaction management during the call is restricted to the service provider and that their addressing and naming choices can be sensitive to socio-demographic factors, in particular majority and minority group membership of customers. The brief examination of endearments showed that beyond rapport enhancement through personalisation and colloquialization, they can be used to support shifting and re-allocating participant footing during the interaction for the purpose of managing deviations from the conventional sequence of the transaction and to maintain control over the interaction. Endearments occur as departures from default, unmarked first name address and constitute a momentary update of the existing footing in the institutional frame through a "deliberate other-positioning" (Harré and Langenhove 1991) of the caller through a selective display of an affective stance (Ochs 1996). By making use of the overt "friendliness" and "solidarity" meaning of the endearment and its more covert meanings of diminution and non-reciprocity (Wolfson and Manes 1980; Poynton 1990), estate agents accentuate an asymmetrical institutional relationship infused with heightened affective intensity and meanings of localness (Johnstone et al. 2006) between themselves and the caller. The assumption of intimacy where there is none and the assumption of personal authority where there is none construct an asymmetrical relationship which withdraws interactional agency from the addressee. One of the functions of endearments in telephone service talk is therefore to help to constitute and reinforce the service provider identity and to create an incontestable position of being in control when they need it.

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Transcription conventions

Overlap	[ ]
Pausing/silence	(.) micropause; (-) 0.2-0.5s; measured (0.73)
In- and outbreaths	°h/h°
Reduced/increased loudness	<<p/f>>
Paraverbal features	<< >>
Emphasis	_____
Lengthened sound	:
Latched utterances	=
Non-linguistic actions	(( ))
Unintelligible speech	( )