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The linguistic means used for address in Vietnamese folktales: Through some folktales in “The treasury of vietnamese folktales” by Nguyen Dong Chi

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Abstract

The article is based on theories of address, including concepts, forms of address in Vietnamese, and a survey of address terms in some folktales from “The Treasury of Vietnamese Folktales” by Nguyen Dong Chi to classify different address forms. From this categorization, we identified six address forms used by characters in Vietnamese folktales: by other combinations, by kinship nouns, by personal pronouns, by names, by titles, and by other terms. The address forms in Vietnamese folktales are not just ways of calling names but also reflect cultural values, respect for elders, deities, and family members. They express veneration, social status distinctions, and reverence for high-ranking characters while fostering closeness in folk culture. These linguistic forms help build character traits and relationships, making Vietnamese folktales vibrant and relatable to everyday life.

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1. Introduction

Address in communication refers to the use of pronouns and terms to indicate the person being referred to, thereby identifying the participants in the conversation. It becomes the primary and most important condition for recognizing and establishing the communicative roles of the individuals involved. Therefore, the use of address terms not only facilitates the conversation but also influences the strategy and effectiveness of the communication. Using appropriate and effective address terms will make the conversation proceed smoothly; conversely, inappropriate or face-threatening address can abruptly end the conversation and harm the interlocutor.

Maxim Gorky stated: “Literature is anthropology” ^[11]. Literature originates from and centers around human beings. Likewise, Russian educator Xukhomlinxki, when discussing the role of fairy tales in children's development, argued: “Fairy tales nurture the souls of children, like a refreshing breeze igniting the flames of their thoughts and language” ^[15]. It can be said that fairy tales are fundamental in shaping the thoughts, emotions, and intellect of every individual. Preserving and developing the genre of fairy tales is crucial in education, as it helps form the character of individuals from a young age and preserves the cultural characteristics of the Vietnamese community.

The article is based on theories of address, conducting surveys, classifying, and analyzing linguistic means used for address in Vietnamese, focusing on data from selected folktales in “The Treasury of Vietnamese Folktales” by Nguyen Dong Chi.

2. Content

2.1. Some theoretical issues regarding address

2.1.1. Views on address

In any communication, address and the address terms are indispensable. Address is a term used to denote the act of referring to oneself (addressing) and calling others by name (calling).

According to Hoang Phe in the work “Vietnamese Dictionary”, address is “referring to oneself and calling others by their names when speaking to each other” [12]. According to this definition, address involves two roles in communication: referring to oneself (addressing) and calling the person one is communicating with (calling).

Author Pham Ngoc Thuong in the work “Address forms in the Nung Language” has defined: “‘Addressing’ is the action where the speaker uses language expressions to position oneself within the speech, letting the listener know who is speaking and taking responsibility for one’s words. This is the self-referential action of the speaker (first person)” and “‘Calling’ is the action where the speaker uses language expressions to involve the listener in the speech (second person)” [14, p. 12].

According to Do Thi Kim Lien, “Address can also be seen as a syntactic category, namely the category of person. When referring to address, people often mention the group of authentic address pronouns and kinship terms transformed into address” [10, p. 174].

Based on the definitions above, address involves two

communicative roles: self-addressing (addressing) and calling the person one is communicating with (calling). Thus, in communication, there are two types of relationships:

a) Corresponding relationship between addressing and calling: if I address myself as X, then I will call the corresponding person Y. This is a corresponding relationship, for example: *anh-em, chị-em, bố-con, chú-cháu*.

b) Non-corresponding relationship between addressing and calling: I address myself as X but I call the person I am communicating with as Z instead of Y. For example: *chú-em, tôi-ông*. Author Nguyen Van Chien has termed (a) as accurate corresponding address and (b) as inaccurate corresponding address [3].

2.1.2.2 Address forms in Vietnamese

Vietnamese is a language with a rather complex system of address terms, making it difficult to establish a universal address form. However, through practical research, author Nguyen Van Khang [8, p.362] has classified several common address forms used in communication as follows:

Table 1: Classification of Address Forms in Vietnamese Communication by Author Nguyen Van Khang

No.	Address form	
1	A/ Address form by surname and name	(1) Address form by first name;
		(2) Address form by surname;
		(3) Address form by middle name + first name;
		(4) Address form by surname + first name;
		(5) Address form by family + middle name + first name;
2	B/ Address form by all words that can be used for address	(6) Personal pronouns;
		(7) Kinship words used in calling;
		(8) Other words used for calling;
3	C/ Address form by title	(9) Address form by one of some titles;
		(10) Address form by many or all titles;
4	D/ Address form by name of relatives	(11) Address form by the name of relatives, such as husband’s name, wife’s name and child’s name.
5	E/ Address form by combination (1), (2), (3), (4)	(12) Address form by other combinations (e.g. title + name, title + full name, calling words + first name / full name).
6	F/ Address form by the absence of address terms	(13) No address terms of communication (the absence of address terms).

Based on the address forms, in the work “Address Terms and Address Forms in Vietnamese Dialects” (2002), author Le Thanh Kim has outlined the usage frequency of address forms in Vietnamese communication as follows:

- The common address forms in Vietnamese communication are forms (1), (3), (6), (7), (8), and (11).
- Forms (9) and (10) are typically used in administrative communication; form (10) is specifically used in formal administrative communication.
- Form (13) is often used in intimate communication or as a communication strategy.
- Forms (4) and (5) are typically used in certain contexts such as in court or during roll calls.
- Form (2) is rarely used, and if it is used, it either carries a playful tone or conveys a respectful, intimate nuance. [9, p.44]

In the article “Social Address in Chinese and the Changes in Social Address Since China’s Reform and Opening Up”, author Hoang Thi Bang Tam identified the forms of social address in Chinese as follows: 1/ Personal pronouns; 2/ Surnames and given names; 3/ Common social address (also known as general honorifics); 4/ Kinship address; 5/ Address by profession; 6/ Address by position or title [13, p.48].

Thus, based on several theoretical issues regarding address, we conducted a survey of address terms in 50 Vietnamese folktales from “The Treasury of Vietnamese Folktales” by Nguyen Dong Chi.

2.2. Linguistic Means of Address in Vietnamese Folktales

Through a survey of 50 folktales in the collection “Vietnamese Folktales” by Nguyen Dong Chi, we found that the vocabulary units used as linguistic means for address vary in number and frequency of occurrence.

Table 2: Address Forms in Vietnamese Folktales

No.	Address forms	Addressing		Calling		Example
		Quantity	%	Quantity	%	
1	Address form by names	2	3,57	12	7,79	Bái Dung, Đức Phật, Cổ Đương, Dạ, Khi, Rắn, Sấu, Cá, Cóc,...
2	Address form by personal pronouns	10	17,86	16	10,39	Tôi, ta, tao, mình, chúng ta, chúng mình, mọi người, chúng mày, họ, nó,...
3	Address form by kinship nouns	15	26,79	36	23,38	Ông, bà, bố, mẹ, bác, chú, cô, thím, cậu, chú thím, cháu, anh, chị, em,...
4	Address form by other terms	1	1,79	16	10,39	Lão, mụ, hủi, ân nhân, con người, tên này, nhà người, mình công,...
5	Address form by other combinations	22	39,29	62	40,26	Bác Ba, chị Tắm, bác trăn, bà Tiên, chàng trai lạ, nhà em, bố con ta, con vua Thủy Tề, Sứ giả Thanh Giang, ngài Táo Quân, kẻ sau lưng, đồ lừa đảo, con nhà dân,...
6	Address form by title	6	10,71	12	7,79	Quả nhân, hạ thần/ thần, trẫm, bệ hạ, nhà vua, các thầy, hòa thượng,
Total		56	100	154	100	

Looking at the table above, we can see that many vocabulary units used as address means have a high number of occurrences but a low frequency of use. Conversely, some vocabulary units, though few in number, have a very high frequency of occurrence. Specifically:

In Vietnamese folktales, the use of address terms such as “ông/bà” to denote respect and position with elders is clearly evident. Younger characters often use these terms when communicating with older individuals or characters in high positions.

2.2.1. Address Form by Other Combinations

Address form by other combinations involve combining different forms of address, formed by combining various address forms together. For example: kinship noun + name (*bác Ba, chị Tắm, dân Âu Lạc, anh Quạ*); personal pronoun + name (*thằng Đê, thằng Vành,...*), kinship noun + personal pronoun (*bố con ta, chú nó, bu mày,...*); number + family noun + other words (*hai mẹ con người, mẹ con nhà mày,...*), family noun + occupation word (*anh thầy thuốc, anh thợ bần,...*);... In communication, these forms of address create diversity and richness, reflecting the emotional characteristics, attitudes, beliefs,... of the communicating parties. Example:

^[1] *When Hefty peasant returned from plowing the field with the buffalo, the girl counted them again and again and found only five. She thought: “How strange! There are only five. Maybe because there are no documents, and hearing about his father's death, he secretly sold one.” She then said loudly:*

- Hey Uncle Ba (bác Ba). Where is the other buffalo?

Uncle Ba was surprised:

- What other buffalo? I have always kept only five buffaloes for your father.

[The story of the Cuculus micropterus]

In example ^[1], the rich man's daughter uses a address form by other combinations – “bác Ba”. This form of address is direct and shows respect and familiarity. “Bác Ba” is used to address an older man, implying respect, closeness, and familiarity. In this case, “bác Ba” is how the girl addresses the person taking care of the buffalo, likely a employee or manager of the buffalo for her family.

^[2] *Ngốc dived down again for Bự to press down with a pole while standing on the boat. Bự kept pressing for almost half a day before releasing the pole, by which time Ngốc had long been dead. Seeing Ngốc's corpse floating on the water,*

Bự thought he was still alive and scolded him immediately:

- You greedy guy (thằng tham lam), eating a belly full of honey down there and still grinning.

At that moment, a boat rowed by, and the boatmen saw a corpse floating and bobbing, so they told Bự:

- That guy (thằng kia) is dead, why don't you bury him? Leaving him like that, the stench is unbearable.

[Going to search for honey]

In example ^[2], the phrase “thằng tham lam” is an address term used by Bự to scold Ngốc's corpse. This phrase expresses contempt and criticism of Ngốc's greed, even though he is already dead. “Thằng kia” is the phrase used by the people on the boat to refer to Ngốc's corpse. This term is indicative, not directly scolding but also not respectful. The address terms “thằng tham lam” and “thằng kia” in this context both convey a sense of contempt and lack of respect towards Ngốc, who is deceased. These terms reflect the attitudes of the characters Bự and the others towards Ngốc and simultaneously create the social and psychological context of the story.

2.2.2. Address Form by Kinship Nouns

In families, the bond between members is based on blood relationships, whether direct or indirect. This relationship can be between parents and children, siblings, or even more distant relations like cousins. Thanks to this connection, family members are always attached and responsible for each other. Therefore, address form in a family is not merely about calling names but also describing the relationship between members. Each form of address carries the meaning of each person's role and position in the family, helping to establish the hierarchy and responsibilities of each individual.

^[3] *After speaking, the wealthy man called his three daughters to him and immediately asked the eldest daughter:*

- Do you (con) want to marry this woman's son?

The girl gave the woman a long sideways glance and hurriedly walked inside, not forgetting to say hastily:

- Oh dear, why marry a goat when there are plenty of men?

The wealthy man laughed heartily. He then asked the second daughter:

- And you (con), are you afraid that he is a goat?

- Dear Father (cha), I am a human and cannot marry a goat.

When it was the third daughter's turn, the wealthy man asked again:

- And you (con), do you feel the same way?

But the third daughter, shyly bowing her head, replied:

- Wherever **parents (cha mẹ)** place me, **I (con)** will stay!
[Marry a goat]

In this example, the words “con”, “cha”, “cha mẹ” are used to indicate family relationships and show respect, responsibility, and affection between family members. The terms “con”, “cha”, and “cha mẹ” in this example are not just ways of calling names but also reflect the familial tone, respect, and close relationships among members. They help create the social and psychological context in the story, showing concern and care for each other's opinions within the family.

[4] *The uncle hurriedly wove two baskets and took them to the riverbank. Then he climbed into one and told the boy to tie it tightly and throw it in. Seeing bubbles rising in the water, Cuội clapped his hands and shouted:
- Aha! Uncle (chú) is collecting it!
Hearing this, the aunt hurriedly urged Cuội:
- Quickly, You (cháu) lower me (thím) down too.
The aunt then climbed into a basket for Cuội to throw into the river. From then on, Cuội inherited his uncle and aunt's property.*

[Lie like Cuội]

In this example, the forms of address “chú”, “cháu”, “thím” reflect the kinship relationships. Specifically, “chú” is used to refer to an older man, usually a brother of one's parents or a close family relative. In this context, “the uncle” is working with Cuội and performing an action related to tying and throwing the basket into the river. “Cháu” is used to refer to a younger person, often a child or in this case, a younger relative. Here, “cháu” refers to Cuội, who is following his aunt's instructions. “Thím” is used to refer to an older woman, usually a sister of one's parents or a close family relative. “The aunt” in this story is the woman instructing Cuội to tie and throw the basket into the river.

2.2.3. Address Form by Personal Pronouns

The system of personal pronouns in Vietnamese is very limited in quantity and carries strong emotional connotations, only used in contexts ranging from intimate to vulgar or disdainful, making it challenging for foreigners to use. This system includes exclusive pronouns (used for a specific person such as *tôi*, *tao*, *mày*, *tó*) and inclusive pronouns (used for multiple persons like *mình*), depending on the context. Additionally, Vietnamese has the first-person plural inclusive pronoun (*chúng ta*) and exclusive pronouns (*chúng tao*, *chúng tôi*), with the pronoun “*chúng mình*” being usable for both cases.

[5] *Once upon a time, there was a young man named Cuội. From a young age, Cuội was an orphan and had to live with his uncle and aunt. He was a cunning fellow, especially skilled in the art of tricking people. An old wealthy man in the region heard rumors about Cuội and was skeptical. One day, he summoned Cuội and said:
- I heard you (mày) are very good at tricking people. Now, I (tao) am sitting here, and I challenge you (mày) to trick me (tao) into stepping outside the gate. If you succeed, I'll reward you with five “quan” immediately. Everyone here can be a witness!
Cuội scratched his head and replied:
- You're sitting here, already on guard, how can I trick you*

out there? If you were standing outside the gate, I (tôi) might have a way to trick you into the house.

[Lie like Cuội]

In example [5], the words “mày”, “tao,” and “tôi” are personal pronouns used in the conversation between the old wealthy man and Cuội. The old man uses the pair “mày” – “tao” when address Cuội, showing a familiar, somewhat mocking form of address. This form address also reflects an informal context and familiarity between the characters. Cuội uses “tôi” and addresses the man as “ông,” showing personalization and respect towards someone of higher status.

2.2.4. Address Form by Titles

In forms of address, occupational or positional nouns are often used in formal communication to describe the subject. In Vietnamese, occupational terms (such as teacher, student, soldier, worker, etc.) are usually accompanied by kinship nouns to create familiarity and describe the subject, like “em học sinh ơi”, “bác đưa thư ơi”, “anh bộ đội ơi”, reflecting gender and occupation. Conversely, positional titles can stand alone in address, typically used when a person of lower rank addresses someone of higher rank without additional elements.

[6] *The king asked an elder by the roadside:*

- What is this mountain?

The elder replied:

- Your Majesty (bệ hạ), this is Mount Mộ Dạ, approaching the Nam Giới region.

Realizing he was at the end of his journey, the king remembered the instructions of the Golden Turtle God and called out several times:

- Oh envoy Thanh Giang, quickly help me eliminate the enemy!

[Mỵ Châu – Trọng Thủy or the Legend of the Magic Crossbow]

[7] *The king immediately ordered the wedding to be postponed and instructed the guards to cut off the python's head to find the sword fragment. Shortly after, the guard returned with the piece of steel and presented it. When it was matched with the young man's sword, it fit perfectly. The king shouted:*

- So, the prince consort has deceived me (trẫm) and everyone else.

Immediately, the king ordered the removal of the golden badge of the Duke from him and bestowed it upon the young man. The king then seated the young man in the prince consort's place and ordered the wedding to continue as before. Meanwhile, the commander was taken to the execution ground.

[Slaying the python]

In examples [6] and [7], the words “bệ hạ” (Your Majesty) and “trẫm” (I, the royal pronoun) are used for address in communication. This form of address reflects the supreme position of the king in a formal context. The use of “bệ hạ” demonstrates the respect and reverence of subjects when interacting with the king. These address terms clearly depict the power dynamics and status of the characters in communication.

2.2.5. Address Form by Names

Typically, a full Vietnamese name consists of three elements: surname + middle name + given name. However, the middle name is optional, and sometimes omitted, for example: Nguyễn Du, Phạm Thái. In Vietnamese, surnames, middle names, and given names can all be used for address someone, but their usage varies:

- Surnames are commonly used in feudal society and are now mainly used by foreigners.
- Middle names are often used for differentiation or decoration, typically combined with given names in educational settings to distinguish students.
- Given names are widely used in daily communication to create familiarity. However, in formal settings or when address someone of higher social status, people often combine given names with kinship terms or social relationship nouns.

^[8] *That is why the descendants of the Peacock have very colorful wings. Wherever they go, they strut and constantly boast: "Peacock (Cuông)[1] is good! Peacock (Cuông) is good!" On the contrary, the descendants of the Crow have pitch-black wings, with the Magpie particularly having a white ring around its neck. Because of their unattractive wings, the Crows are very ashamed, constantly lamenting: "Crow (quạ) is ashamed! Crow (quạ) is ashamed!"*

[The Legend of Crow Feathers and Peacock Feathers]

^[9] *The next time she went to the well, she took rice from the container and said to the old man:*

- They left me only the burnt rice, here, have a bowl to ease your hunger.

After eating, the old man asked her:

- Why were you crying earlier?

The girl hesitated, lowered her head, and did not answer.

*- I am the **Buddha (Đức Phật)**, the old man continued, I see you have a kind heart. If you want anything, I will make you happy.*

[The Legend of the Monkey]

In examples ^[8] and ^[9], the terms "Cuông," "Quạ," and "Đức Phật" are names used in address. Using names as terms of address is precise in identifying the subjects and objects in conversation. These terms convey closeness, familiarity, or respect and admiration depending on the context and cultural usage. They help articulate the relationship and attitude of the speaker towards the addressed party clearly and accurately.

2.2.6. Address Form by Other Terms

In Vietnamese, there are other temporary forms of address used as a address form. The temporality of this group is very distinct, and without context, their roles are difficult to identify (especially with phrases temporarily used as address forms). According to our research, to develop communication and create interest with the other party, besides the four main groups of pronouns, communicators also widely use groups of words such as: "lão", "mụ", "hủi", "ân nhân", "con người", "tên này", "nhà người", "minh công", etc.

^[10] *The guy, who was familiar with the profession of burial for hire, responded immediately:*

- It's not difficult. Just a few shovels and it's done, I'll help you (mụ). As for the wages, just you (mụ) give me a few jars

of wine.

The innkeeper did not refuse the monk's enthusiastic offer, saying:

- Just you (lão) help me properly, and you can come here to drink as much as you want, I won't mind.

- Then borrow me a hoe and a shovel hoe, I'll come over this evening.

[The Death of Four Monks]

The terms "mụ", and "lão" in the example above are address terms that belong to the address forms by other terms. The word "mụ" is used to calling a woman, typically older or appearing older. The word "lão" is used to calling a man, typically older. This address form is used when the characters are familiar with each other. The terms indicate closeness, familiarity, and respect between the two people in an everyday communication situation. These words help enhance the relationship and understanding between the participants in the exchange and communication.

3. Conclusion

In communication, address is the first sign to indicate the participants, establishing and maintaining the interaction. In Vietnamese folktales, authors use six types of address: by other combinations, by kinship nouns, by personal pronouns, by names, by titles, and by other terms. These address forms are not merely ways to refer to names or ages but also deeply reflect cultural values and respect for elders, deities, legendary figures, and family members. Additionally, address terms also signify veneration, social status distinctions, and reverence for high-ranking characters, while expressing closeness, intimacy, and respect for characters in folk culture. This makes the characters not only symbols of cultural values but also embodiments of the deep religious faith of the Vietnamese people.

It can be affirmed that these linguistic means not only help build the characters and their relationships but also enable readers to gain deeper insights into traditional values, beliefs, and social relationships in the national culture. This makes Vietnamese folktales always vibrant and relatable to everyone's daily life.

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