

## Negev Arabic address forms: Senior to junior

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As a contact dialect, Negev Arabic has merged two different sets of reversed kinship address forms: a bipolar Syro-Palestinian set whereby a mother addresses her son as ‘mum’ or ‘my mum’ and a Bedouin one whereby she addresses him as ‘O your mother’. Moreover, nonreversed forms are also used for all kin, and some of the reversed and nonreversed forms have diminutive variants. This brings to a potential total of at least ten variants for each kin member—more, if we consider also sub-dialectal variants typical of the different historical layers in this speech community.

Such a large inventory naturally tends to undergo functional differentiation. The factors that govern the functional distribution are dialectal, sociodemographic, pragmatic, and stylistic. I will discuss just some interesting differentiations, limiting the scope to kinship terms used by seniors to address juniors.

For example, a social factor extends the inventory of reversed terms that a paternal grandmother can use and limits those of the mother in the patrilineal and patrilocal social system: in many families a paternal grandmother can address her grandchildren using other seniors’ reversed terms: ‘granddad’, ‘dad’, ‘mum’, while a mother can only use her own reversed term ‘mum’. I see this as possibly associated with the central role a paternal grandmother plays in the care of her son’s children while the mother is always an outsider in the household. She is ‘only’ a mother.

Another major sociolinguistic factor is the crucial difference between paternal and maternal uncles and aunts. Reversed addressives of the paternal side, such as when a woman addresses a girl as ‘auntie’ using the paternal term, may imply authority, while those of the maternal side imply empathy and moral support. The most endearing forms, used for beseeching, are reversed forms of the sedentary type ‘O my mum’. Reversed forms of Bedouin origin ‘O your mum’ are default and unmarked. But in their positive function within the markedness system, they may be a little demanding.

I will propose explanations for all these phenomena in terms of etymology, dialect, and social structure. The corpus on which my arguments are based consists of some two hundred texts of Negev Arabic, mainly life stories, folk stories, history of the Bedouin Negev, and other genres of oral narrative. All the texts were recorded by Negev Bedouin students, and the informants are mostly elderly relatives, so that kinship address forms are abundant both inside the stories and outside them, in the interactional discourse frame.

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