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Complex address practices in Finland-Swedish – Actual and reported use of address in service encounters

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This chapter compares actual address in service situations with reported use and perceptions of address. We focus on Finland-Swedish and compare it with Sweden-Swedish to highlight typical features of Finland-Swedish address practices. Our data come from two sources: observations of address practices in service encounters and responses to a questionnaire administered to Finland-Swedish speakers, which explored address use in service situations. Findings show that Finland-Swedish address practices go beyond a conventional T/V dichotomy. T address dominates, but V address still occurs to some extent in service contexts. Nevertheless, some speakers find V address highly inappropriate. Furthermore, plural V and absence of direct address are common in service contexts. Our results confirm the non-binary character of the Finland-Swedish address system.

Key words: Swedish, Finland-Swedish, service encounters, address practices, variation

1. Introduction

Address practices in Swedish, which is a pluricentric language spoken as L1 not only in Sweden but also in Finland, have undergone significant change in modern times. Most significantly following the so-called “*du*-reform” in the 1960s and 1970s, there was a rapid shift from formal V to universal T address. While the impact of the shift was pervasive in the Swedish spoken both in Sweden and Finland, Finland-Swedish has maintained V address to some extent in the public arena. Specifically, V address sometimes occurs in service interactions between unacquainted interlocutors (Saari 1995; Nyblom 2006; Clyne, Norrby & Warren 2009). However, the attitudes to V address vary considerably among speakers of Finland-Swedish (from positive to very negative, Wide & Norrby 2022), and different strategies to avoid or overcome the binary distinction between T and V, such as use of plural reference, and generic, impersonal, or passive constructions, are therefore also common (Norrby et al. 2015, 2018).

In Sweden-Swedish, V address is extremely rare today. In this contribution, we therefore focus on Finland-Swedish, where both T and V address still occur. However, the status of V address is disputed, leading to its frequent avoidance, often through means other than simply switching to T. We compare actual and reported use of address practices, with a particular focus on service encounters (for a description of the two datasets, see Section 3). What address patterns occur and how are they commented on in reported use? In order to

highlight the characteristics of the address system in Finland-Swedish we also provide a quantitative comparison with Sweden-Swedish based on earlier studies of recorded and transcribed service encounters at box offices (Norrby et al. 2015, 2018).

In Section 2 we give a brief background on Swedish as a pluricentric language, followed by an overview of the address system in Swedish (2.1) and the variation found in address practices (2.2). We then present our data and methods in Section 3, followed by a report on our findings regarding the actual use of address in service encounters in Section 4. In Section 5, we discuss the results from a questionnaire on reported use and perceptions of address. Finally, in Section 6 we discuss our results and how the address practices in Finland-Swedish go beyond the conventional T/V dichotomy first suggested by Brown and Gilman (1960). On the one hand, T address is used equally or even more often than V address in contexts characterized by non-closeness and formality, and, on the other hand, T and V are not the only two options.

2. Background

In Sweden, Swedish is the principal language in society, spoken as a first language by an estimated 85% of the population of 10.5 million (Parkvall 2016). For its part, in Finland, Swedish is also a national language, spoken as a first language (L1) by a numerical minority of just under 290,000 people, equivalent to 5.2 percent of Finland's total population of 5.6 million. Meanwhile, Finnish is spoken as L1 by 85.9% (Statistics Finland 2023).¹

Previous studies on Swedish as a pluricentric language have found some social actions to be expressed in a more formal and restrained way in Finland-Swedish, showing a general tendency towards preserving a level of social distance and displaying respect for the integrity of the interlocutor (Norrby 2021; see also Norrby et al. 2021). This tendency is typical not only of Finland-Swedish but also of Finnish (Lappalainen 2015). When compared to both Sweden-Swedish and Finnish, Finland-Swedish occupies a middle position. As shown by Wide et al. (2019), Finland-Swedish displays similar communicative patterns as Finnish for managing interpersonal relationships in communication, but a weaker tendency towards formality and distance than Finnish (see also Fremer 2019). However, the aim of this paper is not to compare Finland-Swedish with Finnish, but rather to analyze address in Finland-Swedish more closely by comparing actual and reported use (for a comparison with Finnish, see Wide et al. 2019; Wide 2022).

2.1. The address system in Swedish

In Swedish, verbal forms are inflected in neither number nor person. Address is therefore only encoded in pronouns. Like many other languages, Swedish distinguishes between an informal and a formal address pronoun in the singular, often referred to as T and V pronouns, after the pronouns *TŪ* and *VŌS* in Latin (Brown & Gilman 1960) (as seen in Table 1).

¹ The Swedish-speaking Finns live in provinces along the western and southern coast of Finland. Except in the monolingually Swedish Åland Islands, studying the other national language in school is compulsory for both Swedish- and Finnish-speaking Finns (see, e.g., Latomaa & Nuolijärvi 2005). The level of proficiency in the other national language, however, varies within both language groups. While some Swedish-speaking Finns are highly bilingual, others may use Finnish seldom in their daily life. The latter is the case, for example, in those municipalities on the western coast of Finland where Swedish is spoken by a vast majority of the population and Finnish is in fact the minority language (see, e.g., Stenberg-Sirén 2020).

Table 1. T and V forms in Swedish (*du* ‘you_T’, *dig* ‘you_T’, *din*, *ditt*, *dina* ‘your_T’, *ni* ‘you_V’, *er* ‘you_V’, *er*, *ert*, *era* ‘your_V’, *ni* ‘you_{T.PL}’, *er* ‘you_{T.PL}’, *er*, *ert*, *era* ‘your_{T.PL}’²)

	Subject	Object	Possessive
Singular, less formal (T)	<i>du</i>	<i>dig</i>	<i>din</i> , <i>ditt</i> , <i>dina</i> *
Singular, more formal (V)	<i>ni</i>	<i>er</i>	<i>er</i> , <i>ert</i> , <i>era</i> *
Plural	<i>ni</i>	<i>er</i>	<i>er</i> , <i>ert</i> , <i>era</i> *

* Inflected to agree with the gender and number of the head noun: *din*, *er* (SG, common gender), *ditt*, *ert* (SG, neuter gender), *dina*, *era* (PL).

The Swedish address system is, at first glance, similar to the French, which also employs the second person plural pronoun (*vous* in French and *ni* in Swedish) as a formal form of address to one person. However, in actual use, the formal V pronoun is not used much in contemporary Swedish, where the T pronoun (*du*) is the default address form in most situations and to most addressees, thus making Swedish more similar to the one-pronoun system of contemporary standard English (Clyne et al. 2009: 38). The almost universal use of T address dates back to the 1960s, a decade marked by a rapid shift from a hierarchical system where titles were ubiquitously used and direct address was often avoided. This avoidance was achieved through passive constructions (e.g., *Vad önskas?* ‘What is desired?’) or the use of the indefinite pronoun *man* ‘one’ in formal contexts or when addressing someone of higher rank or unknown social standing. Those who lacked a title were expected to address those of higher social rank by their title while themselves receiving the pronoun *ni* in return. This non-reciprocal use where *ni* was used “downwards” to somebody in a socially inferior position led to a situation where *ni* attracted such negative connotations that it could no longer function as a polite form of address between strangers. Instead, those who wanted to be polite to unknown interlocutors had to resort to avoidance strategies, often resulting in rather stilted constructions (Ahlgren 1978). However, in Finland, the use of titles was less widespread, and accordingly *ni* was not as tainted by non-reciprocal use as it was in Sweden, but could still be used as a formal, polite form of address to one person (Mara & Huldén 2000; Fremer 2019).

Accordingly, address use in Swedish is far more complex than what the binary T/V system presented in Table 1 suggests. As outlined above, passives and impersonal constructions are resources still in use to avoid having to choose between T or V, particularly in Finland. Yet another alternative is to take advantage of the ambiguity of the pronoun *ni*. For example, a question like *Tar ni kontanter?* ‘Do you accept cash?’ at the checkout in a shop could be heard as addressing not just the individual staff member but the whole establishment. However, depending on the context, the same question could be interpreted as addressing one person with V. As a result, the pronoun *ni* provides a means of leaving it up to the addressee to interpret it either as a T or a V form, depending on the contextual clues available.

2.2 Variation in address practice in Sweden-Swedish and Finland-Swedish

The shift to the indiscriminate use of T address in Swedish has been described as a result of the above mentioned “*du*-reform” initiated by the then director of the Health Department in Sweden, Bror Rexed, in the mid-1960s. It was a sign of the egalitarian ethos of the time, based on solidarity rather than social hierarchies (Clyne et al. 2009: 22–23). However, T as the new default address was not universally embraced, with different norms of use prevailing between different social groups (Paulston 1976). Accordingly, the 1970s was a period of insecurity and variation in use, but with a clear trajectory towards T address for most purposes and contexts. In the early 1980s there were signs of the re-emergence of the V form, but in a new function,

² We will translate and gloss the Swedish pronouns of address like this in all examples and transcripts. T denotes *du*, *dig*, *din*, *ditt*, *dina*, V denotes singular uses of *ni*, *er*, *ert*, *era* and T.PL denotes plural uses of *ni*, *er*, *ert*, *era*.

referred to as “the new *ni*” in a seminal study on reported address in different situations (Mårtensson 1986). The results indicated that “the new *ni*” now lacked its former negative connotations and was used to signal polite distance, particularly in service encounters and predominantly reported by younger customers. However, subsequent studies on reported address have not been able to confirm such a return of *ni* as a polite address pronoun. On the contrary, V address in service encounters is often considered inappropriate and even offensive (Clyne et al. 2009: 110–112).

The development in Finland is similar (both for Swedish and Finnish, see Lappalainen 2015). As pointed out above, *ni* was, however, preserved as a possible option in certain situations, particularly in interactions with older unacquainted addressees and in service encounters. At the same time, public authorities in Finland have introduced explicit *du* address in customer service (Lassus 2010). The development thus runs in different directions in Finland, which we have also noted in previous studies of service encounters discussed in this chapter (Norrby et al. 2015; Norrby et al. 2018).

3. Data and methods

Our data consist of video-recorded service interactions presented in 3.1 and qualitative questionnaire data on reported use and perceptions of address presented in 3.2. In Section 3.3 we present our methods, which are mainly qualitative.

3.1. Service encounters

In the research program Interaction and Variation in Pluricentric Languages (IVIP),³ we collected service encounter data at venues selling tickets to theater performances, music, and sports events, as well as information desks at libraries and cultural centers in Finland and Sweden. The encounters are characterized by generally being brief, task-oriented interactions with a predictable trajectory, where the customer wants to buy or pick up pre-ordered tickets, and where the staff member’s role is to provide the requested service. Staff participate in their professional role, and while the customer is there as a private person, they clearly orient to the role as customer, and stick to the service agenda. Among nearly a thousand service encounters in total, in this study we focus on a subset of 318 service encounters, 159 from each nation.⁴

As pointed out earlier, service encounters are one of the contexts where V address can still be expected to occur to some extent in Finland. Due to the pervasive impact of the *du*-reform described above, T address can nonetheless be predicted to be more frequent than V address also in the Finland-Swedish service encounters.

3.2. Qualitative questionnaire data

The questionnaire data on reported use and perceptions of address were collected by the Society of Swedish Literature in Finland (SLS) in 2019–2020 (SLS 2347; Södergård 2020). The survey focused on open-ended questions covering various themes, with the first three being most relevant for this study: 1) T or V address, and other means of addressing depending on the

³ The program compared communicative patterns in Finland and Sweden and was funded by Riksbankens jubileumsfond 2013–2020 (Grant no.: M120137:1), see Norrby (2021) for details.

⁴ We have used the same dataset previously in Norrby et al. (2015, 2018).

situation, age, and social relationships; 2) the impact of the professional role, such as addressing a customer; 3) perceptions of how it feels to be addressed by T or V.⁵

We focus on the 217 responses that were submitted online by L1 speakers of Swedish in Finland. They range in age between 18–91, with a relatively even distribution across groups, except for 60–70-year-olds who represent by far the most responses (57/217). Those who identified as female make up the bulk of the data (161/217). In terms of professional identity, the respondents mentioned a wide variety of occupations, covering a range of different sectors in society.⁶

3.3. Methods

Due to the nature of the two datasets our main methodological approach is qualitative. By reading through both datasets closely, we first distinguished the main tendencies and less common patterns in each. Subsequently we analyzed the findings in more detail, made comparisons between the datasets, and related the findings to earlier studies on address in Swedish.

The service encounter data were analyzed from an interactional sociolinguistics perspective to reveal how the address patterns contribute to constructing, reproducing, and maybe also challenging established social identities and relationships by the interacting participants (Rampton 2006: 24).⁷ The qualitative questionnaire data were analyzed thematically from a folk life studies perspective to map the main tendencies in the informants' answers to the open-ended questions in the questionnaire (Rivano Eckerdal & Hagström 2016; Hagström & Sjöholm 2017).

In addition to these two qualitative analyses, we draw on earlier quantitative analysis of the address pronouns used in the service encounters in both Finland-Swedish and Sweden-Swedish, the results of which have been previously discussed in Norrby et al. (2015; 2018).

4. Results of the study of address in authentic service encounters

We start by presenting the quantitative comparison of the address resources in service encounters in Swedish both from Finland and Sweden in Section 4.1. In Section 4.2 we analyze address practices in the service encounters from Finland more closely.

4.1 Quantitative comparison of service interactions in Finland and Sweden

Table 2 and Figure 1 show how the address resources in Swedish are used in the authentic service interactions from Sweden and Finland. Table 2 provides an overview of the main differences between Sweden-Swedish (SS) and Finland-Swedish (FS), while Figure 1 illustrates the role of age by focusing on staff.⁸ The numbers and percentages provided in the

⁵ The remaining themes concerned differences between languages, varieties, regions, spoken and written language as well as diachronic development.

⁶ The questionnaire has previously been presented in a preliminary study with a wider scope, published in Swedish (Wide & Norrby 2022) and in a study focusing on the informants' perceptions of differences in address patterns between Swedish and Finnish in Finland (Wide 2022).

⁷ For a presentation of Interactional Sociolinguistics, see, for example, Gumperz (2015).

⁸ Table 2 and Figure 1 are based on the same data that have been analyzed from different perspectives in Norrby et al. (2018) and Norrby et al. (2015), respectively. We have left out the variable AGE from Table 2 to be able to include customers and staff in the same table (for two separate tables including AGE, see Norrby et al. 2018: 25).

table and the figure are based on whether a particular form of address (T, V or plural *ni*) is used at least once by the speaker in question (customer or staff) in a particular interaction, rather than the total number of occurrences of the respective types of address. Categories marked by ONLY means that no other address form is used in the interaction, and the label NO ADDRESS refers to interactions where no address pronouns are used.

Potentially ambiguous cases of *ni* as plural T address or singular V address were interpreted in the situational context and through sociocultural member understanding of the speech communities. Since *du* ‘you_T’ is the most dominant address form in Swedish and *ni* is primarily used as a plural form, only clear cases of *ni* as a polite form to address one person were counted as V address (see Examples 3 and 4, and discussion in Norrby et al. 2015; 2018).

As can be gleaned from Table 2, exclusive use of T (i.e., T ONLY) is the overall most frequent category in both national varieties, which supports the claim that both countries are “T societies”. The dominance of T is strongest in the data from Sweden which also supports earlier observations (Saari 1995; Fremer 1998; Clyne et al. 2009). In Sweden, both customers and staff overwhelmingly stick to T ONLY (64%) and there are no clear cases of V. This contrasts with the Finland-Swedish data where exclusive use of T is less frequent, particularly among staff (33%).

Table 2. Number of interactions with different types of address by customers and staff in the service encounter data (f = frequency)

	Sweden-Swedish (SS)				Finland-Swedish (FS)			
	Customers		Staff		Customers		Staff	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
No address	42	26	32	20	53	33	49	31
T only	100	63	101	64	80	50	52	33
T and plural <i>ni</i>	12	8	19	12	17	11	12	8
Plural <i>ni</i> only	5	3	6	4	9	6	18	11
T and V	0	0	1*	1	0	0	6	4
V and plural <i>ni</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	4
V only	0	0	0	0	0	0	15	9
Total	159	100	159	101	159	100	159	100

* This includes an ambiguous case of V.

The greatest variation in address use is found among staff in Finland, as outlined graphically in Figure 1, which focuses on staff only, distinguishing between younger and older staff. In particular, variation in address use is characteristic of the younger staff in Finland. Their single most frequent way of interacting with their customers is by no address – 41% of their interactions lack an address pronoun. Addressing the customer with T (i.e. T ONLY) only accounts for 23%. By contrast, in Sweden, younger staff use exclusive T address in almost 67% of their interactions. It is also worth noting that staff in Finland, particularly younger staff, exhibit much greater variation in address practices overall than their Swedish counterparts. For the younger staff in Finland, address with V, either alone or in combination with T or with plural *ni*, is fairly widespread: V ONLY accounts for 15%, followed by a combination of V with T (6%) or plural *ni* (6%). Finally, PLURAL *ni* ONLY also appears more in the service encounters from Finland. In summary, staff in Finland have a broader address repertoire, and younger staff in Finland in particular exhibit the most variation.

Figure 1 focuses on staff, who display much more variation in address practices than customers (for a similar figure showing customers’ use of address forms, see Norrby et al. 2015: 81).

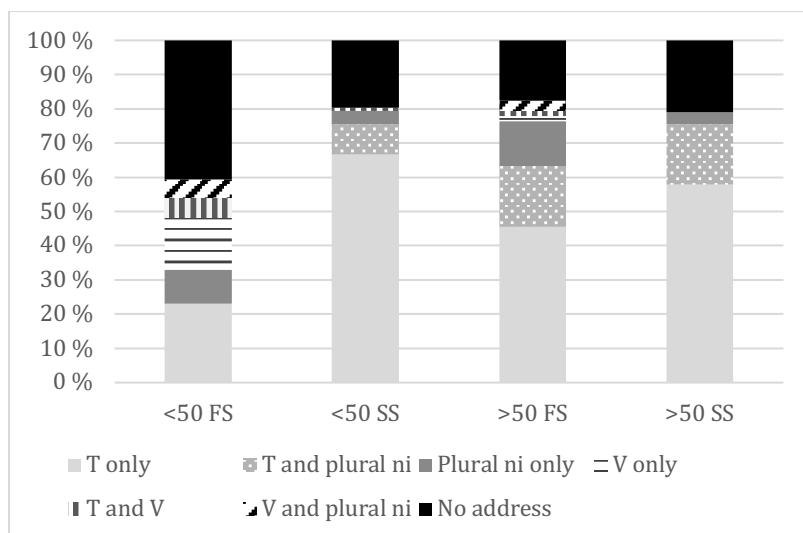


Figure 1. Older and younger staff members' use of address forms; (<50 FS = Finland-Swedish staff younger than 50 years of age, >50 FS = Finland-Swedish staff older than 50 yrs, <50 SS = Sweden-Swedish staff younger than 50 yrs, >50 SS = Sweden-Swedish staff older than 50 yrs) (Norrby et al. 2015: 82)

4.2. Qualitative analysis of service encounter interactions from Finland⁹

Excerpt (1) shows a case where both customer and staff use T address in a service encounter in Swedish from Finland.

- (1) T address (S: female, 53 years old; C: female, 67 years old)
- 1 C: *hördu Kvinna till salu i kväll*
listen+you_T ((name of play)) in evening
'listen, *Kvinna till salu* this evening'
- 2 *läste ja i Husis att den går i dag*
read I in ((colloquial name of newspaper)) that it goes today'
'I read in *Hufvudstadsbladet* that it is on today'
- 3 S: *den går i dag ja*
it goes today yes
'it's on today, yes'
- ((18 lines omitted))
- 4 S: *så där å en biljett sa [du]*
like that and one ticket said you_T
'here and one ticket you_T said'
- 5 C: *[en]*
one
'one'
- 6 (5.2)
- 7 S: *å ja behöver ditt telefonnummer*
and I need your_T telephone number
'and I need your_T phone number'
- ((68 lines omitted))
- 8 C: *utmärkt tack ska du ha tack*
excellent thanks shall you_T have thanks
'excellent, thank you_T, thanks'

⁹ For qualitative analyses including Sweden-Swedish service encounters, see Norrby et al. (2015; 2018).

In the excerpt, the customer starts the service encounter with the particle *hördu* ‘listen you_T’ which attracts the attention of the staff. By using the *hördu* particle in its T form the customer signals an informal approach to the situation, which is also picked up by the staff, who uses T address with the customer several times during the encounter (lns. 4, 7). The exchange ends with T address in line 8, when the customer uses the phrase *tack ska du ha* lit. ‘thank you shall you_T have’.

As shown in Table 2, all the Finland-Swedish customers who address the staff explicitly either use the singular pronoun *du* or the pronoun *ni* with plural meaning to refer collectively to staff members as representatives of the theatre or ticket venue, such as in *hej har ni biljetter till ... ikväll* ‘hi do you_{T,PL} have tickets to ... tonight’. Excerpt (2) illustrates how plural *ni* is also used by staff to refer collectively to customers.

(2) Plural *ni* (S: F, 58; C: M, 77)

- 1 S: *å hur många personer e ni*
and how many persons are you_{T,PL}
‘and how many are you_{T,PL}’
- 2 C: *fyra*
four
‘four’
- 3 (0.7)
- 4 S: *å och har du varit å tittat på vår hemsida*
and and have you been and looked at our homepage
‘and have you_T looked at our website’
- 5 S: *vad ni vill ha*
what you_{T,PL} want have
‘to see what you_{T,PL} want?’

Just prior to the start of the excerpt, the customer has inquired about refreshments for the interval. In her response, the staff member uses the pronoun *ni*, which in this referential context can only be interpreted as a plural form, addressing the customer and his company collectively. The shift between individual and collective address is highlighted in lines 4 to 5, where the staff member first addresses the customer with *du* and then includes the whole party with *ni* in line 5.

As discussed in 4.1, clear cases of the pronoun *ni* referring to a single person (i.e., V address) are primarily (but not only) found among younger Finland-Swedish staff (see Figure 1). In Excerpt (3), the customer uses T address throughout the interaction (lns. 1, 4, 11), while the staff member addresses the customer by V (lns. 2, 10).

(3) V address (S: F, 25; C: F, 53)

- 1 C: *eller [hur (0.3) vilken] e e tycker du*
or how which is is think you_T
‘or how, which [seat] is, do you_T think’
- 2 S: *[ni kan gå in där (---)]*
you_V can go in there’
‘you_V can have a seat there’
- 3 C: *att de e*
that it is
‘that it is’
- ((29 lines omitted))

- 4 C: *va sa du*
what said you_T
'what did you_T say?'
- 5 S: *trettifyra euro tack*
thirty-four euro thanks
'thirty-four euros please'
- 6: C: *två stycken*
two pieces
'two tickets'
- 7 S: *aj de e två stycken ursäkta*
oh it is two pieces sorry
'oh, it's two tickets, excuse me'
- ((9 lines omitted))
- 8 S: *femman glömde- nej men int*
the five forgot no but not
'forgot the five euro, no but not'
- 9 C: *nä*
no
'no'
- 10 S: *ni fick [ren]*
you_V got already
'you_V already received'
- 11 C: *[du du]sa [sextiåtta så]*
you_T you_T said sixty-eight so
'you_T you_T said sixty-eight'
- 12 S: *[(laughs)] ja*
yes
'yes'
- 13 (0.4)
- 14: C: *så e de nog rätt*
so it is surely right
'so it is right'

The young member of staff in Excerpt (3) uses V address more than any other participant in our data. In lines 4–6, it becomes quite clear that she has used the pronoun *ni* in line 2 to express V address, since she only asks the customer to pay for one ticket, to which the customer reacts with surprise. Following this, the staff member continues to use *ni* to express V address (ln. 10), while the customer continues to use *du* to express T address (ln. 11).

In Excerpt (4), the same staff member, however, suddenly switches to T address after first having used V address in a similar way as in Excerpt (3).

(4) V and T address (S: F, 25; C: F, 47)

- 1 C: *FIRST NAME (0.9) LAST NAME (0.5) jag har en biljett*
I have a ticket
'I have a ticket'
- 2 *på tredje rad[en]*
on third row-the
'on the third row in the stalls'
- 3 S: *[ju]st det det var ni som ringde*
right it it was you_V that phoned

- ‘right it was you_V who phoned’
- 4 (0.5) *vi ska se* (0.3) *där*
 we shall see there
 ‘let’s see there’
 ((13 lines omitted))
- 5 ((the customer pays for the ticket by credit card))
- 6 S: *mt* (0.4) *så där var så goda* (.) *vill du ha*
 like that be so good_{PL} want you_T have
 ‘here it is do you_T want’
- 7 *kvitto*
 receipt
 ‘the receipt?’

The customer has come to pick up a single ticket (lns. 1–2). In line 3, the staff responds by addressing the customer by *ni*, which unambiguously expresses V address here (*just det det var ni som ringde* ‘right it was you_V who phoned’). In line 6, the staff also uses the plural form of *varsågod* (lit. ‘be so good’) ending in -a, which is often used together with V address in service situations. However, after a micropause, the staff shifts to T address when asking the customer if she wants a receipt (*vill du ha kvitto* ‘do you_T want the receipt?’). Even though the shift is quite sudden, it occurs at a transition from the transaction itself to handling the receipt, where there is less at stake. The staff appears to change from the formal professional role where she uses V address, to a less formal role, where T address is the default option also in Finland-Swedish (see Raymond 2016 and Fernández-Mallat 2020 about shifts in address connected to changes in the speech situation).

Another pattern manifested among young staff in the Finland-Swedish data is avoiding address altogether, as seen in (5).

- (5) Avoidance of address (S: F, 29; C: M, 80)
- 1 S: *sen önska dom från röda korset jag skulle*
 then wished they from Red Cross-the I should
 ‘then they asked me from the Red Cross to write’
- 2 *ta upp ännu .hh namn och* (.) *kontaktuppgifter*
 take up yet name and contact information
 ‘down also the name and contact information’
- 3 *telefon[nummer]*
 telephone number
 ‘phone number’
- 4 C: *[ja hap] LAST NAME*
 yes
 ‘okay, LAST NAME’
- 5 (0.2)
- 6 S: *nja+a:*
 well
 ‘well’
- 7 (0.8)
- 8 S: *LAST NAME*
- 9 (0.7)
- 10 C: *FIRST NAME och FIRST NAME*
 and
 ‘and’

- 11 (4.3)
 12 S: *å en telefonnummer räcker riktigt bra*
 and a telephone number suffices really well
 ‘a phone number is enough’
 ((The customer gives his phone number))

The customer in Excerpt (5) has bought tickets to an event organized by the Red Cross and the staff member needs to obtain the customer’s name and contact details to pass on to the Red Cross. Instead of asking the customer directly for this information, she uses constructions without address pronouns (lns. 1–3). The customer treats her action as a request and provides a last name (ln. 4). However, the staff member is seeking the customer’s full name and does this very indirectly (lns. 6–8), and after a micropause (ln. 9), the customer gives his full name (ln. 10). Following a long pause of 4.3 seconds, the staff member issues another request, similarly lacking an address pronoun (ln. 12). In contrast to the previous examples, the staff member seems to consciously avoid addressing the customer altogether, and as a result she does not have to choose between T or V address. As discussed by Yli-Vakkuri (2005) for Finnish, this strategy of avoiding reference to the addressee can be a result of the conflict between T and V address that became unavoidable when T address became prevalent in the 1960s.

To summarize, the address practices in the service encounter dataset display how T and V are clearly not the only options available in Finland-Swedish. Besides using *ni* ‘you’ to collectively refer to staff or customers, especially younger staff, there are instances where neither T nor V is used, suggesting that both pronouns can be perceived as problematic. In the next section we therefore turn to the questionnaire data, where the informants were explicitly asked to comment on their use and perceptions of T, V, and other means of addressing.

5. Results of the survey study on reported use and perceptions of address

Since the questionnaire data only consist of open-ended questions, it is not possible to present precise figures on the distribution of preferences concerning T and V address among the informants. That notwithstanding, during the qualitative reading of data it was possible to make a rough estimation of the address preferences of the informants: some 60% conveyed a preference for T address in all situations, whereas some 40% reported that they use V address sometimes or prefer it in certain situations. Examples (6) to (9) illustrate how perceptions vary between individuals. As in most extracts shown in this section, the informants use the verbs *dua* ‘address by you_T’ and *nia* ‘address by you_V’ to express their preferences.¹⁰ In the translations of these verbs we will use general expressions such as *T/V address* and *address by T/V*. Only occurrences of the pronouns *du* and *ni* themselves will be translated with you_T, you_V and you_{T,PL}, respectively.

- (6) *Jag säger alltid **du** till alla och vill själv bli **duad**.* (F, 76)
 ‘I always use you_T with everyone and want to be addressed by T address myself’.
- (7) *Jag hatar när unga människor **duar** mig.* (F, 57)
 ‘I hate it when young people address me by T’.

¹⁰ The verbs are conjugated as follows in the extracts: *dua-r* (PRS), *dua-s* (PASS), *har du-at* (PRF), *dua-d*, *dua-de* (PTCP SG, PL).

- (8) *"Du" eller "ni" spelar ingen roll för mig och väcker inga känslor. Ingendera känns fel.* (F, 57)
 ‘You_T or you_V is just the same to me and raises no feelings. Neither feels wrong’.

The older woman in (6) prefers T address in all situations. The informants in (7) and (8), in turn, were born in the same year but convey different perceptions of T and V address. While the woman in (7) expresses strongly that she does not want younger people to address her by T, the woman in (8) thinks both *du* ‘you_T’ and *ni* ‘you_V’ are fine.

In the data, there is a general tendency for younger people (around 30 or below) to be more positive to V address, which supports the suggested re-introduction of V address in Swedish discussed in Section 2.2. However, attitudes towards T and V address vary among the younger informants in the data as well, as evidenced by examples (9) through (11).

- (9) *"Ni" passar ALDRIG, "du" passar däremot alltid. Lätt som en plätt!* (M, 32)
 ‘You_V is NEVER okay, you_T, on the other hand, is always okay. Piece of cake!’
- (10) *Niar främmande, äldre personer. Duar yngre främmande personer.* (F, 32)
 ‘I address older unacquainted persons by V. I address younger unacquainted persons by T’.
- (11) *Jag önskar att yngre personer någon dag skulle nia mig men förväntar mig inte det hända ännu under de kommande 20 åren.* (M, 30)
 ‘I hope that one day younger people will address me by V, but I don’t expect that to happen during the next 20 years’.

While the informant in (9) strongly favors T address in all situations, the informant in (10) says that she uses V address with older people she does not know. The informant in (11), in turn, looks forward to younger people using V address with him.

5.1. Perceptions of T and V address in service encounters

In most cases where service situations are mentioned in the questionnaire data, the informants report that they prefer being addressed by T as customers, such as in examples (12) and (13).

- (12) *Jag vill absolut själv bli duad men blir rätt ofta numera niad av obekanta, främst yngre personer - ofta expediter. Det känns lika obekvämt för mig varje gång. Själv skulle jag aldrig drömma om att nia en expedit. Jag upplever mig själv som en ungdomlig person och ogillar distans mellan människor.* (M, 82)
 ‘I absolutely want to be addressed by T but nowadays I’m quite often addressed by V by unacquainted, mostly young, people – often service staff. It feels just as uncomfortable for me every time. Myself I wouldn’t dream of addressing a service clerk by V. I see myself as a youthful person and dislike distance between people’.
- (13) *Jag tycker att det känns oartigt och avståndstagande när yngre eller jämnårig servicepersonal ibland niar mej. Jag är i 30-årsåldern och om någon niar känner jag mig gammal och jag upplever att servicepersonalen då vill skapa ett avstånd mellan oss.* (F, 34)
 ‘I think it sounds impolite and distancing when younger or same age service staff sometimes address me by V. I’m in my 30s and if somebody addresses me by V I feel old and perceive that the service clerk wants to create a distance between us’.

Some informants, however, explicitly state that they prefer being addressed by V in service situations, as seen in (14). In addition to this, as illustrated in (15), some young informants point out that it sometimes feels nice to be addressed with V. A few informants, such as the one in (16), do not seem to mind whether they are addressed by T or V as customers in service situations.

- (14) *Jag tycker om att bli **niad** till exempel av butikspersonal* (M, 56)
 ‘I like being addressed by V by shop assistants for example’.
- (15) *Jag vill helst bli **duad**, men är dock trevligt om man blir **niad** när man kommer in på t.ex. en fin restaurang.* (M, 28)
 ‘I prefer to be addressed by T, but it is nevertheless nice to be addressed by V when you go to, e.g., a really nice restaurant’.
- (16) *Har inget emot att bli **duad**, men som tidigare nämnts så skall det inte för det, bli för personligt [...]. Vet att det i butiker skolas till att man **niar** sin kund, helt ok. Jag tar inte illa vid mig, men jag **duar** nog i mitt svar.* (F, 77)
 ‘I have nothing against being addressed by T, but [...] it should not become too personal [...]. I know that in shops they are trained to address customers by V, that’s ok. I’m not offended, but I would respond with T’.

In the comments on what address forms the informants use as staff in service situations, T is less prevalent, but still a common option. Some point out that their company has a T policy, such as the informant in (17). Others refer to personal strategies to use T address, such as the informant in (18).

- (17) *Min arbetsgivare har som linje att vi **Duar** kunderna, vilket gör det lätt för mig. Har stött på både äldre kunder som önskat att jag **Niar** - och själv då **Niat** mig - med förklaringen att vi ju inte känner varandra personligen. Likaså har jag också blivit ombedd att **Dua** då jag omedvetet **Niat** en kund. [...] Jag börjar med att **Dua** men har inga problem att naturligt kunna **Nia** om kunden så önskar.* (F, 35)
 ‘My employer has a policy that we address customers by T, which makes it easy for me. I have encountered both older customers who want me to address them by V – and who have addressed me by V – with the explanation that we don’t know each other personally.
 But I have also been asked to use T address when I have unwittingly addressed a customer by V. [...] I start with T address but have no problems using V naturally if the customer so wishes’.
- (18) *I kundservice skulle jag inte heller säga att jag använt "**ni**" särskilt ofta. [...] För en del människor är ju kundbetjäningen den enda kontakten de får med en människa den dagen och då känns det viktigt att göra den på ett sätt som de upplever sig välkomna genom, vilket ett "**du**" ofta kan hjälpa till med. [...] Så strategiskt försöker jag använda "**du**" för att som sagt dels göra den andra individen sedd, men också för att skapa en slags äkta dialog mellan lika parter trots att det egentligen existerar en obalanserad maktrelation.* (F, 36)
 ‘In customer service I wouldn’t say that I have used “you_v” particularly often either. [...] For some people the customer service might be the only contact they

will have that day with a human being and then it feels important to manage it in a way that they feel welcome, which a “you_T” can help achieve. So strategically I try to use “you_T” to pay attention to the other individual but also to create a sort of real dialogue among equals despite the fact that there is an imbalanced power relationship’.

Some informants who say that they always use T address point out that they may use V address “if the customer is really old like 80 years – or if it is very formal” (F, 29).

Plural *ni* is mentioned in one comment, which is shown in (19).

- (19) *Jag jobbar inom kundtjänst och **duar** alltid. Nu har jag inte längre direkt kundkontakt men tidigare hade jag det och det var nog 'du' som gällde, ifall man inte pratade till kunden i form av att avse deras företag, då blev det **ni** - t.ex. "Kan **ni** ta emot leveransen på måndag morgon?"* (F, 41)

‘I work in customer service and always use T. Now I don’t have direct customer contact any longer, but earlier I did and it used to be ‘you_T’. Unless you were addressing the customer’s company, then it would be ‘you_{T.PL} – e.g., “Could you_{T.PL} receive the delivery on Monday morning?”’

V address is, however, also mentioned by quite a few informants. Some say that they always address customers or older customers in service situations by V. Example (20) shows a comment by a younger informant and (21) one by an older informant.

- (20) *Jag **niar** alltid kunder i kundbetjäning. Det är alltid **ni** även om personen vore yngre än en själv.* (M, 19)

‘I always address customers by V in customer service. It is always you_V even if the person would be younger than oneself’.

- (21) *Jag har jobbat inom servicebranschen i över 30 år. Att tilltala kunder med **Ni** så har jag dragit gränsen för dem som är ca 15 - 20 år äldre än jag själv. [...] Det har hänt att kunderna generat sagt att de inte behöver bli **niade**.* (F, 52)

‘I have worked in the service sector for over 30 years. For addressing customers by you_V, I have drawn the line at those who are about 15–20 years older than myself. [...] Sometimes the customers have been embarrassed and say that they do not need to be addressed by V address’.

One informant, who says that she always addresses people over 50 by V, adds that she also reads the customer by observing their body language, clothes, behavior, greetings and so on, as shown in (22). However, reading customers may prove difficult, especially if you are working in the service sector in another region than the one you are from yourself, which the informant in (23) has experienced. This informant, who is from Ostrobothnia on the western coast of Finland, where she was not accustomed to using V address, refers to her difficulties figuring out whom to address by V when she was working in a bank in the capital, Helsinki, on the southern coast.

- (22) *Om man varit länge i serviceyrken utvecklar man ett bra öga för om man ska hålla sig till **ni** eller om det kommer att uppfattas som uppstyltat eller rentav snorkigt. Kundens kroppsspråk, klädsel och allmänna uppförande, hälsning och sätt att tala brukar ge bra fingervisning om vad som passar bäst.* (F, 70)

‘If you have worked in a service profession for long you develop a keen eye for whether you should keep to you_v or whether it would be perceived as stilted or even snooty. The customer’s body language, clothing style and general conduct, greeting and way of speaking usually give a hint about what suits best’.

- (23) *Första gången jag hörde att nån skulle **nias** var när jag började sommarjobba i kassa på bank. Var jättejobbigt att avgöra vem det skulle gälla. Som tur är jobbade jag inte mycket med privatkunder - företagare och yngre personer kunde man tacksamt nog **dua**. Tre äldre kunder borde jag kanske ha **niat**, vet inte om jag lyckades med det, eller om jag bara konsekvent undvek tilltalsformer. Den dag jag vikarierade på anrikt kontor i södra Helsingfors var jättetung. Önskade att jag haft en stor skylt med texten "österbottning, omedveten om att jag inte kan uppföra mig". (F, 48)*

‘The first time I heard that somebody should be addressed by V was when I started a summer job as a bank teller. It was really hard to decide who it should apply to. Three older customers I should have addressed by V perhaps, don’t know if I succeeded, or if I simply avoided address forms. The day when I was a substitute at a prestigious office in south Helsinki was really difficult. I wish I had had a big sign with the text “Ostrobothnian, unaware of not being able to behave myself”’.

To sum up, the responses in the questionnaire data also confirm the non-binary characteristics of the address variation found in Finland-Swedish. On the one hand, there are some clear differences between individuals in how they perceive T and V address. On the other hand, there seems to be a misalignment between how staff think customers should be addressed and how customers want to be addressed. While some informants state that customers should always be addressed by *ni* ‘you_v’, others even perceive it as impolite. In the following section we will discuss these tendencies in more detail.

6. Discussion

Both the analysis of actual address use in service encounters and the perceptions of T and V show that the address system in Finland is not used and perceived in the same way by all speakers. On the contrary, there are in fact directly opposite perceptions of T and V address in service encounters, which is one of the rather few settings where V address is still used in Finland.

When compared to earlier studies of actual and reported use of address in service encounters in Finland-Swedish, our findings indicate that V address has lost more ground. In the service encounter data from the 1990s analyzed by Saari (1995) and Fremer (1996, 1998), the most common pattern was V address, which is not the case in our service encounter data from the 2010s, where T address is most frequent. As for perceptions of address, T also dominates in our data, but less so than in the service encounters representing actual use. The most striking difference compared to older qualitative questionnaire data such as those reported by Mara and Huldén (2000) is, not surprisingly, the complete disappearance of titles as a major part of the address system. With regard to T and V address, Mara and Huldén (2000: 21) conclude that, during the 20th century, V became the default option in the official and public sphere, whereas T took over in unofficial and private settings. In our 21st century questionnaire data this still holds to some extent, but T has clearly gained ground in the official and public sphere and has become at least equally common. Several informants in our data – in all age

groups – state that T is the only option for them in all situations. Quite a few informants also strongly dislike being addressed by V, for example, in service encounters. At the same time, V has not disappeared and is still favored by some informants, both in the role of staff and customers. The questionnaire responses illustrate quite clearly how community members may have radically different perceptions of the values expressed by the T and V pronouns (cf. Vismans 2018). In theoretical models of address systems, complexities such as these need to be considered more than they have been so far.

In more recent questionnaire data from the early 21st century, a majority of Finland-Swedish informants, and particularly the younger generations, reported that they address customers by V in service settings (Norrby 2005, Nyblom 2006; Clyne et al. 2009: 138–139). This tendency can be seen in our data as well. In the service encounters, most of the occurrences of V address can be found among young Finland-Swedish staff. At the same time, they use T address or no explicit address marker at all equally often. In the questionnaire data, young informants are generally the most positive towards V address compared to other groups, but their perceptions also vary radically. Some strongly dislike V, or say they never use it. As shown in the examples from our data, the fluid perceptions of V address also become quite visible in actual use. A staff member may consistently use V in some service encounters where the customer uses T, while in other encounters, the same staff member may shift to using the T address after, for example, completing the transaction, reflecting a change from a professional to a more informal role. In addition to this, young staff members sometimes avoid address altogether, which is a strategy for dealing with the ambiguity of both T and V address (Yli-Vakkuri 2005). Again, this illustrates the dynamic features of address systems, which become quite apparent in the kind of open-ended data that we have focused on in our study. Considering results as these in theoretical models would be important to capture the full complexity of address as a linguistic phenomenon.

The misalignment in both datasets between the use and perceptions of T and V in the role of customer and staff, respectively, is striking. No clear cases of the pronoun *ni* being used for expressing V address can be found among customers (only *ni* collectively referring to staff members as representatives of the theatre or ticket venue). Customers also often use T address very explicitly, and many informants in the questionnaire data point out that they want to be addressed by T in service encounters. This demonstrates that for many speakers of Finland-Swedish, the binary T/V distinction has lost its currency and T address is universal (as is the case in Sweden). Even though some informants seem to like being addressed by V as customers, V address is emphasized much more strongly as appropriate in the staff role. Quite a few informants report that in their role as staff they address much older customers, just slightly older customers, or all customers by V address. At the same time, many informants point out that they dislike being addressed by V because it makes them feel old. Others mention that V address creates uncomfortable or even impolite distance. Characterizing V address as the polite option is thus problematic because it is clearly not perceived as such by everyone. A more accurate description would be to say that V conveys distance, which can either be perceived as positive or negative.

Even though variables such as regional and social background also likely play a role, both our datasets indicate that individual preferences or even speakers' personalities may be decisive for what address patterns are chosen. When competing address practices are available, as is the case in Finland, individual speakers have the possibility to and must choose which form to use. This, however, also inevitably leads to clashes between expectations among speakers and addressees which may be difficult to predict. Not surprisingly, the avoidance of address pronouns therefore remains an important resource in Finland, both in Swedish and in Finnish (Yli-Vakkuri 2005). Above all, our results demonstrate that address in Finland is much more complex than the binary T/V system would suggest. Since the swift transition to universal

T address in the 1960s was not completed in Finland, the address system still contains some elements of older address practices, resulting in a fluid and multidimensional address system today. In addition, our data suggest that the reintroduction of V address, especially in service encounters among young people, in the last decades of the 20th century might additionally contribute to maintaining the complexity in address practices in Finland although it did have a modest impact in Sweden.

Transcription symbols

[	point when overlapping talk begins
]	point when overlapping talk stops
wo+ord	legato pronunciation
((word))	meta comment
(-)	talk not discernible
mt	click (for example from smacking one's lips)
(.)	micro pause (less than 0.2 seconds)
(0.5)	silence measured in tenths of a second

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