

5.2 Key Concepts

We have already implicitly defined sociolinguistics as a field of research concerned with the study of how language is used in social interactions and in different social contexts. The motivation for focusing on language in its varied contexts of use lies in the conviction that there are limits to what can be elicited through direct questioning of speakers about what they believe is ‘good’ or ‘casual’ language, or about their awareness of when one linguistic code is preferred over another. Crucially, at the point of variation that is below the level of conscious awareness or below the level of social stereotyping, speakers’ intuitions fail to capture the entirety of their competence. Example 1 illustrates this: Nanbakhsh's direct question about the use of the 2nd person pronouns *to* (intimate) and *šoma* (deferential) elicits the conventional [±respect] meaning of the pronouns, and some insights in how *šoma* functions within an individual's larger habitus (Bourdieu 1990). But in none of her direct questioning did any of the Persian speakers show any awareness of an unconventional but widely used strategy that combines the deferential *šoma* with the subject–verb agreement marking associated with the intimate 2nd person singular pronoun *to* (Nanbakhsh 2010).

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(1) Direct questioning about deference norms and the use of plural pronouns in Teheran Persian (Nanbakhsh 2010)¹

Yasmina: female, 22-year-old university student

Golnaz:

<i>be</i>	<i>næzære</i>	<i>šoma</i>	<i>forme</i>	<i>khætabiye</i>	<i>jam</i>	<i>mafhume</i>	<i>ehteram</i>
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prep	opinion	2PL	form	address	PL	meaning	respect
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<i>ra</i>	<i>mi-resun-æd?</i>
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‘In your opinion does the plural address form convey respect?’

Yasmina:

<i>Na,</i>	<i>ehteram</i>	<i>fægæt</i>	<i>ke</i>	<i>be</i>	<i>formez</i>	<i>khætabi</i>
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no	respect	only	emphatic	prep	form	address
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<i>nist</i>	<i>be</i>	<i>næhveye</i>	<i>bærkhord</i>	<i>æst,</i>	<i>momkene</i>	<i>šoma</i>	<i>khatabešun</i>
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be.NEG	prep	manner	behave	is	possible	2PL	address.2PL
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<i>konim</i>	<i>vali</i>	<i>ræftare</i>	<i>zænændeyi</i>	<i>dašte</i>	<i>bašim</i>	<i>ya</i>	<i>bæræx.</i>
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do.1PL	but	manner	repulsive	have	be.3PL	or	contrary
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‘No, respect is not only indexed with the forms of address per se but may also be constrained with the stance the individual takes in the use of that form in the interaction. We may address someone with the deferential address pronoun (*šoma*) while being repulsive or rude to them or vice versa, (i.e. respect may also be shown with the use of the informal address pronoun (*to*) but with a polite manner).’