



Husband (lǎogōng) Beyond Marriage: The Generalization of a Kinship Address Term on Weibo

Yin Binxin

School of Foreign Languages and Cultures, Nanjing Normal University, Nanjing, China

Email: cfx4ever@163.com

Received: 19 Sep 2026; Received in revised form: 17 Oct 2026; Accepted: 22 Oct 2026; Available online: 27 Oct 2026

©2026 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open-access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Abstract— The generalization of kinship terms is a highly active linguistic phenomenon in modern Chinese. However, existing studies have largely focused on consanguineal kinship terms, leaving the generalization of marital kinship terms under-examined. Taking the kinship term *lǎogōng* (“husband”) as a case study, this paper draws on 507 Weibo posts collected from January to July 2025 and employs qualitative content analysis to investigate its referents, pragmatic functions, and underlying motivations. The findings show that: (1) *lǎogōng* has been highly generalized on Weibo, with generalized uses accounting for 73.96% of the data and referring to male idols, female idols, virtual characters, and fellow netizens; (2) the generalized use of *lǎogōng* serves three main pragmatic functions, including constructing intimacy, conveying positive evaluation, and mitigating face-threatening acts; (3) the generalization is driven not merely by intra-linguistic mechanisms but also by users’ emotional needs and communicative strategies, and is continually shaped by platform affordances. This study fills a gap in online address term research concerning marital kinship terms, reveals how address term evolution in the new media era is increasingly embedded in the affective and attention economies of platform society, and offers implications for regulating online language use and community governance.



Keywords— Kinship Term, Generalization, Address Term

I. INTRODUCTION

Address terms are linguistic forms employed to attract an interlocutor’s attention or to designate that person in interaction (Braun, 1988). Among these, kinship terms of address were originally used to refer to family members related by blood or marriage. In actual communication, however, their scope of use frequently extends beyond the kinship domain and becomes generalized to non-kin addressees, as when a waitress addresses a customer as *jie* (“older sister”) or when internet users address one another as *xiaojiejie* (“little sister”). Such non-kin use of kinship terms has become an increasingly common phenomenon in contemporary Chinese.

Scholarly attention to the generalized use of kinship terms has a long history. A review of the relevant literature shows that many studies have focused on the semantic

evolution of kinship terms and its motivating factors (Chen & Ren, 2020; Huang & Zhou, 2017; Mansor *et al.*, 2018; Wang & Gao, 2022), while others have examined the functions that generalized kinship terms perform in different communicative contexts (Ren & Chen, 2019; Shahid *et al.*, 2025). With the development of the internet, generalized kinship terms in online communication have also entered the research agenda. However, existing studies are scattered across settings such as e-commerce livestreaming and *WeChat*, and the few *Weibo*-based studies available have focused primarily on self-referential uses (Ren & Yao, 2025); systematic investigation of other-referring generalized uses remains insufficient. More importantly, existing studies of online communication have concentrated largely on consanguineal kinship terms such as “aunt” (Ren & Yao, 2025) and “son” (Yang &

Chen, 2023), paying inadequate attention to marital kinship terms such as “husband.”

Against this background, the present study takes the Chinese kinship term *lǎogōng* (“husband”; *hereafter referred to simply as lǎogōng*) as a case in point and investigates the generalization of address terms on the basis of *Weibo* data. The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. Section 2 reviews the literature on kinship terms of address. Section 3 presents the methodology, including the research questions, data collection, and analytical procedures. Section 4 reports the findings, analyzing the referents and communicative functions of the generalized use of *lǎogōng*. Section 5 discusses the factors shaping the use of *lǎogōng*, and Section 6 concludes the paper.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The generalized use of kinship terms

The generalized use of kinship terms refers to the extension of address terms originally used for specific kin relations to interlocutors with whom no actual kinship relation exists (Alenizi, 2019). Existing research has examined this phenomenon from semantic, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic perspectives, focusing respectively on the semantic changes involved in kinship-term generalization, its sociocultural conditions, and its functions in situated communication.

From a semantic perspective, studies have been concerned primarily with the semantic changes that kinship terms undergo in generalized use and with the mechanisms driving such change. Wu (1990) investigated the semantic features and linguistic manifestations of kinship terms in generalized use. Taking *jie* (“older sister”) as an example, Wang and Gao (2022) argue that its generalization involves processes such as pragmatic inference and the conventionalization of inferred meaning. Research of this kind reveals how kinship terms break free from their original kinship constraints and acquire, in new contexts of use, meanings that differ from their traditional ones.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, researchers have explored the social-structural and cultural factors that condition the generalized use of kinship terms. Some studies link the phenomenon to changes in social structure. Huang and Zhou (2017), for example, argue that the shift of Chinese kinship terms toward occupational address terms reflects a re-evaluation of occupational status in the course of social transformation. Other studies attend to the sociocultural values embodied in kinship-term generalization. Chen and Ren (2020) note that generalized kinship terms in academic settings embody China’s

family-centered sociocultural values; similarly, Mansor *et al.* (2018) point out that the prevalence of non-kin uses in Malay is closely related to its collectivist cultural background. Together, these studies demonstrate that the generalization of kinship terms is not an isolated linguistic phenomenon but is shaped by particular social structures and cultural ideologies.

From a pragmatic perspective, research has focused mainly on the functions that kinship terms serve in concrete communicative situations (Hentschel, 2012; Ren & Chen, 2019; Shahid *et al.*, 2025). Hentschel (2012), for instance, regards generalized kinship terms as an important means of achieving politeness. Shahid *et al.* (2025) find that in Pakistani English, kinship terms are frequently used between strangers and new acquaintances to establish immediate familiarity. Ren and Chen (2019) show that generalized kinship terms not only reduce interpersonal distance but also express respect among graduate students.

Overall, existing research has revealed the multifaceted nature of kinship-term generalization in terms of semantic change, sociocultural conditioning, and pragmatic function, thereby laying an important foundation for understanding this phenomenon.

2.2 The generalized use of kinship terms online

The development of the internet has created space for the flexible use of address terms. In recent years, researchers have begun to examine how kinship terms are used across different online platforms and online communities.

In ordinary online interaction, studies have focused primarily on the interpersonal functions of kinship terms. Yang and Wang (2022), for example, find that *baobao* (“baby”) in e-commerce livestreaming helps create a sense of closeness and serves commercial goals in livestream sales. Yang and Chen (2023) point out that *erzi* (“son”) in WeChat interaction can express intimacy while also serving a jocular function. Ren and Yao (2025) find that young women on *Weibo* construct virtual identities by referring to themselves as *lao ayi* (“old auntie”), alleviating age anxiety through self-deprecation. These studies indicate that kinship terms in online contexts are used not only to build or signal relationships but may also perform distinct pragmatic functions in particular interactions, and that their meanings must be understood in light of the actual contexts of use.

Online subcultures and fan communities constitute another important setting for the generalized use of kinship terms. In such contexts, kinship terms are used not only to express affection toward particular figures but may also contribute to the formation of community norms and the expression of group belonging. Tinaliga (2018) finds that *oppa*, a Korean term originally used to address an older

male relative, has become an important symbol in K-pop fan culture of emotional bonding between female fans and male idols. Li and Hiramoto's (2025) study of address terms in the Chinese pop music fandom examines the role of kinship terms such as *lǎogōng* and *erzi* in the construction of group belonging. These studies further demonstrate that the use of kinship terms in online communities is closely tied to particular cultural practices and patterns of group interaction.

2.3 Research gap

In sum, existing studies have examined the generalization of kinship terms from semantic, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic perspectives, and have gradually extended their scope to online settings. This body of work provides valuable reference points for understanding the use of kinship terms among non-kin. Nevertheless, several gaps remain. On the one hand, prior research has focused largely on generalized kinship terms in offline communication; although studies of online settings have grown in recent years, they remain scattered across platforms such as e-commerce livestreaming and WeChat. With respect to *Weibo*—a platform that combines public discussion with fan interaction—existing research has concentrated mainly on self-referential uses (Ren & Yao, 2025), while systematic investigation of other-referring generalized uses is still lacking. On the other hand, studies of online communication have concentrated on consanguineal kinship terms such as *jiějie* (“older sister”), *erzi* (“son”), and *oppa*; although marital kinship terms have been mentioned in individual studies (Li & Hiramoto, 2025), systematic examination of the generalized use of this category remains absent. Accordingly, the present study takes the kinship term *lǎogōng* on *Weibo* as a case study and investigates its generalized use, with a view to addressing these gaps.

III. RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 Research questions

To address the gaps identified above, this study takes the Chinese address term *lǎogōng* (“husband”) as a case study and investigates its generalized use in *Weibo* posts and the underlying motivations. Specifically, it answers the following three research questions:

- (1) What are the referents of the address term *lǎogōng* in *Weibo* posts?
- (2) What functions does the generalized use of *lǎogōng* perform in *Weibo* posts?
- (3) Why do *Weibo* users generalize the use of *lǎogōng* to achieve these functions?

3.2 Data collection

The data for this study were collected from *Weibo*. The platform was selected for two reasons. First, as one of the most influential open social media platforms in China, *Weibo* allows posts to be publicly visible, which facilitates systematic data collection. Second, *Weibo* has 587 million monthly active users and a diverse user base (Gong, 2026), and can therefore offer a relatively representative picture of how address terms are actually used in online communication.

Using *lǎogōng* as the search keyword, we searched the *Weibo* platform for posts from January to July 2025, restricting the search to original posts and collecting the first 30 pages of search results each month under the platform's default ranking. This yielded roughly 100-200 posts per month. To ensure the validity of the collected data, we further excluded the following types: (1) reposts; (2) posts containing only links or images with no substantive textual content; (3) commercial content posted by marketing accounts or suspected of being mass-posted by bots; and (4) posts for which contextual information was so limited that the use of *lǎogōng* could not be determined. After this screening, a final corpus of 507 valid posts was obtained.

Although all data were drawn from a public platform, this study adheres to established ethical guidelines for internet research (Franzke *et al.*, 2020). During data processing and writing, all information that could identify users—including usernames, profile pictures, and exact posting times—was removed or anonymized, and @-handles in quoted examples were masked. We are aware that verbatim quotations from public posts may be traceable to their original sources via search engines. However, because the linguistic phenomenon under investigation resides in the precise wording of the posts, paraphrasing would compromise the authenticity of the data. We therefore retain verbatim quotations only where analytically necessary, on the grounds that the posts constitute publicly accessible, non-sensitive fan discourse, that the quoted users are not identifiable by name, and that the research poses minimal risk of harm to the original posters. When quoting the data, we retained only the textual content relevant to the research questions and applied the necessary technical processing to expressions involving personal information, so as to avoid any potential impact on the original users.

3.3 Data analysis

The study adopts qualitative content analysis, addressing the three research questions one by one. For Research Question 1, the researchers analyzed the textual content of each *Weibo* post. In the great majority of cases, the

referent of *lǎogōng* can be readily determined from the post text, accompanying images, hashtags, and @-mentioned accounts. For example, if a post is accompanied by a picture of a public figure together with relevant hashtags, the referent of the term can be identified. Where the available textual and contextual information was still insufficient to determine the specific referent of *lǎogōng*, the researchers drew inferences from the user's complete timeline, consecutive preceding and following posts, and comment interactions.

Upon completing this first step, we proceeded to address Research Question 2 by analyzing the same set of posts and comments, while also taking into account users' interactive feedback on certain high-engagement posts. Specifically, whenever a generalized use of *lǎogōng* was identified, we analyzed the communicative function of the address term and the user's communicative intention. Where the textual context was ambiguous and the function difficult to determine, we focused on commenters' interpretations, likes, and replies in order to confirm the communicative purpose the user sought to achieve through *lǎogōng*.

Research Question 3 is addressed in the Discussion section.

IV. FINDINGS

4.1 Referents of the generalized address term *lǎogōng*

Through coding and analysis, five categories of referents of *lǎogōng* were identified: real-life spouses, virtual characters, male idols, female idols, and *Weibo* netizens. Their distribution is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of Referents of *lǎogōng*

Referent	Frequency	Percentage
Real-life spouse	132	26.04%
Virtual character	9	1.78%
Male idol	301	59.37%
Female idol	28	5.52%
<i>Weibo</i> netizens	37	7.30%
Total	507	100%

When *lǎogōng* is used to refer to the user's real-life spouse, it constitutes the literal (non-generalized) use of the term. Of the 507 posts collected, 132 involve this literal use. Example 1 is a typical case.

(1) 这会肚子饿的咕咕叫，想吃烧烤[团子][关东煮]把洗完澡已经躺在床上准备睡瞌瞌的老公薅起来去门口给我买买买[购物袋] 爱妻者风声水起~我老公以后肯定越过越好 发财暴富升职加薪[钱][庆祝]

"My stomach is growling with hunger right now and I'm craving barbecue [dango][oden], so I dragged my husband—who had already showered and was lying in bed ready to sleep—out of bed to go to the entrance and buy buy buy for me [shopping bags]. Fortune favors loving husbands~ My husband is bound to do better and better: get rich, get promoted, get a raise [money][party popper]"



In Example 1, the blogger shares an everyday episode in which she rouses her husband—who had showered and was ready for bed—to go out and buy her barbecue. The remark attached to the chat-record screenshot she posted, labeled *xiansheng* ("Mr") confirms that *lǎogōng* here is used in its literal sense.

Beyond the literal use, the study finds that in the 507 posts, *lǎogōng* appears more often in generalized uses, totaling 375 instances (73.96% of the corpus). These are discussed in turn below with reference to the data.

Among all generalized uses, the most frequent is the use of *lǎogōng* to refer to male idols, totaling 301 instances, as in Example 2:

(2) #我的超话卡册##龚俊苏暮雨#gj#龚俊 暗河传# 见过横店深夜三点的月和清早五点的雨，雨哥在我们心中已是如此亲切又梦幻的存在。老公五个月拍摄辛苦啦！期待与龚俊苏暮雨@龚俊 Simon 在优酷电视剧《暗河传》中早日相见！

#MySuperTopicCardAlbum##GongJunSuMuyu#gj#GongJun TheDarkRiver# Having seen the moon over Hengdian at three in the morning and the rain at five in the morning, Brother Yu has become such an intimate and dreamlike presence in our hearts. Husband, thank you for your hard work over the five months of filming! Looking forward to meeting Gong Jun's Su Muyu @GongJunSimon soon in the Youku drama The Dark River!

Example 2 is taken from a fan's *Weibo* post; the user uses multiple Super Topic hashtags (e.g., #MySuperTopicCardAlbum#, #GongJunSuMuyu#, #GongJun TheDarkRiver#). Such hashtags both tag the content of the post, making it searchable for other fans, and boost the trending momentum of the topic; they constitute a typical discursive practice through which fans

participate in chart-ranking campaigns (Zhang & Negus, 2020). The user addresses the actor Gong Jun as *lǎogōng*, an emotionally projective form of expression internal to the fan community: *lǎogōng* here does not point to a real marital relationship but conveys the user's solicitude, appreciation, and affection for the actor's five months of hard filming.

In addition to male idols, *lǎogōng* is also used to refer to female idols, totaling 28 instances (5.52%), as in Example 3:

(3) #迪丽热巴摄影尹超#老公我要被帅晕了

#DilrabaPhotographedByYinChao# Husband, I'm about to faint from your handsomeness



In Example 3, the name of the referent does not appear in the text itself, but the accompanying photo and hashtags make it clear that the person addressed as *lǎogōng* is the actress Dilraba. Dilraba's dashing styling in the photo gives rise to the user's exclamation of being "about to faint from her handsomeness." This use of *lǎogōng* for a female celebrity is consistent with previous findings (Miao, 2025).

In recent years, with the development of otome games, some users have also used *lǎogōng* to refer to virtual characters from games, totaling 9 instances (1.78%), as in Example 4:

(4) [爱慕]#秦彻# [爱慕]#秦彻 0715 一周年快乐# 快啦快啦到七月啦马上就可以见到老公咯

[adore]#QinChe#[adore]#HappyFirstAnniversaryQinChe0715# Almost there, almost there, July is coming—I'll get to see my husband soon



Example 4 comes from the Super Topic community of a character in a Chinese otome game, and the user is a player

of the game. As the accompanying image shows, an anniversary card for the game character Qin Che was scheduled for release in July. The user here addresses Qin Che as *lǎogōng* to express her anticipation of the character's anniversary event. This type of use extends *lǎogōng* further to virtual characters, illustrating how generalized use extends from real persons to targets of parasocial relations.

In addition, 37 instances (7.30%) use *lǎogōng* to refer to fellow Weibo netizens. This use occurs mostly in interactive Weibo scenarios, where users address non-spouse netizens as *lǎogōng* while performing speech acts such as requesting, thanking, and apologizing (see Examples 5–7). Of these 37 instances, 21 use the plural form *lǎogōng-men* to address groups of netizens, while the remaining 16 target specific users through the @-mention function; verification shows that all 16 mentioned users were women. This is consistent with the previous observation that *lǎogōng* can serve as an intimate, jocular form of address among women (Miao, 2025).

In Example 5, the user thanks another user who gifted her a Weibo membership decoration, saying *xiexie lǎogōng* ("thank you, husband") followed by a jocular request. *lǎogōng* here does not express a real marital relationship but creates an intimate conversational atmosphere online, serving as a familiarity-based politeness strategy (Hentschel, 2012).

(5) @*** 谢谢老公，其实你可以送我 iphone16promax，我不介意的

@*** Thank you, husband—actually you could have sent me an iPhone 16 Pro Max, I wouldn't have minded

In Example 6, the user publishes a post soliciting opinions, using the plural form *lǎogōng-men* to address netizens in the Super Topic. The use of the plural marker -men creates a kind of group intimacy (Cook, 2020) that helps elicit more positive community feedback.

(6) 老公们能否帮我抉择一下我想做 p3 那样的镜子用哪张图

Husbands, could you help me decide which picture to use—I want to make a mirror like the one in p3

In Example 7, the user apologizes for being unable to maintain continuous interaction, likewise addressing netizens as *lǎogōng-men*. The address term mitigates the awkwardness of the apology and maintains interpersonal relations within the online community (Taylor, 2016).

(7) 老公们今晚休息一天先不续火了明天继续

Husbands, taking a day off tonight—won't keep the streak going today, will continue tomorrow

4.2 Pragmatic functions of the generalized address term *lǎogōng*

The analysis shows that the generalized use of *lǎogōng* on *Weibo* performs three main pragmatic functions: creating intimacy, positive evaluation, and mitigating face threats.

The prototypical function of the generalized address term *lǎogōng* in *Weibo* discourse is the creation of intimacy. This conclusion is consistent with previous findings on the generalization of kinship terms (Wang *et al.*, 2025; Yang & Chen, 2023). However, whereas existing research has mostly emphasized that generalized kinship terms shorten the psychological distance between interactants, the use of *lǎogōng* in the present data creates an imagined intimacy. In Examples 2 and 4 above, for instance, the users address a male idol and a virtual character, both media personae, as *lǎogōng* to express their emotions. Such one-directional emotional bonding can be regarded as a manifestation of what Horton and Wohl (1956) termed the parasocial relationship.

Second, the generalized *lǎogōng* on *Weibo* performs a positive-evaluation function. In Example 3, the user, a fan of the actress Dilraba, posts “*lǎogōng*, I’m about to faint from your handsomeness,” in which the use of *lǎogōng* does not necessarily express genuine romantic attraction (Li & Hiramoto, 2025) but rather appropriates the address term to convey admiration for the actress. This finding echoes the study by He (2016) on the use of *ye* (“grandpa”) and *ge* (“older brother”) for outstanding women in various professions; the present study further demonstrates that *lǎogōng* likewise serves this commendatory function.

In addition, *lǎogōng* can be used to mitigate face threats. Previous research has noted that the use of kinship terms can soften tone and reduce confrontational force in particular contexts (Garlepow, 2026). Unlike Garlepow (2026), who examines English address terms, the present study shows that the generalized use of the Chinese kinship term *lǎogōng* on *Weibo* likewise performs this mitigating function. Take Example 6, “*lǎogōng*-men, could you help me decide which picture to use—I want to make a mirror like the one in p3.” Requests are face-threatening acts (Brown & Levinson, 1987); the use of the address term *lǎogōng* here functions as a downtoner (Spencer-Oatey, 2008, p. 23), weakening the illocutionary force of the request and reducing its negative interpersonal effects. The comments on this post provide corroborating evidence: the post received nine substantive replies, all of which were positive responses to the request, with no questioning of or objection to the *lǎogōng*-men address itself. This suggests, to a certain extent, that the address term *lǎogōng* likewise helps to create an informal, friendly interactional atmosphere and softens the speech act.

V. DISCUSSION

The above analysis shows that on *Weibo* the kinship term *lǎogōng* has become highly generalized: it can be used to refer to male idols, female idols, virtual characters, and fellow netizens, and its generalized use performs a range of functions in different communicative situations, including creating intimacy, positive evaluation, and mitigating face threats.

A comprehensive examination of the corpus reveals that the generalized use of *lǎogōng* on *Weibo* is not merely a matter of individual choice on the part of *Weibo* users; it is a choice driven by emotional and communicative needs, and one that is simultaneously shaped by platform affordances.

The first factor is emotional needs. Existing research indicates that addressing idols as *lǎogōng* occurs mainly among young female fans (Li & Hiramoto, 2025), and the observations from our corpus are consistent with this. As contemporary young women face the structural predicament of the disciplinary regime of marriage and romance, coupled with the scarcity of ideal intimate relationships (Wang, 2026), the symbolic performance of intimacy afforded by the use of *lǎogōng* constitutes a low-cost, compensatory emotional outlet. Unlike platforms such as *WeChat* Moments, which are characterized by strong-tie acquaintance networking and highly embedded real-life identities, *Weibo*’s weak ties and semi-public nature constitute a “third place” (Oldenburg, 1989), in which female users can project private emotional fantasies and temporarily suspend the social discipline imposed on women’s expression of desire (Zarafonetis, 2017).

The second factor is communicative needs. The generalization of address terms has a distinctly pragmatic character: in different communicative situations, communicators select particular address terms to meet specific communicative needs (Ren, 2019). The netizen-directed uses of *lǎogōng* in this study are precisely motivated by this need. On the one hand, the term conveys closeness and solidarity between the parties (Hampel, 2015), conforming to the operating logic of the “solidarity politeness system” (Scollon & Scollon, 2001), that is, establishing temporary quasi-intimate relationships at relatively low linguistic cost. On the other hand, it constitutes a positive politeness strategy (Brown & Levinson, 1987): by signaling goodwill through an intimate form of address, it reduces interactional friction among strangers and manages “relational face” (Spencer-Oatey, 2008), thereby satisfying communicative needs (Examples 5-7).

The third factor is the shaping role of platform affordances. Existing research shows that social media

recommendation algorithms tend to allocate exposure on the basis of engagement metrics, and that content of higher emotional intensity typically gains greater visibility (Zafar *et al.*, 2026). *Lǎogōng*, used with high frequency within fan circles, is repeatedly exposed and replicated under the acceleration of the platform's algorithmic recommendation logic, gradually transforming into a reusable emotional resource and a circulating code of the fandom (Ahmed, 2004; Papacharissi, 2015). In other words, platforms are not neutral sites of language use (boyd, 2010; Van Dijk, 2013;). Algorithms amplify emotion, and emotion feeds traffic in return. The generalization of the address term *lǎogōng* in the new media environment is thus an almost inevitable trend that increasingly permeates everyday interpersonal interaction (Li & Lai, 2025).

VI. CONCLUSION

This paper analyzes the generalized use of the kinship term *lǎogōng* on *Weibo*. The study finds that the term has become markedly generalized on the platform: in the corpus collected, only 26.04% of instances are literal uses, while generalized uses account for 73.96%, designating male idols, female idols, virtual characters, and even strangers online. In the *Weibo* context, the generalized use performs such pragmatic functions as creating intimacy, conveying positive evaluation, and mitigating face threats. The study further argues that the generalization of *lǎogōng* on *Weibo* does not simply follow language-internal regularities; rather, the observed patterns are consistent with an account in which individual emotional appeals, communicative strategies, and platform affordances jointly drive the process, although the relative weight of each motivational factor remains to be established through interviews or surveys.

The study has both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, it addresses the tendency in existing research on online address terms to focus on consanguineal kinship terms, thereby enriching research on generalized kinship terms online; at the same time, it reveals how the evolution of address terms in the new media era is increasingly embedded in the affective and attention economies of platform society. Practically, the study deepens understanding of address-term generalization in social media environments and may inform work on online language use, platform communicative norms, and community governance.

The study also has certain limitations. First, data collection was restricted to the period from January to July 2025, so the data did not allow tracking of the diachronic development of *lǎogōng*. Second, the study mainly focuses on *Weibo*; future research could compare other social

platforms such as *WeChat*, *Douyin*, and *Xiaohongshu* to further reveal how platform-specific features shape the generalization of address terms. In addition, subsequent studies could incorporate interviews or questionnaires to probe the underlying motivations for users' generalized use of *lǎogōng*.

REFERENCES

- [1] Ahmed, S. (2004). Affective economies. *Social Text*, 22(2), 117-139.
- [2] Alenizi, A. (2019). The norms of address terms in arabic: The case of saudi speech community. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, 9 (5), 227-241.
- [3] boyd, d. (2010). Social network sites as networked publics: Affordances, dynamics, and implications. In Z. Papacharissi (Ed.), *A networked self: Identity, community, and culture on social network sites* (pp. 39-58). Routledge.
- [4] Braun, F. (1988). Terms of address: Problems of patterns and usage in various languages and cultures. Mouton de Gruyter.
- [5] Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge University Press.
- [6] Chen, X., & Ren, J. (2020). A memetic cultural practice: The use of generalized kinship terms in a research seminar attended by Chinese graduate students. *Lingua*, 245, 102942.
- [7] Cook, A. (2020). Constraints on the use of the plural morpheme *men* in spoken Mandarin. *Lingua Sinica*, 5, 30-57.
- [8] Franzke, a. s., Bechmann, A., Zimmer, M., Ess, C. M., & the Association of Internet Researchers. (2020). *Internet Research: Ethical Guidelines 3.0*. Association of Internet Researchers. <https://aoir.org/reports/ethics3.pdf>
- [9] Garlepaw, L. (2026). Address Terms of Brotherhood in the Indian Online Gaming Community. *World Englishes*. Advance online publication.
- [10] Gong, W. (2026). Growing amid rupture: Trends in young people's social mentality in cyberspace—An analysis based on Weibo big data. *Social Science Journal*, (4), 94-107. [In Chinese]
- [11] Mansor, N. S., Abd Rahim, N., Mamat, R., & Abdul Halim, H. (2018). Understanding the choices of terms of address: a sociolinguistic study of Malay cultural practices. *Indonesian Journal of EFL and Linguistics*, 3, 129-147.
- [12] Hampel, E. (2015). "Mama Zimbi, pls help me!"—Gender differences in (im) politeness in Ghanaian English advice-giving on Facebook. *Journal of Politeness Research: Language, Behavior, Culture*, 11(1), 99-130.
- [13] He, X. (2016). A tentative analysis of the gendered connotations of *ye* ("grandpa") and *ge* ("older brother") as address terms. *Journal of Mudanjiang University*, 25(6), 122-124. [In Chinese]
- [14] Hentschel, E. (2012). All men become brothers. The use of kinship terms for non-related persons as a sign of respect or disrespect. *Linguistik Online*, 51(1), 29-42.

- [15] Horton, D., & Wohl, R. R. (1956). Mass communication and para-social interaction: Observations on intimacy at a distance. *Psychiatry*, 19(3), 215-229.
- [16] Huang, X., & Zhou, Y. (2017). Semantic transfer of Chinese kinship terms to occupational address forms since the economic reform. *Social Sciences in China*, 38(1), 150-166.
- [17] Li, X., & Hiramoto, M. (2025). Address terms in Chinese popular music fandom: Exploring stancetaking in social media discourses. *Discourse, Context & Media*, 63, 100837.
- [18] Li, M., & Lai, X. (2025). The generative mechanism and effects of the generalization of intimate address terms in stranger interaction in new media contexts. *New Media Research*, 11(19), 22–25. [In Chinese]
- [19] Miao, J. (2025). A study on pragmatic function of address terms on Chinese social network from memetic perspective. *Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Science*, 13, 81–93.
- [20] Oldenburg, R. (1989). *The great good place: Cafes, coffee shops, bookstores, bars, hair salons, and other hangouts at the heart of a community*. Paragon House.
- [21] Papacharissi, Z. (2015). *Affective publics: Sentiment, technology, and politics*. Oxford University Press.
- [22] Ren, J. (2019). The generalization of Chinese address terms from the perspective of pragmatic identity. *Journal of Zhejiang International Studies University*, (5), 60–67. [In Chinese]
- [23] Ren, J., & Chen, X. (2019). Kinship term generalization as a cultural pragmatic strategy among Chinese graduate students. *Pragmatics and Society*, 10(4), 613-638.
- [24] Ren, J., & Yao, M. (2025). The “old aunties (lǎo ā yí)” are not old: Chinese young women's attitudes toward aging and old age through using the generalized kinship term on social media. *Journal of Aging Studies*, 73, 101325.
- [25] Scollon, R., & Scollon, S. W. (2001). *Intercultural communication: a discourse approach*. 2nd ed. Blackwell.
- [26] Shahid, H., Asghar, I., Ahmad, N. N., & Bilal, H. A. (2025). Words of belonging: The identity construction through kinship terms in Pakistani English. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and TESOL*, 8(4).
- [27] Spencer-Oatey, H. (2008). *Culturally speaking: culture, communication and politeness theory*. Continuum.
- [28] Taylor, C. (2016). *Mock politeness in English and Italian: A corpus-assisted metalanguage analysis*. John Benjamins.
- [29] Tinaliga, B. (2018). *At war for oppa and identity: Competitive performativity among Korean-pop fandoms* [Master's thesis, University of San Francisco].
- [30] Van Dijck, J. (2013). *The culture of connectivity: a critical history of social media*. Oxford University Press.
- [31] Wang, E. N. (2026). “My Non-Existing Organ”: Transitional Objects, Compensatory Romance, and the Affective Enclaves of Chinese Female idol Fandom. *Social Media+ Society*, 12(2), 20563051261458617.
- [32] Wang, H., & Gao, J. (2022). On the generalization mechanism of Chinese kinship term “jiejie”. *English Language and Literature Studies of Canadian Center of Science and Education*, 12(2), 74-78.
- [33] Wang, J., Mao, Y., & Zhao, K. (2025). Family (jiārénmen) is not a family: a study on the construction of pragmatic identities in the generalization of Internet address term “jiārénmen”. *Lodz Papers in Pragmatics*, 21(1), 123-142.
- [34] Wu, Y. (1990). The usages of kinship address forms amongst non - kin in mandarin Chinese: The extension of family solidarity. *Australian Journal of Linguistics*, 10(1), 61-88.
- [35] Yang, K., & Chen, J. (2023). The son (érzi) is not really a son: Generalization of address terms in Chinese online discourse. *Pragmatics*, 33(1), 78-98.
- [36] Yang, N., & Wang, Z. (2022). Addressing as a gender-preferential way for suggestive selling in Chinese e-commerce live streaming discourse: A corpus-based approach. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 197, 43-54.
- [37] Zafar, Z. U. R., Gunawan, D., & Saif, M. (2026). Sentiment Analysis of Emotional Intensity as a Continuous Driver of Engagement and Algorithmic Visibility. *Nusantara Journal of Artificial Intelligence and Information Systems*, 2(1), 39-46.
- [38] Zarakonitis, N. (2017). *Sexuality in a changing China: Young women, sex and intimate relations in the reform period*. In: Routledge.
- [39] Zhang, Q., & Negus, K. (2020). East Asian pop music idol production and the emergence of data fandom in China. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 23(4), 493-511.