The Jordanian terms of address: Asocio- pragmatic study

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Abstract. This study investigates the terms of address in Jordanian Arabic. It focuses on six major categories of address terms. The study identifies the most important forms under each category, their social meanings, and the governing factors that control their use. The participants of the study are 100 adult Jordanians who are chosen randomly from different public places. The data is collected by means of a questionnaire and participant interview. The results of the study show that Jordanian terms of address reflect the complex social relationship between the interlocutors. The choice of a given term is determined by a number of social factors such as age, gender, social status, formality, intimacy, and familiarity between the speaker and the addressee. Each category of address terms has its special uses in different social domains. The interpretation of each term is found to be context-dependent. Finally, the study concludes with restating the study objectives and the main findings of the study in addition to recommendations for further research.

Keywords: Pragamatics, Social Context, interlocutors, terms of address, Kinship terms

1 Introduction

A linguistic interaction is necessarily a social interaction during which the use of language entails more than simply exchanging information about thoughts and factual things between one person and another [1]. According to [2], when people participate in conversations, they consciously or unconsciously show their identities, their belonging to a specific culture or group and also their tendencies to become close or distant from others. A significant linguistic area in which all these functions are highlighted is “terms of address”.

According to [3], terms of address are words or linguistic items used for addressing others to attract their attention or referring to them during interaction. They hold two types of meanings, i.e. lexical and social meanings which do not necessarily have a close connection [4, 5]. For example, the term sister refers to a woman or a girl of the same parents, but it could be also used to refer to a nun. Therefore, Braun [4] posits that the address behavior refers to how speakers use the repertoire of address variants available to them.

Terms of address can be investigated within the framework of politeness theory in which the choice of a particular address form is determined by how polite it sounds in a given situation. According to Brown and Levinson [6], terms of address are vital linguistic mechanisms by which a speaker's attitude toward, and evaluation of his or her relationship

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with another speaker is mirrored. Moreover, they argue that by the appropriate use of these terms, the speaker can identify himself/herself as part of a social group while an inappropriate choice of address is expected to impede or even cease good interaction. The significance of these terms lies in their function as an indicator of interlocutors’ social status as well as their social distance, showing their emotions to the other side and a means of saving one’s face. Thus, the more intimate the speaker is to the addressee, the more s/he will use familiar forms such as first names, and the more distant the speaker is from the addressee, the more s/he would be expected to use more formal ones such as titles.

Nominal forms of address include a wide range of categories. Dunkling [7] provides a good classification for terms of address: 1) kinship terms which are used to address members in the family, e.g. mum, cousin and uncle, 2) names, e.g. first, middle and last names which can be used with other terms of address as well, 3) religious terms, e.g. father in Christianity, imam in Islam and Rabbi in Jewish, 4) titles, e.g. sir, madam and your majesty, 5) occupational terms, e.g. doctor, driver and waiter, 6) military ranks, e.g. sergeant and general, and 7) endearment and friendship terms, e.g. love, baby and angle. Afful [8] adds another category to this classification which is 8) zero address, i.e. terms used when the speaker is not certain how to address others, e.g. excuse me.

The usage of address terms is a rule governed process that mainly depends on the speaker, addresses and the context. However, these terms might be used in contexts other than the expected ones, where they are meant to convey a certain message [4, 9]. For example, a White police officer addresses a Black doctor by using the term boy instead of a title; this indicates a racial message by denying the doctor’s rank and age. The followings represent the most influential factors that affect the address system:

**Who are the interlocutors?** The speaker’s as well as the addressee’s age, gender, identity, and social relations influence address behaviors [9, 3, 10]. For examples, men use terms of address such as Old Boy, and Old Chap more frequently than women, and those who are superiors tend to use first name when addressing their subordinates [7].

**What is the context?** Setting, audience, and topic of the discourse are very important elements that may affect the choice of the proper terms of address [11]. For example, Esmaei [12] reveals that the social context affects the way that Iranian spouses address each other. He reveals that Iranian couples do not use pet names in the presence of children or parents-in-law.

**What is the culture?** Terms of address are culture-dependent. Not only terms of address are different from one culture into another, but also their pragmatic meanings are different. For example, Hwang [13] observes the differences in the address system between Korean and American cultures. The results indicate that the American culture is first-name oriented, while Korean culture is family name and title oriented. Moreover, the use of kinship terms in the American society is limited to address relatives only, whereas Korean may use these terms to address elderly people.

**What are the historical changes?** Terms of address change in the course of time. In the sense that new forms emerge and other forms extinct or change its meanings [5]. For instance, Moghaddam, et al. [2] examine the changes in that Persian address terms in three different historical periods and suggest that there is a gradual and regular movement in the Iranian address system from formality to solidarity.

Due to the fact that the proper use of address forms may result in an effective communication, and since the usage of these terms is context-dependent, these term have been the subject of many studies which generally attempt at investigating their nature, major categories, and governing factors. Therefore, it seems plausible to explore the Jordanian terms of address from a pragmatic point of view. This paper is an attempt in this direction.

Specifically, the study seeks answer to the following questions:
- What are the social meanings and usages of Jordanian terms of address?
- What are the social factors that govern the usage of these terms?
2 Literature Review

Research on terms of address is generally agreed to have begun by Brown and Gilman’s [14] article “The Pronouns of Power and Solidarity” which investigates pronominal terms of address in European languages and differentiates between two pronominal forms, i.e. T pronouns (second person singular pronouns) and V pronouns (second person plural pronouns). Brown and Gilman (ibid) find that “T pronouns” are used to address intimates or inferiors, whereas “V pronouns” are used with non-intimate or superiors. They conclude that the choice of pronouns is determined by the notion of power and solidarity between the speaker and the addressee. This piece of work has been followed by a number of influential studies which analyze the address systems in different languages and determine their pragmatic usage in different context.

Parkinson [15] investigates Egyptian Arabic (EA) terms of address. To collect natural data on EA address system. He analyzes the conversations of Egyptians individuals from different social classes. The results show that EA terms of address are chosen based on who is the addressee and what type is the relationship between the speaker and the receiver. Also, he notices two linguistic phenomena affecting EA address system, i.e. the first is borrowing from prestigious languages such as “boss” from English, and “monsieur” from French, and the second is phonological reduction such as uştaaz/ uşta.

Dickey [16] attempts to examine how terms differ in address and in reference and what factors control this difference. After observing and interviewing 28 informants who are native speakers of English, Italian and German. The study indicates that dimensions of power and solidarity between the speaker and the addressee influence terms of reference as well as terms of address. Keshavarz [3] explores the impact of social context, intimacy and distance on the choice of Persian address system. His study reveals that the Parisian language has two pronominal terms, i.e. the pronoun to which reflects inferiority and informality and some which denotes distance and respect. Furthermore, the study suggests that context and social factors such as age, gender, education, social status and occupation have great influence on the choice of address forms.

Nevala [17] investigates terms of address and forms of reference in late 16th-century English correspondence from a socio-pragmatic point of view. The results of his study reveal that the reasons for the choice of an appropriate term are complex and the parameters set for, e.g., positive and negative politeness can no longer be seen as equally valid.

Aflul [8] explores the address system of university students in Ghana based on spontaneous and deliberative spoken discourse. He highlights the strong relation between terms of address and variations in terms of gender, mood, domain, purposes, and setting. Salihu [10] also investigates the address system of Hausa society. The research gives a list of Hausa terms of address and shows that each class of address forms has its special usage for particular people under certain circumstances. The employment of address terms in Hausa is affected by age, gender, personality, social status, religion, and family relation. Furthermore, the results reveal that kinship terms in Hausa are sometimes used to address non-relatives.

In conclusion, many studies have investigated terms of address in different languages. However, to the best the researcher's knowledge, no research has tackled the Jordanian forms of address, the factors that govern their usage, and how can they be used to manifest interpersonal relationships. This highlights the plausibility of conducting a study to fill this research gap.

3 Methods

3.1 The participants

The sample of this study consists of 100 Jordanians who are chosen randomly from different public places and from different Jordanian governorates. The participants’ age ranges from 18 to 73 years old. Fifty percent of the participants are males, and the other (50%) are females.
3.2 Data collection

The researcher designs a questionnaire to provide a large quantity of natural data concerning Jordanian terms of address. In addition, short interviews with 20 participants to support the findings are conducted.

The questionnaire designed to collect the data is made up of two sections; viz. the first collects personal information, including age, gender and educational level, whereas the second investigates Jordanian terms of address in various social contexts, i.e. family, neighbors, work, university and strangers. Then, the questionnaire is distributed, completed, and collected.

Moreover, twenty participants, i.e. 12 females, and 8 males are interviewed for 15 minutes each during which they are asked to justify their answers in the questionnaire and if there are any other alternative terms they would like to add and in which context they use them. Finally, the informants' responses are analyzed statistically and the terms of address figured out in the study are classified into six categories, i.e. kinship terms, tecnonyms, first names, titles, religious terms, and zero terms.

4 Findings and discussion

It has been argued that terms of address are almost never neutral in the interpersonal meanings they convey, so the choice of a particular form inevitably entails the expression of particular feelings and attitudes (Moghaddam, 2013). This section discusses the social uses of address terms, the factors governing the usage of these terms and the social meaning they convey within the framework of politeness theory. Each category is examined individually and discussed in terms of its pragmatic meaning and the factors governing its use.

4.1 Kinship terms

Kinship terms are used to address members in the family, e.g. mum, cousin and uncle. Table (1) below shows the percentage of kinship terms in each social domain.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Relatives</th>
<th>Neighbors</th>
<th>University</th>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Strangers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>female</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Kinship terms are originally used to address relatives. The Jordanian kinship system distinguishes between maternal and paternal relatives as the following:

_Baba, yabaa, ʿabuai, waalidi, and babi_ for the father

_Maamaa, yammaa, ʿummy walidi, and maami_ for the mother

_ʿammi and ʿammo_ for the father’s brother

_ʿammti, and ʿammo_ for the father’s sister

_Xaali, and Xaalo_ for the mother’s brother

_Xaalti, Xaalito, and anti_ for the mother’s sister

_Jiduu, jiddi, siidi, and siido_ for grandfather

_Jiddah, jidity, tetu, and sitoo_ for grandmother

_ʿaxoy_ for a brother

_ʿuxti_ for a sister

Table (1) shows that kinship terms are not only used to address relatives, but are also used to address people in other social domains. First, the terms _ʿammi_ and

_ʿammti_ are widely extended to address parents-in-law. Married males and females reported that they use the terms _ʿammi and ʿammti/xaliti_ when addressing their father-
mother-in-law. This result might be attributed to the assumption that these terms of address are more polite than the original terms ūlamayf (father-in-law) and ūlamaut (mother-in-law).

Moreover, no differences are found in the use of address terms between male and female when addressing relatives. However, females use more Madani terms of address (the dialect of the urban areas in Jordan), such as xaalito, ant, mami, teta, than males do. The results also show that Jordanians do not use kinship terms to address siblings, brothers- and sisters-in-laws; instead, they use first names or tecnonyms to address them.

In addition, the findings of the study indicate that kinship terms are widely used to address neighbors. (93%) of females and (87%) of males reported that they use kinship terms (Sammi, xalit, and īiixtii) to address neighbors. These terms can be used in combination with first name, or tecnonyms. Furthermore, the use kinship terms is found to be extended to include strangers: (60%) of informants use (Sammi, and xalit) to address strangers who are older than them, and (40%) of informants use īiiiiiixtii to address strangers who are of the same age of the speaker.

However, the results reveal that kinship terms are not frequently used at university and work. Their use is limited to address individuals who share the same or less amount of power. For example, (70%) of females informants use the term Sammo to address a subordinate old age male at, but they do not use this term to address their boss at work. With regard to university domain, the results show that a very limited number of male informants reported that they use the term īiixt to address unfamiliar female students. Besides, some instructors reported that they use the terms bint (my daughter) and ibni (my son) to address their students in order to reflect intimacy and avoid formality. The results also indicate that elderly speakers in Jordan usually use the terms bint, ibni, when addressing young individuals in different social contexts.

However, they might also use the terms Sammi, xaalii, Sammto, and xaaluo. This use is widely acceptable and polite.

It can be noticed that the use of kinship terms is affected by some factors; viz. the social domain, the addressee, age, and context. While these terms are considered polite and face-saving forms to address family members, and neighbors, they are not appropriate to be used in formal settings. Another important factor that governs the use of kinship terms is the age difference between the speaker and the addressee. For example, when a male speaker addresses someone who is older than him, he would most probably use the term Sammi, whereas when the addressee is younger than him, he may use the term ibni, and if the addressee is of the same age, he may opt to use the term īiiiiiixtii. At work old-aged subordinates are usually addressed with Sammi, xaalii, or xalit, but young subordinates are addressed by their first name. Also, power relations are found to influence the use of kinship terms. For example, no one addresses his/her old-aged boss by Sammi, or xaalii.

In sum, kinship terms have two social meanings that contradict each other: the first denotes respect and politeness with family members, neighbors, and strangers in the street. The second, on the other hand, denotes inferiority or same level of power in formal settings such university and work.

### 4.2 Tecnonyms

Tecnonyms are terms used to address adults which are derived from the name of their eldest child. Arabic tecnonyms are a combination of the words abu + the name of the eldest male child. Table (2) below shows the percentages of tecnonyms' use in different social domains:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Neighbor</th>
<th>University</th>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Strangers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table (2) indicates that tecnonyms are used by all informants for addressing relatives, friends, and neighbors. First, they are widely used to address family members. Most of the informants reported that they use tecnonyms to address married relatives with or without kinship terms. In addition, some informants reported that they use them to address their spouses in public. The results reveal that tecnonyms are also used to address neighbors; (70%) of male informants and 80% of females use tecnonyms when addressing neighbors.

As far as formal settings, i.e. university and work, are concerned, the findings point out a limited use of tecnonyms. Only (30%) of informants use tecnonyms at work, and (5%) of informants use them at university. The participants’ responses also indicate that tecnonyms are used to address a colleague with the same or less level of power. However, they are rarely used to address a superior. Finally, the study detects a number of fixed tecnonyms that are used among male youth to address strangers, or friends such as abu-ḥmeid and abu-alshabaab.

In conclusion, the findings of the study show that tecnonymic terms are widely used in the Jordanian community. They are frequently used with family members, friends, and neighbors to indicate familiarity, intimacy, politeness and respect. Furthermore, the results point out that the age of the addressee, his/her maternal status as well as the social context are the most important factors that control the pragmatic meaning of tecnonyms.

4.3 First name

In Jordan, people rarely address each other with family names. In contrast, first names are widely used and embedded in the Jordanian society as a term of address. Table (3) presents the percentages of first names as they are found to be used in different social domains.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>family</th>
<th>Neighbors</th>
<th>University</th>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Strangers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Table (3), first names are used to address people in different social domains except when addressing strangers. Among family members and neighbors, first names are used to address individuals in the same age of the speaker or younger. Most of the informants reported that they use first names to address their younger brothers and sisters. Moreover, married participants also stated that they address their brothers- and sisters-in-law who are also of the same age or younger by their first names.

Furthermore, (70%) of male informants and (90%) of females stated that they use first names when addressing their neighbors: 1) who are of the same age or younger, and 2) who have the same gender. However, in formal settings, first name is used according to hierarchal and symmetrical relationships. The questionnaire reveals that (96%) of informants use first name with their subordinate employees, (60%) of informants use first name with their colleagues without any title, whereas (0%) of informants use first name to address their boss.

It is important to be mentioned here that gender play a role in addressing others using first name. Both male and female participants reported that they use first names more freely when addressing people of the same gender. Females avoid addressing non-relative males with their first names without any title. Similarly, males tend to avoid addressing non-relatives females with their first names.

Besides, the familiarity between participants, even among males and females, affects the use of first names in all domains. The more familiar the addressee is, the more frequent s/he would be addressed by his/her first name.

In sum, it appears that there are four main social factors governing the usage of first names. These factors are the addressee’s age, social rank, gender, and familiarity.
4.4 Titles

The findings reveal two types of titles in Jordan; viz. gender-oriented titles such as ?anisah (miss), madaam (madam), sayeed (Mr.), and job-oriented titles such as muhandis (engineer), ductoor (doctor), ?ustzaz (instructor), and m9alim (teacher). Table (4) below shows the percentages of titles’ use as terms of address according to social domains:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Neighbors</th>
<th>University</th>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Strangers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A glance at Table (4) shows that titles are broadly most likely to be used at work and university. But, they are rarely used with family members and neighbors. The results reveal that (90%) of males and (95%) of females address their superior by using titles. Furthermore, all the informants use the title ductoor when addressing their professors inside and outside the lecture.

The data analysis also reveals that the use of ?ustzaz (male instructor), and m9alim (male teacher) has been extended to indicate other meanings. ?ustzaz is used to address school teachers, school master, employees in banks and companies and strangers who seem educated. The term m9alim, on the other hand, is more commonly used to address people who have low-status jobs such as craftsmen, workers, grocers and even plumbers. Furthermore, the word m9alim is used by male informants but not females who prefer zero or kinship terms to address people with low-status jobs. Another observation, the borrowed word miss is used to address female teachers only. Finally, the findings reveal that job-oriented titles are used more frequently in the Jordanian culture than gender-oriented titles. Only (20%) of the participants use gender-oriented titles, while all participants use job-oriented titles.

The participants reported that that title terms would support negative face in formal situations where they express distance and formality. However, in some situations, they might be used to express irony. One of the participants in the interviews stated that once he had an argument with an uneducated man who expressed an opinion with which the participant did not agree, so he addressed him by saying "sho ya duktoor, khef Slna !". Finally, the addressees’ social status, familiarity, and the formality of the situation are found to be the most important factors determining the use of titles.

4.5 Religious terms Hadj/ Hadjah

The use of the term ḥadj to address old males and ḥadjah to address old females is very common among Jordanians. This term is used to address old people in general whether they have undertaken the pilgrimage to Mecca or not. Table (5) below shows the percentages of ḥadj/ ḥadjah as they are used in different social domain:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Neighbors</th>
<th>University</th>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Strangers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results show that ḥadj is used to address elderly relatives, neighbors, and strangers. (50%) percent of males and (30%) of females use ḥadj and ḥadjah to address their parents and grandparents. About (65%) of informants use ḥadj and ḥadjah when addressing elderly
neighbors, and (50%) of male informants use ḥadj/ḥadjah when addressing elderly strangers. However, females avoid the terms ḥadj/ḥadjah to address elderly strangers, instead they reported that they opt to use the terms 9ammoo and xaalloo.

Nevertheless, the findings show that religious terms are rarely used at university and work; informants do not use ḥadj/ḥadjah to address their colleagues at work and university even if the age difference is very big. The most significant factors that were found to determine the appropriateness of ḥadj and ḥadjah terms are the addressee's age, the social context, and speakers’ gender.

### 4.6 Zero terms

Zero terms refer to the avoidance of using any term of address. According to Afful (2007), this can be achieved by two strategies; viz. the use of attention getters such as excuse me, or the use of greetings such as hi, and hello. Table (6) below shows the percentages of zero terms of address as they were found to be used in different social domains.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Neighbors</th>
<th>University</th>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Strangers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Table (6), Jordanians use zero terms mainly to address a stranger and rarely use them with an acquaintance. Moreover, the results show that females address strangers with zero terms more than males do. The results also reveal that the participants tend to use less zero terms with elderly strangers who are usually addressed with kinship terms or religious terms ḥadj or ḥadjah. Furthermore, both attention getters such as law samaḥt (excuse me!), 9afuan (pardon me!), m9lish (forgive me!), momkin laḥzah (can you give me a minute?!), and min ba9id ?iZnak (if you allow me!), and greeting terms such as marhaba (hi), assalam alykum, sallam, and sbah alkheir (good morning) were found to be used by Jordanians to attract the recipients’ attention.

Finally, the data analysis shows that zero terms are widely used to address the government’s employees, police officers, and employees in banks. However, workers and grocers are more addressed with the term m9alim, or with some kinship terms. This may indicates that zero forms in such contexts are considered more polite and more prestigious than kinship terms and the term m9alim.

However, the participants reported that zero terms might be considered inappropriate when addressing a friend, a colleague or a family member.

In sum, zero terms are wildly used as a polite strategy for addressing strangers. Furthermore, it appears that the social domain, familiarity, gender, and social status affect the use of zero terms.

### 5 Conclusion

This paper is an investigation of the address system in Jordanian Arabic. It focuses on six major classes of terms of address and examines their social usages and meanings in different contexts. In addition, the study highlights the factors governing the usage of each category of address terms.

The study reveals that the social meanings of Jordanian terms of address are context-dependent. For instance, Kinship terms have peculiar behavior. They are used to address relatives and non-relatives to support positive face. For example, the kinship terms 9ammi and xali are not limited to their literal meaning of relatives since these terms can also
be used to address neighbors and strangers. Furthermore, Teconyms are found to be greatly embedded in the Jordanian culture as polite terms of address since they are nearly used in all social domains. First names and titles, on the other hand, reflect symmetrical and asymmetrical relationships between individuals. Jordanians are found to display great tendency in the avoidance of addressing strangers through the use of zero terms (attention getters, and greetings) instead they tend to address them with kinship or religious terms. Besides, males and females sometimes reveal some differences in the way they use terms of address.

In addition, the findings of the study reveal that the use of a given Jordanian term of address in a particular context is governed by the interlocutors' age, social rank, power, and social distance. The social domain is also found to affect the use of these terms to a great extent. Finally, the researcher recommends further research to be conducted in order to examine other categories of address terms such as pronominal, verbal, occupational, and friendship categories and see if these terms are used to achieve additional meanings in different contexts.

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References