

Address Terms in Tay Fairy Tales in Thai Nguyen Province

¹Le Thi Huong Giang, ²Nong Thuy Nuong

^{1,2}, Faculty of Literature – Thai Nguyen University of Education, Thai Nguyen University

ABSTRACT: Thai Nguyen is a province in the northern midland and mountainous region of Vietnam, known for its large and ethnically diverse population. Among these ethnic groups, the Tay people make up a significant portion and mainly reside in districts such as Vo Nhai, Dinh Hoa, Phu Luong, and Dai Tu. Tay fairy tales in Thai Nguyen are not only oral narratives passed down through generations but also spiritual and cultural products that reflect the Tay people's labor, beliefs, moral values, and folk knowledge. The study of address terms in literary works - particularly in the fairy tales of the Tay ethnic group in Thai Nguyen - plays an important role in bridging gaps in minority language research and shedding light on the unique cultural features of the Tay through the lens of language.

KEYWORDS: address terms, fairy tales, Tay ethnic group.

I. INTRODUCTION

In literary works, especially fairy tales - a common genre of oral literature - address terms serve not only as linguistic tools but also as means of expressing social relationships, traditional morals, and familial structures specific to each ethnic group. In reality, there has been a lack of in-depth research into the system of address terms used in the fairy tales of the Tay ethnic group. Most existing studies focus primarily on the collection of stories, their content, plots, or character portrayals, without thoroughly examining the linguistic aspects. Therefore, a study of address terms in Tay fairy tales in Thai Nguyen province holds significant cultural value. It helps fill gaps in minority language research and provides deeper insight into the ethnic cultural characteristics of the Tay people through the lens of language. This article focuses on the system of address terms in Tay fairy tales from Thai Nguyen province, examined from two main perspectives: specialized address terms (used consistently in specific roles) and temporary address terms (context-dependent). The goal is to identify their structural and cultural features as reflected in the fairy tales.

II. RESEARCH METHODS

- ✚ This study employs the following key research methods and techniques:
- ✚ Descriptive Method: This method is used to describe, analyze, and interpret the structural and semantic characteristics of address terms used by the Tay people in fairy tale texts.
- ✚ Statistical and Classification Technique: This technique is applied to classify the collected address terms based on their structure and meaning. After data collection, the terms are organized systematically according to various criteria.
- ✚ Theoretical Research Method: This method serves as the theoretical foundation of the study. It is used to collect, analyze, and synthesize materials at different levels, and to statistically classify the literature, thereby supporting both the theoretical and practical aspects of the research.

III. RESEARCH FINDINGS

The Concept of Address Terms: According to the Vietnamese Dictionary compiled by the Center for Lexicography, Da Nang Publishing House, the term *xưng hô* (addressing) originates from Sino-Vietnamese: *xưng* (稱) means "to name or refer to oneself," and *hô* (呼) means "to call". The dictionary defines *xưng hô* as "referring to oneself and calling others something when speaking to one another, to express the nature of their relationship". Vietnamese has a diverse and complex system of address terms, and anyone engaging in a specific communicative situation must be able to observe, assess, and choose appropriate terms such as *ông/bà*; *cô/dì/chú/bác*; *anh/chị/em*, etc. [6]. In this system, *xưng* refers to the act by which the speaker uses a linguistic term to identify themselves in a conversation, helping the listener recognize who is speaking and who is responsible for the utterance. This is a self-referential act. *Xưng* can also involve using a certain title to refer to oneself, indicating the relationship with the interlocutor. *Hô* refers to the act of using linguistic expressions to call or address the listener, thus involving them in the conversation. *Hô* reflects the expressions the speaker uses to refer to the person being addressed and, at the same time, indicates that person's role and status within the communicative relationship. According to Nguyen Van Chien, "Addressing is, first and foremost, a social communicative act. In Vietnam, addressing most directly and clearly reflects the conduct and interpersonal

behavior of the participants”. Address terms are not merely a product of a structuralist linguistic approach. They include words from various grammatical categories in the language system that are selected and used to fulfill the social communicative function of addressing- expressing addressing categories [3]. We understand address terms as words used to refer to oneself and to others in communicative relationships, including references to people mentioned in the conversation. In folk culture - especially in fairy tales- address terms are not merely linguistic tools. They also carry deep cultural values, reflect national identity, and affirm their indispensable role in everyday communication.

Characteristics of Address Terms in Tay Ethnic Fairy Tales from Thai Nguyen Province

Survey Results : Through a survey of five Tay ethnic fairy tales from Thai Nguyen province - “Tua Tênh - Tua Nhi” (a tale of a stepdaughter, included in the local literature curriculum of Thai Nguyen province, with a motif similar to the story of Tam Cam), “Ý Pịa” (a tale about an orphan), “The Daughter and the Daughter-in-law” (a fairy tale of the Tay people in Bac Thai), “The Bridge of Virtue” (a fairy tale from the Vo Nhai region), and “Nàng Khay” (a tale of a magical figure in disguise) - we conducted a classification and statistical analysis of the address terms used in these texts. The address terms were then categorized and described according to different usage groups.

The results are shown in the following table:

Table 1. Survey Results on the Frequency of Address Term Usage in Tay Ethnic Fairy Tales from Thai Nguyen Province

	Quatity		Occurrences	
	Quatity	Percentage (%)	Occurrences	Percentage (%)
Specialized address terms (personal pronouns)	40	17.9	105	11.8
Contextual address terms (situational terms)	183	82.1	782	88.2
Total	223	100	887	100

Remarks: From the table above, we observe that the total number of address terms appearing in the selected Tay fairy tales is 223 unique terms, with 887 occurrences. Among them, Specialized address terms account for 40 unique items with 105 occurrences, representing 17.9% of the total number of terms and 11.8% of the total usage. Meanwhile, contextual address terms (temporary or situational terms) make up 183 unique items (82.1%) with 782 occurrences (88.2%).

Description of Personal Pronouns in the Fairy Tales of the Tay People in Thai Nguyen Province : Fairy tales around the world in general, and the fairy tales of the Tay people in Thai Nguyen in particular, are always fascinating in every story and every detail. This is clearly demonstrated through the use of personal pronouns.

a. Specialized Personal Pronouns – Personal Pronouns

Through our survey, we found that the total number of specialized personal pronouns is 40 units with 105 instances of usage. Among them, third-person personal pronouns appear most frequently, with 19 units (accounting for 47.5%) and 45 instances of usage (accounting for 42.68%). The second-person personal pronouns appear the least, with only 9 units (22.5%) and 19 instances (18.09%). The first-person pronouns appear quite frequently, close to the third-person ones, with 12 units (30%) and 41 instances (39.05%).

In the singular form, personal pronouns are more dominant with 25 units (62.5%) and 69 instances (56.7%), while plural pronouns include 15 units (37.5%) and 36 instances (34.3%). Singular nouns such as: “tôi”, “tao”, “mình”, “ta”... often appear in fairy tales and vary depending on the context and content of each specific tale.

Example 1: *Just now when I passed by, I saw some buffaloes eating rice seedlings over there. I wonder if that's our field or someone else's?*

[“Daughter and Daughter-in-law”]

In this story, the character uses the pronoun “I” (tao) referring to the father visiting his daughter after she got married. She lied to him so he wouldn't eat the newly steamed sticky rice. The father then lied to make her go out to chase the buffaloes. The usage of “tao” and “mình” here reflects a flexible, expressive way of speaking, demonstrating a close, familiar relationship where an elder speaks to a younger person. This highlights the Tay

people's speech culture - though "tao" is used, it still shows concern for the communal field ("mình"), implying close village ties.

Example 2:

There weren't any buffaloes at all. That old man tricked me.
[“Daughter and Daughter-in-law”]

In this case, the daughter goes out to look for buffaloes but finds none. The use of the pronoun “me” (tôi) instead of more traditional or familial pronouns indicates a shift to a more formal or even confrontational tone, reflecting negative emotion and some disrespect. In Tay culture, closeness is highly valued in communication, and the use of first-person pronouns in fairy tales allows characters to express emotions and build empathy, increasing the vividness of the story. This is crucial in Tay fairy tales, as they aim to convey moral lessons and life values in an engaging and educational way. The second-person pronouns appear the least among the three grammatical persons, but they still play an essential role in adding vividness to the stories. There are only 9 second-person units (22.5%) and 19 instances (18.09%).

Example 1:

You must stay home and sort all these mung beans and sesame seeds separately before you can attend the festival. If I come back and it's not done, you'll be dead.
[“Tua Tềnh - Tua Nhì”]

The word “You” (mày) expresses threat and contempt, commonly used by antagonistic characters like evil stepmothers in fairy tales. This illustrates the contrast with kind characters who often use more respectful forms such as “con”, “em”, or “cháu”.

Example 2:

*I was testing you all. **You** can keep that money to buy things for your children.*
[“Daughter and Daughter-in-law”]

The second-person plural pronoun “you” (chúng mày) is a distinctive form of address in Tay fairy tales. After the daughter-in-law passes the test, her father-in-law - previously hiding his identity - uses this pronoun affectionately. Although “chúng mày” can sound harsh, in this context, it conveys familiarity and hidden affection, maintaining authority while showing love.

Third-person pronouns refer to people not directly involved in the conversation, such as “họ”, “nó”, “hắn”, “y”, etc. These are also widely used in fairy tales.

Example 1:

The next day, the young men and women of the village were very surprised. They believed it was thanks to the cloth ball that Pịa found good fortune. So they decided to make their own imitation balls from fabric, with tassels and strings, and tossed them at the festival, hoping to catch luck like Pịa did.
[“Ý Pịa”]

The pronoun “they” (họ) refers to villagers observing and imitating the protagonist Pịa. This is a common motif in Tay fairy tales: when someone has good fortune, the community learns and follows. It reflects the Tay people's communal lifestyle and values.

Example 2:

Seeing that Kháy was beautiful, the lustful king was overjoyed. But he couldn't help feeling uneasy because she neither spoke nor smiled. He ordered the court to perform rituals, consult fortune-tellers, and bring in shamans to cast spells and try all kinds of treatments for her illness, but she remained silent. Finally, he declared: Whoever could cure her would be greatly rewarded.
[“Nàng Kháy”]

Here, “he” (hắn) is used repeatedly to describe a lascivious king. This pronoun conveys contempt and helps portray the negative character traits. Many characters in Tay fairy tales lack specific names and are referred to by third-person pronouns. This allows readers to infer their traits and roles from the language, a deliberate storytelling technique by the tale creators.

- b. Temporary Personal Pronouns – Contextual Terms of Address
- b1. Proper Names

Proper names used in the Tay ethnic fairy tales from Thai Nguyen province partially reflect the nature, customs, and naming conventions of each character depending on the specific situation or story. Each character's name carries its own distinctive features that not only evoke memories of the story but also highlight the traditional culture of the Tay people. According to our survey, among 183 temporary terms of address used 782 times, proper names appear 10 times (5.5%) with 194 usages (24.8%).

Example 1:

Hearing what the crows told her, Tênh immediately used the sieve to sift and the large and flat basket to separate. Tênh was able to get mung beans from mung beans, sesame seeds from sesame seeds. Tênh prepared to go to the festival but had no beautiful clothes to wear. She buried her face in her hands and cried. While sobbing uncontrollably, she suddenly heard a voice asking:

– Why are you crying so bitterly, dear?

Tênh looked up to see an old woman with silvery white hair standing in front of her, leaning on a cane. At first, Tênh was frightened, but after a closer look, she saw that the old woman had a kind face. Tênh felt reassured and told the old woman all about her situation.

[Tua Tênh – Tua Nhì]

In the tale *Tua Tênh – Tua Nhì*, we recorded 70 instances where the character's name “Tênh” was used. Like other stories in which characters representing goodness and virtue often appear kind and humble, the distinctive use of such names helps readers easily remember the character. This naming style is a cultural marker of the Tay people, unique and unmistakable compared to any other ethnic group.

Moreover, the word “Tua” means “con” but not in the sense of a human child - it refers to animals. For example: *Tua Tênh* means “Con Tênh”, *tua cây* means “con gả” etc. In the Tay culture, when addressing children in a family, the word “lục” is used instead. For example: *lục nhìn* (daughter), *lục slài* (son).

However, in these fairy tales, the use of “Tua” - referring to animals - in naming the stories is a way of embedding ethnic identity directly in the title. It reflects cultural uniqueness that cannot be confused with any other language. At the same time, it also implies Tênh's unfortunate fate - her status is like that of a mere chicken - a metaphor for her being a stepchild.

Example 2:

Seeing everyone having fun playing with hoops, Pịa also wanted to join in, but he didn't have a hoop. Watching people pair up, Pịa also wished to find a partner, but no one wanted to pair with him. Whenever he approached, people turned away. Pịa longed to play so much that he felt itchy all over. Without a hoop or a handkerchief, he dashed home to get the shuttlecock he had picked from the forest and carried with the firewood bundle the day before. It had a fresh string and leaves attached to it. Pịa tossed the shuttlecock all the way up to the ninth heaven. Some praised him for his skill; others mocked him.

[Ý Pịa]

“Pịa” is the proper name of the main character mentioned 39 times in the tale. He is an orphaned young man who meets a fairy, changing the course of his life. The title “Ý Pịa” contains a linguistic nuance: the word “Ý” in Tay is a prefix placed before proper names, similar to an affectionate form of address. It functions similarly to “anh,” “cậu,” or “em” in Vietnamese, depending on the context. In Tay fairy tales, such forms of address reflect closeness and oral storytelling traditions. “Ý Pịa” can be understood as “chàng Pịa” or “anh Pịa” — a familiar, humble way of referring to a respected or beloved character.

b2. Kinship Terms

In the Tay people's fairy tales from Thai Nguyen province, there are many kinship relationships such as between grandmother and grandchild, between parents and children, between husband and wife, and among siblings. Our survey results show that kinship terms account for 330 instances (42.20%) of the temporary address terms used in these fairy tale conversations.

Example 1:

Tênh returned looking ten times more beautiful than before. Nhì was both frightened and envious, longing for the beauty her sister had. Nhì sweetly said:

- Sister Tênh, oh Sister Tênh! How did you become so beautiful?

Tênh, having endured much cruelty from Nhì and her mother, replied:

- If you want to be as beautiful as I am, it's not that hard!

[Tua Tênh - Tua Nhì]

The Tay people place great importance on kinship hierarchy in their forms of address, especially within the family. In the Vietnamese translation of the Tay fairy tale *Tua Tênh - Tua Nhì*, the terms “chị - em” are preserved to reflect family ranking. However, in this context, “chị - em” do not express familial affection. Nhì calls Tênh “chị” with selfish intentions, pretending to be close to discover her sister’s beauty secret. Meanwhile, Tênh calls Nhì “em” with sarcasm and bitterness, hinting at her desire for revenge. Thus, although the kinship terms match their actual roles, they contradict the true emotions behind the words, creating an ironic effect in the fairy tale.

Example 2:

The king recognized the drop of milk as belonging to his former wife. He called out from the chamber:
- Heavenly Mother Pút,
- Celestial Mother Then,
- If that’s truly my wife, let her come out so I may see her face.
[Tua Tênh - Tua Nhì]

The term “vợ cũ” is a third-person kinship term used to describe and identify family relationships. Meanwhile, the terms “mother Pút” (mẹ Pút) and “mother Then” (mẹ Then) are kinship titles used to refer to deities in Tay folk belief. The phrase “my wife” (vợ ta) indicates a close relationship and, in this context, expresses the king’s longing for his former spouse. The act of invoking “mẹ Pút” and “mẹ Then” shows the sacredness and faith in the supernatural world—a key characteristic of Tay culture. These kinship terms like “mẹ” (mother) and “my wife” not only show social roles but also convey emotional depth, faith, and spiritual connection between humans and divine beings in Tay family culture.

Example 3:

Knowing she could not resist, Nàng Khay asked the envoy for a moment so she could say farewell to her husband. Holding back tears, she whispered to her husband:

— *Take this orange seed. After I leave, plant it right away. If a bird comes to eat it, shoot the bird and use its feathers to make a coat. When the orange ripens, the coat must be finished. Also, make a pouch for the orange. If someone asks to buy it, tell them it costs five coins per fruit. They’ll say: “That’s so expensive, only a king could buy it!” Then ask where the king lives and bring it to sell to him.*

After saying that, she lay on the hammock, bid farewell to her husband, and left. From that moment on, she no longer spoke or smiled.

[Nàng Khay]

The kinship terms used in Nàng Khay appear in conversations between Nàng Khay and her husband. These terms help readers connect emotionally with the characters and contribute significantly to the storytelling. The frequent use of kinship terms in such dialogues reflects not only conversational habits but also the strong emphasis on family hierarchy and respect in communication within Tay households.

b3. Terms of Address Reflect Social Hierarchies

Example 1:

If Your Majesty wore that coat, I could laugh even harder!

[Nàng Khay]

In the story, Nàng Khay told the lustful king that if he wore the coat made of bird feathers, she would laugh even more - suggesting flattery. However, as soon as the king put on the coat, he was captured and immediately executed. Although the pronouns “Your Majesty” (Bệ hạ) – “I” (tôi) clearly express social hierarchy — with “tôi” showing respect and humility towards the king — the king’s immoral behavior ultimately led to his punishment by Nàng Khay.

Example 2:

The prince ordered his soldiers to wade into the stream, where they found a very beautiful shoe.

[Tua Tênh – Tư Nhì]

The term “The prince” (hoàng tử) indicates a noble status, while “soldier” (binh lính) belong to a lower class with a duty to obey. This reflects a clear social relationship of “master – servant” or “superior – subordinate”. In Tay culture and fairy tales, the prince is a powerful figure, and giving orders to soldiers is a concise way of expressing his higher social rank, emphasizing the sharp distinction between the nobility and the common people.

Example 3:

If great mandarin is truly determined, then this bridge will soon be finished, and the people can cross easily - what could be better?

[The Bridge of Blessings]

The term “great mandarin” (quan lớn) shows respect toward someone in power. The speaker doesn’t identify themselves, which already implies a lower social position. The form of address “great mandarin” reflects politeness and reverence. In Tay fairy tales, social hierarchy is often emphasized as it reflects societal order and serves as a vehicle to convey power relations, moral values, and duties. This demonstrates that in traditional Tay culture, etiquette, social awareness, and knowing one’s place in society are highly valued.

IV. CONCLUSION

Terms of address in Tay fairy tales from Thai Nguyen province are frequently used and show a relatively rich vocabulary. The findings of this study on terms of address in Tay fairy tales can be applied in teaching the Tay language, bilingual education in ethnic minority regions, and in developing local cultural education programs. This contributes to nurturing ethnic pride and raising awareness about preserving the mother tongue among the younger generation of the Tay people.

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