



Chinese Address Terms “Shifu” (師傅) vs. “Shifu” (師父): A Comparative and Diachronic Study Based on the BCC Corpus

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Abstract:

This paper compares the usage of the address terms “shifu”(師傅) and “shifu”(師父) in Chinese in a diachronic manner. The study investigates the evolution and different usage of the two address terms and analyzes the possible reasons for the different choices to use these address terms. The data for this study comes from the BCC corpus (BLCU Corpus Center), a corpus with tens of billions of words built by Xun Endong et al. (2015, 2016) from Beijing Language and Culture University. The findings show that the highest frequency used for “shifu” (師傅) occurred in 1963, while “shifu” (師父) appeared in 2001. The address term “shifu” (師父) is more often used in ancient Chinese, while “shifu” (師傅) is relatively more frequent than “shifu” (師父) in modern and contemporary Chinese. The original meanings between the two address terms are different: “shifu” (師傅) is used as official title to indicate a teacher, while “shifu” (師父) is more related to religions through giving non-evil life and knowledge to others. The research findings will surely benefit the corpus linguistic studies, translation studies and the study of address terms. By resorting to the abundant corpus data, this study could offer a relatively more comprehensive and systematic comparison of the two Chinese address terms by far. Furthermore, it will help further distinguish the two address terms based on the empirical data and detailed case analysis.

Keywords: address term, BCC corpus, comparative study, diachronic study.

汉语称谓“师傅”与“师父”：基于密件抄送语料库的比较和历时研究

摘要：

本文比较了汉语中称呼“师傅”和“师父”的用法。该研究调查了两个地址术语的演变和不同用法，并分析了不同选择使用这些地址术语的可能原因。本研究的数据来自密件抄送语料库（北京语言大学语料中

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心), 这是一个由荀恩东等人构建的百亿词语料库。(2015, 2016)来自北京语言大学。来自北京语言大学。调查结果显示,“师傅”的使用频率最高出现在1963年,而“师父”则出现在2001年。”(师傅)在现当代汉语中比“师父”出现的频率要高。两个称谓的本义不同:“师傅”作为官称称呼老师,而“师父”则更多地与宗教相关,通过给予他人非邪恶的生活和知识。研究成果必将有益于语料库语言学研究、翻译研究和称谓词研究。借助丰富的语料库数据,本研究可以对迄今为止的两个中文称谓进行比较全面和系统的比较。此外,这将有助于根据实证数据和详细的案例分析进一步区分这两个地址词。

关键词: 地址词、密件抄送语料库、比较研究、历时研究。

1. Introduction

China is a nation of etiquette, among which the complicated usage of address terms is an important aspect. Lan Ding (2022) believes that appropriate addressing is the first step toward successful communication. However, there exist many similar address terms, the proper use of which should be attached more significance.

Generally, “师傅” (shi fu) refers to a skilled worker or an apprentice’s mentor, while “师父” (shi fu) is often used among people who have a master-apprentice relationship to indicate the master by apprentices. In Chinese, “师” (shi) means a “teacher,” “傅” (fu) usually indicates a mentor, and “父” (fu) refers to a “father.”

According to the New Century Chinese-English Dictionary, the detailed usage is listed as follows: 1) ‘master worker’; ‘mentor’ (a qualified worker as distinct from an apprentice); 2) as a kind of respectful addressing for skilled people: for example, it could be used after the word “worker” or “carpenter” for respect. As to “师父” (shifu), the first usage of “师父” (shi fu) is the same as “师傅” (shi fu). Secondly, “师父” (sh fu) could also refer to “monk,” “nun” and “Taoist priest” as respectful addressing (Yu, 2002, p.1455).

In Chinese, the address term “shifu” (师傅) have the same pronunciation with the address term “shifu” (师父), the usage of which is also similar. In other words, the two terms are homophones with similar usage, but these two address terms have a different writing patterns. Thus, it is natural for us to verbally address a taxi driver or technician as “shifu”. The fact that these two address terms with a similar pronunciation but a different ways of writing make it difficult for most people, including the native speakers, to tell the differences in usage between the two address terms in writing texts. The appropriate context of usage of the two terms is still not clear-cut enough to most of the Chinese speakers. Therefore, this study hopes to clarify the usage of the two address terms based on sufficient empirical data and examine their similarities and differences in both the ancient and modern Chinese.

Considering the facts previously mentioned, this study aims to answer the following questions:

1) Which address term is used more frequently in both ancient and modern contexts?

2) What are the similarities and differences on the usage of the two address terms in terms of origin,

variation and context?

3) What is the future use trend on the choice of the two address terms?

Therefore, the objectives of this study are

1) To examine the usage of two address terms namely “shifu” (师傅) and “shifu” (师父) based on the corpus data collected from the ancient to modern context;

2) To compare the similarities and differences between the two address terms by categorizing the usage of two address terms based on the corpus data;

3) To examine the usage trend of two address terms by identifying the variation of the two terms in a diachronic manner.

2. Related Studies on Address Terms “shifu” (师傅) and “shifu” (师父)

Wu Linfang (2019) compared the meaning and usage of “师傅” (shi fu) and “师父” (shi fu) by tracing back to their historical origin. One of the conclusions in the paper is that “师父” (shi fu) shows more respect than “师傅” (shi fu) since the character “父” (fu) means “father”. Chen Zhiwei and Xu Xu (2019) also pointed out that “师傅” (shi fu) was quite different from “师父” (shi fu). As an old saying goes, “One day a teacher, one life as a father”. Therefore, compared with “师傅” (shi fu), the word “师父” (shifu) shows a closer relationship and more sincere respect.

Furthermore, the meaning and context of the address terms change over time. Wu Linfang (2019) discussed this specific address term by comparing “师傅” (shi fu) and “师父” (shi fu) from their historical origin, definition, application scope, etc. The microscopic analysis of address terms has greatly enriched the study of address terms. However, context is another key element to be considered, which could locate these terms in a suitable discussion environment. Furthermore, more abundant data need to be provided to verify the statements and figure the similarities and differences between the two address terms.

Thus, this study will examine the usage of the two address terms based on the abundant corpus data diachronically from ancient Chinese to modern and contemporary Chinese, which could help grasp the using trend of the two address terms. Additionally, the study will also classify the usage of these address terms,

which will contribute to a clearer understanding of the terms.

3. Data and Methodology

The data for this study comes from the BCC Mandarin corpus (BLCU Corpus Center), an online multilanguage database with approximately ten billion words. This corpus was built by Xun Endong et al. (2015, 2016) from the Beijing Language and Culture University. The text types for this data system include newspaper, dialog, ancient Chinese, literary texts by famous Chinese and western writers, etc. This data system offers customized and diachronic retrieval from the 1946 to 2015.

The data for this study are mainly composed of two aspects:

1) The data in the modern and contemporary age: the function of diachronic retrieval is used to retrieve and compare the relevant data;

2) The data in the ancient Chinese: as for the data in this respect, the category of this database is employed to retrieve the two address terms in the field of ancient Chinese, which included numerous Chinese classical works in terms of medical works, Confucianism works, Buddhism works, historical works, etc.

This study employed a mixed method by combining the corpus-based quantitative method and qualitative analysis. This study investigated and compared the usage of the two address terms “shifu” (师傅) and “shifu” (师父) diachronically.

To begin with, the usage frequency of address terms “shifu” (师傅) and “shifu” (师父) has been retrieved separately in the field of ancient Chinese. Afterward, we compared the usage frequencies and analyzed the possible reasons for the different usage of the two terms by dating back to their original meanings.

Additionally, we examined the variation of the address terms “shifu” (师傅) and “shifu” (师父) using the function of diachronic retrieval in this database. Subsequently, an analysis of the variation for each term and a comparison of the two terms was carried out.

4. Results and Discussion

Firstly, this paper compares the frequencies of “shifu” (师傅) with “shifu” (师父) used in the ancient Chinese and modern & contemporary Chinese in the BCC corpus. Furthermore, the paper also summarized the key usage of the two address terms both in the contexts of ancient and modern and contemporary Chinese by analyzing the representative examples. This part includes two sections. Section one compares the usage of the two terms in ancient Chinese, while section two specifies the usage of the two terms in modern and contemporary Chinese based on the BCC corpus. The results and analysis of data are displayed as follows.

4.1. Comparative Analysis of “Shifu” (师傅) and “Shifu” (师父) in Ancient Chinese

The use of the two address terms dates back to ancient Chinese. Based on the data from the BCC corpus, this paper compares the frequencies of the two terms in the context of ancient Chinese. Additionally, this study also summarizes the key usages of the two terms in ancient Chinese with a detailed analysis of the representative cases.

To get a full picture of the two address terms in the context of ancient Chinese, this paper compares the frequencies of the two terms separately.

Table 1. Frequencies of “shifu” (师傅) and “shifu” (师父) in ancient Chinese

No.	No.	Frequency
1	Shifu (师傅)	11581
2	Shifu (师父)	24139

Table 1 describes the frequencies of the address terms separately. The data show that the term “shifu” (师父) is used more frequently with 24139 times than the term “shifu” (师傅) with 11581 times in the context of ancient Chinese. From Table 1, we could see that the term “shifu” (师父) is used more than twice as much as the term “shifu” (师傅). Why “shifu” (师父) is used more frequently in ancient Chinese? And in what contexts are the two address terms used?

In the next section, the paper will analyze the usage of the two address terms with specific examples.

4.1.1. The Usage of “Shifu” (师傅) in Ancient Chinese

This study examines the first 100 pieces of the relevant data and categorizes the usages of shifu (师傅) in the following Table 2. Some typical usages of “shifu” (师傅) are listed as follows.

Table 2. The usage of shifu (师傅) in ancient Chinese

Type	No.	Addressee
Shifu (师傅)	1	Monk
	2	Master of apprentices
	3	Teacher in a general sense
	4	In a narrow sense: teacher for the male offspring of the emperor

Generally, there are four major usages for the address term “shifu” (师傅) in the context of ancient Chinese, including “monk”, “master of apprentices”, “generalized teacher”, and “teacher for the male offspring of the emperor in particular”. In this section, the paper selected four representative examples to help deepen readers’ understanding of the address term “shifu” (师傅) in ancient Chinese. By the way, all the English meanings in this paper have been added by the

authors for reference.

Four examples are extracted from the database BCC corpus. “shifu” (师傅) in Example 1, 2 and 3 refers to a certain category of people, that is “teacher”. The origin of “shifu” (师傅) dates back to *Biography of Guliang* (《穀梁传》gu liang zhuan), “羈贯成童, 不就师傅, 父之罪也”(ji guan cheng tong, bu jiu shifu, fu zhi zui ye), which means that a child over eight years without finding a shifu is the fault of the father.

Example 1

Chinese: 师傅是官名。俗称名儒能讲论六艺者。曰师傅。--《木人剩稿 佛藏嘉兴藏》

Pinyin: Shifu shi guan ming. Su cheng ming ru neng jiang lun liu yi zhe. Yue shifu.

English meaning: Shifu is an official title. It is commonly known that the Confucian who can give lectures on the six arts could be addressed as “shifu” (师傅).

Example 1 defines “shifu” (师傅). In this respect, “shifu” (师傅) refers to a teacher in a generalized manner with three key elements. Firstly, “shifu” (师傅) is an official title. Moreover, it limits shifu into a certain group of people, that is a famous Confucian who believes in Confucianism. Furthermore, a shifu must master the skills of teaching “six arts”, namely, ritual, music, archery, carriage (driving, or horse-riding), calligraphy, and mathematics. The three essential elements of “shifu” (师傅) in this context can be described as follows in Figure 1.

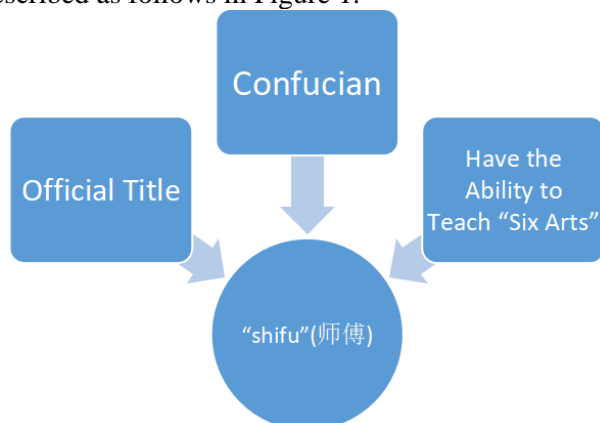


Figure 3. Three key elements of “shifu” (师傅)

The definition shows that “shifu” (师傅) is an official title. Actually, before South Song Dynasty, “shifu” (师傅) was mainly used as an official title, which combined the official title “taishi” (太师) and “taifu” (太傅), or “shaoshi” (少师) and “shaofu” (少傅) (Zhang Jing & Zhang Xiaojin, 2022). This statement could also be testified by the document in *Shangshu·Zhoushu·Zhouguan* (《尚书·周书·周官》), “立太师、太傅、太保。兹惟三公, 论道经邦, 燮理阴阳, 官不必备, 唯其人。少师、少傅、少保, 日三孤。貳公弘化, 寅亮天地, 弼予一人。” (English translation by the authors: “san gong” (三公), three official positions,

“taishi”, “taifu”(太傅) and “taibao” (太保) are set up. The people who hold these three official posts preach the rule of the dao, govern the country and reconcile Yin and Yang. It is not necessary to have all the three official posts. What really matters is the right people for the posts. “shaoshi” (少师), “shaofu” (少傅) and “shaobao” (少保) are three deputy positions for “sangong” (三公), the above-mentioned three official positions. They assist “sangong” to carry forward the enlightenment, worship the universe, assist only one person.) The three official positions (“sangong”) were firstly set up in the Qin Dynasty, after which they became positions in name only. As for “sangu” (三孤), they are set up in Zhou Dynasty in the time of the Duke of Zhou.

Example 2

Chinese: 上书房师傅、有专课之责者。--《清实录嘉庆朝实录 史藏别史》

Pinyin: Shang shu fang shi fu, you zhuan ke zhi ze zhe.

English meaning: Shifu (师傅) at Shangshufang Study is the one who has the responsibility of teaching class.

In Example 2, the sentence could also be regarded as a definition for “shifu” (师傅), especially at Shangshufang Study, a place for the sons and grandsons of the emperor to receive education. “shifu” (师傅) in this example is set in the context of “shangshufang”. Thus, the data reveal that “shangshufang shifu” (上书房师傅) could be used to indicate a teacher for the offsprings of the emperor, especially the male offsprings.

Example 3

Chinese: 卿是朕西台大臣, 当今为太子师傅。--《太平御览 子藏类书》

Pinyin: Qing shi zhen xi tai da chen, dang jin wei tai zi shifu.

English meaning: You are the minister of the Central Secretariat. Now, I’d like you to be the prince’s teacher.

In Example 3, the data indicate that “shifu” (师傅) in that context refers to the prince’s teacher. In China, after the Qin and Han Dynasty, “shifu” (师傅) was mainly used to refer to the prince’s teacher. At that time, the context of “shifu” (师傅) was narrowed to the teacher of the prince especially.

Example 4

Chinese: 你若是去年来拜我为师, 我决当不了你的师傅。--《侠义英雄传 集藏小说》

Pinyin: Ni ruo shi qu nian lai bai wo wei shi, wo jue dang bu liao ni de shifu.

English meaning: If you had come to me last year, I would not have been your shifu.

As listed in Example 4, apart from the usage of “teacher”, shifu (师傅) could also be employed to

indicate a master with specific skills who can teach some skills to the apprentices.

To sum up, as for the original meaning in ancient Chinese, the address term “shifu” (师傅) mainly refers to a teacher. Furthermore, the term “shifu” (师傅) is an official title. In addition, a “shifu” (师傅) is usually a Confucian.

4.1.2. The Usage of “Shifu” (师傅) in Ancient Chinese

As for the address term “shifu” (师傅), the major usages are specified in the following Table 4 based on the first 1-100 pieces of the corpus data in ancient Chinese.

Table 4. The usage of shifu (师傅) in ancient Chinese

Type	No.	Addressee
Shifu (师傅)	1	Monk
	2	Master of apprentices
	3	Nun
	4	Taoist priest

Example 5

Chinese: 师父 (为人模范曰师。谓教人以道之称也。生我戒身。长我慧命曰父。.....) --《木人剩稿 佛藏\嘉兴藏》

Pinyin: Shifu (wei ren mo fan yue shi. Wei jiao ren yi dao zhi cheng ye. Sheng wo jie shen. Zhang wo hui ming yue fu. ...).

English meaning: Shifu (师傅) (“Shi” refers to a person who could serve as a model, which is an addressing for people who could teach others knowledge. The person who gives me life away from evil, and prolongs my wisdom life is called “fu”. ...).

Example 5 defines the address term “shifu” (师傅) based on the context of Buddhism. It is also the original meaning of the term “shifu” (师傅). “Shi” (师) indicates that the person’s behavior could be followed by others; Meanwhile, the person could also teach another knowledge. As for A person who could be addressed as “fu” (父) also possesses the following two characteristics: 1) the person gives a life of non-evil to the apprentices; 2) the person extends apprentices’ wisdom life. Thus, in the context of Buddhism, the person is relevant to the apprentices’ father (in Chinese, “father” means “fu” (父)).

Example 6

Chinese: 素姐从此赶着老侯叫“侯师父”，老张叫“张师父”。这两个道婆当面叫素姐是“徒弟”..... --《木人剩稿 佛藏\嘉兴藏》

Pinyin: Su jie cong ci gan zhe lao hou jiao “hou shifu”, lao zhang jiao “zhang shifu”. Zhe liang ge dao po dang mian jiao su jie shi “tudi”...

English meaning: Afterwards, Sister Su would address Ms. Hou as “Hou shifu”, Ms. Zhang as “Zhang shifu”. The two nuns address Sister Su as an

“apprentice” to her face...

In Example 6, Sister Su addressed the two women who believe in Taosim as “shifu” (师父). In this context, the data show that the term “shifu” (师父) in ancient Chinese could also be used to address a nun, despite the character “fu” (父) in Chinese usually indicates a father, a male role. This finding also conforms to the explanations in the dictionary.

Example 7

Chinese: 他同白云观里的安道士原有些首尾，就在安道士那里住下。...京城里安师父的名望，随你是个三头六臂的“哪吒三太子”，听了“安师父”三个字，总要吓了一跳。--《木人剩稿 佛藏\嘉兴藏》

Pinyin: Ta tong bai yun guan li de an dao shi yuan you xie shou wei, jiu zai an daos shi na li zhu xia. ... Jing cheng li an shi fu de ming wang, sui ni shi ge san tou liu bi de “nezha san tai zi”, ting le “an shifu” san ge zi, zong yao xia le yi tiao.

English meaning: Since he is acquainted with Taoist priest An in Baiyunguan, he stayed there... An Shifu in the capital is so famous that even if you are a three-headed and six-armed “Third Prince Nezha”, you will always feel startled on hearing the three words “An Shifu”.

The sentence in Example 7 is sourced from Buddhism classics. Here, “shifu” (师傅) was employed with the surname to address a Taoist priest. This finding also conforms to the definitions of the term “shifu” (师傅) in the *New Century Chinese-English Dictionary* (2002).

In Conclusion, just as specified in the above examples, the address term “shifu”(师傅) in ancient Chinese usually indicates a master with religious background.

Therefore, there exist significant differences between “shifu” (师傅) and “shifu” (师父) in terms of the original meaning, using contexts in ancient Chinese.

4.2. Diachronic Analysis of “Shifu” (师傅) and “Shifu” (师父) in Modern and Contemporary Chinese

Furthermore, this paper explores the variation of the two address terms “shifu” (师傅) and “shifu” (师父) in modern and contemporary Chinese diachronically. Figure 2 shows the frequency and trend of using the two address terms from 1946 to 2015.

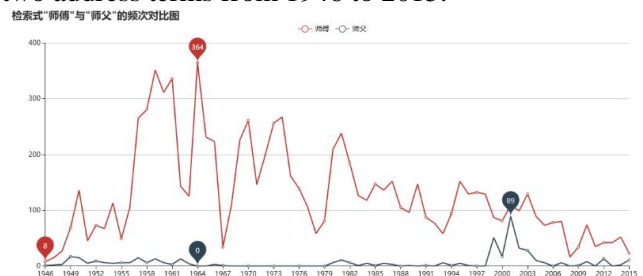


Figure 2. Comparison of the using frequency between “shifu” (师傅) and “shifu” (师父) from 1946-2015

Note: Red line indicates the frequency of using shifu (师傅), while the blue line indicates shifu (师父) usage.

As shown in Figure 5, the data reveal that the highest frequency for shift (师傅) occurs in 1964 with a frequency of 364 times, while the highest frequency for shifu (师父) occurs in 2001 at 89 times. In the following section, the paper will analyze the possible reasons for this phenomenon based on the typical examples from the corpus data.

4.2.1. The Usage of “Shifu” (师傅) in Modern and Contemporary Chinese

As for “shifu” (师傅), the highest frequency with 364 times occurrences appears in People’s Daily in 1964. Four typical usages of the address term “shifu” (师傅) are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5. The usage of shifu (师傅) in modern and contemporary Chinese

Type	No.	Addressee
Shifu (师傅)	1	Worker
	2	Master of apprentices
	3	Electrician
	4	Pastry cook

Example 8

Chinese: 许多人先当徒弟, 学会了再当师傅。

Pinyin: Xu duo ren xian dang tu di, xue hui le zai dang shifu.

English meaning: Many people choose to be an apprentice before becoming a shifu.

Example 8 shows that “shifu” (师傅) could still be used to indicate a master within the master-apprentice relationship in the modern and contemporary context. In Example 8, it reveals that the role of the apprentice could also be converted into a master as long as one master obtains enough skills, which highlighted a significant characteristic of “shifu” (师傅), that is, skills. Therefore, in this circumstance, “shifu” (师傅) could be translated into “master”.

Example 9

Chinese: 在电工师傅和小组工人的帮助下, 设计安装了一个“自动叫水器”, 减少了水的浪费。

Pinyin: Zai dian gong shifu he xiao zu gong ren de bang zhu xia, she ji an zhuang le yi ge “zi dong jiao shui qi”, jian shao le shui de lang fei.

English meaning: With the help of electricians and workers, he designed and installed an “Automatic water whistle”, which reduced the waste of water.

Example 10

Chinese: 另一副经理杨家富是面案师傅。

Pinyin: Ling yi fu jing li shi mian an shi fu.

English meaning: Another associate manager is a pastry cook (mian'an shifu).

In Example 9 and 10, “shifu” (师傅) is used to refer

to technicians with skills in a specific area, such as “electrician” and “pastry cook”, which is also a common usage for this term. In this respect, a person with skills, especially in basic industry, could be addressed as “shifu” (师傅). This usage of “shifu” (师傅) accounts for a large part in the context of modern Chinese. For instance, “shifu” (师傅) is widely employed to address a taxi driver, a maintenance worker, a carpenter, etc.

Example 11

Chinese: 他们从一个铁合金厂请来了工人师傅。

Pinyin: Ta men cong yi ge tie he jin gong chang qing lai le gong ren shi fu.

English meaning: Many people choose to be an apprentice before becoming a shifu.

Example 11 reveals that in that time people usually address a worker as “shifu” (师傅). And by examining the data, it is easily to find that the frequently mentioned words in the relevant contexts are “worker”, “factory”, etc. Thus, the data imply that in that time China is developing its industry vigorously. Dating back to China’s history, we could learn that 1964 marks the beginning of the “Third-line Construction”, which is the second step of China’s industrialization process. China is a large agricultural country, but developing industries are given more priority in that period. The policy on developing the industry in that period empowers “workers” with more respects, which also explains the reason why the address term “shifu” (师傅) for workers at that time could be generalized as an honorific. This finding also agrees with the research by Zhang (2011), who states that “shifu” (师傅) is frequently used as an honorific during Culture Revolution (1966–1976). The study by He, Z., & Ren, W. (2016) also indicates that the address term “shifu” (师傅) has become popular to address a stranger during the period 1966 to 1976.

In short, the term “shifu” (师傅) in modern and contemporary Chinese could be further summarized as the three key categories: 1) worker; 2) master of apprentices; 3) people with professional skills in basic industry in particular.

4.2.2. The Usage of “Shifu” (师父) in Modern and Contemporary Chinese

The address term “shifu” (师父) was used most frequently in 2001 that occurred 89 times from People’s Daily. Based on the empirical data from the corpus, two typical usages of the address term “shifu” (师父) are summarized as follows in Table 7.

Firstly, most of the occurrences are mentioned in the report about a master of Qigong. As for the term itself, “shifu” (师父) could be used to address a master with specific skills with religion background, such as Buddhism, and Taoism. These usages of “shifu” (师父) also conforms to its original usage in ancient Chinese.

Qigong pertains to Taoism, which is a kind of traditional Chinese method of health care, health preservation and disease elimination. That is the reason why this sport is very popular among the elderly.

Table 6. The usage of shifu (师父) in modern and contemporary Chinese

Type	No.	Addressee
Shifu (师父)	1	People are usually masters with religion backgrounds
	2	Masters with Kungfu within the master-apprentice relationship

Furthermore, there are also some other usages for “shifu” (师父). For instance, it could also be used between apprentices and masters. As in the following Example 12, “shifu” (师父) is used to indicate a Kungfu master of the character Ling Huchong in *The Legendary Swordsman*, a Wuxia novel by the famous Chinese writer, Jinyong.

Example 12

Chinese: 令狐冲和他的师父、师妹以及他的敌人、朋友，其喜怒哀乐、举手投足间也难见侠客风骨。

Pinyin: Ling Huchong he ta de shifu, shiniang yi ji ta de di ren, peng you, qi xi nu ai le, ju shou tou zu jian ye nan jian xia ke feng gu.

English meaning: It is difficult to feel the swordsman’s spirit of Ling Huchong, his shifu, shifu’s wife, his enemies and friends from their emotions, including pleasure, anger, sorrow and joy as well as their gestures and expressions.

The sentence in Example 12 was excerpted from an article of People’s Daily. The author in that article criticized the drama version by pointing out that the shooting skills of this drama series were difficult in reproducing the spirits of the Kungfu masters. “shifu” (师父) in this example refers to a great Chinese Kungfu master of Ling Huchong, the heroine from a famous Wuxia novel whose background is in ancient China. Actually, with the popularity of the Wuxia novel at present, the term “shifu” (师父) still remains the usage in this respect in modern Chinese.

In brief, “shifu” (师父) in the context of modern & contemporary Chinese is used in two major contexts: 1) to indicate people with religious background, such as a monk, a nun, a Taoist priest, etc. Under these circumstances, addressees could be people from all walks of life, which are not merely limited to master-apprentice relationship; 2) to refer to masters with Kungfu within the master-apprentice relationship. In this respect, “shifu” (师父) could be used to address the masters in Chinese wuxia novels by their apprentices. “shifu” (师父) usually masters extraordinary Kungfu, which could be passed down to their apprentices. The apprentices usually need to be trained by the masters, and they must abide by strict rules set by the masters or

grandmasters. Since the character “父” in Chinese means “father”. The saying “a teacher for a day is a father for life” is often cited by the apprentices to express their loyalty to their masters.

To sum up, the two address terms “shifu” (师傅) and “shifu” (师父) are quite different in modern Chinese. However, nowadays the misuse of the two terms by the media has made the distinction between the two terms even more ambiguous. In some prior studies, the address term “shifu” (师父) was regarded as an honorific compared with “shifu” (师傅). As a matter of fact, the two address terms are quite different from each other based on the corpus data. Therefore, it’s necessary to clarify the two address terms as soon as possible to benefit the further users and learners.

5. Conclusion

The data from the BCC corpus show that the two address terms “shifu” (师傅) and “师父” are different in usage from ancient Chinese to modern and contemporary Chinese. In ancient Chinese, “shifu” (师父) is used more frequently; while in modern and contemporary Chinese, “shifu” (师傅) is mostly used. It is probably because, in the context of ancient Chinese, the master-apprentice relationship is a more common phenomenon compared with the present. In addition, the changes in the social structure, language policies, people’s changing preferences in choosing address terms also affect people’s choice of address terms.

Furthermore, by comparing the two address terms, this study finds that the original meanings of the two terms are slightly different. “shifu” (师傅) is firstly used to indicate a Confucian who could teach “six arts”, while “shifu” (师父) symbolizes a person who gives the life of non-evil to others apart from teaching someone knowledge. Moreover, “shifu” (师傅) is used as official title to indicate a teacher, while “shifu” (师父) is more related to religions through giving non-evil life and knowledge to others. Additionally, the addressees of the two terms are slightly different both in the context of ancient and modern and contemporary Chinese, as summarized in the discussion section. The term “shifu” (师傅) is widely used to address workers and technicians in many walks of life, especially during the 1960s. Afterwards, “shifu” (师傅) is generalized as an honorific. Besides, the using trend of the two address terms keeps changing all the time.

Different from the previous studies, this study compares the two address terms diachronically, which reflects their use trends in dynamics. Furthermore, the abundant corpus data reveal their usage in a more reliable way.

The findings will surely benefit the corpus linguistic studies, translation studies and the study of address terms. It will help users distinguish the two address terms based on the abundant empirical data and detailed case analysis. Moreover, the diachronic analysis

contributes to a better understanding of the using trend for the two address terms. Additionally, this study will help people choose appropriate address terms in different contexts, thus contributing to more effective communications. However, the limitation of the study is that the data are still limited in terms of time and size.

Therefore, it is recommended to update the corpus and enlarge its size in the future studies. Moreover, the future studies need to investigate the two address terms synchronically by comparing their usage in different text types.

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