

## More than “Bad Words”: Corpus-Based Investigation into Parental Terms as Self-Mention, Taking “Laozi” and “Laoniang” as Examples

**Authors :** Kaixin Zhou

**Abstract :** Self, the concept of “who I am” and “how I relate to other” is constructed through social interaction and negotiation. The specific topic of delivering the information of self with the linguistic resources of self-mention abounds with discussions on authorship construction in academia, illustrating how researchers call themselves, convey their own opinions, and quote their own papers. Linguistic practices of self-mention in languages other than English and on less formal and less constrained media of writing are under-researched. This raises the necessity to enrich the theories about self-mention with an exploration into the various options of self-reference terms (SRTs) in ancient and modern Chinese languages, a collection of alternative words that share the distribution of “I”, the first-person singular pronoun. This article focuses on a pair of SRTs, “Laozi” and “laoniang”, usually perceived as bad words and originally being the colloquial “father” and “mother”. It performs a corpus-based survey on the usage and functions of the terms in traditional writings and women’s social media posts and explains the sociolinguistic causes behind them by taking advantage of the theories of metadiscourse and interdependent self-construal. The Laozi and Laoniang Corpus comprises three datasets: one consists of texts on traditional media extracted from the CCL Corpus, one collected through querying on Weibo, the largest social media platform in China, and one gathered from Twitter. Comparison between their usage of traditional and social media uncovers language variation and change. Since the SRTs bear a gendered nature due to their original meanings, this study also analyzes the gender-related mentality and sociocultural background through the lens of women’s choice between the masculine “I” and the feminine “I” on Chinese social media. This study discovers that the interdependent Chinese culture, which urges social members to strengthen relatedness to others and to practice socially upheld modesty, has fostered a rich and varied collection of Chinese SRTs. As single-word alternatives to “I”, the SRTs constitute a unique and effective tool for metadiscourse, showing great power in delivering stances and attitudes without the assistance of other components of texts. In a culture where the relationships with others define who you are, using parental terms to call oneself is offensive, power-struggle-like attempt to transfer the supremacy of parenthood to the text producer’s personal attributes; therefore, the addressees are predominantly non-superior, and the terms are more frequently used as SRTs in the less-constrained context of social media. On social media, Chinese women avail of SRTs to inject the power of parenthood into their exclamations and announcements and have hence created a diversified manipulation of SRTs than in general Chinese texts or in English. However, their preference for the masculine SRT “laozi” to the feminine SRT “laoniang” and the close linkage between the terms to anger, command-issuing, and plan-declaring indicate that the act is stilling tacitly following the traditional association of parenthood and masculinity to power.

**Keywords :** interdependent self-construal, metadiscourse, self-mention, social media, women’s language

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