

THE USE OF “DR.(C)” AND “MAG.(C)” IN CHILE

EL USO DEL “DR.(C)” AND “MAG.(C)” EN CHILE

Claudio J. Pizarro*

Independent researcher

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RESUMEN

El uso de “Dr.(c)” y de “Mag.(c)” en las presentaciones públicas de estudiantes de posgrado ha aumentado notablemente en Chile. Este artículo presenta dos estudios para determinar la magnitud de esta situación en sitios web universitarios y la confusión que este tipo de presentación podría acarrear en el público. El primer estudio recolectó las presentaciones de 915 profesores universitarios contenidas en los sitios web oficiales de 47 universidades. Los resultados indicaron que alrededor de un 18% de los profesores universitarios estaban haciendo un posgrado y que usan el Dr.(c) y el Mag.(c) como presentación a pesar de que es dudoso que se encuentren en la última etapa de sus programas, que sería la candidatura. El segundo estudio encuestó a 119 estudiantes universitarios buscando la comprensión que tenían del sufijo Dr.(c). Los resultados indicaron que alrededor de un tercio de la muestra interpretó el Dr.(c) como una credencial equivalente a Dr., lo que apoya la idea de que este tipo de presentación se presta para engaño y confusión.

Palabras Clave: Dr.(c), Mag.(c), Ética, Credenciales, Antipresentación.

ABSTRACT

The use of “Dr.(c)” and “Mag(c)” by graduate students in public presentations has increased to a noticeable level in Chile. This work presents two studies to offer a measure of the magnitude of this situation in university web sites and a measure of the confusion that this type of presentation may provoke to the public. The first study collected 915 professor’s names from 47 university websites searching for the use of “(c)” in their presentations. Results indicated that around 18% of faculty members were graduate students and they used the Dr.(c) and Master(c) form for self-presentation even though it is doubtful that all of them were in their last stage of their programs, which is the candidacy. The second study surveyed 119 undergraduate students searching for their understanding of the Dr.(c) suffix. Results indicated that around one third of a sample interpreted the Dr.(c) suffix as a credential equivalent to the Dr. suffix, which supported the idea that this type of self-presentation is confusing and deceiving.

Key Words: Dr.(c), Mag.(c), Ethics, Credentials, Self-presentation.

The Use of “Dr.(c)” and “Mag.(c)”

In Chile, where this study was conducted, psychologists, in general, and faculty members, among them, use several degree abbreviations before or after their names as a way to show their credentials and titles. For example, the prefix “Ps.” is often used to address a psychologist in written form (e.g. Ps. Claudio Pizarro). If this psychologist

holds a doctorate, the prefix “Dr.” may precede his name. In addition to this form of presentation, there are doctoral students who indicate their status by adding a “(c)” to the degree they are pursuing, which is meant for candidacy, taking the form of “Dr.(c).” Traditionally, this form of self-presentation is used by doctoral students who already passed their final comprehensive doctoral exams or have approved their doctoral thesis project or, in some universities,

* Claudio J. Pizarro, psychotherapist in private practice and independent researcher, Santiago, Chile.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Claudio J. Pizarro, Merced 286, 2do piso, Santiago de Chile.

E-mail: claudiopizarroh@gmail.com

only when the doctoral student has been assigned a date to defend his/her thesis. Specifically, this form is used in disciplinary contexts (congresses, workshops) and in C.V.'s for job seeking purposes. However, it is surprising to find that the use of the Dr.(c) is increasingly appearing in a variety of other situations such as presentation cards, lists of faculty members on institutional web pages, election runs propaganda, and letter heads. In addition, Master's students are doing the same and now one can observe a "Mag.(c)" after their names in the same variety of contexts, in spite of the nonexistence of a candidacy status in Master's programs.

This behavior is worrisome because it may fall under an unethical misrepresentation given that it is not risky to assume that people will understand the meaning of Dr. but they might not understand the (c) and its relation to a candidacy status; therefore, many might take it as a credential and, wrongly, take the holder as a doctor. In order to be clearer about this situation, this work will present two studies, the first one was done to get an estimation of the frequency of this type of self-presentation used by both masters' and doctoral students and the second study was to determine the degree of people's confusion in interpreting the Dr.(c) self-presentation.

Study 1: Frequency and Proportion of Academicians Using "Dr.(c)" or "Master(c)" as a Self-presentation in University Websites

The first study had the intention to get a measure of the magnitude of the problem; that is, the use of the candidacy as a self-presentation in contexts

other than workshops, conferences and congresses. In Chile, there are 60 universities and 47 of them have professional psychology programs; then, it was considered that self-presentations in institutional web pages was going to offer an indication about how widespread was the Dr.(c) use.

Method

The 47 Chilean psychology department web sites were reviewed searching for lists of faculty members to determine the frequency of Dr.(c) and Master(c) self-presentations.

Sample

The sample was composed by faculty member self-presentations from psychology department websites. Out of the 47 psychology departments, 12 did not list their Faculty; thus, the sample was extracted from 35 websites, which totaled 923 names. As eight of them appeared in two universities, the working sample was reduced to 915 professors.

Results

Only two out of the 35 psychology departments had no candidates in their faculty list. The other 33 units presented 77 professors as doctoral students and 73 professors as master's degree students. The form of the self-presentation is shown next (Table 1).

Out of the 915 faculty members, it was found that 74 (8.1%) of them were pursuing a doctoral degree and three individuals (0.32%) indicated

Table 1

Faculty Members Using the Doctoral Candidacy as Self-presentation in 35 Chilean Departments of Psychology Websites

Self-presentation	Frequency	%
Dr.(c)	52	70.3
Ph.D.(c)	4	5.4
(c) Doctor	3	4.1
Candidato a Dr. o Ph.D. (Doctoral or Ph.D. candidate)	7	9.4
Doctorando (Doctoral student)	6	8.1
Ph.D. student	1	1.3
Estudiante doctorado (Doctorate student)	1	1.3
Total	74	100

Note. N=915.

Table 2*Faculty Members Using Magister Candidacy as Self-presentation in 35 Chilean Departments of Psychology Websites*

Self-presentation	Frequency	%
Mag.(c) [Master(c)]	69	94.5
Candidato a Mag. (Candidate to Master)	4	5.5
Total	73	100

Note. N=915.

they had unfinished doctoral studies. Therefore 74 professors self-presented as current doctoral students and most of them (79.7%) self-presented as Dr.(c) or its similar in the faculty list shown in their website.

Only 15 (20.3%) individuals indicated that they were candidates or a doctoral student without using the form Dr.(c) (Table 2).

Among the 915 professors of the sample, 73 presented themselves as Master' students, which represents 8% of the whole. Almost all (94.5%) of the 73 individuals who self-presented as Master's students used the form Mag(c) and only four of them (5.5%) used the sentence candidate to Master. Nobody used the word student.

In summary, 147 professors were doctoral or master students, which represent 16.1% of the 915 professors surveyed. One hundred and twenty eight of them used the title they were pursuing followed by the (c), which represents 87.1% of the sample.

Discussion

Within the university realm one can find statuses and hierarchies among professors and students. Professors are categorized as Professor, Associate Professor, Assistant Professor, Instructor and so on. Students also hold statuses related to their progress in the program. In the U.S.A., these academic levels or academic status are named according with year in course and each year has a name: Freshman, Sophomore, Junior and Senior. In Chile, the levels just take the name of the year of progress, from First Year student to Fifth Year student. Graduate students follow the same logic and they are categorized as First Year Magister or doctoral student, Second Year Magister or doctoral student and so on. Traditionally, doctoral students are called doctoral candidates only once they have

passed comprehensive exams at the end of their coursework and/or their thesis project has been approved or they have handed in their doctoral thesis and they are waiting for its defense. At that stage, they might use a Dr.(c) before their names for academic events or for job seeking purposes although they are not to be called Dr. yet. In this sense, to show a Dr.(c) as a way of self-presentation might be considered adequate if the intention is to show an academic status and not a credential or certification.

In doing this self-presentation review, it was also found that 73 (8% of the total sample) professors self-presented themselves as pursuing a Master's degree and almost all of them (69 out of 73) used the form "Magister(c)" despite the fact that Master's programs do not have the tradition of a candidacy status. It is very likely that among this group there are first and second year students and not only Master students who have presented their thesis or are working on their thesis. That would mean that the candidacy is used from the moment they start the program, which seems a stretch of the concept. It could be argued that this behavior of using the Mag.(c) form is not a matter of style but implies an intention to show an improved status by using a form that, in reality, is not defined in master's programs.

The proportion of doctoral students who were in the stage of candidacy seems higher than expected for a sample of this size. It would mean that only 20% of them are in the coursework stage and 80% are done with that and developing their approved thesis project or are preparing the thesis defense, which seems unlikely. Anyhow, this study did not include a measure of the real academic status of the graduate students. It can be said, though, that the Dr.(c) public self-presentation should be more judiciously used in order to avoid falling in a misrepresentation because Dr.

is a degree and a credential recognized by any citizen but the (c) could be harder to understand. In addition, a doctoral candidacy is a status within the academic realm but it is neither a title nor a credential but its widespread use in public contexts, as demonstrated in this study, makes it look too close to a credential. It is different to write *John Doe, doctoral candidate* than *Dr.(c) John Doe*. The people's understanding will probably differ in front of these two statements; on one hand, they will understand the denomination of Dr. but, in the other, they might have difficulties in interpreting the letter (c) after such denomination. Then, a reasonable ethical questioning is at stake: Is the use of Dr.(c) in public presentations that have no other purpose than to show credentials and academic hierarchy, as universities' web sites are, a proper behavior? A primary answer seems to be a nay.

The second part of this study was structured to measure the magnitude of this hypothesized confusion.

Study 2: Perception and Interpretation of the "Dr.(c)"

Even though it does not seem risky to assert that the Dr.(c) cause confusion among lay people, it must be tested. This second study was designed with two parts to test the interpretation of the suffix in question; the first one consisted in showing the participants a letter addressed to a fictitious professor that is listed as Dr.(c) in the Faculty web site; they had to choose the form of addressing this professor. The second part was a direct question about the meaning of Dr.(c). Participants were university students and not public in general so that the results might be considered as a floor for this potential confusion given that college students are much closer to understand the hierarchies and statuses proper of the university realm.

Method

Participants were approached in open areas of three universities and requested to answer two-questions about ways of addressing people by writing.

Sample

One hundred and nineteen undergraduate students, 73 of which were undergraduate psychology students from a state university and 46 were

undergraduate students from other careers and universities, composed the sample.

Instruments

The data was collected with an ad-hoc two items-questionnaire. The first item presented a hypothetical situation of addressing a Professor by mail and whose name on the Faculty list appeared as *Dr.(c) Fernando Lazcano Villarreal*; the participant had to choose the heading and salutation from four alternatives. In this item, the participant was forced to choose one of the three salutation forms: *Mr.*, *Dr.(c)* or *Dr.* and it had the following form:

If you had to write a formal letter to the following person, who is in the Faculty list of a university: Dr.(c) Fernando Lazcano Villarreal, Professor and researcher, Antarctic University, ¿which letterhead would you use?

Letterhead and salutation	Mark your choice with a X
Mr. Fernando Lazcano Villarreal Professor and researcher Antarctic University Dear Mr. Lazcano: In the attachment, please find...	
Dr. (c) Fernando Lazcano Villarreal Professor and researcher Antarctic University Dear Dr. (c) Lazcano: In the attachment, please find...	
Dr. (c) Fernando Lazcano Villarreal Professor and researcher Antarctic University Dear Dr. Lazcano: In the attachment, please find...	
Dr. Fernando Lazcano Villarreal Professor and researcher Antarctic University Dear Dr. Lazcano: In the attachment, please find...	

The second item was a straightforward question about the difference between "Dr." and "Dr.(c)" with five alternatives and it was structured as follows:

- ¿What is the difference between Dr. and Dr.(c)?
(Mark your choice with a circle):
- There is no substantial difference
 - They are two types of doctorates

- c) One is a doctor and the other is not a doctor
- d) The Dr.(c) is studying to be a doctor and the Dr. is already graduated.
- e) The Dr.(c) is just near to be a doctor and the Dr. is already a doctor.

In this case, c, d and e were considered correct and alternatives a and b were the incorrect answers.

Results

The 119 participants were undergraduate students of psychology, law, education, engineering and health. They were from 17 to 29 years old with an average of 21 years of age. Responses to the first item are shown in Table 3.

Around half of the sample used for heading and salutation the same form Professor Lazcano used as a self-presentation; that is, the heading and salutation preferred was Dr.(c). One third addressed him using the form Dr. and only 12.6% of the sample chose the form Mr.

The question about the difference between Dr. and Dr.(c) was answered as follows (Table 4).

One third of the sample did not perceive differences between the forms Dr. and Dr.(c). The rest of the participants indicated that Dr.(c) is not a Doctor and the great majority preferred the idea that a Dr.(c) is studying a doctorate.

Discussion

One third of the sample (33.6%) chose to address Professor Lazcano as Dr. Lazcano. This result seems to indicate that the suffix Dr. was strong enough to make the participant to omit the meaning of (c), whatever it meant. One half of the participants preferred the alternative Dr.(c) as a way to address this fictitious professor; which suggests they were interpreting this form as a credential or status to be acknowledged. One wonders how this form would convert into an oral addressing for these participants in a personal encounter with Dr.(c) Lazcano given that the (c) is just a modulator of the written meaning and it has no pronunciation.

It seems that only 12.6% of the participants were clear that Lazcano was not a Doctor and preferred to address him as Mr. Lazcano.

Table 3

Preferences of Heading and Salutation

Heading and salutation	Frequency	%
Mr. Fernando Lazcano		
Dear Mr. Lazcano	15	12.6
Dr.(c) Fernando Lazcano	64	53.8
Dear Dr.(c) Lazcano		
Dr.(c) Fernando Lazcano	25	21
Dear Dr. Lazcano		
Dr. Fernando Lazcano	15	12.6
Dear Dr. Lazcano		
Total	119	100

Table 4

Responses to the Question About the Difference Between Dr. and Dr.(c)

Alternatives	Frequency	%
a. There is no difference	13	10.9
b. They are two type of doctors	21	17.6
c. One is a Dr. and the other is not a Dr.	3	2.5
d. Dr.(c) is studying a doctorate	71	59.7
e. Dr.(c) is near to be a doctor	10	8.4
Total	118	100

Even though it might be argued that there is no intention of misrepresentation because the (c) stands for candidacy, it seems the form Dr.(c) was perceived as a title or as a credential by a high number of university students. If this type of self-presentation is indistinguishable from the prefix Dr. for many university students, no better outcome should be expected for citizens not related to the academia.

The results of this study support the idea that the use of Dr.(c) is confusing and misinterpreted by an important proportion of the population. The using of the phrase “important proportion” must be analyzed from a qualitative perspective and no statistic analysis should be needed because these results belong to the professional ethics field. University policy makers and the professional code of ethic committees are the instances called to judge this situation.

Final Discussion

The majority of faculty members who appeared pursuing a doctorate presented themselves as doctoral candidates and not as doctoral students. If the candidacy status in doctoral programs requires passing comprehensive exams and a defense of the thesis project; then, it seems a great coincidence that 59 out of 74 (that is, 80% of the doctoral students of the sample) held the doctoral candidacy status. One might think that at least some students are using the Dr.(c) self-presentation based just on the circumstance they are pursuing this degree. This seems clearer in the case of master’s students given that there is no “candidacy” status in Master’s degree programs and, despite this fact, 94.5% of them used the form Magister(c) considering themselves as candidates, most probably, just for the fact they are regular students in a Master’s program. The appropriateness of this form of self-presentation seems questionable.

The world’s largest association of psychologists, the American Psychological Association (APA), expresses in its Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct (APA, 2002) that “Psychologists do not make false, deceptive or fraudulent statements concerning (1) their training, experience or competence; (2) their academic degrees; (3) their credentials...” (APA, Standard 5: Advertising and Other Public Statements). The Chilean standard about degrees and professional self-presentations is defined

in the Código de Ética Profesional Article 16th, where in number 1.4 is indicated that psychologists should not use deceiving information regarding academic titles, they must use only titles and undergraduate degrees from accredited universities (number 2.1) (Colegio de Psicólogos de Chile, 2012). This code specifies the use of undergraduate degrees and does not address the use of graduate degrees but it could be deduced that it applies to the latter as well and that the code just needs an upgrade.

If it is argued that the candidacy is an academic status given to doctorate students and, therefore, they could use it as a self-presentation in official web pages, it would be necessary to establish how these denominations should be classified; are they titles? Are they recognitions of a status? Is there a certification behind?

In fact, universities define that a student becomes a candidate to the doctoral degree after passing comprehensive exams and/or defending a doctoral thesis project and this status is certifiable, usually, for job seeking purposes. Several personal communications with graduate program officers indicate that most doctoral programs in Chile do not have rules about how to use the status of candidacy in the public realm but some of them specify that the candidacy is lost after a period of time without finishing the thesis.

In the case of master programs it is clear that there is no tradition of candidacy and no program defines a period of candidacy for the student.

Finally, some curious cases were found in this search. For example, one professor self-presented as Magister(c) along with Doctor(c) and from programs from the same university in which he is Faculty member. Also, there were several Faculty members who used the Ph.D. form despite the fact their doctoral programs were from Chile or other countries where universities do not grant a Ph.D. but a “Doctor en Psicología.” In countries like the U.S., it would be very inappropriate, to say the least, if, for example, a psychologist with a Psy.D. degree would self-present him/herself as a Ph.D. instead.

One last example of unexpected cases found in the present study was the casual observation of a professor who has presented herself as a Dr.(c) for so many years that makes it absolutely improbable she is still working on her doctoral thesis.

The results of this study gives support to the idea that the form Dr.(c) looks like a credential rather than an academic status for at least one third

of people. Participants were university students, who are supposed to be more informed regarding the meaning of this way of self-presentation in university environments; thus, the results could be interpreted as a basal magnitude and it is reasonable

to assume that this proportion is much greater in the general public. It can be concluded that adding a (c) to the prefix Dr. or Mag. misleads a significant number of people to wrong interpretations about the credentials of the professional.

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