Linguistic Manifestations of Age-Grade Status in Iraqw Address Term Practice

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Abstract

This study examines linguistic manifestations of age-grade status among the Iraqw, a Southern Cushitic ethnic group in northern Tanzania. It identifies how life stages or age grades are conceptually distinguished in Iraqw terminology and then looks at how the use of address terms relates to concepts of age and seniority. Based on the qualitative methods of native speaker observations and interviews, the study analyses linguistic patterns across various social interactions such as greetings, conversations, and both formal and informal acts of address. Drawing on anthropological linguistics and the pragmatics of person reference, the findings reveal that age is conceptualized in terms of social roles rather than chronological age. The obligatory use of kinship terms and titles for older individuals reflects their superiority and the honour that is due to them, while the use of proper names, pronouns, endearments, and attention-getting interjections is often the choice for juniors, signifying their lower social status. The selection of address forms reveals distinct elements across relationships, with practices varying from focusing on relational status within families to combining age and marital status in affinal ties, and emphasizing age in non-relative interactions. Nevertheless, all address practices reflect deeply rooted cultural values of respect and hierarchy. This study indicates the subtle ways linguistic choices reinforce social structures, offering insights into how language, age, and social status intersect. It also contributes to broader discussions in sociolinguistics and anthropology by examining traditional address practices.

Keywords: social indexicality; age-grade status; Iraqw; address practices; seniority

About the author

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1 Introduction

This study examines the linguistic manifestation of age-grade status among the Iraqw ethnic group in northern Tanzania, focusing on address terms. These terms reflect social hierarchies, relationships, and cultural values, highlighting how age and seniority influence social interactions. Understanding their linguistic representation is essential for insights into the Iraqw community's social structure. This study aims to contribute to the growing body of sociolinguistic research emphasizing the significance of age and seniority in linguistic practices. It elucidates how social hierarchies manifest in address term practices and highlights the role of these terms as social indexicals that shape and reinforce interpersonal relationships within the Iraqw community.

The Iraqw reside on a high plateau between Lake Manyara and Lake Eyasi, with elevations exceeding 2,000 metres (Mous 2021). This region's rugged terrain and fertile volcanic soil support the Iraqw's agropastoral lifestyle, providing diverse crops and livestock essential for their subsistence. With approximately 602,000 speakers (LoT 2009), the Iraqw primarily inhabit the districts of Mbulu, Babati, and Hanang in the Manyara Region and Karatu District in the Arusha Region. Iraqw, the southernmost Cushitic language in Tanzania, is closely related to Burunge, Alagwa, and Gorwa (Mous 1993). This linguistic context places Iraqw amid rich linguistic diversity, interacting with neighbouring Bantu languages such as Langi, Mbugwe, Nyaturu, Nyiramba, and Nyisansu, as well as Swahili. Although Swahili dominates in many public domains, Iraqw remains prominent in daily communication, especially in rural areas where various address terms are actively used. Iraqw also interacts with Southern Nilotic languages, including Datooga and Maasai, and the isolate language Hadza (Mous 1993). While the grammatical properties of Iraqw have been well described (Mous 1993; Nordbustad 1988; Alphonce 2022), the sociolinguistic study of this language is still in its infancy.

2 Previous work on person reference and seniority

This study contributes to the sociolinguistic understanding of age-grade status through address terms, providing insights into how language use reflects social hierarchies and values. It fills a gap by focusing specifically on the address practices of the Iraqw community, a topic not thoroughly explored. Iraqw society is patriarchal, with traditional leaders such as the *waawutmo* 'chief or king', *kaahamusmo* 'speaker who decides on land issues', and *qwałaarmo* 'doctor with supernatural powers' (Mous 2021). These roles and their titles not only reflect societal values but also denote seniority and convey honorification. For instance, the *qwałaarmo* may gain political influence through followers, and specific address forms used for these roles demonstrate their social significance and the respect accorded to them. Alongside life-stage terminologies, address forms are essential for understanding how the Iraqw's linguistic practices represent age distinctions and social hierarchy.

A substantial body of work examines the relationship between address terms and age, seniority, and social hierarchy. Afful (2006) explores non-kinship terms of address among the Akan, identifying catchphrases, personal names, and attention-getters that maintain politeness and respect. Similarly, Esmai'li (2011) finds that context dictates the use of pet names among Iranian spouses versus respectful names in the presence of parents. Other studies illustrate how formal address indicates social distance and respect, reinforcing hierarchy. This aligns with Akindele's (2008) findings on Basotho address usage, where the prevalence of titles and teknonyms is noted, while nicknames and first names are rare. Salihu (2014) highlights that address forms among the Hausa reflect age, gender, and status. Address

practices depend on complex social dynamics, as seen in Rifai and Praseningrum's (2016) categorization of address terms into five groups based on intimacy, power, and respect. This complexity resonates with Al-Qudah's (2017) study on Jordanian address terms, where kinship terms and titles reflect social relationships. Ramadhani and Wahyuni (2018) found that kinship terms and pet names among IPMK-SB Kampar students attract attention and convey politeness. Alenizi (2019) similarly notes that in Saudi Arabia, intimacy and social status dictate address term usage. The literature indicates that terms serve distinct functions based on context; for instance, Lusekelo (2021) reveals that specific terms are reserved for individuals in administrative roles during formal gatherings, indicating power relations. Awoonor-Aziaku (2021) observes that in classroom contexts at the University of Cape Coast, students use honorifics and formal titles for lecturers, while lecturers may use first names for students, highlighting power dynamics.

Age significantly influences linguistic practices across cultural contexts, with speakers of different age groups using language differently. However, this paper focuses on how relative age is constructed in multi-party interaction through the choice of address terms. Eckert (1997, 156) identifies three conceptualizations of age: chronological age (years since birth), biological age (physical maturity), and social age (contextual age related to life stages). In Western societies, chronological age often serves as the primary reference point in studies of language use (Cheshire 2005). However, Coupland (1997) emphasizes the importance of social age in understanding age-related practices. In communities like the Iraqw, where precise chronological age is not commonly recorded, physical appearance and social rituals serve as more pertinent indicators of age (Alphonce 2023; Eeden 1991, cited in Makoni 1997). The limited research on age concepts in Iraqw society includes Snyder's (1997) discussion of the different roles of elders, youths,

and women. The chief elder, *kahamusmo*, and his council manage ritual and social affairs, conducting rituals to appease earth spirits and ensure rain, and often consulting a paramount diviner. Elders also resolve internal conflicts, enforce compliance, and may impose ostracism for non-compliance (Snyder 1997). They guide youths in ritual tasks and respond to women's demands for rituals, illustrating how age and seniority shape leadership and social structure, with elders holding the highest authority.

Building on the existing literature, particularly the works of Bayo (2023) and Mous (2021), this paper specifically examines the social indexicality of age-grade status in Iraqw address term practices, a topic not thoroughly explored in previous studies. By doing so, the study investigates how age and seniority are manifested in these address practices, contributing to an understanding of linguistic practices within the Iraqw community. These terms function as social indexicals conveying respect and reinforcing social hierarchies. To achieve these goals, the study draws on anthropological linguistics and the pragmatics of person reference. Anthropological linguistics offers insights into how language is embedded in cultural practices and social norms (Duranti 1997), emphasizing that address terms are not merely communicative tools, but that they actively reflect and reinforce social hierarchies and age-based roles. This understanding aligns with Berman's (2014) assertion that age distinctions are best comprehended through social interactions and cultural norms rather than solely biological factors. The pragmatics of person reference illustrate how individuals use language in real-time interactions to convey social meaning and relational patterns (De Cock and Nogué Serrano 2017). These perspectives clarify how the choice of address forms reflects social hierarchies and interpersonal relationships, highlighting the significance of cultural context in understanding language use. Fleming and Slotta (2018)

demonstrate, in one of the few cross-linguistic studies of address practices, that kin terms are predominantly used for seniors to convey respect, while proper names are often reserved for juniors. This distinction indicates the relationship between language and social hierarchy, reinforcing the notion that address terms serve as social indexicals signalling age and seniority. Ultimately, these integrated perspectives reveal how language operates within cultural contexts to shape social hierarchies and relationships, illustrating that address terms within the Iraqw community are instrumental in constructing and reflecting age and seniority in social interactions. By foregrounding the cultural roots of age-related address practices, the analysis emphasizes how these terms not only mirror but also actively shape social realities.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 3 covers the methodology. Section 4 presents an analysis of key findings, with Section 4.1 focusing on life stage or age category terms, Section 4.2 examining the types and usage of Iraqw address terms, and Section 4.3 exploring address practices across relationships. Finally, Section 5 concludes by summarizing the findings.

3 Methodology

This qualitative descriptive research aimed to explore age and seniority as expressed through person reference practices among the Iraqw. The study was conducted in Gunyoda and Kwermusl villages in Mbulu, which are located in Manyara Region. The selection of these communities was based on the fact that they have very little interaction with their non-Iraqw neighbours' speech communities, something that enabled the researcher (a native speaker of Iraqw) to interact with other native speakers of the language and observe patterns of person reference in spontaneous speech. Data were collected through observations by detecting a variety of spontaneous social contexts where

people interacted and used kin terms (for kin and non-kin members) and proper names to address and refer to one another. Observations were conducted concurrently with the collection of metalinguistic judgments of six consultants, who were selected through a snowball sampling procedure. Six participants were interviewed individually before participating in a group discussion to determine how aspects such as seniority, juniority, and equality are identified in day-to-day interactions through person reference, and especially the use of kin terms and proper names. Consultants were also asked to discuss how they conceptualize age and generation groups, as well as how various speakers belong to distinct generational cohorts. Participants were then asked to provide names for each generational cohort.

4 Analysis of the findings

The findings address life stage or age category terms, define different cohorts, detail the types and usage of Iraqw address terms, explore address practices across relationships, and conclude with a summary and a consideration of the broader social implications of these linguistic practices.

4.1 Life stage or age category terms

In the Iraqw community, biological and social age take precedence over chronological age, as traditional practices do not record birth dates according to a numerical calendar. Instead, age is understood through developmental stages and social roles, reflecting cultural norms. The terminology used within the community denotes stages of growth, social roles, and maturity. Traditionally, the Iraqw determined a child's birth date by referencing significant events, such as natural disasters or historical occurrences. According to Alphonce (2023), these events embed cultural markers into personal identity. Significant life events and rites of passage define transitions between

life stages. The Iraqw categorize individuals into five age-graded groups known as *qari*, meaning 'generation' or 'age mate', with their primary significance lying in biological and social connotations. Table 1 details these terms and their corresponding life stages, illustrating their role in defining social roles and responsibilities within the community.

The terms outlined in Table 1 highlight specific life-stage distinctions within the Iraqw community, essential for clarifying senior-junior relations. These terms serve both referential and symbolic roles, reflecting cultural values such as respect for elders and the significance of life transitions. They denote social responsibilities and reinforce hierarchical structures by defining roles and guiding behaviour. Individuals are categorized into age and gender groups at birth and progress through life stages based on biological and social age.

Table 1: Life stages or age categories among Iraqw

Superordinate terms	Subordinate terms	Possible referents
naʕii 'children'	*qaweero* 'infants'	*naʕii* in infancy stage, typically under 4 months
	naʕii 'children'	*naʕii* from 4 months to 5 years old
	laqwolo 'children in middle childhood'	*naʕii* from 5 years to the onset of adolescence
	tseheeya 'children in late childhood'	*naʕii* in the stage of transitioning from late childhood to adolescence
masoomba 'youth'	*masoomba* 'youth of both genders'	Youthhood for both genders, but can also refer to male youth
	ʕamaatɬiite 'female youth'	Young females in the youth category
dageeno 'initiated woman'	n/a	Young women who have completed initiation and are ready for marriage, transitioning to womanhood
ʕameena 'women'	*ʕameenár ninakw* 'young women'	Young or junior women, typically married with between one and six children
	ʕameenár tɬaʕatsara 'middle-aged women'	Women from middle age, typically having seven or more children, up to menopause
	amʔi 'old women'	Older women, typically post-menopause
bariise 'old men'	*bariisér ninakw* 'young/junior old men'	Older men who have just retired from youthhood
	bariise 'senior old men'	Senior old men, often part of a council led by a traditional leader

In childhood, growth and physical appearance are observed, with distinct characteristics and social expectations marking each phase. Childhood is generally referred to as *laqwli* or *naʕuuma*, the latter also meaning 'childishness'. The cohort is commonly called *naʕii*, meaning 'children' of all ages, while *laqwli* refers to the broader concept of 'childhood'. This category is divided into four subgroups: *qaweero* for newborns (0–3 months), *naʕii* for babies and young children (4 months to 5 years), *laqwolo* for older children (5 years to adolescence), and *tseeheya* for adolescents who have reached puberty. Notably, *tseeheya* is derived from *tseheeyiʔit*, meaning 'to grow up', while *laqwli* and *laqwolo* come from the verb *laqwaal*, meaning 'to give birth'. The term *naʕaay* refers to socially immature adults, illustrating a lack of maturity in behaviour and reasoning. This dual usage highlights linguistic flexibility in expressing age-related social status. The concept is illustrated through rhetorical questions like *Naʕuuma xayla i fak* 'When will childhood end?', emphasizing that age is conceptualized through chronological, psychological, and cognitive factors.

The next life stage after childhood is *masoomba*, a youth cohort that includes both males and females. Although Mous, Qorro, and Kiessling (2002) translates *masoomba* as 'male youth', a male youth is specifically called *masoomo*, while a female youth is referred to as *masombitoʔo*, synonymous with *ʕamatɬiitoʔo*, meaning 'young girl'. In groups, female youth are preferably called *ʕamaatɬiite*. The transition to youthhood for girls is marked by the term *ʕamaatɬiʔiit*, signifying maturity and readiness for marriage. Traditionally, girls underwent *marmoo* 'girls' initiation' before becoming *dageeno*, which signifies that they are prepared for marriage. For males, joining the *masoomba* cohort requires biological maturity and the completion of initiation rituals such as circumcision. Uncircumcised males are termed *sareeʕa* 'buffalo' and are excluded from the cohort. The youth council, known as *tɬahoó masoomba*, includes separate councils for young men and women.

After youthhood, individuals transition into adulthood, with separate cohorts for men and women. Women enter adulthood immediately after marriage or giving birth. For men, transition occurs when their first-born child is old enough to join the youth cohort. If a man does not have a child, he may leave the cohort alongside his peers, although he might remain longer than those whose children have already joined. For women, progression begins with the *ʕamenár ninakw* cohort, which includes newly married women with one to six births. Members of this cohort do not participate in communal work. The next stage, *ʕamenár tɬaʕátsara*, represents middle-aged women who have passed their seventh birth and are transitioning into menopause. The term *tɬaʕátsara*, derived from *tɬaʕangw* meaning 'middle' and *tsara* meaning 'two', signifies a position between young women and old women. Thus, *tɬaʕátsara* represents the intermediate stage between young womanhood and elderhood. Traditionally, a woman enters this cohort upon reaching her seventh birth. Members of the *ʕamenár tɬaʕátsara* group play a central role in communal activities. Women who have reached the menopause are referred to as *amʔi* 'old women'.

For men, subsequent cohorts include *bariisér ninakw*, or young elders, who have recently transitioned from youthhood based on the age of their first child. This group participates in communal activities alongside male youth but in a different capacity. The highest male cohort is the *bariise*, or senior old men, who form the top council responsible for significant decision-making within the community. This council, *tɬahoó bariise*, is led by the *kahamusamo* or *waawitamo* 'chief or leader', usually from the chiefdom clan. While primarily involving older men, older and middle-aged women, as well as male youth, may be invited for special occasions, but young women and girls do not participate. Transition to the

bariise cohort often involves specific criteria or rituals, signifying the completion of one's duties and acceptance into the highest ranks of decision-making. As we can see, seniority is very much associated with superiority in this community (see Widlok, this volume, for an alternative).

Life-stage distinctions in the Iraqw community are essential for defining social relationships and hierarchies, functioning as a form of social indexicality. They express respect, clarify senior-junior relationships, and convey social status through specific linguistic terms. Although not all terms are directly used in address, they are crucial for understanding the community's social structure in interactions. Further details on their use in specific address practices will be discussed in the next section.

4.2 Types and usage of address terms in Iraqw

Address terms are crucial in the Iraqw community for fostering familial relationships, expressing respect, and maintaining social hierarchy. Furthermore, they play a significant role in attracting attention, establishing connections, and upholding traditional values. These terms not only reflect cultural values but are also employed in various contexts, including greetings, conversations, and formal gatherings. Moreover, the choice of address terms is influenced by factors such as age, seniority, gender, and social roles. This paper specifically focuses on how age and seniority manifest in address practices. In this regard, it identifies six types of address forms: kinship terms, names, titles, second person pronouns, endearments, and attention-getting interjections. Table 2 presents a detailed list of these kinship terms.

For instance, specific terms like *baabá/aayí* for parents, and *aakó/aamá* for grandparents convey respect and acknowledge seniority within the family hierarchy. On the other hand, terms such as *hatnangóʔ/nangwnangóʔ,* *hathoʔó/nangwahoʔó,* and *hathiyawóʔ/nangwahiyawóʔ* are used for younger family members, reflecting hierarchical relationships and cultural expectations. Additionally, some kinship terms, including *hatʔamá/nangwʔamá* and *hatʔaáy/nagwʔaáy,* emphasize familial connections without regard to age or seniority. These terms highlight the family bond itself rather than the hierarchical status.

It is noteworthy that certain kinship terms are used exclusively within family contexts. For example, specific terms are reserved for addressing relationships such as between a paternal aunt and her brother's children, between a maternal uncle and his sister's children, and among children of the mother's sister. These terms are deeply embedded in the cultural and social fabric of familial relationships and are not used outside the family. Conversely, some kinship terms are extended to non-familial individuals in contexts where respect or a familial-like relationship is conveyed. For instance, a term that denotes respect and seniority within the family might also be used to show similar respect towards a non-relative, reflecting broader cultural norms. Therefore, the use of these terms varies depending on the relational context, age, seniority, and whether the address is directed towards a family member or a non-family member.

Another aspect of address practices involves the use of personal names, particularly first names, which are significantly shaped by the age-status relationship between interlocutors. Commonly, names are used symmetrically among peers or individuals of similar age and social status, such as between children or men, excluding married women. This practice denotes familiarity and equality in relationships. In contrast, elders use personal names to address juniors, reflecting an asymmetric relationship characterized by authority and respect while reinforcing hierarchical order. Juniors are not permitted to use names when addressing seniors, which highlights their lower status and the need for respect. Moreover, although

Table 2: Iraqw address terms and their possible referents

Iraqw term and English gloss	Possible addressees
baabá (*taatá*) 'father'	one's own father, father's male siblings, paternal aunt's husband, husband of mother's sister, a man of similar age to one's father
baabú niiná 'young father'	one's paternal aunt's son
aayí 'mother'	one's own mother, mother's elder sisters, wife of father's older brothers, a woman of similar age to one's father.
aayó 'wife'	one's wife, one's own mother, wife of one's own brother, a woman of similar age to one's wife
aayí niiná 'young mother'	one's mother's younger sister or paternal aunt's daughter, wife of father's young brother
aamá 'grandmother'	one's grandmother, one's wife, old woman, endearment term
aakó 'grandfather'	one's grandfather, one's husband, old man, endearment term
ayiis(h)igá 'paternal aunt'	one's paternal aunt
maamáy 'maternal uncle'	one's maternal uncle
harmaamáy 'maternal uncle's wife'	one's maternal uncle's wife
hatʔaáy 'sister'	daughter of one's father's maternal uncle, daughter of one's paternal aunt's daughter
nangwʔaáy 'brother'	son of one's father's maternal uncle, son of one's paternal aunt's son
hathatóʔ 'granddaughter'	one's daughter's daughter
nangwhatóʔ 'grandson'	one's daughter's son
hatnangóʔ 'granddaughter'	one's son's daughter
nangwnangóʔ 'grandson'	one's son's son
hathhooʔó 'niece'	one's sister's daughter (daughter of sister)
nangwhoʔó (*ohooʔó*) 'nephew'	one's sister's son (daughter of son)
hatħiyawóʔ 'niece'	one's brother's daughter
nangwħiyawoʔ 'nephew'	one's brother's son
hatʔamá 'cousin'	one's mother's sister's daughter
nangwʔamá 'cousin'	one's mother's sister's son
hatmaamáy 'cousin'	one's mother's brother's daughter
naanú maamáy 'cousin'	one's mother's brother's son
deedé 'elder sister'	one's elder female sibling
naaná 'elder brother'	one's elder male sibling
hatóʔ 'daughter'	one's daughter, granddaughter, a girl of similar age to one's granddaughter

nangóʔ 'son'	one's son, grandson, a boy of similar age to one's grandson
kumbáʔ 'male in-law'	one's sister's husband or wife's brother
deená 'woman after initiation'	one's married female sibling, sister-in-law, any married woman of similar age to one's sister
dasí 'daughter'	one's daughter, a girl of similar age to one's daughter
garmá 'son'	one's son, a boy of similar age to one's son

names indicate familiarity, using them alone to address seniors or individuals of higher status may be perceived as disrespectful. Therefore, titles or honorifics such as *aakó* 'Mr.' or *aamá* 'Mrs.', as in *aakó Burá* or *aamá Burá*, are added to show appropriate respect when addressing seniors or individuals of higher status. This practice ensures that hierarchical distinctions are maintained and respect is appropriately conveyed.

The use of titles reflects social roles and reinforces hierarchical structures. Titles can be categorized into three main types. Firstly, honorific titles such as *aakó* 'Mr.' and *aamá* 'Mrs.' have just been discussed. When used by juniors alongside names, these honorifics ensure respectful interactions aligned with social hierarchies, reflecting asymmetrical relationships. Conversely, these honorifics can also be used among peers of the same age or social status, representing a symmetrical relationship where both parties are on equal footing. Using a name among peers emphasizes a casual and familiar connection, while incorporating a title adds an element of respect and formality. Both forms can often be used interchangeably in social interactions, depending on the context and the relationship between individuals. Generally, names are more commonly used among peer men. In contrast, peer women tend to prefer titles plus names when addressing each other, while they often prefer to use names rather than titles when addressing peer men. Secondly, age-specific titles such as *laqwoló* or *haywaáʔ* 'young children', *masoombá* 'adults', *dageenó* 'initiated women', *ʕamatłiité* 'young girls', and *ʕameená* 'mature women' denote specific life stages and social

roles within the Iraqw community. These titles are typically used by seniors to address juniors in groups, highlighting an asymmetrical relationship where seniors recognize the juniors' life stage and status. In contrast, titles such as *aayí* or *amʔí* 'old ladies, dear mothers' and *bariisé* 'elders' are used by juniors to address seniors, reflecting the juniors' lower status and showing deference to the seniors' more advanced life stage and social role. Thirdly, traditional titles such as *qwałaaramo* 'healer', *kahamusamo* 'spiritual leader', *waawitamo* 'king or chief', and *aarusamo* 'prophet' signify individuals who hold esteemed traditional roles within the community. The use of these titles is context-specific, with juniors typically addressing such individuals with *aakó* for males and *aamá* for females. Although traditional titles are not commonly used in daily interactions, they reflect the importance of hierarchical roles and the preservation of cultural heritage. For example, interactions with traditional leaders are marked by titles such as *kahamusamo* 'respected leader', reflecting respect for their authority. During dispute settlements, mediators or elders are addressed as *bariisé*, acknowledging their esteemed role. For instance, one might say, '*Bariisé*, we seek your wisdom on this matter'. Additionally, address terms are essential in formal settings like community councils and family events. Terms such as *bariisé* 'senior old men', *in baabá* 'dear fathers', and *in aayí* 'dear mothers' are used to recognize participants' roles and statuses. For instance, a participant might say *Lawoó dohúng Bariisé, sagaloarhung a harħifaan*, 'How are you elders, we value your guidance in this meeting.' Address terms are also used to invite

different groups to participate in discussions. For example, *In aayí axay ilawatsare daandu axwesantiye?* 'Dear mothers, could you share your opinions on this issue?' invites women to contribute, while *Masoombá, kungáʔ mao-inda baraá daandú axwesantiye?* 'Youth, what are your thoughts on this matter?' encourages young people to share their views. In clan or family gatherings or meetings, seniors are addressed with the appropriate kinship terms to acknowledge their respected roles.

Furthermore, general address terms such as *dasí* 'girl', *dasú* 'girls', *garmá* 'boy,' *daqaáy* 'boys', *naʕaay* 'child', *naʕií* 'children', and *deená* 'sister, colleague' are employed across various relational contexts. In address practices these terms are typically used to address younger individuals or those of lower status, reflecting informal or familiar relationships in both familial and non-familial settings, meaning daughter and son. Notably, *deená* is an exception, as it is commonly used among peers, particularly married women, or by siblings to address married female siblings, emphasizing a sense of camaraderie or shared experience. These general address terms categorize individuals based on their life stages or social roles, providing a means to address others without specifying detailed familial relationships, and they play a crucial role in maintaining social harmony by acknowledging age and status within the community.

Another form of address in the Iraqw community involves the use of second person pronouns. These pronouns include *king* for females, *kúng* for males, and *kungáʔ* for group address. Notably, these pronouns are used by peers and older individuals to address younger people, reflecting familiarity and a lower hierarchical status. However, juniors do not use the singular pronouns when addressing seniors, as doing so would imply a lack of respect. Instead, only *kungáʔ* can be used by juniors to communicate politeness when addressing seniors, particularly when expressing feelings of disappointment, ensuring that the interaction remains respectful. When a junior uses *kungáʔ* in conversation with a senior, it is often paired with a kinship term, such as in the expression, *Aayí, kungáʔ bareme muruʕaymarʔeéʔ una fakeʔ* 'Mother, why did you (and others) finish my food?', spoken in a very gentle and polite tone. In this context, the junior uses *kuunga* even when addressing directly the senior who is alone. The plural form *kungáʔ* is sometimes used to emphasize respect and politeness, while second person singular pronouns are reserved for addressing juniors and peers.

Further devices for addressing others are attention-getting interjections such as *xayén*, *xaygán*, *xaysiirí*, and *xaysagén*, meaning 'Hi!'. These interjections are used to capture the addressee's attention and vary according to the speaker's and addressee's age and social status. When addressing peers, both *xaygán* and *xayén* are used for individuals of either gender, with *xayén* being a simplified form of *xaygán*. Commonly, men prefer to use *xaygán* to address each other and use *xayén* when addressing women. In contrast, women prefer to use *xayén* to address both men and women. This pattern reflects a casual and informal approach in interactions among individuals of similar age or social status, emphasizing familiarity and equality. In contrast, *xaysagén* is used by seniors to address juniors, particularly in group settings. Additionally, *xaysiirí* is used to address women of the same age or social status and is also employed by senior females to address junior females. While *xayén* and *xaygán* can occasionally be used to address younger individuals, juniors do not use these interjections when addressing seniors. Thus, *xayén*, *xaygán*, and *xaysiirí* are primarily used among peers, while *xaysagén* and names are employed by seniors to capture juniors' attention before greetings. This distinction highlights the senior's authority and right to respect in their interactions with juniors.

To further illustrate address practices, two endearment forms, *aama* and *aako*, are used to express familiarity and affection within

the Iraqw community. *Aama*, meaning 'grandmother', and *aako*, used for 'grandfather', have both extended beyond their familial origins to convey warmth and endearment. These terms are typically used to show affection toward juniors, regardless of whether their names are known, an example of what has been called 'address inversion' (see, e.g., Kraska-Szlenk 2009 on Swahili). For example, an older sibling might use *aama* to address a younger female sibling and *aako* to address a younger male sibling in a fond manner. Endearment forms are also used in greetings, such as *Asayuuta aama?* 'Are you fine, my dear?' for females and *Asayuuta aako?* 'Are you fine, dear?' for males. Although *aama* and *aako* are generally used to address juniors, there are specific occasions when they are also employed to address seniors. For instance, these endearment forms may be used to express sympathy, such as when a senior is ill, grieving, or going through a difficult time. Examples include *Orok aama* 'I feel sorry for you, dear' and *łaqwa aidoma aako?* 'How is your health, dear? How are you feeling dear?'. In these contexts, a junior might use *aama* or *aako* to offer comfort and show empathy. It is noteworthy that while *aama* and *aako* are primarily used by females, men rarely use *aako* to address each other or *aama* to address females. When men do use *aako*, it is typically directed towards younger individuals rather than those of the same age or older. This reflects a more reserved approach among men in expressing affection compared to women. Consequently, *aama* and *aako* are predominantly used by older individuals to convey warmth and affection, even when addressing younger people. Their usage underlines the seniority of the speaker, reinforcing the hierarchical structure of the community while emphasizing emotional connection.

As we have seen, address practices within the Iraqw community are deeply intertwined with social hierarchy, age, and personal relationships. The use of various address forms such as kinship terms, names, titles, pronouns,

and attention-getting interjections reflects the community's values and social structure. These practices not only reinforce respect and social order but also demonstrate adaptability to external influences and evolving cultural dynamics. The detailed ways in which address terms vary across different types of relationships reveal the complexity of interaction within the community.

4.3. Address practices according to relationship

The choice of address terms in the Iraqw community reflects and constructs the social structure, serving as a form of social indexicality. These terms embody the community's values and hierarchical structures, revealing how relationships are influenced by age, seniority, and social roles. The interplay between address practices and social indexicality highlights the significance of these terms in shaping and expressing the community's hierarchical relationships. In this part of the paper, I consider how the type of relationship – familial, affinal, and non-kin – affects address term choices.

4.3.1 Familial relationships

In addressing immediate family members, specific kin terms (see Table 1) reflect respect and social hierarchy. The term *baabá* (or *taatá*) is used for one's father and his male siblings, while *baabú niiná*, meaning 'small father', is reserved for the son of a paternal aunt. *Aayí* is used for one's mother, elder female siblings, and wives of the father's elder siblings, whereas *aayí niina*, meaning 'small mother', applies to younger female siblings, daughters of paternal aunts, and wives of the father's younger male siblings. That is, we see that seniority distinctions within the parental generation play a role in the choice of kin terms. *Aayí* 'mother' is preferred for mothers, as reported by women during interviews, who stated that it recognizes and affirms the familial bond and respect

between mothers and children. Conversely, addressing them as *aayó* 'mother', a term meant for husbands, creates discomfort and feelings of disrespect, blurring roles and confusing relationships. I observed similar sentiments in my interactions, noting my mother's preference for *aayí* over *aayó*. Thus, using *aayó* for one's mother is considered impolite.

Addressing senior family members by name is not permitted; names may only be used in the third person, highlighting the Iraqw community's emphasis on respect and hierarchy. Parents typically address young children by name, while kin terms like *dasí* 'daughter', *garmá* 'son', and *dasú* 'daughters' are used for married children, with married females' names used less frequently. I experienced this shift after marriage when my parents stopped using my name and that of my elder sisters. This change was also reported during interviews, reflecting a common practice in the community. Occasionally, terms like *ható?* 'my daughter' and *nangó?* 'my son' express intimacy, but they are less common than the general terms *dasí* 'daughter' and *garmá* 'son'.

For grandparents, the kinship terms *aamá* 'grandmother' and *aakó* 'grandfather' apply to both paternal and maternal grandparents, extending to their siblings and spouses. These terms reflect respect and are obligatory when addressing one's grandparents. Grandparents use specific compound forms for grandchildren, such as *hatható?* for the daughter of a daughter and *nangwható?* for the son of a daughter. Collective terms include *haywáható?* 'children of daughter' and *haywánangó?* 'children of son', derived from *hat* 'daughter' and *nangw* 'son'. While there is an expectation for grandchildren to use these kinship terms, grandparents often address them with names, kin terms, or nicknames, indicating flexibility in social roles. In some cases, both grandchildren and grandparents may use the same kin terms for each other. For example:

Granddaughter and grandfather:

| Grandfather: | *aamá* | 'my wife' |
| Granddaughter: | *aakó* | 'my husband' |

Grandson and grandmother:

| Grandmother: | *aakó* | 'my husband' |
| Grandson: | *aamá* | 'my wife' |

These playful exchanges, symbolizing reciprocal relationships, blur traditional lines of seniority. I have observed this interaction between my grandparents and me, as well as between my children and their grandparents; my mother often addressed my son with kinship terms and terms associated with a husband, while my father did the same with my daughter. Interview reports indicate that in joking contexts, a grandchild may address their grandfather by name, though this is less common with grandmothers. Children often remain unfamiliar with their mothers' and grandmothers' names, as these are rarely used in direct address.

Traditionally, sibling address terms in the Iraqw community reflected both age and status. Older male siblings were addressed as *naaná*, while older female siblings were called *deedé*. Younger siblings are generally addressed by their given names, except for married younger siblings, who are referred to as *deená*, meaning 'initiated woman' or 'married one'. These terms are often used alongside pronouns and attention-getters. However, these indigenous terms have been replaced by Swahili equivalents like *dadá* 'sister' and *kaká* 'brother'. As one consultant noted, "We don't use names for older or married female siblings, regardless of their age, and now use Swahili terms like *kaká* and *dadá*." The use of names for juniors reflects their lower status, while kin terms for older or married siblings signify a higher standing based on age and social role. This highlights how social indexicality shapes sibling address

practices, even with the adoption of Swahili terms for elders.

Other kinship terms for the parental generation include *maamáy* 'maternal uncle', *harmaamáy* 'maternal uncle's wife', and a*yiis(h) igá* 'paternal aunt'. Based on my familial interactions and interviews, paternal aunts and maternal uncles are obligatorily addressed with these terms regardless of their age, signifying seniority and reinforcing cultural norms. Names, pronouns, and attention-getters are generally not permitted; however, endearment forms may be used in specific contexts, such as when expressing sympathy.

Terms such as *hatʔamá* 'daughter of mother's sister' and *nangwʔamá* 'son of mother's sister' denote relationships between maternal cousins, reflecting strong connections through the mother's side of the family. These blood ties link women to their descendants and their *daaʔawi* 'uterine kin' "in a web of affective ties" (Snyder 1997, 565), restricting marriage within this network. Additionally, *hatʔaáy* refers to the 'daughter of one's father's maternal uncle' or the 'daughter of one's paternal aunt's daughter', while *nangwʔaáy* denotes the 'son of one's father's maternal uncle' or the 'son of one's paternal aunt's son'. These terms represent more distant relationships on the paternal side, where familial ties begin to dilute, allowing for potential marriage between the children of *hatʔaáy* and *nangwʔaáy*. Kinship terms are obligatory for addressing older and married individuals, while younger and unmarried individuals may be addressed by either kinship terms or names.

One's position in the kinship hierarchy is more important than age in a chronological sense. For instance, an aunt's son shares the same status as a father's younger male sibling and is addressed as *baabú niiná* 'young father', even though these individuals belong to different generations from the etic anthropological perspective. Similarly, an aunt's daughter, who could easily be younger than ego, holds the same status as a mother's younger sister and

the wife of a father's younger brother, and is addressed as *aayí niina* 'young mother'. Juniors are often addressed by general terms, pronouns, or their names, with attention-getting interjections like *xaysagén* used in groups. The variety of options for addressing juniors indicates that kinship terms are not as strictly required for them as they are for seniors, where honorification is more important (see Fleming and Slotta 2018).

4.3.2 Affine address practices

In the Iraqw community, addressing affinal kin involves specific terms that reflect respect and social status, consistently with cultural norms. In-laws typically use parent-child kinship terms when addressing one another. For example, a daughter-in-law refers to her father-in-law as *baaba* and her mother-in-law as *aayí*. Conversely, parents-in-law address their daughter-in-law as *dasí* 'daughter' and their son-in-law as *garmá* 'son'. It is considered inappropriate for a daughter-in-law or son-in-law to address or refer to their in-laws by name, even in their absence. This practice, known as *wakaari* (Mous 2021) or 'in-law name avoidance', accentuates cultural norms of respect and hierarchy. For instance, my parents began avoiding the name Anna for my daughter because it is shared by two of their sons' wives. Instead, they addressed my daughter by her traditional Iraqw name, *Hhokí*. Due to name avoidance, parents also refrain from using their children's names if they are similar to those of their in-laws.

Kinship terms for addressing spouses reflect mutual respect and personal identity. Terms like *hare* 'wife' and *ħawata* 'husband' are reserved for third person references rather than used for direct address. For direct address, a wife may call her husband *aakó* 'husband' or *aakoʔeéʔ* 'my husband'. However, *aakó* can also mean 'grandfather', 'master', or 'old man' in different contexts, highlighting its specific relational meaning in marital

settings. A wife might also use *kúng* 'you' or *xayén* 'Hi!'. Conversely, a husband typically uses terms such as *aayó* 'wife', *aamarʔeéʔ* 'my wife', or *aamarí* 'this woman' to address his wife, with *-ee* as a possessive suffix and *-ri* as a demonstrative suffix. *Aamá* can mean 'wife' in this context but may also refer to 'grandmother' or 'old woman' when used for elderly female relatives. Additionally, a husband may use *deena* followed by his wife's father's name (e.g., *deenaá Bura*, meaning 'daughter of Bura') to show familial respect, along with *kíng* 'you' or *xayén/xaygán* 'Hi!'.

A wife and her sister-in-law use *deená*, a term specifically reserved for married sisters-in-law, to address each other. For younger, unmarried sisters-in-law, names are used, showing that *deená* applies to married individuals while names are reserved for younger, unmarried ones. When addressing her husband's brother, a wife uses terms similar to those she uses for her husband but avoids names specific to her brother-in-law. Notably, her brother-in-law addresses her with the same term her husband uses for her, reflecting a reciprocal relationship. For a very old sister-in-law, a husband may also use *deená* to convey respect for seniority based on age. Both brothers and sisters-in-law do not address their brother's wife by her name. In contrast, a husband addresses his wife's sisters with terms like *deená* for married and older sisters-in-law, as well as with other terms similar to those he uses for his wife. For younger sisters-in-law, he uses *ħeeramó* 'younger sister-in-law', regardless of marital status, while unmarried younger sisters-in-law are addressed by their names. Although *kumbaoʔó* 'female-in-law' refers to a female relative by marriage in third person contexts, it is not used for direct address. The term *kumbáʔ* is used by brothers-in-law to refer to each other, meaning the 'husband of one's sister' or the 'brother of one's wife'. Thus, the use of *deená* for older sisters-in-law signifies respect for both seniority and marital status, while names are reserved for younger

sisters-in-law and husbands' brothers, regardless of age.

4.3.3 Addressing non-relatives

In the Iraqw community, addressing senior non-kin involves specific terms that reflect respect and acknowledge social hierarchy. Kinship terms such as *baabá* 'father' and *aayí* 'mother' are extended to address older non-relatives of similar age to one's parents, while *aamá* 'grandmother' and *aakó* 'grandfather' refer to elders on a level with one's grandparents. The term *deená* is employed for any married woman of similar status or age, emphasizing seniority based on marital status. Titles are often combined with names, as in *aakó Burá* 'Mr. Bura' and *aamá Burá* 'Mrs. Bura'. Endearment forms such as *aamá* for females and *aakó* for males are used affectionately. Consultants reported that they often use *aamá* or *aakó* to address older non-kin when they are sick or going through difficulties, reflecting both affection and empathy. In everyday interactions, juniors are expected to use kinship terms rather than other forms when addressing older non-kin, taking into account physical appearance and age similarities to kin members.

Non-kin juniors are addressed using familial kinship terms for one's son's children, such as *hatnangóʔ* 'son's daughter', *nangwnangóʔ* 'son's son', and *haywanangóʔ* 'grandchildren', which are also commonly used for non-kin of a similar age to one's grandchildren. In contrast, terms for a daughter's children, such as *hathatóʔ* 'daughter's daughter', *nangwhatóʔ* 'daughter's son', and *haywahatóʔ* 'daughter's children', are not used in this context, reflecting a preference for terms related to one's sons' children due to the patriarchal nature of Iraqw society. This indicates the significance of paternal lineage, where children inherit their father's identity. The researcher experienced being addressed as *hatnangóʔ* rather than *hathatóʔ* by non-kin of a similar age to her grandparents. This is echoed

by consultants who confirm that they use kinship terms for sons' children when addressing non-kin grandchildren. Additionally, names such as *dasí* 'daughter', *garmá* 'son', *daqaáy* 'sons', *dasú* 'daughters', and *ʕamatɬiité* 'girls and young women', as well as *dageenó* 'initiated women', are used for non-kin. Although the practice of *marmo* 'women's initiation', where girls graduated to become *dageenó*, no longer exists, the term is still used as an address form for girls of that age. Juniors are also addressed by life-stage names, such as *laqwoló*, *naʕií*, and *haywaʕeéʔ*, meaning 'children', and *masoombá* for both males and females. Additionally, the endearments *aamá* for females and *aakó* for males are prevalent, alongside attention-getters and second person pronouns. Ultimately, the choice of terms is defined by the addressee's age. For age-mates, the term *deená* is used to refer to married women of similar age, reflecting their status within the social hierarchy. Pronouns, endearments, and attention-getting interjections are commonly employed. Men use *aayó* 'wife' to address a woman of similar age to their wife. Names and titles are typically reserved for unmarried men and children but are not commonly used for women.

Thus, the choice of address forms within the Iraqw community illustrates both distinct and overlapping aspects across family, affinal, and non-relative contexts. While the mechanisms governing address practices differ, emphasizing relational status in immediate families, a combination of age and marital status in affinal ties, and age in interactions with non-relatives, a common thread persists. All practices are deeply rooted in the cultural values of respect, hierarchy, and social cohesion, highlighting the critical role of language as a social index across relationships.

5 Conclusion

The address practices within the Iraqw community as described here illuminate the linguistic manifestation of age-grade status, revealing a complex linguistic framework that reflects and reinforces familial hierarchies and social norms. These practices are intertwined with age, seniority, and relational status, providing a structured approach to interpersonal communication that emphasizes hierarchical relationships and respect for elders. Address terms differentiate individuals based on marital status and age, illustrating how the Iraqw community defines social roles and expectations. The use of specific terms in marital contexts highlights the balance between personal identity and societal expectations. Names, pronouns, and attention-getting interjections are often reserved for younger individuals and those of equal or lower age status, while the avoidance of direct name usage among in-laws and seniors emphasizes the hierarchical nature of Iraqw social structures. In non-kin contexts, age influences address terms, with individuals assessing age through physical appearance and social status, which affects their choice of respectful terms. Conversely, in kin contexts, relational roles and kinship structures take precedence, rendering age and seniority less significant in determining address practices among family members. This illustrates how address practices maintain respect and reinforce social hierarchies across different age groups and familial roles. Furthermore, as contemporary influences reshape cultural norms, future research could explore how these practices evolve and adapt, offering deeper insights into intergenerational interactions and the ongoing influence of language on social structures.

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