



Honorific Address and Linguistic Politeness in *Uab Meto*: A Sociolinguistic Study of the Numponi Speech Community

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Abstract: This study describes the forms and meanings of noble address terms and analyzes their functions within the politeness system of the *Uab Meto* (Manlea dialect) speech community in Numponi Village, Malaka Regency. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed, with data collected through participant observation and semi-structured interviews with three informants, one nobleman and two traditional elders. Data were transcribed, classified, and analyzed using sociolinguistic and politeness theories. The findings identify two basic noble address terms: *Pah* (male) and *Tua* (female), which develop into four derivative forms, *Pah Nasi*, *Tua Nasi*, *Pah Ana*, and *Tua Ana*. These terms encode gender, age, and social status while simultaneously functioning as cultural symbols of respect, politeness, and communal identity. The use reflects Leech's politeness principles, particularly the maxims of tact, approbation, and modesty, which are central to maintaining social harmony within the Numponi community. These findings suggest that noble address terms in *Uab Meto* are not merely linguistic conventions but serve as vital mechanisms for preserving cultural values and social order within the community. Therefore, documentation and conscious transmission of these address terms are essential for safeguarding the sociolinguistic heritage of the *Uab Meto* speech community in the face of cultural and linguistic change.

Keywords: Sociolinguistics, Address Terms, Language Politeness, *Uab Meto*

1. Introduction

Language is a fundamental medium of human communication, enabling individuals to convey information, express identity, and build social relationships (Jakobson, 1960). Beyond its referential function, language carries social meanings, particularly through the norms of politeness that govern interpersonal interaction. (Lakoff, 1975) defines politeness as a system of interpersonal relations designed to minimize conflict and facilitate smooth communication, while (Kridalaksana, 2008) frames linguistic politeness as an awareness of the dignity of others, manifested both in spoken and written language. One of the most direct expressions of linguistic politeness is the use of address terms, words or expressions used to greet, refer to, or acknowledge others, which serve not only communicative but also social and cultural functions.

The significance of polite language becomes particularly evident when its absence leads to social conflict. Cases of verbal defamation and disrespectful communication, such as the reported case involving public figure Olla Ramlan (Noviansah, 2024), illustrate how impolite language can damage social relationships and reputations. This underscores the critical role that politeness, especially through address terms, plays in maintaining social harmony. Scholarly attention to address terms and politeness has grown considerably within sociolinguistics. (Wardhaugh, 2006) establishes that social factors such as class, gender, and cultural norms fundamentally shape language use, while (Holmes, 2001) demonstrates that language both reflects and constructs social identity within communities. (Leech, 1983) further articulates politeness through a set of maxims, including tact, approbation, and modesty, that regulate how speakers navigate social relationships through language. (Hymes, 1972) adds that communicative

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competence extends beyond grammatical knowledge to encompass the socially appropriate use of language in specific cultural contexts.

Despite this growing body of literature, significant gaps remain. First, most existing studies on address terms in Indonesian regional languages have focused on widely spoken languages such as Javanese, Balinese, and Sundanese, leaving smaller regional languages considerably underrepresented. Second, while some research has been conducted on *Uab Meto* (UM) as a linguistic system, these studies have largely addressed phonological and morphological aspects, with little attention given to its sociolinguistic dimensions, particularly the use of address terms. Third, and most critically, no prior study has investigated the noble address terms specific to the Manlea dialect of Uab Meto as spoken in Numponi Village, Malaka Regency. The community of Numponi is unique in that it is predominantly composed of noble descendants, making it a distinctive speech community in which social hierarchy is actively encoded in everyday language use.

The focus on aristocratic communities is theoretically and socially significant for several reasons. Noble address terms such as *Pah* and *Tua* are not arbitrary linguistic choices, they are socially loaded expressions that encode gender, genealogical status, and hierarchical positioning within the community. Their use signals deference, respect, and cultural continuity, values that are increasingly at risk as younger generations shift toward more standardized or informal speech. Examining how these terms function within Leech's politeness framework therefore offers insight into how language mediates power, identity, and social cohesion in a stratified community.

The novelty of this research lies in three dimensions. First, it documents a previously unstudied set of address terms in the Manlea dialect of *Uab Meto*, contributing to the descriptive record of endangered regional language varieties in Eastern Indonesia. Second, it applies established politeness theory, specifically Leech's maxims, to a non-Western, hierarchically organized speech community, testing the cross-cultural applicability of these frameworks. Third, it treats noble address terms not merely as linguistic forms but as cultural symbols that carry meaning beyond their referential content. Theoretically, this study contributes to sociolinguistic discussions of address systems, honorifics, and the intersection of language and social stratification. Practically, it provides a foundation for language documentation and cultural preservation efforts in Numponi Village, ensuring that the sociolinguistic heritage encoded in these address terms is recorded and transmitted to future generations before it is lost to language shift or cultural erosion.

2. Materials and Methods

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach, as qualitative research aims to understand phenomena holistically through description in the form of words and language within a natural context (Moleong, 2014). The research was conducted in Numponi Village, East Malaka Subdistrict, Malaka Regency, which was selected purposively because the community actively preserves noble address terms as a form of linguistic politeness rooted in its historical social hierarchy. Informants were selected through purposive sampling based on four criteria, native speakers of the Manlea dialect, minimum 20 years of residency, active users of noble address terms, direct knowledge of the noble social structure. Data were collected through participant observation in natural communicative settings and semi-structured interviews conducted in the Manlea dialect to ensure authenticity, in accordance with Sudaryanto's (1993) principle that linguistic data must be obtained through direct observation of language in use. The collected data were then analyzed through four sequential stages: coding to identify and categorize meaningful units of address terms, thematic analysis to group recurring patterns into broader themes, discourse analysis to examine how address terms construct social identity and hierarchy, and sociolinguistic interpretation using Leech's (1993) politeness maxims tact, approbation, and modesty to explain their function within the community's politeness system. Data validity was ensured through source triangulation by cross-checking observational and interview data, and member checking by returning key

findings to informants for verification, thereby strengthening the credibility and dependability of the research findings (Denzin, 1978).

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Forms of Address Based on Gender, Age, and Social Status

There are two basic address terms used by commoners when addressing nobles. For male nobles, the term *Pah* is employed, which in its lexical meaning refers to “territory,” while in its social meaning it signifies “king” or “territorial leader.” Meanwhile, in addressing female nobles, the term *Tua* is used, which carries the social meaning of “queen” or “female ruler of the territory.” From these two basic terms, four derivative address forms emerge: *Pah Nasi*, *Tua Nasi*, *Pah Ana*, and *Tua Ana*. These terms are used to address nobles according to their gender, age, and social status in Numponi village, as described below:

a. Forms of address based on gender

There are four terms used to address nobles based on gender, there are: (a) *Pah Nasi* = used to address a male noble, (b) *Tua Nasi* = used to address a female noble, (c) *Pah Ana* = used to address a young male noble (prince), (d) *Tua Ana* = used to address a young female noble (princess).

b. Forms of Address Based on Age and Social Status

From the four address terms mentioned above, they can be categorized according to the addressee’s age and social status, ranging from the youngest to the eldest noble, as follows: (a) *Pah Nasi*: is used to address the eldest male noble as the leader or king. (b) *Tua Nasi*: is used to address the female noble who serves as the queen or the wife of the king. (c) *Pah Ana*: is used to address the prince or son of the king. (d) *Tua Ana*: is used to address the princess or daughter of the king.

In addition, there are address terms used for non-noble members of society who serve the king, as follows: (a) *Bai Kaot*: a title for a male guard or attendant. (b) *Fanai Kaot*: a title for a female guard or attendant. (c) *Ate*: a title for a servant or person who serves the king and the nobles.

3.2. Selection of Word Forms and the Use of Address Terms in Language Polite Based on Situation

Polite forms of address are employed both in formal and informal situations during social interactions between nobles and the common people in Numponi village, it can be seen from the analyze below:

a. Context: Inviting the King and Queen to attend a traditional house ceremony

Ba’i mnasi fanai mnasi bea nao tasini na pah nok tua sin (“Attention everyone, tomorrow someone must go to invite the King and Queen.”), Usi Pah nok Tua sin hai ate em masini na rais uim reu at nae, (“Your Majesties, King and Queen, we the common people have come to invite you to the traditional house ceremony.”)

b. Context: Escorting the King and Queen to an event

- 1) Usi Pah nok Tua sin hai ate em miskau Pah nok Tua sin nawen fain rasi (“Your Majesties, King and Queen, we the common people have come to escort you, the King and Queen, on the way to the event.”)
- 2) Usi Pah nok Tua sin ho ate neam tas’kau ke fain rasi ben (“Your Majesties, King and Queen, we have come so that we may depart together for the event.”)

c. Context: Offering betel nut to the King and Queen at the beginning of the ceremony

- 1) Hei ba’i mnasi fanai mnasi, kabi sa hai ate hateut na Pah Nasi/Tua Nasi/Pah Ana/Tua Ana sin matkon namteot nainen misaeb he niammon ben.

- (“Honored elders, the betel nut prepared by the attendants for the King, Queen, Prince, or Princess is already set in front; please kindly partake.”)
- 2) Hei Pah nok Tua sin hout mamat sa hai ate hateut na hit matkon kan tom na Pah nok Tua sin matnon hai ate parua.
 (“Your Majesties, King and Queen, the betel nut that we attendants have presented before you may be found lacking; therefore, we humbly beg your pardon.”)
- d. Context: Inviting the King and Queen to dine
- 1) Usi Pah, Tua, nok ba’i mnasi, fanai mnasi hout-hout, na’a’mon namteut nainen te misaeb he niam’mon tan hai aet meis haraik ia.
 (“Your Majesties, King and Queen, along with the elders and attendants, the food and drinks placed before us are ready to be enjoyed.”)
- 2) Hei mnai’son hout-hout na’a’mon at hit matkon fe mui misaeb he niam’mon naom tao ten, bian nut inhoran fe nabe naon tao ten, bian nut ka nabe nainen hai ate at haraik ia.
 (“The food and drinks before us are still available. If anyone wishes to take more, please feel free; however, if others are already satisfied, it is fine we remain ready to serve.”)

3.3. Discussion

1. Forms of Address Based on Gender, Age, and Social Status

a. The term *Pah Nasi*

The term *Pah Nasi* consists of two elements, they are *Pah* and *Nasi*. The term *Pah Nasi* is a compound expression that consists of two lexical elements, *Pah* and *Nasi*. Morphologically, *Pah* is a free morpheme functioning as a noun that serves as a form of address for male nobles or royal descendants within the Uab Meto community, while *Nasi* refers to a particular territorial domain or ancestral land. When these two morphemes are combined, they form a compound noun with a noun + noun structure in which *Pah* acts as the head and *Nasi* serves as an attributive modifier that indicates territorial or cultural belonging. According to Ramlan (2001) in (Noviansah, n.d.), morphology concerns the structure and formation of words that generate new meanings.

Semantically, the term *Pah Nasi* carries both literal and extended meanings. Lexically, *Pah* means “territory” or “land,” and *Nasi* refers to a specific place or region, so *Pah Nasi* can be interpreted as “the ruler of the land” or “the lord of the territory”. However, the term has undergone a semantic extension that goes beyond its literal meaning. In social and cultural contexts, *Pah Nasi* is used to refer to a king or the eldest male noble who leads the community. This semantic development reflects the process by which physical or territorial meanings are extended to express social status and authority.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, *Pah Nasi* reflects the deep connection between language, culture, and social hierarchy within the Uab Meto community. The use of this term serves as a linguistic marker of social status and politeness, illustrating the norms of respect and hierarchy that shape interpersonal communication in Numponi Village. As (Agha, 2007) explain, address forms in speech communities function as registers that index social identities and encode relationships of respect and authority. In a broader perspective, (Errington, 1988) demonstrates that linguistic etiquette in traditional communities, including the use of specific address forms, is a semiotic system that communities social structure, power, and cultural belonging. Furthermore, (Yule, 1996) emphasizes that pragmatic meaning in address terms goes beyond their literal referential content, encompassing the social and cultural dimensions of speaker-hearer relationships.

b. The term *Tua Nasi*

Tua Nasi consists of two which are *Tua* and *Nasi*. *Tua* and *Nasi*, each carrying distinct linguistic and cultural functions within the *Uab Meto* language. Morphologically, *Tua* is a free morpheme functioning as a noun that serves as a form of address for noblewomen or royal daughters. It can stand independently and is frequently used to ad-

dress women of high social status. Meanwhile, *Nasi* refers to a specific territorial domain, thereby indicating a place or region associated with royal lineage.

When combined, *Tua* and *Nasi* form a compound noun with a noun + noun construction, in which *Tua* serves as the head of the phrase and *Nasi* as a modifier that specifies territorial or cultural identity. This morphological composition not only indicates a linguistic process of compounding but also embodies a symbolic merging of personal and territorial identity.

Semantically, *Tua Nasi* carries both lexical and social meanings that reflect the complex relationship between language and social hierarchy. Lexically, the word *Tua* means “old” or “elderly,” and in many linguistic and cultural contexts, it connotes wisdom, maturity, and respect. However, within the Numponi community, the term *Tua Nasi* has undergone a semantic shift through a process of meaning extension. Rather than referring merely to an elderly woman, it functions as a title denoting the queen or the wife of the king, a woman of royal status.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, *Tua Nasi* reflects the interplay between language, gender, and power in the social hierarchy of the Numponi community. The use of this address term demonstrates the community’s adherence to traditional norms of politeness and respect, as described by (Leech, 1983) Politeness Principle, particularly the Appropriation Maxim, which encourages the expression of admiration and acknowledgment of others’ value. Sociolinguistically, *Tua Nasi* thus functions as a marker of identity, power, and cultural continuity. It strengthens social harmony and preserves the values of respect, equality, and solidarity that are central to Numponi’s customary life.

c. The term *Pah Ana*

From a sociolinguistic perspective, *Pah Ana* embodies the social principles and politeness norms that structure communication within the Uab Meto community. (Brown, P., & Levinson, 1987) argue that politeness is inherently related to the maintenance of social relationships, and this is evident in the use of *Pah Ana* as a form of linguistic respect.

(Kridalaksana, 2008) explains that address terms serve as linguistic instruments to express social relations, roles, and hierarchies, and *Pah Ana* perfectly exemplifies this function. By addressing the king’s son or a young noble as *Pah Ana*, speakers conform to traditional norms of politeness while simultaneously reinforcing the hierarchical social structure.

Sociolinguistically, the use of *Pah Ana* also performs a symbolic function it maintains the social order and legitimizes authority within the community. It is used not only as a communicative tool but also as a cultural emblem that reinforces lineage and preserves customary values. In public or ceremonial contexts, such as traditional gatherings or formal events, this term signifies collective recognition of noble descent and respect for established leadership. The Numponi people differentiate respect based on social class and ancestry, and *Pah Ana* reflects this distinction by marking an individual’s noble birthright. In doing so, the term serves as a linguistic manifestation of social continuity, ensuring that the hierarchy of authority is both recognized and respected through speech.

d. The term *Tua Ana*

The term *Tua Ana* in the Uab Meto language can be examined from a morphological perspective. Formally, the term consists of two free morphemes, there are *tua* and *ana*. The word *tua* is a specific form of address used to refer to a female noble or the daughter of a king, while *ana* means child or daughter. The combination of these two morphemes forms the nominal phrase *Tua Ana*, which literally means “the daughter of a noble” or “a princess”.

From a semantic perspective, the term *Tua Ana* contains both lexical and social meanings. Lexically, the term refers to the daughter of a king or noble. However, socially, it carries connotative meanings of honor, dignity, and the legitimacy of noble status.

Thus, the use of *Tua Ana* is not merely a reference to biological kinship but also a social symbol that emphasizes the elevated position of a princess within the traditional order.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, the use of *Tua Ana* reflects linguistic politeness, social identity, and respect for the hierarchical order within Uab Meto society. This term functions as a recognition of a noblewoman's status from birth and as a means of legitimizing authority within customary structures. (Brown, P., & Levinson, 1987) emphasize that politeness strategies are closely related to social hierarchy and the relationship between speaker and hearer. In a similar vein, Kridalaksana (2001) asserts that address terms are linguistic devices that serve to mark roles, status, and social positions within a community. (Duranti, 1997) further explains that address terms in speech communities are not merely referential but serve as markers of social relationship, cultural values, and power dynamics. (Goffman, 1967) also argues that face-saving rituals embedded in address forms are central to maintaining interpersonal harmony and reinforcing social order within communities. (Sumarsono., 2002) adds that in Indonesian societies, the choice of address terms reflects both the speaker's awareness of social stratification and their intent to show respect toward those of higher status. Similarly, (Trudgill, 2000) notes that language variation, including the use of specific address forms, is fundamentally shaped by social factors such as power, solidarity, and hierarchy, all of which are evident in the use of noble address terms in Numponi village.

2. Selection of Word Forms and the Use of Address Terms in Language Polite Based on Situation

- a. Context: Inviting the King and Queen to attend a traditional house ceremony
 - (a) *Ba'i mnasi fanai mnasi bea nao tasini na Pah nok Tua sin*, (b) ("Attention everyone, tomorrow someone must go to invite the King and Queen.") (c) *Usi Pah nok Tua sin hai ate em masini na rais uim reu at nae* ("Your Majesties, King and Queen, we the common people have come to invite you to the traditional house ceremony.")
- b. Context: Escorting the King and Queen to an event
 - 1) *Usi Pah nok Tua sin hai ate em miskau Pah nok Tua sin nawen fain rasi* ("Your Majesties, King and Queen, we the common people have come to escort you, the King and Queen, to the event.")
 - 2) *Usi Pah nok Tua sin ho ate neam tas'kau ke fain rasi ben* ("Your Majesties, King and Queen, we have come so that we may depart together for the event.")

In this context, the community employs special address forms such as *Usi Pah nok Tua* as a manifestation of linguistic politeness indirect/indirect speech acts communication with nobles, whose social status is higher than that of commoners. This is consistent with Leech's (1983) politeness principle, which states that appropriate word choice helps to maintain social harmony. The use of special terms to invite nobles reflects this principle of politeness. Regarding the specific vocabulary used when inviting nobles, there are four key terms employed by the Numponi community in accordance with context: *Ta'sini*, *Masini*, *Miskau*, and *Tas'kau*.

Tasini means "plan," referring to the initial intention of the community to invite nobles. Meanwhile, *Miskau* means that the community is about to depart to escort the nobles from their residence. The term *Masini* carries the same meaning as *Tasini*, but its usage differs: *Masini* is employed when the person inviting the nobles is already face-to-face with them to deliver the message directly. Similarly, *Miskau* and *Tas'kau* share the same meaning, yet differ in context. *Miskau* is used to express that "we have come here to go together with the nobles to the event," while *Tas'kau* is used when the nobles and the community are departing together for the event.

These four terms are employed according to their specific contexts. This is in line with (Chaer, A., & Agustina, 2010), who argue that lexical choice is influenced by the speech situation. The varied use of these terms when escorting nobles highlights the community's respect for their elevated social position. Employing more polite expres-

sions demonstrates the Numponi people's acknowledgment of the nobles' higher status and their effort to maintain deference in social interaction.

- c. Context: Offering betel nut to the King and Queen at the beginning of the ceremony
- 1) Hei ba'i mnasi fanai mnasi, kabi sa hai ate hateut na Pah Nasi/Tua Nasi/Pah Ana/Tua Ana sin matkon namteot nainen misaeb he niammon ben.
("Honored guests, the betel nut prepared by the attendants for the King, Queen, Prince, or Princess has been set in front; please partake.")
 - 2) Hei Pah nok Tua sin hout mamat sa hai ate hateut na hit matkon kan tom na Pah nok Tua sin matnon hai ate parua.
("Your Majesties, King and Queen, the betel nut that we attendants have presented before you may be insufficient; therefore, we humbly beg your pardon.")

The phrase *hei ba'i mnasi fanai mnasi* literally means "grandfathers and grandmothers," but its social meaning is "all the guests present," encompassing both the elderly and the young. This expression is used because it is regarded as more polite and respectful in addressing the audience. (Lakoff, 1973) states that the principle of politeness is to be clear, be polite. The use of this form of address affirms respect toward the nobles while simultaneously maintaining social harmony among the attendees.

Furthermore, the terms *hateut* and *namteot* are used by the Numponi community when inviting nobles to partake of food or offerings. *Hateut* means "to prepare," while *namteot* means "already prepared/ready." These terms are specifically employed when inviting nobles, whereas for commoners, a simpler phrase such as *kabi nok mamat sa hit matka ia tahna ben* ("the betel nut in front of us, let us eat together") is used. In this context, the more elaborate and respectful expressions *hateut* and *namteot* are reserved exclusively for nobles.

The address forms illustrated above are used to invite the king, queen, or royal children present at the ceremony to partake first, so that the rest of the community may then follow. This practice reflects the respect of the Numponi people for their nobles, who are regarded as holding a slightly higher position than ordinary members of society.

- d. Context: Inviting the King and Queen to Dine
- 1) Usi Pah, Tua, nok ba'i mnasi, fanai mnasi hout-hout, na'a'mon namteut nainen te misaeb he niam'mon tan hai aet meis haraik ia
("Your Majesties, King and Queen, along with the elders and attendants, the food and drink set before us have been prepared and are ready to be enjoyed.")
 - 2) Hei mnai'son hout-hout na'a'mon at hit matkon fe mui misaeb he niam'mon naom tao ten, bian nut inhoran fe nabe naon tao ten, bian nut ka nabe nainen hai ate at haraik ia
("The food and drinks before us are still available. If anyone wishes to have more, please help yourself. However, if others are already full, that is perfectly fine we are ready to serve.")

The polite forms of address used above are specifically intended for inviting the king, queen, or nobles present at a formal event. These address forms are reserved exclusively for nobles and are not applied when addressing ordinary community members.

For instance, the word *na'a'mon*, meaning “food,” is considered more formal and is used when inviting nobles to dine. By contrast, the term *mnahat*, which carries the same lexical meaning of “food,” is more commonly used among commoners when inviting one another to eat together in informal situations. This distinction aligns with (Wijana, 1996), who explains that politeness in Indonesian culture is often manifested through refined address forms and expressions of respect. Thus, the use of *na'a'mon* illustrates a linguistic differentiation intended to uphold politeness and social hierarchy. In addition, the expression *Hei mnai'son hout-hout* must be used when addressing all those present, from the elderly to the young. This form of address is frequently employed in both formal and informal contexts, serving as a respectful means of acknowledging the audience as a whole.

The findings of the present study can be situated within a broader academic conversation by comparing them with prior research on address systems in Indonesia and beyond. Such comparison reveals both the distinctiveness of the Uab Meto address system and the extent to which it aligns with patterns documented in other speech communities.

4. Conclusions

The use of noble address terms by the *Uab meto* community in Numponi Village, specifically the variations of *Pah Nasi*, *Tua Nasi*, *Pah Ana*, and *Tua Ana*, demonstrates that language serves as a vital instrument for reproducing social structures, cultural identity, and politeness values that transcend mere communication. Theoretically, these findings contribute significantly to sociolinguistics by illustrating how traditional hierarchies are maintained through specific lexicons that secure social harmony within various ritualistic contexts. While this research effectively maps the pragmatic functions of such terms, its limitations lie in its narrow geographical scope and a lack of depth regarding the influence of Indonesian language interference among the younger generation. Consequently, future research should explore the shifts in these address terms within urban settings through comparative studies and prioritize digital documentation to ensure the preservation of this linguistic heritage against the tide of modern globalization.

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