

## Senior Man! Semantic Classification of Address Terms in Nigerian Pidgin

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### **Abstract**

Address terms are fixed anchorage of politeness in every language and culture. In Nigerian Pidgin (henceforth NP), they are fluid and dynamic concepts that are opened to change, adaptation and variation. This article investigates the semantic classification of address terms in NP, and from a sociolinguistic account explores some address terms in NP as they are used in situated contexts by young people in their varied communities of practice to mark solidarity, identity and equality. The study is rooted in Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness which maintains that interlocutors choose politeness strategies to mitigate or address loss of face. Data for the study were elicited through ethnographic (qualitative) fieldwork using semi-structured interviews with 25 participants in Calabar and Ikom, in Cross River State, south-south geopolitical zone of Nigeria. They were purposively sampled. The study identified five forms of address terms in NP: reciprocal terms, non-reciprocal terms, kinship reference, borrowed terms and impolite terms. We conclude that young people utilise address terms in NP to reinforce social relations, illuminate youth-centred experiences and strengthen belonging. In this way, heterogeneity of address terms in NP provides insights into understanding how politeness is achieved in interactional contexts.

**Keywords:** Address Terms; Politeness; Person Reference; Identity; Youth Language; Semantic Classification

**Abstract in Nigerian Pidgin:** Di name wey wi dey carry call pesin dey show respect fo awa lingo. Fo Naija, dis name dey change and dey blend anyhow. Dis pepa wan see di how wetin wi dey call pesin dey make sense fo Naija. E wan folo see de kaind way awa big pikin dem dey carry name show support, show face dey balans. Wi come tanda carry idea wey

Brown and Levinson dem carry come fo 1987 wey talk about respect. Di pepu folo say respect dey shine pesin face but insult dey kos katakata. Wi kom kolet small small sense from 25 pipu fo lkom wey dey Cross River for South-South fo Naija carry put awa idea one place. Wi agree say five way dey wer wi dey carry call pesin: u call me name wer I fit call yu, u call me name I no fit call u, name wi dey call pipu fo family, name wey we boro plus name wey dey insult pesin. Wi kom end am say big pikin dey carry dis plenty name dey tight wid dem friend wella. Wi come folo talk say dis plenty name dey hep pipu make sense fo d way respect dey show face for tori.

## Introduction

The social expansion process and increasing communicative demands of NP is consolidating its emerging status as the lingua franca among the grassroots in Nigeria (Mensah, 2011). The domination of NP in the social media space and other sociolinguistic domains has resulted in its spread and hegemony which have shaped interpersonal relationships and group affiliations. The use of address terms is one of the social domains in which NP is interactionally activated. An address terms is used to identify and speak directly to an individual. It is also used to enact social solidarity, power dynamics and create a sense of belonging and unity. Norrby & Wide (2015) argue that the choice of address terms is guided by the level of formality of the situation and the particular context. This is often activated in a face-to-face interactive situation. Unuabonah (2018) maintains that terms of address encode the social status of interactants and the relationship that exists between them. This evidence demonstrates the imperative of power semantics in some interactional relationships which illustrate the hierarchical characterisation of certain social connections. Mensah (2021, 700) collaborates this position when he reiterated that address terms are used to “enact the imbalance of power or status and shared social traditions.” In this way, some terms ascribe power and authority to social superiors, and cannot be used reciprocally by lower status individuals.

The use of address terms in both formal and informal contexts is a linguistic universal. Every known society or culture uses address terms to build social connections or maintain “phatic communion.” Every address term is expressed through the medium of language which entails that they exist in the lexicon of every language hence, they are an intrinsic aspect of the grammar of a language. This implies that address terms have rules of usage and vary according to age, status, class and place (Yang, 2010). Some address forms are realised as pronouns, which represent or replace nouns or noun phrases. These pronouns

do not only imply social relationships, they also assert gender identity. This justifies the claim by Taavitsainen & Jucker (2016) that address terms convey interpersonal and expressive meanings. Aliakbari & Toni (2008) have conducted a sociolinguistic study of address terms in Modern Persian. The authors submitted that the Persian language is rich in the wide range of address terms at its disposal which require an artful skill to make accurate and proper choice in different social contexts. The study identifies personal names, titles, religious expressions, honorifics and descriptive phrases as some of these address terms. It concluded that address terms help to strengthen the relationship between language, culture and society, and provide valuable information between interlocutors, their relationship and circumstances.

Research on address terms in Nigerian indigenous languages is sparse in the extant literature. However, few studies like Oyali (2009) have investigated address forms in Oko, a dialect of Igbo from ethnolinguistic and pragmatic perspectives. With a documentation objective in focus, the study views address form as essential aspects of linguistic etiquette that is useful in maintaining the social order in the Oko society. Oyetade (2009) examines address terms in Yoruba and argues that the choice of address forms are guided by perceived social relationship that exist between interlocutors. The study identifies age, status, kinship and the dichotomy of power versus solidarity as the primary determinants of address terms usage. The author maintains that in the Yoruba cultural context, solidarity does not necessarily implies equality as a result of excessive regards for age. This evidence reveals that though address terms are broadly classified as linguistic universals, there are certain particularities that exist cross-linguistically.

Some studies have undertaken comparative analysis of address terms in Nigerian and other languages. For instance, Ezeifeke & Ojonugwa (2019) have conducted a comparative study of politeness strategies and address terms in Igbo and Igala kinship systems. The study argues that the two cultures employ culture-specific honorifics and address terms in relating with kinship reference. The paper maintains that these cultures uphold respect in observing address terms and honorifics. Similarly, Anedo (2023) examines address forms in Chinese and Nigeria languages. The study highlights the cultural differences and similarities in value systems and beliefs underlying address form usage. The author argues that while Nigerians address people using first names or surname depending on age or status, kinship plays an important role in Chinese address system. Age, generation and order of seniority are the key considerations.

The present study aims to investigate the types of address terms in NP based on their semantic classifications and their contextual applications especially by young people in forging social connections: distance, intimacy and power. The article further examines the fluidity and shifting dynamics in the use of these terms, and explores politeness strategies that inform their usage. The study makes a novel contribution to the linguistic anthropology of address terms especially to the development of socio-pragmatic competence through address practices and other forms of social interactions in NP.

### **Literature review**

The study of address terms has been at the front burner in sociolinguistic research from the early 1960 with Brown & Gilman's (1960) seminal publication, *The pronoun of power and solidarity*, which demonstrates how the choice of pronouns is used to reinforce social dynamics like power, identity, solidarity, belonging and hierarchy. The study significantly demonstrates how language structures and reveals social relationships between interactants. Address terms have been studied from a wide range of interdisciplinary impulses and contexts; linguistics, sociological, psychological, anthropological and philosophical. However, the presently review intends to majorly focus of address terms as youth language in an attempt to lay a foundation to explore the cognitive, ideological and sociolinguistic realities that determine the choice terms in NP based on their semantic classification.

Al-Khawaldeh et al. (2023) have described how young people in Jordanian university use address terms to enact interactional stances in conversations based on the Javanese/Indonesian languages at the expense of Malang. The authors maintained that the choice of the preferred language was to accomplish specific discursive goals such as to minimise face threatening acts (FTAs) or to enact stances of solidarity based on religion, identity and intimacy. The paper further reiterates that this state of affairs reveals resistant to Javanese hierarchical norms as a result of fluid communicative demands of young people in enacting social identity. The study concludes that such address dynamics may lead to a change in the local sociolinguistic landscape. This account shows the adaptability of address terms to changes in the context of youth language. They may be flexible and fluid outside a particular social domain depending on the meaning-making sense of the interactants. This evidence further shows that address terms are essential components of young people's linguistic practices, agency and identity construction. They

share inherent commonalities with their linguistic practices that shape deeper understanding of social group dynamics (Mensah, 2025). They also provide sites for creative use of language and a platform to challenge social and linguistic stereotypes in addition to sustaining cohesion and solidarity among multilingual group members.

In a similar study, Ebongue (2018) investigates the use of address terms among Cameroonian youth on social media. The author argues that the address terms present some specificities in their various forms and typologies in a bid to sustain immediacy and spontaneity of spoken language in the social media. Aboh et al. (2023) examine a specific type of address terms, endearment terms as they are used in the online environment particularly in the construction of gender identity. The authors illustrate how these terms carry both negative and positive connotations, express politeness and impoliteness and negotiate gender identity and boundaries. The study concludes that endearment terms are sites for the enactment of emotive relationship that enables young people on social media to bond socially and adapt flexibly in the social networking space. In this way, we have seen how address (endearment) terms are used to acknowledge others, reflecting social relationship and context. Such a system of address is often shaped by familiarity, power dynamics and socio-cultural norms and values.

Among Banjarese youth, societal norms and level of education are the main indicators that influence the choice of address terms. According to Arini (2016), there are three levels of polite expressions young people use in addressing elderly people which are practically based on their educational background and social status. They have the most polite; the less polite; and the least polite forms. In a related study, Fleming & Slotta (2018) study the use of proper names in contrast with kin terms in address practices from a survey of some communities. The authors reveal a striking regularity in the way kin terms alternate with names; kin terms are always used with senior kin and names are used for junior kin. The study reiterates that this regularity cannot be explained by universals of politeness or specific linguistic ideology but is motivated by semantic properties of kin terms which are engendered by cultural conceptualization of kin terms as honorific and names as anti-honorific. This evidence reveals how the relationship between linguistic forms and their sociolinguistic functions may be internally constrained. Broadly speaking, the study underscores the role of kin terms and names as cultural markers signifying the role of respect in youth-adult interaction.

## Theoretical underpinning

This study adopts Brown & Levinson's (1987) politeness theory as the theoretical anchor for the analysis of address terms in NP. The theory is concerned with how social interactions are managed via linguistic strategies in order to protect one another's face. The authors describe the act of managing face as public self-image or social identity. They identify positive and negative face as the two universal types of face. A positive face expresses the desire to be liked and appreciated, while a negative face expresses the desire for autonomy and freedom from imposition. The authors also identified the ways in which face threatening acts (FTAs) can be mitigated. A face threatening act defines any action or utterance that can damage a positive or a negative face. The politeness theory by Brown & Levinson (1987) stands on three key pillars: the universality of face across human culture which implies that every interactor has the desire to maintain and protect a positive or negative face. There is also the potential for FTA which entails that every speech act, example, (use and misuse of) address terms has the potential to threaten face. The third pillar is rationality or face-saving which requires interlocutors to make rational choices against damaging each other's positive or negative face in social interaction (Leech, 2014).

Mensah et al. (2022) maintain that positive and negative faces directly correlate with positive and negative politeness respectively. These are some of the politeness strategies formulated by Brown & Levinson (1987). Positive politeness highlights the desire to maintain the speaker or addressee's positive face. Here, the need, interest, want or good of the speaker is believed to be similar to that of the addressee. Positive politeness establishes familiarity, interest, friendship and claims common ground. Negative politeness on the other hand, addresses the speaker's need for freedom from imposition in decision making (Spiers, 1998). Other strategies include bald on-record, off record and avoidance of FTAs. On-record involves direct communication where the speaker's meaning is explicitly communicated. It emphasises efficiency and lacks embellishments of mitigation. Off-record relies on implications based on indirect communication. The speaker's intention is not often directly communicated. It deals with the ability of the hearer to interpret the speaker's intended meaning (Isfara et al., 2023). Face threatening acts (FTAs) are avoided in order to evade embarrassment. They minimise damage to a person's self-image and the desire for freedom in social interaction.

Many studies on politeness, impoliteness, intercultural communication, and linguistic ideology have adopted and tested Brown and Levinson's politeness theory to provide a

foundation for linguistic strategies that are activated to manage social interactions particularly in minimizing FTAs. Although there have been considerable critiques of this theory especially on its perceived lack of cultural universality, making its generalisations from a purely Western perspective and oversimplification of strategies, we agree with Kalso (2023) that Brown and Levinson's politeness theory has provided the framework for understanding the complexities of interpersonal communication and the delicate balance of maintaining social harmony. This theory is apt for our analysis because a speaker's positive or negative face can be threatened by the choice of an address term. In other words, address terms can be used for the expression and interpretation of politeness (or impoliteness). The way people are addressed can protect, threaten or damage face. Politeness influences the choice of address terms and validates the functions of the face in interpersonal communication. The theory has provided a conceptual base for analysing the phenomenon of address terms in NP, and connected the study to the immense base of knowledge in the field of politeness research and interactional sociolinguistics more broadly.

## **Methodology**

The study adopts the qualitative design in data collection, interpretation and analysis. The work benefitted from six months fieldwork exercises in Calabar metropolis and Ikom Town in Cross River State, which are regarded as places of significant creativity in NP (Okon, 2003; Ugot et al. 2013). These areas are also melting pots for people with different cultures which naturally nourish communication in NP. Twenty-five Participants were selected through purposive sampling, and the inclusion criteria were mainly their willingness to participate in the study in addition to their socio-pragmatic competence in NP. Participants' socio-demographic characteristics such as age, gender, education, occupation and religion were taken into account because these variables shape and influence the use of address terms in different social domains. The age range of participants was between 18-28 years. There was unequal gender ratio of participant who were involved in the study: 15 males and 10 females. This was because male participants were more versatile and creative with the use of address terms than their female counterparts. The educational background of participants varied. Ten of them were students; five were graduates of higher institutions and the other ten were products of secondary schools. Participants were also engaged in different occupations. Apart from the ten who were students, five were in government paid employment; five were artisans

and five were street hawkers in both study sites. All interviews were conducted in NP. Participants gave informed consent in writing for all interviews, observation and recordings, and granted approval for the publication of research involving the data they generated. The research was approved by the Directorate of Research and Development, University of Calabar.

Two ethnographic approaches: participant observation and in-depth semi-structured interviews were used as the data collection techniques. Participant observation allowed the researchers access to immerse in the natural environment of the participants to understand their use and perception of address terms in NP. The approach also permitted access to study their behaviour in the context of address terms usage. Our positionality during participant observation was to be active observers and passive participants. We were able to observe how we and other people were addressed both formally and informally in a wide variety of contexts including the street, church, playground, hotel, office and farmland in NP. Semi-structured interviews enabled the researchers to have one-on-one interactions with the participants to ask relevant questions bothering on the typology and context for the use of address terms in NP. Questions were also posed about the fluidity and shifting trends in NP address terms. Significantly, we needed to understand the linguistic ideology that informed the use of address terms in a given social context.

Data were collated, and 35 address terms (excluding personal names) were generated during the fieldwork exercise. They were categorised into the relevant thematic tropes, coded, transcribed and translated (as the need arises). A digital audio recorder was used in obtaining oral data and field notes were used to document transcripts of interviews like time, location of interview and name (pseudonym) of participants. Thematic analysis was adopted as the descriptive methodological tool for the analysis of data. This approach systematically identify patterns or themes from the dataset through coding to discover broader sets of meaning and provide detailed understanding of the data (Clark & Braun, 2013). This approach also flexibly allows the opinions and perspectives of the participants to be heard in their own words.



## Results

### Semantic classifications of address terms

We identified five semantic categories in which address terms in NP were deployed in interpersonal communication between interlocutors. These include reciprocal terms, non-reciprocal terms, kinship terms, borrowed terms and impolite terms. In the analysis that follows, we consider each of the terms in greater details adopting Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory to elicit deeper understanding of address practices in different sociolinguistic settings in NP.

### Reciprocal terms

Reciprocal address terms are mainly used by social equals in a symmetric way. They are particularly used to express solidarity, intimacy and informality. They often reflect balance of power between interactants. These terms are also used to denote increased rapport that strengthens social relationship. Brinton (2023, 156) argues that these forms of address terms are used to activate "camaraderie politeness." Examples of non-reciprocal address terms are demonstrated below:

O'boy

Gee

Main Gee

Guy

Correct Guy

Babe

Bae

Personal Person

The address term, O'Boy is mainly used by male peers or contemporaries in a casually and friendly manner in informal interactions. Age, relationship and social standing are some

of the determinants of the use of this reciprocal address terms. It may be used to mark intimacy and approachability. Participants generally agreed that they use this address term to convey equality or aggression depending on the context or tone (of voice). It may also be used to signal encouragement, camaraderie or surprise. This address term is equivalent to the use of “mate” in Australian English which has “traditionally been a male solidarity term used by males and for males” (Rendle-Short, 2009, 245). The various contextual application of O’Boy in NP is demonstrated below:

Excerpt 1:

(a) Speaker A: *O’Boy*, how far? – O’Boy, how are you? (cordiality)

Speaker B: I dey fyn, Bros – I’m fine, brother.

(b) Speaker A: *O’Boy* yu don kolo? O’Boy, are you mad? (aggression)

Speaker B: How dat one come jel? What’s the meaning of that (expression)?

(c) Speaker A: Yu try wella, O’Boy – You did very well, O’Boy. (encouragement)

Speaker B: I doable. – I respect (you for the commendation).

(d) Speaker A: Dino yarn say Tinubu wan capplate for Moniepoint- Dino said Tinubu wants to borrow from Moniepoint.

Speaker B: O’Boy-e. (expression of surprise)

In the data in Excerpt 1(a) to (d), we observed that there was no gap in social distance between the respective sets of speakers. The use of these intimate terms reveals a much closer relationship and expression of solidarity. In Excerpt 1(a), the two speakers employed reciprocal terms of address like *O’Boy* and *Bros* in exchanging greetings. They operated at the same power equation and informal context in which the address terms were used. In (b) where we see how the face want of speaker B was threatened, he quickly resorted to understanding the circumstance that may make Speaker A to assume he was mad. This is because calling someone a mad person does not resonate with their sociocultural values or within a community of practice (Norby & Wide, 2015). In (c), the address term accompanied an expression of encouragement. Although the two speakers

operate on equal power semantics, Speaker B deliberately avoided the use of an address term for Speaker, and instead, preferred an impersonal construction like *dobale* which means to prostrate in Yoruba, to compliment him for the encouragement. In (d), the address term O'Boy is used as an exclamation by attracting a pragmatic marker like (–e). Speaker A was relating how a former senator, Dino was lamenting the spate of borrowing from foreign countries by the Nigerian president, Tinubu, and subsequently remarked that he will soon be borrowing from online financial ecosystem like Moniepoint. Speaker B expressed his resentment by the use of the address term. Pragmatically, the term means that the two speakers know (or ought to know) that the president's excessive borrowing is plunging the country into financial hardship which will consequently take its toll on the life of an average Nigerian. This is a pointer that address terms are social actions across cultures and contexts (Norby & Wide, 2015).

The use of address terms like *Gee*, *Main Gee*, *Personal Person*, *Guy*, *Correct Guy*, *Babe*, and *Bae* is equally devoid of power and hierarchy based on our field observation. Apart from *Guy* and *Correct Guy* which are masculine gender specific terms, others are gender-neutral and can be used reciprocally. *Gee* and *Main Gee* define people who are in intimate relationship not necessarily a romantic one. They may belong to a friendship network or community of practice where they make specific alignments in their discursive practices to exhibit differences, creativity and originality (Goodwin & Kyratzis, 2012; Parkinson, 2020; Rendle-Short, 2010). These terms are used in a variety of contexts especially in the perception of common ground, solidarity and familiarity. The address terms, *Guy* and *Correct Guy* are mainly used and exchanged by young men who see themselves as contemporaries. They are used in casual settings often in a relaxed environment. Participants believed that these terms have special resonances for them because they permit access to addressing someone without his name. Thus, they provide a neutral approach of addressing unfamiliar people too. The address terms *Babe* or *Bae* were formerly used to address young women only. However, contemporary shift in identity dynamics has made young men to be addressed as *Babe* or *Bae*, especially by their partners or lovers. The form is derived from the English word, *Baby* which is a term of endearment. Participants argued that this address term is mainly used to show affection and express the desire to love and care for someone.

### **Non-reciprocal terms**

This category of address terms in NP is used asymmetrically among interlocutors. It generally reflects the imbalance of power, social status, age and hierarchy. In other words, it is rampant among social unequal. Examples of non-reciprocal address terms are demonstrated below from our data corpus.

Boss

Boss man

Chair

Chairman

Chairmoo

Presido

Senior man

Oga

Oga madam

The address terms here are often used to reference people who wield social power to convey respect and distance. This implies that they index asymmetric distribution of power. People with lower social status often use these terms to address their social superiors, often without getting anything in return. Therefore, there is lack of mutual benefits as a result of the sociological dimension of power involved in the use of these address terms (Formentelli & Hajek, 2016). The choice of any of these terms, according to a participant, is a way of positioning oneself to be seen as respectful, loyal or subservient. Significantly, these terms of address reflect cultural norms for politeness and respect for elders (particularly social superiors). Some contextual uses of these terms from our data corpus are illustrated below:

Excerpt 2:

(a) Speaker A: Boss Man, make ya boys drink pure water (Boss, can your boys drink sachet water?)

Speaker B: Nothing do yu (There's no problem)

(b) Speaker A: Senior Man, I troway salute (Elder, I salute you)

Speaker B: James, how yu dey? (James, how are you?)

(c) Policeman: Oya, clear well (Clear well, immediately)

Bus driver: Boss, Make I no find pikin dem bele? (lit. Should I not look for my children's stomachs?)

Policeman: Na my friend I dey stop na. Oga, bless us, waka. (It's my friend that I stopped. Oga, bless us and go)

Excerpts 2(a) and (b) clearly demonstrate the activation of power semantics in the use of these terms of address. They encode various degree of social distance. In (a), Speaker A addressed Speaker B as Boss Man and called himself 'boy' when he needed him to give him a tip (...drink sachet water). Speaker B did not have any term of reference for the former. He merely assured him that he will get the tip. The same power relation plays out in (b) where Speaker A addressed Speaker B as Senior Man in the greeting exchange but was rather addressed by his name, James by Speaker B. In both cases, the interactions were between superiors and subordinates thus giving rise to the power differential. Speakers A in Excerpts 2(a) and (b) are not licensed culturally to address Speakers B without reference term or in their names as they did to them. The power dynamics are activated to maintain the gulf in social distance and create an aura of respect (Mensah, 2021).

However, in (c), we have seen that this regime of address terms can be used to establish a set of understanding and foreground extra-linguistic information. The essence of clearing well is to ensure that the driver's particulars: drivers' license and passengers' manifest are checked. However, to the driver, "clearing well" entails either delaying his journey or being exploited by the police. The driver responded first by calling the policeman Boss. At this point, he attempts to establish an intimate relationship with the policeman. The purpose of this friendly disposition is to inject warm, approachable and positive attitude into the discourse. The driver then said 'Make I no find pikin dem bele?'

(lit. Should I not look for my children's stomachs?) "Should I not labour to fend for my family?" This expression has some pragmatic connotations. First, the driver is protesting that he is doing a legitimate business which he uses to fend for his family as its bread winner. Significantly, he was implying that he could not afford to give any bribe because he believed that his papers (particulars, license and manifest) were in order. The policeman reciprocated the warmly gesture of the driver by first calling him his friend. This means that he was willing to be empathic by not delaying him if he co-operates accordingly. On the strength of the driver's welcoming demeanor, the policeman addressed him as Oga (which can also mean Boss), and asked him to bless them immediately and go. The implication is that addressing the driver as Oga indicates the policeman's willingness to let him go provided he offers the bribe. This evidence shows that age, and hierarchy may not be the differentiating factors in the use of non-reciprocal address terms in NP. Participants reported that there are certain informal contexts where non-reciprocal terms can jocularly be used reciprocally. Broadly speaking, this category of address terms in NP is a symbolic capital that marks a person out as a man or woman of respect, status and authority.

### **Kinship terms**

Kinship terms are often used by family members to address each other. In NP, only consanguineal terms are used as addresses terms as we can see in the examples below. Affinal terms which are connected by bond of marriage are not so used. Kinship terms have strong adherence to local values, beliefs and sociocultural knowledge. It was noted that in NP, the use of kinship terms is not necessarily based on genealogical relationship. Rather, age, seniority and level of intimacy are the primary determinants of the choice of address. Examples of kinship terms are shown below:

Pally/Popsy (father)

Mally/Mumasy (mother)

Bros (brother)

Sis (sister)

Aunty

## Uncle

Based on our field observation, any aged adult male could be addressed as “Pally” which stands for one’s social father and is often differentiated from “Popsy” which represents one’s biological father. Similarly, one’s biological mother is called “Mumsy” and every aged adult female or social mother is “Mally”. This state of affairs is similar to what Mitchell (2017) reported about the Datooga in Tanzania where word *iiya* means one’s own biological mother and *qeamatta* stands for a person’s other mothers, and can refer to social mothers. Both social and biological parents are accorded the same high level of respect as a cultural requirement. In both cultures where this study was conducted, children are believed to belong to the community and not strictly to their immediate family. They can be corrected, admonished or disciplined by community members other than their biological parents. Therefore *Pally* and *Mally* are used to address individuals who are not related by blood but can be looked up to and accorded the respect of one’s parents. *Bros* and *Sis* are derived from English “brother” and “sister” respectively, and serve as general terms for one’s biological brother and sister or people one does not share any blood relationship. These forms are mainly used to extend social cohesion and solidarity in interaction. *Aunty* and *Uncle* have extended usage as address terms. They may be used with people the addresser shares blood relationship or those without any kinship connection. In the latter case, we observe the extension of cultural pattern of politeness to the use of kinship forms in NP which have been semantically extended beyond kinship reference to address terms. The use of these forms are based on cultural sensitivity and social relations between interactants. Broadly speaking, kinship address terms in NP reflect cultural conceptualizations that connect cultural beliefs, attitudes and behaviours to language use (Larina & Suryanarayan 2013; Sharifian, 2017). Some of the ways these forms were used contextually are illustrated in Excerpt 3:

Excerpt 3:

(a) Speaker A: Bros, na me wan win dat cup.

(Bros, it’s me that will win the competition).

Speaker B: Bros, tori don full my belle.

(Bros, there's so much (uninteresting) stories (from you)).

(b) Speaker A: Aunty, abeg, wetin be your time? (Aunty, please what is the time?).

Speaker B: My pikin, e don nack four. (My child, it is four O'clock).

The data above points to the fact that while *Bros* can be used reciprocally, *Aunty* cannot be used in that way given the factors of age and politeness which are triggered by cultural conceptualizations. So while there is balance of power in Excerpt 3(a), there is power differential in (b).

### **Borrowed terms**

We also found borrowed address terms in our data corpus. Some of the terms are borrowed from Nigeria's indigenous languages and elsewhere. For instance *Ọmọ* (Yoruba), *Nnà* (Igbo), *Dá* (Efik), *Old School* (English) and *Màsà* (Akan, Ghana). Some of these terms may be used reciprocally or otherwise like *Ọmọ*, *Nnà* and *Dá* while others can only be used non-reciprocally such as *Old School* and *Masa*. *Ọmọ* is a Yoruba word for 'boy' but has recently gained traction as an address term in NP. The meaning has also been extended semantically to cover both genders (boy and girl). It is a friendly term used informally by the youth to signal equality, intimacy and solidarity. Based on our findings, this term of address helps to foster social bonds, construct in-group identity and reinforce adaptation to the social environment. *Ọmọ*, *Nnà* and *Dá* can be used among younger and elderly people at their various levels of conversational engagement. A younger person can only address his contemporary with this term and not his senior. Doing so may be regarded as an act of impoliteness. An elderly person can address both his mate and a younger person with it. Significantly, unlike *Ọmọ*, these terms are mainly used by males although some females may use them in certain informal contexts.

The term *Old School* is used as a mocking reference for conservative elderly people who are resistant to change. Young people label any elderly person as *Old School* when he or she does not subscribe to their beliefs, values and outlook that shape their understanding of the world especially in the digital age (Besa, 2016). Participants generally believed that the use of *Old School* as an address term is not an expression of impoliteness rather it describes people who embody traditional values as opposed to



modern styles and practices. This traditional ways of life may affect taste for music, dressing, hair style and even cuisine culture. This address term is therefore not used reciprocally but majorly used by young people to reference elders. Essentially, the address term, *Masa* involves power relations between the interlocutors. This choice of address reveals the social dynamics at play when it is activated. It signals social status, age and solidarity. This is not similar to the way it is used in the Ghanaian context as a general reciprocal term that identifies a person the addressee may or may not be familiar with. Therefore, it is mainly used in a no-power situation. In NP, however, the use of *Masa* conveys respect, acknowledges distance, enlists power differential and reinforces hierarchy. In other words, it is socially driven term and embeds varied communicative values. We illustrate how some address terms in this category are used contextually in Excerpt 4 below:

a) Speaker A: Omo, how body. (Omo, how are you?)

Speaker B: Notin spoil (There's no problem (I'm fine))

Speaker A: Omo, I don bend JAMB-o. (Omo, I have defeated JAMB)

Speaker B: Omo-o! (Exclamation)

(b) Speaker A: Wetin dat Old School talk (What did that Old School say?)

Speaker B: E say mak we no dey give police egunge. (He said we should not bribe policemen).

Speaker A: E talk am well (He said it well).

In Excerpt 4(a), Speaker A used *Omo* to follow a greeting speech act which is ritualized politeness behaviour that is an essential components of the opening and closing of verbal interactions or exchanges and which allows both interactants to maintain a positive face need. Greeting rituals reinforce sociability and solidarity in the context of this dialogue. Speaker A also used the address term to express his excitement in announcing his success in JAMB exams to Speaker B who used the same address term pragmatically to congratulate him. This evidence reveals that when an address term like *Omo* carries a

discourse marker in word final position (-o), and it can be used to perform a pragmatic function. In Excerpt 4(b), a bus driver, Speaker B was sharing his thought with an elderly person who advised him against giving bribe to the police on the road. His colleague overheard them and was not comfortable with the advice. Hence, he labelled the elderly man, *Old School*. This connotes a person who is not in tune with current reality. He then made an ironically allusion to the man's advice, *E talk am well*, which means he was talking nonsense.

### Impolite terms

Based on our data corpus, we were able to identify some impolite forms of address such as: *Look here! Hey you!* and *Àfó-ó!*. These terms are mainly used to call to attention people the speaker may or may not know or be familiar with, or to add emphasis to a statement. In the cultural settings where this study was conducted, using any of these forms to attract attention is considered as an impolite behaviour. *Look here!*, for instance is believed to be a command or order that is used to diminish one's personality. It also gives the impression of the addressee being socially inferior to the speaker. Some participant maintained that this address term is used as an expression of anger especially when the speaker is annoyed with the addressee. The address term, *Hey you!* is an informal term used by friends and acquaintances. However, in English where the term is derived, it is a form of time-free greeting in informal settings, and not an address term. Similarly, *Afo-o!* which is a second person singular in Efik is used as an address term in NP to create social distance between the interlocutors. It is often used by people who wield social power to reference social inferiors, and not vice-versa. The meaning this address term in NP arises from the social and communicative nuances of the term considering the context and relationship between speakers. The contextual application of these address terms usage is demonstrated in Excerpt 5 below:

Excerpt 5:

(a) Speaker A: Look here, I no bi ya mate (Look here, I'm not your mate

Speaker B: Abegi! (I owe you no apology)

(b) Speaker A: Hey you! No bi yu I dey yarn? (Hey you! Are you not the one I'm talking to?)

Speaker B: If ah hear (If I could hear you well)

(c) Speaker A: Afo-o, wetin u dey find dier? (Afo-o, what are you looking for there?)

Speaker B: Oga no vex, I be iron condemn (Don't be angry sir, I am a scavenger)

The dialogue in Excerpt 5(a) shows that Speaker A is visibly angry and tended to use the address term, Look here to diminish Speaker B who showed no remorse for whatever he must have said or done to Speaker A. *Abegi* is undoubtedly a pragmatic marker which is derived from *abeg* 'please', which is a politeness marker in Nigerian Pidgin. This type of pragmatic marker generally reveals the relative stance of participants and how they manage meta-knowledge in understanding discourse. In the context of the dialogue, it is used as a dismissive act where a threat can be regarded as unworthy of serious attention. In (b), the address term *Hey you!* is used to attract the attention of Speaker B who may possibly be uncomfortable with such a reference, and decided to ignore Speaker A. Speaker B's response indicated that he did not hear what Speaker A said. In (c), the tone of the dialogue reveals the enactment of power differential between the interlocutors. While Speaker A addresses Speaker B with a diminishing term, Afo-o, Speaker B rather addresses him as Oga (Boss), and apologised for committing no offence. This evidence shows that this term of address is governed by the principle of politeness, social relationship, status and power.

## Discussion

Address terms in NP are essential components of interactional sociolinguistics with their unique idiosyncrasies. Like address terms in other languages, they are mainly governed by power, status, intimacy, social relationship and politeness principles (Özcan, 2016). In certain contexts, they display social relations that reflect balance of power between interactants (Brinton, 2023). In the different uses to which address terms in NP are put into, the ultimate consideration is to minimize the threat to face during interaction. Some speakers save others face which is consistent with a positive self-image and some addressees lose face which may be interpreted as an affront on their self-esteem in the course of social interactions involving address terms. This implies that the interpretation of politeness in NP significantly varies based on social relationship and the cultural environment of the interlocutors. Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory

identifies two types of face, positive face and negative face which directly correlate with positive politeness and negative politeness. Positive face entails the desire of one's self-image to be appreciated by others. If an appropriate address term is not used for a social superior, for instance, it means that his positive face has been compromised. Similarly, a negative face expresses the desire for freedom or autonomy for imposition. The use of an impolite form of address may sometimes be interpreted as an imposition on the freedom of the addressee. This may also be considered as a face-threatening act (Bond, 1991).

Address practices in NP by young people are activated in a variety of sociolinguistic contexts. They are used in the construction and negotiation of in-group identity and social relations. Address practices among the research participants display heterogeneity and others are sites for opposition (Norrby & Wide, 2015). We identified reciprocal terms, non-reciprocal terms, kinship terms, borrowed terms as well as impolite terms. They are used by each interlocutor by reading the situation and understanding certain social dynamics like status, distance, hierarchy and age. The employment of *Old School* as an address term is visibly a site of resistance to values that are considered "modern". Significantly, the use of address terms in NP is principally informed by cultural cognition which is concerned with the intersection of culture and cognitive mechanisms in processing and interpreting meaning of address terms. It is instantiated across different social domains of interactional practices. It explores the way people interpret, process and apply knowledge based on their cultural values, norms, beliefs and attitudes (Sharifian, 2017).

Essentially, the conceptualization of address terms in NP strictly aligns with address practices in indigenous Nigerian and other languages. We have seen this through borrowing and integration of address terms and the extralinguistic and metapragmatic information they encode which are transliteration from the larger cultural environment. Some terms of address are gendered and others are gender-neutral. Gendered terms of address are sites for gender socialization aimed at promoting social cohesion and solidarity. Participants utilise such address terms to gain social space for themselves and illuminate their gender-centred experiences. Gender neutral terms allow access the entrenchment of formality or informality depending on how the context is interpreted. The use of address terms in NP by young people provides a foundation in understanding how politeness is achieved in interactional contexts. It offers a conceptual plank to evaluate the relevance and significance of Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory. The study aims to acknowledge some limitations in the course of the data collection

exercise. Some participants were too busy to honour interview schedules. They were excluded and committed participants were recruited as their replacements. The scope of the study covered only address terms in Calabar and Ikom varieties of NP. The validity of the present study may not be generalised to cover other varieties of NP like Wafi, Ajegunle, Warri, Port Harcourt and Ogoja.

## Conclusion

The study principally deals with semantic classification of address terms in NP taking into perspective the Calabar and Ikom varieties. The study also explores the various sociolinguistic contexts to which young people use NP address terms. We identified five semantic categories of address terms in NP. These include reciprocal terms, non-reciprocal terms, kinship terms, borrowed terms and impolite terms. Using Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, we argue that the use of address terms in NP is basically governed by the principles of politeness that aims at avoiding face threatening acts (FTAs). Few exceptions however stand out like the use of impolite terms to call someone to attention or deliberately mounting opposition to elderly people who may not believe in the emerging values of younger people. The study discovered how sociocultural elements from indigenous Nigerian languages and cultures are woven into NP address practices. The study concludes that young people use address terms in NP to enact interactional stances of identity, equality and solidarity. The study, in this respect, enriches internal variation in address practices given their heterogeneous classification in NP. Future studies may investigate the pragmatics of address practices in endangered Nigerian languages.

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