



The Honorific of Gamkonora Language: A Study of Sociolinguistics

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Abstract

This study aims to identify and document the use of honorifics in the Gamkonora language, a non-Austronesian language used by the Gamkonora community in West Halmahera, North Maluku. The research method is descriptive qualitative with a sociolinguistic approach. Data were obtained through in-depth interviews, direct observation, and conversation recordings from various social contexts, such as family, education, and religion. The results of the study indicate that the Gamkonora language has a complex honorific system, including referential and addressee honorifics, which reflect social norms and hierarchical structures in its community. The use of honorifics is influenced by factors of social status, age, kinship, and formal or informal situations. This study not only contributes to the documentation of endangered regional languages, but also provides insight into the relationship between language and social structure in the Gamkonora community.

Introduction

Language, as a conventional sound system, is foundational to culture and communication, shaping national identity and reflecting societal values (Kramsch, 2014). It unites communities by facilitating oral and written communication, with vocabulary development being crucial for effective interaction and task completion (Halliday, 1993). Language also plays a key role in global communication and comprehension, fostering social cohesion. Weak language skills hinder communication and emotional connection, creating distance between individuals (Mailani et al., 2022). Each language mirrors its culture, revealing history and philosophy through unique vocabulary, structure, and usage. Mastering a language requires understanding the subtleties of its speakers (Siregar, 2021; Boboxo'Jayev, 2022). In regions like North Maluku Province, Indonesia, both Austronesian and non-Austronesian languages, such as Gamkonora, preserve ethnic heritage and cultural identity (Chaer, 2010).

In 2019, North Maluku had 19 native languages, with 31 identified in regional regulations (Mulae & Sarif, 2021). Gamkonora, spoken by approximately 1,500 people in West Halmahera Regency, reflects the linguistic diversity of the region (Lewis, 2009). Honorifics, as defined by Kridalaksana (2008), are used in many languages to express respect and politeness, signaling social status and relationships. For instance, Japanese honorifics vary based on relationship and class, demonstrating respect and civility (Cui et al., 2022; Hagiwara, 2021). Similarly, Gamkonora features honorifics that highlight its hierarchical society, with distinct forms used by nobles, commoners, and religious figures. Understanding these honorifics requires an analysis of social status within the community, emphasizing the link between language, culture, and identity (Muhamad et al., 2021).

Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory serves as a foundation for understanding honorifics, asserting that civility is universal, though the forms of honorifics vary across cultures. Honorifics help mitigate face-threatening acts (FTAs) and promote social harmony.

For example, Javanese and Balinese honorifics indicate social status, reflecting broader societal structures (Errington, 1988; Geertz, 1973). Similarly, Gamkonora honorifics reveal its hierarchical society, offering insight into the relationship between language and social organization. Studies like these highlight the importance of documenting endangered languages, as Grenoble and Whaley (1998) emphasize that language preservation is vital for maintaining cultural diversity and legacy.

This research on Gamkonora honorifics explores a critical linguistic feature that reflects the unique culture and identity of the Motilo'A tribe in North Maluku Province, where this lesser-known non-Austronesian language plays a key role in preserving traditions. Investigating the grammar and pedagogy of Gamkonora honorifics not only preserves an endangered language but also contributes to understanding its social and cultural ideals. In educational contexts, honorifics serve as tools for teaching respect, politeness, and appropriate social behavior based on age, status, and position. They play an essential role in fostering students' understanding of societal norms and promoting effective cross-cultural communication. As globalization necessitates intercultural competence, honorifics help learners navigate diverse cultural contexts while retaining linguistic traditions. This research supports the teaching and preservation of the Gamkonora language and culture, ensuring its legacy endures. These considerations inspired the sociolinguistic study, "The Honorifics of Gamkonora Language: A Study of Sociolinguistics," which aims to document and analyze this significant linguistic feature for both academic and cultural purposes.

Methods

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method with a sociolinguistic approach, aiming to analyze, describe, and explain the phenomenon of the use of honorifics in the Gamkonora language. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, direct observation, and conversation recordings, which were then transcribed and analyzed. The research sample involved native Gamkonora speakers in Gamkonora Village, selected using a purposive sampling technique to obtain relevant and in-depth data. The research subjects consisted of various age groups, including the older and younger generations, to explore variations in the use of honorifics in different social contexts such as family, education, religion, and the general public. Data analysis was carried out through an interactive approach, including data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The analysis process involved classifying and coding data based on patterns of honorific use, which were then compared with social contexts, status, and formal or informal situations. The results are expected to provide an in-depth picture of the relationship between language use and social structure in the Gamkonora language community, as well as support language preservation efforts

Results and Discussion

Data 1. Husband-Wife Conversation

- Husband : *Sijaang nane to rencana to tagi guda.* (Tomorrow, I plan to go to the garden)
Wife : *Tagi guda kanyia?* (Go to the garden where?)
Husband : *Tagi guda da'u Talope bolo Ta Oa bolo* (I want to go to the garden in Talope or in Ta Oa)
Wife : *No a'a gana so?* (What do you want to do?)
Husband : *Rencana to ie to hida ma igong dau ma trif de haro dua bugia la, kalu ma trif haro dua, fo ma si atur la fo ma rari bolo soaga.* (I plan to go there to see the coconuts there, whether they can be harvested or not, if they can be harvested, we plan to clean the garden first or what.)
Wife : *Ngoi to mete adi bolo?* (I'm coming too, right?)

After supper, a married couple gives the nuclear family discourse in data (1). The husband tells his wife his tomorrow intentions. Relaxed conversation took held in the living room. Data (1) shows a husband and wife communicating domestically. This exchange between a husband and wife shows how class, age, and status affect relationships. As the speaker, the spouse begins by announcing his plan to go to the garden using “to,” which means “I.” This represents his role as family and household head. His status as family head gives him decision-making power. Despite their tight relationship, the wife uses honorifics to address the husband as the speech partner. She calls her husband “ngoi to,” a more formal pronoun. Gamkonora culture values courtesy, and wives are expected to respect their husbands regardless of their social rank or career. The wife's usage of “no” to refer to the husband shows an attempt to be courteous. In this situation, the husband responds with “fo,” meaning “we,” indicating familiarity and equality. However, regard for the husband as an authoritative figure remains.

Data 2. Children-Parents Conversation

- Children : *Meme, dadi bolo ala fajaru to tagi de ni goa?* (Mom, can I go to my aunt's house for a while?)
 Mother : *Mangale gana ngana no si'ia da'a?* (Why are you going there?)
 Children : *Fajaru mau to ma gi'o bola de ngo Intan.* (I want to play marbles with Intan.)
 Mother : *Oe, tapi ma gio lengan awa, idio pasal magari awa de no momongol awa sigidio ma bola nage.* (Okay, but don't play for too long, come home before dusk, and don't forget to bring your marbles to home.)

A youngster (O1) and their mother (O2) in Gamkonora use many honorific terms from Comrie's (1976) typology. The child uses fajaru instead of ngoi for “I” or “me,” which is more respectful. The following expression shows the child's aim or intention, an essential element of respectful asking. The possessive marker ni indicates the child-aunt relationship (O2). Referential honorifics like this possessive language show the child's esteem for the referent. Mothers use ngana no to approach children with familiarity and respect. For a more official tone, ngin ni is more courteous. Finally, the prefix ngo before a person's name, like ngo Intan, conveys respect and elevates their stature in the debate. This function also uses referential honorifics, where the speaker's language reflects the third-party's reputation.

Data 3. Siblings

- Y Brother : *Ni godi i sala bugia?* (Maybe you ate the wrong food?)
 O Brother : *Dodoho, ma pel to butu kaitala, ma pel da'a to oke siutu dua.* (I don't know, I bought the medicine last night, I took the medicine there last night.)
 Y Brother : *So, ma pel ni oke dua?* (So, did you take the medicine?)
 O Brother : *Nyang, doma ma wange cabu si.*

Around 10:00 am, a younger brother visited his ailing older brother at home, where their conversation in the living room reflected civility and intergenerational bonds. The younger brother (O1) used the honorific “ni” to address his older brother, showing greater respect than “no,” consistent with Comrie's (1976) framework on appropriate address terms. The older brother (O2) responded with “to” (meaning “me” or “I”), conveying familiarity and emotional closeness. This interaction, despite its informal setting, adhered to etiquette norms, with Addressee and Referential Honorifics highlighting respect and affection within their familial relationship.

Data 4. Students and Teacher of the Quran

- Teacher O1 : *Nane, haro toma wala ge, si dei ma oo enang ma iding lala-la ie la bacaan lala-la. Fa baca ge fa si dei, kalu ala ge ma huruf i benar tapi enang ma iding*

ge ai sala. Iding ai sala kan fa a'a sodage la enang i gana lala-la, enang ma iding i dadi lala-la, coba ala ma iding i kokade. (This, until you get to the house, change your voice well so that the reading is also good. We have to place the reading, if the letters are correct but the pronunciation is wrong. We make the pronunciation sound like that so that he can improve, the pronunciation sound becomes good, otherwise our voice will be bad.)

Students O2 : *Injo jo, Kalifa.* (Well, ustadzah.)

Teacher O1 : *Dadi enang ma gana ge harus fa si lanjut lala-la, nage bato e.* (So, what should be continued well, that's all.)

Student O2 : *Injo, sukur lepe-lepe.* (Well, ustadzah, thank you so much.)

At 16.00 WIT, a Qur'an recitation session focused on teaching hijaiyyah letter reading to children, highlighting the use of Gamkonora honorifics to reflect social dynamics and respect in teacher-student interactions. Teachers employed directive language, such as "nane," to guide focus and improve pronunciation and intonation, while maintaining respect. Phrases like "enang ma iding lala-la" and "iding ai sala" emphasized voice modulation and clarity, embodying cultural norms of civility and transparency in education. Students responded with respectful expressions like "injo jo" (okay, yes) and "sukur lepe-lepe" (thank you very much), signaling gratitude and closing discussions politely. These interactions align with Comrie's (1976) honorifics theory, where addressee and referential honorifics enhance societal harmony and respect through culturally relevant communication in educational settings.

Data 5. Teacher-Student

Teacher : *Assalamualaikum* (Assalamualaikum/greeting)

Student : *Wa'alaikumsalam encik* (Walaikumsalam, miss.)

Teacher : *Nia habar soaga simata nane?*
How are you, my student?

Student : *La'a-la'a bato ne, so encik na habar soaga?* (We are fine, and you?)

Teacher : *Alhamdulillah, la'a-la'a bato ne. Hari sabtu gunena yang du skola ala?* (All praises be to Allah, I'm fine. Who doesn't go to school on Saturdays?)

Student : *Fajaru, Meida* (Me, Meida.)

Teacher : *Ii dana so no haro skola ala?* (Why didn't you go to school?)

Student : *Ni sae sidi so* (I have a headache.)

Teacher : *Aaa, kalu na sae sidi harus siloa na ngina bolo na baba du haro siloa kane skola supaya encik a dodoho. Kalu fo haro ala berarti ma encik du gae no alpa. No hadir ala to.... Simata eeee* (Aaa, if you have a headache, you have to tell your mother or father to come to school so that the teacher knows, if you don't come it means that the teacher will put you absent in the attendance. You are absent, right? This is for everyone.)

Student : *Injo* (Okay)

On a Saturday morning, a school session highlighted the use of honorific language and conversational tactics to convey respect and relational hierarchy. The teacher began with "Assalamualaikum," while the student responded with "encik," reflecting reverence and acknowledgment of the teacher, consistent with Comrie's (1976) idea that honorifics reinforce social hierarchy and respect in context. Using the term "nia" (you, plural), the teacher addressed the class collectively, employing a referential honorific to respect group identity and foster a united classroom experience (Holmes, 2022). Additionally, the teacher's reminder for students to inform parents if unwell, exemplified by the phrase *ni sae sidi so* (I have a headache), emphasized cultural values of responsibility and community concern. The teacher concluded

with simata eeee, softening the tone and balancing formality with a reminder of shared humanity.

Data 6. Teacher-Teacher

Teacher 1 : *Fajaru to sano de ngin cabu, kanang ngin ni haro ge ngin ni si apel ma ngo'a bolo gunena du si apel?* (I asked a few questions, when you came, were you the one who did the morning roll call for the students or who did the morning roll call?)

Teacher 2 : *Kanang yang si apel ge fangare ala, fangare to haro gasa terlambat cabu, dadi yang si apel ma ngo'a ge ngo Tanti, fangare hanya ta cek kalas, mulai dari kala stoma adu haro kala stoma nye'u. Yang kebetulan ma guru yang du cua ge hanya cuma kalas 2. Fangare to wosang kalas 2 to gasa Pelajaran.* (I wasn't the one who did the morning roll call, I arrived a little late so it was Tanti who did the roll call, I just checked the classes, starting from the lowest class to the top class. It just so happened that the class with no teacher was class 2. I went into class 2 to give a lesson.)

Teacher 1 : *Dadi sementara nane du mae Pelajaran simata raidua, nane sadi du istirahat.* (So, in the meantime, the students have had all the lessons, they are about to take a break.)

Teacher 2 : *Ma waktu cako nyagi moi nane kara du itrahat.* (They will rest at 10 am.)

Teacher 1 : *Injo e, cako nyagi moi kara du istirahat dadi.* (Yes, they will rest at 10 am first.)

The teacher and vice principal spoke like colleagues in an educational setting. Since vice principal teacher 1 (O1) is female, she always uses fajaru as the pronoun "I," which is more polite than ngoi. The text uses honorifics, civility, and respect in language. Male speakers use fangare, which means "I" in English, as a polite first-person pronoun, equivalent to fajaru for female speakers. Following fangare, the particle to is introduced to show courtesy by showing the speaker's respect for the listener by appearing or being present. The phrase ngo precedes names (e.g., "ngo Tanti") to show respect. Ngo lowers the tone of the person's name to comply with cultural norms for courteous address. As direct names are reserved for less formal situations in many regional languages, using ngo as a prefix shows deference and maintains social harmony and respect, according to politeness theories like Brown & Levinson's (1987) model. Finally, the particle du shows respect for an absent teacher. This word choice implies that a person is respected even while they are absent, which is culturally appropriate in many languages. Referential Honorifics, as defined by Comrie (1976), are reinforced by du's hierarchical regard for teachers. This subtle language use shows how phrases and particles can add meaning, politeness, and social awareness.

Data 7. Head of Village-Villager

Head of village : *Enang ai uci enang ma baba nane, i uci nan goa-ngo nane, terus stala ma danong.* (It goes down to the father, then it goes down to the children, then it goes down to the grandchildren.)

Villager : *Nage i sangol, supaya i ilang awa bolo.* (That's good, so you don't lose your family tree.)

Head of village : *Ngom kan pasalia na ngo ci Laila Ternate de Om Sene nage kan ana Isi nane kan du o'o dadi ma haji dai, Haji Dufa-Dufa nane, Haji Suadi. Haji Suadi du si taladi ana Isi kara majarita na silasila keturunan. I dana so ngom de anang keluarga. Nage kara anang isa carita kara anang du tulis, kara fa si dodoho kalu ngeneng ge keluarga ge i uci sodane-sodane tala ge de nane-nane, daeng haro Bacan.* (At that time, we were with Sister Laila Ternate and Uncle Sene and Isi we went to the Hajj father there in Dufa-Dufa, Hajj Suadi. Hajj Suadi sat with Isi and told her about their family tree, why we were related to them.)

After Isi told us the story and wrote it down, then we knew that we were family and that the genealogy was like this and that, and that we could reach our relatives in Bacan.)

Villager : *Ma ngoa-ngoala tuudu nane kan, a du sano de du igalo diala, turus ma gigidamo juga carita ala bolo. Kalu ma gigidamo du a'a carita de ngoa gana tala berarti anang du iseng du dodoho. Tapi kemudian ma ngoa-ngoala nane kalu ni carita ala, anang me du sano ala adi akhrianya fo dodoho ala.* (Kids nowadays, they don't ask and they don't care, and their parents don't tell them. If the parents make a story with the child, it means they listen and they know. But then these children if we don't tell them, they also don't end up not knowing.)

The evening lecture was led by the village leader. The village head's residence plans a wedding days later. Through family, they value knowing each other. Gamkonoras think ai is nicer than i. Ngom is polite, above fo or fa and below ngeneng. To seem nice, ngo precedes a name. Haji Suadi also means holy area pilgrims. Anang is nicer than "they". The "we" (ngom) honorifics of Comrie help speech communities be polite. It's politer than fo or fa and addresses group activities or family trees. Comrie thinks honorific pronouns show respect for the listener and change discussion hierarchy and unity. He is called haji for his religious and social achievements following pilgrimage. These titles demonstrate respect and admiration for the person's elevated status in the community, supporting Comrie's view of referential honorifics as a way to recognize exceptional achievements or titles. The researcher discusses Gamkonora honorifics using family, educational, and religious data. It examines language honorifics and their use across socioeconomic strata. Data 1–7 indicate Gamkonora honorific usage trends. Gamkonora The researcher found language honorifics in family, educational, and religious contexts. Honorifics provide respect, humility, and formality, indicating communal socio-pragmatism, the study revealed. Respectful honorifics for elders, religious figures, and authority vary. Previous research identified referential and addressee honorifics for Gamkonora.

Referential Honorific

Pronouns substitute names: speaker, interlocutor, third-party. Honorific referents are first, second, and third persons. To, ngoi, ngoi to, fajaru, and fangare mean "I" in Gamkonora. Older relatives and casual friends do. In formal settings, women use fajaru (I) and men fangare (me). Nini iga means "my belonging" in Gamkonora. However, fo is casual and fa official. For "you", Gamkonora uses honorific second-person pronouns such no, ngana no, ni, ngin, and ngin ni. There's social status and honor. Nyana no is for elders, while no is casual. Ni is formal, while ngin and ngin ni are for high-status situations. Gamkonora uses ngin and ngon for third-person pronouns. Based on the topic, ngin might mean first or third person. Gingin can mean "me" or the third person. Clearly third-person Ngon.

Addressee Honorific

These honorifics include family, occupational, title, marital status, and common identifiers. Honorific expressions come from these categories. The research includes honorifics like meme (mother) and goa (mother's sister). Encik means teacher in education, and hajj pilgrims are called by their names in society. Karifa teaches Qur'an recitation. Additionally, sukur lepe-lepe (thank you) and oe, injo, and injo jo (yes) convey respect. These three words become professional or casual depending on context. Beyond these, family and social situations utilize many other words:

Gamkonora Vocabulary	Meaning
idang nanaud	older brother
tafu ma nyida	brother/brother of wife

tafu ma nyida	brother/sister of husband
baba nyida / ngina nyida	father/mother's brother
longodu	Sister
tafu ma longodu	younger brother from wife/husband
eema	father/mother's younger brother
Goa	father/mother's younger sister
ngoa'a dadi	child of brother/sister
dotung	son of the grandchildren
diotong	Besan
danong	Grandchildren
coofo	wife/husband-in-law
Tafu	wife/husband of brother/sister
daud	wife/husband of younger brother
nyida	older sister
eema (l), goa (p)	father/mother's brother
Ete	Grandfather
diotong ngoa (l), dunung ngoa (p)	son-in-law

Factors Affecting the Use of Honorifics in Gamkonora Language

Gamkonora honorifics start with social rank. Status distinctions between speaker and listener greatly affect honorific use. Community leaders and older persons are addressed more formally out of respect. Social rank and age are also considered in honorific choosing. Gamkonora addresses seniors formally. Conversations with younger or similar-aged people may use casual honorifics. Gamkonora honorifics are kinship-based. Older relatives speak more politely. Family honorifics improve social bonds by showing respect and intimacy. The formal or informal scenario follows. Professional environments like the workplace and government events use formal honorifics to maintain communication decorum. In casual interactions with close friends, honorifics are less formal. In Gamkonora, gender impacts honorifics. Honourifics differ by speaker or recipient gender. Men and women have different honorifics and respect. Conversation goal impacts honorifics. In religious or ceremonial discourse, higher honorifics show respect for society and religion. Religious or customary situations impact Gamkonora's honorifics. Furthermore, education and degree can alter honorific use. Academics use formal honorifics. This shows education and social status respect.

Conclusion

This study support the main objective of the research which aims to analyze the variation of honorifics in Gamkonora language across different social layers. The use of honorifics found in daily conversation reflects the importance of politeness and respect for social status in maintaining relationships between individuals. This research reveals that the Gamkonora language plays an important role in showing the social structure that exists in the community, both at the family level, education, and in social interactions in the wider community. Thus, this research contributes to enriching our understanding of the relationship between language and social structure in the Gamkonora language-speaking community.

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