

KINSHIP TERMS IN THE NIAS LANGUAGE AS CARRIERS OF AUSTRONESIAN CULTURE AND THEIR EXISTENCE IN THE MODERN CONTEXT IN NORTH SUMATRA PROVINCE (AN ETHNOLINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE)

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Abstract

This research aims to describe kinship terminology in the Nias language as one reflection and bearers of Austronesian culture from an ethnolinguistic perspective. The study focuses on linguistic aspects in terms of socio-cultural structures and interpersonal relationships within the Nias ethnic community. This is a descriptive qualitative study with data consisting of words and expressions related to kinship terms in Nias, analyzed inductively using an ethnographic approach in order to explore the cultural meanings contained in these expressions. Data were collected through interviews, supported by library research. The findings show that kinship terms are organized based on age and generational level, namely consanguineal kin, affinal kin, and ego-equivalent categories. Ethnolinguistically, Nias kinship terms are very rich, expressed through words and multi-word phrases which reflect a hierarchical social structure (nobles, commoners, slaves) and strong patrilineal principles, as seen in terms such as *ama* 'father/in-law', *ina* 'mother/in-law', *ono alawe* 'married daughter' reflecting vertical and horizontal relationships. This kinship system is functionally significant as a social guide that maintains harmony, regulates rights and obligations, and ensures the continuation of Austronesian cultural traditions and respect within the community. In the modern context the existence of kinship terms continue to serve as a strong cultural anchor: not merely as words, but as a living social system that adapts in order to endure and help Nias communities maintain connections and identity in an increasingly globalized world.

Keywords – *kinship, Nias language, Austronesian culture, modernity*

Introduction

Language and culture are two fundamental entities in human life that are closely intertwined, mutually influential, and inseparable from one another in social practice. Language functions not only as a tool of communication for conveying information, ideas, and emotions, but also as a symbolic medium used to transmit cultural values, social norms, belief systems, and the social structures that exist and evolve within a society. From an ethnolinguistic perspective, language is understood as a representation of the cultural knowledge system possessed by a community, such that every linguistic form used by speakers reflects their worldview, social relations, and collective identity (Duranti, 1997).

One of the key aspects of the relationship between language and culture is the kinship system, which is one of the most fundamental social structures in human life. Kinship systems not only regulate genealogical relationships between individuals based on lineage

and marriage but also determine social roles, the distribution of power, rights and obligations, as well as patterns of interaction within society (Stone, 2010). In Austronesian societies, kinship systems play a crucial role in maintaining social stability, strengthening group cohesion, and preserving cultural identity across generations.

The Nias people of North Sumatra are known for their complex, structured kinship system, rich with deep cultural significance. This system not only reflects biological relationships between individuals but also illustrates a hierarchical social structure, the value of respect for age, and social interaction norms that govern individual behavior in daily life (Koentjaraningrat, 2009). Furthermore, the kinship system in Nias society also exhibits distinctive Austronesian cultural traits, such as a patrilineal system that traces descent through the paternal line and the importance of social alliances formed through marriage (Fox, 1980). This kinship system reflects the social structure, cultural values, and local knowledge systems that are the subject of this study. However, previous research has largely focused on the Nias language from a structural perspective or on historical linguistic kinship relationships, while studies specifically examining kinship terms from an ethnolinguistic perspective particularly those linking language to social structure and cultural dynamics—remain relatively limited. Therefore, this study is important to fill this gap by conducting an in-depth examination of the relationship between language, culture, and the kinship system in Nias society.

Based on the above discussion, this study aims to provide a detailed description of the kinship terminology structure in the Nias language from an ethnolinguistic perspective and its existence in a modern context characterized by globalization, social mobility, and advancements in communication technology. This study is crucial for efforts to safeguard, preserve, and pass on this language.

The approach adopted is interdisciplinary, with a focus on the sociocultural cognitive approach in linguistics (Langlotz, 2015). From this perspective, language issues within a society are viewed as phenomena linked to social and cultural factors; thus, the insights gained encompass an understanding of culture within the context of social interaction among the individuals involved. From an ethnolinguistic perspective, language is considered a crucial element in cultural practices. Duranti (1997) states that ethnolinguistics is the study of language as a reflection of culture and communication as a component of cultural activities. The meaning associated with ethnolinguistics can be understood as a field within linguistics that examines language within a broader social and cultural context, with the aim of promoting and preserving cultural practices and social structures (Foley, 1997:3). Furthermore, Wakit Abdullah (2013:10) states that ethnolinguistics is a linguistic discipline that focuses on linguistic aspects such as phrases, sentences, discourse, and other linguistic elements within social and cultural contexts—such as ceremonies, cultural events, and folklore—to protect and preserve cultural practices and the social order of a community. In this regard, ethnolinguistics demonstrates that how individuals within a community incorporate elements of their heritage language into the dominant language to develop a symbolic group identity, even without full mastery, and to support language revitalization efforts and social movements (Sukraandini et al., 2022; Jamallullail and Nordin, 2023). From this perspective, language issues in society can be viewed as socio-cultural phenomena, so that existing understandings relate to culture within the context of social interaction among the bearers of that culture.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach using ethnographic methods, aiming to understand linguistic phenomena within the sociocultural context of the speaker community in a deep, contextual, and interpretive manner. This approach was chosen because it is capable of revealing the meanings behind language use as well as the relationship between language and sociocultural practices in everyday life. The research location covers the regions of North Nias and South Nias, which represent dialectal variations in the Nias language as well as differences in sociocultural dynamics. There were ten informants in this study, selected purposively based on specific criteria: they were native speakers of the Nias language, possessed adequate knowledge of customs and kinship systems, and represented various age groups, genders, and social statuses, ensuring the data collected was representative (Faisal, 1990; Spradley, 1997). Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews to explore the informants' understanding of kinship terms and their usage in various social contexts, participant observation to understand language use in real-life interactions, and documentation through the recording and transcription of linguistic data. In addition, a literature review was conducted to strengthen the theoretical framework and compare the research results with previous studies. The documents used as sources of information included general references such as books and specific sources such as research results, scientific articles, and papers.

The collected data was analyzed using an inductive qualitative approach, that is, moving from the data toward abstraction from an ethnolinguistic perspective combined with sociolinguistic studies. In sociolinguistic studies, language is not only understood as a social system, a communication system, and as part of the culture of a particular society, but also takes into account how its use within society is influenced by certain factors such as social factors, including social status, educational level, age, economic status, gender, and so on, according to Fishman (in Chaer, 2004:49).

The results are of a local-ideographic nature because they reflect organized kinship terms, namely those based on blood kinship, affinity kinship, and kinship levels equivalent to the ego. Ethnolinguistically, kinship-related terms in Nias exhibit rich variation, expressed through words and phrases. This reflects a hierarchical social structure and reinforces strong patrilineal principles, such as *ama* (father/father-in-law), *ina* (mother/mother-in-law), and *ono alawe* (married daughter), which indicate both vertical and horizontal relationships. This kinship system serves as a social guide to maintain harmony, regulate rights and responsibilities, and ensure the preservation of Austronesian cultural traditions and respect within the community.

Finding and Discussion

3.1 The Kinship System of the Nias People

The kinship system of the Nias people is fundamentally patrilineal, meaning it traces descent through the father's line, so that men hold a central position in the family and social structure. In this system, men serve not only as heads of households but also as the primary inheritors of lineage and social identity. Kinship terms in the Nias language reflect complex social relationships and can be classified into three main categories: vertical relations, horizontal relations, and affiliation relations. Vertical relations reflect hierarchical relationships across generations; horizontal relations reflect equal relationships within a single generation; while affiliation relations reflect relationships formed through marriage that serve to expand social networks. A group descended from a single lineage is called *Mado*. A kinship group resulting from marriage is called *Ngambato* (husband and wife), forming a smaller kinship unit known as the nuclear family (Laoli et al., 1984/1985). In this system, the son becomes the heir to the lineage (clan). After marriage, daughters join their husband's family. A person's identity is largely determined by their father's lineage. This principle aligns with other Austronesian societies that also emphasize specific lineages (though variations exist, such as the matrilineal system in Minangkabau).

Table 1. Kinship Terms in the Nias Language: Bearers of Austronesian Culture

No	North ern Nias (NU) and South ern Nias (NS) Term s	Meaning / Equivale nt	Type of Kinship	Relationshi p (Ego)	Austron esian Cultural Traits	Ethnolin guistic Meaning
1	Ama (NU, NS)	Father / Father- in-law	Consang uineal & Affiliativ e	Vertical (ascending)	Strong patrilinea l	Symbol of authority, head of the family
2	Mothe r (NU, NS)	Mother / Mother- in-law	Consang uineal & Affiliativ e	Vertical (ascending)	Nuclear family	Source of affection and early education
3	Ono (NU, NS)	Child	Biologica l	Vertical (descendant)	Lineal descenda nt	Represent ation of generatio nal continuit y
4	Ono Alawe (NU)	Daughter (married)	Consang uineal + Affiliatio n	Vertical (descendant)	Exogamy , social mobility	Indicates the relationsh ip

	Ono Sialawe (NS)					between two families
5	Ono Matua (NU), Ono Simatua (NS)	Son	Consanguineous	Vertical (descendant)	Patrilineal	Heir to the family name and status
6	Talifusö (NU), Iwa (NS)	Brother	Consanguineous	Horizontal	Family solidarity	Bonds of cooperation and protection
7	Talifusö alawe, (NU), Iwa Sialawe	Sister	Consanguineous	Horizontal	Gender structure	Roles in social relations and marriage
8	La'o (NU, NS)	Sister-in-law	Affiliation	Horizontal	Marital alliance	Social network enhancer
9	Elder (NU, NS)	Grandfather	Consanguineous	Vertical (ascending)	Honoring ancestors	Symbol of tradition and wisdom
10	Awe (NU, NS)	Grandmother	Consanguineous	Vertical (ascending)	Generational system	Guardian of cultural values
11	Si Baya (NU, NS)	Uncle (father's older brother)	Consanguineous	Vertical (ascending)	Seniority	Representation of age hierarchy
12	Ina Lawe (NU, NS)	Aunt (mother's sister)	Consanguineous	Vertical (ascending)	Extended family	The role of supplementary care
13	Umonö (NS, NU)	Son-in-law	Affiliation	Vertical/horizontal	Family integration	Link between two lineages
14	Balugu (NU),	Nobility	Social status	Vertical social stratification	Social stratification	Elite class identity

	Si'ulu (NS)					
15	Niha Mbanua (NU, NS)	Common people	Social status	Horizontal social structure	Community structure	Representation of the general public
16	Sawuyu (NU, NS)	Slaves (historical)	Social status	Vertical social structure	Old stratification system	Social historical markers

Table 1 above illustrates that the kinship system in Nias is patrilineal (descent through the father). However, the social structure of Nias society is not based solely on the patrilineal nuclear family, but also extends to larger kinship groups. The nuclear family includes the father, mother, and children. The extended family includes siblings, uncles, aunts, and their descendants, as well as the clan (*marga*), which encompasses a large group based on the paternal lineage. In the traditional context, *Siulu/Balugu* refers to the noble class or traditional elite, while *Niha mbanua* denotes the common people. This status also influences patterns of kinship, marriage, and social status. It places emphasis on age hierarchy, and social position serves as a regulator of social relationships, acting as a means to disseminate Austronesian cultural values.

Table 2. Comparison of Kinship Systems (Nias, Bali, Batak, Minangkabau) in the Austronesian Cultural Group Austronesian

Aspect	Nias	Bali	Batak	Minangkabau
Lineage	Patrilineal	Patrilineal	Patrilineal	Matrilineal
Kinship group	Clan	Dadia (family clan)	Clan	Tribe
Inheritance	From father to son	From father	From father	From mother to daughter
Residence after marriage	Virilocal (living with the husband)	Virilocal	Virilocal	Uxorilocal (living with the wife)
Marriage system	Clan exogamy	Exogamy	Clan exogamy	Tribal exogamy
Marriage exchange system	Böwö (jujuran)	Dowry/custom	Sinamot	Japuik money
Role of men	Dominant (heir)	Head of the family	Clan heir	Guardian (mamak)

Role of women	Joining the husband's family	Joining the husband's family	Joining the husband's family	Primary heir
Social stratification	Exists (Si'ulu, etc.)	Exists (caste)	Not rigid	Not rigid
Characteristic of Austronesia	Strong clans + bride price	Rituals + ancestors	Strong clan	Matrilineal descent

References: Bali, Batak, Minangkabau

Table 2 above shows the similarities among Austronesian cultures, namely complex kinship systems, marriage as an alisani, and languages that reflect social structures.

Table 3. Kinship Terms in the Nias Language Reflect a Patrilineal System.

Terms Northern Nias (NU), Southern Nias (NS)	Meaning
Ama (NU, NS)	Father
Ina	Mother
Talifuso, Ira Matua (NU), Iwagu Simatua (NS)	Brother
Talifuso, Ira Alawe (NU), Iwa Sialawe	Sisters
Ono (NU, NS)	Children
Ono Alawe	Daughter

This term denotes distinctions based on generation, gender, and kinship ties, and serves as a marker of social identity, a regulator of social relations, and a vehicle for the transmission of traditions. In practice, the use of this term reflects norms of etiquette and social hierarchy

Kinship terms in the Nias language reflect complex social relationships and can be classified into three main categories: vertical relationships, horizontal relationships, and affiliative relationships. Vertical relationships reflect hierarchical ties across generations; horizontal relationships reflect peer relationships within a single generation; and affiliative relationships reflect ties formed through marriage that serve to expand social networks.

The relationship between kinship terms becomes apparent when one person addresses another, through the use of forms of address. The use of these forms of address depends heavily on the relationship between the speaker and the addressee and is also determined by several factors, namely gender, age, status, respect, politeness, and kinship ties. The use of terms of address is closely related to social situations within a specific cultural context.

3.2 Terms for Blood Kinship in the Nias Language

Blood kinship is a relationship based on biological lineage that connects individuals within a family. In the Nias language, terms such as *ama* (father) and *ina* (mother) not only serve as markers of immediate family relationships but also carry symbolic meanings that reflect authority, respect, responsibility, and the moral values held in high regard within the community.

The use of these terms in everyday interactions demonstrates that language serves as a tool for preserving and transmitting cultural values that emphasize the importance of hierarchy, respect for elders, and a well-ordered social structure. Thus, kinship terms possess not only denotative meanings but also connotative meanings related to cultural values.

1) The Nias Kinship System Based on Age and Gender

Age plays a very significant role in the proper use of honorifics. Younger people should not use just any words when addressing older people or their conversation partners. For example, the appropriate term for addressing *someone* older is “ ”; for *a younger sibling*, “*akhi*” is used; for an older sibling, “*kaak*” is used; and for *a child*, “*ono*” is used ‘child’ is addressed as ‘*ono*’, those addressed as ‘*ama*’ (‘father’) are called ‘*ama*’, those addressed as ‘*ina*’ (‘mother’) are called ‘*ina*’, those addressed as ‘*dua*’ (‘grandfather/grandmother’) are called ‘*dua*’, those addressed as ‘*Sibaya*’ (‘uncle’) are called ‘*Sibaya*’, those addressed as ‘*foomo*’ (‘aunt’) are called ‘*foomo*’, and so on. The word *yango* ‘you’ should not be used in conversation with family members or others, especially by younger people when speaking to older people; however, older people may use this word when speaking to younger people.

In general, the Nias language is divided into two main regions: Northern Nias and Southern Nias. The use of kinship-based terms of address in Nias society also varies between Northern and Southern Nias communities, primarily in terms of dialectal, phonological, and pragmatic usage, rather than differences in kinship structure. Both remain part of the same Austronesian patrilineal cultural system. In Nias communities, age is a crucial factor in determining how to address others. Younger individuals must use terms of address that demonstrate respect toward their elders.

In the Nias community, age is a key factor in determining how to address others. Younger people must use terms of address that show respect to their elders, as in the following examples.

(1) The terms “*ama*” (father) and “*ina*” (mother)

The term of address using the noun “*Ama*” (“father”) is used for older men or fathers, and the term of address using the noun “*Ina*” (“mother”) is used for older women or mothers. These forms of address, based on age, reflect deep-rooted cultural values of respect. This indicates that social relationships are hierarchical, with age serving as the primary determinant of one’s social status, as seen in the following dialogue.

Dialogue: (2) with an elder in the Northern Nias language

A 1: *Ama, Hewisa ndra’ugö?*

Father, how are you?

B 1: *Turia si sökhi nogu, Hawisa ndra’ugö ?*

'I'm fine, my child. How about you?

A 2: *Ina, Hewisa nono alawe si no möi nihalö ?*
 Mom, how is that married daughter?

B 2: *ya'ia, sökhi-sökhi manö?*,
 She's doing fine

Dialogue (3): Interaction with parents in Southern Nias

A 1: *Dad, how are you ?* 'Dad, how are you?

B 1: *ya'ia sökhi nogu* 'I'm fine, my child

A 2: *Ina, hawisa nonou alawe si no möi nihalö?*
 'Mom, how is that married daughter of ours?

B 2: *She's doing well.*
 'She's doing fine.

The use of the words *ama* 'father' and *ina* 'mother' in dialogues (2a1), 2a2, 3a1, and (3a2) above indicates a vertical relationship and respect. The use of the word *nonou alawe* 'daughter' in (2a2) and 3a2) serves as an expression of affection while also affirming the genealogical relationship. The forms of address in dialogues (2a1), (2b1), (3a1), and (3a2) also reflect gender role divisions in Nias culture. Men are typically associated with authority, while women are associated with domestic roles and the preservation of cultural values.

(4) Dialogue: Interaction within an Extended Family in Northern Nias

A: *Ina Hewisa, , nono alawe , si no möi niholö?*
 'Mother, how is that married daughter?

B: *Ya'ia sökho-sökhi manö*
 She's doing fine

(5) Dialogue: Interactions within an Extended Family in the Northern Nias Language

A: *Ina, hadia umono sialawe ?*
 Mom, how is that married daughter?

B: *Faoma dödögu.*
 'She's doing fine'

The forms of address in dialogues (1), (2), (3), (4), and (5) also reveal gender role divisions in Nias culture. Men tend to be associated with authority, while women are associated with domestic roles and the preservation of cultural values. In data (4) above, the phrase *nono alawe* 'daughter' and *umono sialawe* 'married daughter' in (5) indicate specific social statuses that reflect marital status within the kinship system. This reflects a tendency toward simplification in a modern context.

(6) Dialogue: Peer-to-Peer Social Interaction in the Northern Nias Language

A: *Ya'ahowu, hewisa ndra'ugo?*

'Hello, how are you?'

B: *Lo hadia ia khogu* 'I'm fine'

(7) Dialogue: Peer Social Interaction in Southern Nias

A: *Ya'ahowu* . "Hello, may you be blessed."

B: Faoma. 'Fine'

The forms of address in dialogues (6) and (7), specifically "*Ya'ahowu*," reflect a neutral form of address that conveys social solidarity. This form of address does not indicate a strong hierarchy. The kinship system based on forms of address, which vary by age and gender, is multidimensional. Forms of address are not influenced by a single factor but rather by a combination of age, gender, and genealogical relationships.

Table 4. The Nias Language Kinship Greeting System

N o	Kins hip Ter m	Type of Gree ting	Based on Age	Social Statu s	Gen der	Family Relations hips	Ethnolin guistic Meaning
1	<i>Ama</i>	Term of respe ct	Elder	High (autho rity)	Male	Father/Fa ther-in- law	Symbol of power, head of the family
2	<i>Ina</i>	Term of respe ct	Elder	Tall (careg iver)	Fem ale	Mother/ Mother- in-law	Symbol of love and guardian of values
3	<i>Ono</i>	Neut ral greet ing	Younger	Youn ger (child)	Gene ral	Child	Represent ation of descent
4	<i>Ono alaw e</i>	Speci fic greet ing	Younger /older	Chang es after marria ge	Fem ale	Married daughter	Change in social status
5	(Nob le title)	Speci al title	Variable	Very high	Com mon	Social elite	Legitimac y of power

6	(Greeting among peers)	Neutral form of address	Equal	Equal	General	Non-hierarchical	Social solidarity
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Table 4 This system demonstrates that language functions not only as a tool for communication, but also as a symbolic system that regulates social interaction and preserves cultural identity.

Table 5 : Differences in Terms of Address and Kinship in Northern and Southern Nias

No.	Aspect	Northern Nias	Southern Nias
1.	Complexity	High	Simpler
2.	Customary power is very strong	Very strong	Beginning to adapt
3.	Variations in Terminology	More	More flexible.

2) The Nias Language Family System According to Affiliation

Affinal kinship is a relationship formed through marriage that serves to integrate individuals into a broader social network (Stone; Koentjaraningrat, 2009). In the Nias language, terms such as *ama matua* and *ina matua* indicate that relationships with in-laws are treated as an integral part of the kinship system. This phenomenon demonstrates that language not only reflects social relationships but also plays an active role in shaping and reinforcing them. Through the use of kinship terms, individuals who previously had no biological connection can be accepted as part of the family.

Affinal kinship in the Nias language refers to relationships formed through marriage, as seen in the use of terms such as *ama matua* ‘father-in-law’, ‘*mother-in-law*’, ‘*umono simatua*’ or ‘*son-in-law*’, ‘*umono sialawe*’ (‘daughter-in-law’), ‘*lao ira matua*’ (‘brother-in-law’), and ‘*lao ira alawe*’ (‘sister-in-law’) when addressing the father-in-law and mother-in-law, the son-in-law and daughter-in-law, and the brother-in-law and sister-in-law. This phenomenon illustrates the expansion of meaning from biological relationships to social relationships, aimed at strengthening family integration and maintaining balance within the community. From an ethnolinguistic perspective, this indicates that language not only reflects kinship ties but also functions as a tool for building social alliances (Stone, 2010; Fox, 1980). The following are examples of kinship terms in the Nias language, including both Northern Nias and Southern Nias.

(8) Affinity terms between husband and wife (Northern Nias dialect)

- Husband: *Amagu matuagu, hadia so ia ba nomo?*
 ‘Father-in-law, are you at home?’
- B. Wife: *So ia inagu matuagu mondiono ban aha nawu*
 ‘Yes, he’s here. My mother-in-law is cooking in the kitchen’
- A: Husband: *Hadia so la’ogu ba nomo?*
 “Is my brother-in-law home?”
- B: Wife: No! Lo’o! La’ogu nomöi ba kabu
 “No! My brother-in-law went to the garden.”

(9) Affiliative kinship dialogue: Husband and wife (Southern Nias language)

- A (Husband): *Ama matua hadia so ia ba omo?*
 “Father-in-law, are you home?”
- B (Wife): *He’e, Ama matua so ia. Ina matua mondino ba naha nawu*
 ‘Yes, my father-in-law is here. My mother-in-law is cooking.
- A: (Husband) : *Lao ira matua ba omo? ‘?’*
 Brother-in-law at home
- B: (Wife) *He’e, la’o ira matua ma möi ba kabu*
 . ‘Yes, my brother-in-law has gone to the garden

In dialogue data (8) above, the phrase *amagu matagu* ‘father-in-law’ and the phrase ‘*matuagu*’ ‘mother-in-law’, along with the word *la’ogu* ‘brother-in-law’, and in dialogue data (9), the phrases *ama matua* ‘father-in-law’ and *ina matua* ‘mother-in-law’ and *lao ira matua* indicate that direct marital relationships are constructed as full kinship relations rather than external relationships. This illustrates that language not only reflects reality but also creates social structures. The element ‘*matua*’ in the phrases ‘*lao ira matua*’ and ‘*ama matua*’ is not merely a linguistic marker but a symbol of social acceptance and integration into the extended family. This aligns with the theory of alliance in anthropology as a form of social exchange.

Table 5. Comparison of the Related Languages of the North and South Nias Branches of the

Aspect	Northern Nias	South Nias	Conclusion
Structure	Simple	Complex	South is more explicit
Term for in-laws	Long (possessive)	Concise	Same meaning
Term for "sibling-in-law"	Short	Longer	South is more formal
Social function	Same	Same	Unchanged

3) The Nias kinship system according to ego kinship

Ego-equivalent kinship refers to relationships within the same generation, such as siblings and cousins, which are more flexible and egalitarian. In the Nias language, these relationships are not always marked by a strict lexical distinction between older and younger siblings, so the meaning of the relationship is often determined by the social context and the communicative situation. This indicates that Nias culture is characterized as a high-context culture, where the meaning of communication is determined not only by words, but also by the situation, social relations, and prevailing cultural norms. Consider the following dialogue example.

Dialogue 10: A Conversation Between Relatives in the Northern Nias Dialect

A: *Talifosögu ono matua , hadia möio ba sekola?*

Brother, are you going to school?

B: *Moöi talifosoöda ira alawe fao ia*

Yes, our sister is going.

A: *! Talifosoögu ira alawe orino goda!*

Sister, please cook for us!

B: Lau, tola

‘Yes, okay

Dialogue 11: Conversation between siblings in the Southern Nias dialect

A: *Iwagu simatua, gömöi sikola?*

Brother, are you going to school?

B: *Möoi iwada si alawe mööiya*

“Yes, our sister is coming too.”

A: *! Iwagu sialawe orino goda*

Sister, please cook our food!

B: E’o lau

‘Yes, okay’

Equal kinship terms, such as in dialogue example (10) with “*ono matua*” and “*ira alawe*,” in dialogue (11) with the phrases “*iwagu simatua*” and “*iwada si alawe*” above , indicate: a relationship that is not strictly hierarchical but remains within a cultural framework of respect , in contrast to: *Ama / Ina* (vertical, strongly hierarchical). Since there is no lexical distinction for “older sibling/younger sibling,” meaning is determined by actual age, the communication situation, and intonation. This kinship of ego-equivalence indicates , reflecting a high-context culture

Table 6. Comparison of Ego-Equality in the Northern Nias Dialect and the Southern Nias Dialect

Aspect	Northern Nias	South Nias	Analysis
Brother	Talifusō Ira Matua	<i>Iwagu</i> <i>Simatua</i>	Phonological changes
Sister	<i>Talifuso</i> Ira <i>alawe</i>	<i>Iwa sialawe</i>	Phonological changes
Age markers	Not explicit	Not explicit	Pragmatics
Communication style	Concise	More expressive	Cultural variations

Equal-status kinship terms, as illustrated in the dialogue above, indicate a relationship that is not strictly hierarchical but remains within a cultural framework of respect in contrast to: Ama / Ina (vertical, strongly hierarchical). Since there is no lexical distinction between “older sibling” and “younger sibling,” meaning is determined by actual age, the communication context, and intonation. This kinship of equal status indicates a high-context culture (*high-context culture*). Kinship terms in Nias society reflect hierarchy and regulate social interaction. From a sociolinguistic perspective, this kinship language preserves cultural values and serves as a group identity. This is related to the Austronesian cultural system, characterized by patrilineal systems, relational terms, and the importance of marriage. Kinship levels in the Nias language demonstrate a vertical structure (strong *hierarchy*), a horizontal structure (*flexible*), and an affiliation structure (*integrative*). Together, these three form a cohesive social system.

The kinship system of the Nias language consists of three main levels: vertical, horizontal, and affiliation. Each level has social functions and cultural significance. Language serves as the primary tool for maintaining the kinship structure. Variations in the Northern and Southern Nias dialects do not alter the basic system.

3.3 Nias Kinship Terms in a Modern Context

In the context of modern society, kinship terms in the Nias language have undergone significant shifts in function due to the influences of globalization, urbanization, and advancements in communication technology. Whereas in traditional times kinship terms served as the primary regulator of social structure, in the modern context their function has shifted to symbolizing cultural identity and expressing social solidarity. Younger generations tend to use kinship terms selectively and contextually, combining them with Indonesian in their daily communication. This phenomenon of “ ” indicates a process of adaptation and negotiation of cultural identity amidst rapid social change.

Nevertheless, in the context of customs and rituals, the use of kinship terms remains firmly entrenched and is even considered sacred. This indicates that kinship terms continue to serve an important function as a cultural anchor that preserves the continuity of traditions and community identity.

Table 7. Functions of changes in kinship terms

Traditional Functions	Modern Function
Indicator of social hierarchy	Indicator of cultural identity
Regulator of social relations	A means of fostering closeness
Symbols of power	Symbols of tradition

Kinship terms no longer fully govern social structures, but rather function as symbols of identity and cultural heritage

In the digital age, the use of kinship terms has also emerged on social media, in family groups (WhatsApp, etc.), and within local cultural contexts. Terms like “Ama” or “Ina” are used in family chats. Digitalization has actually created new opportunities to preserve language, albeit in a more flexible form. This phenomenon reflects a process of cultural identity adaptation, in which younger generations strive to preserve traditions while adapting them to modern contexts.

It can be concluded that kinship terms in the Nias language have undergone changes and adaptations, rather than becoming extinct. There has been a shift in function from structural to symbolic. The younger generation plays a crucial role in this process of change. Kinship terms remain as a strong cultural identity. This study demonstrates that language is dynamic and capable of adaptation. Changes in language reflect changes in culture. Language preservation should not be rigidly tied to form but should also allow for adaptation.

Conclusions

Kinship terms in the Nias language are a powerful reflection of Austronesian culture, illustrating the close ties between language, social structure, and cultural values. The kinship system, which comprises vertical, horizontal, and affiliative relationships, demonstrates that language plays a vital role in organizing, reflecting, and sustaining the social life of the community.

From an ethnolinguistic perspective, kinship terms not only describe social reality but also serve as a tool for shaping, maintaining, and transmitting cultural identity from one generation to the next. The existence of a patrilineal system affirms men’s position as the bearers of the lineage, while language serves as the primary means of regulating social relationships, expressions of respect, and the division of roles within society

In the modern era, the function of kinship terms has shifted from regulating social order to serving as symbols of cultural identity. Despite these adaptations including the use of mixed languages and digital media kinship terms continue to exist as “cultural pillars” that preserve the continuity of the traditions and identity of the Nias people amid the tide of globalization.

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