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Kinship, seniority, and rights to know in Datooga children's everyday interaction

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the epistemics of social relations among Datooga-speaking children of rural Tanzania. It describes two linguistic resources for epistemic management in the Datooga language, namely, questions and an epistemic particle *néadá*. The paper then investigates children's use of these two resources in a 3.5 h sample of children's spontaneous interaction, taken from a video corpus. Questions often establish epistemic asymmetries by positioning addressees as more knowledgeable, while use of the particle *néadá* projects speech participants' equal rights to know, typically in emphatic contrast to the epistemic implications of an earlier turn. Of special interest is how children's negotiation of rights to know reveals sensitivity to social relations, particularly those defined by kinship and age. Though by no means ever-present, concepts of kinship and seniority are made relevant in these children's interactions. Children oriented to kinship relations when deferring to other people's rights to know about their own kin, and they positioned speech participants in junior–senior relationships when requesting generalizable knowledge. The paper contributes to empirical research on children's everyday language use with insights from a rural African community.

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1. Introduction

In a much-cited paper, [Raymond and Heritage \(2006\)](#) have shown how the negotiation of knowledge in interaction can be linked to interlocutors' social identities, a phenomenon they refer to as “the epistemics of social relations”. In one case, the authors analyse how a speaker designs an assessment of her interlocutor's grandchildren (“they're a lovely family now ar'n't they”) with a tag question that defers to the latter's privileged rights to know about and evaluate her own relatives (2006: 688). In orienting to such an epistemic asymmetry, the speaker makes relevant the close social relation that holds between her addressee and the referent. The present paper addresses this topic of the epistemics of social relations in the context of Datooga-speaking children of rural Tanzania. It explores how children use linguistic resources to display knowing or not-knowing, how children orient to the knowledge states of others, and to what extent these epistemic positions can be linked to aspects of children's social identities and relationships. I concentrate on two linguistic resources that provide important tools for epistemic management in the Datooga language: first, questions, and second, an epistemic particle *néadá*. While questions often establish epistemic asymmetries between individuals, with speakers deferring to their addressee's

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rights to know, the particle *néadá* is shown to emphasise participants' equal rights to know. Of particular interest here is how these different configurations of rights to knowledge might articulate with aspects of participants' identities.

Ethnographic research in rural Datooga-speaking communities suggests that two dimensions of social identity are especially relevant for Datooga children: seniority, as determined by age, and kinship relations. One goal of this paper is to investigate the degree to which concepts of seniority and kinship are made relevant in children's everyday negotiations of who knows what. The above example from [Raymond and Heritage \(2006\)](#) indicates how English-speaking adults might orient to kinship relations in their negotiation of knowledge. We will encounter a similar example in my child language data, in which participants' kinship relations influence their projections of rights to know. How speakers orient to age differentials in their epistemic management has not attracted much scholarly attention, though the idea that age confers epistemic primacy in certain knowledge domains is presumably of cross-cultural relevance.¹ Age-based seniority is an important principle of social organization in societies throughout Africa, with sibling birth order often a relevant dimension of social differentiation ([Lüpke and Storch, 2013](#): 36). The significance of sibling birth order in Datooga communities is evident from the differential rights and responsibilities of siblings as well the existence of lexicalised terms for the eldest and youngest child (*dúuwèachèeda* and *ng'adánèeda*, respectively). As we will see, concepts of seniority appear to influence children's language use in terms of whom they direct requests for information to, though younger participants are given epistemic primacy in certain contexts.²

[Goody \(1978\)](#) addressed the relationship between age and knowledge negotiation in her study of how seniority, as well other differences in social status, affected the use of different modes of questioning among both adults and children in Gonja, Ghana. While the tools of micro-level epistemic analysis were not yet available to Goody, based on her ethnographic work she showed how certain configurations of relative social status could inhibit the use of direct information questions on account of their performative effects. For instance, one of her question categories, termed 'control' questions, are information questions associated with people in positions of authority, which thus tended to be avoided by juniors when addressing seniors. Goody also touches on the ways in which cultural ideologies about childhood may affect epistemic practices. She observed that, in contrast to children growing up in Western societies, "Gonja children do not bombard their parents with endless questions about the world around them" (1978:25). I had a similar impression with respect to Datooga children when conducting my fieldwork in Tanzania and here I take a systematic look at the distribution of questions in a sample of children's interaction (see §4). At least in this particular sample, requests for information indeed seem to play only a minor role in children's everyday speech practices.

[Goody's \(1978\)](#) contribution appeared in the context of flourishing research in developmental pragmatics and language socialization in the 1970s and 1980s. Children's use of questions, a topic I address here, received quite a bit attention in this period, e.g., [Keenan et al. \(1978\)](#), [Tyack and Ingram \(1977\)](#), [James and Seebach \(1982\)](#). We are currently seeing a revival of interest in developmental pragmatics, particularly from a conversation analytic perspective ([Gardner and Forrester, 2010](#); [Stivers et al., 2018](#); [Walker, 2017](#); [Davidson, 2018](#)), but also in more experimental traditions (e.g., [Salomo et al., 2013](#)). One novel development within this broad field of developmental pragmatics is a strand of research exploring children's negotiation of knowledge in interaction: see papers in [Bateman and Church \(2017\)](#). The present paper adds to this growing body of work with data from a rural African context. While children's use of epistemic resources is an interesting research area in its own right, part of the purpose of this study is to explore what everyday language use can reveal about children's understandings of social organization. The research presented here feeds into a larger project investigating children's understanding of kinship concepts. While the larger project takes a multi-methods approach, interactional analysis of children's negotiation of knowledge is an especially rich method, I think, for understanding how children conceptualise their social worlds.

In addition to this more anthropological goal, the paper aims to add to our knowledge of epistemic resources in the world's languages, and in Africa in particular. Grammatical evidentials have not been widely attested in Africa, though [Aikhenvald](#) suspects this is due to "oversight" rather than "absence" (2014: 16). While grammaticalized evidentials are reported for some other Nilotic languages (e.g., [Storch \(2013\)](#) on Luwo and [Miller and Gilley \(2007\)](#) on Shilluk), to my knowledge Datooga does not code evidential meanings grammatically. However, speakers of course have access to lexical and other resources for epistemic management. Such resources are not well documented in Datooga or other Nilotic languages, though [Dimmendaal \(2014\)](#) provides a survey of "attitude markers" in this language family, some of which appear to have epistemic functions. Given the limited state of our knowledge about epistemic management in Datooga and related languages, in §3 I spend some time describing two relevant resources, namely questions and a particle *néadá*. The paper then investigates children's use of these resources in a sample of interaction and explores examples that demonstrate children's sensitivity to seniority and kinship relations (§4). First, though, I provide some background about the Datooga language and its speakers.

¹ [Sidnell \(2005\)](#) explores the relationship between age and epistemic rights in his book on the 'social life of knowledge' in Guyana, demonstrating, for instance, the importance of age in reminiscing about the past. Research on how age differentials might shape other aspects of interaction includes [Sidnell et al. \(2020\)](#) on the role of seniority in other-initiated repair in Vietnamese, [Coupland et al. \(1991\)](#) on the construction of an elderly identity in British conversation, and [Albert \(1964\)](#) on the role of age (as well as social rank) in determining the organisation of turn-taking in mid-twentieth-century Burundi.

² As indicated in this paragraph, 'seniority' is used in this paper to refer to differences based on biological age. A second kind of seniority is determined by genealogical relationships, e.g., someone in my father's generation is my senior, even if they are younger than me. While both concepts of seniority are relevant for Datooga, and potentially interact in interesting ways, for simplicity we restrict our focus to age-based seniority here.

2. Ethnographic and sociolinguistic background

The term ‘Datooga’ refers to an umbrella ethnic identity as well as a cluster of dialects spoken in several different regions of Tanzania. The research presented here was conducted with speakers of the Barabaiga and Gisamjanga dialects, terms which are also used as ethnic identity labels. Barabaiga and Gisamjanga people were traditionally semi-nomadic cattle herders and cattle remain central to social and economic life, though many people now live more sedentary lives, practicing agriculture in addition to pastoralism. Like other pastoralist groups of East Africa (see, e.g., Yanda & Mung’ong’o, 2016), Datooga people are politically and socioeconomically marginalised within the larger nation and many live in relative poverty. Limited integration into the wage economy, the Tanzanian education system, and urban civic life means that, at least in rural Datooga communities, the language is still widely spoken and learned by many children as their first (and sometimes only) language. Across all dialects, Muzale and Rugemalira (2008) estimate the speaker population to be around 160,000, which makes Datooga a medium-sized language in the Tanzanian context. Genetically, Datooga belongs to the Southern Nilotic family; areally, the language is spoken in a region of high linguistic diversity (Kießling et al., 2008) which has seen long-term contact between speakers of Cushitic Iraqw, in particular, but also speakers of various Bantu as well as isolate languages.

My fieldwork with Datooga speakers has been concentrated in villages located in Mbulu District, Manyara Region. The data on children’s language use presented in this paper was mostly recorded between April and December 2017 in a single family compound where I have carried out both linguistic and ethnographic fieldwork for several years.³ The compound is located in a rural village, mostly inhabited by ethnic Datooga still pursuing a pastoral lifestyle. ‘Village’ in this context is used to refer to an administrative unit; while there is a small cluster of concrete buildings that serve as residences and shops, the physical environment of the village is largely savannah, with domestic compounds and associated agricultural plots located at some distance from this centre and from each other. The children whose speech practices form the basis of this study live in two interconnected compounds belonging to a male elder and his deceased son along with their wives and children. The composition of the household varies over time but during my fieldwork there were ten children living permanently in the compound, ranging in age from new-born to around sixteen years. Most of these children were more or less monolingual and spent their days in and around the family compound, helping with herding, fetching water, looking after younger siblings, and performing other household labour.

Before exploring how this particular group of children negotiate knowledge through their language use, I describe the epistemic linguistic resources that form the focus of the study, namely, questions and an epistemic particle *néadá*.

3. Resources for epistemic management in Datooga

Datooga is not an especially well-described language: the most comprehensive works are Rottland (1982), which provides a sketch grammar of all dialects, and Griscom (2019), a doctoral thesis on the verbal morphosyntax of Asimjeega Datooga. Various aspects of Datooga nominal and verbal morphology have been dealt with in papers by Kießling (e.g., Kießling, 2000, 2007). Briefly, Datooga is a verb-initial language, though word order is flexible, with synthetic morphology and grammatical tone. Datooga has no attested grammaticalized system of evidential marking and other epistemic resources have not received much attention, though Griscom (2019: 74–75) deals briefly with interrogatives in Asimjeega Datooga. While not its primary goal, this paper thus contributes in a minor way to Datooga language description with the following short sections on question formation (3.1) and the epistemic particle *néadá* (3.2). These overviews serve as a foundation for considering children’s use of these resources in Section 4.

3.1. Questions

Polar questions in Datooga are distinguished from declarative utterances only by rising pitch, as Griscom (2019) also describes with reference to his Asimjeega data. Extract 1 provides a simple, one-word example of a polar question, followed by a confirmation. The rising pitch of the polar question in line 1 is indicated by the corresponding line on the spectrogram in Fig. 1 (produced in Praat (Boersma and Weenink, 2021)).⁴

³ I spent multiple two-week periods living in my host household and would make recordings of interaction several times a day. Conversations were recorded with the prior permission of the adults present. We often watched parts of the recordings back afterwards (which the children especially enjoyed) and family members understood that I transcribed what was said, and would later write about it, though the exact nature of my analysis was difficult to translate. Institutional ethical clearance for this project was granted by the University of Bristol School of Arts Ethical Review Board. Names used in the paper are pseudonyms.

⁴ Abbreviations of morpheme glosses can be found in the Leipzig Glossing Rules, with the exception of the following: AFF ‘affirmative’; ASSOC ‘associative’; CF ‘centrifugal’; CP ‘centripetal’; DSC ‘discourse marker’; EPIST ‘epistemic marker’; IS ‘inflectional suffix’; MR ‘multiple reference’; PLUR ‘pluractional’; PRO ‘pronoun’; PS ‘primary suffix’; PSN ‘personal name’; TERM ‘terminal’; UR ‘unit reference’. I use an adapted version of the standardized Datooga orthography with surface tone marking.

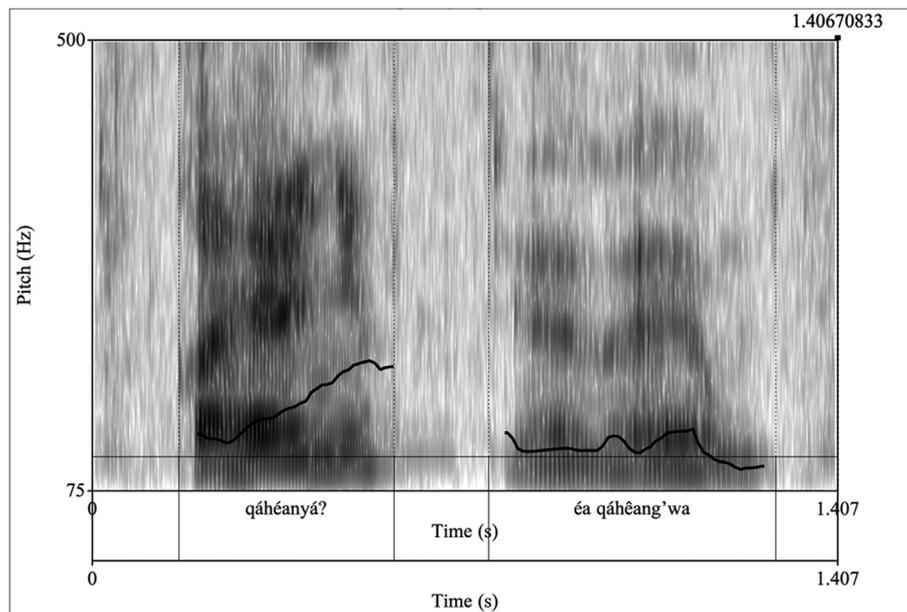


Fig. 1. Spectrogram and pitch track of Extract 4.

Extract 1

- 1 Majirjir *qáhéanyá?*
house.1PL.POSS
"at our house?"
2 (0.2)
3 Muudaan *éa qáhéang'wa*
ea qáhéang'wa
yes house.2PL.POSS
"yes, at yours"

To answer polar questions, Datooga speakers typically use interjections (the affirmative token *éa*, as well as *mmm*, and the negative token *màndà*, or *ah-ah*, *mm-mm*), though in this example we see a 'combination' answer comprising of an affirmative interjection plus repetition with deictic shift (Enfield et al., 2018).

Content questions in Datooga are formed using in situ interrogative words and rising pitch. Interrogative words in Datooga include *ng'èa(há)* 'who', *náa(há)* 'what', *èenù* 'where', *èejù* 'when', *qwásáan* 'why', and *hàad* 'how many'. Content questions can also be formed by prefixing the nominal interrogative prefix *áná-* 'which' to a noun. Datooga is usually described as a verb-initial language, though constituent order is flexible: VAO, VOA, AVO, AOV and OVA are all attested in my corpus. Interrogative words, however, are much more restricted than other nominal arguments in their syntactic position: these forms are not attested in preverbal position in my data and almost always directly follow the verb.⁵ Extract 2, from a recording of adult conversation, gives an example of a content question. Here, the question word *ng'èa* 'who' encodes the subject and occurs postverbally; the response also contains a postverbal subject argument:

Extract 2

- 4 Majirjir *Dèedée bégà gwéadú ng'èa?*
Dèedée bée-gà gwéadú **ng'èa?**
PSN water-MR AFF.3.bring,CP who
"Deedee, who brought the water?"
5 (0.25)
6 Deedee *gwéadú Úchimbù*
gwéadú Úchimbù
AFF.3.bring,CP PSN
"Uchimbu brought it"

⁵ These constraints point to the information structural meanings associated with particular positions in the clause; Kießling (2007: 158) suggests that immediate post-verbal position is associated with contrastive focus.

3.2. Epistemic particle *néadá*

The second linguistic feature to be considered in this paper is the epistemic particle *néadá*. My analysis of the structural and functional properties of this particle is based on a sample of 100 utterances containing *néadá* that were extracted from adult speech in the first 5 h of my video corpus.⁶ These 5 h amount to roughly 25,700 transcribed words. In terms of frequency, then, the particle occurs in this particular sample on average once every 3 min, or approximately four times per 1,000 words. An optional particle, *néadá* indexes shared access to some piece of knowledge. By using *néadá*, speakers signal that they and their addressee occupy similar positions “on an epistemic gradient” (Heritage, 2012: 32), often in emphatic contrast to an epistemic asymmetry that has been projected in an earlier turn (see discussion of Extract 3 below for an example). As *néadá* relates to both the speaker and the addressee's states of knowledge, it can be described as a complex perspective marker (Bergqvist, 2017). I gloss this epistemic status particle as EPIST.

The pragmatic effect of *néadá* depends on the sentence type and polarity of the utterance in which it appears. In declarative utterances, *néadá* indicates that the speaker knows the proposition to be true and believes that the addressee also has access to this knowledge. For example, in Extract 3, a child asks his mother whether a pen has a function (line 13). His mother replies with the interjection ‘yes’ (with rising intonation, indicating surprise; line 15), and then expands her response with the word ‘writing’, preceded by *néadá* (line 17). This particle indexes shared epistemic access to the fact that pens are used for writing:

Extract 3

7	Child	<i>Máng'áng'ána?</i> [mother's name]
8		(0.1)
9	Mother	<i>oy</i> [response to summons]
10		(0.3)
11	Child	<i>mm</i> (0.2) <i>mm</i> (0.1) <i>mhh</i>
12		(0.4)
13	Child	<i>mm gwándá gādīyèadaanyí gálàam</i> <i>mm g-wá-ndá gādīy-ea-dàa-nyí gálàam</i> AFF-3-be.at work-PS-UR-3SG.POSS pen.NOM 'Is a pen used for something?' [lit. Does a pen have its work?]
14		(0.7)
15	Mother	<i>ea:?</i> 'yes'
16		(0.4)
17	Mother	<i>néadá ng'óorshòoda</i> <i>néadá ng'óor-sh-òo-da</i> EPIST write-ANTIP-PS-UR 'It's for writing, isn't it'

The design of the mother's response in line 17, with the use of turn-initial *néadá*, points to a discrepancy between the child's unknowing epistemic stance with respect to pens, projected by his question in line 13, and his epistemic status, i.e. what he actually knows (Heritage, 2012). What the mother communicates in line 17 is thus not just an answer to her child's request for information (and thus transmission of knowledge about pens), but also an attitude towards the relevance or appropriateness of his question. We will see an example of *néadá* used to more explicitly challenge another person's prior epistemic stance in Extract 10.

The particle *néadá* occurs much more frequently in interrogative than in declarative utterances. (In the 100-utterance sample, 77 tokens occur in interrogative utterances compared with 22 in declarative utterances, with one ambiguous case.) *Néadá* is largely restricted to polar interrogatives, where it indexes shared epistemic access to the fact that the truth value of the proposition is opposite to the polarity of the question. In other words, in affirmative polar questions, *néadá* implies that all participants know (or should know) that the proposition is false, and in negative polar questions, that the proposition is in fact true. I give an example of each type of question in Extracts 4 and 5. Extract 4—which comes from the sample of child speech rather than adult speech—is part of a discussion relating to a broken torch, in which a woman complains about people's carelessness and then directs a somewhat disparaging comment to her 10-year-old son. In response, he asks the polar question in line 18: ‘did I break it?’. By using *néadá* in this utterance, the child indicates that both he and his mother are aware that he did not break the torch. The interactional effect of this question serves to challenge the addressee's earlier negative affective stance towards him (a literal paraphrase might be ‘I didn't break the torch so I don't know why you're acting as though I did’). In response, his mother confirms their shared epistemic status on this matter by identifying the person who did in fact break it.

⁶ I restricted the sample to adult utterances for my basic analysis of *néadá* in case the form was used differently in children's speech. In fact, in all the examples from children's speech, *néadá* serves the same general functions as described in this section. How such epistemic forms are acquired is an interesting question, but not one this paper addresses.

Extract 4

- 18 Child *néadá géanyàrjí ání?*
néadá g-éa-nyàr-j-í ání
 EPIST AFF-1SG-break-CAUS-IS 1SG.PRO
 'Did I break it?' [it = the torch]
- 19 (0.8)
- 20 Mother *Báyàngà gil=níi àdà gwányàrjáadá Báyàngà*
B. gil níi àdà g-wá-nyàr-j-áad-á B.
 PSN thing DEM.PROX DSC AFF-3-break-CAUS-PLUR.CF-IS PSN
 'It was Bayanga=Bayanga broke this one'

The single utterance in Extract 5 illustrates the use of *néadá* with a negative polar question. Prior to this utterance, a young woman had asked an elderly woman what she was going to do with some water that another family member had just brought inside. The elderly woman replies that she will wash her hands and she then utters the negative polar question in line 21, indicating the ultimate purpose of the water. By framing this question in the negative, the elderly woman implies that her addressee already had some access to this information. With the addition of *néadá*, the speaker points to the shared nature of the information she is presenting, emphasising that the purpose of the water was obvious to both parties. That is to say, without *néadá*, the question implies prior knowledge but allows for some degree of epistemic uncertainty on the part of the speaker or addressee; with *néadá*, the utterance projects a firmer stance regarding what both speech participants already know.

Extract 5

- 21 Woman *màjéeyágiischí néada?*
m-àjée-ág-iis-ch-í néadá
 NEG-FUT.1 PL-eat-PL.TERM-ANTIP-IS EPIST
 'Aren't we going to eat?'

Turning finally to syntactic and semantic properties of *néadá*, this particle typically occurs in either turn-initial or turn-final position: in the sample, 39% of utterances had *néada* at the beginning of the turn; another 39% of utterances had *néada* as the final word; 6% of utterances had *néada* in both turn-initial and turn-final position, flanking the rest of the utterance; and in 16% of utterances, *néada* occurred elsewhere, though usually early in the turn, preceded only by a topicalized noun phrase. Possible differences in meaning associated with the different positions have yet to be investigated. Semantically, *néada* takes wide scope, modifying the epistemic status of a whole proposition.

This section has described two linguistic resources available to Datooga speakers for managing epistemic status and stance in conversation. The remainder of the paper considers the ways in which Datooga-speaking children employ these resources in specific interactional contexts and how their use might be sensitive to interlocutors' social relationships.

4. Negotiating rights to know: Children's use of epistemic resources

This section addresses two questions: first, how children use the resources described in Section 3 in their everyday speech; and second, to what extent children's negotiation of knowledge in interaction, as navigated by means of these linguistic resources, makes relevant participants' social relations, limited here to those defined by seniority and kinship. Investigation of these questions is based on a sample of six recordings taken from my larger video corpus of everyday interaction recorded in the household described in §2. These six recordings range from 25 to 55 min in length and amount to 3 h of video and a half hour of audio. Seventeen individuals feature in these recordings: fifteen members of the household, one household guest (me), and one neighbour, who is also a relative of the head of the household. Ten of the participants count as 'children' for the purposes of this study, ranging in age from a pre-verbal toddler to a twelve-year-old girl. The recordings capture a variety of domestic contexts, including two young boys digging a hole in front of one of the houses in the compound, a group of children playing outside, children gathered inside when an adult returns from a market, as well as indoor food preparation and mealtimes. I first consider basic frequencies of these epistemic resources to give some impression of their significance in children's everyday language use. Since the paper is not making any claims about developmental trajectories, these frequencies will not be compared with those of adult speech. In §4.1–4.3 I then look at how these resources can make relevant different aspects of participants' social identities.

In the sample data, I found children's use of the epistemic particle *néadá* to be extremely minimal, and questions were also not especially frequent. The transcriptions of the six recordings contain a total of 7,139 words, of which 3,361 (i.e., roughly half of the total) words were spoken by children. Only eight tokens of *néadá* appear in the sample child language data, a frequency of 2.4 per thousand words. Though a very low frequency item, the form appeared in the speech of five different children. The youngest child to use *néadá* was around five years of age.⁷ Five tokens occurred in negative interrogatives and the remaining three in affirmative declaratives. As we would expect from the discussion in §3.2, these uses of *néadá* tended to point to an

⁷ Effective use of complex perspective markers like *néadá* presumably relies on the cognitive ability to take more than one perspective at the same time, i. e. what I know, plus what I think you know. The relationship between the development of perspective-taking and epistemic language use may be an interesting line of enquiry for developmental psychologists.

asymmetry in participants' understandings of some state of affairs. In §4.3, I analyse an example in which a child's use of *néadá* serves to challenge her brother's refusal to follow a directive (Extract 10).

With respect to questions, 199 utterances of a total of 1,576 utterances in the child language sample were identified as such, i.e., roughly 13% of children's utterances were questions. Of these, almost exactly half were polar questions and half content questions. I identified an utterance as a question on the basis of at least one of three criteria: (i) the presence of a question word or other interrogative form; (ii) rising pitch; and (iii) a subsequent response from the addressee. I then coded the broad function (or 'social action') of each question following the coding scheme developed by [Stivers and Enfield \(2010\)](#). Results are presented in [Table 1](#). Around half of all questions in the sample were genuine information questions (see Extract 6 for an example); other actions frequently achieved by questions were other-initiated repair (commonly in the form *mm?* or *ah?*) and requests for confirmation. Categorising questions in this coarse-grained way is intended to give a broad sense of what children do with this linguistic device. As mentioned in the introduction, we can see that seeking information from others by means of questions is not an especially prevalent activity among Datooga children. Nonetheless, in contexts where children do ask others for information, the negotiation of epistemic rights comes to the fore and allows us to probe the extent to which rights to know are bound up with seniority and kinship. In the following section, I investigate who asks whom what kinds of questions, and what this tells us about children's understandings of social relations.

Table 1
Types of action performed by questions in the child language sample.

Action	Total	%
Request for information	103	51.8
Request for confirmation	24	12.1
Other-initiated repair	34	17.1
Rhetorical question	10	5.0
Outloud	5	2.5
Other	23	11.6
	199	100%

4.1. Who to ask? Children's requests for information and the social distribution of knowledge

As we saw in [Table 1](#), a slight majority of children's questions in the sample data were designed to request information. By using questions in this way, children project an unknowing stance about some state of affairs and position their addressee as more knowledgeable than self. Taking a closer look at these requests for information may reveal how children conceptualise their "epistemic landscape" ([Heritage and Raymond, 2012](#)), i.e., who is expected to know what, and why? To what extent do social categories play a role when children confer rights to know upon others? To consider the possible effects of seniority (as defined by age, in this case) in the attribution of rights to know, I coded the addressee of each of the 103 requests for information as either 'senior', 'junior', or 'equal', with the following results: 44 (42.7%) information questions were directed to juniors; 56 (54.4%) were directed to seniors; two (1.9%) were directed to equals; and for one question (1%) the addressee was unclear. At this coarse level of analysis, which does not take into account the possible range of addressees in each case, there is potentially a slight preference for directing information requests to seniors, though this would need to be examined in a much larger sample. Broadly speaking, age does not appear to strongly influence patterns of questioning. If we look more closely at the types of information being requested, however, we do see a difference in children's expectations about what other people know. These expectations can be related to the evidential basis of knowledge: requests for information that can be answered on the basis of an addressee's immediate or recent experience were addressed to people both junior and senior to the speaker, while requests for more general information about the world were directed only to senior individuals, usually adults, in the sample data, as I illustrate below.⁸

Children's use of questions shows that other people's rights to know can derive from experiential access to some piece of information, regardless of that person's age or status. If a younger child has heard, seen, perhaps tasted something that an older person has not, they may be asked about it. Extract 6 provides an example in which a nine-year-old girl asks her seven-year-old brother for information about something that he can see and she cannot. Just prior to this extract, the two children were sitting inside their mother's house, the girl holding her baby sister in her lap. From his position close to the door, the brother sees some calves entering the compound and quickly gets up to go outside as he utters the turn in line 22. Following the 'oy', the sister shifts her gaze from the baby to her brother and her gaze follows him as he speeds outside to deal with this unusual situation. Since the girl cannot easily get up and look for herself (with the baby on her lap), she asks him whether there are many calves, which he then affirms.

⁸ There may of course be cultural restrictions on asking people significantly senior to oneself about their own feelings and experiences. In the sample data, none of the requests for information could be considered 'personal', which points to the possibility that other people's inner lives are off-limits as the target of questions. The only question in the sample that touches on an individual's emotional experience was directed to me by a five-year-old boy: "Do you like it here?"

Extract 6

- 22 Brother *oy* (.) *mn* (.) *súuká múhóogá máanàli qéedéa béa*
súuká múhóogá m-áa-nàli qéé-déa béa
 DEM.PROX.PL calf.MR NEG-1SG-KNOW.IS house-UR.POSS ASSOC
 'Oy, mm, these calves, I don't know whose house they're from!'
- 23 (0.8)
- 24 Sister *áa sàang'á?*
áa sàang'á
 COP many
 'Are there many?'
- 25 (0.4)
- 26 Brother *éa dá!*
éa údá
 yes girl.voc
 'yes!'

This fragment of interaction illustrates how, by means of an information question, a younger child can be positioned as more knowledgeable on account of his superior epistemic access—in this case, immediate visual access to the scene unfolding outside the house.

With respect to more abstract, general, or less immediate types of knowledge, though, rights to know tend to be conferred only on older people, usually adults. For instance, my sample data contains several requests for generalizable information where the response requires some extended experience with the outside world, e.g., 'what do you light charcoal with?', 'what is a *baatpoot* ['passport']?', 'are these [mobile phone credit] vouchers?'. We also saw an example of a general knowledge question in Extract 3 above. All of these questions were directed at people older than the speaker. Of course, older people are more likely to know the answers to these questions, given their more extensive life experience. The point is that these requests for information index epistemic asymmetries between participants which in turn point to, and reproduce, a social distinction defined by seniority. In Extract 7, we observe how a girl, in the presence of a group of children, selects the oldest child, Gidaroopta, to answer a question which depends on knowledge of the wider world outside the compound. More specifically, she asks Gidaroopta to confirm her understanding that a group of adults who had visited the compound earlier that day belonged to *shirikaara* 'government' (from Swahili *serikali*):

Extract 7

- 27 Udeaweeda *mii shirikáarèa Gídáróopta?*
mii shirikáara Gídáróopta
 NEG.COP government PSN
 'Wasn't it the government, Gidaroopta?'
- 28 (0.6)
- 29 Gidaroopta *éa*
 'yes'

By designing her turn with a term of address to select the next speaker, Udeaweeda positions Gidaroopta as the most knowledgeable person among the group of children. He accepts this position and confirms his rights to know about this matter by offering a type-conforming response. In cases such as these, age, and the more extensive life experience with which it is associated, confers rights to know. In turn, deferring to another's knowledge in such a way as Udeaweeda does in Extract 7 orients to individuals' asymmetrical experience of the world and thereby constructs a relational identity between the two participants as junior-senior. This is a good example of how identities are relationally constructed through interactional negotiation (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005).

4.2. When kinship relations confer rights to know

The previous section showed how the interactional construction of rights to know based on immediate sensory experience is socially egalitarian, in the sense that epistemic asymmetries are constructed regardless of participants' relative ages. In contrast, rights to knowledge that are based on lived experience in the world are attributed along lines of age. An additional factor relevant to the negotiation of rights to know is kinship, as it defines the quality of relationships between people. Territories of knowledge that are determined by peoples' kinship relations take precedence over seniority: even very young participants can be positioned as knowledgeable about their own kin, as I explore here.

The following example is taken from a recording in which a five-year-old boy, Geejaru, and a three-year-old boy, Madootay, are sitting on the ground outside the three-year-old's house and digging a large hole, with no one else around except me. The boys live in the same large compound but belong to different 'houses': the older boy is a grandchild of the head of the household, while the younger boy is his son (which makes the younger boy a classificatory father of the older one). See Fig. 2 for a depiction of the relevant kinship relations:

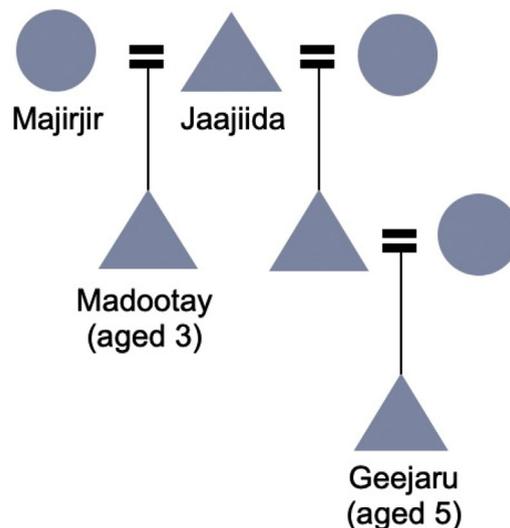


Fig. 2. Kinship diagram of participants and referents in Extracts 8 and 9. Circles denote female individuals; triangles denote male individuals; the equals sign denotes a marital relationship.

While digging away at the hole with a stick, Geejaru asks his younger companion whether the younger child's mother, Majirjir, is going to beat them today (line 30). The younger child responds to this question with a negative interjection, *eh-eh*:

Extract 8

- 30 Older boy *èanéan qábarèasi Májirjir Mádootày?*=
 èanéan q-á-bár-èasi Májirjir Mádootày
 today AFF-3-beat-1PL.OBJ.IS PSN PSN
 'Is Majirjir going to beat us today, Madootay?'
- 31 Younger boy =eh-eh
 'no'

The question in line 30 is, on one level, a request for information about Majirjir's reaction to the hole-digging. It also implies a recognition that digging a hole in front of someone's house is a potentially punishable activity and thus registers a concern with their current course of action (though at no point does either child suggest that they stop). Most importantly for our purposes, this extract shows the older child orienting to the three-year-old child's territory of knowledge, as defined in terms of kin relations and perhaps also place—the questionable activity is taking place outside the younger child's house, and it is the younger child's mother who is most likely to be displeased. By taking an unknowing epistemic stance with respect to the reaction of the other child's mother, Geejaru cedes the rights to know about Majirjir to her son. In this way, one aspect of the younger child's social identity is made relevant: that he is more closely related to (or at least associated with) Majirjir. The younger child accepts this identity ascription and the associated rights to know by offering a type-conforming response, which disconfirms the proposition.

Five minutes later, the older boy is evidently still concerned about the possible repercussions of the hole-digging activity and poses a very similar question, but this time about the head of the household:

Extract 9

- 32 Older boy *màyyqábáléasi Jáajiida Mádootày?*
 m-ày-qá-bár-èasi Jáajiida Mádootày
 NEG-FUT-3-beat-1PL.OBJ.IS PSN PSN
 'Won't Jaajiida beat us, Madootay?'
- 33 (0.3)
- 34 Younger boy *eh-eh*
 'no'
- 35 (1.2)
- 36 Younger boy *nùwá Jájii*
 nù-wá Jáajiida
 3.PRF-GO PSN
 'Jaajiida has left'

The design of the question in line 32 differs from the question in line 30, Extract 8, not only in its subject referent but also in the verbal polarity marking: the question is posed in the negative. As Raymond and Heritage (2006) have argued in the case of English, negative interrogatives serve to upgrade the speaker's epistemic rights. Though the older boy still confers rights to know on the younger one by seeking confirmation of a proposition, his use of a negative rather than affirmative polar question

demonstrates a greater degree of certainty about Jaajiida's response than he displayed with respect to Majirjir. I see two possible motivations for the change in polarity here. One possibility relates to how degrees of kinship and relational dynamics confer differential rights to know: this linguistic modification may reflect the older child's closer kinship relation with—and thus greater rights to know about—his grandfather compared with the grandfather's wife (the younger boy's mother). Nonetheless, the younger child may still be perceived to have stronger epistemic rights to Jaajiida as his son (and/or because Jaajiida spends more time in his wife's house than his daughter-in-law's house), hence the older boy's choice of question rather than assertion. An alternative motivation for the negative question here is not that the older boy is upgrading his rights to know about Jaajiida, but rather upgrading his degree of certainty of them being punished. In either case, the younger child again asserts his rights to know about Jaajiida by responding with the dispreferred form 'no' and in this case also offering a justification for this claim (that he has left the compound).⁹

Though only fleeting moments of interaction, these examples provide us with highly naturalistic evidence for how young children conceptualise the relationships between themselves and others, and how 'kinship', or relatedness, affects their everyday thinking and behaviour as they carry out practical activities with others.

4.3. *Néadá* and equal rights to know

Thus far, we have looked at examples of questions that establish an epistemic asymmetry whereby the addressee is positioned as more knowledgeable. As I have shown, an addressee's rights to know can be predicated on social-relational factors such as age and kinship, as well as on an individual's immediate or recent experiential access to information. I now consider how the other epistemic resource in focus in this paper, the particle *néadá*, is used by children in negotiating people's rights to know. Turns containing this form function in the opposite way to questions by establishing epistemic *symmetry* between participants: *néadá* projects equal rights to know. Because *néadá* points to shared access to knowledge, it works to momentarily erase any social differences that might bring about differences in knowledge. In this respect, utterances containing *néadá* emphasise sameness rather than difference, uniting participants through an assumption of shared experience and understanding. While this analysis might suggest that *néadá* has affiliative, solidary interactional effects, speakers in fact frequently use this form to challenge another person's epistemic stance¹⁰.

As mentioned above, *néadá* occurred rarely in the child language sample and it is therefore difficult to generalize about its use. Like adults, though, children use *néadá* in turns that challenge prior understandings presented in the discourse. Extract 10 provides an example in which a nine-year-old girl uses *néadá* to challenge her younger brother's justification for refusing to follow a directive. In line 37, the sister tells her brother to go get fire (with the implied source of the fire being their grandmother's house). He refuses (line 39) and then offers a justification for his refusal (lines 39 and 41): their grandmother will be annoyed by him opening the door while she is sleeping. In response, the sister utters the affective interjection *djá*, indexing frustration, and asks the negative polar question containing *néada* in line 44 ('hasn't she already got up?'):

Extract 10

- 37 Sister *úná máqàadà bèastà Géejaru*
úná máqàadà beas-dà G.
 go.IMP get.CF.IMP fire-UR PSN
 'go get fire, Geejaru!'
- 38 (0.2)
- 39 Brother *j- maam- áh-áh (.) ah gábála(ksa) S.*
gàygwáyii
áh-áh g-à-bálaksa S. g-ày-gwá-yii
 no AFF-3-MOVE.TERM PSN AFF-FUT-3-say
 '[disfluency] (.) no Sagealan will be
 annoyed, she'll say-'
- 40 (0.3)
- 41 Brother *gàygwáyii (.) gǐjèasì náa gídáqùuti*
g-ày-gwá-yii g-í-jèasì náa gídáqùuti
 AFF-FUT-3-say AFF-2SG-OPEN.TERM what door
 'She'll say 'what are you opening the door for''¹¹
- 42 (0.3)
- 43 Sister *dja*
 [interjection indexing frustration with addressee]

⁹ A reviewer asks about alternative ways to introduce a topic, since the choice of a question format in Extracts 8 and 9 could possibly be explained by discourse function rather than epistemic concerns. A contrastive example presents itself later in the same recording, when the older child comments that his brother has gone to hospital and uses a declarative clause to do so, rather than a question. It would be worth investigating this question about topic initiation systematically.

¹⁰ It is interesting to note that, in establishing epistemic asymmetries, questions can have deferential effects, while in establishing epistemic symmetry, speakers can take critical and disaffiliative stances towards others.

¹¹ Questions in reported speech, as in this utterance, were excluded from the coding on the basis that the 'author' of the utterance is someone else.

44 Sister *néadèa mii nìng'éat òò?*
néada éa mii nì-ng'éat òò
 EPIST CONJ NEG.COP 3.PRF-get.up boy.VOC
 'Hasn't she got up?'

45 Brother *dja*
 [interjection indexing frustration with addressee]

The design of the sister's turn at line 44, a negative polar question with the particle *néadà*, asserts shared rights to know—in this case, that their grandmother has in fact already got up. If both parties have equal access to this knowledge, as the sister's utterance suggests, then the brother's refusal to go get fire is not valid. The combative tone of this whole sequence is produced through a combination of different multimodal resources, one among them the epistemic particle *néadà*. The negative affective qualities produced by the sister's question in line 44 are evident from the brother's response—the interjection 'dja', indexing frustration.

By claiming shared rights to know, the use of *néadà* positions participants on a level epistemic playing field, an inter-subjective position that makes questions of seniority largely irrelevant. Nothing in Extract 10 makes relevant the difference in the interlocutors' ages. The prerogative to counter someone else's projected understanding of the world, as the sister does in line 44, does not appear to be a privilege of being older; see Extract 4 for an example of a child challenging his mother using *néada*. With respect to kinship, it is plausible that the communal knowledge assumed by *néadà* presupposes the kind of social closeness and shared experience found among close kin, though this idea would need to be explored with additional data. With a great deal more data, it may be possible to detect social patterning in the use of *néadà* (and similar epistemic resources), whereby the attribution or non-attribution of shared rights to know reveals something about speakers' understandings of group membership.

5. Turn design and rights to know among Datooga children

This article has described two epistemic resources in the Datooga language, including a previously undocumented epistemic particle *néadà*, which was shown to index shared rights to know. The exploration of Datooga-speaking children's use of questions led to a number of findings: first, that questions only make up a small part of children's interactional activities overall; second, that around half of all questions were requests for information, with other questions serving different social functions; and third, requests for 'generic' information were addressed only to senior people, at least in the sample data. By voicing requests for information, children position themselves as unknowing and confer rights to know on their addressee. By contrast, the particle *néadà*, which occurred only rarely in the sample data, indexes a knowledgeable epistemic status on the part of both the speaker and the addressee. Such a meaning lends itself to challenging another person's prior, contrary epistemic stance. Though I limited myself to studying requests for information, children also frequently use rhetorical questions to challenge the stances of others. The rarity of *néadà* in the child language data poses interesting questions concerning the developmental requisites for using complex perspective markers, but it also points to a methodological issue. In studying children's negotiation of knowledge, I chose two linguistic features that I already considered relevant for epistemic management in Datooga. In the case of *néadà*, this rather top-down approach in the end produced only limited data. An alternative, "bottom-up" approach to take in the future would begin from the data, rather than specific linguistic forms, and attempt to determine which semiotic resources are drawn on in children's negotiation of knowledge.

In studying children's language-in-use in a little-studied language, this research contributes to efforts to bring greater diversity and plurality to the field of pragmatics (Ameka and Terkourafi, 2019). Though the theoretical tools relied on here—concepts relating to epistemic stance, status, primacy, etc—come from a Western tradition of studying knowledge negotiation, the social dimensions of epistemic management of interest in this paper, namely age-based seniority and kinship, derive from my ethnographic research in Datooga communities. These aspects of social organization are of long-standing interest for the social anthropology of Africa, yet they do not feature especially strongly in sociolinguistics and pragmatics. Here I attempted to approach these concepts with an interactional lens to see to what extent social categories relating to age and kinship can be detected in, and emerge from, children's everyday negotiations of knowledge. While by no means ever-present, concepts of kinship and seniority were shown to shape children's interactions to some degree in their use of questions: children positioned speech participants in junior–senior relationships when they requested generalizable knowledge, and they oriented to kinship relations when they deferred to other people's knowledge about their own kin. In contrast to these projections of epistemic asymmetries, utterances with *néadà* make claims to equal access to knowledge and establish an 'egalitarian' social landscape. The extent to which claiming shared rights to know depends on, and thus indexes, the intimacy of kinship (and/or friendship) remains open for future study.

Author statement

Alice Mitchell: Conceptualization, methodology, investigation, analysis, and writing. Fiona Jordan: Conceptualization and funding acquisition.

Declarations of interest

None.

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