

# Terms of address in everyday interactions between older female friends and acquaintances

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**Abstract.** This article explores conversational patterns of community-residing, older women in Cyprus, focusing on terms of address (ToA) in everyday, naturally-occurring conversations of a long-standing friendship group, and their acquaintances, all aged 62 to 78 years old. Data include eighteen hours of self-audiorecorded conversation, supplemented by ethnographic interviews and extensive participant observations. Quantitative and micro-analytic perspectives, especially membership categorization analysis, as well as some insights from politeness theory, are combined in the analysis of ToA, with the aim of investigating explicit and implicit references to age and other categories. The analysis focuses on various address terms, from more formal (e.g., title plus first name) to high-solidarity terms resisting age categories, typically used to address same-age or younger female interlocutors. It looks how these ToA are employed in a number of interactions, including impromptu meetings with one or two close friends, planned meetings of larger groups of friends, and conversations with acquaintances. The choice of terms is explained in the first instance in terms of solidarity and age differences, with more distant acquaintances and members with larger age gaps using more formal ToA. Chronological age is an important but insufficient predictor for the use of more reverential or distancing ToA. The interactional history of the participants also plays a significant role in deciding between different ToA (and lack thereof), as well as older participants' strategies of rejecting the reception of distancing ToA. Finally, young-age categories (e.g., 'girls') functioning as ToA are analyzed. These terms appear mostly in formulaic greetings or in directives with the function of redressing dispreferredness of directive. Rather than invoking membership in young-age categorizations, these young-age ToA function, in this context, as an in-group marker.

**Keywords.** terms of address, peer group, age, aging, categorization, Cypriot Greek

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## 1 Terms of address in later life

The way we address each other in interaction is critical to human relationships and is crucial for understanding how we perceive and manage ourselves and others within local, institutional, and wider social contexts (Clyne, Norrby, and Warren 2009, 183). Terms of address are also inextricably linked with our life histories, positionalities, and cultural backgrounds (Yazdanpanah 2022). Previous research has focused on exploring how terms of address (henceforth ToA) construct and are constructed by the relative status (power) and solidarity (or distance) of social members (Braun 1988; Wood and Kroger 1993; Wood and Ryan 1991; Özcan 2016). This wave of research employs or adapts Brown and Levinson’s (1987) politeness theory and approaches ToA as “one of the clearest instances of language that encodes social relationships” (Wood and Kroger 1993, 264), viewing status—that is, social standing, based on socially desirable characteristics—and solidarity—that is, degree of intimacy or closeness between interactants—as subsuming all other dimensions (Wood and Ryan 1991, 167; Kroger, Wood, and Kim 1984, 283). Address terms are then seen as revealing (and constructing) relations that are solidary/non-solidary on the one hand, and equal/unequal on the other.

Although individuals’ ages have long been found to be an important variable in the use of terms of address, as it can shape both the relative status and solidarity of interlocutors (e.g., Braun 1988; Semiun 2019), the actual terms of address that older adults use have been very rarely investigated. Instead, research has focused on terms of address used towards older adults (especially in institutional contexts), interactions between carers and residents in care facilities (Yazdanpanah 2022; Backhaus 2008, 2009), interactions between older patients and medical staff in medical settings (Wood and Kroger 1993), and, most recently, local government announcements regarding the Covid-19 pandemic on Facebook (Naughton, Padeiro, and Bueno-Larraz 2023). Previous research has shown that terms employed to address older adults tend to be homogenizing (Naughton, Padeiro, and Bueno-Larraz 2023), or inconsistent with older adults’ preferred forms of address (Yazdanpanah 2022; Wood and Kroger 1993). For example, Backhaus (2009) has shown that address terms, such as first name (or kinship terms), which are unusual between non-intimate adults in institutional contexts in Japan, are used by care providers in Japanese nursing homes and indicate, rather than familiarity, power imbalance. Of course, nursing homes are very specific contexts, being in Goffman’s terms “total institutions,” that is “a place of residence

and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life” (Goffman 1961, xiii). Therefore, research in non-institutional, everyday communication is needed to better understand how social variables affect address terms to and by older adults, not least because older adults interact most of the time with friends and family in informal, often domestic, settings (Wood and Ryan 1991; Charalambidou 2011). This study contributes to the small but growing body of research that places older adult speakers at the center of sociolinguistic inquiry (e. g., Wagner 2023; Pichler 2023).

In my corpus of self-recorded conversations of a group of older Greek Cypriot women, I observed that participants oriented to the fact that membership in different age categories affects the appropriateness of the different ToA. Also, some of the terms used by the participants to address others present are themselves age categorizations (e. g., κοπούες ‘young girls’). This paper investigates the specific ToA this group used and their relationship to categorizations of age. This study approaches terms of address not as static reflections of age but as interactional practices through which older speakers actively negotiate age, resist decline-oriented old-age categorizations, and align themselves with competent, socially active identities in later life.

The article is structured as follows: first an outline of the participants, their linguistic resources, and the methods for collecting and analyzing a corpus of everyday conversational data is provided. Then an overview of all different address terms employed in the self-recordings is presented. Next, I focus on the two most frequent ToA, FN (first name) and κόρη ‘daughter.’ Subsequently, the use of reverential and distancing ToA is analyzed followed by an investigation into young-age categorizations employed as address terms among the participants. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of what ToA mean for identity work in everyday conversations.

## 2 Methods and data

This study focuses on a close friendship group of Greek Cypriot women, most in their 70s: Gregoria, 79; Loulla, 73; Charoulla, 73; Myria, 72; and Tasoulla, 63. The group has had a very long interactional history (some since childhood) and has lived in close proximity in a suburb of Nicosia, the capital of Cyprus. All but one participant were widows, had only primary-school education, and in their working lives worked mainly inside but also outside the house as seamstresses, cooks, and in small family businesses (e./g/, bakery, coffee shop). Although many participants knew each other for decades, they started socializing as a group on a regular basis five years before the recordings started. They would typically meet at each other’s houses for coffee in the morning or afternoon, either for impromptu meetings with two to three members present or for pre-arranged meetings with all five members that would require the host to prepare various treats for her guests (as shown in Figure 1). The study also included three additional peripheral members that very occasionally were included in the group’s meetings.

Although this group seems at first rather homogeneous, in fact participants routinely claim and ascribe different age identities. Research has shown that age difference between adults of at least 15 years is required to make status unequal in North America (Brown 1965), but only one year’s difference is enough to create unequal relationships in other cultures (Kroger, Wood, and Kim 1984). In the dataset, for example,



**Figure 1:** A pre-arranged coffee meeting of three main participants, in the kitchen of one of the participants. Photo taken by the author in 2015.

there is a clear distinction between Tasoulla (62/63 years old)—described as their “young girlfriend”—and the other participants in their 70s (Charalambidou 2019). This age difference is also negotiated in the (non)reciprocal use of reverential/distancing ToA, which will be explored below.

I conducted fieldwork with this group over a year and a half and asked them to self-record their meetings with a digital audio recorder. The participants recorded eighteen meetings, ranging from twenty minutes to over two and a half hours each. This resulted in eighteen hours of self-recorded conversations that I transcribed using Conversation Analytic conventions (Jefferson 2004). The recordings and field notes were supplemented by diaries of daily interactions completed by the participants and audio-recorded ethnographic/retrospective one-to-one interviews between each of the five main participants and the researcher, lasting approximately one hour each. The total time of all five interviews was four hours and fifteen minutes and they took place in each participant’s home. I approached the data in an ethnomethodological (EM) theoretical framework, guided by the EM principle that social reality, order, and relations are jointly accomplished in the tiny details of talk and interaction (Sacks and Jefferson 1995). For the analysis I employed concepts from Membership Categorization Analysis and Conversation Analysis (Hester and Eglin 1997a; Schegloff 2007b; Hutchby

and Wooffitt 2008; Stokoe, Raymond, and Whitehead 2025). For more information on data collection processes, see Charalambidou (2019).

The participants of this study mainly talk in Cypriot Greek, employing a baseline register of mesolectal koine (Fotiou and Grohmann 2022). Cypriot Greek is the variety of Greek spoken, primarily, by Greek Cypriots in Cyprus and which is normally described as an established dialect of Greek (Goutsos and Karyolemou 2004). Cypriot Greek is acquired at home and used in all face-to-face interactions among Greek Cypriots, whereas Standard Modern Greek is taught at school and used in writing and formal oral discourse, e. g., public speaking, broadcast speech (Pavlou and Papapavlou 2004). There are a number of phonological, morphological, semantic, pragmatic, and lexical differences between Standard and Cypriot Greek (Terkourafi 2005b). Because Cypriot Greek is largely reserved for oral use, it does not have a widely accepted orthography (Arvaniti 2010, 20), and I have therefore chosen to represent the original data in Standard Modern Greek spelling, followed by a translation to English.

The present paper focuses on address terms employed by interlocutors (e. g., FN, κόρη, κοπέλλες ‘girls’) and less on the address forms (which also include the grammatical person employed). The reason being that in the dataset all addresses are done in the  $\tau$  form (second singular grammatical person when addressing a single participant), as opposed to the polite plural  $v$  form, or even third person address forms (see Brown and Gilman 2003 for the  $\tau/v$  distinction). Although Standard Modern Greek allows for the  $\tau/v$  distinction, the  $v$  form is traditionally absent from the Cypriot Greek basilect and also working class Standard Modern Greek speakers (Terkourafi 2002, 2005a; Arvaniti 2010, 19; Makri-Tsilipakou 1983) and is never used in the data.

### 3 Terms of address used in the data

The participants use different terms to address each other. At a glance these are the various terms used are listed in Table 1. The table includes literal and near equivalent translations in English and very brief commentary on the typical use of each term in Cypriot Greek.

The most popular type of ToA is First Name (henceforth ‘FN’) formulations, e. g., Λούλλα ‘Loulla,’ Γλιόρου ‘Gliorou,’ Γρηγορία ‘Gregoria,’ and to a lesser degree FN followed by the first-person possessive pronoun μου. FN+μου formulations, e. g., Μύρια μου, which literally translates as ‘my Myria.’ The first-person possessive pronoun μου, added to person references, is typically a term of intimacy and endearment in Greek (Kleparski 2016, 12; see also Vasilaki 2020) and the closest English equivalent would be *dear*, e. g., *dear Myria*. In the translations of the excerpts, the literal translation ‘my’ is used. The second most frequent term in all conversations was κόρη, followed by κόρη+μου. Κόρη is a very common, invariant ToA, exclusive to Cypriot Greek, and is typically used to address same-age or younger female members in informal contexts. It therefore has connotations about the relative age of the interlocutors. It is a high-solidarity, very informal term that denotes closeness (Charalambidou 2015). There is no direct English equivalent, and it literally means ‘daughter’ or ‘girl’ (κόρη) or ‘my girl’ (κόρη μου). ToA with the possessive pronoun (μου ‘my’) could denote a degree of intimacy and closeness. However, especially in the case of κόρη μου, because of its routine, standardized use, in Cypriot Greek the distinction between κόρη and κόρη μου does not signify a differentiated degree of intimacy. In addition, another figurative kinship term μάνα μου ‘my mum,’ is only used with the pronoun μου in Cypriot Greek.

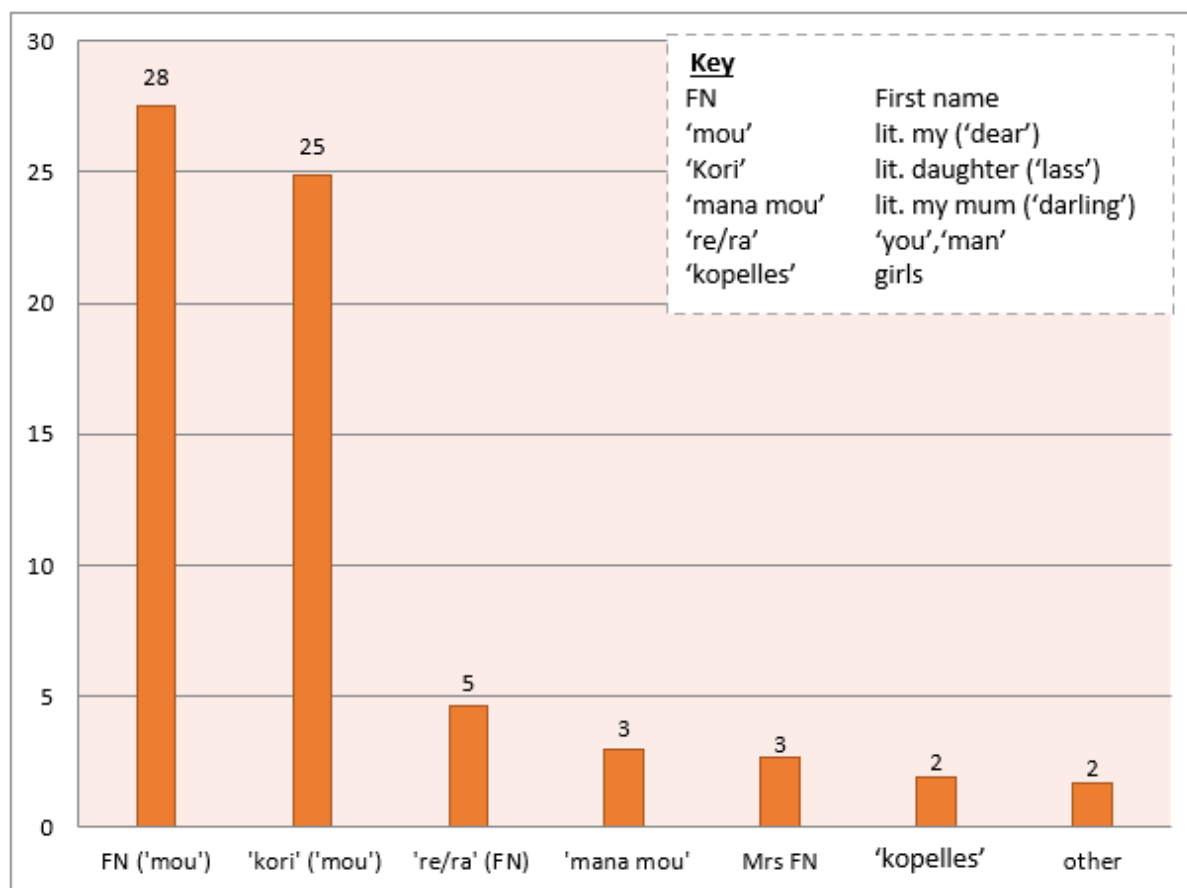
**Table 1:** Address term types, examples, and pragmatic functions

| ToA type       | Example            | Literal translation | Functional equivalent | Typical use/<br>pragmatic function |
|----------------|--------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------------|
| κυρία+FN       | <i>Kyria Myria</i> | Mrs. Myria          | Mrs. Myria            | Reverential, distant               |
| FN             | <i>Myria</i>       | Myria               | Myria                 | Informal                           |
| FN+μου         | <i>Myria mou</i>   | My Myria            | Myria dear            | Informal, higher solidarity        |
| κόρη           | <i>Kori</i>        | Daughter            | Lass                  | Very informal, Cypriot Greek       |
| κόρη+μου       | <i>Kori mou</i>    | My daughter         | Lass                  | Very informal, Cypriot Greek       |
| ρε or ρα (+FN) | <i>Re/Ra Myria</i> | n/a                 | Hey you/Hey Myria     | Very informal, can be derogatory   |
| μάνα+μου       | <i>Mana mou</i>    | My mum              | Duck/darling          | Very informal                      |
| κοπέλλες       | <i>Kopelles</i>    | Girls               | Girls                 | Informal, solidarity               |

Μάνα μου is an informal, invariable ToA and is generally employed for same-age or younger male or female addressees.

Another formulation found in the sample is the combination of κόρη plus FN, e. g., κόρη Τασούλλα, observed 65 times in the 18 hours. A less frequent ToA is ρε (or ρα), sometimes preceding the FN (e. g., ρε Γληγορού, ρα Λούλλα, ρε). In Greek Cypriot ρε (also found in Standard Modern Greek) has connotations similar to κόρη, since they are both invariable, informal ToA signaling equal status and solidary relations and they can precede other ToA (e. g., κόρη κορούες ‘*kori* girls’ or ρε Χαρούλλα ‘*re* Charoulla’). Ρε can be used for both male and female addressees; however, ρα is exclusively employed when addressing female members, is only used in Cypriot Greek, and is closer to the Cypriot Greek basilect. Other, less frequent address terms are κοπέλλες (Cypriot Greek and Standard Modern Greek for ‘young women’), κυρία ‘Mrs.’ plus first name (e. g., κυρία Λούλλα ‘Mrs. Loulla’) and others. Most ToA, including κόρη, ρε, κοπέλλες, and the like are, in Petrits’s terms, “generic,” i. e., they do not identify a particular recipient (Petrits 2001:206). Figure 2 shows the frequency of each address term per hour, across all speakers.

In addition to frequency data and interactional analysis of the eighteen hours of self-recorded conversations, I also draw on one-to-one semi-structured interviews I conducted with participants after the collection of the self-recordings where participants reflect on their own use of specific terms. This additional layer of data collection strengthens my ethnomethodological approach. A comparative account of FN and κόρη is given in the next section, focusing not only on frequency of use in the conversations, but also on participants’ own commentary on the use of ToA in their interviews.



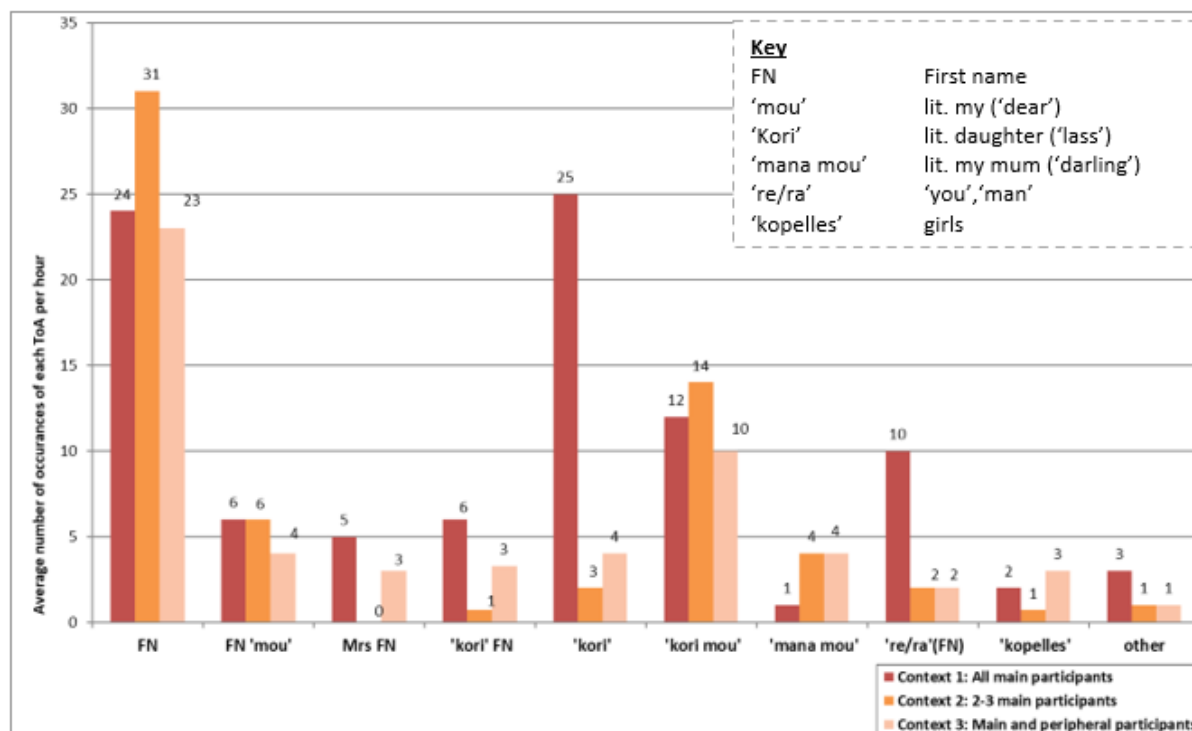
**Figure 2:** Terms of Address per hour of recorded conversation

#### 4 Kόρη and First Name in context

The combined total of FN and FN+μου formulations outnumbers the sum of Kόρη and Kόρη μου (554 vs. 407 instances). According to politeness theory, as has been adapted for talk to elders by Wood and Ryan (1991, 167), both FN and invariable informal address terms (such as *dear*) are appropriate for solidarity (with regard to the degree of closeness) and equal (with regard to social status) relations, and when used in these kinds of relationships they would be evaluated as friendly forms. Therefore, in the first instance the basic parameters of politeness theory cannot account for the varied use of Kόρη vs. FN. It is then worth examining whether the three different contexts could account for the use of Kόρη (μου) as opposed to FN (μου). The contexts/types of meetings were categorized as follows:

- Context 1: pre-arranged meetings with all five main participants (Gregoria, Loulla, Myria, Charoulla, Tasoulla), total 9.4 hours
- Context 2: impromptu meetings with two or three main participants (Gregoria, Myria and Loulla), total 5.1 hours
- Context 3: meeting with main and one to three peripheral participants (six to seven participants at a time), total 4.3 hours

In Figure 3 the use of each term in the three different contexts is illustrated. The data have been normalized to control for the varied length of the different types of conversations found in the dataset. Hence, the chart indicates frequency of occurrence, i. e., how many times each term is encountered per hour, in each of the three contexts.



**Figure 3:** Terms of Address per hour in different contexts

From a first look at the chart some patterns emerge, most prominently in relation to the most frequent ToA. Regarding FN formulations a similarity between Contexts 1 and 3 appears; in encounters where only two or three main participants are present FN ToA are privileged. Another tendency that surfaces is that the invariable terms *kóρη* and *πε* are substantially more frequent in interactions of the five main participants, that is, context 1. No major differentiation appears in the use of terms with the possessive *μου* 'my' at the end (i. e., FN *μου* or *kóρη μου*), though they seem slightly less frequent in the presence of peripheral participants.

As mentioned above, *kóρη* is a generic address term, as unlike FN it does not identify a specific addressee. On the contrary, it can be used to address more than one participant simultaneously. Therefore, it is not surprising that it is used less frequently in the context of conversations between two participants. In fact, a closer examination of the conversation where only two members, Loulla and Gregoria, are present, *kóρη* is completely absent. This would then explain the lower occurrence of *kóρη* formulations in the context of conversations between 2–3 main participants. However, this begs the question why *kóρη* is not used to a comparable degree in the first context (all main participants) and the third context (main and peripheral participants), since in both contexts no two-party conversations are included. Some background information is helpful in examining the role of *kóρη* in multi-party conversations.

In the audio-recorded interviews I conducted with the participants, when asked to identify how they are addressed in the street, they made relevant some categories that

they associate with the use of certain ToA. Excerpt 1 is indicative. It is taken from the interview with Charoulla, fifteen minutes into the discussion.

- Excerpt 1: (participants: Charoulla, researcher) 15.22
1. A εμ. (0.5) στον δρόμον >όταν σε δει< κάπκοιος γνωστός πώς θα σου πει
  2. θεία, κυρία Χαρούλλα? πώς σε- πώς θα σου <φωνάξει> κάπκοιος?
  3. X ε αν έν γνωστή: φιλενάδα εν να μου πει Χαρούλλα, αν έν [κα]μιά:
  4. A [νναι.]
  5. X που ξέρω γω:: - τζαι δεν μου αρέσει να μου λαλούν (.) κυρία Χαρούλλα
  6. A ν(h)αι χα (1)
  7. X εν νά μου πει: κυρία. (1) σαν να πούμε μικρές (.) [ηλικίας, (0.5)]
  8. A [νναι.]
  9. X λαλούν μου κυρία Χαρούλλα άμαν εν της ηλικίας μου, (.) κόρη Χαρούλλα.
  1. A erm. (0.5) in the street >when someone sees you< an acquaintance what will he call
  2. you, aunt, Mrs. Charoulla? what the- what will someone <call> you?
  3. C if it is an acquaintance: girlfriend she will call me Charoulla, if it [so]meone:<sup>2</sup>
  4. A [yes.]
  5. C who I know:: - and I don't like it when they call me (.) Mrs. Charoulla
  6. A y(h)es ha (1)
  7. C they will call me: Mrs. (1) like let's say ((if they are of)) young (.) [a]ge, (0.5)
  8. A [yes.]
  9. C they call me Mrs. Charoulla when they are my age, (.) kori Charoulla.
- 15.39

In Excerpt 1, the researcher proposes the address terms θεία 'aunt' (a figurative kinship category) and κυρία Χαρούλλα 'Mrs. Charoulla' (Mrs.+FN). However, Charoulla first refers to the FN formulation, which is oriented as the alternative of at least the title+FN (hereafter TFN) form that the researcher proposed. The informant identifies as a criterion the level of intimacy; more specifically, she repairs the more generic γνωστή 'acquaintance' with the more intimate φιλενάδα 'girlfriend.' Therefore, FN address terms are constructed as activities bound to the category "girlfriend." Age is also made relevant in line 7, where Charoulla associates co-incumbency to the same age category (της ηλικίας μου 'of my age') with the address term κόρη FN. In contrast, the use of TFN is bound to the age category μικρές 'young.' On the whole, Charoulla, without being prompted, associates certain categories from the membership categorization devices "age" and "social relations" with the use of ToA. (Membership categorization devices are collection of categories plus the relevant rules of application, see Schegloff 2007a, 3.) This is also done in the interviews with other participants. In particular, Loulla associates the use of FN formulations with membership in categories of people with whom she has a very long interactional history (see Excerpt 2). Furthermore, in her interview, Gregoria links membership in the category συνήλικες 'same age' with the use of address terms in FN form and also κόρη. Hence, in the interviews FN and κόρη formulations are associated with a level of intimacy and interactional history as well as co-membership in the same age category.

2. For all references to people who would use the different terms of address, throughout the excerpt Charoulla uses the female form exclusively. However, in lines 1–2 the researcher used the male form for 'an acquaintance' and 'someone.'

Ethnographic observations show that the peripheral members, although not complete strangers, have a less close relationship with the main participants than do the main members among themselves. One could then argue that the increased frequency of *kóri* in conversations where all five main participants are present indexes the fact that *kóri* functions as an in-group marker, and therefore the use of *kóri* in conversations with peripheral group members is not as prominent. If we add other ToA that contain *kóri* into the equation, i. e., *kóri mou* 'my *kori*' and *kóri FN* '*kori* FN,' the pattern remains the same: the highest frequency of *kóri*, *kóri mou*, and *kóri FN* combined is again reserved for interactions between all five participants (43 instances in an hour), while this number is substantially lower for conversations between only few of the main participants, or with peripheral members (in both cases the frequency of *kóri* formulations is 17 in an hour). Invariant, solidary ToA have been found, in previous research, to enhance in-group membership in peer older-adult conversations. More specifically, Wood and Ryan (1991) found that *dear* (the closest equivalent of the Cypriot Greek *kóri*) functions as an in-group marker. Also, Sifianou (2001, 415, 426) has argued that terms such as *παιδάκι μου* 'my child,' whose literal meaning is similar to *kóri mou* 'my *kori*' (literally 'my daughter'), is also used as an in-group ToA and is not necessarily related to age difference. In this respect, the findings of this study contribute to and extend previous studies on in-group ToA in older adults on the one hand and Greek speakers (of all ages) on the other.

In addition, *πε*, the Standard Modern Greek equivalent of *kóri*, is also found more frequently in conversations between the five main participants. Tannen and Kakava (1992, 31) argued that *πε* is a pervasive formulaic marker which ultimately reinforces solidarity. This finding then also supports the hypothesis that in the context of interactions between the five main participants, solidarity and ingroupness are more frequently indexed through certain address terms. So far, I have argued that *kóri* (and also *πε*) formulations reinforce in-group solidarity in multi-party conversations. The following sections focus on distancing ToA.

On the whole, the alternation between first-name formulations and the invariable address term *kóri* is not simply a matter of stylistic variation, but an interactional resource through which older speakers manage age, solidarity, and peerhood in later life. While both FN and *kóri* are compatible with relations of intimacy and equality, their patterned distribution across interactional contexts reveals how members actively construct non-hierarchical, age-symmetrical identities. In particular, the use of *kóri* in multi-party encounters among long-standing peers of the core friendship circle enables participants to foreground in-group membership and continuity of social relations, rather than chronological age difference. From the perspective of aging, these practices matter because they allow older women to sustain identities as socially active, mutually aligned peers, countering decline-oriented expectations that associate later life with increasing loneliness, distance, formality, or status asymmetry.

## 5 Reverential and distancing address terms

Whereas the previous section focused on solidary address practices that minimize hierarchy among older peers, this section turns to reverential and distancing terms of address, particularly the non-reciprocal use of TFN. There is a total of thirteen instances in the data sample where the formulation title+FN (e. g., *κυρία Λούλλα* 'Mrs. Loulla') appears. All but one instance of TFN are employed by Tasoulla to address

Gregoria or Loulla. In one instance TFN is used by a secondary participant, Ketsina, to address Tasoulla. Age has been argued to be, to some extent, the basis for assessing status equality (Wood and Ryan 1991, 174). In fact, Makri-Tsilipakou (1983, 232) argues that in Greek-speaking communities an age difference of ten years can be decisive in the choice of address forms and terms. In this case, Tasoulla is eleven years younger than Loulla and seventeen years younger than Gregoria; therefore, it can be argued that she has subordinate status on the basis of age difference. However, when addressing Myria or Charoulla (who are contemporaries of Loulla) Tasoulla never uses TFN. Instead, she employs plain FN formulations three times, *πε* (FN) seven times and *κόρη μου* twice. On the other hand, Gregoria, Myria, Charoulla, and Loulla all primarily use FN (*μου*) ‘(my) FN’ and *κόρη (μου)* ‘(my) *kori*’ to address Tasoulla, just as they do when addressing each other. Therefore, TFN is non-reciprocal and only directed at Gregoria and Loulla, although there is no meaningful difference in the way each participant addresses Tasoulla.

The parameters that affect the use of ToA are also discussed by the participants. For instance, in Excerpt 1 Charoulla constructs TFN, as opposed to FN and *κόρη* FN, as the term associated with membership in different age categories. As suggested above, Loulla also juxtaposes TFN with FN address terms, and associates them with an alternative collection of categories. The excerpt below, taken from the middle of the Loulla’s interview, is illustrative. The interviewer has asked how others address her in the street and suggested two possible ToA, *θεία* ‘aunty’ and *κυρία Λούλλα* ‘Mrs. Loulla.’ So far, Loulla has elaborated on the use of the term *θεία* in the Greek community in Africa and has also mentioned that with her *χωριανές* ‘co-villagers’ they use FN formulations.

Excerpt 2: (participants: Loulla, Anna)

24.00

1. Λ ε οι:::μ (.) οι συμμαθήτριες μου λέμεν το Λούλλα τζαι το αυτόν.
2. Α νναι.
3. Λ οι λίγο:- σαν την Τασούλλαν λόου χάρι που εγνωρίσαμε τώρα τελευταία τρία
4. τέσσερα χρόνια στον κύκλον, (.) κυρία Λούλλα. (1) αυτές που δεν ήτανε χωριανές
5. μας, (.) συμμαθήτριες μας, είναι μεν φίλες μας αλλά (.) το κυρία.
6. Α =νναι
7. Λ κυρία Λούλλα.
1. L well the:: (.) my classmates we use Loulla and such.
2. A yes.
3. L those who are a bi:t- like Tasoulla for example that we met just recently three
4. four years in the circle, (.) Mrs. Loulla. (1) those who were not our co-villagers,
5. (.) our classmates, they are still our friends but (.) the ((term)) Mrs..
6. A =yes
7. L Mrs. Loulla.

24.11

In this stretch of talk Loulla attempts to map out members’ categories that are bound to the attribution of employing the TFN form as a ToA (for category-bound attributions, see Stokoe 2012; Sacks and Jefferson 1995, A300; Eglin and Hester 2003, 94). These categories include those who are “a bi:t-” (presumably more distant, line 3). This incomplete categorization is repaired by the example of Tasoulla. Therefore, people met in the last three or four years (lines 3–4), women that were not her co-villagers (i. e.,

they were not born in Atalanta, or did not move there at a young age), and women who were not her classmates (line 5) are also included in the collection of categories associated with TFN. Finally, the category φίλες ‘girlfriends’ is constructed as compatible with the employment of the TFN address term. The contrastive conjunctions in the phrase είναι: είναι μεν φίλες μας αλλά (.) ‘they are still our friends but (.)’ (line 5) orient to the perceived contradiction between the use of this less intimate ToA with co-incumbency in the category “friends.” It is interesting that Loulla shifts from the first person singular in line 1 (e.g., συμμαθητρίδες μου ‘my classmates’) to the plural (e.g., εγνωρίσαμε ‘we met,’ line 3; χωριανές μας ‘our co-villagers,’ line 4). This attempt to construct the practice of employing TFN as one in which others also participate might also suggest the perceived incompatibility between employing such a term and co-membership in the category “friends.” Therefore, Loulla constructs the activity of (receiving) TFN as one that is not exclusive between Tasoulla and herself but as a common practice, at least in the local community. The use of the plural helps to construct the activity as a common practice, which further supports its compatibility with the category “friends.” Loulla thus places emphasis on the length of time she has known someone as a criterion for the ToA used and does not make any explicit reference to the membership categorization device “age.” However, one would assume that women she knew since her youth (χωριανές ‘co-villagers’) and especially classmates are of a similar age as her, whereas friends she has met recently may be younger, and thus the membership categorization device “age,” although not explicitly mentioned, is also hinted at as a possible factor in ToA use.

Although age differences affect status inequalities, and interactional history affects members’ solidarity, this does not explain why Tasoulla does not employ TFN when addressing Myria and Charoulla, both of whom are of the same age (and also other possible bases for assessing status such as occupation or education) as Loulla and have known Tasoulla for the same amount of years. Both Charoulla and Myria, in their interviews, mentioned in passing that they do not like being addressed with the TFN form (see, e.g., Excerpt 1). In fact, all of the children Myria looked after have always addressed her as “Myria” and still do. In the follow-up interviews the researcher asked Myria specifically about the ToA between her and Tasoulla, and she responded that she had asked Tasoulla to address her with FN. Therefore, one can conclude that Tasoulla, because of status (age) difference and distance (at least when she was introduced to the other participants), initially employed the TFN ToA which she maintained unless the FN option was explicitly offered to her.

In the follow-up interviews Gregoria, when asked about Tasoulla’s choice of ToA, regarded the issue as trivial and of no significance. In fact, she has been observed addressing Tasoulla as κυρία Τασούλλα ‘Mrs. Tasoulla’ (i. e., TFN) on some occasions. This shift between TFN and FN formulations for the same person is also found in one of the conversations in the sample analyzed for ToA. In a self-recorded conversation Ketsina, a peripheral member of the group and not a close acquaintance of Tasoulla, addresses the latter with the FN μου formulation six times. Yet at some point in the middle of the conversation Ketsina shifts to TFN (κυρία Τασούλλα ‘Mrs. Tasoulla’). This shift between more or less distant/reverential ToA, occurs, in Ketsina’s case, because solidarity and status relations are still in negotiation. The fact that Gregoria on (rare) occasions also addressed Tasoulla with TFN could be interpreted as Gregoria’s move to attribute the use of non-solidary ToA not to their age-related status difference (which would call for unilateral TFN forms), but to their level of intimacy (in which case a

reciprocal TFN form is required), and thus downplay the age difference. The fact that in the follow-up interviews Gregoria constructed the non-reciprocity of ToA between Tasoulla and herself as very trivial also suggests an attempt to downplay an age-related status difference.

Summing up, Tasoulla employs TFN to address Gregoria and Loulla but she overwhelmingly receives FN and *κόρη* formulations, whereas solidary terms are employed to address Charoulla and Myria. It has been shown that the use of the non-solidary ToA is explained by status (in particular, age) differences, the closeness of the relationship (i. e., years of knowing each other), and explicit requests by the member with higher status (e. g., Myria's request for FN). The next section investigates young-age categorization in the context of ToA.

The analysis has shown that the participants orient to the non-reciprocal use of TFN not as straightforward reflections of age-based status differences, but their use becomes a site for negotiating, accepting or contesting age-related asymmetries. From an aging perspective, these moments are analytically significant because they reveal how older speakers resist being positioned within older, typically decline-oriented age hierarchies by explicitly rejecting, reworking, or reciprocating reverential address. The section therefore illustrates how age is interactionally accomplished not only through the deployment of solidary terms, but also through the strategic management of deference and distance.

## 6 Young-age categories as terms of address

Young-age categories are, on occasion, employed as ToA. In the 18 hours of self-recordings, young-age categories are used as ToA 25 times. By far the most frequent young-age ToA employed in the self-recordings is *κοπέλλες* 'young women,' which is encountered 19 times. It is used as a ToA most frequently on its own, but is also, on a couple of occasions, combined with *κόρη* (i. e., *κόρη κοπέλλες*), once with the possessive *μου* 'my,' and it also appears twice in the diminutive form, *κοπελλούες* 'girls.' Another young-age address term, employed 6 times, is *κορούες*, a Cypriot Greek term for 'girls.' Note that *κορούες*, although grammatically the diminutive of *κόρη* (discussed in Section 4), is actually quite different. *Κόρη*, like *πε*, is an age-neutral, invariable ToA and when it is used in a grammatical case other than vocative in singular, then the meaning switches to 'daughter.' However, *κορούες* is a variable term and belongs to the membership categorization device "age" (Chaemsaihong 2024; Charalambidou 2019; Hester and Eglin 1997b) when used as a generic category and not as a ToA. In all but one instance these young-age ToA are used in the plural to address all the participants present and they tend to occur, just like *κόρη*, in conversations where all five main participants are present. In the literature about Greek terms of address similar terms (such as *κορίτσι μου* 'my girl') have been referred to as "metaphorical and generic" (Petrits 2001, 206): metaphorical because the addressee is not necessarily a young woman and generic because (as mentioned above) they do not identify the hearer the way first name terms do.

One could argue that these terms, which in other contexts mean 'young women,' are not oriented to as such by the members. However, the following example illustrates that these ToA are not metaphorical and can indeed carry the young-age attributions (Jayyusi 1984) of *κοπέλλες*. Excerpt 3 is taken from the first interview with Myria and it occurs sixteen minutes into the recording. Myria was describing the day-trips she

goes on with her circle of friends (η παρέα τούτη ‘this group’) and, prompted by the researcher to give information about any trips abroad, she starts talking about a trip that she went on with three same-age friends (Loulla, Ketsina, and Myria’s sister-in-law). Myria has identified her co-travellers as (μιαν φίλη μου: η Κετσίνα η Μαλεκκίδου ‘a friend of mine Ketsina Malekkidou,’ η Λούλλα του Ζήνου ‘Zenos’s Loulla,’ and την νύμφη μου ‘my sister-in-law’), and although it is known to the researcher that they are of similar chronological age as Myria, the membership categorization device “age” has not been made explicitly relevant in the immediately preceding interactional sequence, as is the case with all other sequences analyzed in this paper.

Excerpt 3: (participants: Myria, Anna)

16.59

1. M τζαι επήαμεν παρέα. επεράσαμεν <πάρα> πολλά ωραία. (.)
2. A τέσσερις κοπέ[λλες?]
3. M [ <τέ]σσερις> (.) κυρίες. ΜΕΓΑΛΕΣ κυρίες.
4. A μ-νναι.

1. M and we went together ((as a group)). we had a <very> nice time. (.)
2. A fou:r kope[lles?]
3. M [ <fou]r> (.) ladies. FULL-GROWN ladies.
4. A m-yes.

17.05

In the second line, the researcher introduces the term κοπέλλες “to do referring” (Schefflo 2007b, 434) to the characters of the story narrated by Myria, in order to confirm whether only those four participated in the trip. Myria in the next, overlapping turn, offers an other-initiated other-repair of the researcher’s categorization, proposing the term κυρίες ‘ladies’ and self-repairing it to μεγάλες κυρίες ‘full-grown ladies.’ The higher volume and stressed intonation of the repaired categorizations show that this repair is foregrounded and unmitigated. The fact that “full-grown,” the most explicit age categorization in this sequence, is especially emphasized shows that the problem with the trouble source κοπέλλες is the fact that it is an inappropriately “young” age categorization for the characters of the narrative, who Myria constructs as members of an older age category. The researcher’s agreement token in line 4 indicates that, at this local occasion, the term κοπέλλες is jointly constructed as a young-age categorization, inappropriate for the characters of Myria’s story (which of course include Myria herself). In the self-recordings, terms such as κοπέλα and κορούα, both ‘young or little girl,’ are also oriented to as young-age categories, and are constructed as parts of a contrast pair with old-age categorizations such as old woman, old man, seventy-one-year-old. Therefore, it is legitimate to say that these terms are oriented as young-age categorizations, at least in certain local contexts. Below an overview of the use of these young-age categories as ToA and their function in the conversation is given.

Firstly, young-age ToA are employed along with unmitigated directives, as Excerpt 4 shows. In Excerpt 4, the five main participants are visiting Olivia’s house and Tasoulla, the only member who drives, will give them a lift home. Tasoulla is in a hurry to leave early to pick up her grandson from his tutorial, therefore at this point she tells her coparticipants to get up so they can all leave. The use of ρε κορούες here helps to soften the impositive character of the directive in line 4. Therefore, κορούες performs the discourse function of mitigating a face threatening act. Such use of metaphorical and kinship terms with directives is also documented in the literature on the use

of address terms in Turkish and in Greek (see especially Bayyurt and Bayraktaroglu 2001, 222; and also Tannen and Kakava 1992, 25; Petrits 2001, 210).

Excerpt 4: (participants: Tasoulla, Loulla, Gregoria, Myria, Charoulla) 39.08

1. T άτε ρε κορούες τζαι: εν να:-
2. M ↑άτε!
3. Λ =άτε,
4. T σηκωστείτε πάνω
1. T come on re korues we wi:ll-
2. M ↑come on!
3. L =come on,
4. T get up

39.11

In addition to being used as positive politeness devices to minimize face threat (10 out of 25 occurrences), young-age categories as ToA are also routinely found in the context of greetings (15 out of the 25 occurrences). They can be found when entering or leaving a room, for example Γεια σας κοπέλλες 'Hello *kopelles*' (can occur upon arrival) or Ατε κοπέλλες μου εχάρηκα που σας είδα 'Well my *kopelles* it was nice seeing you' (when leaving the meeting). Also, these address terms are used next to ceremonial wishes for good health uttered just before taking the first sip of coffee. The frequently used formulaic wish is either Εις υγείαν κοπέλλες or Στην υγειαν σας κοπέλλες, both meaning 'Wishing you health, *kopelles*.' Formulaic expressions are "sequences of words that are in some regard not entirely predictable, whether on account of a meaning that is wildly or subtly different from the words they contain, [or] a function that is only achieved with the whole expression" (Wray 2013, 317). They are very frequently used in Standard Modern Greek and Cypriot Greek, and are most frequently employed by older adults (Tannen and Oztek 1981, 46; Terkourafi 2002). About 10 % of the total ToA used in the data are part of formulaic expressions. In the dataset, εις υγείαν 'to your health' and similar wishes are also often followed by other types of ToA, such as first names, invariable address terms such as κόρη, and most frequently no address term. Therefore, although greetings constitute a context where most young-age ToA appear, young-age categories are not the only or even most frequent address term found in such contexts. Therefore, the members can choose whether to employ young-age ToA or not in their greetings.

Tannen and Kakava (1992) argue that such ToA, which they call "figurative kinship terms" and include examples such as κοπέλα μου 'my *kopela*,' function as solidarity markers. It might then be the case here that the participants employ these ToA to purposefully reinforce in-group solidarity. Participant observations showed that young-age categories were not employed by younger acquaintances or family members to address the participants. In fact, when a younger family member of one of the participants employed the ToA κοπέλλες to greet the informants, they showed their surprise with the use of the term.

Overall, the use of young-age categories such as κοπέλλες and κορούες as terms of address among older women is a practice that might initially appear to contradict age-appropriate categorization. In the self-recorded conversations of this study, young-age ToA are employed in contexts of greeting and wishes and redress the dispreferredness of face-threatening acts. Therefore, they do not appear to necessarily make relevant

the membership categorization device “age” or any young-age category-bound attributions. Nevertheless, because young-age categories, as ToA, are exclusively employed in peer older-adult conversations, they could be seen as an in-group marker. The analysis demonstrates that these forms do not function primarily to ascribe youthful identities to the addressees but rather operate as context-sensitive interactional devices that reinforce solidarity and mutual alignment. From the standpoint of aging, such practices are consequential because they show how older speakers can invoke age categories playfully and selectively without endorsing their normative or decline-oriented implications, thereby momentarily suspending decline-based expectations and contributing to alternative, non-decline constructions of later-life identity. Taken together, the analyses in Sections 4–6 show that terms of address are not merely reflective of age categories but are central resources through which age, status, and solidarity are actively negotiated in everyday interaction. Whether through the reinforcement of peerhood, the contestation of reverential asymmetry, or the playful redeployment of youth categories, older speakers display ongoing interactional competence and agency. These practices provide the empirical grounding for the discussion that follows, where I argue that such uses of terms of address contribute to the construction of anti-decline old-age categorizations in later-life social interaction.

## 7 Concluding discussion

This concluding discussion draws together the analyses presented in Sections 4–6 to show how specific terms of address function as interactional resources through which older speakers negotiate age, status, and solidarity in everyday talk. In this article I analyzed ToA, whether comprising explicit age categorizations or not, as they were used by a group of older women in their everyday conversations with friends and acquaintances. The choice of terms (i. e., *κόρη* as opposed to the less solidary ‘FN’; ‘TFN’ as opposed to the less reverential and less distancing FN+*κόρη* formulation), is in the first instance explained in terms of solidarity and power relations. Terms such as *κόρη* or *πε* have been shown to index in-group solidarity in the data and thus are disproportionately used in context 1, pre-arranged meetings with all five of the main participants of the core friendship group. As demonstrated in Section 4, the frequent use of solidary and invariable terms such as *κόρη* and *πε* among core group members foregrounds peerhood and in-group belonging, thereby minimizing hierarchical age distinctions. On the other hand, Section 5 showed that reverential and distancing forms (e. g., TFN) are selectively resisted, reciprocated, or rendered interactionally trivial, allowing recipients to contest age-related status asymmetries.

Young-age categories functioning as ToA have also been found to be indices of in-groupness. These terms appear mostly in formulaic greetings or in directives with the function of redressing the dispreferredness of the directive. Section 6 demonstrated that young-age categories used as terms of address function primarily as discourse-oriented and formulaic resources rather than as age ascriptions, reinforcing solidarity without invoking decline-based age categorizations. Fieldwork has shown that such terms are employed exclusive among same-age members, and this is also made explicitly relevant by the participants in follow-up interviews with the researcher. More specifically, in the interviews, participants indicated that it would be inappropriate for younger interlocutors to use young-age ToA (e. g., *κοπέλλες* ‘girls’) to address them and their peers. On the whole, terms of address such as *κορούς* and *κόρη* are not ex-

clusively participant-oriented (indexing age and solidarity) but can also be discourse-oriented (e. g., indexing changes in topic and footing).

Moreover, it has been argued that chronological age was an important but insufficient predictor for the use of more reverential or distancing ToA, such as TFN. It is noteworthy that Tasoulla is the youngest member of this friendship group, being 10 to 17 years younger than all other participants. Tasoulla's membership in different, younger age categories is explicitly made relevant both by herself and her interlocutors in the self-recorded conversations (Charalambidou 2019). This shows that chronological age categories are still an important value of purchase in this context, as they affect membership to generic age categorizations (e. g., "elderly," "mature," "young") but also clearly affect use of ToA. However, the recipients of non-reciprocal TFN are able to challenge the associated old-age categorizations by asking the younger member to employ more solidary and reciprocal address forms (as in the case of Myria-Tasoulla and Charoulla-Tasoulla) or by reciprocating the non-solidary TFN address term (Gregoria-Tasoulla). Therefore, through the contestation of age-related status difference in the use of ToA older participants can downplay age difference between them and their younger friends and jointly construct counter-decline and positive old-age identities for themselves. As has been shown elsewhere (Charalambidou 2015; Georgakopoulou and Charalambidou 2011), despite its significance, chronological age is not the sole or the determining factor for membership in age categories.

On the whole, this paper shows how categories of relative status and solidarity (Braun 1988; Wood and Kroger 1993; Wood and Ryan 1991; Özcan 2016) are understood by members in terms of their interactional histories, local constructions of age identities, and context of interaction (including prior and upcoming text). All these factors shape members' choices between different ToA and lack thereof in talk-in-interaction. Not only that, but members seem to construct very local meaning for ToA whose associations are quite different from the terms used in other contexts (including media texts and interactions with much younger members). A telling example of context-specific use of ToA is how young-age categorizations are used as appropriate ToA between the (older) participants.

The playfulness in the use of young-age categorizations and proliferation of solidary terms in conversations with the core members of this group, show that ToA not only reflect but construct in-group membership and delineate between five core and other peripheral members of this friendship circle (or "clique," as they describe themselves). In this way, everyday address practices emerge as a subtle but powerful site for the interactional production of aging, showing how older speakers actively manage age meanings rather than merely reflecting them. The context-specific use of ToA is not surprising, but what this study illuminates is how chronological age, status, and solidarity are negotiated, ascribed, and contested in the contingencies of situated activity, ultimately contributing to the construction of anti-decline old-age categorizations.

Individual speakers' use of non-conventional ToA (e. g., young-age categorizations to address women who ascribe for themselves and peers the category of "third age") is motivated by their joint construction of counter-decline, old-age identity (Terkourafi 2005a). This analysis has important implications not only for the use of ToA in specific contexts (in this case, peer interaction of older Greek Cypriot women) but also for our understanding of how ToA intersect with age categorizations: both by indexing the speaker's and addressee's age categorizations and by emphasizing or contesting the relative age difference between the interlocutors.

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## Ethics statement

This research was approved by the Humanities Research Ethics Panel of King's College London (Protocol number: REP-H/07/08-6), and the conversational data were collected with the full informed consent of all interlocutors.

## Conflict of interest

The author has no conflict of interest to declare.

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