

Becoming (un)equal in age

Aga Khan University, Arusha Campus
14th–15th September 2023

Organizers

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Description

We commonly treat age as a biological given. However, like other social variables such as gender or class, age is increasingly recognized to be a sociocultural construct (e.g., Berman 2019). Unlike gender or class, though, age is vastly understudied in the social sciences. If we ignore age, we risk ignoring a crucial ingredient in social and political power dynamics. An individual's age and the generation to which they belong influence their social status and ability to act. Seniority often brings with it privileges and opportunities to influence the future. Those who are junior may have limited authority and control over resources, though this position may in some cases be desirable (e.g., for evading responsibility). Being equal in age may stimulate communal action through a powerful sense of solidarity.

In this workshop we aim to explore how people ascertain who is junior, who is senior, and who is equal in everyday life, and for what purposes. We are interested in the cultural and linguistic repertoires by which people lay claim to being senior or junior, such as asymmetric greeting practices, honorific language, conventions regarding who sits where, who speaks when, and so on. With regard to age-mates, we want to identify processes by which diverse people become bound into a generational unit, be it a formal age-set or a self-declared historical generation. The overall goal of the workshop is to collect and compare empirical examples from Africa and Europe on how age differentials are produced and negotiated in different communicative contexts.

Reference

Berman, Elise. 2019. *Talking like children: Language and the production of age in the Marshall Islands*. Oxford University Press.

Programme

Thursday 14th September

9:00–9:30	Greetings and introduction
Session 1 – Egalitarian societies (Chair: Sabrina)	
9:30–10:15	Akira Takada (Kyoto University) Doing being senior/junior: Reconsidering naming and kinship relationships among the !Xun of north-central Namibia
10:15–11:00	Thomas Widlok (University of Cologne) Differences of age without distinctions of authority: How Khoisan marks juniority/seniority and why
Tea break	
Session 2 – Childhood and interaction (Chair: Thomas)	
11:30–12:15	Solange Mekamgoum (University of Hamburg) “This child is only small in age. Yet, in his thinking, he is a grownup”: Age negotiation in spontaneous interactions in Ngemba
12:15–13:00	Alice Mitchell (University of Cologne) Bigger is better: Preoccupations with size and seniority in Datooga children’s interaction
Lunch	
Session 3 – Linguistic strategies (Chair: Agnes)	
13:45–14:30	Joshua Mwaipape (The University of Dodoma) Bantu functional words beyond deictic meaning: The manifestation of power and solidarity through Nyakyusa pronouns
14:30–15:15	Ahmad Kipacha (NMAIST) What is ‘old’ in old age? An inquiry into Swahili paremia
Tea break	
Session 4 – Society and language (Chair: Joachim)	
15:45–16:30	Luisa Schneider (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam) Homing in on the young: Gendered ideologies in a gendered social and legal world

16:30–16:45	Agnes Brühwiler (University of Cologne) Untangling significance of age: Tales and insights from my family
16:45–17:00	Chrispina Alphonse (The University of Dodoma) Concepts and terminologies of age and seniority in Iraqw
17:00–17:15	Veronica Kimani (University of Cologne) Beyond age: Transformation of the concept of seniority as depicted in the health policy planning sector in Tanzania, 1960–1980s.
17:15–17:30	Discussion and closing

Friday 15th September

Session 5 – Age set societies (Chair: Thomas)	
9:00–9:45	Sam Maghimbi (University of Dar es Salaam) The Maasai age system
9:45–10:30	Sabrina Msangi (University of Cologne) On becoming women in Maasai
Tea break	
Session 6 – Seniority and knowledge (Chair: Sabrina)	
11:00–11:45	Koen Stroeken (Ghent University) Wasomi today: medicine and the network of the learned
11:45–12:30	Augustine Agwuele (Texas State University) Grayness is aged, bearded is adult: Yoruba age and seniority
12:30–12:45	Discussion and publication plans
Lunchboxes en route to Arusha National Park	
13:30–17:00	Visit to Arusha National Park