

GETTING TO KNOW YAHOWU AND YA'AHOWU: WARM GREETINGS FROM THE NIAS COMMUNITY

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Abstrak

Bahasa dan budaya memiliki peran penting dalam membentuk identitas suatu masyarakat. Dalam masyarakat Nias, salam "Yahowu" dan "Ya'ahowu" merupakan bentuk sapaan khas yang mencerminkan kehangatan, doa, serta nilai-nilai sosial yang dijunjung tinggi. Meskipun kedua salam ini sering dianggap memiliki makna yang sama, terdapat perbedaan dalam penggunaannya, baik dari segi konteks sosial, keagamaan, maupun adat istiadat. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji makna, perbedaan, dan signifikansi budaya dari "Yahowu" dan "Ya'ahowu" dalam kehidupan masyarakat Nias. Melalui pendekatan kualitatif yang melibatkan studi pustaka dan wawancara dengan masyarakat lokal, ditemukan bahwa "Ya'ahowu" lebih sering digunakan dalam konteks formal, adat, dan keagamaan, sedangkan "Yahowu" lebih umum dalam percakapan sehari-hari. Salam ini bukan hanya sekadar bentuk komunikasi, tetapi juga simbol identitas budaya yang memperkuat solidaritas sosial dan kearifan lokal masyarakat Nias. Studi ini diharapkan dapat meningkatkan pemahaman dan apresiasi terhadap warisan budaya Nias serta pentingnya melestarikan nilai-nilai tradisional di era modern.

Kata Kunci: *Yahowu; Ya'ahowu; salam; budaya Nias; komunikasi; kearifan lokal*

Abstract

Language and culture play a crucial role in shaping the identity of a community. In Nias society, the greetings "Yahowu" and "Ya'ahowu" serve as distinctive forms of address that reflect warmth, blessings, and deeply held social values. Although these greetings are often considered to have the same meaning, there are differences in their usage across social, religious, and customary contexts. This study aims to examine the meaning, distinctions, and cultural significance of "Yahowu" and "Ya'ahowu" in the daily life of the Nias people. Through a qualitative approach involving literature studies and interviews with local community members, the findings indicate that "Ya'ahowu" is more commonly used in formal, customary, and religious settings, whereas "Yahowu" is more prevalent in everyday conversations. These greetings are not merely forms of communication but also serve as cultural identity markers that reinforce social solidarity and local wisdom within the Nias community. This study is expected to enhance understanding and appreciation of Nias cultural heritage and emphasize the importance of preserving traditional values in the modern era.

Keywords: *Yahowu; Ya'ahowu; greeting; Nias culture; communication; local wisdom*



A. Introduction

The Nias community is known for its rich and meaningful culture, which is reflected in the way they communicate and exchange greetings. The expressions "*Yahowu*" and "*Ya'ahowu*" are commonly used greetings among the Nias people, serving as expressions of warmth, blessings, and respect for others. However, despite their similarities, these greetings differ in meaning, usage, and cultural context (Harefa, D. 2025). Language and culture are deeply interconnected in shaping the identity of a community. On Nias Island, one of the most profound expressions is "*Yahowu*", a distinctive greeting that embodies warmth and the local wisdom of the Nias people. This expression is not merely a form of address but also carries prayers and good wishes for the person being greeted.

In Nias tradition, "*Yahowu*" holds a meaning beyond a mere greeting. It is often interpreted as a prayer for health, happiness, and blessings. This greeting is used in various situations, both in daily life and within the context of customary and religious ceremonies. Therefore, a deeper understanding of the meaning and usage of "*Yahowu*" is essential for preserving Nias culture amid the waves of modernization.

Language is an integral part of a community's cultural identity. In the context of the Nias people, greetings hold profound meaning and represent the social and spiritual values embraced by the community. "*Yahowu*" and "*Ya'ahowu*" are two distinctive forms of greeting used in various situations, both in daily interactions and in customary and religious ceremonies. In Nias local wisdom, greetings are not merely forms of address but also reflect core life values such as togetherness, blessings, and mutual respect. The distinction between "*Yahowu*" and "*Ya'ahowu*" has often been an intriguing subject of study, particularly from linguistic, philosophical, and practical perspectives. According to linguistic research on the Nias language, variations in greeting expressions often arise due to dialectal influences and the generational evolution of language (Sudarmoko, 2018). Differences in pronunciation and usage can reflect historical aspects and cultural shifts within a society. A study by Laoli (2019) found that "*Ya'ahowu*" is more frequently used in formal and religious contexts, whereas "*Yahowu*" is more common in everyday conversations.

Furthermore, a cultural study by Zebua (2020) highlights that greetings in Nias society are not merely forms of address but also serve as prayers, carrying hopes for health, happiness, and blessings for the



recipient. This aligns with intercultural communication theory, which posits that language and expressions within a community function not only as communication tools but also as means to strengthen social solidarity and reinforce cultural identity (Hall, 1989).

In addition, an anthropological study by Waruwu (2021) emphasizes that the expression "*Ya'ahowu*" is closely linked to Nias customs and belief systems. Its use in traditional ceremonies and formal interactions reflects the spiritual values of the Nias people and their connection to ancestors and God. Through this literature review, it can be concluded that the distinction between "*Yahowu*" and "*Ya'ahowu*" holds significant linguistic, social, and cultural dimensions that warrant further study. This research aims to gain a deeper understanding of the meaning and usage of both expressions, providing broader insights into the role of language in preserving the cultural identity of the Nias people.

Every region in Indonesia has its own unique greeting that reflects cultural values and warmth in social interactions. On Nias Island, the greeting "*Ya'ahowu*" plays a crucial role in the daily lives of its people. More than just a salutation, "*Ya'ahowu*" carries prayers and good wishes for the recipient, including happiness, health, and well-being. In Nias society, "*Ya'ahowu*" is

not only used in daily conversations but also in traditional ceremonies, official gatherings, and religious celebrations. This expression serves as a symbol of hospitality and social harmony, strengthening relationships among individuals and the community. As part of local wisdom, "*Ya'ahowu*" also reflects religious values and life philosophy, which have been passed down through generations.

Cultural and linguistic studies reveal that greetings in a society are not merely tools of communication but also serve as representations of social and cultural identity. "*Ya'ahowu*" carries a deeper significance than a simple greeting, as it embodies respect and an awareness of the importance of brotherhood within the Nias community. This study aims to explore in greater depth the meaning and differences between these two expressions in the daily lives of the Nias people. Through historical, cultural, and social approaches, this research seeks to provide a broader understanding of the significance of greetings in the identity of the Nias community and how these local values continue to be preserved and passed down through generations.

B. Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical



method to understand the meaning, differences, and cultural significance of the greetings "*Yahowu*" and "*Ya'ahowu*" within the Nias community. This method was chosen as it allows researchers to explore the **symbolic meanings** and **social functions** of these greetings within the cultural and traditional contexts of Nias society (Harefa, D. 2025).

1. Data Sources

This study utilizes two types of data:

a. Primary Data

Collected through interviews with traditional leaders, religious figures, and Nias community members who continue to use "*Yahowu*" and "*Ya'ahowu*" in their daily interactions.

b. Secondary Data

Obtained from literature reviews, including books, journals, academic articles, and relevant documents discussing Nias culture, language, and communication systems in Nias society.

2. Data Collection Techniques

The data for this study is collected using the following techniques:

a. In-depth Interviews

Interviews are conducted with traditional leaders, religious figures, and Nias community members to gain insights into the usage, meaning, and differences between "*Yahowu*" and "*Ya'ahowu*".

b. Participatory Observation

Direct observations are carried out to witness firsthand how these greetings are used in various contexts, such as traditional ceremonies, social gatherings, and daily interactions.

c. Literature Study

A review of relevant literature, including linguistic, cultural, and communication studies on Nias society, is conducted to provide a broader theoretical foundation for the research.

3. Data Analysis Techniques

The data is analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model, which consists of the following steps:

a. Data Reduction

Selecting and simplifying the collected data to focus on the key research objectives.

b. Data Presentation

Organizing the information into a descriptive narrative to provide a clear illustration of the usage and differences between "*Yahowu*" and "*Ya'ahowu*".

c. Conclusion Drawing

Interpreting the data to derive meaningful insights about the cultural significance of these greetings in Nias society.

4. Data Validity

To ensure data accuracy and reliability, this study employs source triangulation, which involves comparing information from multiple data sources-including



interviews, observations, and literature studies to enhance the credibility and objectivity of the findings. This method is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the differences between "*Yahowu*" and "*Ya'ahowu*", as well as how these greetings contribute to strengthening the social and cultural values of the Nias community.

C. Results and Discussion

Research Findings

Based on research conducted through interviews, observations, and literature studies, several key findings have been identified regarding the usage, meaning, and differences between "*Yahowu*" and "*Ya'ahowu*" in Nias society.

1. Meaning and Philosophy of the Greetings "*Yahowu*" and "*Ya'ahowu*"

This study confirms that both greetings share a common root meaning: expressions of prayers and well wishes for the person being greeted. In the Nias language, these greetings generally mean "May you be healthy, happy, and blessed." More than just a form of address, these greetings reflect cultural values that emphasize hospitality, togetherness, and mutual respect among individuals.

2. Differences in Usage

Through observations and interviews with local community members, the study

reveals distinct contextual differences in the use of these greetings:

a. *Ya'ahowu*

- 1) Primarily used in formal, religious, and customary contexts.
- 2) Commonly found in official ceremonies, prayers, traditional speeches, and interactions with respected individuals.

b. *Yahowu*

- 1) More frequently used in everyday conversations as an informal greeting.
- 2) Typically exchanged in casual interactions or friendly meetings.

However, these distinctions are not absolute, as both greetings can sometimes be used interchangeably depending on the situation and level of respect intended, without diminishing their inherent meaning of blessing and goodwill.

3. Social and Cultural Functions of Greetings in Nias Society

The study also reveals that "*Yahowu*" and "*Ya'ahowu*" play a broader role in building social relationships and strengthening solidarity within Nias society. The key cultural functions of these greetings include:

a. A Symbol of Cultural Identity

These greetings distinguish the Nias people from other ethnic groups in Indonesia and serve as a source of local pride.

b. A Form of Respect Among Individuals



Their use reflects politeness and etiquette in social interactions, reinforcing mutual respect among community members.

c. An Expression of Spirituality

The use of these greetings in prayers and religious ceremonies highlights the spiritual connection of the Nias people with their faith and local beliefs.

4. Preservation and Challenges in the Modern Era

Interviews with traditional leaders and Nias youth indicate that the use of "*Yahowu*" and "*Ya'ahowu*" remains strong in local communities, especially in rural areas where traditional customs are still upheld. However, several challenges threaten the continuity of these greetings:

a. Influence of the Indonesian Language and Globalization

Younger generations tend to use Indonesian more frequently, leading to a decline in the daily use of traditional greetings.

b. Lack of Awareness Among Younger Generations

Many young people are unfamiliar with the nuanced differences and deep meanings of these greetings, which may gradually diminish their cultural significance.

c. Limited Academic Documentation on Nias Language and Culture

There is a lack of extensive research and academic documentation on Nias greetings, making knowledge about them limited to local communities and understudied in wider scholarly discussions.

5. Efforts for Preservation

As part of **cultural preservation efforts**, this study identifies several **local initiatives** undertaken by the **Nias community** to maintain the use of "*Yahowu*" and "*Ya'ahowu*", including:

a. Strengthening Local Cultural Education

Integrating **Nias language and traditions** into school curricula to ensure younger generations remain familiar with their **linguistic and cultural heritage**.

b. Utilizing Digital Media

Creating **videos and educational content** to promote Nias culture, making it more accessible and appealing to younger audiences.

c. Preserving in Traditional and Religious Events

Ensuring that these greetings remain a core part of customary ceremonies and religious activities, reinforcing their cultural significance.

The findings of this study confirm that "*Yahowu*" and "*Ya'ahowu*" are more than just greetings—they are symbols of identity, unity, and spirituality within the Nias community. The differences in usage are contextual, with "*Ya'ahowu*" being



more common in formal and religious settings, while "*Yahowu*" is predominantly used in daily conversations (Harefa, D., et al., 2024). However, in the modern era, challenges in preserving these greetings are increasing, particularly among younger generations. Therefore, efforts to safeguard Nias greetings must be pursued through education, media engagement, and reinforcement in traditional and social life. This study is expected to serve as a reference for understanding and preserving Nias local wisdom, ensuring that it remains resilient amid cultural and linguistic shifts in contemporary society.

Discussion

This study finds that the greetings "*Yahowu*" and "*Ya'ahowu*" play a crucial role in the social and cultural life of the Nias community. These greetings are more than just expressions of politeness; they embody local wisdom, social warmth, and the cultural identity of the Nias people. This section will discuss the meaning, usage, challenges, and preservation efforts of these greetings in a modern context.

1. Meaning and Philosophy of the Greetings "*Yahowu*" and "*Ya'ahowu*"

In the Nias language, both "*Yahowu*" and "*Ya'ahowu*" originate from the same root word, which can be literally interpreted as a prayer or well-wishing expression for the recipient. The deeper

meanings of these greetings encompass several key aspects:

a. Health

Expresses a hope for good health and well-being for the person being greeted.

b. Prosperity

Implies a prayer for happiness, abundance, and a fulfilling life.

c. Spirituality

In some contexts, the greeting also reflects a connection to God and religious values, as blessings and well-wishes are often tied to divine protection and guidance.

Linguistic studies suggest that dialectical variations exist in the usage of these greetings across different regions of Nias. However, despite minor differences in pronunciation or structure, the core message remains consistent a heartfelt prayer and expression of goodwill towards others.

2. Differences in the Usage of *Yahowu* and *Ya'ahowu*

Observations and interviews reveal that, although these two greetings are often considered similar, there are distinct differences in their usage within the community. The differences in the usage of "*Yahowu*" and "*Ya'ahowu*" were identified through observations and interviews, confirming that while both greetings are often considered similar, they have distinct



contexts and applications within Nias society.

Aspects	Yahowu	Ya'ahowu
Usage Context	More relaxed, everyday	Used in traditional ceremonies, religious events, and formal situations
Usage Situation	Casual social interactions, informal	Speeches, traditional ceremonies, prayers, and interactions with respected figures
Meaning Nuance	More general and flexible in	More formal and often associated with spiritual and cultural values
Scope of Use	Commonly used in daily life by the general	Used in official contexts and by traditional leaders or religious figures

Despite these differences, in some cases, both greetings can be **interchangeable** without diminishing the **respect and prayers** embedded in their meaning (Harefa, D., et al., 2024).

3. Social and Cultural Functions of Greetings in Nias Society

Beyond being simple forms of address, "Yahowu" and "Ya'ahowu" serve important social and cultural functions in Nias society:

a. As a Cultural Identity

These greetings are a distinct characteristic of the Nias people and are part of their cultural heritage passed down through generations.

b. As an Expression of Solidarity

They strengthen interpersonal relationships, reflecting values of togetherness and brotherhood.

c. As a Form of Respect

In various traditional ceremonies and social interactions, the use of these greetings signifies respect toward others.

d. As a Religious and Spiritual Expression

In religious contexts, these greetings are often used in prayers and religious ceremonies as expressions of hope for blessings from God.

4. Challenges in Preserving the Greetings "Yahowu" and "Ya'ahowu"

Interviews with traditional leaders and younger generations indicate that while the use of "Yahowu" and "Ya'ahowu" remains strong in traditional communities, several challenges threaten their continuity in the modern era:

a. Influence of the Indonesian Language and Globalization

Younger generations tend to use Indonesian more frequently in daily communication, reducing the use of traditional Nias greetings.

b. Lack of Understanding Among Younger Generations



Many young people do not fully grasp the differences and deeper meanings of "*Yahowu*" and "*Ya'ahowu*", leading to a decline in their usage.

c. Limited Academic Documentation

Literature on Nias culture and language is scarce, meaning that these greetings have not been extensively studied in academic research.

5. Efforts to Preserve the Greetings "*Yahowu*" and "*Ya'ahowu*"

Recognizing these challenges, various efforts have been made to preserve the use of "*Yahowu*" and "*Ya'ahowu*" within the Nias community, including:

a. Integration into Education

Some schools in Nias have started teaching the Nias language and culture to students to maintain their cultural identity.

b. Strengthening in Traditional and Religious Events

These greetings continue to be used in traditional ceremonies and religious practices to ensure the continuation of traditions.

c. Utilizing Digital Media

The Nias community has begun using social media, educational videos, and cultural content to promote and preserve these greetings.

d. Encouraging Daily Use

Traditional leaders and religious figures encourage the community to continue using "*Yahowu*" and "*Ya'ahowu*"

in daily interactions to prevent them from fading over time (Harefa, D., & I Wayan Suastra, 2024).

This study highlights that "*Yahowu*" and "*Ya'ahowu*" are more than just greetings—they reflect the cultural, social, and spiritual values of the Nias people (Sarumaha, M., et al., 2024). Their primary difference lies in their usage context, where "*Ya'ahowu*" is more **formal** and used in traditional and religious ceremonies, while "*Yahowu*" is more flexible in daily interactions. Despite challenges from globalization and social changes, the Nias people remain committed to preserving these greetings as an integral part of their cultural identity (Mutolib, A., et al., 2025). With proper preservation efforts, "*Yahowu*" and "*Ya'ahowu*" are expected to continue being symbols of warmth and brotherhood for the Nias community, both now and in the future.

D. Conclusion

This study has examined the meaning, differences, and cultural significance of the greetings *Yahowu* and *Ya'ahowu* in the daily life of the Nias community. Based on the analysis, it was found that while both greetings share the same fundamental meaning serving as expressions of prayers and well wishes—they differ in their usage contexts:



1. Meaning and Philosophy

a. Ya'ahowu

- 1) More commonly used in formal, traditional, and religious contexts.
- 2) Carries a stronger spiritual connotation and signifies respect.

b. Yahowu

- 1) More flexible and widely used in everyday conversations.
- 2) Functions as a casual and relaxed form of greeting.

2. Social and Cultural Functions

a. These greetings are not merely forms of communication but also serve as:

- 1) Cultural identity markers,
- 2) Expressions of unity, and
- 3) Symbols of spirituality within Nias society.

b. Their usage in customary ceremonies and religious activities reinforces cultural values and social solidarity.

3. Challenges in Preservation

a. Globalization and the dominance of the Indonesian language have led to a decline in the use of these greetings among younger generations.

b. Limited academic understanding and documentation make knowledge about the differences between *Yahowu* and *Ya'ahowu* less accessible.

4. Efforts for Preservation

Introducing these greetings in local cultural education, reinforcing their use in traditional and religious events, and

leveraging digital media can be effective strategies for ensuring their survival.

Ultimately, *Yahowu* and *Ya'ahowu* are **more than just greetings** they are part of the identity and cultural heritage of the Nias people, carrying deep social and spiritual values. Therefore, it is essential for the Nias community to continue preserving and promoting these greetings so that they do not fade away amid modernization (Harefa, D., & Fatolosa Hulu, 2024).

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be made to ensure the preservation of the greetings *Yahowu* and *Ya'ahowu* in the daily life of the Nias community (Harefa, D., et al., 2024):

1. Education and Socialization

a. Local governments and educational institutions should integrate the Nias language and culture, including traditional greetings, into school curricula to help younger generations understand their local values.

b. Organizing workshops or cultural seminars to discuss the importance of these greetings in Nias social and customary life.

2. Preservation in Traditional and Religious Events

a. Traditional leaders and religious figures should continue using *Ya'ahowu* in



rituals and religious ceremonies to reinforce its role in formal contexts.

- b. Encouraging the use of *Yahowu* in daily conversations within families and communities to maintain its presence in everyday life.

3. Utilizing Digital Media

- a. Creating educational content such as videos, articles, and infographics explaining the differences between *Yahowu* and *Ya'ahowu* and the meanings behind them.
- b. Leveraging social media platforms to introduce Nias culture to a wider audience, particularly younger generations.

4. Further Research and Documentation

- a. Conducting further research on the linguistic variations and historical usage of these greetings in different regions of Nias.
- b. Encouraging academic scholars and cultural experts to document more references on Nias greetings and culture to ensure the wider preservation of this cultural heritage.

With collaborative efforts from various stakeholders, *Yahowu* and *Ya'ahowu* are expected to remain a living tradition and a source of pride for the Nias people amid the challenges of modernization.

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