Patterns of Greeting in Etulo

Benjamin Ifeanyi Mmadike[1,] Adaobi Ngozi Okoye[2,]

Department of Linguistics, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, P.M.B. 5025, Awka

Abstract: *This study focuses on the patterns of greeting used by the Etulo, a minority ethnic and linguistic group who live in parts of Benue and Taraba states of Nigeria. Etulo is not a widely studied language. Before now, no study has been done on the patterns of greeting in the language. This study therefore is an attempt to fill this gap. The data consist of 28 greeting tokens based on live greeting events recorded in the course of a number of field trips. These were transcribed and translated into English. The findings show that such variables as age, status, sex and context determine the type of greeting to be used. In addition to serving as conversational routine, greetings are found to have propositional content.*

Key concepts: *greeting, communicative competence, routine, adjacency pair, propositional content.*

I. Introduction

Knowledge of a language should not be restricted to knowledge about the grammatical rules in the language. Such knowledge should include the basic discourse rules or conversational routines of the language. An example of these routines is the pattern of greeting used by the speakers of the language.

According to Duranti (1997:63)

Greetings are an important part of the communicative competence necessary for being a member of any speech community. They are often one of the first verbal routines learned by children and certainly one of the first topics introduced in foreign language classes.

The concept of communicative competence is the ability of a native speaker to speak and understand his/her language and to use it as appropriate. It "subsumes the social determinants of linguistic behaviour, including such environmental matters as the relationship between the speaker and hearer, and the pressures which stem from the time and place of speaking" (Crystal 2003:88).

Greetings constitute a set of linguistic and non-linguistic expressions used by humans in social interactions and encounters. Cross-linguistically, there seem to be no general definition of greetings due to the variation in what constitutes a greeting expression. A greeting expression in one culture may not be regarded as one in another culture (Duranti 1997:67, Wei 2010:62, Ekanjume-Ilongo 2013:26). This is to say that "semantically, greetings gain their meaning from the culture they are derived from and their precise content is culture-specific" (Rababa'h & Malkawis n.d:19).

The study of greetings has attracted the interest of a number of researchers. With regard to the content of greetings, one view is that greetings lack semantic content, while the other is that they have propositional content. Searle (1969), cited in Duranti (1997:64) contends that greeting exchanges are devoid of propositional content. In other words, they are mere verbal exchanges which are used to maintain ties of union or human relationship. On the contrary, Duranti (1997:89) argues against the claim that greetings are devoid of meaning. He asserts that among other things, greetings "can be used to gather information about a person's identity or whereabouts". In Thailand for instance, "the greeting 'how are you?' is understood as genuine interest in one's welfare and requires polite reciprocal discussion in detail of one's current condition,… in the United States 'how are you?' is a ritual greeting and nothing more" (Lenkeit 2001:84).

According to Akindele (2007), greetings involve the exchange of expression, pleasantries or good wishes between two people or a group of people interacting for the purpose of establishing interpersonal relationship. Ibrahim, Grimshaw & Bird (1976:12) consider greeting as a universal feature of human interaction which could be defined as "the set of linguistic and/or non-linguistic devices used for the initial management of encounters". The linguistic devices pertain to verbal exchanges between or among the interlocutors. The non-linguistic form refers to such instances of waving of hands, eye movements and embrace used as greeting (Harvey 1982, cited in Ekanjume-Ilongo 2013:26).

Agyekum (2008) describes Akan greetings as the basic oil of social relations that sets the tone and establishes the relationship between the interlocutors. The relationship could be such that may show affirmation of equality or enact social inequalities. Thus, greetings can be used to indexicalize the social relationship between and among the interlocutors.

In a study of the Oring sociolinguistic group, Nkamigbo (2012) asserts that greetings constitute a moral sociolinguistic routine meant for the establishment of interpersonal relationship. The study also identifies such

greetings that are used for the expression of good wishes, solidarity, grief or sorrow. Among the Igbo of southeast Nigeria, Nwoye (1993) identifies three broad categories of greetings: salutary, exhortative and commiserative, which are based on the communicative functions of greetings. The study claims that greetings, among the Igbo, constitute an essential aspect of socio-cultural interaction for phatic communion and exchange of information.

The foregoing reveals that greeting is a universal feature which is however culture-dependent. Greeting serves to foster social relationship and to indexicalize parameters like equality and inequality. It provides the platform for inquiring about each other's health and wellbeing, showing delight with one who is joyful and commiserating with one who is sorrowful. In the section that follows, we examine the patterns of greeting as observed among the Etulo.

II. The Etulo Ethnic Group

The Etulo constitute a minority ethnic and linguistic group found in Benue and Taraba states of Nigeria. The name Etulo refers both to the people and their language. Though a less studied language, some linguistic studies have been conducted, based on the Adi variant. These include Mmadike & Okoye (2008), Ezenwafor (2009), Okoye (2009), Ezenwafor (2011), and Ezenwafor & Mmadike (2012). Hitherto, no study has been done on the patterns of greeting in Etulo. Thus, the present study tries to fulfill this need.

This ethnographic approach was adopted in the course of data collection (Leinket 2001, Holmes 2008). A total of 28 greeting tokens were collected based on tape-recorded live greeting events. The greetings were transcribed and translated into English with the assistance of the informants. Being a tone language, we adopt the tone marking convention whereby only low [`], step [¯], and high-falling [^] tones are indicated. The high [´] tone is left unmarked.

2.1 Patterns of greeting in Etulo

The Etulo word for greeting is amgba. Among the Etulo, there are greetings for different occasions. For instance, there are greetings used to inquire about people's well being, show solidarity during someone's period of grief and also to express joy in someone's happy moment. A set of sociolinguistic variables such as time, age, context and sex come into play in greeting events. Time factor has some conditioning effect on greetings. Those who are not in a hurry may decide to engage in a more elaborate type of greeting. Interlocutors with less time at their disposal will be as brief as possible, without giving room for expansion.

In Etulo, respect is usually accorded to elders. The younger person greets the elderly one first. This accounts for the use of such kinship terms like baba/mama 'father/mother' in place of the elder's personal name. In the event of the contrary, it is taken as a show of disrespect on the part of the younger person. Like the age variable, the context also imposes its restriction. In the event of coming into a gathering, one has to greet the group first, irrespective of one's age, even when the gathering is made of up people younger than oneself. Sex is also a determinant of who greets the other first. Generally, women are expected to greet the men first, and with a show of deference. However, if the female is older than the male, the male will greet first. Age therefore takes precedence over sex. In the discussion that follows, we categorize Etulo greetings thus; time of day, status, commendation, commiseration, welcome and miscellany greetings.

2.1 Time of day greeting

Time of day greeting is made up of morning, afternoon, evening and night greetings.
The table below is illustrative.

S/N	Greeting	Gloss	Context	Purpose
1	Òkyèewāā baba/mama? Ɔ̀tɔwāā baba/mama? Ofãegbēwā baba/mama?	Have you woken up father/mother? Have you come out father/mother? Have you broken the day baba/mama?	Morning	To find out how the person spent the previous night
2	Osìsewāā? Otoŋawaa?	Are you sitting? Are you resting?	Afternoon	To inquire about the person's condition or how
3	Ogbōɔ̀nɔ̀èsewāā Omwāɔ̀nɔ̀nwùtawāā	Have you fallen the sun Have you reduced the sun?	Evening	He/she is faring
4	Sɛ ɛkɛkā Lasɛsan	Till tomorrow/next morning	Night	Expression of good wish/Valediction

Table I: Day greeting

In table 1 above, each of the greetings in (1)-(3) is in the interrogative form. The response to either of the three greetings could be eee 'yes', tamgbā 'thanks' or òkyèsinè 'how are you?' Either of these responses could be followed by ònwè anî 'my child', should the respondent be of age to be addressed as baba/mama. This gives rise to adjacency pairs whereby the responses are identified as a follow-up of the greeting.

2.2 Status greeting

In a typical African setting, a traditional title is a remarkable status symbol. There is usually a distinction between the titled and non-titled members of the society. The title members are regarded highly while those without title are not so regarded. This distinction is equally observed in the way the two categories of people dress and also how they are addressed. Table II exemplifies a status-based greeting.

S/N	Greeting	Gloss	Context	Purpose
5	Ogabaidù	High chief	Anytime	To show respect and recognition
6	Ŏkwese	Chief		

Table II: Status greeting

In the course of greeting a titled man, one would prostrate and then utter the greeting that is appropriate to the status of the titled man. Thereafter, the response would be ònwè anî 'my child'.

2.3 Commendation greeting:

The forms of greeting that fall under this heading are exemplified in Table III

S/N	Greeting	Gloss	Context	Purpose
7	Abùkiòsan	You have done well	A successful event	To exult someone for his/her achievement
8	Abùfia	You have tried		
9	Abulɔɔ̀ndʒùlɔɔ	You are a man	Achievement of task or feat	
10	Abulɔɔ̀ndʒùlɔɔndʒaa	You are a man-woman		
11	Kɛɛyayìi	Keep it up / keep moving forward	A successful event	To encourage a motivate someone
12	Kunewō(nā)	Be strengthened	At work	
13	Tamgbā	Thanks	In the event of any act of benevolence or kindness	To express joy and to show appreciation for a favour

Table III: Commendation greeting

Greetings (9) and (10) are used to commend one who has accomplished a task or feat. There is evidence of a marked feature associated with (10). Greeting (9) is used when a male is greeted, whereas (10) is used to greet a woman. As indicated in the gloss, the female is referred to as a 'man-woman', a woman who is likened to a man. By implication, this suggests that such a feat is reserved for men. This is an evidence of male chauvinism expressed in sexist language (Mmadike 2014). In (12) the plural marker -na is used when two or more persons are at work.

2.4 Commiseration greeting

The primary objective of commiseration greeting is to establish identify and affirm solidarity (Emery 2000).

S/N	Greeting	Gloss	Context	Purpose
14	Yɛ̀ɛsān	Get well soon	When sick or ill	To express sympathy and to show that one shares in the sorrow or pain.
15	Òkèyìikùwà	Thank you for death	During a burial or condolence	

Table IV: Commiseration greeting

There are basically two types of commiseration greeting. The first greeting (14) is addressed to a sick person as a show of concern for his/her condition of health. The second (15) is for the expression of sympathy to someone who is bereaved. Such greetings are used to comfort and console the affected individuals.

2.5 Festive greetings

Festive greetings usually follow the pattern whereby the word tamgba 'thanks' is followed by the festival that is being marked.

S/N	Greeting	Gloss
16	Tamgbā ikrisimas	Merry Christmas
17	Tamgbā ɔ̀nɔ́vàòfufê	Happy new year
18	Tamgbāàngwɔɔ̀fufê	Happy new yam

Table V: Festive greeting

2.6 Welcome greetings

S/N	Greeting	Gloss	Context	Purpose
19	Mkyoɔ̀nɔ́	Welcome	Visit	To show a warm reception
20	Ònwènchōmìlabā	Welcome baby	The birth of a child	To express joy for the birth of a baby
21	Ɔ̀ndʒànchōmìlabā	Welcome woman. Woman, you have put to bed safely.	On a visit to a woman who had has just put to bed	To exalt a woman for the safe delivery for her baby
22	Àmirīynchōmìlabā	Welcome wife	On a visit to a newly married woman	To express joy and to show the new wife their friendly disposition

Table VI: Welcome greeting

The greetings in Table VI depict the positive frame of mind of the people who use the greeting towards those being greeted. Such greetings are used to identify or affirm solidarity with the person or persons so greeted.

2.7 Miscellany greetings

Miscellany greetings are such greetings that can be used at anytime and to indicate an end in a discussion, among others.

S/N	Greeting	Gloss	Context	Purpose
23	Sɛ ɔnɔgbwɛ	Later,till another day	Departure or parting of ways after a discussion	Expression of goodwill
24	Sɛɛgbɛɛɔka			
25	Tamgba	Thanks	Anytime	To express appreciation or goodwill
26	Sinɛ	Hello	Anytime	To acknowledge someone's presence or to acknowledge a greeting
27	Sɛɛgbɛɛɔka			
28	Zesan	Till another day Stay well	Signals an end to a discussion	Expression of good will.

Table VII: Miscellany greeting

III.   Summary And Conclusion

The study has examined the patterns of greeting in Etulo. A total number of twenty eight greeting tokens were collected, transcribed and translated into English with the aid of native-speaker informants. The practice of greeting is universal and culture dependent on such sociolinguistic variables as age, sex, status and context. Greetings have propositional content, they are not semantically empty.

As in other cultures, greetings in Etulo are used to inquire about people's well being. There are greetings that are used to show solidarity with someone who is in sorrow and to express joy with someone's happy moment. Greetings therefore form part of the socialization process and manifestation of the communicative competence of the people.

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