

Convergence and Divergence Strategies in Greetings and Leave Taking: A View from the Dagbaŋ Kingdom in Ghana

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Abstract

This paper, which centres on events at the court of the Yaa Naa in Yendi, Ghana, focuses on speech events where greetings are used. Greetings are ritually used to solidarise with peers, or show deference to higher ups on the social ladder, in a cultural milieu. The greetings and exchanges at times of meeting and leave-taking utilise asymmetric salutations to show respect to, and index the status of interactants, while symmetric ones aim at showing solidarity between interactants. The choice of code depends on the occasion, participants, and the nature of the subject under of the discourse. Participant observation was used to gather the data, which was matched against library material for analyses. These brought to the fore that, greetings are ritualised verbal sessions where people react with each other, and also show deference to higher ups on the social ladder. The established protocols are observed during these interactions.

Keywords: strategies, greetings, Dagbaŋ, power index, convergence and divergence

1. Introduction

Greetings are formulaic ways in which humans acknowledge encounters between each other. These may serve to show respect or solidarity, and to also show that the interactants mutually obtain and validate one another's presence. Communication, like all social interactions, is governed by rules of interaction, especially in social structures that have such features as role, hierarchy, and exchange requirements (see Grimshaw 1980: 791).

The palace of the Yaa Naa, the traditional overlord of the Dagombas¹ of Northern Ghana is awash with activity throughout the day. Disputes, negotiations of all sorts are engaged in from sunrise till sunset. Each interaction is ushered in with greetings and exchange of kola nuts and other gifts. We intend to examine the interactions that took place at an introductory session as well as at a farewell meeting, at this royal setting, when we paid a courtesy call at the palace. The beauty of the exchanges that we observed motivated us to attempt an analysis of the interaction. The events were marked by the use of greetings and praise-uttering; and as observed by Duranti (1992: 657) of Samoan ceremonial greetings, the words used in each situation is accompanied by ritualised, negotiated body postures and movement. This is symptomatic of all settings where we observe an asymmetrical power index at play, as echoed by Yankah (1995).

2. Methodology

This is an ethnographic enquiry that looks into the everyday experiences of a people. In the Malinowskian and Baumanian² traditions, the ethnographer in mingling with the target community becomes aware of, better understands, and is in a position to accurately document his findings. Many ethnographers have talked about cultures without accurately describing them. The researcher needs to be with and observe the community he is studying in order to access the local interpretations of their discourse.

We participated in and observed the discourse situations in order to capture the goings on as they came up. The evolving corpus of discourse material gathered was processed from an insider perspective, but was complemented with some balanced academic objectivity so as not to take anything for granted.

By participating in and also observing the normal protocol, we came to be accepted as an 'acting member' of the court with the license to come and go with a minimum of bureaucratic hindrance.

We wrote down field notes each night. The audio-visual recordings of proceedings that were made constituted the second mode of data collection, which complemented the observations made of the interaction process. To appreciate the complexity of culture, an ethnographer must initially record events and conditions in as much detail as possible; selection and search for patterns can come later. This was what we did.

Each session is framed, in this traditional political institution. One would expect that such a

¹ Dagombas are found in Northern Ghana. The 'state' is known as Dagbon, and a member is called a Dagbana (or Dagomba, Plural Dagbamba/Dagombas). The language is called Dagban(l)i.

² Malinowski (1922) and Richard Bauman (1972) espouse a participant observant method of conducting social research.

structured system as this would not have any room for creativity within the routine ‘chores’ of the courtiers. This, however, was not the case, and the intermediaries were ever so ingenuous with their on-the-spur-of-the-moment creations.

The interaction is shaped by the participants, time, setting and purpose. Southerland (1987:373) cites Hymes’ use of the mnemonic acronym SPEAKING (Table 1 below) to define the components of a speech situation.

Table 1.

S	The setting and scene of a speech situation, distinguishing between the physical locale and the type of activity.
P	The participants often characterised by terms such as addressor, addressee, speaker, performer, audience ... and so on.
E	The ends , including both functions and outcomes.
A	The act sequence , including the content and form of speech.
K	The key , tone, mood, or manner, distinguishing among serious, facetious, formal, sarcastic and so on.
I	The instrumentalities , including the "channel" (verbal, non-verbal, face to face, written) and "code" (the language and/or variety used).
N	The norms of interaction and interpretation (the basic rules that underlie the interaction).
G	The Genre , any one of a class of speech acts (e.g. greeting, leave-taking, lecture, joke.)

The speech event, as we shall see from the text recorded from the interactions, progresses from an opening, through a complicating action, the result, that leads to a coda to close the exchanges.

I am interested in the unravelling sequence of events, and how ‘different’ this performance is from other discourse situations in this culture.

The interactions here, we observed, were done on a deferential key, because the setting is a hierarchical one and everyone is cautious about what they do, lest they be sanctioned for inappropriate behavior, verbal or non-verbal. Duranti 1992: 657 again, observes that the words used in greetings are part of act sequences that cannot be divorced from kinesics surrounding these utterances. This is at the core of the current paper. The power-solidarity equation that is brought to play during interactions is very important here. How are these two principal elements negotiated, and how does this shape the politeness strategies used?

Dagbon, like the Wolof society (see Irvine 1974:2) of Senegal, is a hierarchical society, with its citizens being ranked by virtue of birth into particular families. Chieftaincy plays a central role in the day to day activities of the people, with the chief acting as the symbol of the ethnic group, and acts in a mediatory role between the people and their ancestors. His position as a leader is a divinely conferred one. The chieftaincy titles themselves are in a

hierarchy, from the smallest village title through to the overlord's Kingship³, which is headquartered at Yendi, the traditional capital. His house, the palace, is shrine-like, and hence his subjects go there daily and on occasion to 'worship' him. In fact the local term used to describe paying respects or obeisance to the chief is *jembu*, which translates as "worship". Some of his praise terms, as we shall see later in the paper, equate him to God. The principal players in the praise-game at the palace are the court elders and the griots, or drummer-praise singers-cum-musicians.

The setting, as stated above is a palace, where the participants (except visitors) are a select group, each with specific courtly functions. This situation compares with what pertains among the neighboring Gonja ethnic group, where Goody (1972) observes that greetings are used to start social exchanges as well as properly identify the participants. This latter situation shall be seen in the linguist's use of address and solidarity terms during the greeting ceremony.

3. Preservation of Personal Space

Although the Yaa Naa's palace is technically open to all, it is the case that ordinary Dagomba citizens are shy of going there unless they have good reason to. There are so many dos and don'ts at play here, which serve to maintain the status quo. Every court elder has a specific seat in the reception space around the king, and even when they are absent no one may occupy them. Abdulai had the unpleasant experience of twice being told he was sitting at an elder's seat when during our first trip to the palace. Thereafter, we relied on our escort to show us where to sit. The King sits on a raised dais, and his aide-de-camp and confidante, Mbadugu sits closest to, and right at his feet. Salifu (2011: 43) also asserts that,

"kinesic elements such as body posture during performance, voice modulation, and distance between [performer] and patron are important dynamics ... [used to] grasp its meanings."

Elders sit on the eastern half of the reception hall, and in front of the King (see Fig. 1) while visitors occupy the western half, facing him. Though they face him, people are not permitted to stare the King in the face. It is irreverent, and seems to be a challenge to his authority if one locked him in one's gaze. In a like manner, Wolof nobles must not speak too much (Irvine, p. 2), and intermediaries do their talking for them, at a price. It is the duty of such nobles, who aspire to ascend to some chiefly titles in the future, to frequently "court" favor from elders, by being generous to the latter.

Two situations observed during the trip shall presently be analyzed to see how the unfolding events were encoded. In both instances greetings framed the events, and each took politeness markers into consideration.

³ I use the term "chief" to refer to traditional leaders at villages and towns under the Yaa Naa's dominion, and reserve "King" for the overlord at Yendi.



Fig. 1. Yaa Naa with elders (picture courtesy Ghanaweb.com)

The Yaa Naa sits on an elevated dais, with Mbadugu located to the King's left, by the central post. The Daambale sits close to Mbadugu, from whom he receives instructions.

Situation 1.

Interaction: Exchange of Greetings.

Addressee: The Daambale (linguist).

Principal Audience: Elders, visitors.

Secondary Audience: The Yaa Naa.

Setting: Place: Zontua (inner reception hall)

Time: Morning

Language: Dagbani.

<i>Naa puhiri o zo Balonaa</i>	The king greets his friend Balonaa
<i>Naa puhiri yidan' Gunu</i>	The King greets Landlord Gunu
<i>Naa puhiri yidan' Baba</i>	The King greets Landlord Baba
<i>Naa puhiri o zo Kumlana</i>	The King greets His Friend Kumlana
<i>Naa puhiri o zo Malli</i>	The King greets His Friend Malli
<i>Naa puhiri o zo Gulana</i>	The King greets His Friend Gulana
<i>Naa puhiri o zo Kpahigu</i>	The King greets His Friend Kpahigu
<i>Naa puhiri Warikpamo</i>	The King greets Warikpamo
<i>Naa puhiri Talinaa</i>	The King greets Talinaa
<i>Naa puhiri Bomahigu</i>	The King greets Bomahigu
<i>Naa puhiri Gabiga</i>	The King greets Gabiga
<i>Naa puhiri Wôrizhiagu</i>	The King greets Wôrizhiagu
<i>Naa puhiri Kpihiginaa</i>	The King greets Kpihiginaa
<i>Naa puhiri Wôrivinaa</i>	The King greets Wôrivinaa
<i>Naa puhiri Kij̄kansi</i>	The King greets Kij̄kansi
<i>Naa puhiri Kulaalana</i>	The King greets Kulaalana
<i>Ni ti daa Alizumma</i>	On the Occasion of Venerating Friday
<i>Ni ti daa Alizumma</i>	On the Occasion of Venerating Friday
<i>Ni ti daa Alizumma</i>	On the Occasion of Venerating Friday

(Pause)

Gbuyinli, Sayimlana, Duniya lana, Tolana, Duniya balinda.

Lion, Sustainer, Almighty, Sovereign, Earthly Intercessor!!!

(Pause)

<i>Naa a Yaba</i>	King, Your Grandfather (Kugu Naa)
<i>Naa a Bi ði</i>	King, Your Elder Brother (Zohi naa)
<i>Naa puhiri o yab' Tugurinam</i>	The King greets Grandfather Tugurinam
<i>Naa puhiri o yab' Gomdi</i>	The King greets Grandfather Gomdi
<i>Naa puhiri o yab' ηunkahigo</i>	The King greets Grandfather ηunkahigo
<i>Naa puhiri o yab' Neen d ôgu</i>	The King greets Grandfather Neen d ôgu
<i>Naa puhiri o yab' Kalbillana</i>	The King greets Grandfather Kalbillana
<i>Naa puhiri o yab' Kpatihinaa</i>	The King greets Grandfather Kpatihinaa
<i>Naa puhiri Yani Limam</i>	The King greets the Imam of Yendi
<i>Naa puhiri o bapir' Guntinlinaa</i>	The King greets his uncle Guntinlinaa
<i>Naa puhiri o bapir' Botinlinaa</i>	The King greets His uncle Botinlinaa
<i>Ni ti daa Alizumma</i>	On the Occasion of Venerating Friday
<i>Ni ti daa Alizumma</i>	On the Occasion of Venerating Friday
<i>Ni ti daa Alizumma</i>	On the Occasion of Venerating Friday

(sits)

Gbuyinli, Sayimlana, Duniya Balinda!!!

Lion, Sustainer, Earthly Intercessor!!!

(Pause)

4. Analysis

The language used during greetings is determined by the specific situation. Greetings normally focus on the physical and spiritual well-being of interactants, as expressed in stock phrases like, 'how are you', 'have a good night', and 'peace be upon you'; but other speech acts are used to frame the dialogues of greetings. Duranti (1992: 663) observes that,

...questions, announcements, or statements about time or space used in the opening and closing utterances [that] routinely frame social encounter .

Like the Samoans, participants in Dagomba ceremonial greetings address each other using ceremonial phrases and a special set of lexical terms and expressions that vary from their everyday use. In addressing the King's greetings to his guests for example, the linguist uses the imperfective tense forms and reported speech, e.g., *Naa puhiri...* 'The King greets X', or *Naa, a yaba*, 'King, your grandfather'. We shall return to the lexico-syntactic analysis of greetings later in the paper. There is actually no need for mediation in greetings in everyday life (outside the palace). People greet or answer for themselves. Yankah (1995) also talks about the mediatory function of the Akan linguist in interactions at the Asante King's palace.

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4.1 Symbols/ Non-verbal Input

Greetings normally are in adjacency pairs, with a specific greeting demanding a corresponding response. In this ceremonial greeting environment, whether a greeting originates from the King himself, or is sent out to a visitor through a surrogate, the overlord is not obliged to give a verbal response to his visitor. Court elders will normally answer for guests through the use of soft deferential claps, snapping of the three last fingers of the right hand against the left thumb, and the use of honorific addressives directed at the Yaa Naa. These opening formula heralds the session, before the Daambale rises to address greetings to each elder and visitor assembled, by title. He gives the greetings a coda by naming the occasion (e.g. ni ti yuum'palli `happy new year`), after which he pauses, sits, and again continues uttering praise terms of his lord.

This last segment is a cue for the next speech event, which is, announcing the visitor. Unlike with greetings outside the palace, the time of the day is not mentioned. The greeting is formulaic, and has the form,

Naa puhiri ... 'Chief/King greets X'.

Ni ti ... "And Our... (Literally) = On (our) occasion of ..."

The King sends X felicitations on the occasion of...

This situation dovetails into the next one, the announcement of the visitor, and people are called to get their respective businesses done.

Situation 2.

Interaction: Announcing a visitor.

Addressee: Chief's secretary.

Principal Audience: The Yaa Naa.

Secondary Audience: Elders.

Setting: Place: zontua.

Time: Morning.

Language: Dagbani (codemixed with English)

King's Secretary: Naa, Wuni ni' a daalibarika ni. A bapir' Ablaa ni njidila o `masters' Legon. T ô naa O mi ni niñdi o masters maa O piila...a Ti Dagbañ ɲo... kaya ni taada	King's Secretary: King, By God's and your grace. Your uncle Ablaa is pursuing his masters degree at Legon So, King And as he is pursuing the masters He has chosen... Our Dagbañ... customs and traditions (i.e. an
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<p>Naa, Wuni ni a daalibarika ni Kambôntiŋ polo nim n̄ô bana, Ban, pun niŋ b̄e dina</p> <p>Amaa tinim Dagbaŋ dini n̄ô Di na ka kundinim ni Naa, ka o yel' ni..i O ni kpe di ni N lee... n che ka tinim gba dini maa</p> <p>Ka di be kundi ni Naa, Wuni ni a daalibarika ni, Ka o yeli ni Ti zaŋ o kana ka o ti puhi</p> <p>Naa, Wuni ni a daalibarika ni Naa, ka sa nya Kaman biëuni alizumma n̄ô Naa, a mini Yani kpamba Naa yi ni maani alizumma shem.</p> <p>Naa, ni o yi sa na kuli nya li, Di ni lahi suhi s̄di ti o, Ka o bagili. Naa, ka lee nye saha N lan labina N lee ti niŋ dabsi b̄ôbgu Naa, n nya Yaannayili tuma Di ni chani shem Naa, ka di tooi niŋ ka o sabi li N niŋ gbana ni.</p> <p>Naa, Wuni ni a daalibarika ni A bapira... O ni kana shem m-bala. Naa, O bo kpalaŋ pihinu Ni di pa gbaŋ zugu ti o</p> <p>Naa. Taali Naawuni' niŋ alibarika niŋ Kpamba: (claps, snaps)</p>	<p>aspect of) King, by God's and your grace As for people from the south, They have already done theirs</p> <p>But that of Dagbaŋ has not yet been documented. King, and (so) he has said... He will research into it so that ... ours too</p> <p>So that it could be in books (written down) Chief, by God's and your grace And he has said that We should bring him to pay homage</p> <p>Chief, by God's and your grace King, so that tomorrow he'll observe, Tomorrow being a Friday King, how you and your elders, King, perform the Friday ritual.</p> <p>King that if he is able to see it Permission will be sought for him To stand by. King, so that he can get time To come back To spend some days with us King, and observe how proceedings at the Yaa Naa's palace are carried out King, in order that he documents them.</p> <p>King, by God's and your grace Your uncle... That is his message King He has given ten thousand cedis To be placed on the skin on his behalf.</p> <p>King. Thanks God bless you Elders. (claps, snaps)</p>
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4.2 Analysis

Situation No.2, which is very much like the invocation in a religious ceremony, functions as an opening to this second speech event; where a researcher is announced to the court. The chief's greetings are conveyed to all assembled in the room (as seen in Situation 1), acknowledging each person by title. Thus, the participants, time and particular occasion get established. By using reported speech the linguist puts some distance between the King on the one hand and the visitors and elders on the other. This is an avoidance (or divergence) strategy that elevates his patron, the King. Next, the linguist signals the elder who escorted the guest(s) to the King's presence, to announce their presence.

In this particular situation, the secretary stands, and after addressing the King and indicating that it is by His leave everything is coming to pass, resorts to the use of embellished language to present his guests. The visitors' names (or titles if they are titled), places of origin, mission and what goods (gifts) have been presented to the palace, are mentioned. The overlord acknowledges receipt of the goods by expressing his appreciation with Naawun' ni nin abarika nin 'God bless you'. As with most Ghanaian societies, the gift is obligatory, and serves as recognition of one's involvement in the King's 'world'. This gesture will be reciprocated, first with an offer of kola and subsequently with a more concrete parting gift. This kola offering ritual is a symbol, and cuts across many West African cultures. Recipients are required to take a bite of the nut in the presence of the giver, to show that they identify with, and trust that the King has no intention of harming them.

The event ends when the secretary resumes his seat and Mbadugu calls the visitor to come for kola. Other civilities could be exchanged if the King so wishes or he dismisses the visitor with whatever response he has, through the spokesman.

In my specific situation, the language chosen was an admixture of English and Dagbani. The code-mixing here was because, the subject matter of the discourse was academic in nature, and certain lexical items can best be named in the English language.

4.3 Lexico-Syntactic Analysis of Greetings

Analysis of a few lines of greetings that occurred during the period of observation reveals the following constructions:

- i) Naa puhiri o bapira Ablai. (Referring to the researcher)
King greet + IMPERFECTIVE 3SG GEN father's-younger-brother Abdulai.
King greets his uncle Abdulai.
- ii) Naa puhiri o bakpema Kar'naa.
King greet + IMPERFECTIVE 3SG GEN father's elder brother Karaga chief.)
King greets his uncle the chief of Karaga.)
- iii) Naa a yaba.
King 1SG GEN grandfather.
King greets his grandfather (Kugu naa).
- iv) Naa a bieli.
King 1SG GEN elder sibling.
King greets his elder brother (Z̄hi naa).
- v) Ni ti yuum' palli. _____
And 1PL GEN year new.)
Happy anniversary.
- vi) Ni ti dali maligu.
And 1PL GEN recent celebration.
I commend all for a good performance (of a funeral)

The general format is,

daa alizumma
 Ni ti { *yuum' palli* }
dali maligu

These greetings in the paradigm above represent greetings on the ceremonies of venerating Friday⁴ (*alizumma*), at annual festivals (*yuum' palli*), and funerals (*maligu*) respectively.

vii) Ti mabihi maa zaa (be wula)?

1PL GEN. mother children DEM all (be how)?

How are all our brethren?

viii) Ni Dr. Abubakari be wula?

That Dr. Abubakari pres-be how?

He says, how is Dr. Abubakari?

The imam or his representative is the only one who shakes hands with the Yaa Naa, and responds to his greetings with prayers, as in

ix) Naawuni deemi a suhugu

God accept + IMPERF. 2SG GEN prayer

May God accept your prayers.

Naawun' ni deei suhugu.

God will accept prayer.

May God accept your prayer.

x) Naawuni pahimi a dariza

God add+IMPERF. 2SG GEN. Charisma

May God make you more charismatic.

xi) Naawun' lirimi a daashili

God conceal + IMPERF 2SG GEN secret.

(Lit. May God conceal your secret)

May God dignify, and protect you from shame.

Whereas the message delivered by the linguist or his representative is in reported speech and hence in the past tense, greetings are always in the present and progressive tenses, to show their immediacy. The greetings are structured to mean that the words being said are the King's exact

⁴ Griots assemble at the Forecourt of the King's palace on Mondays and Fridays to praise and to entreat Him to rouse and pray to God Almighty for peace and prosperity of His 'nation'. This is what is referred to as *venerating Monday, or Friday*.

words, i.e. *Naa puhiri*... ‘The King greets/ is greeting...’ and not that “the King has asked me to greet”. The greeting ritual is in progress, and has not elapsed either. During the principal speaker’s greeting the other members of the audience use deferential claps and responses to affirm what is being “performed”. This also gives the speech event a ritual ambience.

4.4 Politeness, Deference and Solidarity

It is worthy of noting, that several cultural elements are at play during this ceremonial greeting session. We are made aware that everyone is important, and must be acknowledged. Even if one is inadvertently left out, the linguist finds a way of tagging a general greeting at the end of the greeting chain, as in, *ni ti yuumpalli* ‘happy anniversary to us all’.

We also get to see the importance of prayer, and the place religious leaders occupy in this society. Whereas no elder may shake the King’s hand, the imam or his representative not only has that license, but the King has to descend a step lower on his dais, and remove his cap, to receive the religious leader’s blessings.

The use of kinship forms of address by the Daambale shows solidarity of the King with the addressees. This is a convergence strategy which aims at bringing all together as one family. Placed in a historical context, the first Kugu naa, who was a son to Naa Gbewaa⁵ became the royal soothsayer, and is addressed as ‘grandfather’; while Zohi naa was an elder brother to Shitobu, the first King of Dagbon. In Dagomba custom, when two people meet, the younger person squats upon sighting the older person, or one higher in stature (if the person has a royal title). This is a physical display of the use of space to index the power relationship between people. The elder then greets first, to acknowledging the junior partner in the dyad. This is the reason the Daambale does not say ‘Chief greets his grandfather Kugu naa or elder brother Zohinaa’. He however greets his Uncles Kar’naa, Mionj Lana or Yoo Naa because they, in spite of being his ‘seniors’, can still ‘grow up’, i.e. they aspire to rise to the high office of Yaa Naa. Since the Daambale must not by-pass anyone in his greetings, he informs the King’s ‘historical seniors’ that his patron has sighted, and acknowledges their presence, by mentioning their titles. This compares with Mossi greeting rituals, which also keep the power differential in mind when people exchange greetings.

Another marked distinction of the act sequence at the palace is that, the visitors must be seated before the King comes out to sit in state (if the interaction is an outdoor one). Only select audiences meet Him in his reception hall, the *zontua*, which is indoors. The Yaa Naa tries to bridge the gap between Him and his subjects by interjecting jokes between serious court businesses. He jokes about making a farm where His elders will work before He pays their utility bills for them. He also jokes about being a bachelor, even though he has about twenty wives. Unlike his elders, who may sit with their wives in public, the King’s wives only see Him in private. This is why He says He is a bachelor. These speech acts should be analysed with the key on which they were made kept in cognisance (i.e. a jocular one).

⁵ Gbewaa is a common ancestor to the sister ethnic groups of Dagombas, Mossi, Nanumba, and Mamprusi.

4.5 Sharing of Information

It is important to observe that the greeting sessions were also very important platforms for the exchange of information. The elders inform the King of happenings around the kingdom, and also receive instructions from him. Important cultural messages are also encoded in the exchanges. This actually places greetings in this palace environment in a different genre of its own.

2.6 Surrogation

The King's elders are his mouth pieces, as seen from the exchanges. They speak for and on his behalf. He comes in with a word or two occasionally, and even when he does this, a linguist affirms what has just been said, with a "yes", "that's true", or accompany the King's statement with a royal appellation addressed to Him. This seems to be common among the various 'ethnic kingdoms' in Africa (see Yankah 1995) and during African American religious sermons.

4.7 Place of Greeting in an Educational Environment

The importance of greetings in the polytechnic community cannot be over-emphasised. As stated earlier, greetings make us acknowledge, and approve of each other. This is what keeps society as an integral unit. A unified society progresses faster than a fragmented one. If greetings can foster this togetherness, then it is imperative that every member of the community gives it some attention.

This study points to the importance that we should keep on acknowledging each other, and also giving reverence where it is due. Educational institutions can progress better, and more orderly if we are guided by such cultural norms of interaction as seen in this royal setting.

Greetings also set the stage for reconciliation after folks have fallen apart. We need to focus attention on the right form, and format of each greeting sequence. Conflicts can easily be resolved if would-be antagonists would just greet each other.

5. Conclusion

Greetings are ritualised verbal sessions where people solidarise with each other, as well as show deference to higher ups on the social ladder. The greetings and exchanges at times of leave-taking utilise asymmetric salutations to show respect to, and index the status of interactants, and symmetric ones that aim at showing solidarity between them. The choice of code depends on the occasion, participants, and the nature of the subject under discussion. If visitors are among the audience, even as observers (and not active participants), every attempt will be made to make them feel at home, hence the jocular atmosphere in which some of the interaction took place. The greetings as has been observed, serve to remind all participants that they share a certain space and time, a shared cultural identity.

In conventional western discourse, greetings will follow a pattern nearly like what we have discussed in this paper, where everyone will like to feel recognised and appreciated. Saying "hi" or "good morning" is a good way to open a discourse, just as "adieu" or "goodbye" can

be a coda to an interaction. But, whereas a subordinate may ask a superior, “How are you?” in western society it will be most imprudent to do same in almost all African societies. This compares with Morton’s (1988:434) observation of the northern Beja, where greeting sessions are important information sharing occasions, yet they carry lots of cultural information.

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