Greeting Dynamics in Chukwuemeka Ike's The Potter's Wheel and The Bottled Leopard

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Abstract. Communication is ruled-governed; so are greetings which serve as a polite way of communication. The rules vary depending on the cultural context and the weight given to greetings and their function vary from culture to culture. This paper examines greeting dynamics in Chukwuemeka Ike's *The Bottled Leopard* and *The Potter's Wheel* in order to examine the strategies adopted by the interlocutors. The corpus used for analysis consists of excerpts taken from *The Bottled Leopard* and *The Potter's Wheel.* The theoretical framework adopted for this study is that proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) which seeks to account for how politeness norms are encoded in greetings. Our analysis shows that the interlocutors employed greeting strategies such as questions, physical contact, personalization of the greeting and thanking.

Keywords: Greetings, Culture, Rule-Governed, Context, Strategies, Communication, Politeness.

1. Introduction

Greetings are important as well as frequent in everyday social interaction all over the world. They influence conversations as they take place at its beginning, a crucial part of a conversation. An addressee's first impression of a speaker can affect his/her attitude towards the speaker and for this reason, it is important to choose the right greeting register. Appropriate greeting behaviour is crucial for the establishment and maintenance of interpersonal relationships. As a significant aspect of politeness phenomenon, greetings have been studied in disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, sociolinguistics and discourse analysis.

Politeness is subjective and varies from culture to culture. The culture of a people is unique to them and

is what marks out them from other cultures or nationalities. Idang (2015, p.1) observes that culture entails a totality of traits and characters that are peculiar to a people to the extent that it marks them out from other peoples or societies. According to him, these peculiar traits go on to include a people's social norms, taboos and values. Each culture has its own politeness rules that are taken for granted and are not understood by people from other cultures. For this reason, it is important to investigate greetings dynamics in different communities. In doing this, we gain insight into the social values operating therein. Given this background, this paper investigates greeting dynamics in Chukwuemeka Ike's *The Bottled Leopard* and *The Potter's Wheel* in order to examine the strategies adopted by the characters in the novel. It holds the view that although greetings appear to be unexceptional in their structure and function, they are highly complex interactional phenomena. This view is highlighted in situations of cross-cultural communication where the potential for misunderstanding and misinterpretation is inevitable. Unexpected or inappropriate usage may be perceived as impolite and result in negative sentiments between interlocutors, regardless of whether or not they were previously acquainted. Given the consequences of inappropriate usage, it is important to investigate greeting dynamics in human relationship and in different cultural environments. This makes it possible to hypothesize regarding the roles of language and cultures in guiding inter-cultural interactions and relationships.

1.1 Methodology

The data to be used for analysis comprise of extracts taken from Chukwuemeka Ike's *The Bottled Leopard* and *The Potter's Wheel*. Some of these extracts are mainly in dialogue form. These texts were presented

in italics to distinguish them from the rest of the paper. Ten samples were selected and each of them labeled as 'Extract'. In all, there are Extracts 1-10.

1.2 Chukwuemeka Ike

Vincent Chukwuemeka Ike was born in Anambra state, Eastern Nigeria in April, 1931. He had his early education in his home town and Mbaise, before proceeding to Government College, Umuahia from where he graduated in 1950. He gained admission into the University College, Ibadan in 1951. A career in the administrative sector saw him serving as a registrar at the University of Nigeria for over eight before the outbreak of the war. He later went to Stanford University , California, U.S.A where he obtained a Master's degree in 1967.

Chukwuemeka Ike has published for both the young and the old. Some of his works include:*Toads for Supper* (1965), *The Naked Gods* (1970), *The Potter's Wheel*(1973), *Sunset at Dawn* (1976), *Expo'77* (1980), *The Chicken Chasers* (1980), *The Bottled Leopard* (1988), and *Our Children are Coming (*1990). In all, he has published and co-authored about twenty-four books. Ike as a writer has made quite an impressive contribution to academics within and outside Nigeria and has had the singular honour of initiating the Nigerian Book Foundation that led to the development of the African Writers' Series.

2.   Review of Related Literature

Over the past half century, researchers have identified multiple functions of greetings and leave-takings (Austin, 1962; Goffman, 1971; Searle, 1971) and documented considerable cross- cultural variation in their usage (e.g Blum- Kulka, 1987; Hickey, 1991;Sifanou, 1992; Thomas, 1994).Further studies into greetings as a sociolinguistic element or as a speech act include the following: Akindele (2007) who studied greetings in Sesotho, Fadipe (1970) and Akindele (1997) examined Yoruba greetings while Egblewogbe (1990) researched into Ewe greetings. Others are Emeni (2000); Irvine (1974) and Ibrahim *et al* who researched into greetings in Northern African Communities.

2.1 On Greetings

Firth (1972) identifies three major themes of greetings and farewells: the production of attention, the identification of the interlocutor and the reduction of anxiety in social contract. He further suggests that greetings should not be treated as spontaneous emotional reactions to the coming together of people. According to him, for the most part, they are highly conventionalized and follow patterned routines. In support of Firth's view, Laver (1981 p. 304) sees greetings as far from being a relatively meaningless and mechanical social behaviour. He asserts that greetings as conversational routines are parts of the linguistic repertoire of politeness. They are tools of politeness behaviour and their use is guided by a polite norm. Song-Cen in Rabee and Al-Haq (2017, p.92) observes that greeting expressions constitute an important part of polite language and by greeting, a speaker indicates his attitude towards the addressee or starts a conversation with him.

 Goody (1972) recognizes three basic functions of greetings: to begin a series of communicative acts, to define and affirm identity and rank and to manipulate a particular relationship for achieving particular ends. In agreement with Goody's stance, Brown and Levinson (1978) state that greetings constitute politeness strategy. They identify two broad types of politeness strategies: positive and negative. While positive politeness satisfies a speaker's need for approval and belonging, negative politeness serves to minimize the imposition of a face threatening act. Goffman (1971), points out that greetings and leave – takings serve partly to maintain social relationships and that failure to deliver an expected greeting or leave –taking could have dire impact on the development and maintenance of relationships both within and across sociolinguistic groups.

2.2 Greetings as illocutionary acts

Greetings, according to Firth (1972, p.30), are a system of signs that contain convert rather than overt messages. In order to account for how people derive convert messages (ie the intention or goodwill of the speaker) from the system of signs that greeting is, Austin (1962) proposes his Speech Act Theory as a useful tool for the explanation of this phenomenon. The central insight of the Speech Act Theory is that language performs communicative acts. Austin approaches the issue of language functions from the perspective of what speakers do with language rather than what they say. According to him, utterances are the production of words and sentences on particular occasions by particular speakers for particular purposes. They are not ends in themselves but means to ends-means to affecting listeners in certain ways. Austin posits that speech acts fall into three classes: the locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts. A locutionary act is an act of saying something, an

act of producing an utterance. Illocutionary acts are the real actions performed by the utterances, where saying equals doing as in apologizing, interrogating, warning etc. Perlocutionary acts are the effects of the utterance on the listener who is being interrogated, warned or welcomed. Searle (1979) contributes to the Speech Act theory by making a distinction between direct and indirect speech acts and categorized illocutionary acts into five classes: assertives, directives, commissives, expressives and declaratives.

According to the above classification of illocutionary acts, greetings fall into the category of expressives. As such, they show the psychological state of the speaker (Huang, 2001) and are 'used to express certain feelings towards the hearer' and 'should not be taken literally' (Li 2010, p.57).An interesting example of the expressive aspect of greeting routines is seen in the use of the word "Fine" in response to the expressions "How are you?", "How is your family?","How was work today?".This response, though often a white lie, is the conventional response because the negative response could put the interactants in an awkward situation.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework to be adopted for this study is that proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) which offers insight into how politeness norms are encoded in individual greeting tokens. It is frequently utilized in the literature as a base for examining and comparing greetings and leave- takings(Garcia 2006; Li 2000, 2010).In their theory, politeness is defined as redressive action taken to counter- balance the disruptive effect of face-threatening acts. Communication is considered as hypothetically threatening and aggressive and interlocutors are expected to come up with strategies to counter balance the disruptive effects of these face threatening acts. Brown and Levinson (1987) introduce the concept of 'face' and follow Goffman (1967) in identifying face as the public self- image that every member wants to claim for himself. It is often likened to self- esteem or self- image and can be lost, maintained, or enhanced. Within this construct lie both 'positive face' and 'negative face'. Positive face represents an individual's desire to be approved by others while negative face represents an individual's right to freedom of action. So a face saving act which is oriented to a person's negative face will tend to show deference, emphasize the importance of the other's time or concerns and even include an apology for the imposition or interruption. This is called negative politeness. A face saving act

which is concerned with the person's positive face will tend to show solidarity, emphasize that both speakers want the same thing and that they have a common goal. To do so, a speaker searches for common ground with the hearer and aims to address the hearer's wants. This is called positive politeness. Any action that impinges in some degree upon a person's face (insults, orders, and criticisms) is a face- threatening act (FTA).The general idea of Brown and Levinson's model is to understand various strategies for interactional behaviour to achieve satisfaction of certain wants. Their theory observes that most speech acts , for example, requests , offers and compliments, inherently threaten either the hearer's or the speaker's face-wants and that politeness is involved in redressing those face- threatening acts. Politeness, therefore, implicates face needs and is common to all social systems though the conventions and formalities are culture specific (Arua, 2013).

Goffman (1967) recognizes that greetings and leave-takings (in part) serve to mitigate the temporally-limited display of solidarity between interlocutors. His observation demonstrates the applicability of the face-saving model to the speech acts by affirming the importance of positive politeness or face (ie expression of solidarity) between speakers. This applies both to greetings and leave-takings as shown in 'Hi, it's good to see you. I missed you'. This greeting displays positive politeness by expressing the speaker's desire to interact with the interlocutor. It includes a positive comment and reassurance that the speaker enjoys the interlocutor's company.

Research has shown that the values associated with the different kinds of face vary across cultures, as do strategies for preserving face. Scholars like Hickey (1991) and Sifanou (1992) have observed that British English culture is more negative-face oriented while the Greek and Spanish cultures are more positive-face oriented. Nwoye (1989, 1992) notes that in Igbo societies, people are more concerned with the collective self-image of the group than that of the individual. Just as the conceptualizations of politeness and face vary across cultures, so also do the speech acts of greetings. While greetings such as 'Hi' 'Hello' or 'How do you do?' occur in English speaking countries like Britain, it is common in Nigeria to hear greetings such as' Have you eaten?', 'Have you woken up?' This study examines greeting dynamics in Chukwuemeka Ike's *The Bottled Leopard* and *The Potter's Wheel* with a view to identifying the different types and assessing the sense of social expectation or obligation that is associated with the use of greetings between the interactants.

3. **Analysis and Discussion**

This section is an analysis of the different types of greetings identified in two of Ike's works. To do this, excerpts from *The Bottled Leopard* and *The Potter's Wheel* will be examined and classified into sub-types and according to the face-saving strategies they represent. The classification of the various greeting types is based on the observations made by Coppock (2005) and Schegloff and Sack (1973).

Questions

Questions regarding the interlocutor's state of being, expressed in greetings, reflect positive politeness through a show of solidarity and interest in the hearer. They show that the speaker is concerned about the hearer as in line with Goffman's (1967) characterization of greetings as a method of showing that the relationship is still intact from the previous encounter. This function of greeting is illustrated in 1.1 below.
 Extract 1.

'Good afternoon please.' Amobi stood respectfully at the entrance to the Prefects' Room. Recognizing the voice, Olatunji dropped the book he was reading and turned to the door. '**And how are you today my young man?'**
'I 'm fine please ,' Amobi replied. 'I 'm told you sent for me.*'*

(The Bottled Leopard, p.60)

Personalization of the greeting *(eg uttering the hearer's name, making remarks specific to the hearer as an individual.*
This is a strategy for showing solidarity and closeness. Coppock (2005) notes that personalization mitigates the threat as a speech act might be seen as overly conventionalized and insincere. This strategy is used by Mazi Laza in advertising his wares.

Extract 2
"**Ogbuefi,** he would address a man walking past his shed without stopping, 'may the morning mop up and evil which may have survived the night. A man who walks past Egwunaamu without stopping to greet him have been looked out the previous night but his wife. If you suffer what most of us men suffer so often from our wives, let
 me show you the cloth you will buy for her so that afterwards she will never again lock you out."And he would then proceed to display a piece of cloth.
(The Potter's Wheel, p. 7)

In this extract, positive politeness is realized by an address term ***Ogbuefi*** which Brown and Levinson (1987) refer to as an *in-group identity marker*. It is used to express approval of the addressee's personality and positive self-image. Further examples are seen in Extract 3.
 Extract 3.

As soon as he beheld Amobi, something clicked. He immediately applied the brakes, took another look at him, and walked gently to him, his hands clasped in front of his chest: '**Nnanyelugo**!*'* he addressed Amobi, his head bowed respectfully.
'Mazi,' the dibia thereafter turned to Mazi Eze. You should
have told me you were bringing an important visitor to my house.*'*
'Ofia, Mazi Eze replied. 'I'm not sure you know that he is my boy, Ugochukwu; the one who recently entered Government College in January.
'Who told you I don't know the person I saluted?'
'The manner in which you saluted him made me wonder. Or is it because he is now a college student?'
'I don't know about college and student. I know the person I saluted. Please take seats.'
(The Bottled Leopard, pp.123-124)

Extract 4.

*'*Who is that sitting so comfortably in my house?' asked Teacher as he alighted from his bicycle "What debt does teacher owe you that should make you take over my house in my absence?
"**Teacher, good evening , Sir**, the visitor responded if you owe me any debt I do not know about it and it is not what has brought me here".
Thanks be to God even if only that …
(The
Porters Wheel, p.221)

Extract 4 begins with a face-threatening as the teacher requests to know the identity of his visitor. He begins with an interrogative sentence, a direct imposition on the negative face of his interlocutor. The visitor rushes to put his host at ease by adopting the deference strategy using the honorific 'Sir'. He does not mention the name of his host but uses the title 'Teacher'.

Physical contact

This is another greeting strategy that was employed by the interlocutors in the texts under study. In *The Potter's Wheel*, this contact took the form of an

embrace as Mama Obu lovingly welcomes her son back home after a long absence.
Extract 5.

'Where is Obiano ! Obiano! Where are you?' Mama Obu began shouting even before entering the compound.
Obu answered excitedly. Mama Obu rushed into the obi where her son was, and swept him off his feet into a warm embrace. Then she let him go , and rushed out into the open air where she danced with abandon.

(The Potter's Wheel, p. 240)

4. **Other Greeting Forms**

Other types of greetings include temporal greetings which are used to mark the three main demarcations of the day-morning, afternoon and evening. Dzameshie, (2002) calls them 'Time-of-day' greetings. Greeting forms such as "Good morning" and "How are you" are directed towards the hearer's positive face. This is also illustrated in the conversation below.

Extract 6.
'Good morning Ma', greeted Oti.'
'Morning my son', Mama Obu replied without knowing from where the greetings came. She was busy tying green bundles of fresh fodder for one of her goats which had produced two healthy-looking kids. 'The person who went to see Obu,' Oti continued rather timidly, 'has he returned ?
… 'Oh, is it Oti? Mama Obu asked.'Yes, Ma.'
'Have you, come out from sleep?''Yes, Ma'.
'What of Mama Oti?''She is well'.'and your father?'
'He is well'. 'And all your brothers and sisters ?'
'They are well'.'Aren't you going to school today?'
'I'm on my way to school but I wanted to find out about the person who went to see Obu'…
(The Potter's Wheel, pp.232-233)

The conversation above shows the African tradition of mutual care or concern for other's welfare. It contains questions showing concern and warmth to the addressee. In the African society, when people meet, it is natural for them to spend some time greeting by asking something about their lives. This serves to maintain the hearer's positive face. Though the conversation shows that the relationship between interlocutors is amiable; the social distance between them is quite large. For most Igbos and Nigerians in general, one can hardly speak to his/her elder like they would to an equal .One must always be respectful to one's elder and this respect is shown mainly through language. This is why Oti respectfully frames his question about the person who was sent to see Obu. He had to find the right words to mitigate the force of his questions.

Adegbija (1989, pp.61-62) makes some observations on the use of greetings in Nigeria to politeness. First, he observes notes that greetings are an almost mandatory politeness strategy used not only for attracting the attention of a hearer, as Firth notes, but also are a salute to a common humanity, a strategy for perpetuating a communal bond and oil for lubricating the channels of communication. Second, the age is an important factor which plays a dynamic role in the exchange of greetings. Thus, a younger person is expected to initiate greetings whenever he/she encounters an older person. This partly relates to Goody's point, noted above, that greeting is intended to mark and affirm identity and rank. Thirdly, most greetings, especially during a first meeting in a day or after a long period of absence, tend to be protected in nature. They could include enquires about the addressee's wife, children, etc.
The address form used by Oti in Excerpt 6 is different from that used by Chuks in his letter to his parents and to his principal in Excerpts 7 and 8.

Extract 7.   "Hi , Dad and Mom".

(*The Bottled Leopard*, p. 141)

Extract 8
…. They were stunned to hear the cheeky fag shout 'Hi Bill'!   as the Principal walked past one afternoon. The Principal, addressed by staff and students alike as PGC (Principal of Government College), or simply as the Principal, never even as 'Mr Williams'. To be hailed
'Hi, Bill! by a student, a tail-dangling fag for that matter!

(The Bottled Leopard, p. 17)

Chuks' total disregard of the need to observe factors like social distance, power and threat to face is evident in the greetings types employed. This lack of formality closes up the social distance between the interlocutors.   Younger persons are culturally expected in all contexts to show politeness to older persons and anyone who refuses to conform to this societal norm in language use is frowned at.
Greetings are used to open conversations and determine the direction that a conversation may take. According to Ebsworth *et al,* (1996, p.98), 'greetings are among the first speech acts that are learned by

children in their native languages' .Apart from opening conversations, greetings function to establish a platform for acceptance and create a positive social bond between interlocutors. According to Finnegan and Besnier, (1989, p. 344), greetings convey the message 'I want to talk to you'.
Extract 9.

The boys were thrilled to see ' Iambuc' walking towards them in his unique style: short, quick steps with the right shoulder and elbow tilted up…
' Morning boys".
'Good Morning, Sir"
"Iambuc' laid out his precious books on the table: the Latin Vulgate , the New Testament in Greek, the Authorized (St. James') Version of the Bible and the Old Testament in Hebrew .They were an indispensable feature of his religious instruction classes and one of the reasons for his high popularity rating.
(The Bottle Leopard, p. 52)

Thanks
This is another greeting strategy used by interactants in the novels under investigation. By thanking the hearer, the speaker supports the hearer's positive face. An example of the use of the strategy is found in *The Potter's Wheel.*

Extract 10 .
Reluctant to take any other false step ,Madu whispered into Teacher's ear for advice on whether he should deliver Obu's parcel to him there and then. On receiving an affirmative reply, he handed the parcel over to Obu: 'That's for you.' Obu looked at Teacher and Madam as if for instructions on how to respond.
'Take it,' Teacher directed. 'It's for you , not for us.'
Thanks Sirs. Thank Ma.' Obu received the parcel grateful.
(The Potter's Wheel, p.227)

The importance of greeting and human communication cannot be over-emphasized. As stated earlier, greetings make us acknowledge and approve of each other. Greetings are ritualized verbal sessions where people solidarize with each other and show reverence to elders and higher ups on the social ladder. This is what keeps society as an integral unit.

5. Conclusion

This paper has attempted to show that although greetings are ordinary day-to-day events, they often carry a lot of weight as far as harmonious interpersonal relations; both intercultural and intracultural are concerned. They serve to cement existing bonds between people, to create new bonds, to oil the channels of communication and as a recognition and acceptance of the worth of addressees.

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