A Socio-Morphological Analysis of Koring Verbal Greetings

Nkamigbo, Linda Chinelo
Department of Linguistics
Nnamdi Azikiwe University
Awka, Nigeria
linkamigbo@yahoo.com

Abstract

This paper is a linguistic attempt to investigate an aspect of Koring culture: the phenomenon of verbal greeting. Koring belongs to the Upper-Cross group of the Delta-Cross sub-branch of the Cross River language family of the East Benue-Congo. It is the language of the Oring people who live in parts of Benue, Cross River and Ebonyi states of Nigeria. This paper examines the types of Koring verbal greetings. Twenty-one types of greetings were identified. The functions of greetings in the overall life of the Oring were also revealed. Data were collected in both planned and spontaneous

settings. The planned setting involved contextualizing elicitation. This study identified a plural marker which is used only in greetings.

Key words: *greetings, sociolinguistics, morphology, ethnography of communication*

Introduction

Greetings, according to Akindele (2007:3), can be described as the exchange of expressions, pleasantries or good wishes between two people or a group interacting for the purpose of fulfilling social obligations or for the purposes of establishing interpersonal relationship. In some cases, greeting is used as a prelude to the making of a proper conversation or introducing the topic of talk. Similarly, Laver (1981: 304) observes that 'routines of greeting and parting, far from being relatively meaningless and mechanical social behaviour'… [are] extremely important strategies for the negotiation and control of social identity and social relationships between participants in a conversation.

Greeting is usually verbalized but could be non-verbalized as in the case of waving of hands, eye movement, smiles, flashing of car head-lamp (Harvey, 1982). As a universal feature of human interaction, greetings have been defined as 'the set of linguistic and /or non-linguistic devices used for the initial management of encounters' (Ibrahim, Grimshaw and Bird, 1976: 12). In the Oring sociolinguistic community, quite a significant effort has been devoted to the study of Koring phonology, morphology and lexicon, and a substantial amount of literature has been produced in these areas; (See for instance Anagbogu 2002, 2003a, 2003b, 2005a, 2005b, 2006, 2007; Iloene 2006; Nkamigbo 2009) but there is little or no study at all carried out specifically on Koring rules of speaking and greeting system. Yet the phenomenon of Koring greeting forms part of the Oring linguistic etiquette with its set of norms that guide behaviour patterns.

Koring belongs to the Upper-Cross group of the Delta-Cross sub-branch of the Cross River language phylum of East Benue Congo family (Williamson and Blench, 2000). It is the language of the Oring people who live in parts of Ebonyi, Benue and Cross-River States of Nigeria. The Koring–speaking communities are located at Okpoto, Ntezi and some part of Nkalagu in Ishielu Local Government Area, Effium in Ohaukwu Local Government Area, and Amuuda in Ezza Local Government Area of Ebonyi State. Koring is also spoken at Utonkon and Offia in Benue State and the Wanishan dialect

is spoken at Okpoma in Yala Local Government Area of Cross-River State. The Okpoto dialect is chosen for the present analysis because it is the variety spoken by my consultants.

In analyzing the phenomenon of greeting, congratulating and commiserating in Omani Arabic, Emery (2000: 201) observes that greetings are used to establish identity and affirm solidarity. They constitute a necessary stage on the route to 'interpersonal access' whereby information can be sought and shared. He identifies three stages of Omani Arabic (OA) greeting namely *summons* comprising *as-salaamu 'alaykum* (Peace be upon you) with permutated reply. This formula is not repeatable and is followed by a handshake. Summons also occurs in Yoruba greeting (Akindele, 1990) and is observable in Sesotho greeting (Akindele, 2007). The second stage of OA greeting structure consists of a healthy enquiry with conventional answer and thanks to Allah. Males tend to ask after children and women ask each other more detailed questions about family health.

Emery (2000: 203) further notes that in formal situations, considerations of status are observed: the interrogator is the oldest male in the household who addresses the sequence of questions to the oldest male among the visitors. Other rules for initiation of greetings in OA are younger people initiate greetings to older, lower status to higher status, employee to employer, and children to adults. The same observation was made for Yoruba greetings (Akindele, 1990) and greeting system in Ngwa Igbo (Atowa 2006).

Methodology

Data were collected in both planned and spontaneous settings. The approach used for the collection of the data for the planned setting was contextualizing elicitation. The collection of the data involved audio and verbatim recording of greeting events, observation of people greeting each other. The consultants provided a great deal of information concerning greeting by using their own experience and internalization of rules of greetings. The researcher transcribed the recorded greetings while the consultants assisted in translating them into English.

The Ethnographic Account of Greetings in the Oring Community

Ethnography, as a field of study, is the interface between linguistics and culture. However, sociolinguistics studies the inter-relationships between language and society. It is connected to anthropology through the investigation of language and culture. Culture has been defined as the totality

of people's way of life. So, greeting is an aspect of culture. Osuagwu (1987) notes that greeting shows a mark of respect and culture. Different groups of people have different languages. They have different cultures which are reflected in their languages. In this study, we would use language study to determine non-linguistic situation – greeting.

This section of the paper tends to examine communicative competence and its function within Koring speech contexts since much importance is attached to greetings in Africa in general and in Oring speech community in particular. Hymes (1971) established communicative competence. To him, this is the knowledge and skill needed by a speaker in order to communicate effectively within his speech community. This is opposed to Chomsky's asocial orientation to language. Chomsky (1957) developed linguistic competence. He believes that every native speaker has the ability to produce linguistically correct utterances. He sees language as monolithic, invariable, and homogeneous. This is because the society was not taken into consideration.

Some scholars have argued against Chomsky's linguistic competence (Hymes, 1971; Hudson, 1980). They believe that one must possess the ability to make appropriate use of language in any given linguistic situation. Hymes (1971) is of the view that what language is cannot be separated from how and why it is used. This is the social orientation to language. That is, studying language in relation to the society or simply put, considering the owners of a language while studying their language.

Communicative competence involves the knowledge of when to speak, when not to speak, and what to speak about with whom, when, where, and in what manner. In a typical Igbo society, for example, children are not expected to discuss their boy/girl relationships with their parents but their peers. Boy/girl relationship is a secret which is hidden from parents but in developed countries, children freely discuss their relationships with their parents.

In greeting, there is the rule of who greets who first. In a typical Igbo society, a younger person is expected to initiate the greeting. However, the trend is changing in modern times. This is a result of the Igbos' value-reorientation; the Igbo people presently give prominence to wealthy people not minding the source of their riches. Therefore, there are contexts where an elder greets a younger person first. For instance, if an elder wanted a favour from a wealthy younger person, the elder would greet the younger first.

Among the Oring, there are different types of greetings for various occasions. These include, among others, greeting employed for seeking information about the well-being of a person and his/her loved ones, to identify in trying periods, to rejoice with the person in time of success or when good fortune occurs. There are sociolinguistic factors that account for the type and structuring of Koring greeting. These factors are revealed in Akindele's (2007) study. They include age, sex, context and time. Although there seems to be cultural assumptions about the character and motivations of participants, nevertheless deference or respect is accorded to whoever deserves it among the Oring, and this is explicitly reflected in the greeting sequence. The younger person typically initiates greeting whenever the occasion arises. This is a mark of deference to the older person. Context is also a variable that determines who greets first. For instance, if a person enters into a gathering of people, he/she is expected to offer greeting first to the group; the age of the person notwithstanding. In addition, a person who calls on another person's house offers his/her greeting first whether he/she is older or younger. The sex variable does not appear to account for who greets first in Koring. It is whoever considers his/her co-participant worth of greetings that he/she offers to greet. However, if the female participant is an older person and the male is younger, it is the male who greets first in deference to the age of the woman. Similarly, if the male participant is an older person and the female is younger, it is the female who greets first. Greeting persons who are bereaved or who recorded success is regarded as a mark of intimacy and concern for the others among the Oring. Failure to offer such greetings may give rise to bad feelings especially among relations or close friends. Time is another factor that could have been responsible for the length of the greeting system. Persons who are not in a hurry and so have plenty of time to chat may decide to ask each other about the welfare of the kith and kin before proceeding to other matters of concern.

Types, Contexts and Purposes of Koring Greetings

The Oring have many greetings which are used in different contexts and for different purposes. Such as:

- Morning greeting
- Afternoon greeting
- Evening greeting
- Night greeting
- Casual greeting

- Parting of ways/leave-taking
- Commiseration/condolences
- Festivals
- Welcome greeting
- Greeting for bravery/prowess
- Greetings for older persons
- Greeting for younger persons
- Encouragement/ commendation greeting, etc.

The greetings are illustrated in the table below:

Types of greeting	Koring greeting	English equivalent	Context	Intention
Morning greeting	Téwú	Good morning	In the morning	Cheerfulness/ Happiness
Afternoon greeting	Ǹdó	Good afternoon	In the afternoon/ All purpose	Cheerfulness/ Happiness
Evening greeting	Ǹdó	Good evening	In the evening/ All purpose	Cheerfulness/ Happiness
Night greeting	Ǹdó	Good night	In the night/ All purpose	Cheerfulness/ Happiness
Casual greeting	Ǹdó	Hello/How are you?	Any time	Welfare of participants/ Intimacy
Parting of ways/ leave-taking	Èvú kpálá / Nyị̀ị̀dọ̀ọ̀	See you next time/ Stay well	Departure	Good wishes for the parting groups
Commiseration/condole nces	Ǹzọ̀	Don't be downcast/ It's unfortunate	Condolences / Burial	To express solidarity/ Grief
Festivals	Lótá	Merry/Happy	Festive periods	Joy
Welcome greeting	Léèkpá	Welcome	Visit	Warm reception
Greeting for bravery/ prowess	Léèkpá	Great/ Well done	Achievemen t of a feat	Motivation/ Pride
Greetings for older persons	Pàpá/Màmá	Father/Mother	Any time	Respect/ Dignity
Greeting for younger persons	Àphị̀ǹnà	Hello boy/girl	Any time	Welfare

Encouragement/ commendation greeting	**Àyé**	Keep it up	Successful completion of an act	Reinforcement
Greeting at work	**Àyé ọ̀tọ́m**	Good work	At work	Encouragement
Greeting to the sick	**Nzọ̀**	Get well soon	Painful situation/ Sickness	Unhappiness
Greeting for success	**Àyé**	Keep it up	Any successful event	Commendation / Encouragement
Closing greeting	**Kpáráph**	Good bye/ Stay well	End of discussion	Good wishes
Appreciation	**Kẹ́lẹ̀**	Thanks	When someone does something good to another	Happiness
All purpose greeting	**Ǹdó**	Hello	Any time	Cheerfulness/ Happiness
Greeting for child birth/ child outing	**Ízūmē**	The lucky baby/ Welcome woman	At child birth/ outing	Warm reception of a newly born baby and the mother
Marriage/ wedding greeting	**Áká léèkpá**	Welcome wife	After marriage ceremony	Reception of a newly married woman

Functions of Greeting

Koring greeting regularizes patterns of reciprocal behaviour among group members. It facilitates predictability and stability in interpersonal relationships and, at the same time, minimizes negative feelings or general misunderstanding.

Among the Oring, greeting is considered as an aid to peaceful social relations because it is very much a part of the daily experience of the group members. It functions, among others, to keep up good open communication among the members of the sociolinguistic community; brings a sense of pride to the society and keeps unity among them. When used correctly, Koring greeting has 'a stately pomp which can make the simplest conversation seem like a great ceremony' (Geertz 1972).

It helps to establish rapport or comfort with another person; to recognize his/her presence and to show friendliness. Thus, in every context or situation, greetings are expected: when a person enters a house; he/she is expected to greet people in the house; on the street people are expected to greet each other. Traditionally, one is expected to greet everyone met in the farm. One does not greet only the people one knows. Among the Oring, greeting is a demonstration of appreciation of another person, good relations among members and it also shows concern about the well-being of the people, as if to say ''you are your brother/sister's keeper'' (Akindele 2007).

Morphological Analysis of Koring Greetings

The aspect of morphology to be examined here is plural formation. Akindele (2007) notes that in Sesotho greeting *robala* is used to indicate singular while in greeting two or more persons *robalang* (plural) is used. This suggests that the morpheme 'ng' is used to express plural in Sesotho greeting. However, Anagbogu (2005) studies pluralization in Koring. The study reveals some plural formation strategies in the language such as N+gbɔ́dɔ́rɔ́, phoneme alternation, zero affixation, reduplication and the demonstratives. These pluralization rules are evident in the following:

a.   N+gbɔ́dɔ́rɔ́

When gbɔ́dɔ́rɔ́ 'many' follows a singular noun, a plural is formed. For example:

lɛ̀tɔ̀	**lɛ̀tɔ̀ gbɔ́dɔ́rɔ́**
head	heads
zéŋ	**zéŋ gbɔ́dɔ́rɔ́**
eye	eyes (Data from Anagbogu 2005:133)

b.   Phoneme alternation

The initial phonemes of nouns are changed in order to form plurals. For instance:

ódūāŋ		**édūāŋ**
/o/	→	/e/
girl		girls

wàdúm	**gbàdúm**
/w/ →	/gb/
man	men

(Data from Anagbogu 2005:134-5)

c. Zero affixation

Here, there are no apparent changes in both the singular and plural forms of the nouns. Such as:

àràà	**àràà**
father	fathers
ététe ́	**ététe ́**
baby	babies

(Data from Anagbogu 2005:135)

d. Reduplication

The initial syllable of a noun is reduplicated in order to form a plural. Example:

gbàiɛ́mɛ́	**gbàgbàiɛ́mɛ́**
brother	brothers

(Data from Anagbogu 2005:135)

e. The demonstratives

There is also a dichotomy between the demonstratives in Koring. For example:

Singular	Plural
úwì 'this'	**íyè** 'these'
úwè 'that'	**íyèkèkè** 'those'

(Data from Anagbogu 2005:137)

In addition to Anagbogu's (2005) findings, this study identified a plural marker which is used only in greetings. The morpheme 'ŋɔ́' is affixed to

Koring greetings to express plurality. This is evident in the under listed expressions:

To one person	To more than one person	Gloss
ǹdó	**ndo ŋɔ́**	All purpose greeting
èvú kpálá	**èvú kpálá ŋɔ́**	Parting of ways/ leave-taking
àjé	**àjé ŋɔ́**	Success greeting
kɛ́lɛ̀	**kɛ́lɛ̀ ŋɔ́**	Appreciation
ǹzɔ̀	**ǹzɔ̀ ŋɔ́**	Commiseration/condolences

Conclusion

This study of Koring greetings is ethnographically oriented. It has presented a description of Koring greetings. The description of types of Koring greetings provides an insight into the Oring society with its unique way of expressing solidarity and rapport among its people. The study has shown that greeting is a normal sociolinguistic routine meant for the establishment of interpersonal relationship. Deference or respect is accorded to whoever deserves it among the Oring in spite of the cultural assumptions about the character and motivations of participants. Although there has been a study of pluralization in Koring, the study failed to include the plural marker in greeting. However, this present study identifies 'ŋɔ́' as the morpheme which marks plurality in Koring greetings. Finally, the data has shown in some respects that there is a similarity between the types of Koring greetings and those of the Yoruba and Igbo.

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