

## SOCIOLINGUISTIC DOCUMENTATION OF ENDANGERED ETHNOGRAPHY OF COMMUNICATION IN YORUBA LANGUAGE

By

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### ABSTRACT

*The ethnography of communication, particularly of greetings, among speakers of some Yoruba dialects is the major concern of this paper. The author observed that the much-cherished, rich culture of greetings, among Yoruba, which the author grew up to know, by linguistic globalization and modernization is being eroded fast. The study and documentation of the sociolinguistic structure of greetings is both anthropological and ethnographic because greetings, as part of Speech Act, belong to the domain of language and culture. Describing language behavior observed daily in different cultures is the purview of an ethnographer. A detailed comparison of greetings among speakers of three Yoruba dialects (Igbomina, Ijesa, Ijebu) can no longer be regarded as a compulsive desideratum, because documentary linguistics is now seen as a salvage work. Therefore, our work is therefore that of data collection, organization, transcription, translation, and interpretation of the morph-syntax and semantics of greetings in the three dialects. The rationale for the study is based on our belief that since language is rooted in a speech community, in its history and culture, each language or dialect is unlike any other language, hence no data can be regarded as the same. By the same token, linguistic data are not easily replicable. Because data from extinct dialects are not easily replaceable, documenting greetings in these dialects will make them accessible to others, thus saving them from gradual extinction.*

*Keywords: Documentary Linguistics, Accommodation, Co-operative-politeness, Geo-linguistics, Ethnography Of Greetings, Endangered, Theosophy, Ideational, Monumental.*

### INTRODUCTION

Documentary linguistics, as a new sub-discipline within linguistics, is a relatively new coinage that dates back to only about two decades. According to Akinlabi and Connell (2007), interest and perhaps works on the state of the world linguistic heritage have increased dramatically as a form of language development or "salvage" work called documentation. Interest in work on endangered languages and dialects dates back to the mid-1990s with Connell's work in the Mambila Plateau of Nigeria and Cameroon, with the work of Gibbon, Connell and Ahoua in the Ivory Coast on Ega, and with the collaborative work of Akinlabi, Connell and Ndimele on Defaka and Nkoroo in the South Eastern part of Nigeria (Akinlabi and Connell 2007).

Documenting the ethnography of speaking, particularly of greetings among the speakers of three Dialects of Yoruba, namely Igbomina, Ijebu and Ijesa, is the main objective of this research. This involves the collection, organization,

transcription and translation of primary data. The work also entails interpretation of data in such a way that it is accessible to many people who do not speak the language. What we have done in this work involves re-creating and archiving record of linguistic materials on language and culture, in order to create a data bank that could be used for teaching others about Yoruba language and the three dialects. Language documentation, as Himmelmann (1998) puts it, aims at a record of the linguistic practices and traditions of a speech community. Greetings are regarded as a sociolinguistic behaviour based on the culture of the people. The documentation of Nigerian languages and their dialects is therefore indispensable to achieving a deeper understanding of Nigerian languages, cultures, history and societies.

### Geo-linguistics of The Areas

Yoruba language is spoken mainly in Oyo, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, and Ekiti states of Western Nigeria. Speakers are also

found in Kwara, Edo and Kogi States, and in the Republics of Benin (formerly Dahomey) and Togo, in Sierra Leone and Ghana. Some speakers are also found in the West Indies and South America, particularly in Cuba and Brazil. Yoruba language has many dialects among which are Ekiti, Igbomina, Ijebu, Ijesa, Oyo, Ondo, Owo, Ikale, Ilaje, Ikare, Yagba, Gbede, Ijumu, Ife, Ikiri, Isabe, Ijo, and Irun . The standard Yoruba is a blend of two closely related dialects, Oyo and Lagos.

The Ijebu dialect is spoken in Ijebu Ode Local Government Area of Ogun State. There are two main varieties, viz: the Emo variety spoken in Sagamu, Oderemo, Ipara, Isara, Iperu and Ikenne; while the Ijebu Central variety is spoken in Ijebu-Ode, Ijebu-Igbo and its environs. The 1991 population census puts the figure for Ijebu at 781,405. Ijebu territory is bounded in the North by Oyo territory (now Ibadan) in the south by Lagos, in the West by Egbaland, and in the East by Ondo.

Ijesa dialect is spoken in about ten local government areas of Osun State. Some Ijesa speaking villages include Ijebu Ijesa, Enriomo, Esa Oke, Odo, Eti Ori, Ifewara, Ipetu Ijesa, Iye Mogun and Ilesa. The population figure is put at 481,720 (1963 Census). Ijesa land lies in the Yoruba speaking part of south-western Nigeria, around the upper reaches of the Osun, Sasa and Oni rivers, which flow south and south-west to the Lagos Lagoon. The central town of the Ijesa people is Ilesa.

Igbomina dialect is spoken by the Igbominas who are found in both Kwara and Osun States. Igbominaland is divided into eighty districts, in three Local Government Areas, viz: Ifelodun LGA, with Share as the headquarters; Irepodun LGA with Omu-Aran as the headquarters, and Isin LGA, with Owu-Isin as the headquarters. The population figure is put at 306,573 (1991 census). Like other Yoruba Kingdoms, Igbomina is composed of many towns and villages, and their political organization is bounded in lineage. Several types of Igbomina dialects are spoken in different parts of Igbominaland. The Mosan, Moye, Mohan and Ileko (Eyo Igbomina) are spoken in different areas. The speakers of Mosan variety are found in Isin LGA and in Irepodun LGA of Kwara state while speakers of Moye variety are found in Ifelodun LGA. Ileko variety is spoken at the

borders of Ilorin, while Mohan is spoken in Isin and Irepodun LGA.

### **Ethnography of Communication/Greetings**

Ethnography of Communication, particularly of greetings, is concerned with the description of the culture and language of a tribe or a race. The subject matter of ethnography of greetings is illustrated with the question "what does a speaker need to know to communicate appropriately within a particular speech community?" Hymes (1962) uses the acronym SPEAKING to describe the variables which influence communicative competence as follows: Setting (spatio-temporal factors); Participants; Ends or objectives; Act sequence, form and content of speech; Key, tone, and manner of speech; Instrument, channels of communication either oral or written; Norms and Genre. According to Olaoye (2007), the prerequisite knowledge that speakers need to have includes not only the rules of grammar and shared rules of interactions, but also knowledge of cultural rules that are the basis for the context and content of communication and interactional process. Greetings require both cultural/and linguistic knowledge. Ethnography of greetings therefore refers not only to the rules of speaking, but also to the ways in which a speaker associates specific modes of speaking to topic or message forms with particular settings and activities.

### **Global View on the Concept of Greetings**

Greetings are conventional expressions used for welcoming people or for expressing pleasure when meeting somebody. According to the Chambers English Dictionary (1990), greetings refer to salutations, kind wishes, congratulatory remarks and compliments in general. It involves exchange of pleasantries between two or more people. In greetings, a language is used for the purpose of maintaining good rapport between people. Greetings as aspects of phatic communion refer to the social human desire to signal friendship or, at least, lack of enmity. Greetings are therefore social lubricants used for maintaining a comfortable relationship between people (Olaoye, 1991).

Greetings are so important to the Yoruba people that they refer to themselves as "Omo O Kaaro Ojii rebi" which means descendants of those who greet by saying "good

morning and how are you?". Daramola and Jeje (1967) assert that it is obligatory for parents to teach their children how to greet politely, as "Omo ti a ba ji lowuro lodo agbalaba ti ko si mo lhun ti o to lati se yoo gba eebu, yoo si gba abuku". This means that a child who wakes up early in the morning without first of all greeting the elders would be rebuked. On the other hand, a child that wakes up and first of all observes the norms associated with greetings would be highly favoured. Greetings however depend on three basic factors, viz: the time of the day, the context of greeting and the people involved especially their age and relationship.

Paralanguage is involved in greetings. Greetings are accompanied by gestures such as kneeling down, genuflecting, prostrating, bowing down, and sometimes hand shake. A younger female person kneels down to greet an elderly person, while a younger male person prostrates and also removes his cap. A breach of this language behaviour is often regarded as an act of rudeness, insolence or indiscipline. The Yoruba people hold greetings in high esteem. This is evident from the proverbs associated with greetings, two of which are: "Ki a rini lokeere, ki a se ariya, o yoni ju onje lo", which means "warm greetings satisfy more than food". The second is "Eniyan ni a ko ti a ko ki, eni ti a ba ki ko tara jeni", which means greeting someone is a privilege, let him that is greeted respond promptly, after all there are people one meets without greeting them.

### Methodology

The data used in this paper was collected through both structured and unstructured interviews. The native speakers of Yoruba, both male and female, (Igbomina, Ijebu and Ijesa) between the ages of 60 and 100 years, and those who speak the standard Yoruba were the main respondents. Yoruba students of the University of Ilorin and Abuja, and students of some Colleges of Education in COE Ila-Orangun, COE Ikere-Ekiti, COE, Oto-Ijanikin Lagos were also randomly selected and interviewed. Their responses were tape-recorded. Questions posed to both the aged and the students centered on certain types of Yoruba greetings, like greetings for festivals, at work, mourning, greetings to kings/chiefs, eulogy/pedigree greetings,

seasonal greetings, and so forth. Only those forms of greetings which were adjudged by the respondents as dying were used and analysed in this paper.

The framework of analysis is our model theoretical framework called the Co-operative Politeness Hypothesis, which the author found very apt in describing and analyzing the ethnography of greetings among the Yoruba. The syntactic-semantic analysis of some of the greetings was carried out, bringing out the variant forms in the three dialects and the Yoruba Standard Form.

The Co-operative-Politeness Theory in this paper, our model framework, is based on Grice's (1975) co-operative principles and Leech's (1983) politeness hypothesis. Grice's pragmatic theory finds application in the ethnography of greetings of the Yoruba People. The co-operative principle has it that conversation is usually a cooperative activity. Grice believes that at any point in a conversation, a speaker should be guided by certain maxims, viz: quality – speaker should say only what is true; quantity – speaker should say no more and no less than is required; relation – speaker should be relevant; and manner - speaker should be perspicuous, that is, be brief, orderly and should avoid ambiguity. Greetings follow Gricean laws or maxims, because Yoruba culture entails a lot of co-operative interactions which also involve politeness. The primary function of the co-operative maxims is that of constraining the participants in the greeting conversation to make their conversation orderly, purposeful and maximally efficient.

Leech's (1983) politeness principle also has four maxims; viz: tact, generosity, approbation and modesty. A speaker is required to be tactful rather than offensive, generous rather than dismissive or insensitive, be modest rather than boastful, and also be socially approving rather than pretentious. In greetings, as in any other communicative event, conformity to societal rules, or code of conduct, especially respect for elders and superiors, reciprocal respect for one another, condescension, accommodation and modesty are instances of the co-operative-politeness principles which interlocutors must observe. The politeness principle is motivated by the desire to maintain social equilibrium and friendly relations. These two principles are largely regulative factors which ensure

that conversation does not follow a fruitless or destructive path; as principles have normative characteristics akin to moral imperatives.

Greetings and politeness are universal concepts which are inseparable and indispensable. In Yoruba culture, refusal to greet others is regarded as impoliteness, whereas greeting people is regarded as the greatest honour that could be bestowed on those who are being greeted. Greetings and politeness are both levels of conversational interaction (Coulthard 1985, and Leech 1983).

## Data Analysis and Discussion

### Types and Forms of Greetings

There are different types of greetings such as daily greetings, periodic/seasonal greetings and those at places of work, greetings for the royalties and pedigree/eulogy (Oriki) greetings. There are different forms of greetings which depend on the time of the day, the role relationship between the people involved, their age, sex, status, educational background, occupation and the context.

#### The Sociolinguistic Structure of Greetings

The grammatical structure of greetings among the Yoruba, (Igbomina, Ijebu, Ijesa), is determined by some sociolinguistic variables such as the time of the day, the season, status of the people being greeted and the social and psychological setting (Table 1). There are two prominent structures, the first is considered to be old use, while the second structure is more contemporary.

In the standard Yoruba, the structure is:

1. a. Pronoun + ku + time of the day, as in: 'E ku owuro' or 'e k aaro' = Good morning. "E" is either plural "you" or singular "you" but called honorific plural, used for elders, kings, etc.
  - b. 'Ku awuro' or 'kaaro' = good morning, used among mates, or an elder greeting a younger person.
2. In Igbomina dialect the structure is: Pronoun + kun+ the time of the day, e.g. 'ekun ooro'. The table below shows a comparison of Igbomina, Ijebu and Ijesa dialects, for both the old and contemporary time (Table 2).

The Standard Yoruba forms are: Morning: 'E kaaro baba mi'; Afternoon: 'E kaasan baba mi'; Night: 'E kale baba mi'. The honorific or respect pronoun used by the Ijesa and Ijebu are

	MORNING	AFTERNOON	NIGHT
a. IGBOMINA	E kun ooro baami	E Kaasan baami/ babami	E kaale/Ekun ale babami
b. IJESA	Kaa ro baba	Ku osan baa mi	K aale baa mi
c. IJEBU	kaaro baa mi	kaasan baa mi	Kaale baa mi

Table 1. Old pattern of greetings in Igbomina, Ijesa and Ijebu dialects

Igbomina	Ijesa	Ijebu
E Kun ooro/owuro baba mi/baami	In kaaro o baba / in pele o baa mi	Wen/E Kaaro bami
E kun osan baba mi/ baami	In kun osan o baa mi	Wen/E kaasan ba mi
E kun osan iya mi/ moomo mi/moomi	In pele o yee mi / in kuosan o yee mi	Wen/E kaasan ye mi
E Kun ale baba mi/ baami	In kale o baa mi	Wen/E Kaale ba mi
E Kun ale iya mi/ moomi	In Kaale o yee mi	Wen/E kale ye mi

Table 2. Contemporary greetings in Igbomina, Ijesa and Ijebu dialects

"in" and "wen" or "e". In Ijesa dialect, "In pele" is the alternative form of "in ku".

#### Endangered Yoruba Greetings

English language and western civilization have made inroads into the language and culture of the Yoruba. Many of the Yoruba greeting forms are fast disappearing from their ethnography of communication. The following greetings are gradually becoming moribund:

#### Festival Greetings

'E ku odun, e ku iyedun, Olorun yoo je kase opo odun laye'. This corresponds to happy + name of the festival, e.g. happy Christmas, happy Easter, happy Id-el-kabir, etc. The youths are gradually losing these structures, as they simply say "e ku odun" without adding the other deep sociolinguistic forms.

#### Marriage Greetings

'E ku I nawo iyawo O, eyin iyawo ko ni meni'.

"You + greeting + expenses + bride, + back + bride + will not+ know + mat". This means well-done for the expenses of the wedding, may the bride not suffer or stay long before becoming pregnant. The youths will simply say "E ku nawo" or congratulations. Only the elders go on into detailed or more complex greetings, with well wishes or prayers.

#### Childbirth Greetings

'E ku ewu omo, Olorun yoo da omo naa si'. You + greeting

+ risk + child + God + will + save + child + the alive. This corresponds to congratulations on the child's delivery, may God protect the child or keep the child alive.

## *Greetings to Kings*

'Kabiyesi o, kade o pe lori, ki bata o pe lese'. Your royal majesty, may crown stay long on your head, and may your shoes stay long on your feet. This corresponds to: long live the king! The youth just simply say: "kabiyesi oo" and then prostrate, with their cap removed.

## *Seasons' Greetings*

Dry season : 'E ku ogbele yi'

Rainy season : 'E ku oginitin yi'

Most youths do not even know the Yoruba words for dry or rainy season, or any other season for that matter.

## *Burial Greetings*

a. 'E ku ara feraku' You + greeting + body + missed each other

This corresponds to "sorry for missing/losing somebody" or sorry for the death of somebody.

b. 'E ku ileede ologbe, ojo a jina sira won'

You + greeting + absence + the dead + days + will be far + from + each other, meaning sorry for the loss of the dead, may you live long.

## *House Warming Greetings*

'E ku isile, ile a tura o'

You + greeting + opening house + house + will + cool body ,meaning congratulations on the commissioning of the house, may the house bring you comfort.

## *Occupational Greetings*

The most endangered forms of greetings are those for occupations or trades or professions. The youths hardly ever use these greeting words and phrases:

- Hunter: 'a rin pa a'. This means may you walk and kill games.
- Dyeing: 'are du o'. This means may you soak it dark/black
- Plaiting: "oju gboro o' .Meaning may you do it (plait) with facility
- Farming: 'a roko bodun de'. May you farm year- in, year out.

- Tradiing: 'e ku oro aje'. 'A ta gbowo'. Well done in business, may you sell and make profit.
- Palm wine taper: 'igba a yi o'. rope will be strong . Your rope will never cut.
- Blacksmith:' aro ye o' .Smithing will bring prospect
- If a Priest: 'a bo ru boye o, ebo a fin o' .Sacrifice will be propitious.
- Marble (Ayo) paying: 'mo ki ota, mo ki ope', or one asks the players 'ta ni ope, tani ota', Who is losing, who is winning?
- Child loser: one whose child has died: 'e ku iroju, omi lo tu, agbe ko fo', which means, sorry, its only the water that has spilled out, the calabash or gourd is not broken. This means take heart because you are still alive, its only the child that is dead.

From these and many other greetings, there are other structures found in Standard Yoruba greetings that are different from "Pronoun + ku +time of the day, season, festival" pattern. "E ku ise" has almost replaced all types of greetings, especially if one wants to greet somebody who is working or doing something, the type of work or job notwithstanding.

The Igbomina, Ijebu and Ijesa dialects also have similar but different structures from that found in Standard Yoruba. The morphological and syntactic make up of the greetings in Igbomina, Ijebu, and Ijesa dialects are different from Standard Yoruba.

ORIKI ORILE ( Lineage Pedigree): More worrisome is the fact that (oriki orile) lineage praise names used in greetings are fast disappearing in the ethnography of communication of the Yoruba race. The following praise names are used to greet and inspire people:

- Abeni – female name – one who is begged for before having, A child got through supplication to God/gods. "Abeni o" , Abeni, how are you?
- Agbeke – female name: one you carry up and care for, a delicate or fragile jewel.
- Aduke – female name: one you hold tenderly to cater for.
- Abeke – female: one you beg to cater for. Every lineage



has their history of chivalry, valour, defeat, sanctity, piousness, weakness, heroism, opprobrium and infamy with which they are known and greeted.

Lineage Praise names (LPN) used for greeting can be categorized into four broad based semantic types:

a. Theosophic LPN: Praise names derived from God's or gods' attributes, such as:

- "O, kun, omoluwabi", hello, God's own child. This is a form of greeting for a well-behaved child, a descendant of Noah in the Bible.

b. Testimonial LPN: names that testify to the individual's fortune, with respect to procreation, good luck, such as: '

- O kun, omo Adedibu', hello, a child from a royal family that is getting enlarged or expanded. Crown/Royalty has become opulence
- Pele o, omo Irebaayo', how are you, child whose birth has brought goodness or fortune upon joy.
- Omo otedola', a child whose birth has turned conspiracy into honour and wealth.

c. Ideational LPN: Praise names that reflect cultural ideas, such as Yoruba concept of man, society, universe, goodness, death, re-incarnation, spirit world, such as:

- O kun, omo abioje' , Hello, child born into the masquerade cult.
- Taiye lolu, omo iyamoye' , used for greeting the first born of twins, and whose mother is regarded as sagacious, prudent or discreet.

d. Monumental LPN: Praise names derived from parents' personal achievements, as in physical prowess, wealth, professional excellence, courage, industry, bravery, e.g:

- Pele O, omo adifala', greetings for a child whose father (an oracle priest) has become enriched/prosperous through correct divination.
- Pele o, omo ajanaku tii mi igbo kijikiji' , greetings for a child whose father is regarded as an elephant (a strong and brave person) whose moves shake the bush/forest very terribly.

Educated Yoruba no longer use these greeting forms, either because they do not know them, or they have no time for all these cultural niceties. Even among the elders,

both literate and illiterate, this practice is fast dying out, and needs to be revived. The documentation of these endangered Yoruba greetings is therefore imperative.

## Summary and Conclusion

The paper described, glossed, analysed and discussed the socio-linguistic structures of what the author called the endangered ethnography of greetings in Yoruba language. Three dialects - Igbomina, Ijebu and Ijesa - were compared with the Standard Yoruba Language. It was found that the grammatical patterns of greetings are different, particularly the differences in the plural markers and the pronouns. Greetings were categorized into time of the day – morning, afternoon, evening and night. Different types of greetings were identified, such as greetings for special festivals, loss of property, greetings for kings and chiefs, and lineage praise names or pedigree and greetings at work. The study and the documentation of the sociolinguistic structure of greetings is both anthropological and ethnographic because greetings, as part of Speech Act, belong to the domain of language and culture. It is also that pedigree greetings can be divided into four broad categories – theosophic, ideational, monumental and testimonial. Most of these forms of greetings are fast disappearing in the ethnography of communication of the Yoruba, particularly the educated ones. These greetings need to be documented, as salvage research work, to save them from total extinction.

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