

A Sociolinguistic Consideration of Intermediation in Greeting Discourse among the Yòrùbá of South West Nigeria

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Abstract

Existing studies on Yorùbá greeting forms dwell on the appropriateness of their use, with respect to time of the year, event, condition, occupation, vocation, context, politeness and content. The studies portray greetings as discourse between two people or parties who are capable of exchanging pleasantries. None of the existing works has discussed intermediation in greeting discourse among the Yorùbá people such that greetings that are directed to the second person(s) such as toddlers, extremely sick persons, kings and the bereaved are answered on their behalf by a third party. This paper examines intermediation and the rationale in greeting discourse among the Yorùbá people. The data for this study were drawn from participant observation, Yorùbá literature texts, and Yorùbá home movies. The Mutual Contextual Beliefs Theory of Pragmatics as proposed by Bach and Harnish (1979) was adopted for the data analysis. The study established, among other things, that greetings are sacrosanct in Yorùbá culture and the answer/reply is obligatory, irrespective of the state, status, circumstance and condition of the person(s) being greeted. It is also shown that intermediation in greeting discourse could be for politeness, incapacitation, authority and educating the young ones.

Keywords: *greetings, intermediation, cultural constraints, situational constraints*

Introduction

Greeting forms are socio-cultural methods evolved by man to exchange pleasantries and good wishes with a view to advancing friendship, recognition and solidarity in society. From this, it logically follows that greeting is a universal phenomenon, an integral part of human existence and language culture. It is no wonder that there is no culture that does not attest this sociolinguistic/sociological phenomenon. Abiodun (2006) observes that greeting is an important means of social interaction, a means of drawing others' attention and a means of showing recognition for others. Besides this, greetings, in certain contexts, are used to show

familiarity, endearment and solidarity. Akindele (2007) asserts that greeting can be described as the exchange of expression, pleasantries, or good wishes between two people or the group interacting for the purpose of fulfilling social obligation or for the purposes of establishing interpersonal relationship. Ekanjume –Ilongo (2013) claims that greeting is a way by which people consciously and deliberately make their presence felt by other(s), show attention and suggest a type of relationship or social status between themselves and others. Olaniyi (2017) also describes greeting as a collaboration which does not just proceed at random, but obeys certain rules. From these definitions, one can deduce that greetings obey

certain conventions that are predicated on the exchange of pleasantries.

However, cultural differences and divergence cannot be separated from greetings as they come to play in greeting discourse and gestures that follow it. In some cultures, greeting assumes an elaborate form such that it is keenly knitted into other socio-cultural aspects of life (Abiodun 2006).

In Yorùbá culture, greetings assume an elaborate form as gestures such as prostration and kneeling accompany the verbal utterances to show respect and regard for elderly people (see Daramola & Jeje 1967). The Yorùbá also believe that every situation, circumstance, condition and event deserves appropriate greeting forms to show their recognition and positive feelings or otherwise about them. On account of this, greetings cut across all walks of life, seasons, times, periods, events, occasions and festivals (Ogunbowale 1966 & Adeoye 1980). Furthermore, Yorùbá people maintain that pleasant and unpleasant situations demand particular greeting forms that could be to felicitate with or assuage the sad event that happens to a member of the community. The reason for this is, simply because, the success of a folk or otherwise belongs to the community (Abiodun 2006). From this, it is important to note that greeting is sacrosanct in Yorùbá culture, and members of the community who do not place value on greetings are regarded as *alálẹ̀kòṣò* 'a person who lacks home training. Yorùbá culture emphasises greetings amidst feuds between people, because greetings sometimes serve as another form of dispute resolution. It is a common knowledge among the Yorùbá people that if greetings persist over time the feud will disappear between the adversaries. In the Yorùbá culture also, greeting one's adversary first is a sign of maturity and forgiveness. Furthermore, there is a cultural and moral obligation on everybody that is greeted to respond/answer no matter the condition or status. That is why an intermediary who understands the norms and the culture of the Yorùbá normally keys into a greeting discourse to satisfy the moral obligation imposed on the person(s) being greeted where circumstances do not allow him or her to respond. In this paper, the term "intermediary"

refers to a person who greets or responds to greetings on behalf of other people.

Statement of the Problem

The Yoruba are social beings who use greeting forms to socialise and extend the hand of friendship to people around them (Abiodun 2006). Thus, greeting is an important aspect of the Yorùbá culture such that it forms an integral part of home training as well as reflecting humility (Daramola & Jeje 1967). It is also regarded as one of the indices for measuring the culture of *Ọmọlúàbí* 'act of humanism' in a thoroughbred Yorùbá person. However, when the act of humanism is lacking in someone's character, greetings from such a person are perceived as evil or laced with evil intentions. Thus, Yorùbá people would say "*ìdòbálẹ̀ kì í ẹ̀ iwà*" that is, 'prostration is not a sign of good character'. Nevertheless, Yoruba people place a premium on greetings such that there is hardly a profession, situation or event without its own greeting forms (Ogunbowale 1966, Daramola & Jeje 1967 & Adeoye 1975). The penchant for Yorùbá greetings is so pervasive that even the dead, on some occasions, are greeted (Adeoye 1975). This is why responding to greetings, irrespective of someone's state of mind, circumstance and situation is obligatory. Hence, the role of the third party becomes inevitable in a situation where the person being greeted cannot answer/respond to the greetings for certain reasons. These reasons could be as a result of incapacitation due to advancement in age, or a child/ children who cannot yet respond verbally. This also includes extremely sick people who cannot talk, or have severe pains, or who are incapacitated by the ailments. Moreover, sadness and agony may as well prevent the bereaved from responding to greetings. The king on the throne may not have the leisure to respond to greetings because of authority ascribed to the seat by the Yorùbá culture. The king normally receives many visitors in a day that makes responding to greetings boring and stressful. In this situation, the intermediary comes in to fulfill this moral obligation of responding on behalf of the monarch to the greetings offered him. Similar to this scenario is Ifá divination process, whereby the Ifá priest usually greets his/her client on behalf of the oracle

(Abimbola 1977). Existing studies have limited their scopes of greeting discourse to interactions between two people or groups who are capable of exchanging pleasantries. In this study, we are interested in intermediation in greeting discourse in Yorùbá and the rationale behind it. We will show that intermediation in greeting discourse is used to show authority, incapacitation, politeness and educating younger Yorùbá people.

Related Works

Some of the studies that are of interest to the present research works are Ogunbowale (1966), Daramola & Jeje (1967), Abiodun (2006), Olaniyi (2017) among others. Ogunbowale (1966) centres his work on the appropriateness of greeting forms with respect to seasons of the year and events. He claims that different periods of the year deserve different greeting forms and explains that greeting during the raining season is different from that of the dry season. He submits further that morning greeting is quite different from evening and night greetings while the greeting forms for the bereaved are different from those offered to newly-wedded. He adds that anyone who cannot differentiate between these greeting forms will be regarded as a person who lacks home training. He concludes by summarising Yorùbá greeting forms primarily into three categories, namely: sentence, prayers and question. In as much as we agree with Ogunbowale's (1966) summation on greetings, we disagree with his opinion with respect to greetings and home training. Although greeting forms part of home training, it is not the totality of home training. Thus, a person who cannot differentiate between greeting forms and their appropriateness would rather be regarded as a person who lacks the requisite knowledge of greeting forms rather than lacking home training.

Daramola & Jeje (1967) explain greeting forms in relation to culture. They claim that greeting is a fundamental aspect of home training. They opine that gestures that accompany the verbal utterances, such as prostration for male and kneeling for female signify respect for parents and elderly people in Yorùbá culture. The scholars also claim that

different periods of the year deserve certain greeting forms. They provide greeting forms and the appropriate responses for vocations such as: farming, palm wine tapping, hairdressing, Ifá priests, hunting and blacksmith. As significant as the work of Daramola & Jeje (1967) on greeting forms seems to be, they do not provide the appropriate greeting form for herbalists in their work. In Lagos, there are greetings such as: *Òmìsà ìṣẹ̀gùn* 'the herbal practitioners' and the response *ewé a jé* 'leaves will be potent' as opposed to *Àbọ̀rú àbọ̀yè* 'general greetings for priest and herbalist' that is very common to people in the trade. However, it is not unlikely, that the herbalists in Lagos State, Nigeria, might have developed these greeting forms for identification in their domain which may be strange to herbalists from other states in Southwest Nigeria.

Abiodun (2006) examines the sociolinguistic content of Yorùbá greeting forms. He argues that Yorùbá greeting forms are divided into four, namely: all-purpose forms, prayer forms, panegyrics and the *È kú* forms. He explains further that the *È kú* ... forms are predominantly used, and the phrase *È kú* is always attached to the time of the day, period, season, festive, condition and activity. He submits that greetings with reference to either that of activity or events are to be understood within the Yorùbá traditional setting as activities or events that have no perceived evil intention and are considered desirable. For all-purpose greetings, he maintains that the term 'all-purpose' is borne out of the fact that the greeting forms do not refer to a specific time, event or condition. He categorises all-purpose greetings into two: the question form and non-question form. Abiodun (2006) also asserts that prayers form the bulk of everyday greetings which include condition, event, activity, condition and occupation. Finally, he discusses panegyrics, which he claims in the Yorùbá social context, are not primarily used as a greeting form but rather for identification and praise.

We agree with Abiodun's (2006) submission on greeting with respect to activities or events, however, we add that there are certain activities that are perceived as evil but still receive greetings in the Yorùbá

setting. The activities that evoke this greeting form *È kú iya* 'It is a pity' may not be desirable but Yorùbá people may put forward this greeting to curb the menace or mock the person. Furthermore, we agree also with Abiodun (2006) on the all-purpose greeting forms and on the question form but for the non-question form, we need to add that *È pẹ̀lẹ́/È n lẹ́* 'sorry' is used differently based on the context, that is why the Yorùbá normally say *pẹ̀lẹ́ lákọ́ ó lábo* 'sorry' has both positive and negative connotations); that is, context or situation determines the choice of *pẹ̀lẹ́* 'sorry' in the linguistic repertoire of the Yorùbá speaker, and perhaps they have different meaning. It is important to note that *pẹ̀lẹ́* 'sorry' that is used as a greeting form, as observed in Abiodun (2006), can also be used derogatorily in a hostile discourse. It can as well be used to assuage pain in a case of injury and can also serve as a form of greeting to show endearment.

Olaniyi (2017) examines Ilorin greeting forms, using the politeness principle. He looks at how the politeness principle can be used to analyse greeting forms such as condolences, departures, arrivals, rejoicing, daily greetings, casual greetings, seasonal greetings and festive greetings. He submits that greeting is part of the culture of the Ilorin people and failure to comply is an aberration. He states further that the role of greeting is not only to create warmth, but also to cement communality. He concludes that Ilorin greetings are embedded in and constrained by cognition, social principles of communication and the context of use.

In this study, we add that politeness in greeting(s) is universal and is entrenched in every culture but the elaborateness differs as different cultures place premium on different aspects of politeness. In French, *tu* 'you(sg)' and *vous* 'you(pl)' depict familiarity and politeness. *Tu* is used for familiarity and endearment between two people and it can also be used freely among peers. *Vous* (you pl)) on the other hand, is used between superior and the subordinate to show politeness in conversations. However, *vous* (you pl)) can also be used for an elderly person who happens to be one's subordinate to show respect. In Yoruba, the use of honorific

pronouns clearly shows politeness and the use of kinship terms such as *Bòdà, Sisità, àntí, màamá, dádì* in certain contexts, shows politeness for people who are less-acquainted with the speaker. However, these kinship terms can also be used for people that one is acquainted with or members of one's family in order to show respect. In Italian language, *tu* just like in French, is used for familiarity, while *lei* is used for politeness.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the Mutual Contextual Beliefs theory (henceforth MCBs) of pragmatics developed by Bach and Harnish (1979) for its analysis. MCBs are predicated on the assumption that there are contextual and situational knowledge shared by language users who also share the same linguistic competence in an interaction. It is also believed in MCBs that certain extra-linguistic factors such as economic, social and political concerns actually guide the choice of utterance in a linguistic situation. This shared knowledge aids mutual understanding and effective communication between interlocutors in a linguistic discourse. Lawal (2003) explains that six important contexts contribute to the meaning of an utterance. They are: linguistic, situational, psychological, social, sociological and cosmological. Scholars such as Osisanwo (2006) and Dada (2012) have provided explanations for the contexts mentioned. For Dada (2012), linguistic context is the language itself. In other words, for the effective and meaningful exchange of ideas in a discourse, the interlocutors must share the same linguistic competence. Situational context presupposes the settings of the discourse and the condition that surrounds the choice of language in an interaction. The psychological context entails the attitude, feelings, emotions, behaviour and belief of the language user that are brought to bear on his/her use of language. The sociological context deals with the socio-cultural, historical, economic, political and religious backgrounds of language users. The social context basically talks about the interpersonal relationship and the social standing of the language users. Finally, cosmological context covers the general worldview of the language users.

Data Collection

The data for this research were drawn mainly from participant observation in three South-Western states namely: Oyo, Èkìtì and Òṣun. Literature texts and home movies also served as veritable sources of data. It is believed that Yorùbá culture is homogenous, because Yorùbás are descendants of Odùduwà. The Yorùbá share the same religious belief (traditional religion, and the belief in minor gods), history and cultural values such as dressing, food and greeting (Daramola & Jeje 1967). Thus, the results from the three states should clearly give the readers an insight into what is obtainable in the other Yorùbá speaking states. Greeting conversations were recorded in the streets, in the hospitals and in the palace. The utterances of the participants were recorded without their knowledge. The recording is limited to greeting conversations alone; other conversations were not recorded. Since the people did not know they were being monitored, the recording shows the natural way the Yorùbá language is used in their greeting discourse.

Data Presentation and Analyses

The data in this study are presented and analysed with the Mutual Contextual Beliefs theory of Bach and Harnish (1979). The data are greeting forms in Yorùbá language and their translations. The various contexts of these greeting forms have been discussed earlier in order for us to reconcile the theme, importance and their appropriateness with respect to the settings and context. Consider the analyses below:

Greeting the king in the palace

The extract below portrays a typical scenario in a king's palace. Kings are highly honoured and respected in the Yorùbá tradition. They are believed to be sitting on God's throne on earth, which is why they are called '*Aláṣe èkejì òrìṣà*' 'the second-in-command to the gods or goddess'. Thus, with the way the setting is fashioned, the greetings directed at the king are usually answered by the guards or the chief in charge of such duty. Let us consider this greeting discourse in a palace:

Translation

A:	<i>Káábíèsí ooo</i>	'Káábíèsí ooooo'	1
B:	The king		2
C:	<i>Ààrẹ lẹ ọ fẹ ọ re</i>	'Ààrẹ said you have spoken well'	3
	<i>Ọba n kí ọ</i>	'The king is greeting you'	4
	<i>Baba ní ilé n kọ?</i>	'Baba said how is your home?'	5
	<i>Baba ní ọmọ n kọ?</i>	Baba said how are your children?	6
	<i>Baba ní ọdọdẹ ọ dùn bí?</i>	'Baba said hope everything is going smoothly'	7
	<i>Baba ní sẹ ọjò yí ọ dé ọdọ yín?</i>	'Baba said hope it did not rain in your place?'	8

In the discussion, the intermediary is answering for the king as shown in (3-8). The intermediary makes the scenario look like an interaction between the king and the visitor, where the king makes enquiries about the welfare and well-being of the visitor's family. We also note that the intermediary is proactive in his questions; his speech depicts what the king would have said, even though, he does not know the mind of the king. *Baba* 'father' as used in 5, 6, 7, 8 in the extract shows that the king is the father of the community, irrespective of his age, and it culturally shows politeness and respect for the throne. Furthermore, the silence on the part of the king or the non-verbal greeting of shaking the horse tail is a sign of authority. Apart from the participant observation recorded at the *Aláàfin of Òyó's* palace, drama texts which form parts of the Yorùbá literary genre also buttress the point as displayed in *Arúgbó Ilé Wa* and *Kòkúmọ Ọmọ Ọdọ Àgbà*. Famojurọ (2006: 25) display a similar scene in her play *Arúgbó Ilé Wa*:

	Translation
<i>Ọjọ ọdún àwọn omidan. Àwọn ará ilú n</i>	'It was the maidens' day festival, the town
<i>dé lókòọkan sí ààfin ọba Adégoróyè.</i>	people are trooping into the palace of king
<i>Akígbe ki ọba, kò pé, kò jìnnà ,</i>	Adegoroye. The Chanter is prasing the king
<i>ọba bọ s'ita láti inu iyèwù rẹ</i>	in a short while the king came out of his cottage'
Gbobo -ilu :	<i>Káááááábíyèsí oooo. (Wọn dọbálẹ)</i>
Akígbe:	<i>Ọba n jẹ yín. Ọba n dá yín lóhùn</i>
Ọtun:	<i>Káábíyèsí ó. Gbogbo ilú n ki yín fún ti àjọdún òní, a kú ọdún , a kú iyèdún .</i> <i>Wọn ní a òò bá yín sọpọ rẹ láyé o. (Ó kọjú sí áwọn ilú) Tóò.</i> <i>Baba wa náà kí yín o. Wọn ní gbogbo wa yóò sọpọ rẹ</i>
Gbogbo-ilu:	<i>Àsẹ o.</i>

	Translation
The townspeople:	'Káááááábíyèsí oooo (they all prostrated)'
The chanter:	'The king is answering you, the king is responding to you'
Otun:	'Káábíyèsí ó. The people of the town are greeting you for today's festival, they felicitate with you. They said more of this festival shall be celebrated in our lives (He turned to town people). Our father also greets you. He said we shall live to witness more of this.'
The townspeople:	'Amen'

In addition, Adeniyi (2002:24) in his drama text *Kòkúmọ Ọmọ Ọdọ Àgbà*, shows a scene where the chiefs are greeting the king and guard is answering for the monarch:

Ajiroba:	<i>Káábíèsí, kẹẹ pé fún wa. Igba ọdún, ọdún kan</i>
Kebe:	<i>Ọba n kí ọ</i>
Ọtun:	<i>Káábíèsí ,Olúwa mi</i>
Ekerin:	<i>Kí adé pé lóri baba, kí bátá pé lèsè</i>
Kebe:	<i>Káábíèsí ní ẹ gbéra nílẹ</i>

	Translation
Ajiroba:	'Káábíèsí, may your days be long. Two hundred years shall be a stepping stone many more years on the throne'
Kebe:	'The king is greeting you'
Otun :	'Káábíèsí, my lord'
Ekerin:	'May the crown dwell on your head for long and the shoes dwell on your feet'
Kebe:	'Káábíèsí said you should stand'

The extracts from the two drama texts lend credence to the observations in the palace. From these drama texts, it appears that Yorùbá customs and tradition permit intermediation in the palace and it also shows that palace guards have been trained by tradition to respond to greetings for their masters (in the Yoruba tradition, most guards are slaves acquired through wars). Besides, subordinates in the king's palace see the monarch as their lord; as a result, the chiefs can also relate the monarch's greetings to town people. Furthermore, the interaction between the intermediary and the town people in the case of the two drama texts and the interaction in Aláàfin Ọyọ's palace cited above, apparently shows that the parties shared the same linguistic competence that facilitates mutual understanding of the situation and the response expected in the context. It is this shared knowledge that mandated the intermediary to answer on behalf of the monarch right in his presence while the subordinate being greeted also understands that the monarch is talking through the intermediary.

Greeting a woman with a toddler (between the ages of 1-4 years)

Greeting is a sign of affection in the Yorùbá culture and the exercise does not exempt anyone irrespective of age, status or class. This further affirms that everyone is recognized

and cherished in the Yorùbá culture. Often, when greetings involve two parents, their children are given special attention in their discussion, most especially, when they are present at the scene of the discussion. After the exchange of greetings by parents, the children are always incorporated. In such cases, a toddler strapped to the back of her mother may be greeted to show love and affection. The conversation below represents the scenario of greeting a toddler at the back of her mother:

	<i>Translation</i>	
A: <i>Ìya Bólú ẹ kaáarọ.</i>	'Iya Bolu good morning'	1
B: <i>Ẹ káàrọ mọ.</i>	'Good morning Ma'	2
A: <i>Ọmọ mi káààrọ</i>	'My child good morning'	3
B: <i>Ó ní yẹẹsi mọ/ ó ní ẹ káàárọ mọ</i>	'He/she said yes Ma/ He/she said good morning Ma'	4
A: <i>Bàbá ẹ ní kọ?</i>	'How is your father?'	5
B: <i>Ó ní wọn wà dáadáa.</i>	'He/she said he is good'	6
A: <i>Ẹ bá mi kílẹ</i>	'Say me well to your people'	7
B: <i>Ẹ ẹun mọ</i>	'Thank you Ma'	8

In the interaction above, one can observe that greeting in Yoruba culture is psychological, because Mrs. A had greeted Mrs. B who happened to be Bolu's mother. However, to show that greeting in Yoruba has no age barrier; the baby is incorporated into the discourse. That is why Mrs. A extends her greeting to the baby as shown in (3). The greeting in (3) is a way of transferring affection of the mother to the baby. Moreover, Mrs. A made her greeting with the baby interactive as if the baby would reply as shown in (5). However, the mother (Mrs. B) as shown in 4&6 had to fulfill the moral obligation by answering for her baby in order to show politeness. Furthermore, the attention of the woman can be drawn to the baby at her back either to adjust the neck or to reposition the baby for convenience before greeting both mother and the baby. In Yoruba culture, non-verbal gestures can also be used to greet a baby while the mother will still answer. For instance, an

elderly person can wave his hand to the baby at the back of the mother. The mother of the baby in the situation will bow her head a little in recognition of the greeting and say '*ẹ ẹun, sir*' Thank you, sir. Apart from the baby strap at the back, children between the ages of 1-4 who cannot talk vividly can also be greeted while the mother will answer. See the example below:

	<i>Translation</i>	
A: <i>Madam, ẹ kú ọjà o</i>	'Madam, how is the market'	1
B: <i>A dúpẹ o</i>	'Thank you'	2
A: <i>Ẹlọ lẹ ní ta aṣo yìí</i>	'How much is this cloth'	3
B: <i>Ogorun naira ni o</i>	'It is N100'	4
A: <i>Ẹ Ọmọ yín lo ní seré yìí</i>	'Is this your child playing'	5
B: <i>Bẹẹ ni</i>	'Yes ma'	6
A: <i>Omo yin na ti mo ọjà tà</i>	'Your child also has learned the trade'	7
B: <i>Àbẹẹ ri</i>	'You can see it yourself'	8
A: <i>Ọmọ mi káàásán, kú ọjà o</i>	'My son good afternoon, how is the market'	9
B: <i>Ó ní ẹ káàásán mà</i>	'He/she said good afternoon ma'	10
A: <i>Gbà kí o fi ra sùùtì</i>	'Take this token to buy sweet'	11
B: <i>Ó ní ẹ ẹun gan-an ma</i>	'He/she said thank you ma'	12

From the extract, one can deduce that, apart from greeting the child as shown in line 10, the presentation of gift or candid gesture can also prompt intermediation. In line 11, A offers a token to the child while the mother thanks her/him on behalf of the baby. Among the Yorùbá, gifts are hardly taken from strangers. As shown in 12, the response may connote acceptance for a person that is well-known to the parents while the same response may mean a polite rejection of the gift to a stranger. The conversation in extract clearly shows that the interlocutors share the same social background that influences their language use in relation to the context of the discussion. This is actually shown in the mode of the greetings and the politeness involved in

accepting or rejecting gift from a known and unknown person in the context.

Greeting an extremely sick person

The Yorùbá believe that sickness is inevitable and that is why they often say '*a kì í ró kádún*' which literally meanings that one cannot be healthy all the year round. Thus, greeting as a moral and cultural obligation, does not exempt the sick because they are cherished within the ambit of the Yorùbá culture. The conversation below shows a hospital scene where an extremely sick person is being greeted:

	Translation	
A: <i>Ìyá Òjọ ẹ kú ojú méta</i>	'Ìyá Òjọ it is quite an age'	1
B: <i>Ẹ ẹun o</i>	'Thank you'	2
A: <i>Ó tó ojú méta tí mo rí Òjọ</i>	'I have not seen Òjọ for sometimes now'	3
B: <i>Ara rẹ kò yá àisàn náà le díẹ</i>	'He is sick and the ailment is serious'	4
A: <i>Ẹ pẹlẹ, ẹ sì kú itójú</i>	'Sorry, thanks for the care'	5
B: <i>Ó wà nínú yàrá itójú, ẹ yọ jú si</i>	'He is in the treatment room, you can go in to see him'	6
A: <i>Òjọ pẹlẹ o báwo lará ẹ?</i>	'Òjọ how are you and how are you feeling now?'	7
B: <i>Ó ní ará le</i>	'He said, he is better'	8
A: <i>Àisàn rẹ yí lágbara ooo</i>	'This sickness is severe'	9
B: <i>Kò tí ì sọrọ láti iṣẹta</i>	'He has not talked for three days'	10
A: <i>Ọlórún á fún ẹ ní àlàáfíà</i>	'God will grant you quick recovery'	11
B: <i>Àmin</i>	'Amen'	12

In the conversation, one will notice that **Mrs. B** is an acquaintance of **Mrs. A**. The norm in the Yoruba setting is to ask after whoever has not been heard of or seen for some time to know his/her whereabouts. This comes into play when **Mrs. A** who had not seen Òjọ for quite some time was eager to know his whereabouts from the mother. In the extract,

Òjọ, the son of **Mrs. B** is extremely sick and cannot talk because of the severity of the illness; but the moral obligation mandated **Mrs. A** to greet him (Òjọ), irrespective of whether he could answer or not. **Mrs. A** greeted Òjọ as shown in line (7) but the mother (**Mrs. B**), knowing full well that the child could not talk due to his sickness comes in between the conversation to fulfill the cultural rite. It is worthy to note that the role of the third party in the discussion is due to incapacitation on the part of the person being greeted. From the conversation in the extract, it is certain that the interlocutors share the same norms and beliefs with regards to extremely sick people. The shared norms and beliefs dictate the flow of the conversation, their world view and feelings towards the members of their community in the situation.

Greeting the bereaved

It is a common belief in Yorùbá culture that no mortal can escape death. That is why they normally say '*àwáyé ì kú kan kò sí gbogbo wa la ó re iwàlè àsà*' (death is inevitable surely every mortal must go to the great beyond). Based on this background knowledge, the Yorùbá culture values greeting the bereaved, because, no matter how long someone stays on earth, death will surely visit his/her doorstep. Thus, when an elderly person dies, people in the society normally pay condolence visit to the children of the deceased and in some cases, the community head or the king may send people to greet the children of the deceased. This type of greeting connotes felicitating with children of the dead, because, they are alive to bury their parent. In such instances, the Yorùbá people will greet the children of the deceased *ẹ kú àṣẹyìndè bàbá/mámá* (greeting for the death of an elderly person). The burial of elderly people often comes with big celebration among the kids of the deceased. That is why the Yoruba will say *Òkú ọlọmọ àṣẹṣetán* (the burial of one who bears children never ends). However, in Yorùbá culture, whenever a young person dies, such death is referred to as *òkú ọfẹ* 'untimely death' apart from individuals who have come to sympathize the parent of the deceased, selected elderly people may also be sent to greet the parents of the deceased either by the king of a town or by the community head. The

conversation below shows a typical scenario of greeting the bereaved (untimely death).

- A: *E pẹ̀lẹ̀ Bàbá àti Ìyá Àbẹ̀fẹ̀* 1
A: *Àwọn ilú ní kí á ẹ̀ yín ní pẹ̀lẹ̀, wọn ní a ò ní rí irú ẹ̀ mọ̀* 2
C: *E ẹ̀sun ẹ̀yin ọ̀dọ̀ ilú, irú nńkan búburú bá yì kò ní ẹ̀lẹ̀ sí wa mọ̀* 3
C: *A ò ní fí irú ẹ̀ gbá* 4
A: *Àmin oo* 5

Translation:

- A: 'Àbẹ̀fẹ̀' s mother and father we sympathise with you' 1
A: 'The town people sent you their greetings; they said such a sad event will not occur to you again' 2
C: 'Thank you the youth of our town, such a sad happening will not befall us again' 3
C: 'We won't visit you on account of sad event like this' 4
A: 'Amen' 5

The extract shows that three groups of people are involved: the parents of the deceased, a member of their family who is sympathizing with them and the youths sent by the town people. One will notice that the youths direct their greetings to the parents of the deceased as shown in lines 1&2 in the conversation; but the severity of the sadness does not allow the parents of the deceased to reciprocate the greeting. **Mr. C** who understands the gravity of sadness the deceased's parents are going through quickly keys into the discourse to fulfill the cultural obligation, as shown in lines 3&4. Similarly, the home movie titled 'Assignment' presents a scenario where Bísí the daughter of Fausat Balogun (Madam Saje) is gang raped in school by cultists and dies in the process. The friends come to greet the mother who is in seclusion because of the ugly incident. The third party who happens to be the younger sister answers the friends who come to commensurate with the deceased's mother. This scenario in the film provides another shade of intermediation where the person greeted may be absent at the scene but the third party would stand in for him/her. See the examples below:

- Friend1: *Ó ẹ̀şẹ̀şẹ̀ pẹ̀ mí tán ní ọ̀sán ọ̀jọ̀ yẹn ní* 1
Friend2: *Àşẹ̀ bí ènìyàn ẹ̀ máá ní kú nì yí?* 2
Friend3: *Kíí ẹ̀ oníjògbòn oooo* 3
Third party: *E ẹ̀sun, a kú ọ̀rọ̀ ènìyàn ọ̀lọ̀run kò ní jẹ̀ kí á rí irú ẹ̀ mọ̀* 4

Translation

- Friend1: 'He just called in the afternoon of the incident' 1
Friend2: 'Is this how people die?' 2
Friend3: 'She is not a troublesome person' 3
Third party (The aunt of the deceased): 'Thank you, God will give us the fortitude to bear the loss; we won't see such an incident again.' 4

From the extract, the intermediary is greeting the friends on behalf of the deceased's mother who went into seclusion after the death of her only daughter. From the examples cited earlier, one can see that the person(s) being greeted are present at the scene of the conversation; but in this particular situation, the person is absent. This shows that greetings can be answered for people in their absence in the Yorùbá culture. Furthermore, the extracts present sad situations that demand the understanding of some core cultural values of the Yorùbá people before greetings can be offered. Also, it shows that untimely death has great impact on the psychology and belief of the Yorùbá people with respect to the choice of their language use, attitude, feelings, emotions and behaviour.

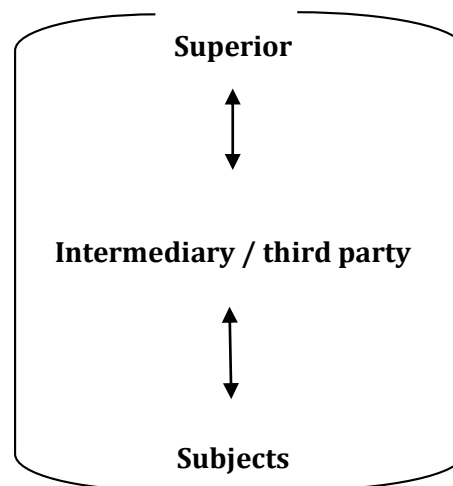
Socio-Cultural Overview

From the presentation so far, it is apparent that Yorùbá culture does not allow for a vacuum in greeting discourse, such that, whoever is greeted must respond; except for the occasions discussed where a third party responds on behalf of the persons being greeted. It is worthy of note that both the greeting forms and their responses have norms which guide them in Yorùbá cultural

settings that must be shared by the interlocutors and the third party in the discourse. This shared cultural background will enable the interlocutors to understand that greetings must be answered, and where there are lapses, the third party must key into the discussion to fulfill the moral obligation. Moreover, the superior and the subject (king and visitor) relationship in Yorùbá greeting discourse as exemplified in (6.1) shows the

upward and downward flow of information through an intermediary who acts as the vessel. The subject in this communication circle cannot interact directly with the superior without the third party. The schema below represents the communication link.

Figure 1: The Communication Link Scheme



The schema above shows that the direction of greetings flows from the bottom to the top echelon. The interlocutors (king and the subject) cannot interact directly because of **cultural constraints**. Therefore, the intermediary in the discussion circle acts as the image-maker or mouthpiece of the superior to the subjects. One will notice that this type of communication setting differs slightly from vertical communication where information flows downwards and upwards, freely. In the Yorùbá traditional setting, information from the top must pass downwards through the intermediary, while information from the bottom must pass upwards through the same link. However, this communication scenario may not be applicable all the times. There are situations where the superior may wish to communicate directly with his subjects, but the occasions are rare. Moreover, the role of the intermediary in the greeting discourse between the king and his subject is a sign of authority that is attached to the throne by tradition.

Apart from the cultural constraints that bring about an intermediary in superior and subject greeting relationship, **situational constraints** can also be responsible for intermediaries in greeting discourse. In this situation, the communication pattern is horizontal. However, for certain reasons, the person or persons greeted cannot have the luxury to answer. The contexts include: greeting a toddler, greeting the bereaved and greeting an extremely sick person. The toddler is constrained by age, while an extremely sick person has health challenges and the bereaved is constrained by sadness. In these three situations, Yorùbá culture recommends greeting, and, for cultural obligations to be fulfilled, the intermediary becomes inevitable. Abiodun (2006) explains that one of the social functions of language is referred to as 'phatic communion'. In Yorùbá cultural settings, greeting is used to foster friendship and enhance cordial social relationship. Thus, when greeting is directed at somebody and he/she is carried away by what he/she is doing at the moment, the attention of such person will be drawn to the greeting whenever they

meet again so that he could fulfill the cultural obligations. Yorùbá will say *Mò ní kí yín lèṣẹkan ẹ ó gbò* 'I was greeting you but you didn't respond'. Furthermore, days and weeks are no barriers to response in the Yorùbá greeting discourse, Yorùbá will say *Mò ní kí yín láná/òsẹ tó kọjá ẹ ò gbó* 'I was greeting you yesterday or last week but didn't respond'. Moreover, whenever the attention of the person greeted is drawn to such greeting he/she will apologize, thank the person that greeted him/her and respond to the greeting. However, in a situation whereby **situational constraints** have prevented or come between the addressee and the addressed in greeting discourse, the intermediation of the third party could be for politeness in case of a toddler, incapacitation in the case of an extremely sick person and the bereaved. For both cultural and situational constraints discussed, the interlocutors must share the same linguistic competence which encompasses sociological, situational and psychological to enhance mutual understanding of the situation and facilitate appropriate response in the contexts.

Conclusion

It has been established in this paper that previous studies have limited the scope of greeting discussions to the exchange of pleasantries between two people, groups and communities. This study seeks to go beyond this. It has shown that greeting discussion does ensue between two people but **cultural and situational constraints** do hinder direct answers or responses from the person(s) greeted to reply. As a result, an intermediary comes into the discussion to fulfill the cultural and moral obligations as well as eliminate communication gaps. It has also been shown that activities such as greeting for or on behalf of somebody else are ways of transmitting the politeness culture of the Yorùbá people to the younger generation.

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