

Lumela/Lumela: A Socio-Pragmatic Analysis of Sesotho Greetings

DELE FEMI AKINDELE

University of Botswana, Botswana

ABSTRACT

This paper is a study of a very significant aspect of day-to-day interactional discourse of the Basotho sociolinguistic community of Southern Africa: the phenomenon of greeting. The study examines the types and structural organization of Sesotho greeting sequence and the sociolinguistic factors that account for this structuring. It also considers the functions of greetings in the overall life of the people. The analysis has shown that greeting is a normal sociolinguistic routine meant for the establishment of interpersonal relationship and also a serious business of topic introduction and development in Sesotho, since it involves knowing about the welfare of the person being greeted, his/her family relations and friends. It also suggests that deference to age, context of situation and time are powerful factors in the organization of Sesotho greetings. Finally, the data has shown in some respects that there is a similarity between the types and structuring of Sesotho greetings and those of the Yoruba, Setswana, Shona and Arabic.

Keywords: greetings, sociolinguistics, pragmatics, ethnography of communication

INTRODUCTION

In studying and using any particular language, it is not sufficient to master the phonology, syntax, lexis and morphology as a mark of communicative competence. The basic discourse rules or conversational routines of such a language are highly essential. These routines include among others how greetings, compliments, invitations, and the like are given, interpreted and responded to. Unfortunately these are considered trivial and therefore unnecessary to warrant any academic study.

In the Basotho¹ sociolinguistic community quite a significant effort has been devoted to the study of Sesotho Syntax, morphology, phonology, lexicon, tradition, culture and literary genres and a substantial amount of literature has been produced in these areas. (See for instance Ashton (1949), Kunene (1971),

¹ Lesotho is an independent landlocked country entirely surrounded by the Republic of South Africa and has a population of about 2 million. The people are referred to as Basotho (pl.) and Mosotho (sg.). The language spoken is Sesotho and it is the national and one of the languages, English being the second one. Sesotho is spoken by all the Basotho regardless of the different ethnic groups to which they belong. That is why it is always said that Lesotho is “one nation, one language”. (Mokitimi, M.I. 1997: xviii).

Jacottet & Jankie (1972), Guma (1975) Bereng (1982), Mabile & Dieterlen (1985), Doko & Mofokeng (1985). As is the case in most communities in Africa (Akindele 1990, 1994) there is little or no study at all carried out specifically on Sesotho rules of speaking and greeting system. Yet the phenomenon of Sesotho greeting forms part of the Basotho linguistic etiquette with its set of norms that guide behaviour patterns. Etiquette in this context involves procedure, manners, forms, ceremonies, prescribed convention and custom of the Basotho sociolinguistic community. It is best summed up and symbolized in the way the Basotho use their language, which includes greeting as a sociolinguistic event. Greeting, which constitutes an integral part of the Basotho etiquette imposes on each member 'an obligation on how to conduct oneself in a particular way toward others' (Goffman 1956). Sesotho greeting is informed by rules of conduct, and is an inevitable part of everyday conversation. It 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 Basotho, 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, Sesotho 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 street. One does not greet only the people one knows. The trend is changing in modern times, especially in urban areas where people are only concerned about those who are close to them. This is a result of the contact with western culture. Among the Basotho, 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".

1. METHODOLOGY

The approach used for the collection of the data for the study was by means of introspection by native speakers from within their own circle of friends and relations at the National University of Lesotho, Roma Campus; Roma township; the city of Maseru, the capital of Lesotho, and in the suburban Maseru villages. The Basotho share common history, culture and language (Sesotho), and the mode of greeting is the same.

Sixty third-year students taking my *Introduction to Communication and Pragmatics* course in 2001/2002 at the National University of Lesotho collected the various forms of Sesotho greetings. The collection of the data involved audio and verbatim recording of greeting events, observation of people greeting each other. The informants provided a great deal of information concerning greeting by using their own experience and internalization of rules of greetings. The informants also assisted in transcribing the recorded greetings and translating them into English. The greetings were written down in Sesotho by student-reporters/informants and jointly transcribed by the researcher and some of the students. The transcriptions were then cross-checked with other Sesotho speakers. The advantage of this method is that data passes through two stages of introspection by native speakers i.e. the informants and student reporter as well as the researcher.

2. GREETING AS A SOCIOLINGUISTIC EVENT

Greetings 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, as in the case of two students interacting thus:

Mpho: lumela Johane Johane: e Mpho	Mpho: Good morning John John: Yes Mpho	Opening
Mpho: O phela joang? Johane: O phela hantle	Mpho: How are you? John: I am fine/well	Opening
Mpho: Sala hantle Johane: Tsamaea hantle	Mpho: Goodbye John: Stay well.	Closing

It is also used to end a conversation as shown in the closing sequence. Greeting is a phenomenon that must occur between two persons or between a person and a group visible to each other, out on the road, at work, shopping, at the coffee shop, at the drinking bar, at meetings, at home, at social functions, and so on. 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 et al., 1976: 12).

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 permuted 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, as I shall show presently. 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).

3. GREETINGS IN THE BASOTHO COMMUNITY

The system of greeting in the Basotho sociolinguistic community is similar to that of some other African communities (Irvine 1974, Pongweni 1983, Akindele 1990). Among the Basotho, there are different types of greetings for various occasions even though the formula for such greetings may be the same, namely *lumela*. This includes, 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. This can be compared with Yoruba greeting system (Fadipe 1970, Akindele 1990) and Oman Arabic greetings (Ibrahim et al. 1976; Emery, 2000).

There are Sociolinguistic factors that account for the type and structuring of Sesotho greeting. They include age, sex, context and time. Although there seems to be cultural assumptions of equality and about the character and motivations of participants, nevertheless deference or respect is accorded to whoever deserves it among the Basotho, 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 Sesotho. 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. This seems to be the pattern in the villages. It is not quite so in the urban centre and the university community. It was observed during the course of this study that the younger ones rarely offer greetings to the older ones. In fact, it was the older ones that greet the younger ones in the university.

There is also a seemingly ethical code of the Basotho which makes it a duty to greet people at various occasions. It appears that there is a general belief that greetings bring peace and unity to the community of the Basotho. A child who does not know how to greet is considered defective in his/her upbringing. Greeting persons who are bereaved or who recorded success is regarded as a mark of intimacy and concern for the others among the Basotho. Failure to offer such greetings may give rise to bad feelings especially among relations or close friends. One should be able to greet one's relations and ask not only about their welfare but also that of their family and friends. This may perhaps, explain the type and structure of Sesotho greeting. 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.

4. TYPES OF SESOTHO GREETINGS

A. Morning greeting

Ph: lumela Nkhono

Ja: lumela morali

Ja: ke tsohile joang?

Ph: Ke tsohile hantle

Ph: O phela Joang nkhono?

Ja: O phela hantle

Ph: Good morning grandma.

Ja: Good morning my daughter

Ja: How have you awoken?

Ph: I have awoken well.

Ph: How are you my grandmother?

Ja: I am well/fine

Note that the above greeting sequence took place between a granddaughter (Ph) and a grandmother (Ja). Ph initiated the greeting sequence in deference to her grandmother. Ja responded to Ph's greeting and then went on to ask about the welfare of her grandchild. Ph also asked about her granny's welfare, which she responded to with *ke phela hantle* (I am well).

B. Afternoon greetings

Teb: lumela 'm e	Teb: Good afternoon ma/madam
Mph: lumela 'm e	Mph: Good afternoon ma/madam
Teb: O hlotse joang?	Teb: How have you been faring?
Mph: Ke hlotse hantle	Mph: I am well/fine
Mph: O phela joang?	Mph: How are you?
Teb: Ke phela hantle	Teb: I am fine
Mph: ba sa phela hantle	Mph: They are well
Mph: 'm e oa hao o ea joang?	Mph: How's is your mother?
Teb: O phela hantle	Teb: She's fine/well
Teb: Telang o ea joang?	Teb: How's Telang?
Mph: O phela hantle	Mph: She.s fin/well
Teb: lumelisa bana	Teb: Greet your family for me
Mph: Ba ta lumela	Mph: I shall greet them
Teb: Sala hantle	Teb: Goodbye
Mph: Tsamaea hantle	Mph: Stay well.

The greeting sequence took place between two close friends who met, having parted for several months. This is possibly responsible for the length of the greeting sequence. Indeed the participants went on to discuss some interesting topics, which I considered irrelevant for the purpose of this study.

C. Evening greetings

Mk: lumela ntate	Mk: Good evening Sir
Mo: lumela ntate	Mo: Good evening Sir
Mk: O phela joang?	Mk: How are you?
Mo: Ke phela hantle	Mo: I am fine
Mk: U ea kae?	Mk: Where are you going?
Mo: Ke ea hae	Mo: I am going home
Mk: Ke hantle	Mk: Stay well
Mo: Tsamaea hantle	Mo: Go well

D. Night greetings

Mpho: lumela 'me	Mpho: Goodnight ma
Makh: robala hantle ausi	Makh: Sleep well sister
Mpho: ea 'me	Mpho: Yes ma

Note that *robala* is used to indicate singular. In greeting two or more persons *robalang* (plural) is used as in:

Pont/Mpho: lumela ntate
Malibo: robalang bo ausi
Pont/Mpho: ea ntate

Pont/Mpho: Goodnight sir
Malibo: Sleep well sisters
Pont/Mpho: Yes sir

Other variations of night greeting is exemplified as follows:

Mkl: fonane ntate
Mat: Fonane 'me

Mkl: Goodnight sir
Mat: Goodnight ma/madam

My informants stressed that *fonane* is borrowed from Nguni language of a South African tribe into Sesotho. Nguni is the language of a minority ethnic group in Lesotho (Mokitimi, 1997; Machobane (personal communication)). This form of greeting seems to be peculiar to the community of the Nguni people today.

E. Casual Greetings

- | | | |
|-------|---|---|
| (i) | Thi: lumela mm'e
Pal: ea ntate | Thi: goodday ma/madam
Pal: Yes, Sir |
| (ii) | Ph: lumela mm'e
Ha: e a ntate | Ph: Hello ma/madam
Ha: Yes sir. |
| (iii) | Fa: ho joang?
Se: Ho monate | Fa: How are things?
Se: Everything is fine |
| (iv) | Pul: le kae abuti
Neo: ke teng, lekae ausi | Pul: hello brother
Neo: I'm well, hello sister |

The first greeting exchanges (i) – (iii) are formal while the fourth type (iv) is regarded as casual. Traditionally, the fourth type of greeting is peculiar to people of the same age group. It is a marker of intimacy. It is not offered to someone who is older or who is not intimate. If used by a younger person for an older one, it will be considered rude. However, things are changing and today *le kae* is taken as a normal form of casual greeting that could be offered by any one to anybody, age notwithstanding. Other forms of greetings are:

- | | | |
|-------|---|--|
| (v) | Kh: lumela ngaka
Kon: lumela 'm e | Kh: Goodday doctor
Kon: Goodday ma/madam |
| (vi) | Jul: lumela Khaitsemi
Ph: lumela Khaitsemi
Jul: O phela joang?
Ph: Ke phela hantle | Jul: Hello brother
Ph: Hello sister
Jul: How are you?
Ph: I am fine |
| (vii) | Teb: lumela abuti
Mah: lumela khaitsemi | Teb: Good day brother
Mah: Goodday sister |

(viii) Pat: lumela ausi

Pum: lumela khaitsemi

Pat: Goodafternoon sister

Pum: Goodafternoon brother

Informants explained that *abuti* is used to refer to an older brother while *ausi* refers to an older sister. *Khaitsemi* suggests either sister or brother. A male person would call his female sibling *khaitsemi* whether he/she is younger or older. Similarly, a female person would also refer to her male sibling *khaitsemi* whether he/she is younger or older as in the case of examples (vi) and (vii) above. Also note that *abuti* is used as an address term for brother while *ausi* is used for sister whether older or younger in contemporary Basotho sociolinguistic community (Akindele, 2005).

One important thing about the above greeting types is the elaborate use of the formula *lumela*. As can be noted from the instances of the greeting sequences, *lumela* is used to suggest good morning, good afternoon, good evening, good day and hello. It is used when greeting a person or an individual. *Lumela* means accept my greetings or compliments. It is a linguistic manifestation of one's warm compliments to another person. Other informants argued that *lumela* means "*khotso ha ho uena, hoba e teng e ka ho na*" (Peace be on you because it is also in me). The plural form *lumelang* is used when greeting more than one person or a group of persons, as in:

Pat: lumelang bo ntate

Pat: Good morning sirs

Another greeting formula is *khotso*. It means peace (be on you). Its plural form is *khotsong* and is used in a salutation involving more than one person, e.g.

Mpo: Khotsong bo 'Me

Po/Te: e ea Mme

Mpo: Peace be on you madams.

Po/Te: Yes ma

F. Parting of ways/leave-taking

Po: Sala hantle

Ma: Tsamaea hantle

Po: Travel well/bye

Ma: Stay well

Other variants are:

Tit: Tsela tsoeu

Deb: Tsamaea hantle

Ann: Tsamaea hantle

Ca: Sala hantle

Ann: Itlhokomele

Ca: e 'Me

Ann: Ak'u ntumelisetse metsoalle
ea hao

Tit: Have a safe journey

Deb: Stay well

Ann: Goodbye/stay well

Ca: Goodbye

Ann: Take care of yourself

Ca: Yes madam.

Ann: Remember me to your friends
(Give my regards to your friends)

Ca: Ke tia ba lumelisa
Ann: Sala hantle
Jim: Tsamaea hantle

Ca: I shall greet them
Ann: Goodbye
Jim: Stay well

As can be seen from the greeting sequence, parting greeting in Sesotho is an elaborate thing and usually involves an expression of a series of good wishes for both parties who are leaving each other for one reason or the other. This pattern is also observable in Yoruba greeting (Akindele, 1990), in Arabic Oman (Emery 2000) and in English (Laver 1981). Indeed, Laver (1981) notes that parting ceremonials in English can be elaborate. It is characterized by two types of comment used in the parting phase thus: “(1) mitigatory comments (leaver gives reasons for leaving to avoid causing feelings of ‘rejection’ to the stayer thus addressing the latter’s negative face); and (2) consolidatory comments (leaver shows esteem for the other party with such expressions as ‘Nice to see you again’ directed towards the latter’s positive face)”.

G. Commiseration/condolences

Tse: Tseliseha motsoalle
Rot: Kea leboha
Tse: U se ke ua nyahama pelo
motsoalle.
Rot: Kea leboha
Mf: beta pelo khaitsele
Mos: ke a leboha
Mf: Ke rona re la Ie uena
Mos: Kea leboha

Tse: Take comfort my friends
Rot: Thank you
Tse: Don't be downcast my friend

Rot: thank you
Mf: take courage my brother
Mos: thank you
Mf: We share this loss with you
Mos: thank you

Like in many other African societies, the expression of condolences is a significant aspect of Basotho culture, hence the need to offer greeting to the bereaved. Thus, this type of greeting serves two main purposes, namely, to share the grief of the bereaved and express solidarity; and to give encouragement, as shown in the above examples.

H. Festivals

Hel: e monate kerese mese
Ler: e monate kerese meme
Hel: e monate paseka
Ler: e monate paseka

Hel: Merry Christmas
Ler: Merry Christmas
Hel: Happy Easter
Ler: Happy Easter

There seems to be no special greetings for festivals. However, the above types of greetings can be heard from the younger generation of the Basotho

community, who appear to be transferring the system of greeting in English into Sesotho.

There are other varieties of greetings. These include opening greetings and closing greetings, which serve as boundary markers in conversation, greetings for older and younger persons. Examples are:

I. Opening greetings

Sib: lumela
Kop: lumela
Em: Khotso

Sib: Hello
Kop: Hello
Em: Peace (be on you)

Mar: Khotso, kea leboha
Em: Lumela, u phela joang?
Mar: Lumela, ke phela hantle
Re: O phela joang?
Dou: Ke phela hantle

Mar: Peace (be on you), thank you
Em: Hello, how are you?
Mar: Hello, I'm well
Re: How are you?
Don: I'm fine

J. Closing greetings

Kh: Sala hantle
Th: Tsamaea hantle

Kh: Goodbye
Th: Stay well

Teb: tsamaea hantle
Rep: sala hantle

Teb: go well/goodbye
Rep: goodbye

K. Greetings for older persons

Han: lumela ntate
Map: lumela Mm'e
Pul: lumela Nkhono
Tha: lumela moholo

Han: greetings (hello) father/sir
Map: greetings (hello) mother/madam
Pul: greetings (hello) grandmother
Tha: greetings (hello) elderly man

L. Greetings for younger persons

Put: lumela moshanyana/mohlankana
Dor: lumela ngoanana/neaotana

Pul: Hello boy
Dor: Hello girl

5. SESOTHO GREETINGS AS A MARKER OF DEFERENCE

The Basotho pay particular attention to the issue of respect. This is reflected in the Sesotho greeting system. It is very rare to find people greeting each other by

using first names (FN), last names (LN), titles plus last name (TLN) or titles only. e.g.

Phu: lumela Palesa	Phu: Goodday Palesa
Pal: lumela Phumeza	Pal: Goodday Phumeza
Phu: O phela joang Palesa	Phu: How are you Palesa
Pal: Ke phela hantle Phumeza	Pal: I am fine Phumeza
Thu: Sala hantle moruti	Thu: Goodbye Professor/Priest
Moh: Sala hantle ngaka	Moh: Goodbye Doctor

Instead of using these forms of address in greetings, the terms *ntate* and *mm'e* are often used for older persons, e.g. *lumela/khotso ntate/mm'e*. Literally *ntate* means father and *mm'e* means mother. The socio-cultural implication of these address terms is that their semantic import goes beyond the ordinary literal interpretation. The terms are used as gender markers: *ntate* (male) and *mm'e* (female). The connotative meaning of the terms within their context of use in social interaction can be summarized thus:

ntate → male (adult), father, Mr.
Mm'e → female (adult), mother, Mrs, Ms, madam

It is strongly believed and widely held that *ntate* and *mm'e* are used positively in the process of greeting. They may be used in a positive sense to indicate respect for one another. For instance, informants explained that even lovers, husbands and wives employ the term *ntate* and *mm'e* when greeting one another as a marker of deference. This suggests that they hold each other in high esteem.

It should be stressed that greeting persons with *ntate* and *mm'e* does not imply that such persons may necessarily be fathers or mothers in the literal sense. Indeed, it was also observed during the course of this study that *ntate moruti* was used as a term of address for the Bishop of a diocese as a way of identifying his gender and in reverence to him. It should also be noted that *ntate* and *mm'e* are the basic terms used while addressing older persons. e.g. *ntate Dele*, *ntate Johane*, *mm'e Puleng*, *mm'e Teboho* (see Akindele 2005). The terms are also used at times as a greeting formula. In this case a deletion rule is applied where *lumela* is covertly expressed. In some cases *lumela* can be signalled by a wave of hand or a head nod. e.g.

Mof: ntate	Mof: Goodday sir
Mic: e ea ntate	Mic: Goodday sir
Mof: o phela joang?	Mof: How are you?
Mic: ke phela hantle	Mic: I am fine.

There are also other forms of Sesotho greetings that denote respect. These include: *lumela moholoane* – goodday elder or *lumela mohlomphehi* – Hello

respected one. Note that *moholoane* refers to older male sibling while *moena* is used when reference is made to a younger brother.

6. STRUCTURAL ORGANIZATION OF SESOTHO GREETINGS

In analyzing the structure of Sesotho greetings, I draw on the theoretical framework of discourse analysis as proposed by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) and further developed in Ventola (1987) and Akindele (1988, 1990). Following these scholars, I define Sesotho greeting as an interactional discourse organized around at least two participants; one of them initiates and another responds and these two successive utterances form the basis of verbal interaction, which I refer to as an exchange. It is marked by an initiating (I) move or utterance which predicts a response (R), but the predicted move or utterance does not set up any expectation of a precise response, though a voluntary move can occur following it (Akindele 1988), as in the following opening greeting:

Ann: lumela 'm'e	I Ann: Good morning ma/madam
Let: e ntate	R Let: Good morning sir
Ann: o phela joang?	I Ann: How are you?
Let: Ke phela hantle	R Let: I am fine

There are two types of exchanges observable in Sesotho greetings. These are Prefatory and Informatory. A prefatory-oriented exchange is the minimal interactional exchange which has no content information as far as the business of the talk is concerned, but provides an opportunity to make the participants available for more talk. It is thus a type of preliminary, preparatory talk or phatic communication (Akindele 1990: 9). On the other hand, informatory exchanges are units of discourse concerned with negotiating the transmission of information or the topic of discourse.

Sesotho greeting system seems to exemplify the two types of exchanges defined above. The greeting sequences classified as casual are instances of prefatory exchanges. This type occurs very frequently in Sesotho greetings. It is the type that Irvine (1974: 172) observed in Wolof greeting system and labelled it Passing Greeting. This type of greeting is also observed in Arabic Oman greetings (Ibrahim et. al. 1976, Emery 2000), and in English (Laver 1981). It occurs between persons that are not very familiar, or between relations, friends or acquaintances who see each other constantly, but who are in a hurry for some legitimate reasons. Passing greeting in Sesotho is illustrated in the following examples:

6.1 PASSING GREETINGS

Hel: lumela mm' e	Met: Hello madam (type 1)
Pu: lumela ntate	Pu: Hello Sir

Ha: lumela khaitsele
Pe: lumela khaitsele
Mp: Sala hantle
Pa: Sala hantle
Kib: Phepi
Lin: Ke a leboha

Ma: Good evening brother (type 2)
Pe: Good evening sister
Mp: Goodbye (type 3)
Pa: Goodbye
Kib: sorry (type 4)
Kin: thank you

The greeting sequences 1–3 can be regarded as prefatory or phatic and they compare favourably with the type of greetings common with native speakers of English (Laver 1981). Type 4 is a casual expression of sympathy to/by someone who gets hurt. This is in contrast with the native English 'watch out' or 'be careful' (Chris Dunton: personal communication). It was observed that in Basotho culture the onlooker has to greet a person who slips even when, as might be suggested by the English gloss 'sorry', he/she is not responsible for the 'accident'.

However, a person who sneezes or coughs will apologize by saying *ntsoarele*. Some of my informants explained that the person who gets hurt might also say *phepi* to those present at the scene of the 'accident'. The two words: *phepi* and *ntsoarele* can be used interchangeably. Further investigation shows that the expressions are not used for older persons. "There seems to be a childish tone attributed to it", claimed some informants; hence equals often used the two expressions. In addition, *phepi* may be used as a marker of intimacy or minimum social distance as in the case of a younger person saying *phepi* to an older person, as in a girl friend/boy friend relationship (Machobane: personal communication).

The structure of Sesotho Casual or Passing Greeting can be expressed with the following formulae: **Pr G + (Inf G). Prefatory Greeting + (Informatory Greeting)**; where Inf G is an optional element in the greeting sequence. The prefatory greeting will therefore be regarded as a final or terminal exchange in that event, as illustrated in types 1–4 above.

It was also observed that there is another type of Sesotho greeting, which does not end with the passing greeting sequence. In other words, the sequence of Sesotho greetings can also be understood in terms of informatory exchanges which are content-oriented. This type of greeting sequence can be called normal greeting as observed in Yoruba greeting (Akindele 1990). It is exemplified as follows:

6.2 NORMAL GREETINGS

Mk: lumela 'm e	I	Mk: Good afternoon ma	Opening/ Prefatory
Ho: luniela 'm e	R	Mo: Good afternoon ma	
Hk: O phela joang?	I	Mk: How are you?	
Mo: Ke phela hantle	R	Mo: I am fine	
Mk: na u sa phela?	I	Mk: Are you well?	Informatory 1

Mo: E, ke ntse ke phela hantle	R	Mo: Yes, I'm quite well	
Mk: bana ba hao ba ea joang?	I	Mk: Are your children well?	Informatory 2
Mo: ba sa phela hantle	R	Mo: They are well	
Mk: 'me oa hao o ea joang?	I	Mk: How's your mother?	Informatory 3
Mo: O phela hantle	R	Mo: She's well	
Mk: ausi oa hao o ea joang?	I	Mk: How's your sister?	Informatory 3
Mo: o phela hantle	R	Mo: She's well	
Mk: lumelisa bana ba hao	I	Mk: Greet your family for me	Pre-closing
Mo: Ke tia ba lumelisa	R	Mo: I shall greet them	
Mk: Sala hantle	I	Mk: Goodbye	Closing
Ho: Sala hantle	R	Ho: Goodbye	

As can be observed from the above greeting sequence, the first part of the greeting sequence is the prefatory element or opening while the second part of the sequence is the informatory. There is also the third part, which constitutes the pre-closing and closing greetings. Both forms, prefatory, informatory and closing greetings are obligatory in this sequence of greeting. The pre-closing sequence may be optional.

A comparison of normal Sesotho greeting and its passing/casual greeting suggest that they are different in terms of structure and in the context in which they can occur. In fact normal Sesotho greeting sequence, as exemplified above, is unique in the sense that even the second obligatory part of the greeting sequence (Informatory) has three sub-parts labelled 1, 2 and 3. These three sub-types of greetings are introduced by specific questions which deal with the welfare of the person greeted, questions about family or children, and questions concerning the state of other persons or relations e.g. mother and sister.

It seems obligatory to ask one of these questions immediately after the preliminary or opening greeting sequence. As shown in the example of normal greeting sequence above, the questions used in a greeting of this type are stereotyped and are followed by stereotyped responses. For example, when Mo was asked about the welfare of her children, her response was *ba sa phela hantle* (They are well). The closing greeting sequence is also important. It indicates that the greeting event is over. The structure of normal Sesotho greeting sequence can be reformulated thus:

- (a) Pr G + Inf or G
- (b) Inf Gt1 + (Inf Gt2) + (Inf Gt3) + (Pr C1G) + C1G

where Inf Gt1, 2 and 3 imply informatory greeting types 1, 2 and 3. Informatory greeting types 2 and 3, and Pre-closing greetings are optional elements of structure. The rest InfGt1 and C1G are obligatory elements.

It should be stressed that although there seems to be an apparent difference between the types of Sesotho greetings labelled prefatory and informatory, passing and normal, nevertheless the entire system to some extent appears phatic.

The structural organization of Sesotho greeting finds parallel in Yoruba, English and even Oman Arabic greeting sequence. In fact, Emery (2000: 202) observed that Stage 3 of the greeting sequence in OA is characterized as 'ritualised news inquiry', which takes the form of 'what has gone wrong? Or 'what has occurred?' and the conventional reply is 'nothing...as I have heard' or 'only peace'. Ibrahim (1976: 806) sees this stage as transitional and a movement towards referentiality whereby interlocutors express an interest in and a willingness to hear the news.

7. CONCLUSION

The foregoing analysis and discussion of types and structure of Sesotho greeting provides an insight into a society with its unique way of expressing solidarity and rapport among its people. The analysis has shown that greeting is a normal sociolinguistic routine meant for the establishment of interpersonal relationship and also a serious business of topic introduction and development, since it involves knowing about the welfare of the person being greeted, his/her family relations and friends. It also suggests that deference to age, context of situation and time are powerful factors in the organization of Sesotho greetings. The data presents a society that is sociolinguistically in transition and this is evident in the English type of greeting (hello), which has its equivalent in Sesotho as *le kae* frequently used by the younger generation. The transition is also seen in the way that people greet each other selectively in urban districts of Lesotho. Finally, the data has shown in some respects that there is a similarity between the types and structuring of Sesotho greetings and those of the Yoruba, English, Shona and Arabic.

REFERENCES

- Akindede, D.F. 1988.
The structure of family conversation in English-English and Yoruba English. In: E.H. Steiner & R. Veltman (eds.), *Pragmatics, Discourse and Text*. London: Frances Pinter.
- 1990 *A Sociolinguistic analysis of Yoruba greetings*. **Journal of African Languages and Cultures** 3(1): 98–113.
- 1994 *Conversational Routines in Yoruba Social Interaction*. **Institute of Cultural Studies Seminar Series**, Vol. 1, pp. 15–25. Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife.
- 2005 *Sesotho Address forms*. Paper presented at the 8th Conference of the Linguistics Association of SADC Universities, University of Mauritius, August 24–28, 2005.

- Ashton, H. 1949.
The Basotho. London: Oxford University Press.
- Bereng, P. 1982.
I am a Mosotho. Morija: Morija Printing Works.
- Doke, C.N. & Mofokeng, S.M. 1985.
Textbook of Southern Sotho Grammar. Cape Town: Longman.
- Emery, P.G. 2000.
Greeting, congratulating and commiserating in Omani Arabic Language. **Culture and Curriculum** 13(2): 196–217.
- Fadipe, N.A. 1970.
The Sociology of the Yoruba. Ibadan: University Press Limited.
- Geertz, C. 1972.
Linguistic Etiquette. In: J.A. Fishman (ed.), *Readings in the Sociology of Language*. The Hague: Mouton.
- Goffman, E. 1956.
The Nature of deference and demeanor. **American Anthropologist** 58: (473–402).
- Guma, S.M. 1975.
An Outline Structure of Southern Sotho. Pietermaritzburg: Shutter and Shooter.
- Harvey, S. 1982.
Semiotic Perspectives. London: George Allen & Unwin.
- Ibrahim, A.G.Y., Grimshaw, A.D. and Bird, C.S. 1976.
Greetings in the desert. **American Ethnologist** 3: 797–824.
- Irvine, J.T. 1974.
Strategies in Status Manipulation in the Wolof Greeting. In: R. Bauman, & J. Sherzer (eds.), *The Ethnography of Speaking*, pp. 167–191. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jacottet, E. & Jankie, H.E. 1972.
A Practical Method to Learn Sesuto. Morija: Morija Sesuto Book Project.
- Kunene, P.D. 1971.
Heroic Poetry of the Basotho. London: O.U.P.
- Laver, J. 1981.
Linguistic routines and politeness in greeting and parting. In: F. Coulmas (ed.), *Conversational Routines*. The Hague: Mouton.
- Mabille, A. & Dieterlen, H. 1985.
Sesuto-English Dictionary. Morija: Morija Sesuto Book Project.
- Mokitimi, M.I. 1997.
The Voice of the People: Proverbs of the Basotho. Pretoria, Unisa Press.
- Pongweni, A.J.C. 1983.
What's in a name: a study of Shona nomenclature. Gweru: Mambo Press.

Sinclair, J. McH, Coulthard, R.M. 1975.

Towards an Analysis of Discourse. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ventola, Eija 1987.

The Structure of Social Interaction. London: Frances Pinter.

About the author: *Dele Akindele* is a Professor of English and Linguistics and he teaches advanced communication skills and legal language at the University of Botswana. He taught English and linguistics at National University of Lesotho for eight years. His field of specialization is discourse analysis, textlinguistics and sociolinguistics and he has published a wide range of articles in these areas. He is also interested in African linguistics, particularly the plight of minority languages. He has co-authored *The Sociology and Politics of English in Nigeria*, Obafemi Awolowo University Press, Nigeria, 1992; and another book with Karsten Legere, Sandra Fitchat *Talking Freedom: Language and Democratisation in SADC Region*. Windhoek: Gamsberg, 2002. He is the Editor of *LASU: Journal of the linguistics Association of SADC Universities* and *BOJAL: Botswana Journal of Applied Linguistics*.