

***Iho popitha aantu?* – Don't you greet people?: A Contextual Analysis of Oshiwambo Greetings**

Petrus Angula Mbenzi¹ and Justina Meluwa Latenda Amakali²
University of Namibia

Abstract

This paper is intended to investigate the socio-pragmatic context of Oshiwambo greetings. There is a dearth of literature on the intricacies of Oshiwambo forms of greeting and the metamorphosis that it has undergone to date. Thus there is a need to investigate the present state of Oshiwambo greetings. The paper is pegged on Austin's Speech Act theory that emphasizes that utterances are the production of words and sentences on particular occasions by particular speakers for particular purposes. In view of that, Oshiwambo greetings are expressed to convey a specific message to the addressee by the addressor. Two approaches were employed to collect information for this paper namely, ethnographic approach to gauge the impact of Euro-western culture on Oshiwambo greetings and, documentation to dissect the socio-pragmatic context of Oshiwambo forms of greetings. The paper focuses on the functions, situations and types of greeting that exist in Oshiwambo. It further focuses on the paralinguistic and extra-linguistic features which complement the forms of greetings. The analysis has shown that greetings are an integral part of interactional discourse and serve as a prelude to the establishments of social relationships and that they can vary according to the age of the interactants and the circumstances under which the greetings take place. The paper further reveals that there are circumstances in which no exchange of greeting is expected. In the final analysis the paper reveals that western culture has an effect on the extra-linguistic features which accompany greetings thus both verbal and non-verbal modes of greetings are partly westernized.

Keywords: Greetings, Socio-pragmatic, Oshiwambo, Culture, Aawambo

Introduction

The paper investigates the socio-pragmatic context of Oshiwambo greetings, focusing on the functions, situations and types of greetings that exist in Oshiwambo. Greeting in Oshiwambo culture is a sociolinguistic event that guides the norms and behaviors of a person. According to Goffman (1956) "the rules of conduct constitute part of the etiquette of the group and impose on each other an obligation to conduct himself in particular way towards the others" (p. 477). Greeting is accompanied by the rules of conduct and regularizes the patterns of reciprocal behavior among the group members. It also facilitates the predictability and stability in interpersonal relationships and at same time, minimizes negative feelings or general misunderstanding. In exchanging

¹ **Petrus Mbenzi** is an Oshiwambo senior lecturer at the University of Namibia in the Department of Language and Literature Studies. He holds an MA and PHD from the University of Kwazulu-Natal and University of Namibia, respectively. He has specialised in Literature and Rhetoric, and has authored several school books. His research interests include lexicography, literature and onomastics and ethnoscience. E-mail: pmbenzi@unam.na

² **Justina Amakali** is a lecturer at University of Namibia Language Centre. She holds a PhD in English Studies. Her main research interests are in sociolinguistics, rhetorical studies and linguistic landscapes. E-mails: justinemtuleni@yahoo.com and jmtuleni@unam.na

greetings people promote social interaction and show respect for one another, hence the question *iho popitha aantu? don't you greet people?* is asked to challenge a person who doesn't often greet people. Greeting a person is obligatory and knows no bounds. The Aawambo do not pass by a person they have met several times in the same context without saying word like *ombili* (excuse me) or *Eewa* (It is alright or *Indi pite po* (May I pass).

The study of greeting appears to have been given a low prominence in language studies. Researchers often concentrate more on the study of linguistic disciplines and the study of literary genres. The information on the greeting system of Oshiwambo is, therefore, quite scanty in literature. Tirronen (1970), Hasheela and Zimmermann (1996), Tönjes (1948), Estermann (1979) gave information on the Oshiwambo Greetings. The information they provided is very limited as they presented raw data on greetings based on times of the day, for example, morning greetings, afternoon greetings and evening greetings. It is well –known that there are other types of greetings as well as the extra-linguistic features which accompany them. As such no attempt seems to have been made to provide the contextual analysis of Oshiwambo greetings. This study is, therefore, an attempt to carry out the socio-pragmatic analysis of Oshiwambo greetings. The aim of the study is to sensitize various people to give a priority to this important field but often a neglected.

Methodology

The approach used in collecting information for this study is participant observation. The Researchers have observed how the Oshiwambo speakers interact with him and how friends and acquaintances interact with each other on various occasions such as ceremonies, formal meetings etc. Our first year students at University of Namibia provided the fascinating window into the greeting system of Oshiwambo. We observed how they exchanged greeting in various ways which demonstrated that there is a change in the greeting system of the modern Oshiwambo society. The collection of the data involved the audio-visual recording of the interaction between people in different setting in order to capture both verbal and non-verbal forms of greeting.

After the recording we watched the audiovisual picture to analyze the greeting in their context and observe the paralinguistic elements which accompany the greeting. We listed the non-verbal items which intersperse with the greetings and the rules of etiquette that go with them. When we interpreted data, I we also relied on our own experience and the rules that we internalized.

In the final analysis, the data thus collected were analyzed according to Akindele model (2007) which focuses on the types of greetings and the paralinguistic aspects which complement the greetings.

Literature review

Oshiwambo greeting does not differ so much from the greetings of the other Bantu communities in Namibia. There are various forms of greeting in Oshiwambo which depend on time of the day and occasions. Such forms may differ depending on the circumstances. Akindele (2007) observes different types of greetings among Sesotho speakers and confirms that greeting is used serve as a prelude to the making of a proper conversation or introducing the topic of talk.

Similarly, Sacks (as cited in Agyekum, 2008) notes that “greetings are historically relevant and when they occur they properly occur at the beginning of a conversation. This makes the greetings an indispensable aspect because they have a fixed spot and when they are not there, their absence is predictable” (p. 495). Oshiwambo greetings also serve as prelude to the discussion. What often starts as greeting often develops into discussion about social issues within the community. There could be questions about rain, health status of people and animals, etc.

Agyekum (2008) makes similar observations among the Akan of Ghana that greeting extends to the enquiry about occupation, church and where the person is going. Agyekum (2008) further reveals that “other issues that pertain to social, political, religious, economic and educational life could be added to greetings” (p. 499).

In exchanging greeting, a junior often initiates the greeting but sometimes the context determines who initiates the greeting if one, for instance, finds the people seated somewhere, he/she is expected to initiate the greeting. When a junior greets a senior, or when a commoner greets royal people, eye contact is broken, the junior or commoner looks down as he exchanges greeting with a senior in order to show respect and exhibit his/her low status. Naden (1984) observes similar situation among the Mampruli of Ghana when he states that in Mampruli greeting, whatever the degree of eye contact necessary to establish greeting, it is broken when greeting begins and the eyes are lowered towards the feet or to one side of the alter. The same situation is observed in Igbo greetings by Nwoye (1993) who states that the social variable of age, sex and status dictates who initiates the greetings. The younger initiates a greeting with the older, the female with the male, and the status inferior with the status superior. Where sex and age conflict, as in case of an older female and a younger female, age will have a higher valency and the younger male will initiate the greeting with older female. While the commonality is that the younger greets the older first, the opposite happens in Otjiherero greeting in which an older is expected to initiate the greeting. (Kavari, 2008).

Nonetheless modern Aawambo, particularly ones tend to deviate from the norms, hence it is important to investigate their behavior in relation to greetings. Finnegan (as cited in Arowolo, 2010) testifies that, “there is no more respect for values that we held sacrosanct in Africa; young ones find it very difficult to greet elderly” (p. 12).

When one speaks to a senior person, one is compelled to lower the pitch and decrease the volume of his voice, for example, when the wife speaks to the husband she needs to speak in low voice. When greeting a king, the commoner must keep their voice low in pitch and volume (Auala, 1977). However, advocacy for women emancipation concomitant with the quest for equality rights for all appears to have an effect on greeting continuum.

The third person may also be used when greeting a senior, for example one can say: *Tate okwa lala po ngaa nawa?* (Did father sleep well?). In greeting a king, the use of the third person is also strictly applied, e.g. *Aantu oya lala po tuu?* (Did the people sleep well?). The third person is used for two reasons: to show respect and to show distance in terms of seniority.

Among the Masubia of the Caprivi, the commoner is not allowed to greet the chief directly, he/she greets him through the go-between who relays the message to the king (Mbala, 2004). Agyekum (2008) makes similar observation among the Akan of Ghana that, “in greetings the authorities, one has to channel the greetings through the Okyeame, the chief’s spokesperson; custom even demands that the person has to seek permission from the Okyeame and wait till permission is granted before formal greetings can take place” (p. 503). However, in Oshiwambo culture, the use of the spokesperson for the king in the exchange of greetings between a commoner and a king has become obsolete. In formal settings, the king addresses his subjects directly.

In Oshiwambo culture, the use of the third person is not simply confined to greetings, but it may be used in normal everyday conversations. For example, when a daughter/son asks something from his/her father she/he may use the third person, i.e. *Meme okwa pumbwa shike ano?* (What does mother need?).

Although greetings are used as a measure of politeness or impoliteness, there are situations in which no greetings are required. For instance, “it is a taboo to greet while going to the toilet”, (Agyekum, 2008, p. 499). Egblewogbe (1990) also notes that there are times when people do not need to greet, and these are: “before a person washes his or her mouth in the morning, when going to the urinal and when going to latrine” (p. 13). According to Dzameshie (2004), the motive behind this is that “one should not greet when one is about to engage in an *impure* activity” (p. 403).

Furthermore, westernization and its didactic import have affected the African forms of greetings. Most people who live in urban areas and those that are largely exposed to western education tend to imitate the western forms of greetings (Agyekum, 2008). Some people, especially in urban areas have abandoned what they term old fashion way of greetings and have adopted code-mixing to demonstrate the departure from primitive life (Agyekum, 2008). Likewise, they have created truncated form of greetings to imitate the western forms of greetings. For example, *Mwa lala po* and *Mu uhala po* have been collapsed into the truncated form *Aapo*.

Different Forms of Greetings

Oshiwambo greetings may be time-bound, thus are confined to different times of the day. Time of the day greeting consists of morning greeting, afternoon and evening greeting. The addressor asks the question while the addressee’s response would *Ee-ee* (Yes). However, at the end of the greeting both the addressor and addressee would say: *Ee-ee*. But the response of the addressor serves as a confirmation that all is well. In the following example A represents the addressor and B represents the addressee:

Morning Greetings (this is from early morning until 9h00)

A: *Mwa lala po meme?* Did you sleep, mother?

B: *Ee-ee.* Yes.

A: *Onawa ngaa/tuu?* Is it fine?

B: *Ee-ee, ne mwa lala po tate?* Yes, did you also sleep, father?

A: *Ee-ee.* Yes.

B: *Onawa ngaa/ tuu?* Is it fine?

A: *Ee-ee.* Yes.

B: *Ee-ee.* Yes.

Leave taking

A: *Shilwii po nawa meme.* Spend the late morning well mother

B: *Eewa, shilwii po wo nawa tate.* Yes, spend the late morning well also, father.

A: *Ee-ee.* Yes.

B: *Ee-ee.* Yes

Meme is used as a term of respect when greeting adult women or one’s biological mother or mother’s sisters. The short form of *meme* is *mee*. *Tate* is used when greeting an adult male person or one’s biological father or father’s brother. *Kuku* or *meekulu* is a term of respect used when greeting an older female person or any female person who holds senior rank or one’s grandmother. *Tatekulu* is the term of respect used when greeting an older male person or any male person who holds a high position, one’s sister’s brother or a grandfather. Furthermore, a clan name may also be used as honorific term in greetings, for example, *wa lele po mukwamhalanga* (good morning *mukwamhalanga*). *Mukwamhalanga* is the clan name. The clan names are only used to address females. A genitive morpheme *Gwa* may also be prefixed to a

patronym of a female to fulfil similar function, for example, *GwaKambonde*. Akindele (2007) argues that the socio-cultural implication of the Sesotho terms of address is that their semantic import goes beyond the ordinary literal interpretation.

Oshiwambo terms of respect such as *mumati* (boy), *mukadhona* (girl), *sheeli* (first born), *ntowele* (middle one), *nkelo* (last born) may be used in greeting acquaintances or young ones. *Mumati* and *mukadhona* cannot be used when greeting an adult, while *sheeli*, *ntowele* and *nkelo* are not confined to any age. Names may also be used when peers greet one another.

Late Morning Greetings from 9h00 until 11h00)

This form of greeting is exchanged between 9 and 11am. However, in the Oshiwambo culture the position of the sun determines the time frame of this form of greeting.

A: *Mwa shilwa po, meme?* Did you spend the late morning, mother?

B: *Ee-ee.* Yes.

A: *Onawa ngaa/ tuu?* Is it fine?

B: *Ee-ee, ne mwa shilwa po tate?* Yes, did you also spend the late morning, father?

A: *Ee-ee.* Yes.

B: *Onawa ngaa/ tuu?* Is it fine?

A: *Ee-ee.Onawa.* Yes. It is fine.

B: *Ee-ee.* Yes.

A: *Ee-ee.* Yes.

Leave taking

A: *Shilwii po nawa meme.* Spend the late morning well, mother.

B: *Eewa, ne ka shilwii po nawa, tate.* Yes, spend the late afternoon well, father.

A: *Ee-ee.* Yes.

B: *Ee-ee.* Yes.

Afternoon Greetings

A: *Mu uhala po, meme?* Did you spend the afternoon, mother?

B: *Ee-ee.* Yes.

A: *Onawa ngaa/ tuu?* Is it fine?

B: *Ee-ee, ne mu uhala po, meme?* Yes, did you also spend the afternoon, mother?

A: *Ee-ee.* Yes.

B: *Onawa ngaa/ tuu?* Is it fine?

A: *Ee-ee.Onawa.* Yes. It is fine.

B: *Ee-ee.* Yes.

Leave taking

A: *Uhalii po nawa, meme.* Spend the afternoon well, mother.

B: *Eewa, ne uhalii po wo nawa meme.* Yes, spend the afternoon well, mother also.

A: *Ee-ee.* Yes.

B: *Ee-ee.* Yes.

Evening Greetings

A: *Mwa tokelwa po, meme?* Did you spend the evening, mother?
B: *Ee-ee.* Yes.
A: *Onawa ngaa/ tuu?* Is it fine?
B: *Ee-ee, ne mwa tokelwa po tate?* Yes, did you also spend the evening father?
A: *Ee-ee.* Yes.
B: *Onawa ngaa/ tuu?* Is it fine?
A: *Ee-ee. Onawa.* Yes. It is fine.
B: *Ee-ee.* Yes.

Leave taking

A: *Tokelwii po nawa, meme.* Spend the evening well, mother.
B: *Eewa tokelwii po wo nawa, tate.* Spend the evening well also, father.
A: *Ee-ee.* Yes.
B: *Ee-ee.* Yes.

It has to be noted that when greeting acquaintances/ friends, the initiator of the greeting does not begin with the actual greeting straight away. The initiator says a few words before he/she commences with the greeting. Such words are often related to the situation in which he/she finds the addressee. Sometimes the addresser throws in a question, *Oya hokolola shike?* What have they told? in order to challenge the addressor to break the news. When writing on the Sesotho greetings (Akindele, 2007) sees the question "What has occurred or What has gone wrong as a ritualized news inquiry". The response to that question is a conventional reply 'nothing or only peace. The answers to the question: *Onawa tuu?* Is it fine? Or *Ombili ngaa* which is an alternative to *Onawa tuu?* is not always *Ee-ee.* Yes. But other appropriate responses may be given depending on the circumstances in which the addressee finds himself or herself.

Similarly when the addressor/ addressee is about to depart, he/she may say a proverb or any sayings which signal his/her departure, e.g. *Dhokana ihadhi gogoka.* (The words of mouth never come to an end). Naden (1984) observes similar situation in Mampruli greetings when he states that it is possible, although rather impolite, to suggest that it is time for a guest to leave by initiating one of these farewells.

Informal Greetings

These forms of greetings are not formally accepted among the Aawambo, especially among the adults, but they are very common among young people. These greetings apply to any time of the day. This form of greeting applies to all times of the day and is appropriate for any occasion. Writing on the pragmatic values of Norwegian greetings, Rygg (2017) observes that "a property of modern greetings is that they are no longer situation-specific but general, and thus, serve as greetings any time of day, in any situation, and regardless of people's background" (p. 162). Furthermore, Akindele (2007) reveals the same situation in Sesotho greetings when he stresses that *le kae* (How are you?) is peculiar to the 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. The examples of informal greetings are as follows:

A: *Ongiini, kuume?* How are you, friend?
B: *Onawa, ngoye ongiini?* Fine! and how is it with you?
A: *Onawa.* It is fine.

Or

A: *Oshi li ngiini?* How is it?

B: *Oshi li nawa.* It is fine.

Or

A: *Otashe ende ngiini?* How is it going?

B: *Otashe ende nawa.* It is going well.

Leave taking

Oshi iwete. We will see each other.

Eewa, oshi iwete. Yes. We will see each other.

Or

Oshi li nawa. It is fine.

Eewa, Oshi li nawa. Yes. It is fine.

Or

A: *Nashi tye ngawo.* Let it be like that.

B: *Eewa, nashi tye ngawo.* Yes, let it be like that.

Note: *Nashi tye ngawo* also means So be it. Or do it like that.

Apart from those greetings, young people now have come up with forms of greeting that are related to the time of the day. This greeting seems to have been copied from English greetings: How is the day, the morning / the evening:

Morning greetings

A: *Ongula?* How is the morning?

B: *Ongula oyi li nawa.* The morning is fine

Afternoon Greetings

A: *Omuuhalo?* How is the day?

B: *Omuuhalo ogu li nawa.* The day is fine.

Evening Greetings

A: *Omutokelo?* How is the evening?

B: *Omutokelo ogu li nawa.* The evening is fine

Although these forms of greetings, which are linked to different times of the day, are regarded as a formal way of exchanging greetings, the truncated forms, which are common among young people, are considered rude by adults. Furthermore, it must be noted that extra-linguistic features which accompany informal greeting. Young Aawambo tend to slap each others' hands, touch one another's hands, thumbs, clenched fists or touch their shoulders with clenched fists.



Figure 1. Shoulder sign



Figure 2. Thumb to thumb sign



Figure 3. Hand to hand sign



Figure 4. Fist to fist sign

These gestures (in Figures 1, 2, 3, and 4) go hand in hand with their verbal communication. Abercrombie (1968) aptly puts it that:

We speak with our vocal organs, but we converse with our entire bodies Paralinguistic phenomena... occur alongside spoken language, interact with it, and produce together with it a total system of communication... The study of paralinguistic behaviour is part of the study of conversation: the conversational use of spoken language cannot be properly understood unless paralinguistic elements are taken into account (p. 55).

The above text demonstrates that, paralinguistic and extra-linguistic features play a significant role in exchange of greetings. Thus greeting would be incomplete if it is not accompanied by appropriate gestures.

Although young people depart from the formal way of greeting, they restrict their informal greeting to themselves so as not to offend the adults. In this case, young people attempt to be polite to adults. Agyekum (2008) argues that, "the most common kind of politeness formulae in most languages and societies are involved with greetings because greetings are part of the positive politeness that fosters social relationship and solidarity." (p.496). The students that we interacted with, though many used the informal greeting interacting with one another, when we greeted them in the informal way, they responded in the formal way, e.g. *Ongiini? Onawa, Tate. Wa lala po, tate?* (How are you, sir? It is fine, sir. How did you sleep?). Some gave a smile and omitted the response to the question *Ongiini* (how are you?) and responded in the formal way. We were once standing with four students and another student came to greet us. The greeting went on as follows: *Mwa lala po, Tate* (How did you sleep, Sir? *Ongiini, Shikesho, Ongiini, Kauluma*. This shows that young people change their modes of greeting when they turn to parents and peers respectively.

Greeting someone upon return

- A. *Mwa galuka?* Are you back?
B: *Ee-ee.* Yes.
A: *Omwa galuka ngaa nawa?* Are you back safely?
B: *Ee-ee.* Yes.
A: *Ee-ee.* Yes.
B: *Ne, omo mu li?* Are you in?
A: *Ee-ee.* Yes.
B: *Ee-ee.* Yes.

Note that this greeting is often used when the interactants are in the homestead. Often the arriving person poses the question. *Omo mu li?* Are you in? If used outside the homestead the question: *Omo mu li?* Are you in? , becomes redundant.

Greeting a visitor/guest

Our observation confirms that it is a sociocultural obligation for the host to welcome the guest or visitor (Agyekum, 2008). There are special phrases of welcome. The recurrent pattern is that the host says the welcoming phrases and concludes the short panegyric in honour of the guest. The guest responds to the welcoming phrases verbally and gave a smile while being praised, for example:

Host: *Otaate, otaate. Oye naanaa.* It is father, it is father.
It is really him.
Guest: *Ongaaye.* It is me.

Ekanda lyeke lya kamunuka
Pev' oyana ihaali ethele
Uushimba ku lyate
Ohambo olukalwa...
(The strong man whose hand remains open
He does not abandon his children
He has been to Uushimba

Cattle post is his dwelling)

These preludes are then following by the actual greeting. The preludes are uttered while the guest arriving whereas the actual exchange of greeting happens at the reception area (*oshoto*) or in the cooking area (*elugo*), depending on the sex of the visitor. A man is welcomed at *oshoto* while a woman is welcomed in *elugo*.

A: *Mwe ya po?* Did you come?

B: *Ee-ee.* Yes.

A: *Mwe ya po nawa.* Did you come safely?

B: *Ee-ee.* Yes.

A: *Ee-ee.* Yes.

B: *Ne, opo mu li?* Are you alive?

A: *Ee-ee.* Yes.

B: *Ee-ee.* Yes.

Leave taking

A: *Kalii po nawa.* Stay well.

B: *Eewa, ne ka thikii po nawa.* Yes, go and arrive safely.

Or

A: *Kalii po nawa.* Stay well.

B: *Eewa, ne endii po nawa.* Yes, travel safely.

Traditionally, when a guest is leaving, he/she is not accompanied to exit by the host. It is believed that when it happens the guest will never come back. However, in modern times many Aawambo go with their guest outside the homestead to see them off at the exit of a homestead. This practice seems to have been copied from western culture.

New Year/Christmas Greetings

Christmas day does not appear on Aawambo calendar. The celebration of the new year of Aawambo is connected with harvest festival (*oshipe*). *Oshipe* is mainly celebrated four times a year as it is divided into four occasions such as *oshipe shomagongo* (marula festival), *oshipe shiilyawala*, (sorghum festival), *oshipe shomahangu* (finger millet festival) and *oshipe shomboga* (wild spinach festival) during Aawambo commonly utter these words: *Mumvo mukulu za mo omupe eye mo* (literally, Old year go out, new year come in, i.e. Good bye old year, welcome new year).

This expression, however, is not uttered by Aawambo during Christmas or new celebration. Other expressions are used in conversational situation such as *mahevo* (hurrah), exclamation of joy or *Twa moneni* (We are seeing each other), and an expression that is often used between people who have missed each other for a long time. This implies that Aawambo have borrowed expressions from their cultural practices to respond to their need. In modern times, the cosmopolitans or acculturated Aawambo use English words or phrase. Kirdasi (2013) describes greeting during Christmas in America:

Holiday greetings are a selection of goodwill greetings used around the world to address strangers, family, coworkers or friends during the Christmas and holiday season, which spans an approximate time-frame from late November to January. Holidays of this

season generally include Christmas, New Year's Day, Hanukkah, and Thanksgiving. Some greetings are more prevalent than others, depending on the cultural and religious status of any given area. Typically, a greeting consists of the word "Happy" followed by the holiday, such as *Happy New Year*, *Merry Christmas* or *Season's Greetings* can be a notable exception (p. 17).

This illustrates that some Aawambo prefer English words for Christmas and New Year greetings. It has to be noted that even Aawambo whose command of English leaves much to be desired would opt for phrases such as Merry Christmas or Happy New Year. Nonetheless, Oshiwambo greetings adopted from cultural practices are still maintained

A: *Mwa thiki mo?/Mwa lyata mo?* Did you arrive in it?/Did you step in it?

B: *Ee-ee.* Yes.

A: *Nawa?* Fine?

B: *Ee-ee, ne mwa thiki mo nawa?* Yes, did you also arrive in it well?

A: *Ee-ee.* Yes.

B: *Ee-ee.* Yes.

This greeting is concluded with the word of good wishes: *Nagu/nayi mu yambekelwe.* (May it be blessed for you). The addressor then repeats the same expression.

Homestead Greetings

There are strict procedures that must be followed. When a person comes into a house, the greeting is not responded to by the house occupants immediately. The visitor shouts out once, e.g. *Mu uhala po?* Did you spend the afternoon? while he/she is outside the house. When he/she repeats the same shout for the second time, the question: *Yee?* (What?) is asked. This is done because Aawambo fear that if one responds to the first shout, one might respond to a witch who might remove the vocal cords. He/she then repeats the shout for third time then the full response comes. *Ee-ee.* (Yes). The visitor is then asked: *Owe ya ngaa?* (Are you coming?) if he/she is known to the house dwellers. One of the house occupants then says: *Otu li huka.* (We are here) / *Shaa to ya* (as long as you are coming). This is an invitation to him/her to go to the place where the house occupants are. He/she responds: *Ee-ee.* (Yes) If the visitor is not known to the house dwellers, he/she is confined to the *ehale* (passage yard), until one of the house occupants goes to greet him/her. A boy who goes to greet a visitor and crouches down, whereas a girl kneels down before the greeting begins.



Figure 5. Sitting position of a boy



Figure 6. Sitting position of a girl

According to the Aawambo tradition, the visitor remains at the *oshoto* (a round uncovered enclosure for assembling) which is close to the entrance. There are poles at the *oshoto*, which are used as seats. The double poles in the west are reserved for the husband. The pole to his right is reserved for the *munyalombe* (the senior wife) and the one on his left is reserved for junior wives. The poles which are behind the seat of the senior wife are reserved for trouble makers or cowards. The poles that are behind the seat of the junior wives are reserved for the non-trouble

makers. In the centre of the seats is the fireplace where a big log is kept burning as a sign of good luck.

The house holder asks the visitor many questions such as *We enda ngaa omutenya, onawa tuu?* (You are travelling in the heat of the sun, is it all right?) This question challenges the visitor to tell his side of his/her story. The two people involved in the greeting can shake hands if they know each other. When shaking hands, one rests the palm of his /her left hand below the right hand. Such a practice is accompanied by the nodding of heads by men and bending of knees by women.

But a child does not disclose the whereabouts of the parents too soon. It pretends that they might have gone out without telling it. When a stranger tells his/her name, the child goes into the inner part of the house and informs its parents. If the parents do not know the visitor and are suspicious, they tell a child to inform the visitor that they are not in. The wife follows the same procedure when a stranger asks for her husband. She goes to the *oshinyanga shamutyakemo* (a dwelling place of he who is not in) and informs the husband. The husband can either instruct his wife to tell the visitor to come into the inner part of the house, or he asks his wife to tell the visitor that he is not in if he is suspicious.

There are forms which are not restricted to any particular time of the day, but are often said during the day, e.g. *Tu pii mo wo*. (lit. May we be allowed in?) and *Megumbo?* (In the house?)

But again, these forms of greetings are repeated before the response is given. But the response given here is not *Ee-ee*. (Yes) but it is *Oomuka*. (It is in here.) . If the person has already visited the house, when he/she comes back he would shout: *Omo mu li?* (Are you in?). The response to this form of greeting is: *Ee-ee*. (Yes)

Greetings can also be linked to mealtimes. When one visits a house during lunch, one may shout: *Omwiha?* (Lunch?) The person who responds, follow the regular procedure and finally responds: *Oonguka*. (It is here.). When it is supper time, a visitor may shout: *Uulalelo?* (Supper?) The answer is: *Oombuka*. (Here it is.) This does not necessarily mean lunch or supper is available. The people might have finished eating already. This simply means the greetings are determined by meal times. However, if one finds family members eating lunch or dinner, he/she is invited to join them in an indirect way, e.g. *otatu li* (we are eating). Agyekum (2008) observes similar behaviour among the Akan of Ghana:

When a person is eating, some Fantes of Akan will greet *nkwa* (life), to imply that the person should have abundant life. This stems from the nutrients in food that give healthy life. The Twi dialect, however, uses the expression *kuta mu*, 'hold it firmly'. In each of these cases, the addressee would have to respond with *mekuta mu*, 'I am holding it firmly'. The addressee then invites the speaker (guest) to the meal by saying, *waoto me* (you have met me). These are polite ways of inviting a person to a meal. It is awkward to tell the person *bra bedidi* (come to eat).

Open Space Greetings –cum- Homestead Greetings

The custom followed in greeting someone inside a house is not the same as the one when people meet outside a house. When greeting takes place outside a house, people may do it in the standing position. If one finds another person in a stationary position first, such a person is obliged to greet the one in the stationary position. When one finds many people in a place, he/she greets them all in one go, the addressees would greet the addresser one by one. Mmadike and Okoye (2015) state that among the Etulo ethnic group of Nigeria, "in the event of coming into a gathering, one has to greet the group first, irrespective one's age, even when the gathering is made up of

people younger than oneself" (p. 10). The greeting may be based on the situation in which one finds a person. When one finds a person under a tree, he/she may say: *Tu pii wo omuzile*. (May you give us shade) or *Tu popilii wo omutenya*. (May you protect us against the heat of the sun). The addressee would respond: *Oonguka* (Here it is) or *Ee-ee*. (Yes). If the addresser finds a person drawing water from the well, he/she may say: *Tu pii wo omeya*. (May you give us water?) The addressee would respond: *Oongaka*. (Here it is.)

It must be pointed out that greeting may become redundant in certain situations. Writing on the Mampruli greetings, Naden (1984) states that greeting may become redundant in the case of extended or repeated meeting in the same context. The function of both this redundancy and saliency factor in suppressing the requirement for greeting is "information theoretically predictable" on rather general grounds. Redundancy of greetings also applies to Oshiwambo community in the same situation as expressed by Naden, but one has to say a word or two when passing by, e.g. *Indi pite po*, (May I pass). There are, however, cases in Oshiwambo community when no greeting is expressed. When you find a woman collecting cow dung for pot making no greeting is required as such a woman will not respond. It is believed that if she responds her pot will crack. Furthermore, when *hegona* (paternal relative) of the deceased removes the ash and other garbage from the homestead where death has occurred at the end of the mourning period, one is not allowed to greet her and her entourage. The mother of the twins may not satisfactorily respond to greeting before she is purified, her only response is ululation. Commenting on the Ibo greetings, Nwoye (1993) argues that the prevalence of greeting makes its absence in situations where it is expected to occur, something that requires an explanation.

When someone is leaving, [especially a neighbour] he/she may say: *Inali toka namushiinda* (It is not late for a neighbour). This implies that there is still a chance of seeing each other. A proverb: *Shikukutu moluha, shinenguni momupolo* (Let that which is hard go to the side and that which is soft, face you) may be said to someone who is leaving. Another proverb said to someone who is leaving is: *Ondjila naye lale ongali* (May the road lie on its back, i.e. Safe trip.)

Ceremony Greetings

Greetings during ceremonies are different from the usual way of greeting. When one comes to a house where there is a wedding ceremony, a woman may give a shout of praise: *Lililili! Lililili!* or chants praises in honour of the bride or bridegroom. A man may shout: *Uuwuh! Uuwuh!* People who are in the house respond by ululating or shouting. The normal greeting is then done after the dancing and shouting has dwindled. The other phrases shouted during the wedding party are: *Walakata! Walakata! Wandu! Wandu!* which means (it is obvious). It must be noted that ululation is also a form of greetings in a homestead of a person who has been struck to death by lightning. Similarly the mother of the twins responds to greetings by ululating before she is purified.

During the mourning period, the mourners wail or sing upon arriving at the house. The women take the baskets off their heads and hold them up with their left hands above their left shoulders and the men rest their sticks on their left shoulder with their right hands. The mourners inside the house respond by wailing as well. When they get in the house, they may shout: *Omu li momutumba?* (Are you in the sitting position?) The response is either *Ee-ee, ne mwa tondoka* or *Ee-ee, ne mwe shi uvu ko?* (Yes, did you run or Yes, did you hear it.) The expression: *Mwa tondoka* refers to how the Aawambo react to the announcement of death. When someone passes away, his/her family members shout out loudly or ululate if the death is caused by lightning. Ululation is also done when the death of the royal family member is announced. When the neighbors hear the shout or the ululation, they run towards the place where the shouting is coming from, hence the expression *Mwa tondoka? or Mwe shi uvu ko?* (*Did you hear about it that side*)

The question: *Mwa shigama?* (Have you had any sleep?), is said in the morning during the mourning period. When the mourners are dispersing after the funeral, they wave a good-bye by saying: *Twa piti mepya yakwetu* (We travel through the field, friends) or *Twe ke egeka* (lit. We are going to settle, i.e. we are departing from death lamentation).

Royal House Greetings

The form of greeting in *ombala* (palace) is not the same as the one done in the homestead of commoners. When one enters the *ombala*, one does not shout, but he/she coughs or clears his/her throat. One of the people inside the *ombala*, then goes to greet the visitor. If the visitor wants to see the *osimu* (king), the addresser informs the *osimu*. The visitor may wait for a day or two before he/she sees the king. The length of stay of the visitor at the *ehale* (door way) depends on the king's availability or schedule. When the commoner meets the king, he/she crawls towards the king and greets him afterwards. When one is near the king, one sits on his heels and looks down as he/she speaks to the kings. When one leaves the king, he/she crawls backwards, as turning one's back against the king is seen as an insult. When one leaves the *ombala*, he/she leaves without saying good-bye.

Poetic Language in Oshiwambo greetings

It is a well-known fact that greeting in African language is quite lengthy and effusive. Besides that there are responses to greetings which are a truncated form of a particular situation. Such responses require long explanation. These responses depend on the circumstances under which the addressee finds himself/herself. When the people are not really coping with a situation, their replies to the questions: *Onawa tuu?/ or Oshi li ngiini?* could be the following:

Shaa taku shi (as long as the day breaks). This means one is lucky to see the daylight.

Osha gwana (It is enough). In this case, one is able to progress despite his difficulties. Or his deteriorating health does not make it impossible for him to do his duties.

Hatse ngaa mbano (Here we are.) We are live or do exist despite the problems we experience.

Otatu nu ngaa momeya (We do drink water). It is believed that when one is seriously sick the only thing he is able to take is water. When one experience serious difficulties and lose appetite for food, he/she resorts to drinking water only.

Aahwepo ngaa. (We are rather okay. i.e we are so –so).

Otatu endele kele nga hu itaaku ziya. (We are leaning to the side where it is not leaking). A thatched roof may leak when it rains and the hut occupants shift to the side where it is not leaking. This means we face challenges but we overcome them.

When people are really coping with the situation, they may give these responses:

Oshimati. (It is boy way of living). A boy is expected to lead gentle life and should not worry so much about difficulties. Figuratively being a boy means one is gentle, nimble and energetic. Unfortunately this response can be given by men only. One can also say: *Osho opala.* (It is alright). (This poetic language) is the evidence of illocutionary of Austin's theory, because they are intended to provide information (Austin, 1962).

Conclusion

Greeting someone in Oshiwambo culture is obligatory. The number of times one may greet a particular person per day is limitless. The circumstances under which one finds an addressee

determines the types of greeting which an addresser has to use. The age of the person, social status, and gender influences how you would address. Both verbal and nonverbal forms of communication play an important role in greeting. The absence of one of these elements makes the greeting process incomplete. In addition, kinship terms use of third person and plural form are incorporate in greeting to show respect and politeness to the addressee.

Westernisation has a great impact on forms of Oshiwambo greetings. The acculturated Aawambo tend to use English expressions as form of greetings. Young people have borrowed various forms from other cultures which they use when exchanging greeting among themselves. Furthermore, some greeting etiquettes have been abandoned in favour of western practices. Nonetheless, several verbal and nonverbal forms of greeting have survived acculturation because even cosmopolitan centers of Namibia, several Aawambo maintain their forms of greeting as shown by the Oshiwambo speaking students at UNAM (University of Namibia) observed during the study.

References

- Agyekum, K. (2008). The pragmatics of Akan greetings. *Discourse Studies*, 10(4), 493-516.
- Akindede, D. F. (2007). A Socio-pragmatic analysis of Sesotho greetings. *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 16(1), 1-17.
- Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to do things with words [M]*. Mass: Harvard University Press.
- Arowolo, D. (2010). Effect of Western civilization and culture on Africa. *Afro-Asian Journal of Social Sciences*, 1(1). 1-14.
- Auala. L. (1997). *Onakuziwa yandje*. Oniipa: ELOC Press.
- Dzameshie, A.K. (2002) `The Forms, Functions and Social Value of Greetings among the Ewes. In F. K. Ameka & E. K. Osam (Eds.) *NeW Directions in Ghanaian Linguistics* (pp. 381-408). Accra: BlackMask.
- Egblewogbe, E. Y. (1990). Social and psychological aspects of greeting among the ewes of West Africa. *Research Review*, 6(2), 8-18.
- Goffman, E. (1956). *The Nature of deference and demeanor*. *American Anthropologist*, 58, 473-502.
- Kavari, J. U. (2008). *Otjiherero greetings*. University of Namibia: Department of Language and Literature Studies.
- Kirdasi, M. I. (2013). *“Hello” or “Salaam” greetings by Arabs and Americans* (Unpublished MA thesis). National University of Chiao Tung.
- Mbara, R. (2008). *Silozi greetings*. University of Namibia: Department of Language and Literature Studies.
- Mmadike, B.I & Okoye, A. N. (n.d). *Patterns of greeting in Etulo*. *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 204, 1-20.
- Naden, A. (1984). *Social context and Mampruli greetings*. Dallsa: Summer Institute of Linguistics.
- Rygg, K. (2017). The semantic and pragmatic value of Norwegian greetings the last hundred years. *Maal OG Minnie*, 1, 147-174.
- Tirronen, E. T. (1975). *Die praktiese Ndonga*. Windhoek: Departement van Bantoe Onderwys
- Tönjes, H. (1948). *Ovamboland*. Windhoek: Gamsberg Macmillan Publishers.