# Comparing Address Forms and Systems:
# Some Examples from Bantu

## Gabriele Sommer and Abel Lupapula
**Bayreuth University and University of St. Augustine (Mwanza)**

## 1. Introduction

Although address forms and systems in African languages – in some sources also referred to as discourse conventions – have been studied for a long time from different perspectives and disciplinary angles, the topic as such has not yet been tackled in detail from a wider comparative sociolinguistic viewpoint and with a particular focus on Bantu (see § 4 below).

In his chapter on the 'syntax of conversations' in French, for instance, Weinrich (11982, 1997) has brought together the two major aspects involved in this regard, i.e. the linguistic description of forms on the one hand, and aspects of their socially adequate use on the other. The use of opening formulae in spoken French, as he claims in this context, can best be conceived and described as performing a dyadic 'language game' whose primary function is to find out more about the interlocutor's willingness to communicate (strategic aspects). Moreover, greeting routines in French are clearly status sensitive (socially stratified use): status differences are indicated by formulaic expressions and nominal forms including different kinds of titles and of names (cf. bonjour Monsieur le Curé vs. salut Jacques); In written communication, address forms also vary according to the status relationship between the writer and the addressee. Weinrich (1997:683) here distinguishes five categories, intimate [(mon) cher ami], indifferent [Monsieur …], forms used among colleagues [Monsieur et cher collègue], formal [Monsieur le Recteur] and those address forms that are explicitly marked for respect or reverence [Cher Maître].

In a formal academic setting, for instance, ritualized and lexicalized openings (e.g. of speeches or lectures) often comprise formulaic expressions like the German Sehr geehrte Damen und Herren which has a direct equivalent, (Distinguished) Ladies and Gentlemen, in English. In both cases we can assume that the literal meanings of such nominal forms (referring to high social positions) are no longer relevant today. The same applies, we think, to the literal meanings of equivalents in Bantu languages like Xhosa, for instance, where the formulaic expression ma-nene (cl. 6-man) na (conj.) ma-nene-kazi (cl. 6-man-derivation-female) can be used in similar contextual or situational circumstances.[1]

After a few introductory remarks (§ 1), we will first define the terms and topic (§ 2.1) before considering relevant approaches rooted in (socio)linguistic disciplines such as typology, intercultural pragmatics and the ethnography of speaking (§ 2.2). Secondly, we will outline some of the major cultural and sociolinguistic factors that have been taken into account when systematically describing and comparing the use of address forms and systems in African languages (§ 3). In order to illustrate the possibilities and limits of such a cross-disciplinary approach, we will finally discuss some empirical evidence from Bantu languages (Zulu, Xhosa and more extensively Haya and Kerewe, §§ 4, 5). Some examples will be taken from (Kerewe) discourse while others stem from sources like ethnographic accounts and learning materials. Especially from the latter sources we inferr some social aspects of greeting routines that are sometimes not dealt with extensively in texts on Bantu grammar (see below).

---

[1] The Swahili equivalent, *ma-bibi* (cl. 6-grandmother) *na ma-bwana* (cl. 6-sir/mister), makes use of a kinship term.

## 2. Contextualizing the study of address forms and systems
*2.1. Definitions*

Before going into further detail, some terms or concepts need to be defined more explicitly. Ndoleriire (2000:278), for instance, in his introductory article on 'cross-cultural communication in Africa', classifies discourse conventions as only one of three things that may cause severe conversational derailment in intercultural encounters. Besides non-verbal factors, such as physical proximity and distance between participants, and paralinguistic factors such as rising pitch as used in greeting interactions among Luganda speakers, discourse conventions are regarded as being "limited to greetings and forms of address".

Linguists with a comparative interest in address forms and systems restrict the use and scope of the term 'address' as follows: "The term denotes a speaker's linguistic reference to his/her collocutor(s). It does not include according to our definition, linguistic means of opening interaction or of establishing first contact […]. All this, as well as verbal and non-verbal greeting, is excluded from our definition of address" (Braun 1988:7).

Whereas Ndoleriire does not include non-verbal and paralinguistic factors in his description of greetings (subsumed under the term 'discourse conventions'), Braun excludes aspects such as opening interactions, the establishment of first contact as well as verbal or non-verbal greetings from the investigation of 'address'. However, in the present article, we will include examples that illustrate these particular factors, especially when referring to address forms and systems in Eastern African Bantu.

This broader definition of terms like 'discourse convention' and 'address' will thus include linguistic forms as well as aspects of their culturally adequate usage. Moreover, and following Braun in this regard, we see address systems as covering the "totality of available forms and their interrelations in one language" (Braun 1988:12). According to the communicative competence of individual speakers such forms may be employed *inter alia* in greeting encounters including opening sequences. As has been observed for various African languages, such conversational routines may also include the use – or avoidance – of kinship terms and personal names in verbal exchanges (for an overview see below):

<div align="center">

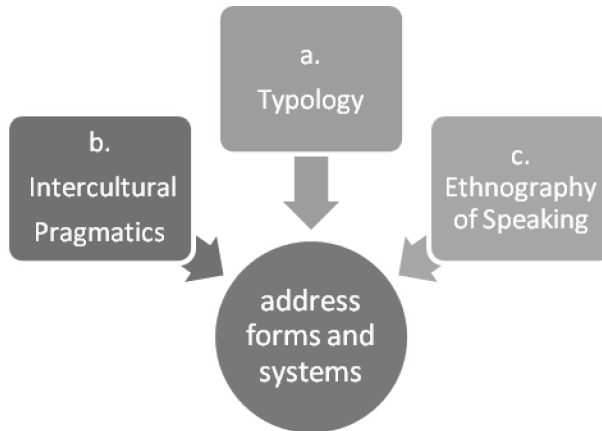**Address forms and systems in context:**
1. Non-verbal and paralinguistic factors (proximity, distance, pitch, loudness)
2. Structures and forms of openings and closings (e.g. pre-greeting events)
3. Bound and free forms of address (lexemes, phrases, formulaic expressions)
4. Pronouns of address (T/V distinctions, pluralization)
5. Special verb forms or nouns of address
6. Names, kinship terms, titles
7. Terms of endearment
8. Avoidance forms and behavior
9. Special languages/registers/codes

</div>

*2.2. Cross-disciplinary perspectives*

As mentioned above, address forms and systems in the wider sense defined above have always been treated from different angles. While the typological comparison of forms does not necessarily focus on a systematic investigation of usage, the analysis of address forms and behavior as occurring in actual discourse more extensively relies on approaches developed and employed within the framework of sociolinguistics and/or the sociology of language.[2] As outlined in the overview below, different kinds of (socio)linguistic studies have always contributed to our understanding of the structure and use of address forms in African languages. Since they are rooted in different academic disciplines they employ

---

[2] While both approaches make use of empirical methods like discourse and conversational analyses, we would like to stress that the present article does not claim to provide new insights into either of these fields. On the contrary, we refrain from in-depth analyses more specifically dealt with in these particular disciplines.

different methods, for instance for areal linguistics (quantitative typological comparison), intercultural pragmatics (discourse/conversational analysis) and also the ethnography of speaking (participant observation/thick description). To name but a few of such studies, Helmbrecht (2008) has looked into the world-wide distribution of pronominal forms as a means of encoding social deixis (a), while Kasanga & Lwanga-Lumu (2007) have compared politeness strategies used in conversational encounters in English (b). Irvine (2001) and Strecker (2010) are two examples of qualitative descriptions of different 'ways of speaking', including address forms and greetings used in West African Wolof (Atlantic, Niger-Congo) and East African Hamer (Omotic, Afro-Asiatic) (c).



a) As early as 1974, and at that time still based on anecdotal evidence, Gregersen identified several phenomena that are still regarded as important for the systematic description and analysis of address forms and systems, or more generally for the 'encoding of respect and reverence' in a number of African languages. In his survey of a total of seventy languages from different language families, the author refers to most of the features mentioned in the present article (see overview above). These aspects appear to be typical of address systems not only in Bantu but in African languages in general (here we will use identical reference numbers for categories 0-9, see also 2.1 above):

**Encoding of respect in African languages  (Gregersen 1974)**
0. Indirect way of addressing (avoidance of certain forms)
3./5. Use of special honorifics (e.g. to avoid use of imperatives)
4.1 Honorific use of pronouns, 4.2 use of plural forms
6. Extensive use of titles
8.1 Avoidance (linguistic, physical …), 8.2 Naming taboo (depending on interlocutors)
9. Secret languages/registers/codes

Helmbrecht (2003, 2008) has more recently discussed pronominal forms of address as one of the linguistic means of encoding respect in the languages of the world including Africa. Some languages make use of V-forms (< *vos*) to signal distance, as opposed to T-forms (< *tu*) that express closeness, intimacy or solidarity among speakers in a given conversational encounter (including greetings). In German, French, Spanish, Russian, Greek or Finnish, this feature is a common phenomenon. All these languages make use of a binary politeness opposition between T/V forms (which has been lost in English). However, such a binary opposition is not common in African languages, or in other parts of the world (see Sommer 2006 for a critical evaluation of the sampling procedure used in Helmbrecht 2003). Binary politeness distinctions in pronouns, Helmbrecht (2008) argues, are mostly found in European languages and are thus exceptions rather than the rule. But although there is a certain overlap in "the conditioning factors of the usage of *du* and *Sie* in German, *tu* […] and *vous* […] in French, and *ty* […] and *vy* […] in Russian", there are significant pragmatic differences:

**Binary opposition of pronominal forms:**
**examples from Europe (Helmbrecht 2008)**
French
*tu* (you.sg.FAM) vs. *vous* (you.HON)
German
*du* (you.sg.FAM) vs. *Sie* (you.HON)

b) Pragmatic differences in the actual use of the above-mentioned pronominal forms of address are considerable, even in closely related languages such as French and German. Such differences, however, can only be detected if the actual use of pronominal forms in every-day interaction is taken into account. Although both French and German share the functional distinction between two pronoun forms (T/V, see above), in French the mother-in-law continues to be addressed by the new son-in-law or daughter-in-law with the polite or V-form (*vous,* 2.pl), whereas in German, the mother-in-law is always addressed with the familiar T-form (*du*, 2.sg) by the new son or daughter-in-law (Helmbrecht 2008). From a more general perspective, conversational encounters in this particular domain appear to be sensitive and are characterized by avoidance practices, a fact that applies not only to European but also to African societies.

c) As this first example indicates, relationships between participants as well as situational contexts of conversational exchange – within or outside the family – are only two parameters that have been taken into account when looking more closely and systematically at the actual use of address forms and discourse conventions in African speech communities. The culture-specific use of conversational routines becomes apparent when comparing the structure and use of opening phrases in African languages. As Ndoleriire (2000:281f.) has shown, opening phrases in African contexts are used to obtain the cooperation of the audience from the very beginning (interactional aspect). Among the Igbo (Kwa, Niger-Congo) of eastern Nigeria, for instance, the orator will only proceed with his or her speech after having used some conventionalized opening phrases and received a response from the audience:

**Culturally embedded use of language: obtaining the cooperation of the audience**
Orator: *Umuaka kwe nu*! ('Children agree!')
Audience: *Hee*!
Orator: *Umuaka rye nu*! ('Children, let's eat!')
Audience: *Hee*!
Orator: *Umuaka ngwa nu*! ('Children, let's drink!')

As Ndoleriire has further argued, the term *umuak*a ('children') as a ritualized form of address 'can be replaced by the name of a village, community, school, party, or social club'. Also the verbal expressions ('eating', 'drinking') used in the example above can be changed according to the context in which the greeting is actually performed. In any case the social significance of greetings and opening expressions is fairly obvious: "Formulae and forms of address which exist in various forms in most, if not all, African societies are of vital importance in ensuring that a communication process fulfils its objectives" (Ndoleriire 2000:281). In the following section, we will outline some of these address forms and conventions, with special reference to greeting routines in (Eastern) Bantu.

## 3. Sociolinguistic parameters: setting, participants and norms

While adhering to a broad definition of 'address' (see 2.1), it seems advisable at this point to restrict ourselves to only a few sociolinguistic variables that will be considered in more detail in the context of an analysis of ritualized conversational encounters and greeting interactions. We will deal with parameters such as 'setting', 'participants' and 'norms'. As Hymes (1962) has shown, the investigation of language use is always governed by the individual speaker's communicative competence. In a given setting, there may be co-occurrent or even competing influences arising from a number of different variables (see Fishman 1965, Goffman 1967 and Ervin-Tripp 1972, to name but a

few). As Hubbard (2000) has remarked in his introductory article on discourse and language(s) in context in African settings, communicative competence enables the speaker to choose the appropriate way of speaking from among a variety of forms, styles and registers, depending, among other things, on the formality of the situation (English speakers, for instance, will not start a conversation with the opening formula *Hi guys* when walking into a room to be interviewed for a job, "because that kind of language is far too informal for such a situation", *ibid.*, p. 245).

Knowledge of the appropriateness of a given form or expression in a particular context, including greetings, is part of this communicative competence. For the analysis of address behavior such knowledge – or the lack of it – is crucial, especially when the communicative act is performed by participants belonging to different cultures. More generally, sociolinguistic variables that determine the linguistic and stylistic choice in a given speech event are *acts*, *key*, *instrumentality* (medium/channel), *genre* and *topic*. Furthermore, the *participants*, *norms* and *setting* are crucial factors in this regard. While norms prescribe particular ways in which a communicative act is expected to be performed, the role played by paralinguistic features in cross-cultural encounters cannot be over-exaggerated: "Thus […] isiZulu-speakers will in general expect slightly longer pauses during a conversation than English-speakers will. As a result, an English speaker talking to an isiZulu-speaker will sometimes think that the latter has come to the end of a speaking turn when this is not yet so, and when the English-speaker then takes a turn, this might seem like an interruption to the isiZulu-speaker" (Hubbard 2000:250).

Moreover, conventionalized forms of linguistic behavior, such as address forms and greetings, are culturally embedded, and as such are transmitted from one generation of speakers to the next. On the other hand, such routines are also subject to changes in respect of societal as well as linguistic norms. In southern Africa, politeness and respect are still commonly captured by the concept of *hlonipha*. According to Rudwick (2008:152), *hlonipha* is a cultural and linguistic system of respect typical of Southern Bantu-speaking African societies in general. Even today, she emphasizes, *hlonipha* is still "a complex web of sociological and linguistic actions which prescribe deferential behaviour" (see Raum 1973). Like other social norms, Rudwick further argues, linguistic norms and practices associated with the concept of *hlonipha* are also 'on the move'. This means that "urban isiZulu-speakers critically evaluate traditionalist notions of *hlonipha*, revise them according to their needs and consequently construct hybrid cultural and sociolinguistic identities which take into account a variety of different reference points as regards respectful social and linguistic behaviour" (*ibid.*, p. 155).

## 4. Examples from Bantu languages

The examples mentioned below are taken from four Bantu languages of Southern and Eastern Africa Firstly, Zulu and Xhosa, two members of the Nguni group, are spoken in the eastern and southern parts of the Republic of South Africa. Although there is a bulk of literature on both, we will concentrate only on certain aspects here (see § 4.1; nos. 5-9, § 2.1). Both are influenced by other Bantu languages, as well as Afrikaans. They are competing with, and partly losing ground to English, one of the eleven official languages, and a common and dominant lingua franca in South Africa. Secondly, Haya and Kerewe are spoken in the northern part of Tanzania, in the vicinity of numerically stronger languages like Sukuma (see § 4.2; nos. 1-4, 6, § 2.1). Like other Bantu languages of Tanzania, they co-exist in an asymmetrical power relationship with Swahili, the official and national language of the country. English – although a co-official language in Tanzania – is confined to official domains.[3]

### 4.1. Southern Africa: Zulu and Xhosa (culture-specific aspects of address routines)

Before taking a closer look at greeting routines from a more empirical perspective (see § 4.2), we will first consider examples from Zulu and Xhosa, two Nguni languages spoken in southern Africa, to

---

[3] For the geographical distribution and linguistic classification we refer the reader to the respective entries in the Web version of *Ethnologue* (http://www.ethnologue.com; for further details see references).

illustrate the structure and some normative aspects of their address systems.[4] Zulu is spoken by nearly 23% of the total population of South Africa. While the vast number of L1-speakers of the language can be found in KwaZulu-Natal, Zulu is "probably the most widely understood African language in South Africa, spoken from the Cape to Zimbabwe" (*Languages of South Africa* 2011). As the second-largest language, Xhosa is still spoken by 17.6% of the population mainly in the Eastern Cape Province. As has been outlined above, verbal and non-verbal aspects of greeting behavior in both languages, as well as in the other closely related Nguni languages of southern Africa, relate to the more general notion of 'respect behavior' (*hlonipha*) and involve a special register/code.: "*IsiHlonipho* […], also termed the 'language of respect' is essentially based on verbal taboo and has been researched most extensively among Xhosa women […]. The linguistic aspect […] manifests itself in its most 'proper' sense, in the avoidance of the usage of syllables occurring in the names of relatives of older and/or superior status and in reference to the names of ancestors. The 'deep' variety of *isiHlonipho* comprises of a large corpus of lexical items which are synonyms for the expressions which carry syllables that need to be avoided. […] The 'soft' variety of *isiHlonipho* can be understood as the simple avoidance of the names of individuals and ancestors who need to be respected through the usage of common *isiHlonipho* terms, based on neologisms, lexical borrowings, or circumlocutions" (Rudwick 2008:155f.). Since Xhosa and Zulu are not only used for intra-ethnic communication as 'home languages', but are also acquired and taught as L2-varieties, the aspect of transmitting communicative competence with regard to greetings and courtesies is quite important. However, a brief survey of learning material shows that only a few of those factors that govern verbal and non-verbal greeting behavior are actually covered in such works:

> ***Learn Zulu Today*** (Munnik & Roos 1996:1)
> Chapter 1, Section 1, Greetings
> *Sawubona*                                   used to greet one person
> *Sanibona/Sanibonani*              used to greet more than one person
> Forms of Address:
> "Greetings in Zulu depend largely on age and familiarity. Younger people are expected to show respect to older people and should address them accordingly. Someone roughly the same age as one's mother is addressed as *mama*, likewise with *baba*. A much older person would be addressed as *gogo* or *babamkhulu*. *Sisi* and *bhuti* are generally used for people of one's own age or older, but sometimes even for a young girl and boy. Older people address young people as their children or grandchildren. Family life is very important in the Zulu community. Terms expressing family relationships are thus significant […]."

Adequate greeting behavior in Zulu is first of all determined by the status relationship of the participants/interlocutors. In the quotation above, the decisive factors are identified as being 'age' (or rather 'seniority') and 'kin relationship'. As is common in African languages in general, kinship terms for 'mother' and 'father' are used not only when addressing family members, but also when talking to non-kin elders. While some of the kinship terms are of Zulu origin (Kumalo 1992), others are borrowed either from English or Afrikaans, the latter most probably the donor language of kinship terms like *sisi* and *bhuti*. Besides the extensive use of kinship terms as forms of polite address, Xhosa has also integrated greetings from English and/or Afrikaans into its repertoire of discourse conventions (for instance, *molo* 'good morning [addressing one person]' vs. *molweni* 'good morning [addressing more than one person] used as an appropriate Xhosa morning greeting, Christoffel Botha, pers. comm.).

As can be deduced from the above example of a common Zulu greeting, this language is characterized by the lack of a T/V politeness opposition, but polite plurals are frequently employed:

> **Online Basic Course (Zulu, Xhosa, Tswana, Sotho)**
> published by the University of South Africa (UNISA, Pretoria)
> "In true Zulu tradition greeting is a very important procedure. It is a structured encounter

---

[4] Although both languages are considered, most examples given here are drawn from Zulu (see below).

and it is considered ill-mannered not to greet either a friend or a stranger in passing. […]
Normally, the person who arrives somewhere is supposed to greet those present but according to Zulu custom the junior person should greet the senior person first […].
It is […] not sufficient to merely say 'Sawubona!' You should also take the time to enquire about the other person's well-being: 'Unjani?' Greeting one person in the plural form is an indication of respect as well as inquiring about the person's family members."

While mainly governed by seniority, status and kin relationship, greetings in Zulu and Xhosa are dyadic in structure, they involve an extended sequence of exchanges, and the appropriate performance of greeting routines can still be found today, although some norm conflicts may sometimes arise (the initiation of greetings, for instance). However, the choice of a particular linguistic form like a polite plural, a title or a kinship term is always primarily meant to signal respect vis-à-vis the interlocutor.

#### Summary: Address forms and systems in Xhosa and Zulu
1. Non-verbal and paralinguistic factors: greeting in passing, young speaker initiates, handshake
2. Structure of (pre-)greeting events: dyadic structure of extensive greeting routine
3.-5. Pronominal forms of address: no binary politeness distinction, use of polite plurals
6.-7. Use of kinship terms, titles etc.: extensive use of kinship terms, relevant parameter: seniority
8. Avoidance: *hlonipha* (respect/etiquette esp. vis-à-vis male relatives, in-laws, ancestors)
9. Special register/code: *isiHlonipho* (= Nguni), some greeting formulae are borrowed in Xhosa

### 4.2. Eastern Africa: Haya and Kerewe (discursive aspects of address and greeting routines)

In eastern Africa, greeting routines and forms of address are also embedded in emic concepts of politeness and linguistic etiquette (see above). While taking a closer look at the forms and structures of greetings and address systems in two eastern African sample languages, we will now take into account further aspects, namely pre-greeting events in Haya, and the actual use of forms of greetings and address titles as used by male and female speakers in everyday verbal exchanges in Kerewe.[5] Furthermore, the aspect of verbal as well as non-verbal (physical) avoidance seems to be of particular importance for a number of eastern African speech communities. So far, avoidance registers have been reported as existing not only in Haya and Kerewe, but also in other Bantu languages like Nyakyusa (Kolbusa 2000), and in neighboring Ethiopian languages like Kambaata (Omotic, Afro-Asisatic, cf. Teferra 1987, Treis 2005). As has been analyzed in a relatively early ethnographic description of Haya, greeting forms and behavior, openings and the socially adequate use of kinship terms can be used to negotiate status relationships among interlocutors in a verbal encounter such as 'greeting'. Formulaic expressions in Haya may of course have quite different structures. But, similar to the situation found in southern Africa, the appropriate use of greeting formulae is often accompanied by the extensive use of kinship terms: "A completed *ekishulo* [speech event of greeting] requires a first utterance chosen from a set of 25-30 alternatives and an answer to it. This exchange may be followed optionally by another pair of utterances, and finally, by an optional set of routinized questions and answers" (Dauer 1984:141).

Before starting the actual greeting procedure, Haya speakers can optionally use a variety of so-called 'pre-greetings' (*kwetaba*). These comprise of summonses on the one hand, and speech events

---

[5] There are a number of linguistic descriptions of Haya (see Kristina Riedel's paper presented at the ACAL conference). In the present paper, we restrict ourselves to Dauer's (1984) ethnographic description of greeting routines in Haya varieties. Published literature on Kerewe greetings, on the other hand, is not voluminous. However, contextual information on Kerewe discourse routines can be found in Kitereza's (2002) ethnographic novel, for instance, which describes the life and customs characteristic of old Ukerewe. Furthermore, some linguistic data have already been collected among Kerewe speakers in Tanzania by way of a questionnaire (based on Braun 1988). Some recordings of spoken Kerewe as used in telephone conversations have also been taken into account (Lupapula, in prep.).

like *kweeta* 'to call and respond to a call', *kukaguza* 'to call out or alert s.o. passing through' and *kuha mahyo* "to express sympathy and congratulation', on the other (Dauer 1984:187). Such communicative events are not only meant to evaluate or negotiate the interlocutor's willingness to communicate (especially since greetings are compulsory); they also function as opening exchanges for the negotiation of status relationships. In this respect, summonses and pre-greetings in Haya fulfill the important communicative function of playing the socially adequate 'status negotiation game' (see also § 1 above).

Similar to the Haya-speaking community, Kerewe society is clearly hierarchically structured and this social stratification influences the actual performance of verbal encounters, too. Greeting routines in Kerewe, for instance, are stratified according to parameters such as seniority, status, kinship and clan membership. In terms of social customs and etiquette, the use of verbal and non-verbal discourse conventions is imperative before, during and after a conversational exchange. Since forms of address are meant to enable speakers to get in touch with each other, they have to be properly employed – always taking into account the interlocutors' social roles and status relationships (Lupapula, in prep).

Although young speakers are usually expected to initiate a social encounter while performing either a greeting or a pre-greeting event (summons), the form *bwacha* (greet), for instance, is commonly used and is also employed by older speakers to address younger ones. This usage can be observed not only in the opening sequences of conversational exchanges, but also when speakers aim at drawing someone's attention to their presence and their willingness to engage in a socially adequate greeting procedure/routine. Before opening a conversation with a senior speaker or relative, women are expected to genuflect on one knee, greet the person, and offer them something (such as water). Physical proximity or distance during the greeting event is always determined by the social hierarchy, and thus the status relationship between the interlocutors. However, failure to respond to a (pre)greeting is regarded as a severe infringement of socio-cultural norms regardless of the speaker's status. Greeting is not only a form of etiquette, but a discipline performed in order to maintain social well-being.

As Dauer (1984:188) has shown for Haya, summonses may consist of a personal name, a title of address, an evocative pronoun or some combination of these different forms of address. Similar to Haya, greetings in Kerewe are very important and a frequently employed and almost obligatory linguistic routine (Dauer 1984:140, Kitereza 2002:14). Full greetings – which immediately follow the opening sequence – occur at the beginning of almost every social encounter in Ukerewe, and they always consist of a dyadic exchange (speaker A initiates the greeting and speaker B responds). Dyadic greeting routines thus consist of a 'form of greeting' and a 'title of address' (for examples see below).

If we take common Kerewe greetings as an example, the following forms of greeting can occur in everyday verbal exchanges between participants who are meeting for the first time on a particular day. Usually, the greeting is initiated by the junior speaker (see above):

**Kerewe greetings: speakers meeting for the first time on a particular day (before 5 pm)**

| greeting | response |
|---|---|
| *a) greetings performed across generations* | |
| 1. *kampire bwacha sugu* (male junior) | *bwacha tata* [variant: *bwana tata*] (male senior, may be extended to one's paternal aunt, i.e. a 'female-father or father-in-law') |
| 2. *bwacha mawe* (male junior) | *bwacha tata* (female senior) |
| 3. *bwacha sugu* (female junior) | *bwacha mawe* (senior male or female) |
| *b) greetings among participants with a slight age difference (approx. 10 yrs.)* | |
| 4. *rerota* [variant: *lelota*] | *nkusura* [variant: *nkusula*] |
| 'how did you spend the night?' | |
| (male junior) | (male interlocutor of nearly the same age) |
| (female junior) | (female interlocutor of nearly the same age) |
| *c) greetings among participants of the same age* | |
| 5. *nkusura* | *nkusura* |
| (male, or spouse, brother in-law) | (male, or spouse, brother in-law) |
| (female, or spouse, sister in-law) | (female, or spouse, sister in-law) |

These forms of greeting can be used in both formal and informal settings. Status differences between the participants are expressed by adding (and changing) titles of address. *Bwacha mawe*, for instance (see entry 2. above), is a general form of greeting applied to female addressees by male interlocutors, irrespective of their age. Each of the participants in a greeting exchange has his or her obligatory share in the process. Among other things, the structure of greeting routines reflects the clear division of labor between men and women which still characterizes Kerewe society today.

Among the most frequently used status-sensitive kinship terms are *tata* (father), *mawe* (mother), *tata zara* (father-in law), *mayo* (mother-in-law), *guku* (grandfather), *kaka* (grandmother), *marumi* (maternal uncle) and *sengi* (paternal aunt), *ensanzi* (spouses' parents), *mulamu* (brother/sister-in-law) as well as occupational terms like *mwalimu* (a Swahili loan meaning 'teacher'), and of course also terms that indicate close relationships between the participants, like *munwani* (friend). These terms are so important that a person cannot address or greet someone without mentioning them.

In order to illustrate the use of such status- and gender-sensitive address forms, we will mention the example of an opening sequence performed by a Kerewe father and his daughter during an informal telephone conversation conducted in Kerewe. The verbal exchange illustrates greeting behavior between interlocutors that meet, or in this case talk, for the first time on a particular day:[6]

**Example of Kerewe discourse conventions in use (daughter talking to her father on the telephone)**

| 1.1 Daughter: | | *bw* | *-acha* | *sugu* | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | conn | dawn | respect | | | | |
| 1.2 Father: | *ee* | *bw* | *-acha* | *sugu* | *kiha*? | | | |
| | part | conn | dawn | respect | Interrog | | | |
| 2.1 Daughter: | | *bw* | *-acha* | *sugu* | *tata* | | | |
| | | conn | dawn | respect | father | | | |
| 2.2 Father: | | *bw* | *-acha* | *mawe* | *mw* | *-a* | *-lala* | *-mo* |
| | | conn | dawn | mother | 2pl | TAM | sleep | loc |
| 3.1 Daughter: | | *tw* | *-a* | *-lala* | *-mo* | **...** | | |
| | | 2pl | TAM | sleep | loc | | | |

This example shows that greeting routines are performed even in informal contexts and during long-distance phone calls. In 1.1 the female junior speaker initiates the greeting routine by offering a respectful form of greeting. Instead of responding, the addressee in 1.2 returns the greeting by indirectly asking for the inclusion of the adequate title of address (*tata* in this case). In 2.1 the daughter repeats her greeting – this time with the expected title. Therefore, elder speakers (father) may insist on being shown the socially appropriate linguistic respect by a younger interlocutor (daughter). After this exchange of first greeting routines, both interlocutors continue (in 2.2/3.1) by asking about each other's well-being (the example above only gives the initial phrases exchanged in this context).

Greetings which serve to initiate social encounters are usually complemented by additional routines that extend the greeting procedure by inquiring about the addressee's well-being, family and state of affairs (see 2.2 and 3.1 in the example above). In Kerewe such exchanges are understood as utterances that follow the actual greeting. However, this part is also very important. A shortening of this

---

[6] Interestingly enough, Kerewe also has a special form of greeting for acquaintances who meet again after a long separation. *Malama* and *tangunu* are expressions that are employed in greetings between a junior female speaker and a senior whom she has not seen for about a year. Likewise *kampire sumarama* (with *tangunu* as response) is a salutation of respect employed by a junior male speaker to greet his senior or senior relative. The discourse value in both cases is to infuse sociability with the warmth of intimacy and to express sincerity and care.

second phase of the extensive greeting routine is interpreted as rudeness or urgency, while extended greetings are perceived as expressing a high degree of politeness or reverence vis-à-vis the interlocutor.

**Summary: Address forms and systems in Haya and Kerewe**
1. Non-verbal and paralinguistic factors: women genuflect, proximity/distance according to status
2. Structure of (pre-)greeting events: summonses, pre-greetings, structured extensive greetings
3.-5. Pronominal forms of address: no pronominal politeness distinction, polite plural forms
6.-7. Use of kinship terms, titles etc.: extensive use of titles and kinship terms
8. Avoidance: in particular in-laws are treated with considerable respect
9. Special register/code: *kusinda* (Kerewe) – a euphemistic way of speaking (females/males)

## 5. Outlook

In lieu of a conclusion we would like to emphasize that the adequate description and comparison of address systems in Bantu languages still requires the collection of more empirical data. An analysis of such data should then pay attention to the aspects mentioned above. Although data are available for some of the Bantu languages referred to in this article, work in progress on Kerewe and Sukuma, for instance, clearly shows that the following aspects are important for describing and analyzing communicative routines like greetings from a comparative perspective:

a) A questionnaire (based on Braun 1988) which has proved to be a useful tool for the systematic collection of **address forms**. This kind of data collection has led to the compilation of a solid and comparable database on forms of greeting in various sample languages (esp. Bantu).
b) **Kinship terms** are of major importance and the additional use of a questionnaire on kinship terms seems indispensable (see Ibriszimow & Porkhomovsky 2001 and Dymitr Ibriszimow, pers. comm.).
c) **Ethnographic information** as outlined in Kitereza (1980, 2002), for instance, can provide additional material for a cross-check of results of the analysis of address forms and greeting routines.
d) More data on **actual discourse** and conversational encounters will facilitate the analysis of greeting conventions as applied in everyday verbal exchanges in the sample languages (esp. Kerewe).

We are currently working on a corpus of address terms (complemented by results obtained from participant observation and native-speaker communicative competence), and we will hopefully be in a better position soon to describe more systematically and adequately, and also contrast, address systems in Bantu languages from a cross-cultural and pluri-disciplinary perspective. And although much work still has to be done, it has become obvious already that a) Bantu languages are structurally similar, and b) that Bantu-speaking communities share a number of socio-cultural traits. However, ongoing research will provide further insights into c) the culture-specific use of address forms in everyday conversations.

## List of abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| cl. | class |
| conj. | conjunction |
| conn. | connective |
| FAM | familiar |
| HON | honorific |
| interrog. | interrogative |
| loc. | locative |
| part. | particle |
| pl. | plural |
| sg. | singular |
| TAM | tense, aspect, mood |

276

# References

Atkinson, Dwight (1990). Discourse analysis and written discourse conventions, *Applied Linguistics 11,* 57-76.

Beeching, Kate (2002). *Gender, Politeness and Pragmatic Particles in French.* Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Braun, Friederike (1988). *Terms of Address.* Problems of patterns and usage in various languages and cultures. Berlin *et al*.: Mouton de Gruyter.

Brown, Penelope & Levinson, Stephen C. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage.* Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press.

Daba, Habibu A. (1987). *Sociolinguistic Study of Address Terms in Hausa*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms.

Dauer, Sheila A. (1984). *Haya Greetings*: The negotiation of relative status. Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms.

De Klerk, Vivian (2006). *Corpus Linguistics and World Englishes. An analysis of Xhosa English*. London *et al*.: Continuum.

Doke, Clement M. & Vilakazi, B.W. (1964). *Zulu-English Dictionary*. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press.

Doke, Clement M. Malcolm, D. M., Sikakana, J. M. A. & Vilakazi, B. W. (1996). *English-Zulu/Zulu-English Dictionary*. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press.

Dryer, Matthew S. & Haspelmath, Martin (Eds.) (2011). *The World Atlas of Language Structures Online*. Munich: Max Planck Digital Library.

Ervin-Tripp, Susan M. (1972). Alternation and co-occurrence. In Gumperz, John J. & Hymes, Dell (Eds.) *Directions in Sociolinguistics: The ethnography of communication.* (pp. 218-250). New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

Ervin-Tripp, Susan M. (2001). Variety, style-switching, and ideology. In Eckert, Penelope & Rickford, John R. (Eds.) *Style and Variation.* (pp. 44-56). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Finlayson, Rosalyn (1995). Women's Language of Respect: isihlonipho sabafazi, In Mesthrie, Rajend (Ed.) *Language and Social History*. Studies in South African sociolinguistics. (pp. 140-153). Capetown & Johannesburg: David Philip.

Fischer, Arnold, Weiss, Elisabeth, Mdala, Ernest & Tshabe, Sonwabo (Eds.) (1985). *English-Xhosa Dictionary*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.

Fishman, Joshua A. (1965). Who speaks what language to whom and when? *La Linguistique, 2*, 67-88.

Fishman, Joshua A. (1993). Ethnolinguistic democracy: Varieties, degrees and limits. *Language International*, *5;1*, 11-17.

*Free basic course in African languages*. University of South Africa. <http://www.unisa.ac.za/free_online_course> (04-08-2011)

Goffman, Erving (1967). *Interaction Ritual.* Essays on face-to-face behavior**.** Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books.

Gregersen, Edgar A. (1974). The signaling of social distance.  In Gage, W.W. (Ed.) *Language in its Social Setting*. (pp. 47-55). Washington, D.C.: Anthropological Society of Washington.

Gunner, Liz & Gwala, Mafika (Eds.) (1991). *Musho: Zulu Popular Praises*. East Lansing: Michigan State University.

Helmbrecht, Johannes (2003). Politeness distinctions in second person pronouns. In Lenz, Friedrich (Ed.) *Deictic Conceptualisations of Space, Time and Person*. (pp. 185-202). Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Helmbrecht, Johannes (2008). Politeness distinctions in pronouns. In Dryer, Matthew S. & Haspelmath, Martin (Eds.) *The World Atlas of Language Structures Online*. (Chapter 45.) Munich: Max Planck Digital Library.

Herbert, Robert K. (1990). Hlonipha and the ambiguous woman. *Anthropos, 85,* 455-473.

Hubbard, Hilton (2000). Discourse: language in context. In Webb, Vic and Kembo-Sure (Eds.) *African Voices*. An introduction to the languages and linguistics of Africa. (pp. 245-267). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hymes, Dell (1962). The ethnography of speaking. In Gladwin, Thomas & Sturtevant, William C. (Eds.) *Anthropology and Human Behavior*. (pp. 13-53). Washington, D.C.: Anthropological Society of Washington.

Ibriszimow, Dymitr & Porkhomovsky, Victor (2001). Towards a typology of kinship terms and systems in Afro-Asiatic (Hamito-Semitic): I. West Chadic and Modern South Arabian. *Afrika und Übersee*, *84*, 161-184.

Irvine, Judith (1989). Strategies of status manipulation in the wolof greeting. In Bauman, Richard & Sherzer, Joel (Eds.) *Explorations in the Ethnography of Speaking*. (pp. 167-191). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Irvine, Judith (2001). 'Style' as distinctiveness: the culture and ideology of linguistic differentiation. In: Eckert, Penelope and Rickford, John R. (Eds.) *Style and Sociolinguistic Variation*. (pp. 21-43). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kasanga, Luanga A. & Lwanga-Lumu, Joy-Christine (2007). Cross-cultural linguistic realization of politeness: A study of apologies in English and Setswana. *Journal of Politeness Research, 3*, 65-92.

Kaschula, Russell. (2002). *The Bones of the Ancestors are Shaking.* Xhosa oral poetry in context. Lansdowne: Juta.

Kerbrat-Orecchioni, Catherine (2010). *S'adresser à autrui*. Les formes nominales d'adresse en français. Université de Savoie: Laboratoire Langages, Littératures, Sociétés Collection Langages.

Kitereza, Aniceti (2002). *Mr. Myombekere and His Wife Bugonoka, Their Son Ntulanalwo and Daughter Bulihwali:* The Story of an Ancient African Community. Translated by Ruhumbika, Gabriel. Dar-es-Salaam: Mkuki wa Nyota Publ. (A Swahili version of the novel first appeared in 1980)

Kolbusa, Stefanie (2000). *Ingamwana*. Nyakyusa Schwiegermeidung. Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Bayreuth.

Koopman, Adrian (2002). *Zulu Names.* Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press.

Kumalo, Mpiyakhe B. (1992). Traditional and modern forms of address in isiZulu. In Herbert, Robert K. (Ed.) *Language and Society in Africa*. The theory and practice of sociolinguistics. (pp. 345-352). Johannesburg: University of Witwatersrand Press.

*Languages of South Africa*. <http://www.southafrica.info/about/people/language.htm> (04-08-2011)

Lupapula, Abel (2010). Sukuma and Kerewe greetings with particular reference to afternoon greetings: a contrastive analysis. Unpubl. seminar paper, Bayreuth University.

Munnik, Anne. (2006). *Learn Xhosa*. Pietermaritzburg *et al*.: Shuter & Shooter.

Munnik, Anne & Roos, Vivienne (1996). *Learn Zulu Today*. Pietermaritzburg *et al*.: Shuter & Shooter.

Mzolo, Douglas (1978). Zulu Clan Praises. In Argyle, John & Eleanor Preston-Whyte (Eds.) *Social System and Tradition in South Africa*. (pp. 206-221). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ndezenyuy, Y.F. (n.d.). Faay's Lamnso': class distinctions in Lamnso', paper held at the Cameroon Conference of African Linguistics (CAMCAL), 17th – 19th April 2000. University of Yaounde I, Ms.

Ndimande-Hlongwa, Nobuhle (2010). Nicknames of South African soccer teams and players as symbols of approbation in a multilingual and multicultural country. *South African Journal of African Languages 30,1*: 88-97.

Ndoleriire, Oswald K. (2000). Cross-cultural communication in Africa. In Webb, Vic & Kembo-Sure (Eds.) *African Voices*. An introduction to the languages and linguistics of Africa. (pp. 268-285). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Neethling, Bertie. (2005). *Naming among the Xhosa of South Africa*. (Studies in Onomastics, 8.). Lewiston, NY: Mellen.

Ngcobo, Mtholeni N. (2003). *Learn to speak Zulu*. A practical guide for second language learners. Colorado Springs, CO: International Academic Publishers.

Nxumalo, Thandiwe & Cioran, Samuel D. (1996). *Funda IsiZulu! – Learn Zulu!:* An introduction to Zulu. Hamilton, Ontario: WXY Media for Juta Academic Publishing.

*Online Course on Zulu Greetings* <http://www.byki.com/lists/Zulu/Meeting-and-Greeting-1.html> (30-11-2011)

Parkinson, Dilworth B. (1985). *Constructing the Social Context of Communication Terms of Address in Egyptian Arabic*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

*Poetic African Language Greetings*. Radio inverview with John Maytham. Cape Talk, 5th June 2003. <http://www.africanvoices.co.za/media/radiogreet.htm> (30-11-2011)

Poulos, George & Bosch, Sonja E. (1997). *Zulu*. Munich & Newcastle: LINCOM Europa.

Poulos, George & Msimang, Christian T. (1998). *A Linguistic Analysis of Zulu*. Pretoria: Via Afrika.

Raum, Otto (1973). *The Social Function of Avoidances and Taboos among the Zulu*. Berlin: de Gruyter.

Rudwick, Stephanie Inge (2008). Shifting norms of linguistic and cultural respect: hybrid sociolinguistic Zulu identities. *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, *17;2*, 152-174.

Sommer, Gabriele (2006). ‚Familiensache Höflichkeit' – Beobachtungen zum Ausdruck sozialer Distanz und Nähe in afrikanischen Sprachen. In Winkelmann, Kerstin & Ibriszimow, Dymitr (Eds.) *Zwischen Bantu und Burkina.* Festschrift für Gudrun Miehe zum 65. Geburtstag. (pp. 235-249). Cologne: Rüdiger Köppe.

*Speak Zulu with Us (Advanced)*. CD Rom. African Voices, Diep River.

*Speak Zulu with Us (Beginners)*. CD Rom. African Voices, Diep River.

Strecker, Ivo. (2010). *Ethnographic Chiasmus*. Essays on culture, conflict and rhetoric. Münster: LIT.

Taljaard, P. C. & Bosch, Sonja E. (1988). *Handbook of isiZulu*. Pretoria : J.L. Van Schaik.

Teferra, Anbessa (1987). Balissa: Women's Speech among the Sidama, *Journal of Ethiopian Studie, 20*, 44-59.

Treis, Yvonne (2005). Avoiding Their Names, Avoiding Their Eyes: how Kambaata women respect their in-laws. *Anthropological Linguistics, 47;1*, 292-320.

*Web version Ethnologue.* South Africa. <http://www.ethnologue.com/show_country.asp?name=SA> (04-08-2011)

*Web version Ethnologue.* Tanzania. <http://www.ethnologue.com/show_country.asp?name=TZ> (04-08-2011)

Weinrich, Harald (¹1982, 1997). *Textgrammatik der französischen Sprache*. Stuttgart: Klett.

Weinrich, Harald (1993). *Textgrammatik der deutschen Sprache*. Mannheim *et al*.: Dudenverlag.

Wilkes, Arnett & Nkosi, Nicholias (1995). *Teach Yourself Zulu*. London: Hodder Headline.

Wolff, Ekkehard (2000). Language and society. In Heine, Bernd & Nurse, Derek (Eds.) *African Languages*. An introduction. (pp. 298-347). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Zungu, Phyllis (1997). Some Aspects of Hlonipha in Zulu Society, *Language Matters, 28*, 171-181.

# Selected Proceedings of the 42nd Annual Conference on African Linguistics: African Languages in Context

edited by Michael R. Marlo,
Nikki B. Adams, Christopher R. Green,
Michelle Morrison, and Tristan M. Purvis

Cascadilla Proceedings Project     Somerville, MA     2012