

## A sociolinguistic analysis of Likuba greetings

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### Abstract

*This paper scrutinised the greetings driving data from Likuba community under a sociolinguistic analysis. Ken Bach & Robert M. Harnich postulated in the literature (1979: 51-52) that greetings are not content-based. Yet, this paper demonstrates that in Likuba, greetings are motivated and socially expressing a special context.*

**Keywords:** *greetings, Likuba community, sociolinguistic analysis, special context, content-based.*

### Résumé

*Cet article a examiné les données relatives aux salutations Likuba sous une analyse sociolinguistique. Il a été postulé par Ken Bach & Robert M. Harnich (1979: 51-52) que les salutations ont un contenu vide. Cependant, cet article démontre qu'en Likuba, les salutations sont motivées et expriment socialement un spécial contexte.*

**Mots clés:** *salutations, communauté likuba, l'analyse sociolinguistique, contexte spécial, contenu substantiel*

### Introduction

Socialization is part of fundamental principles of leading every linguistic community. In fact, it implies several aspects of language among which speech acts in general and greetings in particular. Actually, greetings make the social wheel turns smoothly and vary through different purposes from one social group to another. Accordingly, Ken Bach & Robert M. Harnich (1979: 51-52) state that greetings constitute a means expressing pleasure and a prelude of interaction between individuals. However, this statement raises the following question: Are greetings a mere expression of pleasure and a prelude establishing contact between individuals? In this connection we hypothesised that every linguistic community has specificities related to speech acts in general and greetings in particular. This study examines the social impact of Likuba greetings towards participants.

In the literature, it comes out that Akindélé (2017) talked the type, structural organisation and functions of greetings with regard to Sesotho greetings. Next Iyola (2018) compared French and Yoruba greetings. None of the two authors raised the

issue of greetings related to proverbs; this is an idiosyncratic feature of Likuba greetings. This study falls in pragmatics and we use inductive approach.

This paper has three sections: Greeting functions, types of greetings and analysis, and greetings structural organization.

## **I. Greeting functions**

The present section aims at bringing light on general consideration of greetings. Greetings perform several functions. In this paper, we divide them into three aspects as follows: social integration, religion distinction and geographical one.

### **I.1. Social integration**

Greetings are means which contribute to members of communities' social integration. In fact, people who greet others are said to be kind and capable of living with others. Therefore, this attitude may offer them some opportunities in the community.

### **I.2. Religion distinction**

The distinction of individual's religion can be made through greetings. That is the reason why, "Sala malekoum" is the Muslim greeting mark, "Shaloom" for the Hebrew. Actually, most Congolese newly born churches use this one. In Congo, Catholic church is made of different prayer groups and each of them has a particular way to greet its own members. For instance, the members of "Yamboté" at Saint Jean Baptiste use the name of their group to greet themselves as follows "yamboté" and the answer is "partout".

### **I. 3. Geographical area distinction**

Greetings can enable to distinguish individual according to different area. In fact, the Congolese musician Zoba Casimir provides a worldly illustrations in his song "La guerre" as follows: Mbote(na yo) for Congo and DRC, Mibaramo for the Centrafricans, Amakuru, Buenos dias, Ni hao and Nanga deuf respectively for Rwanda, Portuguese, China and Senegal. It comes out that these greeting functions are noticeable in several countries through the world and their common point is that they can be accompanied with body gestures.

### **I.4. Cultural distinction**

From greetings, it is easier to distinguish individual cultural values. That is the reason why, in Congo some women living in the south part of Congo bow in front of a man regardless his age. It is a mark of respect towards men because our society is male-oriented. This attitude shows the difference between women of the north and south of Congo.

### **I.5.Social class distinction**

The way different members of society greet themselves show the difference of social classes. That is the reason why, in Brazzaville, in Talangai, the way young people who charge common transport buses differ from the students for instance. Since, these young men are considered as troublemakers, their greeting obeys their group. It can be illustrated as follows "asma eza ndenge nini" or "friend, how is there?". Sometimes, they use the term "nko" or "kooko" which respectively mean uncle and great parent. These words are sufficient for them during greetings at any time. In Koyo community, a traditional chief "Kani" or "Mwènè" is greeted with a great deference and honour "Akuki m'okani". In fact, while greeting him; an individual should bow and pronounce some words to honour the chief. In this respect, Gemma Cliff Ngua Oniangue (2017: 55) states, *"The traditional chief called "Kani" or "Mwene" is the only persons to receive honours (Akuki m'Okani). In order to show the high degree of politeness, all the members of the community have to bend for greeting him"*

From this assertion, it appears that a traditional chief cannot be greeted as an ordinary man. This attitude also is a sign which permits to recognize his authority.

## II. Types of greetings and analysis among Likuba.

This section provides an overview of Likuba greetings as a social fact. It includes formal greetings, informal, festival, condolences and proverbial ones.

### II.1. Proverbial greetings

Likuba formal greetings based on "losako" is made of proverbial answers. Note that proverbs are seen as "the mirror of life". In this respect, Benjamin Kala Ngoma (2004:2) following Confucius asserts, "A proverb is like a wing mirror which helps us know what has happened in the past and forecast the future". Otherwise, proverbs shed light on the past which constitutes the basis of every society.

"Losako" is a greeting specificity expressing a special mark of deference towards people who are supposed to be older and socially high status than others. It is also used when addressing family members who play the first role. For instance, a bride-to-be who did not give "losako" to one of the members of his in-law namely father or brother was submitted to some complications later during the wedding ceremony and this one was obliged to pay an amount of money to repair that fault; if not, the marriage could not take place.

Besides, "Losako" was mostly used by male persons than female ones whereas, nowadays, because of modernism, their use no more depends on gender. The following is an illustration of Losako greeting style in Likuba.

Speaker A1: Losako

Speaker B1: Nyangu mosolo mosala  
Mother job work

Speaker B2: Mokindza ma ngai ntsolo  
Fart of me smell

Speaker B3: Dzoa ndzungu  
Stupid pot

Speaker B4: Etsetsege monano olanga té.  
A kind of fish upstream try not

Speaker B5: Ekora a mbango ekiba na yémé  
Runner race to himself

Speaker B6: .Boboro bolamu diambo okula té.  
Family good fine get not

Speaker B7: Kumba ayumbi ndzoto  
Tortoise bent body

Speaker B 8: Bopendza kuku té.  
Solidary kitchen not

Speaker B9: Botondolo aseki mbia  
Aframamum laugh palmtree

Speaker B 10. Moyoko kele té  
Poor angry not

Speaker B 11. Dzamba na moro oyeba eyu  
Live with person know behaviour

Speaker B12: Momboro lo lisangu moro mepoundza n'epoundza  
Grain of maize person foul foul

B1 stands for the source of money is the work. Such a proverb raises the work and condemns laziness. It is a kind of awaking in the framework of working for the Likuba people. In fact, it teaches (young) people not to depend on others and prevents them from bad practices. (Young) men prefer to win their life without making some efforts; this attitude exposes some of them at sorcery.

B2 proverb: "My fat smells badly". It is a piece of advice against bad companies. In fact, everybody makes fart from the bowels. However, from this proverb, it appears that in a group, only one member is accused to be at the origin of disgusting farts. This situation shows that we must avoid bad companies. Accordingly, in the framework of good relationships, people should tell truth to each other instead of being adept of gossiping.

B3 proverb compares cooking pot to a stupid person. Actually, since the cooking pot is always exposed on fire which represents a substantial role, although it does not enjoy any profit. This metaphorical proverb is against ingratitude. Indeed, being grateful is the expression of good education because this practice raises individuals. Then, it is worth for people to learn gratitude notions.

B4 proverb is the following ‘etsetsege’; a kind of fish cannot feel tired while swimming upstream. Indeed, it teaches people perseverance, hardworking virtue which is the key to success in every domain of life. In addition, it encourages people not to consider their failure as the end of their life similarly with the saying “Mpiko lotomba” or “perseverance brings success”.

B5 proverb pinpoints the pains due to efforts made by a runner during a race. Actually, the answer recommends people not to be hurry in life in order to avoid mistakes and asks people to go slowly because precipitation often exposes to all sorts of obstacles. It is synonymous with “Epala na mwko oyina” or “a canoe cannot capsize when you have a recipient to put out water.

B6 refers to kindness is good but one must not be condemned. In fact, this proverb makes the promotion of honesty. In Likuba, an honest person is respected and capable of having some responsibilities in connection with village managements. However, the day he will commit a bad practise such as rape, robbery or sorcery... he will no longer be trusted by the other members of the community and can be replaced by a new one.

B7 is “The tortoise has bent its feet to wait for. The word tortoise is used as a metaphor condemning the passivity attitude in life. The present proverb raises the challenge spirit for a dynamic spirit cannot reduce someone to vulnerability. It teaches to be prompt in front of opportunities.

B8 greeting is “solitude no palaver. It encourages solidarity in human being relationships. Accordingly, solidarity characterizes the Likuba everyday life and a member of community who is not solidary towards the others has difficult social integration. Therefore, this attitude prevents one individual from enjoying community advantages. For instance, in the case of mourning or wedding ceremony, that person cannot have assistance of the other members of the community.

B9 proverb literal translation is “aframamum”; a kind of fruit is mocking at the palm nut. In fact, both fruits are considered as two very poor people who criticize each other in spite of their own social conditions. This proverb condemns mockery of individuals social status since life is considered as a circle; the one who is seen as a non-valuable object may become rich and vice versa. It is similar to the proverb “Mokili mayi ya bwato” or “Life moves like water” or “Ezwi moninga koséke té” or “Don’t laugh at someone who is crying because we don’t know the future”.

B10, it is literally translated “a poor man is never in anger”. This proverb means that people who cannot afford should not complicate things; they should enjoy their benefactors’ advantages. This proverb purports to teach people about the mastering of social classes.

B11 is: each seed maize grows one by one”. In the day –to-day interaction, it advises people to avoid jealousy apart from marriage matters. Actually, this bad feeling exposes people to sorcery.

B12 literal translation of this greeting is “live with someone to know his/her behaviour”. In fact, it means that it is not possible to judge someone from a distance. That is the reason why, in Likuba community, before marriage, the parents asked their bride-to-be to share first the same home so that the partners know each other behaviour and later, they will decide to be married or not. This proverbial greeting teaches people to pay attention with appearances.

**II.3. Common greetings**

The illustration of the dialog is made of literal translation and meaning.

| speakers | Likuba                                                                                            | Meaning                                      |
|----------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| B1       | Ô ngo berege<br>Over there where                                                                  | Good morning/afternoon/Evening/Night         |
| B2       | Dzambi tè<br>Problem no                                                                           | I am fine                                    |
| B1       | Mekôlô me-kuya<br>Days they-enter                                                                 | Long time ago                                |
| B2       | Na-ligi na ndzodo<br>I was with illness                                                           | I was ill                                    |
| B1       | Bena, nga naligo yewa tè<br>Like this, me did not know                                            | Sorry, I did not know                        |
| B2       | Ndzodo likia nga makasi,<br>Health made me strongly,<br>o nga na-ya malamau<br>now, I-become well | I was seriously ill, now I am feeling better |
| B1       | Dzambi té, toho loyi,<br>Problem no, be tomorrow<br>Nayaga<br>Come                                | Never mind, see you after tomorrow           |
| B2       | Dzambi tè, na-bonda yao<br>Problem no, I wait you                                                 | Never mind, I will wait for you              |

It appears that this dialogue consists of two participants who know each other and get used paying visit to others. However, during a moment, they did not meet because one of them was ill. This is remarkable through ‘Mekolo mekuya’. In addition “Bena, nga naligo yewa tè” and “Dzambi tè, toho loyi na yagha o ndago”. That is why, for the Likuba, greeting is an opportunity of a real dialogue between members of the community. “Ô ngo berege or Berege” represents a common greeting among Likuba. It is a natural way to greet which means to know about the health of your interlocutor. Greeting is not a wish, but rather a question synonymous to “How are you?” or “How do you do?”

#### 2.4. Festival greetings

During festivals, it is remarkable that a long conversation is no need and what is substantial is a greeting mark in the connection with the ceremony. This is expressed through different words and the answer is generally short.

In Likuba linguistic community as in other African geographical areas, festivals consist of wedding ceremonies, celebration of new year, birth of twins, reception of new members in traditional institutions, the enthronement of new traditional chiefs ...and so on. Accordingly, there are not special words to greet people. In the case of a feast wedding ceremony, people say “Longonya”. It is a compliment and greeting at the same time. In addition, the answer is “melesi” meaning “Thanks”. Finally, when someone is well dressed, the word “putulu” purports to greet and appreciate him or her too. Note that as regard these words, there is a similarity between Likuba and Lingala. Both languages are sometimes considered as both close sisters.

#### 2.5. Commiseration/Condolences greetings

Dead events constitute an opportunity during which people use special types of greetings for people who lost their dear friends or parents require comfort during the mourning period. Moreover, an afflicted person whose moral is already upset does not speak much and a long conversation with him seems boring. This type of greetings is not made of a long conversation. It is often a sentence describing a sad situation whose the greeted person is victim. It can be illustrated as follows:

Speaker A: Yago kuli pasi nga nano okumina te nga ndzoo eli ekandza

(You were in suffering but I did not come because I was ill).

Speaker B: Pasi nyango (difficult mother).

### III. Structural organization of Likuba greetings

In analysing the structure of Likuba greeting, we lean on the theoretical framework of discourse analysis as proposed by linguists such as Sinclair and Coulthard (1975), Ventola (1987), and Akindélé (1989, 1990). According to them, greetings are made of the following parts: opening or prefatory (pref), informatory (inf), pre-closing (pr-cl) and closing (cl). In fact, the first word refers to greeting terms which initiate a conversation, the second deals with the answer; the third consists of greeting words that people use before closing their conversation, its use appears facultative. Finally, closing is pronounced to end a given conversation. Note that this analysis is based on the form and not in the content for in previous pages; this aspect has been already treated in both languages.

In this section, I am going to present a dialogue from which the structural analysis will be possible. This dialogue will have a literal translation and meaning. Any aspect of a given languages obeys a structure. Since greetings require participants, its structure is going to be pointed out through a conversation.

This dialogue will be presented in a chart made of two parts: structures and proverbial greetings (chart n°1) and structures and common greetings (chart n°2)

**Chart n°1**

|             |                               |
|-------------|-------------------------------|
| Structures  | Proverbial greetings          |
| Prefatory   | Losako                        |
| Informatory | Bonanga bato                  |
| Pre-Closing | Kwa byàò                      |
| Closing     | Boboro bolamu dyambu okula te |

**Chart n°2**

|             |                  |
|-------------|------------------|
| Structures  | Common greetings |
| Prefatory   | O ngo berege     |
| Informatory | Dzambi te        |
| Pre-closing | O ke wani?       |
| Closing     | Na ke ndago      |
| Preclosing  | O pe mama mbote  |
| Closing     | Loyana loyi      |

It appears that the proverbial greetings obey the four greeting steps whereas the common greetings allow the repetition of the two last steps. Of interest is the fact that the obligatory steps in either proverbial or common greeting are the Prefatory and Informatory because the remaining parts are optional.

**Conclusion**

It comes out that Likuba greetings are not used as a simple act of pleasure and a means expressing contact between individuals. It is rather an expression of the whole life of this people. This is mainly observable with the use of “Losako”, considered as an act of wisdom. Nowadays, because of modernism, its use is not the same as in the past be there in villages or rural areas. If we do not pay attention, this African cultural patrimony will disappear. Losako greeting is widely used in Lingala speaking areas in Democratic Republic of Congo and the north of the Republic of Congo. Finally, Likuba greetings attest the discourse properties referred as Prefatory, Informatory, Preclosing and closing. It should be highlighted that only the first two elements are obligatory while the last two are merely optional.

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