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## **Greetings in Akóóse: A Sociolinguistic Approach**

This paper looks at the day-to-day interactional discourse of the Bakossi people of the South West Province of Cameroon through the act of greeting. It examines the various types of greetings found within this community, the nature of these greetings and the factors that lead to the choice of one greeting over the other. The paper equally tries to bring out the functions of greetings in the lives of the Bakossi people. The analysis shows that greeting is a normal sociolinguistic custom used by the Bakossi people to establishment interpersonal relationship, since it involves seeking information about the welfare of the person being greeted, his/her family relations and friends. The analysis equally reveals that age factor, time, and context of situation determine the choice of greetings in Akóóse as well as who greets first, with age being the dominant factor.

*Key Words:* Greetings, Sociolinguistics, Akóóse, Relationship, Bakossi

### **1. Introduction**

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

In the Bakossi sociolinguistic community quite a significant effort has been devoted to the study of Akóóse phonology, morphology, syntax, lexicon, tradition, culture and literary genres and a substantial amount of literature has been produced in these areas. As is the case in most communities in Africa there is little or no study at all carried out

specifically on Akoose rules of speaking and greeting system. Yet the phenomenon of Akóóse greeting forms part of the Akóóse linguistic custom with its set of norms that guide behavioural patterns. Custom in this context involves procedure, manners, forms, ceremonies and prescribed conventions of the Bakossi sociolinguistic community. It is best summed up and symbolized in the way the Bakossi people use their language, which includes greeting as a sociolinguistic event.

Greeting can be defined as a communication means used by individuals to consciously and deliberately make their presence felt by other(s), show attention, and suggest a type of relationship or social status between themselves and others. Greetings exist in all known human cultures, though they may differ from culture to culture and. They can be expressed both audibly and physically, and most often involve a combination of the two. Greeting is usually verbalized but could be non-verbalized as in the case of waving of hands, eye movement, smiles, flashing of car head-lamp, etc. (Harvey, 1982). As a universal feature of human interaction, greetings have been defined as 'the set of linguistic and /or non-linguistic devices used for the initial management of encounters' (Ibrahim et al., 1976: 12).

Greeting imposes on each individual "an obligation on how to conduct oneself in a particular way towards others" (Goffman 1956). Akóóse greeting is informed by rules of conduct, and is an inevitable part of everyday conversation. According to Goffman, a rule of conduct may be defined as a guide for action, recommended not because it is pleasant, cheap, or effective, but because it is suitable or just. It regularizes patterns of reciprocal behaviour among group members. It facilitates predictability and stability in interpersonal

relationships and, at the same time, minimizes negative feelings or general misunderstanding.

Traditionally, people are expected to greet everyone they meet anywhere, and not just especially the people they know. However, this trend is changing in modern times in the Bakossi society due to the effect of western cultures, especially in urban areas where people are only concerned about those who are close to them.

This paper is structured as follows: In the next section, I look at the types of greetings found within the Bakossi community. This is followed by the nature of Akóóse greetings. Next come the factors that influence the choice of greetings in Akóóse. The next section focuses on the functions of greetings within the Bakossi community, while the last section is a conclusion to the paper.

## **2. Types Of Akóóse Greetings**

Greetings can be described as the exchange of expressions, pleasantries or good wishes between two people or a group of people interacting for the purpose of fulfilling certain social obligations or for the purposes of establishing interpersonal relationship. In some cases, greeting is used as a prelude to the making of a proper conversation or introducing the topic of talk. There are different types of greetings in Akóóse. These include, among others, greeting employed for seeking information about the well-being of a person and his/her loved ones, greetings to identify in trying periods, greetings to rejoice with a person in times of success or when good fortune occurs, etc. For the purposes of this paper, I will concentrate on two main types of greetings in Akóóse, namely: greetings employed for seeking information about the well-being of a person and his/her loved ones, and greetings to rejoice with a person in times of success or when good fortune occurs.

### *2.1 Greetings Used To Seek Information About The Well-Being Of Someone And His Or Her Loved Ones*

Greeting is a phenomenon that must occur between two persons or between a person and a group visible to each other, and this could take place anywhere be it out on the road, at work, in a shop, at the coffee shop, at the drinking bar, at meetings, at home, at social functions, and so on. As Laver (1981: 304) observes, ‘routines of greeting and parting, far from being relatively meaningless and mechanical social behaviour’... are extremely important strategies for the negotiation and control of social identity and social relationships between participants in a conversation. This is true of the Bakossi community; for once two or more people meet the tendency is for one of them to greet the other(s) for the sake of social relationship and/or identity. Generally, the younger ones will initiate the greetings and the elder one will respond. A simple greeting sequence when two (not very intimate) people meet is shown below.

(1) Epolle:	Àsàngé Morning	“Good morning”
Epie:	Éh, nè wé-mpéh Yes with you also/Question	“Yes, and you too?”
Epolle:	Éh yes	“Yes”
(2) Epolle:	Chân how	“How?”
Epie:	É-kâ bwâm. Chán nè wè It go well how with you	“It is fine. How about you?”
Epolle:	É-kâ bwâm It go well	“It is fine”

As shown from the sequence, one person initiates the greetings by inquiring about the well-being of the other. The other person answers and then also inquires about well-being

of the first speaker. This is the typical way in which people within the Bakossi community greet each other when they meet, and especially if they are not friends or close relations. Following Firth (1972), one can say that greetings in Akóóse are spontaneous emotional reactions when people come together or meet somewhere, and carry in them some social overt message.

In a situation where friends or close relations meet, the greetings will extend to other members of the families and even other social aspects of the participants' lives. Below is a sequence of the nature of such a greeting.

- |            |  |   |
|------------|--|---|
| (3) Ahone: | Àsàngé<br>Morning  | “Good morning”                          |
| Ekane:     | Éh, nè wé-mpéh<br>Yes with you also/Question             | “Yes, and you too?”                     |
| Ahone:     | Éh. Chán màn kàké<br>Yes how things going                | “Yes, how are things going?”            |
| Ekane:     | Màn kè bwàm. Chán nè wè<br>Things go fine. How with you  | “Things are going well. How about you?” |
| Ahone:     | Bwàm. Chán nè bân<br>Fine. How with children             | “Fine. How about the children?”         |
| Ekane:     | Bé dé bwàm. Chán ně bôn<br>They are fine. How with yours | “They are fine. How about yours?”       |
| Ahone:     | Bé pé dé bwàm.<br>They too are fine                      | “They too are fine”                     |
| Ekane:     | Ně bó. Sú nyèně mpè<br>That's fine. We see-Prog again    | “That's good. We shall see again”       |
| Ahone:     | Éh<br>Yes  | “Yes”                                   |

In the above sequence, the participants, who are close friends or relatives, greet each other and then inquire about each other's life in an attempt to know if things are fine with the other. They are trying to play the role of being each other's keeper and looking after each other. When they are sure that things are fine with both of them, they go on to

find out about the well-being of other loved ones, precisely the children in the above case. The inquiry could even go further by each asking the other about other relations like wives, husbands, parents, etc. This is the kind of greeting that Emery (2000: 201) considers as health enquiry with conventional answer, extendable by repetition or variation on the same theme. When there is nothing else important to talk about at a particular moment, one of them will close the greeting as shown in the last but one utterance above. This kind of ending is typical when people meet during the day. It is not a goodbye for the day with the idea that they might still meet each other again before they go to sleep that day.

However, if the participants meet in the evening and are both retiring to their respective homes with no intentions of going out again, the ending would be as indicated below.

- |            |   |                                  |
|------------|---|----------------------------------|
| (4) Ekane: | Nkú mbwâm. É lélè mètèn<br>Night good. You greet everyone | “Good night. Greet everyone”     |
| Ahone:     | Éh, nè yé-mpéh<br>Yes and you(pl)-also                    | “Yes, and you (plural) too”      |
| (5) Ekane: | Yé nàh bwâm<br>You(pl) sleep well                         | “You (plural) should sleep well” |
| Ahone:     | Éh nè yé-mpéh<br>Yes with you(pl)-also                    | “Yes, and you (plural) too”      |

In the above sequence, the participants say good night to each other and at the same time wishing each other and their loved one a good and sound sleep. The participants make use of the “plural you” because they know that they are both going to meet their family members/loved ones, and that they must look out for each other.

## 2.2 Greetings To Rejoice With Someone In Times Of Success Or Positive Events

In analyzing the phenomenon of greeting, congratulating and commiserating in Omani Arabic, Emery (2000: 201) observes that greetings are used to establish identity and affirm solidarity. They constitute a necessary stage on the route to ‘interpersonal access’ whereby information can be sought and shared. He identifies three stages of Omani Arabic (OA) greeting one of which is summons. Summons as greetings also occur in Akóóse in the form of a praise song. Generally, when something good happens to someone or a family (herein referred to as P1), friends, family members and well-wishers (herein referred to as P2) will come to celebrate with the former. On arrival, P2 will greet with an ululating song of praise, and both P1 and P2 will respond to the ululation greeting in a similar way. A typical example of this type of greeting is shown in example six below.

(6) P2:	Á bè-lóbé óh sóó (art) P1-people praise ululation	“People, let’s sing praise”
P1 & 2:	óh sóó, óh sóó, óh sóó, óh sóó, óh praise ululation.....	“Let’s sing praise”, let’s...
P2:	Á sé mètèngè (art) we happiness	“We are happy”
P1 & 2:	Á sé mètèngè, Á sé mètèngè, Á sé mètèngè óh (art) we happiness, (art) we happiness, (art) we happiness	“We are happy, we are...”

As shown in the above example, P2 is happy that something good has happened to P1. It could be the birth of a child, success in an examination, buying of a car, house, or simply anything that brings joy to people. Immediately P2 arrives, he/she greets P1 with this song of praise showing that he/she is sharing in the happiness of the other. Both participants join in the response to the greetings to show the extent to which they share in each other’s joy. This praise greeting is usually accompanied by some form of dancing and body movement indicating the great joy and happiness shared by the participants. From the

above example, it is evident that the success of one person within the Bakossi community is considered the success of all. And as a result, when something positive happens to one person, everyone else is expected to go and share in the joy. In the event that someone fails to do so, it is considered a great offense and an act of jealousy and hatred.

Another way of greeting someone in the Bakossi community during a happy event is to simply use a greeting that consists of thanks to GOD. A typical form of such a greeting is shown below in example seven.

(7) Mbote:	À Sáng sé sómé Wé (art) papa we thank you	“We thank You Father”
Ntube:	Á ngìnè Dyôb By power GOD	“By the power of God”
Mbote:	Á ngìnè Dyôb óh By power GOD ululation	“Yes, in God’s power”
(8) Palle:	Èdúbé bè nè Dyôb honour be with GOD	“Honor be to GOD”
Ewane:	Sé sómé Mó We thank HIM	“We thank Him”

As is the case with example (6), examples (7) and (8) are also praise greetings where an individual or a group of people come to rejoice with another/others and start praising GOD for His love and goodness. With such a greeting, the participants are simply acknowledging that whatever they are rejoicing for comes from GOD, and so He should be praised for the blessing(s). This type of greeting is mostly used by believers who attribute every good thing that happens in one’s life to GOD. To them, GOD should be given the pride of place and honor because He made it possible for them to have whatever they are celebrating. The greeting is also usually accompanied by some sort of dancing and body gestures.

From the types of greetings discussed in this section, we can clearly see the



cultural aspect of solidarity between the Bakossi people. It is evident that the people are there for one another and share in each other's joy and happiness. In fact, solidarity and oneness is a strong feature within the Bakossi culture where individuals are expected to treat each other with fraternal love. Some of the greetings also show that the Bakossi people acknowledge the presence of a Divine being – GOD – from whom all good things come.

### 3. Nature/Classification Of Akóóse Greetings

Greetings in Akóóse can be classified into two main categories: morning and evening greetings. This is mainly because the Bakossi people divide the day into two main parts namely the day (morning and afternoon) and the night (evening and night). Thus, when greeting someone during the day, which extends to sunset, morning greetings are used; while evening greetings will be used when greeting someone after sunset until bedtime.

#### 3.1 Morning Greetings

As already mentioned, morning greetings in Akóóse cover the period from one gets up from bed in the morning till at sunset. When two or more people meet during this period, one of them or a group initiates the greeting while the other(s) respond. The most common way to begin a morning greeting in Akóóse is as follows:

(9) Ebane:	Asàngé Morning	“Good morning”.
Etube:	Éh, nè wé-mpéh Yes and you-also	“Yes, and you too?”
Ebane:	Éh Yes	“Yes”
Etube:	Chân é kúnê How you sleep	“How did you sleep?”
Ebane:	bwâm fine	“Fine”

Etube:            ně    bó                            “That is good”  
                          That   good

This type of greeting sequence usually takes place during the early hours of the day, from the time one gets up from bed till noon. The greeting is usually initiated by younger ones when they meet elderly people. At home, the children will initiate the greetings in reverence to their parents, and the younger ones in respect to their elder siblings. The elder ones usually respond to the greeting and then go on to ask about the welfare of the other – wanting to know if the younger ones had a good sleep. Note that it is not an acceptable norm for the younger ones to ask about the welfare of the elder ones. This is considered as impolite behavior and can even be termed as being disrespectful. The idea behind this is that the elder ones, such as parents, are the ones who look after the well-being of the younger ones, such as children. Thus, if a parent inquires about the welfare of the children, it is not just a mere greeting but also wanting to be sure that the children are all fine. In the case where anyone says he/she did not sleep well, the parents will continue to ask questions relating to the child’s health; and if necessary they may have to take the child to see a doctor.

During the later hours of the day, after noon till sunset, the greetings are usually of the forms below:

(10)	Etape:	N lèntè wè I greet you	“I greet you”
	Ntube:	Éh, chán màn Yes, how things	“Yes, how are things”
	Etape:	Màn kè bwâm Things go well	“Things are going well”

Or

(11)	Mponge:	É dě      dáb óh You be/Tns    house	“Are you/ you are in the house”
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Emade:	Éh, chàn Yes, how	“Yes, how?”
Mponge:	bwâm Fine	“Fine”

Like in the previous examples, the greeting is initiated by the younger one(s). However, when two people of the same age group meet, or two friends, or even husband and wife, any of them can initiate the greeting. Generally, it is expected that the one who meets the other should begin the greeting sequence, but in cases where the people concerned are intimate to each other, it does not quite matter who begins the greeting. Examples twelve (12) and thirteen (13) below reveal a greeting pattern between two friends, and husband and wife respectfully.

- (12)
- |          |   |                                     |
|----------|---|-------------------------------------|
| Ngabe:   | À mwě chàn?<br>(qual) friend how                                | “How are you my friend?”            |
| Ntungwe: | É kè bwâm. Chán nè wè<br>It go well. How with you               | “It is fine. How about you?”        |
| Ngabe:   | É kè bwâm<br>It go well   | “It is fine.”                       |
| Ntungwe: | Chán nsôn nkî<br>How work TNS/go                                | “How did work go?”                  |
| Ngabe:   | Nsón nkî bwâm. Chán ne môn<br>Work tns/go well. How with yours  | “Work went well. How about yours?”  |
| Ntungwe: | Nkî bwâm, à déŋ à Dyób<br>Tns/go well, in name of GOD           | “It went well in GOD’s name”        |
| Ngabe:   | Né bô; Chán ne ndâb<br>That good; how with house                | “That’s good; How is the family?”   |
| Ntungwe: | Monté dé bwâm. Chán nè chon<br>Everyone is fine. How with yours | “Everyone is fine. How about yours” |

Ngabe: Bó pé dé bwâm. Sú nyéné mwébàn “They too are fine” Let see soon”  
They too are fine. We see small time

Ntungwe: É, mwébàn “yes, soon”  
Yes, small time

(13)

Wife: À-wè njóm chàn “How are you my husband?”  
POSS-My husband how

Husband: É kè bwâm. Chán nè wè “It is fine. How about you”  
It go well. How with you

Wife: É kè bwâm “It is fine”  
It go well

Husband: Chá mà-η-kí chì “How did things go today”  
How things-Past-go today

Wife: Mà-η-kí bwâm á ηgéné Dyób “Things went well by GOD’s power”  
Things-Past-go well in power GOD

The sequence of greeting in (12) is a situation where two friends who have not seen themselves during the early part of the day meet and inquire about each other’s day. The friends are interested in knowing how the other spent the day and if things are going well both at work and at home. The inquiry they make is out of concern for one another given that they are mutual friends. This explains why the conversation is long, and could even go longer. In (13), we have a situation where a husband and wife meet during the day (probably at lunch time or after work) and they try to inquire about each other’s day.

### 3.2 Evening Greetings

The evening greetings are usually done after sunset till bedtime. Just like the case of morning greetings, when two or more people meet the younger one(s) will initiate the greeting and the elder one(s) will respond and then extend the same greeting to the other. A

simple evening greeting sequence is as follows.

- |      |        |  |                     |
|------|--------|--|---------------------|
| (14) | Ebote: | Àhíné<br>Evening                             | “Good evening”.     |
|      | Etape: | Éh, nè wé-mpéh<br>Yes with you-also/Question | “Yes, and you too?” |
|      | Ebote: | Éh<br>Yes                                    | “Yes”               |

The above sequence is commonly used among participants who do not know each other. Since it is a natural phenomenon to greet one another in the Bakossi community, even strangers greet each other when they meet, but will use the simplest form. Note that the kinship terms “sàh” or “mà” will be added if the addressee is an elderly man or woman respectively. Such people will not go into any conversation beyond the normal greeting. But in a situation where the participants know each other, they will go further to inquire about each other’s day as mentioned in previous sections. Such inquiries will even extend to family members and loved ones, as is the case with the morning greetings. The evening greetings usually end in the following sequence as indicated in (15a) and (15b) below.

- |      |    |         |   |                              |
|------|----|---------|---|------------------------------|
| (15) | a. | Eduke:  | ɲkù mbwâm<br>Night good                 | “Good Night”                 |
|      |    | Emade:  | Éh, nè wé-mpéh<br>Yes, with you-also    | Yes, and you too”            |
|      | b. | Epolle: | Yè nàh bwâm<br>You(pl) sleep well       | “You (pl) should sleep well” |
|      |    | Ntube:  | Éh, nè yé-mpéh<br>Yes, and you(pl)-also | “Yes, and you (pl) too”      |

The ending sequence in (15a) is commonly used by all while (15b) is used by people who are closed to each other – close friends, family members, etc. As seen in (b) the sequence is

extended to family members who are not present at the scene of the greetings, with the use of the plural pronoun “you”.

It is important to note that the introductory greeting is usually done in the form of a question and the response clarifies the question. On the other hand, the concluding greeting as seen in example (15a and b) is more of a wish where the participants are wishing each other well throughout the night. Another important thing to note is that unlike the introductory greetings which are initiated by the younger one(s), the concluding greetings are initiated by the elder one(s). If initiated by a younger person to an older one, it will be considered impolite.

#### **4. Choice Of Greetings in the Bakossi Community**

The system of greeting in the Bakossi community is similar to that of some other African communities (Irvine 1974, Pongweni 1983, Akindele 2007). Among the Bakossi, there are different factors that lead an individual to greet others based on various occasions. There are sociolinguistic factors that account for the type and structuring of Akóóse greeting. They include age, sex, context and time. Although there seems to be cultural assumptions of equality and about the character and motivations of participants, nevertheless deference or respect is accorded to whoever deserves it among the Bakossi people and this is explicitly reflected in the greeting sequence.

Age is a very important variable that determines the choice/nature of greetings in the Bakossi community. The Bakossi culture gives special attention to the issue of respect, and one of the ways that this aspect is reflected is in the Akoose greeting system. In the Bakossi community, it is very uncommon to find people greeting one another by using either the first names (FN), last names, or any names at all. Rather, the greeting is

accompanied by the kinship term of “sàh” (for father, male adult, elderly man), or “mà” (for mother, female adult or elderly woman) as shown in the following examples.

- |      |        |                                    |                          |
|------|--------|------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| (16) | Ngone: | Àsàngé sàh/mà<br>Morning sir/madam | “Good morning sir/madam” |
|      |        | Àhiné sàh/mà<br>Evening sir/madam  | “Good evening sir/madam” |

If the above greeting were to be uttered as Àsàngé Mr. X/Mrs. X “(Good morning Mr. X/Mrs. X)”, it would be considered disrespectful especially when it is coming from a younger person to an older one. Even the use of titles like Dr., Prof., Chief, etc. is usually not considered polite in greetings. However, when it is coming from someone of a higher social status and older, it is accepted and sometimes considered as a mark of respect from the elder to the younger one but not vice versa.

It should be noted that greeting people with the kinship terms of “sàh” or “mà” does not imply that such persons may necessarily be fathers or mothers in the real sense of it. They are simply the basic terms used while addressing older persons, irrespective of whether they have children or not. Due to the amount of respect found in these terms, they can also at times be used independently as a greeting, whereby the actual greeting itself will be embedded in them. This is usually accompanied by the bringing together of both hands and the nodding of the head especially when it is a younger person greeting an elder one. In a typical Bakossi setting, the younger person is the one who initiates greeting whenever the occasion arises. This is a mark of deference to the older person. As Goffman (1956) says, the appreciation carried by an act of deference implies that the speaker possesses a sentiment of regard for the addressee, often involving a general evaluation of

the addressee. The younger one is however not expected to send out the hand in an attempt to greet the elder person with a handshake. If there is to be any handshake, the elder person will be the one to initiate that process. If it comes from the younger person, it is considered as being disrespectful. Although Goffman says that those who render deference to an individual may feel, of course, that they are doing this merely because he is an instance of a category, or a representative of something, and that they are giving him his due not because of what they think of him “personally” but in spite of it, this is not the case with greetings within the Bakossi community. For the Bakossi people, an individual is greeted with deference because he/she merits it either due to age or other variables. Thus, unlike Goffman, deference behavior in the Bakossi community is a true sentiment of the speaker’s appreciation of the addressee.

Another variable that determines the choice of a greeting and who greets first is context. Generally, if a person enters into a gathering of people, he/she is expected to offer greeting first to the group. In such a situation, the greeting is usually as shown in example seventeen below, irrespective of the time and place.

- |      |          |  |                        |
|------|----------|--|------------------------|
| (17) | Ntungwe: | Yé dè hé-óh<br>You(pl) be/Tense there-Excl | “Are you (pl) there?”  |
|      | Others:  | Éh. È pìdé<br>Yes. You come/Question       | “Yes. You have come?”  |
|      | Or:      | Éh. È pè bwâm<br>Yes. You come well        | “Yes. You are welcome” |

However, this is sometimes overshadowed by the age factor. In a typical Bakossi society, when an elder walks in and finds a group of youngsters, they will quickly greet him/her instead of expecting him/her to greet them first. This is in line with what Emery (2000:



202) says of OA greetings, when he says that one of the greeting rules is that the younger ones initiate the greeting to the older ones or lower status people to higher status. So, the greeting sequence will change into something like what we have in example eighteen below if an elderly person meets a younger people or if someone of a higher status meets someone of lower status.

- (18) Others: È pìdé sàh/mà “You have come sir/madam”  
 You come/Pres sir/madam
- Or È pè bwâm sàh/mà “You are welcome sir/madam”  
 You come well sir/madam
- Mr/Mrs X: Éh. Yé dè hé “Yes. Are you (pl) there?”  
 Yes. You/pl be/Tense there/Question
- Others: Éh “Yes”  
 Yes

In the same light, it is expected that when someone calls on another person's house, he/she should offer his/her greeting first whether he/she is older or younger. This greeting is done while an individual is at the door of the house. When he/she greets the household, they will respond and then invite him/her in. In this case, the greeting will be specific to the house context as indicated in example nineteen below.

- (19) Ngape: Yé dè à ndàb-óh “You are in the house?”  
 You(pl) be/Tense in house/Question-Excl
- Other(s): Éh. È hyé wén-óh “Yes. You have come here?”  
 Yes you come here- Excl
- Ngape: Éh. “Yes”  
 Yes
- Other(s) Sólé (à ndàb) “Enter (the house)” or “Come in”  
 Enter (in house)

To show the importance of greetings within the Bakossi community, after the greeting sequence above the visitor comes in and still greets the people as follows:

(20)	Ngape:	Ñ-lèntè yé I greet you (pl)	“I greet you (pl)”
	Others:	Éh. È pè bwâm Yes, You come well	“Yes. You are welcome”

Depending on who the visitor is, the greeting can continue with the others asking about the wellbeing of the visitor’s family members and loved ones before they get into the actual reason for the visit. But because it is well known to every Bakossi child that the younger ones must greet the elder people, it is quite common to find that in the Bakossi community the visitor will still be greeted first if he/she is older than the people he/she is visiting. Greetings can thus be considered, within the Bakossi community, as rituals that follow certain routines and habits. This is in line with Firth’s (1972) observation that greetings could be considered as “rituals” since they follow patterned routines. According to Firth, ‘rituals’ are formal procedures of a communicative but arbitrary kind, having the effect of controlling or regularizing a social situation.

The sex variable is another factor which accounts for the choice of greetings as well as who greets first in the Bakossi community. Generally, women are expected to greet the men first and to use a form that shows respect of the male sex. However, if the female participant is an older person and the male is younger, it is the male who greets first and must use the kinship term of “mà” in deference to the age of the woman. Emery (2000:202) contends this when he says that in OA female relatives initiate greetings to male relatives unless where the female is older than the male, and then the male will begin the greeting. This implies that the age variable surpasses the sex variable, although this

seems to be fading away in the urban centre where the younger ones rarely offer greetings to the older ones. It is important to note that greeting exchanges between males and females are generally limited and brief, except where the female is a relative to the male.

Time is yet another factor that can be responsible for the choice of a particular greeting. Persons who are not in a hurry and so have plenty of time to chat may decide to ask each other about many other issues before proceeding to other matters of concern. Such people will choose greetings that are long and can be expanded upon. These types of greetings can be termed *informatory exchanges*. *Informatory exchanges* are units of discourse concerned with negotiating the transmission of information or the topic of discourse. On the other hand, people who are probably rushing somewhere will go in for the shorter greetings of simply inquiring about the other participant and will choose to greet in such a way that the greeting cannot be expanded upon. This kind of greetings can be considered as *prefatory exchange* whereby there is very minimal interactional exchange between the participants. This type of greeting is also observed in Wolof greetings which Irvine (1974) calls “*passing greetings*”, in Sesotho greetings which Akindele (2007) terms *casual greetings*, in Arabic greetings (Ibrahim et. al. 1976, Emery 2000), and in English (Laver 1981). In addition to occurring between people who are in a hurry, it also occurs between people who are not very familiar, or between relations, friends or acquaintances who have already seen each other at least once that day and had already done the proper greeting of inquiring about the well being of all.

## **5. Conclusion**

This paper has attempted to look at the behavioral patterns within the sociolinguistics context of Akoose, from the point of view of greetings, which form part of the cultural

identity of the people. The paper has examined two types of greetings found within this community, the nature of these greetings and the factors that lead to the choice of one greeting over the other. The paper has equally tried to bring out the functions of greetings in the lives of the Bakossi people.

The paper has revealed that age factor, time, and context of situation determine the choice of greetings in Akoose as well as who greets first but that age is the dominant factor that determines who greets first and to an extent what type of greetings to use at a particular instance. This is supported by Emery (2000) who argues that although females tend to initiate greeting exchanges in OA, in a situation where a female is older the male will initiate the greeting. This can be viewed as a sign of politeness and respect for the elders within the OA community and the Bakossi community alike. As Firth (1972:29-30) suggest, greetings should not be treated as spontaneous emotional reaction to the coming together of people. For the most part they are highly conventionalized and follow patterned routines that are governed by the norms of a society. Greetings can thus be considered are part of the linguistic repertoire of politeness in Akóóse. They are tools of polite behavior and their use is guided by a polite norm.

The analysis have shown that greeting is a normal sociolinguistic custom used by the Bakossi people to establishment interpersonal relationship, since it involves seeking information about the welfare of the person being greeted, his/her family relations, loved ones and friends. Appropriate greeting behavior is crucial for the establishment and maintenance of interpersonal relationships. From the analysis, it can be seen that the Bakossi people consider greetings as an aid to peaceful social relations because it is very much a part of their daily experience. Greetings help them to maintain good relationships

and to open communication among themselves, and are thus seen as a mark of unity in the society. They demonstrate a sense of appreciation of one another, and also show concern about the well-being of the people. When used correctly, Akóóse greetings have what Geertz (1972) calls “a stately pomp which can make the simplest conversation seem like a great ceremony”. They help to create a bond or comfort between individuals and show friendliness among the people. It is therefore logical that greetings in Akóóse are expected in every context or situation.

Similarly, there seems to be a hidden moral code in the Bakossi community which makes the people to consider greeting one another at various occasions as a duty or a responsibility. This is in line with Goffman’s (1956) view that there are rules of conduct that guide individuals in various communities. There is some general belief that greetings bring peace and unity to the Bakossi people, to the extent that parents groom their children into knowing that greeting is part and parcel of their daily life. Thus, a child who does not greet is considered a badly brought-up and disrespectful child, who to a large extent brings disgrace to the parents since it will be considered that the parents did not train him/her properly. It should be noted that greetings is so important in the Bakossi society to the extent that failure to greet may give rise to bad feelings especially among relations or close friends. People are expected to greet their relations and ask about their welfare as well as that of their family members and friends.

One important thing about the greeting types in Akóóse is the elaborate use of the word “chán” which literally means “how”, and can be interpreted as “how are you” / “how are things”. The Bakossi people use this word as a means to inquire about each other. As can be noted from the instances of the greeting sequences, “chán” is used at all times of

the day, irrespective of the fact that greetings in Akóóse are divided in to two main time periods – morning and evening. It is also the type of greeting that is said as many times per day as people meet. In other words, if “A” and “B” meet ten times on a particular day, “A” will repeat this greeting ten times to “B” or vice versa, This is the one form of greeting that can be repeated numerously to one person by the same person. This shows that the Bakossi people are quite concerned about the welfare of others. They do not get tired of asking how the other is doing.

All in all, this paper has shed light on one of the areas of Akóóse linguistic custom – greetings - with its set of norms that guide behavioural patterns within the Bakossi sociolinguistic community.

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