

**An Interactional Sociolinguistic Study of Greetings in Selected Traditional Nupe Films
Using Dell Hymes' Ethnography of Speaking**

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Abstract

Greetings are a ubiquitous form of communication found in nearly all societies, serving as a crucial tool for initiating and maintaining social interactions. This study, therefore, explores the diverse sociolinguistic aspects of greetings in Nupe culture, aiming to understand how they function as socially meaningful acts and contribute to the construction of social identities and relationships. Guided by Dell Hymes' Ethnography of Speaking, this study employs a quantitative approach to analyse data collected for this research. The raw data for this research were obtained from four different traditional Nupe films: Usman Mokwa's *Rakpe* (2021), Tsado Felix's *Ndanusa* (2020), Bagi and Amina's *Etan Chin Chin* (2021) and Hussain Koda's *Teacher Eyekondudu* (2006). The findings revealed certain sociolinguistic variables that shape Nupe greetings in selected films, namely, age, gender, status and religion. In terms of the representation of greeting forms, Formal greetings accounted for the highest proportion at 23%, indicating that structured and official exchanges were most prevalent. Respectful greetings followed closely at 19%. Informal greetings made up 15% of the interactions. Playful or teasing greetings and spiritual or eulogizing ones each accounted for 12%. Congratulatory greetings represented 11%. Condolence greetings were the least common at 7%, suggesting fewer observed situations involving expressions of sympathy. The study reveals that greetings in Nupe films are not mere rituals, but dynamic expressions of identity, hierarchy, and cultural continuity in the Nupe community

Keywords: Nupe, Sociolinguistics, Greetings, Dell Hymes, Ethnography, Language

1.0 Introduction

Sociolinguistics, a field dedicated to studying the intricate relationship between language and society, finds a significant avenue for exploration in the domain of greetings. Greetings, as fundamental social acts, provide a rich context for sociolinguistic analysis due to their dynamic nature and cultural variations. The examination of greetings exposes linguistic phenomena like code-switching and language variation, as well as sociocultural aspects such as power dynamics and identity construction (Gumperz, 1982; Holmes, 2001). Furthermore, exploring greetings through a sociolinguistic lens provides a gateway to understanding the intricate interplay between language and society, shedding light on the subtle ways in which communication practices mirror and influence the structures of human interaction.

One of the main focuses of sociolinguistics is the way in which language reflects and reproduces social structures and power relations. Language, as the medium of greetings, not only reflects cultural norms but also contributes to their construction. Language use can be a marker of social identities, such as age, gender, ethnicity, and class, and can reinforce social hierarchies and inequalities (Baugh, 2018; Bucholtz & Hall, 2010).

The Nupe language is a language spoken by the Nupe tribe or people in Nigeria. The Nupe tribe or people are traditionally called 'Nupawa' by the Hausas and 'Tapa' by the neighbouring Yoruba people. Nupe language is a member of the Niger-Congo language family and is spoken by approximately 1.5 million people in Nigeria (Ayomoto, Bomiegha Ofeni, 2019). The Nupe language has a rich repertoire of greetings that are influenced by social, cultural, and linguistic factors. The Nupe language is primarily spoken in Niger State in Nigeria, with smaller communities in Kwara, Kogi, and the Federal Capital Territory. It is a tonal language with three tones: high, mid, and low, and has a complex system of noun classes (Hellen, 2023). The Nupe language has been influenced by neighbouring languages such as Hausa, Yoruba, and Gwari, which has resulted in the adoption of loanwords and linguistic features from these languages (Abdulkadir, 2021).

Greetings have played a significant role in the context of films, because filmmakers often utilise greetings to serve as important tools for character development, setting tone, and advancing plotlines. They can also reveal relationships, emotions, and societal dynamics. Filmmakers often employ greetings to establish a sense of time and place, creating a more immersive and relatable on-screen world for audience. The Nupe people have a rich cultural heritage reflected in their traditional films. Nupe films, which are films produced by the Nupe people, play a significant role in Nupe culture. Films produced in Nupe language often cut across historical, social, cultural, and religious aspects of the Nupe people, reflecting their values and experiences, and also providing a window into their traditions and beliefs. More importantly, Nupe films play a significant role in preserving and promoting Nupe culture, as well as show-casing the creative talents of the people. These films are popular not only within the confine of Nigeria, but also among the broader African audience and they contribute to the diverse tapestry of global cinema.

This research therefore aims at exploring the use of linguistic theories for the analysis of greetings in selected traditional Nupe films, analyzing their types or forms, functions, and cultural significance. These films provide insights into their language use, including the greetings as used in different social situations. Analysis will be guided by the following research questions: (1) What sociolinguistic variables reflect in the greeting patterns? (2) What dynamics shape their representations in the patterns? (3) What are the greeting forms and what are their sociolinguistic significance?

2.0 Review of Extant Studies

Many studies have been conducted on greetings in the Nupe language. Issa and Success (2025) conducted a study that, the Nupe language is used in a range of social contexts, from informal interactions between friends and family members to formal interactions between officials and dignitaries. The use of greetings in Nupe is influenced by factors such as age, gender, social status, and the nature of the relationship between the participants. Abdulkadir (2021) investigated the use of greetings in the Hausa language, which has had a significant influence on the Nupe language.

As a subfield of sociolinguistics, interactional sociolinguistics concentrates on studying the social meaning of language use in the context of communicational activity. This investigates how people use language to accomplish social objectives, people define identities, and information hold together in distinct sociocultural contexts. Theory and methods of interactional sociolinguistics are derived from

those of sociolinguistics, conversation analysis, and ethnography which allow us to analyze the complex ways between language use and social life. This concept draws on the concept of interactional sociolinguistics and the process of its development since 1959 and up to 1972 from Goffman, Hymes and Gumperz through their key contributions and influence over this thought. Erving Goffman is one of the foundational scholar in interactional sociolinguistics whose work on face to face interaction and presentation of self- made considerably impacted the field. Goffman's seminal work "The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life" (1959) established a basis for continuing studies about how people navigate their social identities in their interactions with others. It paved the way for the exploration of social dimensions of language use. It investigated people's ways of taking care of their identity and impressions via linguistic and non-linguistic means in different social situations. Interactional sociolinguistics has widely adopted his concept of 'face' to study how politeness works, how power plays out and how social hierarchies work in conversation.

Ethnography of communication, an approach developed by Dell Hymes, also contributes to the field of interactional sociolinguistics. The ethnography of communication is concerned with how language is used in specific communities or speech communities. In his influential article 'Models of the Interaction of Language and Social Life' (1962), Hymes introduced the notion of 'speech community' to describe the relationship between language and social life in a cultural and social context. The principle lies at the heart of sociolinguistics and it has to do with the notion that language is not simply a system of rules and structures, but a living, dynamic expression of human communication that is fundamentally embedded in social practice. Hymes defines a speech community as a group of people that can speak the same language and the communication norms of the same. Being limited to geographical location and language proficiency is not all it's made of, but rather the patterns and rules by which language is used in the group given. The basic concept of speech community by Hymes includes: Competence vs. Performance. Hymes distinguished linguistic competence (the possession of the language system) from communicative competence (the ability to use language in appropriate social circumstances). Shared norms, values and expectations regarding language use are shaped by speech communities to create communicative competence.

Film is considered by many people to be an important art form. Films entertain, educate, enlighten, and inspire audiences. Bordwell and Thomson (1997, p. 3) state that films are like buildings, book and symphonize artifact made by human for human purpose. It means that film reflects desires, needs, fears, and aspirations of a society at a given time. Nupe films, often referred to as Nupewood, are a significant part of the Nigerian film industry, known as Nollywood. These films are primarily produced in the Nupe language and often translated into English language for the comfort of other language speakers. Over the years, Nupe films have developed remarkably. The late nineties into the early 2000s became the standard period of nupe films in the limelight. The Nupe films differ in that they are mainly Nupe language and often picturing their culture, traditions, and values. To the extent that Nupe films reflect the culture of the people, one expects to find greeting patterns as integral components of Nupewood.

Traditionally, people are expected to greet everyone they meet anywhere, and not just especially the people they know. Anthropological studies have revealed striking similarities in greeting rituals across cultures, underscoring their universality. Erving Goffman, a renowned sociologist, identified a common pattern of interaction rituals, which includes opening greetings, verbal responses, and nonverbal cues (Goffman, 1967). This pattern can be observed in various cultures, such as the handshake in Western societies, the bow in East Asian cultures, or the hongi, a traditional Maori greeting involving the touching of noses in New Zealand.

3.0 Research Methodology and Theoretical Framework

To gain insight into the greetings of the Nupe tribe, the study adopts an ethnographic approach to communication, using Dell Hymes Ethnography of Speaking. Hymes' ethnography of speaking is a theory that focuses on understanding cultures and social practices. It combines linguistic, anthropology, sociology, and ethnology to study the ways people communicate and make meanings in their everyday lives. A quantitative research methodology was used to analyse data collected for this research. The raw data for this research were obtained from four different traditional Nupe films:

Usman Mokwa's *Rakpe* (2021), Tsado Felix's *Ndanusa* (2020), Bagi and Amina's *Etan Chin Chin* (2021) and Hussain Koda's *Teacher Eyekondudu* (2006). The subtitles of these films are used as the backbone or main data source of the study. The films portray naturally occurring interactions selected from diverse contexts that include homes, places of work, as well as social spaces. By using multiple contexts, greetings could be analysed more robustly in terms of how they vary according to social context and speaker relationships. These video recordings were followed verbatim and transcribed as accurately as possible in the spoken language. In addition, formal and informal greetings were captured in these videos to understand the linguistic choices made by the speakers. A purposive sampling technique is used to identify suitable films for the study. By using this approach, the researchers can concentrate only on the selected films exactly for meeting the research objectives and the portrayal of greetings in the traditional Nupe films.

The adopted framework for this research is the Ethnography of Speaking proposed by Dell Hymes (1972) in his book titled 'Models of the Interaction of Language and Social Life.' Hymes framework focuses on understanding how communication practices are shaped by cultural and social contexts. It goes beyond linguistic analysis by considering the cultural norms, power dynamics, and social situations that influence how people communicate. Hymes introduced the concept of SPEAKING, an acronym that stands for Setting, Participants, Ends, Act Sequence, Key, Instrumentalities, Norms, and Genre. These components help analyze and interpret communicative events within their cultural context. The framework encourages researchers to explore not only the linguistic aspects of communication but also the broader cultural and social factors that influence how people use language in various situations.

Applying Hymes' theory to this study of greetings does not only provides a rich understanding of how verbal and nonverbal cues convey cultural values, social relationships, and individual identities in Nupe tribe, but also helps the researcher grasps the deeper meanings embedded within this seemingly simple yet culturally significant communication act. By examining the components of the model in the context of greetings, the researcher will be helped to gain insights into the multifaceted nature of language use and how it reflects the intricate web of social, cultural and communicative factors in the culture. Principally, only five of this model would be used dominantly, with few alternations to others. Setting explores the physical, social, and psychological context in which greetings occur. This includes the location, time of day, and participants' roles, statuses, and relationships. Different settings might dictate specific types of greetings, such as formal greetings in professional environments versus informal ones among friends. Participant refers to the individuals engaged in the greeting exchange. Their cultural backgrounds, social roles, and familiarity with each other influence the choice of greetings. End is the goals, intentions, and purposes behind greetings. Act Sequence involves the structure and order of the communicative events such as opening, developing the conversation and closing it. Genre is the recognised categories or types of greetings. Different contexts might call for specific genres, such as salutations, introductions, or farewells. Each genre has its own linguistic and nonlinguistic features. Key refers to the emotional tone manner and attitude of the communication. It involves understanding the underlying emotions such as sarcasm excitement or seriousness. Instrumentalities are the various forms and channels of communication used, including language, non-verbal cues, gestures, and symbols. Norms are the cultural expectations and rules that shape greetings. These norms determine appropriate behavior, language choices, and rituals associated with greetings. Deviations from these norms might lead to misinterpretations or misunderstandings.

4.0 Result and Discussion

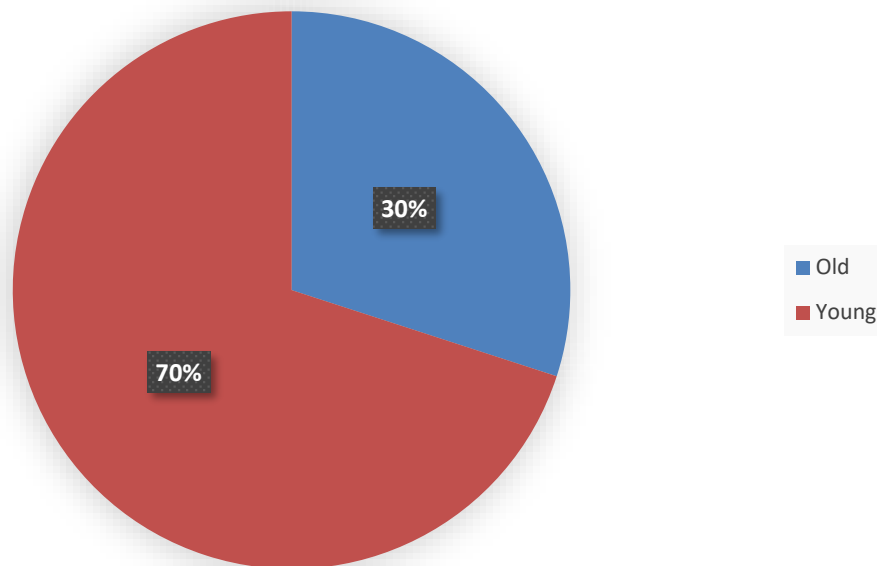
Four Nupe films constitute the data for our analysis – *Rakpe*, *Ndanusa*, *Eta Cin Cin* and *Teacher Yeokondudu*. *Rakpe* (meaning ignorance) is a drama set in a traditional village, exploring the destructive power of ignorance and superstition. The story follows Auntie Wusa, a woman unjustly accused of causing her stepson Jiya's illness through witchcraft. As the village spirals deeper into fear and suspicion, driven by the words of a local herbalist, the community becomes divided between those who cling to age old beliefs and those who seek modern solutions. The film highlights the clash between superstition and education, with a village teacher serving as the voice of reason, trying to guide his community toward a more rational understanding of the world. Despite his efforts, the weight of ignorance bears heavily on the lives of the characters, leading to tragic consequences.

Ndanusa centers on the life of a powerful herbalist named Ndanusa, known as "the different one." Ndanusa is a complex character who straddles the line between tradition and morality, using his powers to help and sometimes challenge those who seek his assistance. The film delves into various aspects of traditional beliefs, moral dilemmas, and the influence of spiritual leaders in a rural community. As Ndanusa navigates through different encounters, from healing the sick to resolving domestic issues, the movie portrays the tension between faith, superstition, and the consequences of human actions.

Eta Cin Cin (meaning pain of Love) follows the romantic life of two lovers who are opposed by their families for daring to be together due to the long history of war between both families. It highlights the hurdles and how they survived it and triumphed at the end. Eta Cin Cin is a regular romantic story where love wins at the end of it all.

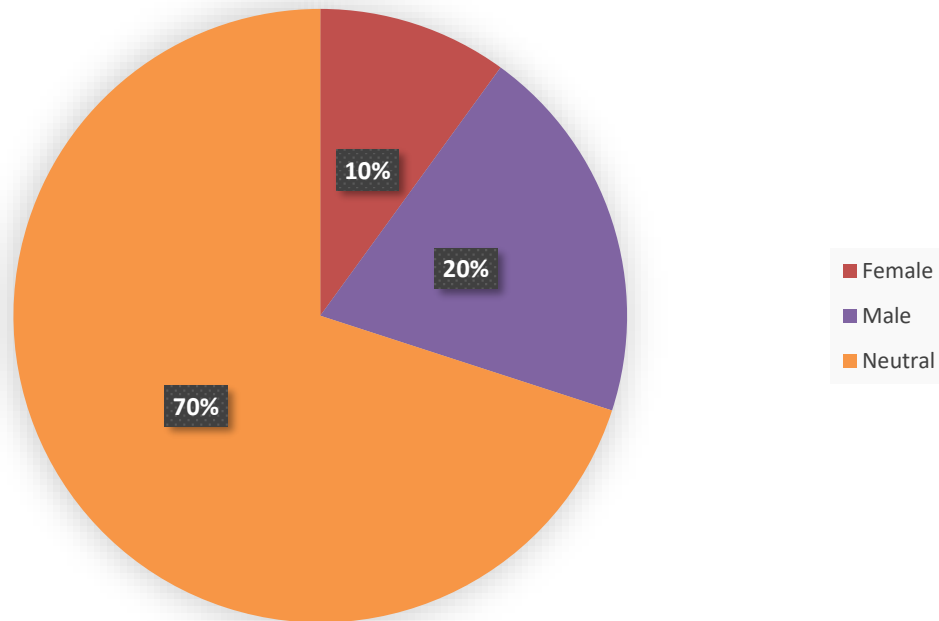
Teacher Yeokundu weaves together humor, tradition, and the challenges of modernity within a small village. The story centers around Teacher Yeokundu, an eccentric and knowledgeable teacher who is both revered and mocked by his community for his strict adherence to old school principals and his unusual methods.

4.1 Age Distribution of Greetings



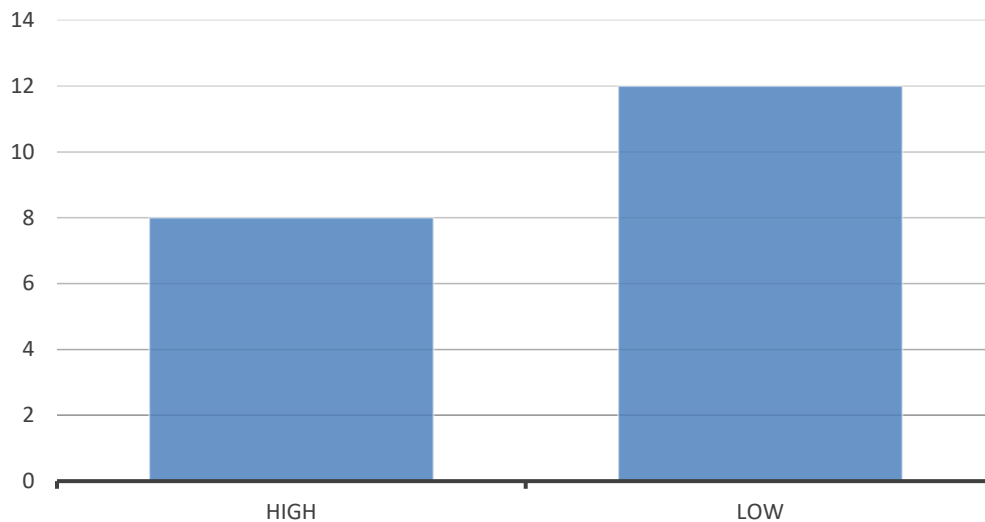
The data indicates that young individuals initiated or were involved in greetings more frequently than older people. This suggests that young people might be more socially active or inclined to initiate communication compared to older individuals in the context of the dataset.

4.2 Gender Distribution in Greetings



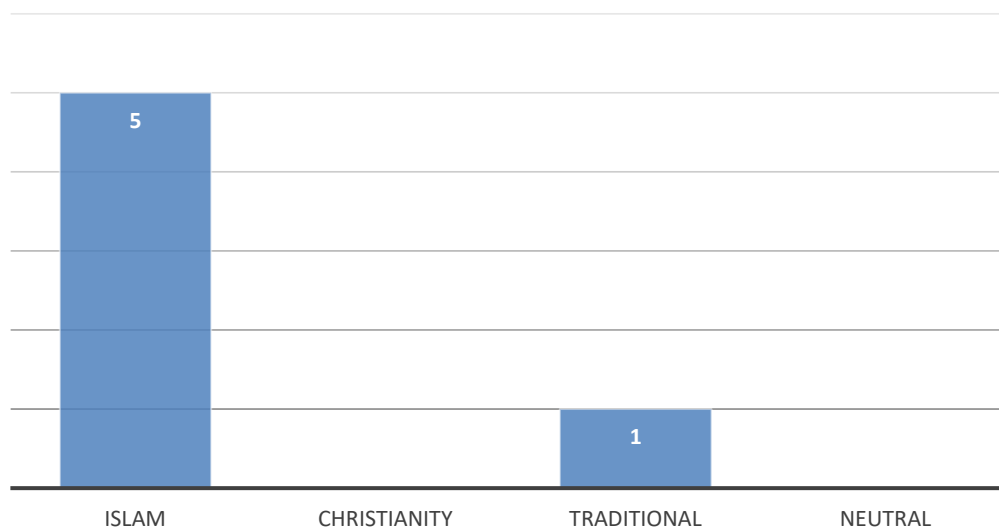
The gender distribution pattern in the data reveals that gender-neutral greetings accounted for the majority (70%) of interactions, suggesting that many greetings were either formal or occurred in contexts where the gender of the greeter was irrelevant or not recorded. Male-initiated greetings represented 20%, while female-initiated greetings were the least frequent at 10%. This pattern implies that men were somewhat more inclined to engage in greetings compared to women, though neutral greetings significantly overshadowed gender-specific interactions.

4.3 Status Distribution in Greetings



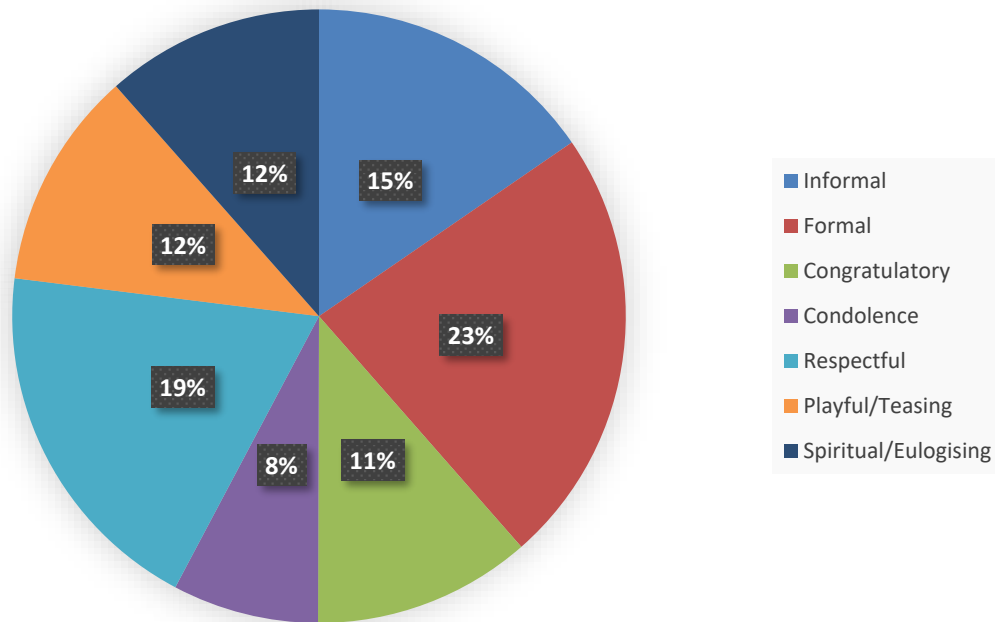
This indicates that the majority of the individuals involved in greetings belong to a lower social or economic status group. A smaller portion of the greetings was associated with individuals of higher status. The data suggests that individuals of lower status may engage more frequently in greeting interactions, possibly due to cultural norms where individuals in less privileged positions are expected to show deference or initiate greetings more often.

4.4 Religious Affiliation in Greetings



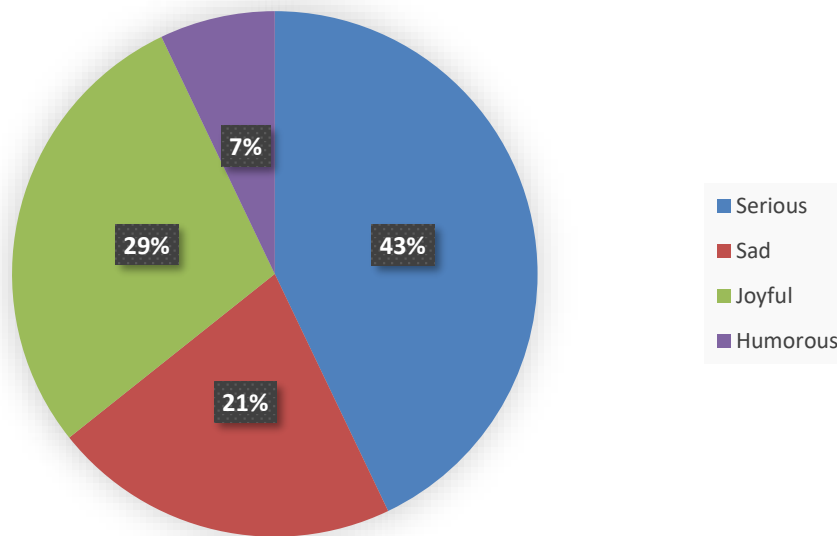
The data above reveals that Islam was the only explicitly recorded category, with five entries observed. Other categories, such as Christianity, traditional religions, and neutral affiliations, were listed without specific values.

4.5 Representation of Greeting Types



The data above shows the different greeting patterns observed. Formal greetings accounted for the highest proportion at 23%, indicating that structured and official exchanges were most prevalent. Respectful greetings followed closely at 19%, reflecting social norms that emphasize courtesy and deference in communication. Informal greetings made up 15% of the interactions, suggesting that casual exchanges were somewhat less common. Playful or teasing greetings and spiritual or eulogizing ones each accounted for 12%, highlighting a balance between light-hearted and spiritually significant exchanges. Congratulatory greetings represented 11%, indicating moderate instances of acknowledgment or celebration. Condolence greetings were the least common at 7%, suggesting fewer observed situations involving expressions of sympathy. The varied distribution shows the multifaceted nature of social interactions, with formal and respectful greetings being most dominant.

4.6 Emotional Tone of Greetings



The data reveals that serious tones were the most dominant, accounting for 43% of interactions. This suggests that a significant number of greetings occurred in formal or solemn contexts, where maintaining a serious demeanour was appropriate. Sad tones made up 21% of the observations, possibly indicating situations involving condolences or other distressing circumstances. Joyful tones represented 29%, reflecting a considerable presence of cheerful and positive exchanges. Humorous tones were the least frequent at 7%, indicating that light-hearted, teasing, or witty interactions were relatively rare. The distribution highlights a prevalence of solemn and serious interactions but also indicates a healthy balance of joy and occasional humour in social greetings.

5.0 Conclusion and Findings

The focus of this study was on the sociolinguistic aspects of greetings in traditional Nupe films informed by the principles of interactional sociolinguistics to investigate the use of language in context. Analyzing the data demonstrated important patterns in the forms, classifications, functions, and cultural significance of greetings in these films. The findings indicate a variety of greeting forms, ranging from formal, respectful greeting to informal, playful forms of greeting. The greetings observed are a function of time of day and social status, as well as the relationship between participants. For instance, greetings are marked by respect and politeness in formal settings such as in the classroom or between elders and a younger person and more casual and even humorous greetings in informal settings between friends. The study indicates that greetings in the films have more than one function. They are used to help start interactions, develop social bonds, show respect, and make negotiations on social hierarchies. Additionally, greetings are also preambles to deeper conversations to exchange more information, emotional expression, and social connections. Characterization functions are crucial to portray the dynamics between characters and highlighting the interplay of status and relationships between the numbered people. Results also demonstrated that initiating greetings increased with age and that men, especially compared to women, initiated greetings with higher frequency. The chapter also addressed greetings' emotional tone: greetings were serious, followed by joyful and sad tones. Formal greetings were the most common, followed by respectful and then informal greetings.

On the whole, greetings in traditional Nupe films are not mere politeness conventions, but are infused with social, cultural and linguistic importance. Thus, the films studied afford a window into how greetings consolidate into mechanisms through which social interaction, identity construction, and cultural expressions are made through the Nupe community.

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