ABSTRACT

This paper is a study of a very significant aspect of day-to-day interactional discourse of the Basotho sociolinguistic community of Southern Africa: the phenomenon of greeting. The study examines the types and structural organization of Sesotho greeting sequence and the sociolinguistic factors that account for this structuring. It also considers the functions of greetings in the overall life of the people. The analysis has shown that greeting is a normal sociolinguistic routine meant for the establishment of interpersonal relationship and also a serious business of topic introduction and development in Sesotho, since it involves knowing about the welfare of the person being greeted, his/her family relations and friends. It also suggests that deference to age, context of situation and time are powerful factors in the organization of Sesotho greetings. Finally, the data has shown in some respects that there is a similarity between the types and structuring of Sesotho greetings and those of the Yoruba, Setswana, Shona and Arabic.

Keywords: greetings, sociolinguistics, pragmatics, ethnography of communication

INTRODUCTION

In studying and using any particular language, it is not sufficient to master the phonology, syntax, lexis and morphology 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 therefore unnecessary to warrant any academic study.

In the Basotho1 sociolinguistic community quite a significant effort has been devoted to the study of Sesotho Syntax, morphology, phonology, lexicon, tradition, culture and literary genres and a substantial amount of literature has been produced in these areas. (See for instance Ashton (1949), Kunene (1971),

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1 Lesotho is an independent landlocked country entirely surrounded by the Republic of South Africa and has a population of about 2 million. The people are referred to as Basotho (pl.) and Mosotho (sg.). The language spoken is Sesotho and it is the national and one of the languages, English being the second one. Sesotho is spoken by all the Basotho regardless of the different ethnic groups to which they belong. That is why it is always said that Lesotho is “one nation, one language”. (Mokitimi, M.I. 1997: xviii).
Jacottet & Jankie (1972), Guma (1975) Bereng (1982), Mabille & Dieterlen (1985), Doke & Mofokeng (1985). As is the case in most communities in Africa (Akindele 1990, 1994) there is little or no study at all carried out specifically on Sesotho rules of speaking and greeting system. Yet the phenomenon of Sesotho greeting forms part of the Basotho linguistic etiquette with its set of norms that guide behaviour patterns. Etiquette in this context involves procedure, manners, forms, ceremonies, prescribed convention and custom of the Basotho sociolinguistic community. It is best summed up and symbolized in the way the Basotho use their language, which includes greeting as a sociolinguistic event. Greeting, which constitutes an integral part of the Basotho etiquette imposes on each member 'an obligation on how to conduct oneself in a particular way toward others' (Goffman 1956). Sesotho greeting is informed by rules of conduct, and is an inevitable part of everyday conversation. 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.

Among the Basotho, greeting is considered as an aid to peaceful social relations because it is very much a part of the daily experience of the group members. It functions, among others, to keep up good open communication among the members of the Sociolinguistic community; brings a sense of pride to the Society and keeps unity among them. When used correctly, Sesotho greeting has 'a stately pomp which can make the simplest conversation seem like a great ceremony' (Geertz 1972). It helps to establish rapport or comfort with another person; to recognize his/her presence and to show friendliness. Thus, in every context or situation, greetings are expected: when a person enters a house; he/she is expected to greet people in the house; on the street people are expected to greet each other. Traditionally, one is expected to greet everyone met in the street. One does not greet only the people one knows. The trend is changing in modern times, especially in urban areas where people are only concerned about those who are close to them. This is a result of the contact with western culture. Among the Basotho, greeting is a demonstration of appreciation of another person, good relations among members and it also shows concern about the well-being of the people, as if to say “you are your brother/sister’s keeper”.

1. METHODOLOGY

The approach used for the collection of the data for the study was by means of introspection by native speakers from within their own circle of friends and relations at the National University of Lesotho, Roma Campus; Roma township; the city of Maseru, the capital of Lesotho, and in the suburban Maseru villages. The Basotho share common history, culture and language (Sesotho), and the mode of greeting is the same.
Sixty third-year students taking my Introduction to Communication and Pragmatics course in 2001/2002 at the National University of Lesotho collected the various forms of Sesotho greetings. The collection of the data involved audio and verbatim recording of greeting events, observation of people greeting each other. The informants provided a great deal of information concerning greeting by using their own experience and internalization of rules of greetings. The informants also assisted in transcribing the recorded greetings and translating them into English. The greetings were written down in Sesotho by student-reporters/informants and jointly transcribed by the researcher and some of the students. The transcriptions were then cross-checked with other Sesotho speakers. The advantage of this method is that data passes through two stages of introspection by native speakers i.e. the informants and student reporter as well as the researcher.

2. GREETING AS A SOCIOLINGUISTIC EVENT

Greetings can be described as the exchange of expressions, pleasantries or good wishes between two people or a group interacting for the purpose of fulfilling 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, as in the case of two students interacting thus:

Mpho: lumela Johane Mpho: Good morning John Opening
Johane: e Mpho John: Yes Mpho

Mpho: O phela joang? Mpho: How are you? Opening
Johane: O phela hantle John: I am fine/well

Mpho: Sala hantle Mpho: Goodbye Closing
Johane: Tsamaea hantle John: Stay well.

It is also used to end a conversation as shown in the closing sequence. Greeting is a phenomenon that must occur between two persons or between a person and a group visible to each other, out on the road, at work, shopping, at the coffee shop, at the drinking bar, at meetings, at home, at social functions, and so on. Laver (1981: 304) observes that ‘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. 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 (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).

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 namely summons comprising *as-salaamu ‘alaykum* (Peace be upon you) with permutated reply. This formula is not repeatable and is followed by a handshake. Summons also occurs in Yoruba greeting (Akindele, 1990) and is observable in Sesotho greeting, as I shall show presently. The second stage of OA greeting structure consists of a healthy enquiry with conventional answer and thanks to Allah. Males tend to ask after children and women ask each other more detailed questions about family health.

Emery (2000: 203) further notes that in formal situations, considerations of status are observed: the interrogator is the oldest male in the household who addresses the sequence of questions to the oldest male among the visitors. Other rules for initiation of greetings in OA are younger people initiate greetings to older, lower status to higher status, employee to employer, and children to adults. The same observation was made for Yoruba greetings (Akindele, 1990).

### 3. Greetings in the Basotho Community

The system of greeting in the Basotho sociolinguistic community is similar to that of some other African communities (Irvine 1974, Pongweni 1983, Akindele 1990). Among the Basotho, there are different types of greetings for various occasions even though the formula for such greetings may be the same, namely *lumela*. This includes, among others, greeting employed for seeking information about the well-being of a person and his/her loved ones, to identify in trying periods, to rejoice with the person in time of success or when good fortune occurs. This can be compared with Yoruba greeting system (Fadipe 1970, Akindele 1990) and Oman Arabic greetings (Ibrahim et al. 1976; Emery, 2000).

There are Sociolinguistic factors that account for the type and structuring of Sesotho 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 Basotho, and this is explicitly reflected in the greeting sequence. The younger person typically initiates greeting whenever the occasion arises. This is a mark of deference to the older person. Context is also a variable that determines who greets first. For instance, if a person enters into a gathering of people, he/she is expected to offer greeting first to the group; the age of the person notwithstanding. In addition, a person who calls on another person's house offers his/her greeting first whether he/she is older or younger. The sex
variable does not appear to account for who greets first in Sesotho. It is whoever considers his/her co-participant worth of greetings that he/she offers to greet. However, if the female participant is an older person and the male is younger, it is the male who greets first in deference to the age of the woman. Similarly, if the male participant is an older person and the female is younger, it is the female who greets first. This seems to be the pattern in the villages. It is not quite so in the urban centre and the university community. It was observed during the course of this study that the younger ones rarely offer greetings to the older ones. In fact, it was the older ones that greet the younger ones in the university.

There is also a seemingly ethical code of the Basotho which makes it a duty to greet people at various occasions. It appears that there is a general belief that greetings bring peace and unity to the community of the Basotho. A child who does not know how to greet is considered defective in his/her upbringing. Greeting persons who are bereaved or who recorded success is regarded as a mark of intimacy and concern for the others among the Basotho. Failure to offer such greetings may give rise to bad feelings especially among relations or close friends. One should be able to greet one's relations and ask not only about their welfare but also that of their family and friends. This may perhaps, explain the type and structure of Sesotho greeting. Time is another factor that could have been responsible for the length of the greeting system. Persons who are not in a hurry and so have plenty of time to chat may decide to ask each other about the welfare of the kith and kin before proceeding to other matters of concern.

4. TYPES OF SESOTHO GREETINGS

A. Morning greeting

Ph: lumela Nkhono  Ph: Good morning grandma.
Ja: lumela morali   Ja: Good morning my daughter
Ja: ke tsohile joang?   Ja: How have you awoken?
Ph: Ke tsohile hantle   Ph: I have awoken well.
Ph: O phela Joang nkhono?  Ph: How are you my grandmother?
Ja: O phela hantle   Ja: I am well/fine

Note that the above greeting sequence took place between a granddaughter (Ph) and a grandmother (Ja). Ph initiated the greeting sequence in deference to her grandmother. Ja responded to Ph's greeting and then went on to ask about the welfare of her grandchild. Ph also asked about her granny's welfare, which she responded to with ke phela hantle (I am well).
B. Afternoon greetings

Teb: lumela 'm e
Mph: lumela 'm e
Teb: O hlotse joang?
Mph: Ke hlotse hantle
Mph: O phela joang?
Teb: Ke phela hantle
Mph: ba sa phela hantle
Mph: 'm e oa hao o ea joang?
Teb: O phela hantle
Teb: Telang o ea joang?
Mph: O phela hantle
Mph: lumelisa bana
Mph: Ba ta lumela
Teb: Sala hantle
Mph: Tsamaea hantle

Teb: Good afternoon ma/madam
Mph: Good afternoon ma/madam
Teb: How have you been faring?
Mph: I am well/fine
Mph: How are you?
Teb: I am fine
Mph: They are well
Mph: How's is your mother?
Teb: She's fine/well
Teb: How's Telang?
Mph: She's fin/well
Teb: Greet your family for me
Mph: I shall greet them
Teb: Goodbye
Mph: Stay well.

The greeting sequence took place between two close friends who met, having parted for several months. This is possibly responsible for the length of the greeting sequence. Indeed the participants went on to discuss some interesting topics, which I considered irrelevant for the purpose of this study.

C. Evening greetings

Mk: lumela ntate
Mo: lumela ntate
Mk: O phela joang?
Mo: Ke phela hantle
Mk: U ea kae?
Mo: Ke ea hae
Mk: Ke hantle
Mo: Tsamaea hantle

Mk: Good evening Sir
Mo: Good evening Sir
Mk: How are you?
Mo: I am fine
Mk: Where are you going?
Mo: I am going home
Mk: Stay well
Mo: Go well

D. Night greetings

Mpho: lumela 'me
Makh: robala hantle ausi
Mpho: ea 'me

Mpho: Goodnight ma
Makh: Sleep well sister
Mpho: Yes ma

Note that robala is used to indicate singular. In greeting two or more persons robalang (plural) is used as in:
Other variations of night greeting is exemplified as follows:

Mkl: fonane ntate       Mkl: Goodnight sir
Mat: Fonane 'me       Mat: Goodnight ma/madam

My informants stressed that fonane is borrowed from Nguni language of a South African tribe into Sesotho. Nguni is the language of a minority ethnic group in Lesotho (Mokitimi, 1997; Machobane (personal communication)). This form of greeting seems to be peculiar to the community of the Nguni people today.

E. Casual Greetings

(i) Thi: lumela mm'e       Thi: goodday ma/madam
     Pal: ea ntate       Pal: Yes, Sir
(ii) Ph: lumela mm'e       Ph: Hello ma/madam
     Ha: e a ntate       Ha: Yes sir.
(iii) Fa: ho joang?       Fa: How are things?
     Se: Ho monate       Se: Everything is fine
(iv) Pul: le kae abuti       Pul: hello brother
     Neo: ke teng, lekae ausi       Neo: I'm well, hello sister

The first greeting exchanges (i) – (iii) are formal while the fourth type (iv) is regarded as casual. Traditionally, the fourth type of greeting is peculiar to people of the same age group. It is a marker of intimacy. It is not offered to someone who is older or who is not intimate. If used by a younger person for an older one, it will be considered rude. However, things are changing and today le kae is taken as a normal form of casual greeting that could be offered by any one to anybody, age notwithstanding. Other forms of greetings are:

(v) Kh: lumela ngaka       Kh: Goodday doctor
     Kon: lumela 'm e       Kon: Goodday ma/madam

(vi) Jul: lumela Khaitseli       Jul: Hello brother
     Ph: lumela Khaitseli       Ph: Hello sister
     Jul: O phela joang?       Jul: How are you?
     Ph: Ke phela hantle       Ph: I am fine

(vii) Teb: lumela abuti       Teb: Good day brother
     Mah: lumela khaitseli       Mah: Goodday sister
Informants explained that *abuti* is used to refer to an older brother while *ausi* refers to an older sister. *Khaitseli* suggests either sister or brother. A male person would call his female sibling *khaitseli* whether he/she is younger or older. Similarly, a female person would also refer to her male sibling *khaitseli* whether he/she is younger or older as in the case of examples (vi) and (vii) above. Also note that *abuti* is used as an address term for brother while *ausi* is used for sister whether older or younger in contemporary Basotho sociolinguistic community (Akindele, 2005).

One important thing about the above greeting types is the elaborate use of the formula *lumela*. As can be noted from the instances of the greeting sequences, *lumela* is used to suggest good morning, good afternoon, good evening, good day and hello. It is used when greeting a person or an individual. *Lumela* means accept my greetings or compliments. It is a linguistic manifestation of one’s warm compliments to another person. Other informants argued that *lumela* means “*khotso ha ho uena, hoba e teng e ka ho na*” (Peace be on you because it is also in me). The plural form *lumelang* is used when greeting more than one person or a group of persons, as in:

Pat: lumelang bo ntate  Pat: Good morning sirs

Another greeting formula is *khotso*. It means peace (be on you). Its plural form is *khotsong* and is used in a salutation involving more than one person, e.g.

Mpo: Khotsong bo 'Me  Mpo: Peace be on you madams.
Po/Te: e ea Mme  Po/Te: Yes ma

**F. Parting of ways/leave-taking**

Po: Sala hantle  Po: Travel well/bye
Ma: Tsamaea hantle  Ma: Stay well

Other variants are:

Tit: Tsela tsoeu  Tit: Have a safe journey
Deb: Tsamaea hantle  Deb: Stay well
Ann: Tsamaea hantle  Ann: Goodbye/stay well
Ca: Sala hantle  Ca: Goodbye
Ann: Itlhokomele  Ann: Take care of yourself
Ca: e 'Me  Ca: Yes madam.
Ann: Ak'u ntumelisetse metsoalle ea hao  Ann: Remember me to your friends (Give my regards to your friends)
As can be seen from the greeting sequence, parting greeting in Sesotho is an elaborate thing and usually involves an expression of a series of good wishes for both parties who are leaving each other for one reason or the other. This pattern is also observable in Yoruba greeting (Akindele, 1990), in Arabic Oman (Emery 2000) and in English (Laver 1981). Indeed, Laver (1981) notes that parting ceremonials in English can be elaborate. It is characterized by two types of comment used in the parting phase thus: “(1) mitigatory comments (leaver gives reasons for leaving to avoid causing feelings of ‘rejection’ to the stayer thus addressing the latter’s negative face); and (2) consolidatory comments (leaver shows esteem for the other party with such expressions as ‘Nice to see you again’ directed towards the latter’s positive face”).

G. Commiseration/condolences

Tse: Tseliseha motsoalle   Tse: Take comfort my friends
Rot: Kea leboha           Rot: Thank you
Tse: U se ke ua nyahama pelo   Tse: Don't be downcast my friend
motsoalle.                 motsoalle.
Rot: Kea leboha           Rot: thank you
Mf: beta pelo khaitseli   Mf: take courage my brother
Mos: ke a leboha          Mos: thank you
Mf: Ke rona re la Ie uena Mf: We share this loss with you
Mos: Kea leboha           Mos: thank you

Like in many other African societies, the expression of condolences is a significant aspect of Basotho culture, hence the need to offer greeting to the bereaved. Thus, this type of greeting serves two main purposes, namely, to share the grief of the bereaved and express solidarity; and to give encouragement, as shown in the above examples.

H. Festivals

Hel: e monate keresemese   Hel: Merry Christmas
Ler: e monate keresememe   Ler: Merry Christmas
Hel: e monate paseka       Hel: Happy Easter
Ler: e monate paseka       Ler: Happy Easter

There seems to be no special greetings for festivals. However, the above types of greetings can be heard from the younger generation of the Basotho
community, who appear to be transferring the system of greeting in English into Sesotho.

There are other varieties of greetings. These include opening greetings and closing greetings, which serve as boundary markers in conversation, greetings for older and younger persons. Examples are:

I. Opening greetings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Sesotho Greeting</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sib</td>
<td>lumela</td>
<td>Hello</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kop</td>
<td>lumela</td>
<td>Hello</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Em</td>
<td>Khotso</td>
<td>Peace (be on you)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar</td>
<td>Khotso, kea leboha</td>
<td>Peace (be on you), thank you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Em</td>
<td>Lumela, u phela joang?</td>
<td>Hello, how are you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar</td>
<td>Lumela, ke phela hantle</td>
<td>Hello, I'm well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re</td>
<td>O phela joang?</td>
<td>How are you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dou</td>
<td>Ke phela hantle</td>
<td>I'm fine</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

J. Closing greetings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Sesotho Greeting</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kh</td>
<td>Sala hantle</td>
<td>Goodbye</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Th</td>
<td>Tsamaea hantle</td>
<td>Stay well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teb</td>
<td>tsamaea hantle</td>
<td>go well/goodbye</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rep</td>
<td>sala hantle</td>
<td>goodbye</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

K. Greetings for older persons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Sesotho Greeting</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Han</td>
<td>lumela ntate</td>
<td>greetings (hello) father/sir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Map</td>
<td>lumela Mm’e</td>
<td>greetings (hello) mother/madam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pul</td>
<td>lumela Nkhono</td>
<td>greetings (hello) grandmother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tha</td>
<td>lumela moholo</td>
<td>greetings (hello) elderly man</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

L. Greetings for younger persons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Sesotho Greeting</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Put</td>
<td>lumela moshanyana/mohlankana</td>
<td>Hello boy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dor</td>
<td>lumela ngoanana/neaotana</td>
<td>Hello girl</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. SESOTHO GREETINGS AS A MARKER OF DEFERENCE

The Basotho pay particular attention to the issue of respect. This is reflected in the Sesotho greeting system. It is very rare to find people greeting each other by
using first names (FN), last names (LN), titles plus last name (TLN) or titles only. e.g.

Phu: lumela Palesa    Phu: Goodday Palesa
Pal: lumela Phumeza    Pal: Goodday Phumeza
Phu: O phela joang Palesa Phu: How are you Palesa
Pal: Ke phela hantle Phumeza Pal: I am fine Phumeza
Thu: Sala hantle moruti Thu: Goodbye Professor/Priest
Moh: Sala hantle ngaka Moh: Goodbye Doctor

Instead of using these forms of address in greetings, the terms *ntate* and *mm’e* are often used for older persons, e.g. *lumela/khotso ntate/mm’e*. Literally *ntate* means father and *mm’e* means mother. The socio-cultural implication of these address terms is that their semantic import goes beyond the ordinary literal interpretation. The terms are used as gender markers: *ntate* (male) and *mm’e* (female). The connotative meaning of the terms within their context of use in social interaction can be summarized thus:

*ntate* → male (adult), father, Mr.
*mm’e* → female (adult), mother, Mrs, Ms, madam

It is strongly believed and widely held that *ntate* and *mm’e* are used positively in the process of greeting. They may be used in a positive sense to indicate respect for one another. For instance, informants explained that even lovers, husbands and wives employ the term *ntate* and *mm’e* when greeting one another as a marker of deference. This suggests that they hold each other in high esteem.

It should be stressed that greeting persons with *ntate* and *mm’e* does not imply that such persons may necessarily be fathers or mothers in the literal sense. Indeed, it was also observed during the course of this study that *ntate moruti* was used as a term of address for the Bishop of a diocese as a way of identifying his gender and in reverence to him. It should also be noted that *ntate* and *mm’e* are the basic terms used while addressing older persons. e.g. *ntate Dele, ntate Johane, mm’e Puleng, mm’e Teboho* (see Akindele 2005). The terms are also used at times as a greeting formula. In this case a deletion rule is applied where *lumela* is covertly expressed. In some cases *lumela* can be signalled by a wave of hand or a head nod. e.g.

Mof: ntate        Mof: Goodday sir
Mic: e ea ntate   Mic: Goodday sir
Mof: o phela joang? Mof: How are you?
Mic: ke phela hantle Mic: I am fine.

There are also other forms of Sesotho greetings that denote respect. These include: *lumela moholoane* – goodday elder or *lumela mohlomphehi* – Hello
respected one. Note that moholoane refers to older male sibling while moena is used when reference is made to a younger brother.

6. STRUCTURAL ORGANIZATION OF SESOTHO GREETINGS

In analyzing the structure of Sesotho greetings, I draw on the theoretical framework of discourse analysis as proposed by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) and further developed in Ventola (1987) and Akindele (1988, 1990). Following these scholars, I define Sesotho greeting as an interactional discourse organized around at least two participants; one of them initiates and another responds and these two successive utterances form the basis of verbal interaction, which I refer to as an exchange. It is marked by an initiating (I) move or utterance which predicts a response (R), but the predicted move or utterance does not set up any expectation of a precise response, though a voluntary move can occur following it (Akindele 1988), as in the following opening greeting:

Ann: lumela 'm'e  I  Ann: Good morning ma/madam
Let: e ntate  R  Let: Good morning sir
Ann: o phela joang?  I  Ann: How are you?
Let: Ke phela hantle  R  Let: I am fine

There are two types of exchanges observable in Sesotho greetings. These are Prefatory and Informatory. A prefatory-oriented exchange is the minimal interactional exchange which has no content information as far as the business of the talk is concerned, but provides an opportunity to make the participants available for more talk. It is thus a type of preliminary, preparatory talk or phatic communication (Akindele 1990: 9). On the other hand, informatory exchanges are units of discourse concerned with negotiating the transmission of information or the topic of discourse.

Sesotho greeting system seems to exemplify the two types of exchanges defined above. The greeting sequences classified as casual are instances of prefatory exchanges. This type occurs very frequently in Sesotho greetings. It is the type that Irvine (1974: 172) observed in Wolof greeting system and labelled it Passing Greeting. This type of greeting is also observed in Arabic Oman greetings (Ibrahim et. al. 1976, Emery 2000), and in English (Laver 1981). It occurs between persons that are not very familiar, or between relations, friends or acquaintances who see each other constantly, but who are in a hurry for some legitimate reasons. Passing greeting in Sesotho is illustrated in the following examples:

6.1 PASSING GREETINGS

Hel: lumela mm’ e   Met: Hello madam (type 1)
Pu: lumela ntate   Pu: Hello Sir
Lumela/Lumela: A Socio-Pragmatic Analysis

Ha: lumela khaitseli   Ma: Good evening brother (type 2)
Pe: lumela khaitseli   Pe: Good evening sister
Mp: Sala hantle       Mp: Goodbye (type 3)
Pa: Sala hantle       Pa: Goodbye
Kib: Phepi            Kib: sorry (type 4)
Lin: Ke a leboha      Kin: thank you

The greeting sequences 1–3 can be regarded as prefatory or phatic and they compare favourably with the type of greetings common with native speakers of English (Laver 1981). Type 4 is a casual expression of sympathy to/by someone who gets hurt. This is in contrast with the native English 'watch out' or 'be careful’ (Chris Dunton: personal communication). It was observed that in Basotho culture the onlooker has to greet a person who slips even when, as might be suggested by the English gloss 'sorry’, he/she is not responsible for the ‘accident’.

However, a person who sneezes or coughs will apologize by saying ntsoarele. Some of my informants explained that the person who gets hurt might also say phepi to those present at the scene of the 'accident'. The two words: phepi and ntsoarele can be used interchangeably. Further investigation shows that the expressions are not used for older persons. “There seems to be a childish tone attributed to it”, claimed some informants; hence equals often used the two expressions. In addition, phepi may be used as a marker of intimacy or minimum social distance as in the case of a younger person saying phepi to an older person, as in a girl friend/boy friend relationship (Machobane: personal communication).

The structure of Sesotho Casual or Passing Greeting can be expressed with the following formulae: Pr G + (Inf G). Prefatory Greeting + (Informatory Greeting); where Inf G is an optional element in the greeting sequence. The prefatory greeting will therefore be regarded as a final or terminal exchange in that event, as illustrated in types 1–4 above.

It was also observed that there is another type of Sesotho greeting, which does not end with the passing greeting sequence. In other words, the sequence of Sesotho greetings can also be understood in terms of informatory exchanges which are content-oriented. This type of greeting sequence can be called normal greeting as observed in Yoruba greeting (Akindele 1990). It is exemplified as follows:

### 6.2 NORMAL GREETINGS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mk: lumela 'm e</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>Mk: Good afternoon ma</th>
<th>Opening/ Prefatory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ho: luniel a 'm e</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>Mo: Good afternoon ma</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hk: O phela joang?</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>Mk: How are you?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mo: Ke phela hantle</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>Mo: I am fine</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mk: na u sa phela?</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>Mk: Are you well?</td>
<td>Informatory 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As can be observed from the above greeting sequence, the first part of the greeting sequence is the prefatory element or opening while the second part of the sequence is the informatory. There is also the third part, which constitutes the pre-closing and closing greetings. Both forms, prefatory, informatory and closing greetings are obligatory in this sequence of greeting. The pre-closing sequence may be optional.

A comparison of normal Sesotho greeting and its passing/casual greeting suggest that they are different in terms of structure and in the context in which they can occur. In fact normal Sesotho greeting sequence, as exemplified above, is unique in the sense that even the second obligatory part of the greeting sequence (Informatory) has three sub-parts labelled 1, 2 and 3. These three sub-types of greetings are introduced by specific questions which deal with the welfare of the person greeted, questions about family or children, and questions concerning the state of other persons or relations e.g. mother and sister.

It seems obligatory to ask one of these questions immediately after the preliminary or opening greeting sequence. As shown in the example of normal greeting sequence above, the questions used in a greeting of this type are stereotyped and are followed by stereotyped responses. For example, when Mo was asked about the welfare of her children, her response was *ba sa phela hantle* (They are well). The closing greeting sequence is also important. It indicates that the greeting event is over. The structure of normal Sesotho greeting sequence can be reformulated thus:

(a) \( \text{Pr G} + \text{Inf or G} \)
(b) \( \text{Inf Gt1} + (\text{Inf Gt2}) + (\text{Inf Gt3}) + (\text{Pr ClG}) + \text{C1G} \)

where Inf Gt1, 12 and t3 imply informatory greeting types 1, 2 and 3. Informatory greeting types 2 and 3, and Pre-closing greetings are optional elements of structure. The rest InfGt1 and C1G are obligatory elements.

It should be stressed that although there seems to be an apparent difference between the types of Sesotho greetings labelled prefatory and informatory, passing and normal, nevertheless the entire system to some extent appears phatic.
The structural organization of Sesotho greeting finds parallel in Yoruba, English and even Oman Arabic greeting sequence. In fact, Emery (2000: 202) observed that Stage 3 of the greeting sequence in OA is characterized as ‘ritualised news inquiry’, which takes the form of ‘what has gone wrong? Or ‘what has occurred?’ and the conventional reply is ‘nothing...as I have heard’ or ‘only peace’. Ibrahim (1976: 806) sees this stage as transitional and a movement towards referentiality whereby interlocutors express an interest in and a willingness to hear the news.

7. CONCLUSION

The foregoing analysis and discussion of types and structure of Sesotho greeting provides an insight into a society with its unique way of expressing solidarity and rapport among its people. The analysis has shown that greeting is a normal sociolinguistic routine meant for the establishment of interpersonal relationship and also a serious business of topic introduction and development, since it involves knowing about the welfare of the person being greeted, his/her family relations and friends. It also suggests that deference to age, context of situation and time are powerful factors in the organization of Sesotho greetings. The data presents a society that is sociolinguistically in transition and this is evident in the English type of greeting (hello), which has its equivalent in Sesotho as le kae frequently used by the younger generation. The transition is also seen in the way that people greet each other selectively in urban districts of Lesotho. Finally, the data has shown in some respects that there is a similarity between the types and structuring of Sesotho greetings and those of the Yoruba, English, Shona and Arabic.

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