

# ARTICLES

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## Greeting and saying farewell in two Bantu languages: Swahili and Zulu\*

### Abstract

The article discusses greetings and farewells of a typical conversation in two Bantu languages: Swahili and Zulu. The conversation usually comprises the greeting followed by the enquiry about each other's well-being, the actual conversation, and then the parting farewell. The article outlines the importance of nonverbal, sociolinguistic, and situational factors of the salutation. The objectives of the paper are to explore the feasibility of considering the salutation in Bantu languages as being uniform, to determine some common trends in the salutation, and to discuss the aspects that may have an impact on the form of the salutation, in languages in general and in Swahili and Zulu in particular.

**Keywords:** greetings, farewells, salutations, Swahili, Zulu, Bantu languages, African languages

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## 1. Introduction

Greetings and farewells (salutations) are speech acts often considered to be highly formulaic. The act of greeting (and saying farewell) is used globally (Brown and Levinson 1978) as a politeness device and plays an important role in everyday social interactions in speech communities all over the world. While some scholars have noted that greetings are used to serve as a communication device to avoid confrontation, nowadays greetings are used to start a conversation in an appropriate manner or to establish and maintain social relationships (Goffman 1967). While Baratta (2009: 21) states that many greetings are relatively straightforward and formulaic, Jucker (2017: 2) asserts more cautiously that at first sight greetings and farewells appear to be fairly simple and well-defined speech acts that mark the boundaries of conversations and are often ritualistic. They have been claimed to be devoid of propositional content (Searle 1969: 67), however, a more critical consideration reveals that the situation is much more complex. Greetings and farewells are often embedded in longer exchanges and within such exchanges individual expressions may or may not have propositional content.

Learning the language of fellow citizens in a multilingual country is important for building trust and unity between different speech communities. Moreover, with rapidly growing globalisation, particularly with young people entering the world of work in foreign countries, comes a dire need to communicate with people who speak different languages and, in turn, the necessity to learn foreign languages. Foreigners often learn just a few words, phrases, and some expressions, including how to greet in the language of the host country or that of new co-workers and friends. Greeting someone in her/his own language becomes a gesture of goodwill that makes the indigenous communities more hospitable and well-disposed towards newcomers and may be the starting point for building social relationships.

## 2. The aim of the article

The paper aims at investigating linguistic, sociolinguistic, and nonverbal conventions employed in greetings and farewells in two Bantu languages: Swahili and Zulu. For that purpose, the selected parts of a typical conversation will be discussed. The typical conversation usually comprises the greeting, followed by the enquiry about each other's well-being, after which the actual conversation ensues and then the parting farewell is bidden. Similarities and differences between the linguistic, nonverbal, sociolinguistic, and situational characteristics of the salutation in these two languages will be investigated.

### 3. The salutation as a speech act

Knowing and using a few words and expressions of a local language may put a smile on faces of the locals, however, that is not enough to engage in a proper conversation. Moreover, successful communication includes both verbal and nonverbal components, nonverbal aspect of communication being crucial. Cohen (1996) remarks that the successful use of a speech act is dependent on the proper definition of its goals, as well as on the semantic and performative prerequisites for its realisation. Performing a speech act is thus a complex task which requires understanding its purpose along with possessing linguistic, cultural, and communicative and pragmatic competence. Even if a second language (L2) speaker performs a linguistically correct speech act, but fails in terms of nonverbal communication, the good intent of the act may be totally annulled. In the process of a speech act production a (L2) target language learner does not only rely on the linguistic rules – the phonetics, phonology, morphology, semantics, and syntax of the language – but also on the appropriate use of these rules and interactional norms according to a specific context. (L2) speakers often inappropriately transfer linguistic rules and sociocultural and contextual conventions of their native language (L1) to the target language (Thomas 1983). Such pragmatic transfer often leads to communicative breakdowns, misunderstandings, and pragmatic failure. Pragmatic errors or “errors of appropriacy” (Grandall & Bas-turkmen 2004: 38) are perceived as serious by native speakers and, compared to grammatical or vocabulary errors, are “less easily forgiven” (Yates 2010: 288). They might be seen as offensive, disrespectful or even rude.

The Bantu languages are no exception to the underlying principles governing greetings. The non-Bantu speakers, therefore, have to learn to use the forms of salutation correctly and appropriately if they want to communicate with the Bantu speakers. The paper focuses on the usage patterns that are connected with greetings and farewells. Thus, greetings and farewells are not seen as speech acts that can be studied in isolation, these expressions must be investigated within the context in which they occur.

The ultimate goal of language teaching and learning is developing the ability to communicate in the target language. Communication is not, however, just a question of grammar and vocabulary, it is also a question of culture (Crozet 1996). Every message a human being communicates through language is communicated in a cultural context. However, there are of course also similarities, particular behaviours, norms and beliefs that are shared among different linguistic communities.

This study focuses on greeting practices among different Bantu communities. It investigates greeting practices of Swahili and Zulu speakers, in particular. While both communities speak a Bantu language, one may assume that there are certain similarities between their greeting routines. In fact, the research shows significant differences between speaker roles in terms of age, position, and family/social relations of the interlocutors.

#### 4. The salutation in Swahili

Swahili is a language of wider communication in East Africa, therefore it is used as a second or third language by the majority of its users. This is important, since every user has her/his own cultural background that comes with linguistic behaviour absorbed within her/his native language and that heavily influences discourse patterns when she/he speaks Swahili. Batibo (2009, 2015) investigated the effects of the differences of cultural norms and values when minority language speakers shift to dominant languages or use them as second or primary language. The research shows that even speakers who abandoned their native language in favour of a dominant language (in this case Swahili) still value and often transfer the cultural norms of their native language into the dominant language. It is thus difficult nowadays to draw a distinction between what “pure” Swahili is and what adopted cultural norms are. The diversity of Swahili speakers does not allow for strictly defined norms and values to be shared by all its speakers across East Africa. In fact, Swahili native speakers do not belong to any defined ethnic group (Batibo 2009). The language itself is not bound to any particular culture but open to all cultural dimensions of its users, easily adopting different variations of cultural norms and values across areas where it is spoken.

Swahili as a widely spread *lingua franca* is a very tolerant and modern language that incorporates norms of the Western culture, so its conventions pertaining to the salutation are not as traditional as those of the other Bantu languages of East Africa. For example, kneeling used to be a popular greeting act among many African communities, but it does not feature in Swahili, however, it is still practiced among other traditional communities, like the Ngoni and Sukuma, who also use Swahili on a daily basis.

The typical Swahili conversation, similar to Zulu, comprises four distinct parts. The greeting is followed by the enquiry about each other’s well-being, after which the actual conversation takes place and thereafter, at the end of the conversation, follows the parting farewell.

#### 4.1. Linguistic forms of greeting in Swahili

Among the Swahili speakers it is age rather than any other characteristic that has the greatest significance for the salutation, especially in terms of turn taking. The younger person always initiates the greeting and it is very important that she/he uses the right expression. If not, the older, offended interlocutor, may react by demanding the right form of address/greeting (Omar 1991).

When an older and a younger person meet, there is a standardised expression *Shikamoo* 'My respects' that the younger person initiates the greeting with. It should be followed by an answer *Marahaba* 'I accept your greeting' – the dependency of the expressions requires the younger person to speak first. The term "younger" may also be equivalent to a lower status of the interlocutor who should pay respect not only to an older person but also to someone of higher status. The form also has a plural variant *Shikamooni* that should be used when greeting several older/of a higher status people at the same time.

The usual greeting routine among interlocutors of equal age and/or status starts with the following saying which can be used regardless of the time of day:

- A: Hujambo?<sup>1</sup>  
'How are you? (*lit.* There is no matter with you?)'
- B: Sijambo.  
'I am well.'

In fact, the words *hujambo* and *sijambo* have significant verbal characteristics. The initial morphemes *hu-* and *si-* are negations. *Hu-* is the negative for the second person singular, while *si-* is the negative for the first person singular. *Jambo* means 'matter', and the literal meaning of the whole phrase *Hujambo* is 'There is nothing wrong with you, I hope'. Similarly, the response can be translated as 'No, there is nothing wrong with me'. Person A does not ask only for information, but he/she puts forward a hypothesis. There is also a plural version that can be used when one addresses a group of people *Hamjambo* 'Are you-all well?' and the response is *Hatujambo* 'We are well'. *Hawajambo* with the same answer *Hawajambo*, is a query meaning 'Nothing wrong with them?' which is used when asking about the other party's (plural) well-being. There is no distinction between the masculine and the feminine, so the forms can be used for both men and women.

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<sup>1</sup> All linguistic examples, if not indicated otherwise, are provided by the authors.

Many Swahili users are Muslims, so one popular salutation that may be heard especially along the East African coast is *As-salaam alaikum* 'Peace be upon you'.

## 4.2. Linguistic forms for enquiring about each other's/one another's well-being in Swahili

After the initial greeting, the interlocutors can proceed by enquiring about one another's well-being. During the conversation, one should not simply respond to a greeting but, in return, should also enquire about the other speech participant's well-being and that of his/her family. Consider the example below:

A: Hujambo?  
'How are you (singular)?'

B: Sijambo. Wewe je?  
'I am well. And you?'

A: Mimi sijambo.  
'I am well.'

B: Bwana hajambo?  
'How is your husband?'

A: Hajambo.  
'He is well.'

B: Na watoto hawajambo?  
'And how are the children?'

A: Hawajambo!  
'They are fine.'

One should address people by title, or by name, but the name option is used less often. The most used forms of address are *mama* 'mother, lady', *baba* 'father, sir', *mzee* 'older person', *bibi* 'miss', *bwana* 'sir'. So, usually the question concerning the well-being of the interlocutor would be *Hujambo, bwana?* 'How are you, sir?' or *Hujambo, bibi?* 'How are you, ma'am?'; used even among friends and colleagues.

The opening form of the greeting does not offer an opportunity to elaborate on one's negative disposition or illness. There are, however, further enquiries one can choose from to ask about other matters. These centre around the word *habari* 'news' and can be associated with the time of day, the interlocutors' last meeting, or other topics, such as work, school or a trip.

A: Habari za asubuhi?  
'What's the news of the morning?'

B: Nzuri.  
'Good.'

A: Habari za safari?  
'How was the trip?'

B: Salama.  
'Peaceful.'

A: Habari za masomo?  
'How are the lessons?'

B: Njema.  
'Good.'

All direct responses are always positive, meaning that all is good, peaceful, and enjoyable. Both forms of the opening, with *-jambo* and *habari*, may be used alternately to form one conversation.

A: Hujambo baba?  
'How are you, sir?'

B: Sijambo. Na wewe je?  
'I'm fine. How about you?'

A: Mimi sijambo. Habari za nyumbani?  
'I'm fine. What's the news at home/of people at home?'

B: Salama. Na mama hajambo?  
'Peaceful. And how is the mother?'

A: Hajambo.  
'She is fine.'

By using forms such as *Hujambo* at the outset, interlocutors assume that the other party is well. However, one may indicate that there is something wrong or that he/she has some bad news by adding additional information following the initial answer. Consider the examples below:

A: Habari za kazi?  
'How is the work?'

B: Nzuri, lakini kazi nyingi.  
'Good, but a lot of work.'

A: Pole. Ndiyo maisha!  
'I'm sorry. That is life, really.'

B: Kwe! Asante.  
'Really. Thank you.'

At the beginning of the conversation, one person may also ask the other person whether he/she got up well, thus:

A: Umeamkaje?  
'How did you wake up?'

B: Salama.  
'Peacefully.'

There are also other, less formal forms of greeting, used by younger people. The forms used by them are much shorter and usually consist of only one question-response turn. Such opening may be *Sema* 'What do you say?', *Mambo* 'How are things?', and the response, among others, may be *Poa* or *Freshi* meaning 'O.K., all is fine'.

### 4.3. Linguistic forms for bidding someone farewell in Swahili

After exchanging several turns of question-response communicative acts<sup>2</sup> one may proceed to the main topic of the conversation or meeting, or simply end the conversation by saying good-bye. Again, there are several possibilities depending on whether the speech participants plan to see each other in the near future or how well they know each other. There is also a simple way to bid someone farewell:

A: Kwa heri.  
'Good-bye.'

B: Kwa heri ya kuonana.  
'Good-bye, see you again.'

To say good-bye to a group of people the suffix *-ni* is added to *heri*, thus: *Kwa herini* 'Good-bye to you all'.

### 4.4. Sociolinguistic considerations relating to greeting in Swahili

In Swahili, as in any African culture, it is considered rude to ignore people and not to greet them. Due to the aspects mentioned above one is not expected to

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<sup>2</sup> Omar (1991) estimates that a typical Swahili greeting comprises five question-response turns.



greet everyone you pass on the street, especially in urban areas, however, casual greeting is much more prevalent in rural areas where the communities are small, and people know each other. In general, one greets people she/he knows and the ones she/he engages with in conversation, such as a street vendor, a shop-keeper or office staff. If people are more familiar with each other, the longer version of the greeting is more appropriate.

In general, it is the person of a lower status that is expected to initiate a greeting. So, a younger will greet an older person first, an employee an employer, etc. As already said, the age constraint is more important than gender. So, a younger man will greet an older woman first.

The younger person greets first but then the older person takes over the conversation and asks about the well-being of the other. The younger person responds to the questions but is expected to be active in the conversation as well and also ask questions. It is regarded rude if one person only responds but is not interested in the other person's well-being. Such a conversation could end abruptly.

A newcomer should greet the people who are already at a venue she/he enters. In fact, there is only one call that can proceed a greeting, and that is *Hodi?* 'May I come in?' shouted out by a newcomer to the house, whereupon the host responds with *Karibu!* 'Welcome!'. Only then should the newcomer enter the house and greet the hosts. A European should not feel offended if the host does not get up upon his/her arrival. Staying in a lower position is a sign of respect and not disrespect as may be wrongly assumed. In the same way bending to lower the body while greeting is a sign of respect.

Regarding the nonverbal part of a greeting, a handshake is regarded as part of a good conversation and it is practiced among men and women, however, one has to be aware of the constraints associated with the Muslim culture, where a man is required not to touch a woman. In such situations men usually wait for women to extend their hand first. If the two persons know each other very well, they may initiate a greeting by a handshake but then proceed to holding both hands. The holding of each other's hands may continue for the whole duration of the greeting and even during the whole conversation. Among good friends, especially women and young girls, it is also acceptable to hug and exchange cheek-side kisses while greeting.

As in African culture in general, it is not polite to look someone in the eyes (Wójtowicz 2021). One is expected to cast your eyes down as a sign of respect. It is also customary for children to be expected not to interrupt adults' conversations but, on the other hand, it is a sign of a good upbringing to come and greet an adult guest.

#### 4.5. Sociolinguistic considerations when enquiring about each other's/one another's well-being in Swahili

As said earlier, if people are more familiar with each other, the longer version of the greeting is more appropriate. One should enquire about the other person's well-being, make enquiries about the interlocutor's family, even if one does not know them well, or about other matters, such as work or school. One should also respond appropriately to such enquiries.

A conversation comprises formal enquiries and responses and a particular enquiry demands a particular response. If someone is asking the other person about the children *Watoto hawajambo?* 'How are the children?', the other person is required to answer *Hawajambo* 'They are fine' and not that he/she does not have any children or that they are not very well at that moment. In fact, this phrase may be interpreted as asking about the dependents, among whom a wife would be included. It is regarded as impolite to ask a man how his wife is, however, asking the wife about the well-being of her husband is acceptable. It is also inappropriate to ask a young person whether he/she is already married or whether he/she has any children. The expected answer is *Bado* 'Not yet' if the person is not yet married and has no children.

After a holiday, weekend or any other longer period without seeing each other, the interlocutors can ask each other how they enjoyed the time. There is even a special saying for such a situation:

A: Habari za siku nyingi?  
'What's new since the past time?'

B: Nzuri tu.  
'Just fine.'

In general, in Swahili conversation there is a lot of repetition, so one should not get discouraged if the conversation is not very innovative. Maw (1985: 33) notices that "a well-mannered Swahili person is never abrupt". What may seem superfluous to a European is of great importance for the Swahili people, who appreciate verbal attention and time spent on small talk. Meeting people and spending time with others to build lasting relationships is an important aspect of African culture in general.

#### 4.6. Sociolinguistic considerations when saying farewell in Swahili

When a conversation comes to an end, one is expected to say good-bye. In taking leave, one always wishes the other person well. By saying *kwa heri* one wishes

the other person good luck or blessing. In fact, *heri* means 'happiness', 'blessed', 'good fortune', so, by saying good-bye one also wishes his/her interlocutors well. One wishes that he/she went to a nice, blessed place, and that they will meet in that place again.

It is also expected that people would want to see each other again, therefore one can often hear *Kwa heri ya kuonana* 'Good-bye, see you again'. There are also other alternative and more informal ways of saying good-bye and wishing to see someone again, such as *Baadaye* 'Later', that clearly indicates the intention of a future meeting. Farewells can also be more situation-bound and express other wishes, like *Nenda salama* 'Go peacefully', *Lala salama* 'Sleep well' or *Usiku njema* 'Good night'.

## 5. The salutation in Zulu

Like Swahili, the typical Zulu conversation will generally also comprise four distinct parts: the greeting followed by the enquiry about each other's well-being, the actual conversation and the end with the parting farewell. In the following discussion we supply examples of the salutation with a literal translation and an English gloss for each form. The focus will be on the verbal communication. Thereafter we will discuss some important nonverbal communicative aspects of the salutation.

Only one form of greeting is used in Zulu regardless of the time of day. There is a distinction between a singular and plural form of the salutation though. The determining considerations for the use of these two forms are the number of people you greet and on behalf of how many people you are speaking. Unlike Venda (where a male will greet someone else using *Ndaa* while a female will use *Aa*) in Zulu the gender of the interlocutors has no influence on the form of greeting.

### 5.1. Linguistic forms of the greeting in Zulu

When an individual A greets another person B, the greeting will have the following form:

- A: Sawubona.  
'We you see / We see you.'
- B: Yebo, sawubona.  
'Yes, we you see / Yes, we see you.'

The form *sawubona* is a unique contracted form of the original statement *siyakubona* 'we you see/we see you' comprising the morphemes, *si-* subject

morpheme for first person plural 'we', *-ya-* present tense morpheme, *-ku-* object morpheme of second person singular 'you', verb root *-bon-*, and categorial final morpheme *-a*. The contraction of *si-* plus *-ya-* to *sa-* is unique and limited to the salutation only and does not occur in other environments where these morphemes appear (frequently) in succession. The same is true for the change of the object morpheme *-ku-* to *-wu-*. Note that the subject morpheme *si-* (thus the plural first person subject morpheme) is used instead of the expected first person singular subject morpheme *ngi-*. The use of the plural instead of the singular subject morpheme of first person is most probably a fossilized politeness strategy<sup>3</sup>. The logically expected contracted form for the greeting, namely *\*Ngawubona < ngi-ya-ku-bon-a*, does not exist.

When a group (A and company) greets a group (B and company) the greeting will have the form as illustrated below:

A and company: Sanibona.  
'We you (plural) see. / We see you (plural).'

B and company: Yebo, sanibona.  
'Yes, we you (plural) see. / Yes, we see you (plural).'

There are other informal forms of greeting, used by peers when they greet each other, but those will not be discussed here. Suffice it to mention one such form, namely the informal greeting below:

A: Hobu sagaxa!  
'Oh, and there we hook up.'

B: Yebo, yebo.  
'Yes, yes.'

The royal greeting, used to greet a king or headman originated in the time of the reign of king Shaka. He was well-known as a warrior king who established a powerful army comprising different regiments and conquering the neighbouring tribes, training the conquered men as soldiers and growing his army in this way. His regiments would greet him with the royal salute: *Bayede!* Shaka was a member of a speech community known as the people who *yeyeza* 'say ye-ye'. The replacement of the l-sound with a y-sound was an outstanding characteristic of this speech community. Shaka's regiments would greet him using the salute, *Balethe!*

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<sup>3</sup> Consider the discussion further down on the use of the plural form of the greeting instead of the expected singular form to express respect or politeness.

'Bring them!' (with the *ba-* being the object morpheme of a class 2 noun, thus meaning 'them', referring to the enemy). Paying respect to him as a *yeyeza* speaker, the /l/ of the verb stem was replaced with /y/ and the /t<sup>h</sup>/ with /d/ resulting in the royal salute *Balethe!* becoming *Bayede!* This royal salute is still used to this day to greet the king or an *induna* 'headman'.

## 5.2. Linguistic forms for enquiring about each other's/one another's well-being in Zulu

After the initial greeting, the two parties will enquire about each other's well-being. This can be done in a number of different ways. The examples below depict how the interlocutors may enquire about each other's well-being and what their possible responses can be in a one-to-one relation.

The interlocutors may enquire about each other's well-being by simply asking how the other party is, thus:

- A: Unjani (na)?  
'You are how? / How are you?'
- B: Ngikhona. Wena (unjani)?  
'I am here. / I am well. (And) you (how are you)?'
- A: Nami ngikhona.  
'Also I, I am still here. / I am also well.'

The interlocutors may enquire about each other's well-being by enquiring whether the other party is still alive, thus:

- A: Usaphila (na)?  
'Are you still alive?'
- B: Yebo, ngisaphila. Wena?  
'Yes, I am still alive. (And) you?'
- A: Nami ngisaphila.  
'Also I, I am still alive.'

One person can ask the other person whether he/she got up, thus:

- A: Uvukile (na)?  
'You got up? / Did you get up?'
- B: Ngivukile. Wena (uvukile (na))?  
'I got up. (And) you (did you get up)?'

A: Nami ngivukile.  
'Also I, I got up. / I also got up.'

One person can ask the other person how she/he got up, thus:

A: Uvuke kanjani (na)?  
'You got up how? / How did you get up?'

B: Ngivuke kahle. Wena (uvuke kanjani)?  
'I got up well. / I am well. (And) you (how did you get up)?'

A: Nami ngivuke kahle.  
'Also I, I got up well. / I also got up well.'

As is the case in Swahili, it is regarded as inappropriate to reply simply saying that you are not well. If the individual is not feeling well or is sick, he/she will normally respond by saying 'I am well / I woke up well, but...' He/she may specify the reason for her/his bad disposition or complaint. Consider the following example where B is not well:

A: Usaphila (na)?  
'You are still alive? / How are you?'

B: Ngisaphila, kodwa ngibulawa umkhuhlane / Ngisaphila, kodwa ngiphethwe yikhanda. Wena (usaphila)?  
'I am still alive, but I am being killed by a cold/flu. / I am still alive, but I am being held by a headache. / I have a headache. You (are you still alive)?'

A: Kwangathi ungasinda. Hhayi-ke, mina ngisaphila.  
'May it be that you recover. Oh no, but, I, I am still alive.'

Obviously, in a case where B has indicated that she/he is not well, A cannot simply reply using the default *Nami ngisaphila* since that would imply that she/he is also well, as if A is ignoring B's suffering. The convention is therefore for A to somehow show empathy by wishing B a speedy recovery or a better prospect and then in turn indicate how she/he is.

Depending on the setting where the two parties meet and how well they know each other, they may, after enquiring about each other's well-being, also enquire about the well-being of the family or household and even that of their livestock. (The livestock would generally include cattle and goats. These two types of livestock are regarded as proper assets). Enquiring about the well-being of the family and livestock is fairly common in rural settings if the interlocutor is aware of the circumstances of the other party. The relevance of enquiring about the

well-being of livestock stems from the knowledge that often people in the rural areas are very dependent on the livestock for their daily survival and their existence – cows are milked, and the milk is consumed, often as *amas*i 'curds'. The cows are used to plough the fields and to transport whatever needs to be transported by pulling a sleigh or wagon and cows are even used as *lobola* – the payment a man has to make to his future father-in-law as a dowry when he wants to marry his daughter. Moreover, both cows and goats are slaughtered for their meat (and for ceremonial purposes).

### 5.3. Linguistic forms for bidding someone farewell in Zulu

When people part to go their separate ways, they will bid each other farewell by either wishing the other party an enjoyable stay or a pleasant journey, depending of the circumstances. The farewell is actually a command, hence the absence of a subject morpheme in the verb form *sala* 'stay' or *hamba* 'go'. Let us presume that person A visited person B at her house and is leaving after their conversation. The two individuals will say farewell to each other as follows:

A: *Sala kahle.*  
'Stay well.'

B: *Yebo, hamba kahle / Yebo, nawe uhambe kahle.*  
'Yes, go well / Yes, you too must go well.'

When saying farewell to a group the plural *-ni* is added to the verb, thus resulting in *Salani kahle* 'Stay, you (plural) well' or *Hambani kahle* 'Go, you (plural) well'. The *-ni* is the contracted form of the pronoun of the second person plural, *nina* 'you (plural)'.

### 5.4. Sociolinguistic considerations relating to greeting in Zulu

We will now turn to the sociolinguistic aspects of the Zulu salutation. It is customary for the minor to greet first. The child is expected to greet the parent or an older person first. Similarly, an employee is expected to greet the manager first. While it is not necessary to use a form of address when greeting someone, it does show affection or closeness if a person is addressed using a praise name. Zulu praise names are clan names – thus the names of prominent kinsmen of the clan who have since passed on. A person with the surname Buthelezi may be addressed as Shenge or Sokwalisa or Mnyamana, someone with the surname Ntuli may be addressed as Mphemba, while someone with the surname Khumalo may be addressed as Mntungwa, etc.

While the interlocutors may shake hands while greeting, this is not an essential part of greeting. If you shake hands with the person you greet, you are not supposed to give a firm handshake because that may be interpreted as an effort to dominate the other person. Moreover, the handshake is normally a three phase handshake, starting with the customary handshake followed by the two parties greeting moving their hands to hold each other's thumb in the palm of their right hands followed by the hands moved into the normal handshake position again.

It is regarded as proper and polite for the person greeting to hold onto his/her right wrist with the left hand (especially when greeting someone for the first time or someone who is your senior). This gesture is a relic from ancient times to demonstrate that you are greeting the other person in peace and that you are not hiding a weapon in the other hand.

When you greet someone, you are furthermore not supposed to look the person you are greeting in the eye for a prolonged period of time. You glance at the person and then look down or sideways. Looking the person you are greeting in the eye for a prolonged time is regarded as rude or challenging.

If the two individuals greeting know each other well, they may hold hands as a gesture of goodwill or solidarity. The holding of hands may continue for the whole duration of the greeting and even beyond. It is not strange for friends to hold hands after greeting and keep on doing so even as they walk to a shopping mall or sport event. This is a gesture of friendship and solidarity.

If you arrive at a traditional homestead, it is customary to wait at the main gate until someone sees you and invites you into the perimeter of the homestead. You do not greet until you are offered a stool or place to sit. Only when you are seated, will the greeting exchange take place and it will be initiated by the host. This practice ties up with another body language gesture, namely that when you greet, the minor's body may not be in a position higher than that of the superior. It is therefore rude to greet a superior who is sitting down while standing. Even when both parties are standing, the minor party will often bend down to be in a body-position lower than the superior.

It is quite common to use the plural form of greeting, thus *sanibona* instead of *sawubona* even though the person is greeting one person. This is done to show respect. This practice often leads to both parties using the plural form of greeting even though they are in a one-to-one situation.



### 5.5. Sociolinguistic considerations when enquiring about each other's/one another's well-being in Zulu

The practice of using the plural form of greeting where the singular form would be appropriate to show respect may be maintained even when two individuals enquire about each other's well-being.

Enquiring about the other party's well-being does not always form part of the salutation. Whether this part of the salutation will take place or alternatively how extensive it will be, will depend on the particular speech situation and the relationship between the interlocutors. If two acquaintances walk past each other on their way to work they may simply greet without enquiring about each other's well-being, however, if a family member or good friend visits you, the enquiry about the well-being of the other party will form part of the salutation. Enquiring about the other party's well-being is deemed important, and not adhering to this principle can result in the party being greeted and not asked about her/his well-being, being irritable. A typical setting that illustrates the importance of asking about the other person's well-being after greeting a Zulu speaker is described below.

A non-African language speaker may for instance walk up to the Zulu (or other Bantu language speaker) salesperson in a clothing shop and greet her/him and then immediately ask where the men's or lady's section is without enquiring about the salesperson's well-being. In such a case the salesperson will generally ignore the question and simply enquire about the well-being of the interlocutor first, forcing the "rude person" to be polite before continuing to direct her/him to the section she/he wants to get to.

After a holiday or weekend, the interlocutors can ask each other how they enjoyed the holiday or weekend. This is done by asking the other party whether "he/she/they ate the holidays / weekend well". Consider the example below:

A: Uyidle kanjani impelasonto (na)?

'You, it ate, how, the end of the week? / How did you enjoy the weekend?'

B: Hhayi, ngiyidle kahle.

'Oh no, I it ate well / No, I enjoyed it.'<sup>4</sup>

A: Uwadle kanjani amaholide (na)?

'You, it ate, how, the holidays? / How did you enjoy the holidays?'

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<sup>4</sup> The use of a negative 'Oh no/No' may seem odd in this context, however, this form is often used to indicate that "despite the interlocutor's expectation" the opposite is actually true.

- B: Hhayi, ngiwadle kahle.  
'No, I ate well / No, I enjoyed it.'

## 5.6. Sociolinguistic considerations when saying farewell in Zulu

Anyone can end the conversation by saying goodbye to the other party. The only time you are not at liberty to leave at will is when you are part of a group summonsed by the king or an *induna*. In such an instance you have to wait for the king or the *induna* to relieve you before you start preparing to leave and say your goodbyes.

Interlocutors may use the form meant for saying goodbye to a group rather than an individual to show respect. In other words, the plural form of the salutation can be used throughout to show respect to the other party in the conversation.

There are two alternative ways of saying goodbye which are not used very often. You may wish the person a "white road" or you can wish the person "to go with the spirits". Consider the examples below:

- A: Indlela emhlophe<sup>5</sup>.  
'A white road.'
- B: Yebo, indlela emhlophe.  
'Yes, a white road.'
- A: Hamba namadlozi<sup>6</sup>.  
'Go with the spirits.'
- B: Yebo, nawe hamba namadlozi.  
'Yes, also you, go with the spirits. / Yes, you too must go with the spirits.'

## 6. Conclusion

Cultural scripts or norms should be taught during language classes since they form an indispensable prerequisite for successful communication and building and maintaining interpersonal ties. One has to be aware that speakers are normally well-acquainted with appropriate cultural behaviour of their own speech community

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<sup>5</sup> This expression implies that the interlocutor is wishing the other person a safe and prosperous journey.

<sup>6</sup> According to Zulu belief, the spirits of a person's ancestors are responsible for the well-being of the individual (and the clan). Saying "Go with the spirits" thus implies that the person is wishing you the protection and blessings of your ancestral spirits on your journey.

and often transmit those behaviours to conversations held in other languages that they may be learning. However, knowing and adhering to the cultural norms that govern communication in other speech communities will allow for effective cross- or intercultural communication. Even such universal communicative acts as greeting have the pragmatic hallmark of a specific culture.

Ameka and Breedveld (2004: 184) rightly observe that “[it] is only when one understands speech practices from an ‘insider’ point of view that one can interact with those in the speech community without causing offence”. The good intention of communicating with interlocutors in their own language may be jeopardised by unknowingly transgressing – not adhering to sociolinguistic and/or nonverbal conventions in that particular culture. Transgressions on the nonverbal level can sometimes be more detrimental to successful communications than poor language knowledge. A learner of a particular Bantu language should not regard the Bantu culture as uniform and thus apply the conventions applicable to the use of the salutation in a particular Bantu language to another Bantu language.

It has been observed in the African context that the speakers of the minority languages often adopt the cultural norms and values of the dominant languages (Batibo 2009). These may be European languages but also the dominant African language, for instance Swahili or Zulu. Someone learning these languages or any other Bantu language should be sensitive to the sociolinguistic and nonverbal conventions of the particular speech community.

Some of the pragmatic choices a learner of a foreign language makes, are directly instruction-related and are influenced by textbooks and classroom discourse. To reduce such limitations of pragmatic instruction, teaching materials should include corpus-based data and teachers could become more sensitive towards alternative speech acts used in the target language.

The paper analysed some linguistic forms of greetings, enquiring about each other's / one another's well-being, and bidding someone farewell in two Bantu languages, namely Swahili and Zulu. The typical conversation (in both Swahili and Zulu) will generally comprise four distinct parts, the greeting followed by the enquiry about each other's well-being, followed by the actual conversation, and then the parting farewell. Similarly, to Swahili, in Zulu the gender of the interlocutors has no influence on the form of greeting, but in Zulu the determining considerations for the use of some forms is not only the number of people you greet, as in Swahili, but also on behalf of how many people you are speaking.

In addition, the paper discussed some sociolinguistic considerations relating to greeting routines in these two languages. Even though there are similarities

between the two languages as far as the salutation is concerned, one has to be careful not to generalise. There are also some significant differences between these two languages and between languages of the Bantu language family in general.

The two major considerations determining the participant roles of the interlocutors when greeting are the social status and the age difference between the interlocutors. In both languages, it is customary for the minor/younger person or the one who is arriving to greet first. So, it is the child, who is expected to greet the parent or an older person first, and similarly, an employee is expected to greet the manager first. The gender of the interlocutors does not play a significant role in either of the languages.

As far as nonverbal communication is concerned, we have highlighted the importance of the avoidance of prolonged eye contact between the interlocutors in the case of both Swahili and Zulu and the significance of a handshake. The posture of the interlocutors is also an important factor to take cognizance of.

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